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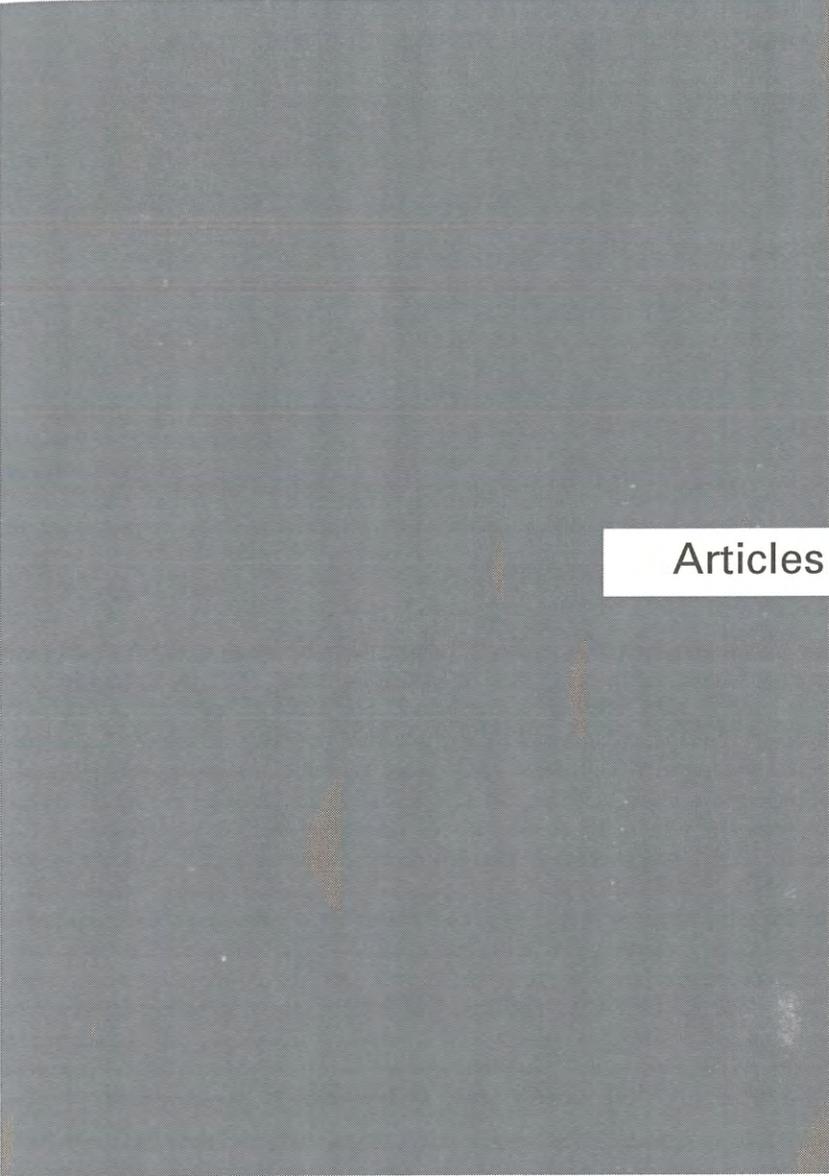
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Articles

“TRUTH IS HELD IN DISREPUTE”: O. HENRY AND THE DISMANTLING OF PARADIGMS

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1. Introduction

Since his short stories became the quintessence of American lowbrow culture (he was only an entertainer, F. L. Pattee warned us in 1923), and critics defined them as “cheap jokes” (Bryllion N. Fagin, qtd. in Current-Garcia 1965: 135), or “expanded anecdotes” (Katherine Fullerton Gerould, qtd. in Current-Garcia 1965: 157), O. Henry —*passé* and of scarce literary merit— has been unjustly forgotten, almost ostracized, by the academic establishment. Yet, like no other writer of his time, he is an exceptionally faithful eyewitness to the consolidation of the society of industrialization and consumerism, which Warren I. Susman (1984) has accurately defined as the “culture of abundance”. Between 1897 and 1910 —O. Henry’s years of unprecedented popularity— the nation faced a conflict between an older culture committed to Puritan virtues (self-denial, temperance, thriftiness and character) and conservative traditions (family, the Church, supremacy of men over women), and an emerging consumer culture “with its emphasis on pleasure and self-fulfillment”, overspending and personality (Susman 1984: xxviii). Self-realization, and not salvation, was the goal of a narcissistic self which became “other-directed”, i.e. moved only by “the expectations of others and the needs of the moment” (Lears 1983: 8).

O. Henry’s characters are obviously not alien to these ideological shifts, and many of their dilemmas directly emerge from the difficulties underlying the embrace

and/or refusal of these conflicting values. My contention in this article is that his short fiction is the site where a number of previously incontestable concepts, immutable principles and apparently indelible shibboleths are disputed or erased. Gender roles become unstable categories, and Darwinist postulates are rendered too imprecise to define human types and predict their evolution. These sweeping changes, which affect almost everything, convert the world into a place where nothing is reliable. Cause-and-effect sequences are reverted, logic proves to be blind, sham appearances count more than disguised truths, uncertainties substitute for deeply rooted beliefs, and dysgenic replaces eugenic in the age of progress.

In “Sisters of the Golden Circle” (*The Four Million*, 1906)¹ the visitors to New York riding in a sightseeing car are unable to see what the guide shows them at each moment. Despite their attempts to “make ocular responses” (O. Henry 1953: 82), the sights trumpeted through the megaphone are associated with the wrong places, and thus it is no accident that “[i]n the solemn spires of spreading cathedrals” they see “the home of the Vanderbilts” and, when asked to look at “the highlands of the Hudson”, they gape “at the upturned mountains of a newlaid sewer” (O. Henry 1953: 82). To greenhorns and oldtimers alike, the Big Apple remains an impossible cryptograph. In his monumental work *The Decline of the West* (1932), Oswald Spengler defined the contemporary world and its epitome, the megapolis, as the place where destiny, that is, the belief in the existence of a “living Direction” (1980: 107) governing the flow of events, has been replaced by “Casuality”, accident or hap. O. Henry applies this principle not only to the depiction of a mystifying world where nothing is what it seems but also to the formal structure of his narrative, invariably ruled by the surprise ending, a technique which needs “ambiguities [and] half-statements” (Éjxenbaum 1968: 260), or “some trick of reversal based on essential information withheld” (Current-Garcia 1965: 138).

In the following pages I will attempt to demonstrate how very little can be taken at face value in O. Henry’s fiction. This entails not only the suspension of any permanent truth but also the dismantling of established structures, be it gender, class or genre. There will come a time when events “will happen logically, and the villain will be discomfited instead of being elected to the board of directors” (O. Henry 1953: 1299), the intrusive narrator of “The Plutonian Fire” (*The Voice of the City*, 1917) argues. But, as things now stand, we will have to admit that “truth is held in disrepute”.

2. O. Henry and Genre

Limelight (1952) shows us Chaplin as Calvero, an aging, washed-up actor who, in the nick of time, saves the waif-like Claire Bloom from gassing herself to death in

her furnished room. Tormented by her inability to survive in a hostile environment, the girl becomes physically and psychologically paralyzed. Lacking self-confidence, she abandons a promising career as a ballerina and contemplates death as the only way out of the world's threats and pitfalls. The melodramatic plot is a clear indictment of the social iniquities of capitalism. Yet the lesson to be learned is not the overthrow of a cruel socioeconomic system but the replacement of self-interest and egoism by generosity and altruism. Only love can vanquish the absurdities of the inevitable struggle for existence, and endow life with an enduring meaning and hope. A semiotic analysis of the motion picture cannot overlook the striking similarities with O. Henry's "The Furnished Room" (1904). O. Henry's characters are also "theatrical people". Eloise Vashner is a "fair girl" who sings on the stage. Unable to survive in the Big Apple, she decides to commit suicide by turning on the gas in her furnished room, and so does the hero by the end of the story. Indeed both seem to be sensitive and devoted, and the youth's quest for his sweetheart demonstrates, once more, the moral superiority of love over the egoism of America's materialistic society.

That O. Henry's short fiction provided the emerging movie industry with melodramatic plotlines, motifs and a gallery of ready-made characters is an indisputable fact. Cisco Kid, the Mexican desperado of the early talkie western *In Old Arizona* (1929), is the protagonist of "A Double-Dyed Deceiver" (1905) and "The Caballero's Way" (1907). The tramps and vagabonds that catapulted Chaplin to worldwide fame also owe a great deal to the writer's immensely popular creations such as Bulger, Soapy or Whistling Dick. In one of the first scenes of *Modern Times* (1936) we are presented with a view of the industrialized city as the byword for labor slavery. American commuters are transformed into a herd of sheep in a way that is reminiscent of O. Henry's "The Pendulum" (*The Trimmed Lamp*, 1907): "A flock of citizen sheep scrambled out and another flock scrambled aboard. Ding-ding! The cattle cars of the Manhattan Elevated rattled away, and John Perkins drifted down the stairway of the station with the released flock" (1953: 1383). Not in vain, Chaplin was soon nicknamed "the O. Henry of the silent drama" (Anon. 1923: 7).

Current-Garcia argues that the writer's fiction is the hybrid result of combining the Southern local color fiction, the Western tall tales and the topsy-turvy city stories. In fact, an amalgamation of hardly compatible texts, registers and genres pervades the dense discursive terrain of the typical O. Henry story. In a seminal essay of the 1920s, Russian formalist Boris M. Eñxenbaum holds that the North Carolina writer chooses parody as the rhetorical principle to unify the most disparate elements (the anecdote, the vaudeville and the feuilleton) into a form which lays bare the construction, the artificial trappings of the story (1968: 259). The result is very often an ironic composite which defies labels and easy categorizations. In choosing

parody as the central axis of his narrative O. Henry is not only recreating textual precedents but also questioning the potential of past formulas to come to terms with the intricacies of the present world. In this regard, as Linda Hutcheon puts it, parody must be here understood as a form of self-reflexivity which aims to disrupt and transgress. Repetition in O. Henry is never a stabilizing agent that unifies or “stresses sameness or stasis” (Hutcheon 2000: 101) but rather a powerful critical tool which foregrounds “irreconcilable opposition between texts and between text and world” (2000: 102). Since the effect we identify as quintessentially postmodern, as Beebee (1994: 9) argues, is one produced “by defeating generic expectations”, O. Henry’s fiction, dominated by a ubiquitous instability, subverts all paradigms and deflates any pretension of a monolithic structure. In so far as his texts postulate “a world of simulacra, without depth, center or causation”, informed only by “pure chance” (Spariosu 1987: 59), the writer has been acknowledged as one who specially favors a postmodern hermeneutics (Evans 1981). If genre is by definition a form of ideology, then “the struggles against or the deviations from genre” must also be regarded as “ideological struggles” (Beebee 1994: 19).

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O. Henry’s parody includes a wide-ranging repertoire. “Thimble, Thimble” (*Options*, 1909), “an ironic presentation of ‘a Southerner’s idea of a Northerner’s idea of the South’” (Current-Garcia 1965: 63) opens with excessively detailed directions how to reach Manhattan’s Financial District (O. Henry 1953: 715). The long-winding passage describes a cityscape with “big Cañons [sic]” (narrow streets), a long “trail” (Broadway), “synthetic mountains” (skyscrapers) and “granite ledges” (sidewalks), all of which converts the urban setting into a replica of the Western wilderness. Not by coincidence, O. Henry was once called “the Bret Harte of the City” (qtd. in O’Connor 1970: 235), and his narrators were defined as “of the Western hotel-foyer type” (Pattee 1923: 358). Furthermore, the tall tale combined two conventions suitable for the representation of the big city’s masquerade: “the discrepancies between what people are and what they appear to be” (Hazard 1927: 189), and the underlying idea that the world is an immoral place where “survival and humor are more important than ethics” (Brown 1987: 37). In describing New York, the epitome of a modern capitalist society, as the stage Far West of a tall tale, rife with perils and outlaws, O. Henry is not only duplicating the props and characters of a popular subgenre, he is also evaluating the moral stature of the dominant world.

A similar parodic critique of the unprincipled ethics of the consumer culture is found in “The Defeat of the City” (1904). The story rewrites the success myth formula but, as the narrative unfolds, we discover a plot which spoofs the easy, Horatio-Algerish optimism. Robert Walmsley, the protagonist, only becomes a fully accomplished man after leaving the city to return to his small town. The rags-to-

riches sequence has been subverted. A good number of O. Henry’s stories also reinstate the idea of the city as the breeding ground of evil and sin, and in so doing they mimic the urban imagery and hell-fire jargon of preachers. Yet it is not always easy to ascertain whether the narrator subscribes to their moralistic point of view or he is simply lampooning the lingo of the clergy. Thus, Robert, the country bumpkin who becomes an affluent lawyer, may “descend” to the city—like Jesus did to Hell—only to return as a glorious victor who has defeated an enemy compared with “the leviathan [sic]”, or described as “a juggernaut [or] a Moloch” (O. Henry 1953: 1626). But it is no less true that the city also becomes the perfect place to prove one’s values in a contest which will eventually strengthen moral principles (Strauss 1961: 144-148).

As Lanford noted long ago (1957: 80), a vast bulk of O. Henry’s stories read as burlesque crime/detective stories. “The Marionettes” (1902), a tale which partly duplicates the plotlines and intrigue of “A Municipal Report” (*Strictly Business*, 1910), combines the robbery/murder motif with the story of a husband who beats his wife and drives her to starvation. Yet the denouement is not the punishment of a fake doctor who has just murdered the dying patient in his urge to grab whatever is left in the safe. Before the robber leaves, he hands over the loot he has snatched from other victims to the abused spouse, and makes up the story of the deceased husband’s deathbed repentance.

O. Henry’s penchant for melodrama, one of the most popular in the long list of genres of the nineteenth century, can be easily observed from the very beginning. His first published story, “The Miracle of Lava Canyon” (1897), draws heavily on the conventions of frontier drama. We have the hero, Sheriff Conrad, the heroine, Boadicea Reed, and the villain, outlaw Arizona Dan. Yet, as the story proceeds, we discover that the characters hardly fit into melodramatic archetypes. As Current-Garcia puts it, “to pose for what one is not” (1965: 87) is O. Henry’s most persistent theme. Conrad is not the brave man we assumed him to be but a coward who cannot conceal his fright, and far from being a weakling, the girl is an intrepid woman who knows no fear. Grimsted (1968: 176) argues that the structure of melodrama invariably includes a tug-of-war between the heroine’s innocence and the villain’s attempts to destroy her. He is “the snake in the garden”; she, the temple of virtue. In O. Henry’s short fiction the dialectical clash between good and evil is still retained but we are no longer able to say who is who in the moral conflict, and even if we momentarily can, we realize later on that our judgment was absolutely wrong. Characters talk, listen and understand at cross purposes, and miscommunication reigns. If melodrama is “a drama of signs” whose only aim is “making the world morally legible” (Gunning 1994: 50), signs are now always deceptive. Thus, the character we might deem to incarnate the heroine does not correspond to the clichéd portrait, and the same could be said of the protagonist

we initially identified as the villain. Soapy, the bum of “The Cop and the Anthem” (1904), is arrested precisely the moment he decides to reform. Moral repentance does not bring reward but punishment. Vuyning (“From Each According to his Ability”, 1919), the crook who teaches some other rogues how to dress and behave in the West, is finally the wealthy son of a rancho owner in Colorado; Arthur Lyle (“The Memento”, 1906), the small town man of irreproachable morality, a “saint” by all standards, is a regular spectator of vaudeville who collects the dancers’ garters as keepsakes; and contrary to our expectations, Rosalie Ray, the burlesque dancer, emerges as a girl of spotless reputation. All the staple ingredients of melodrama are carefully included only to be subverted. The “meet cute” scene does not reunite the lovers. Far from it, in the travesty of the modern world, Cupid always shoots his arrows at the wrong target. The rich man we believed to be the hideous villain in “Brickdust Row” (*The Trimmed Lamp*, 1907) does not intend to abuse Florence, the poor tenant, when he invites her to Coney Island. Blinker’s intentions are genuine. In the character we identified as the materialistic man we discover the true idealist. Florence’s innocence, however, dies (“I am not a wall flower” [1953: 1409], she blurts out brazenly) the moment we learn that this is not the first time she has spent some time with a gentleman. Country bumpkins from the West may prove to have razor-sharp heads for business and clever city slicks may be easily taken in. Anagnorisis, the discovery of concealed truth in melodrama and the key to all conflicts, does not help solve problems in the O. Henry short story. Conversely, when we find out the impostors’ real identity, questions multiply. If melodrama is “a monopathic theatrical event” (Heilman 1968: 74-87), since it elicits an unmistakable, unique response in the audience—hope when the hero wins in the moral battle and hopelessness when he is defeated—in the O. Henry short story, bewilderment and delusion take over, for permanent, ready-made identities must never be taken for granted. On the cusp of modernity, the antagonist may be a victim and the protagonist the oppressor, the goodies may be punished whereas the baddies are rewarded, and conflicts may be left intentionally unsolved or complicated further.

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3. Primitive or barbarian: gender roles on the change

Although O. Henry disclaimed any reformist zeal in his stories, it is undeniable that he was soon regarded “by the reformers as a sociological writer” (Stuart 1990: 177), mostly because he published in magazines (*McClure’s*, *The American*, *Collier’s*, *Everybody’s*, etc) which opened their pages to “the new group of infuriated writers whom Teddy Roosevelt would characterize as ‘muckrakers’” (Stuart 1990: 136). Anne Partlan, the labor leader’s daughter and a passionate advocate of

women’s rights, became one of the writer’s acquaintances. In a famous letter to the writer’s biographer and friend, C. Alphonso Smith, President Roosevelt said that many of “his campaigns for social reform —particularly the plight of the office girl— were sparked by his readings of O. Henry’s stories” (Stuart 1990: 178). Thorstein Veblen’s *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) provides a sociological dichotomy (primitive vs. barbarian) which may help in identifying O. Henry’s gallery of elusive characters forced to inhabit a highly competitive milieu.

Veblen divides mankind’s evolution into three distinct stages: the primitive, the barbarian and the industrial. Honesty, good nature and equity are the objectives of a primitive type of character which is also defined by traits such as “weakness, inefficiency, lack of initiative and ingenuity” (1994: 138). Life has become a struggle in the barbarian stage, and therefore predatory habits such as “ferocity, self-seeking, clannishness, and [...] a free resort to force and fraud” (Veblen 1994: 138) are highly valued. The present-day stage is the industrial age which the economist defines as a hybrid mixture of both primitive and barbarian traits. Working-class individuals are characterized by “honesty, diligence, peacefulness, good-will, an absence of self-seeking” (Veblen 1994: 140). In other words, they have kept archaic traits that belonged to the primitive times. In contrast, the ruling class, far more interested in acquisition and accumulation of wealth, has retained the predatory attitudes typical of the barbarian temperament.

This Darwinian model might be interpreted as dividing the members of the social contract into two opposed types. However, Veblen gainsays this foregone conclusion by adding that all social classes “are engaged in the pecuniary struggle” (1994: 148), and accordingly the barbarian frame of mind may shape the aims of both employers and workers. This leaves open the question of who will be fit to survive in the struggle for existence. No social trait is written in stone, and O. Henry’s unpredictable characters encompass the whole spectrum of responses.

A look at the new role of women at the dawn of the twentieth century will suffice to prove this point. According to Veblen, women are forced into a set of primitive duties which save them from taking part in the pecuniary struggle (1994: 220). Any attempt at achieving a “self-directing, self-centered life” is by definition a barbarian trait, and since women’s natural sphere is always “ancillary to the activity of the man” (Veblen 1994: 216), any deviation from this tenet is likely to bring forth unfeminine results. Yet the sociologist also notes that the massive incorporation of women to the labor market at this time is slowly but surely contributing to breaking many gender-based stereotypes and traditionally assigned traits.

O. Henry is not unaware of the constant state of flux of gender identities which modern industrialization has brought onstage. Married life and domesticity is no longer the exclusive domain of women. Theodora Deming of “October and June”

(*Sixes and Sevens*, 1911) is no longer the Southern belle of the cliché waiting for her gentleman caller. Not surprisingly, she has no qualms about rejecting the captain's wedding proposal because he is slightly younger and she can foresee that the small difference in age will only bring them misery in the future, even though this may entail her remaining a spinster. Women can also challenge the traditional symbols of femininity. Even at the expense of looking like "a truant schoolboy" (O. Henry 1953: 9), Della's decision to have her hair cut in "The Gift of the Magi" (1905) reveals the emergence of a woman who is able to defy conventions. Jim is also forced to abandon the role of the traditional husband, and so he must not only accept Della's new look but also part with the family gold watch, the repository of the patriarchal tradition. Female characters transgress the male-dictated rules of social behavior. Alien to the conflicts of the two major rival ethnic groups of Lower Manhattan, the ugly duckling Irish girl of "The Coming-Out of Maggie" (1904), the paper-box factory worker who never finds a boy to escort her to the Saturday dance, is able to break the norms of the club by inviting an Italian guy whose identity she hides by calling him O'Sullivan. Another good example is Hetty Pepper, the resolute shopgirl of "The Third Ingredient" (1908), fired after slapping a customer who has pinched her arm, and who shares very little with her obliging colleagues. In opposition to her next-door neighbor, Cecilia, the artist who cannot confront problems and attempts to commit suicide, Hetty is the new working girl who does not need a man around to guide her life. Her conclusive words, "It's *us* that furnished the beef" are naturally ambivalent. On one hand, she alone had succeeded in bringing together the ingredients of the stew she is cooking. But even more importantly, it is also on active women like her that New York, the epitome of the nation's melting pot, depends. In Elizabeth Cady Stanton's words, she is "the arbiter of her own destiny, an imaginary Robinson Crusoe, with her woman, Friday, on a solitary island" (2006: 60). The source of Hetty's final tears is left, however, unexplained: do they reveal her fragility as an unemployed woman in the big city? Or are they just brought about by the onion she is chopping? Needless to say, Hetty is the antithesis of the traditional woman, so even if she momentarily breaks down, there is no doubt that she will soon be back on her feet and will, thus, easily give the lie to Veblen's idea of women's traits and their round of duties.

Very different from Hetty is Dulcie, the protagonist of "An Unfinished Story" (c. 1905), the salesgirl who believes in pipedreams, gallantry and undefiled innocence, and who illustrates the impossibility of making old world values compatible with the pressures of the new consumer society. On her very low wages (six dollars a week) she can hardly make both ends meet. Yet the list of superfluous things she purchases (licorice drops, pineapple fritters, imitation lace collars, etc) and her consumption habits (Coney Island, window shopping, expensive Sunday breakfasts and generous tips) make her, in Veblen's words, a consumer of "conspicuous waste

and leisure”, a barbarian trait of the ruling classes of industrial societies. Despite being a victim of the labor market’s blatant injustices, Dulcie’s impulse to become an active consumer is stronger than the fulfillment of her most basic needs (raspberry jam, crackers and tea make her regular dinner). And since buying has become a deep-rooted instinct, her story does not need telling. Only too well does the reader know that she will be unable, sooner or later, to resist the temptation of an evening with Piggy, the great “spender”, for spending, as Veblen puts it, has become the Americans’ unavoidable habit, regardless of their social class, the only visible sign of enhancement of one’s position in an atomistic society.

5. Eugenic/dysgenic: the dumbfounding of Darwinian laws

Out of the long list of characters in O. Henry’s short fiction, artists stand out as blatantly unsuited to the struggle for existence. They have been endowed with primitive traits and are therefore unfit for competition. Weak, sensitive, honest, well-meaning, gullible and lacking predatory traits, they are, in the modern world’s chaos, “at a disadvantage, somewhat as a hornless steer would find himself in a drove of horned cattle” (Veblen 1994: 161). The protagonists of “A Service of Love” (*The Four Million*, 1906), Delia, a musician in search of pupils, and Jim, a watercolor painter without patrons, cannot make their living by their art, and so they have to get a full time job in the laundry—one ironing, the other firing the engine—to enable them to survive in the Big Apple. In “Extradited from Bohemia” (*The Voice of the City*, 1917), Miss Medora, another mediocre painter, is on the verge of being engulfed by the perils of the dissipated lives of the artists in the city, after deciding to leave a peaceful existence in the countryside with Beriah, the ever-faithful fiancé who finally comes to her rescue. Miss Leeson, the stargazer and the unsuccessful playwright in “The Skylight Room” (*The Four Million*, 1906), is sent to hospital and saved in the nick of time from death by starvation. Another “failure in art” (O. Henry 1953: 1457) is old Berhman, a victim of pneumonia in “The Last Leaf” (*The Trimmed Lamp*, 1907), a cranky painter with a drinking problem who does little other than talk about his coming masterpiece even though he very well knows he stopped painting seriously long ago. As noted before, Cecilia, the miniature portrait painter of “The Third Ingredient”, attempts suicide as do Eloise Vashner, the aspiring actress, and her boyfriend in “The Furnished Room”, but this time nobody comes in their rescue. Defined as “[r]estless”, “shifting” and “fugacious as time itself” (O. Henry 1953: 98), since they are dominated by an uncontrollable nomadic impulse (“they flit from furnished room to furnished room, transients forever”, 1953: 99), artists are destined to lose the battle in the quest for a secure niche in the big city. In the social

studies of the time, the “wandering blood” (Rafter 1988: 51), or “wanderlust” (Flynt 1907: 53), becomes the most visible symptom of unfitness, one of the identifying features of the pauper class. Overwhelmed by the predicaments of a materialistic society, artists cannot cope with the harsh pressures of a world which undervalues everything that does not easily yield to the laws of supply and demand, or that proves by all accounts useless in a market teeming with tantalizing commodities and trinkets.

Ruse (2000: 97-99) argues that evolution was not only “a tool of professional scientific research” but “a kind of basic way of looking at the world, a sort of secular religion” which provided “social and moral messages rather than insights about the living world”. That O. Henry was acquainted with Darwinian sociological theories is an incontestable fact. Yet his attitude is one which shows that evolution is running counter to scientific evidence: racially inferior and physically degraded citizens are on the verge of becoming superior in number and force to those endowed with better qualities. As Havelock Ellis puts it: “We are [...] making the path smoother for the unfit, helping them to compete with the fit, and encourage them to propagate their unfitness” (1911: 23). In “The Foreign Policy of Company 99” (1904), O. Henry’s use of the protozoa metaphor to refer to the newly arrived Russian immigrant, Demetre Svangvsk, is reminiscent of Herbert Spenser’s thesis (1862) that modern societies must parallel the geological evolution from protoplasmic life into highly distinct creatures. The first organisms on the earth’s crust were protozoa, indefinite in shape and size, living in colonies called “sponges” and “hydras”, lacking internal arrangement, so low on the evolutionary scale that they were closer to plants than to animals. In accepting immigrants as the new sap of American society, the country is cancelling the biological tendency to support superior individuals by allowing the entrance and multiplication of the inferior. Thus, the nation is favoring a regressive measure detrimental to the rights of the “good” citizens. Immigrants can only bring “squalid poverty and profligacy” (Bremmer 1956: 8), a contagious social disease which may spread “from room to room in a tenement and from house to house in a street” (Pimpare 2004: 30). Svangvsk is one who, like many others at this time of mass immigration, has been “dumped out” at Ellis Island in the name of Liberty, “a lump of protozoa”, “expected to evolve into an American citizen” (O. Henry 1953: 1429). Unable to speak the language, with a stupid grin on his mouth and easily distracted by the hustle and bustle of the big city, he provokes an accident by stepping in front of the firemen’s hose-cart driven by John Byrnes. In order to avoid running over the scatterbrain, Byrnes collides with a pillar of the elevated railroad and is sent to hospital. Demetre, the doctors’ chalk mark on his coat still visible, proves unscathed, though. The narrator shows the shortcomings of the American Constitution which declares identical rights for every man in stark contrast to the

firemen’s code that dictates that some men are unfailingly better than others. However, the prejudiced opinion Byrne has of Russians (one which re-inscribes Lothrop Stoddard’s principle that some men are naturally inferior) is, if not substantially modified, at least alleviated in the second part of the story, when he avoids an accident by jumping on the unbridled horse and thereby saving the life of his own child. We then discover that Demetre is a Cossack, and this realization makes Byrnes, a passionate defender of the Japanese in their war against the Russians, change his point of view to the extent that he ends up defending the superiority of the latter.

“The Furnished Room” also invites a serious Darwinian reflection. The room, set somewhere in the crumbling brownstone houses of the Bowery, fulfils the function of a burial place where the weak come to die, a sort of Paleozoic Sea in whose tepid waters the mass of protoplasmic life will inevitably perish. While the protagonist goes upstairs, we are shown a damp, musty place where everything has gone, or is on the verge of becoming, vegetable. The stair carpet has degenerated to “lush lichen or spreading moss”, as if it were viscid, decomposing “organic matter”. The room is also located in “a water-girt city” which is likened to a “monstrous quicksand, shifting its particles constantly, with no foundation, its upper granules of to-day buried to-morrow in ooze and slime” (O. Henry 1953: 100). The passing tenants are now castaways, the jetsam and flotsam of a ship sinking during a tempest, indeed an old Romantic image of the man’s inability to fight the adversities of destiny (Landow 1982: 92-103), and by 1912 a staple metaphor in social studies to refer to the ominous fate of vagrants living in the Bowery and Tenderloin (Hunter 1912: 106).

In a thought-provoking article, Pittenger (1997: 50) argues that during the Progressive Era the descent to the lower depths in New York City was frequently described as falling down into the “treacherous quicksand” of a jungle, “infested by the most venomous creatures”, which put into action a regressive process that went “from man to beast, to reptile, and to that most noisome of living creatures, the human worm”, an invertebrate which takes up the lower steps of the evolutionary ladder. In fact this is how the landlady is depicted at the start of the story: Mrs. Purdy is compared to “an unwholesome, surfeited worm that had eaten its nut to a hollow shell and now sought to fill the vacancy with edible lodgers” (O. Henry 1953: 99). She speaks with a furry voice that seems to come from remote depths. Her talk with Mrs. McCool over a glass of beer at the end of the story—the use of words such as “colleen”, the glide of the vowel [i:] into diphthong [ei], and the flouting of number in the verb forms— corroborates that they are Irish, a fact that the narrator has carefully planned in order to confirm the widespread prejudice that the Irish are the dregs of society. As Hunter notes (1912:

286), the vast majority of paupers in almshouses were Irish, and the Irish were considered the lowest Caucasian variety at that time (Tucker 1994: 35).

The bulk of the story is, however, devoted to the hero's thoughts and sensorial experiences while he is sitting in the chair breathing "the breath of the house", "a cold, musty effluvium as from underground vaults" (O. Henry 1953: 101). Since he embodies the primitive type, he is dominated by an animistic sense, that is, by an instinct to see preternatural agents behind things, which rules out any attempt to look for a causal explanation of phenomena and which finally leads him nowhere, for he naïvely opts to believe in the landlady's false words. Although he correctly identifies the actress's perfume and hears her voice, he is unable to use his intuition to his own ends, and finally Mrs. Purdy's lies and egoistic code ("rooms are made for to rent", O. Henry 1953: 103), a clear symptom of her barbarian nature, prevail over the primitive actor's altruistic quest for his beloved. While in the room, and before contemplating the idea of suicide, every object has been transformed into a sign which reveals the former tenants' history to him: their hopes and agonies, their wild passions and outbursts of wrath. "One by one, as the characters of a cryptograph become explicit, the little signs left by the furnished room's procession of guests developed a significance" (O. Henry 1953: 100-101). The young man now becomes an archaeologist unearthing whatever object has been left behind that brings back Eloise's fossilized presence, "ransacking the drawers", digging into "the corners of the bulging matting on his hands and knees", "skimming the walls" (102) of a room like a gigantic water bed round whose edges the silt slips down and disappears. It is evident that O. Henry was acquainted not only with Lyell's geological principles, but also with paleontology and stratigraphy. In "Extradited from Bohemia", for instance, he speaks of "prehistoric granite strata" [...] "herald[ing] protozoa" (O. Henry 1953: 1345). By mid 1880s fossil hunting and finds became absolutely central to the development of evolutionism, already the dominant model in the textbooks of the nation's colleges, North or South (Numbers 1999: 133), and also an increasingly popular topic. Lyell's ideas (1830-1833) are particularly useful for an understanding of O. Henry's depiction of the tenants' fate in "The Furnished Room". Lyell starts with the premise that the earth's successive changes entail a parallel "destruction of species" which has now become a "part of the regular and constant order of nature" (1997: 265). Among the agents that remodel the globe's geography he mentions "the solvent power of water" (Lyell 1997: 105) in the shape of torrents, rivers, currents and tides, and the destructive power of fire active through volcanoes and earthquakes. The description of the room that we get through the protagonist's eyes includes explosions (a bottle or glass thrown against the wall and splintered like "a bursting bomb"), convulsions (a couch "distorted by bursting springs"), and a "potent upheaval" which has cleft "a slice from the marble mantel" (O. Henry 1953: 101),

each of them conspiring to destroy a water-corroded room. And since “some portion of the earth’s crust is [constantly] shattered by earthquakes or melted by volcanic fire, or ground to dust by the moving waters of the surface” (Lyell 1997: 333), some species, unable to survive these geological changes, must inevitably perish. Yet the ending is not Mrs. Purdy’s defeat but Eloise and the young man’s death.

Although the story has been labeled as “sheer melodrama” (Quinn 1936: 521-49), and rewrites the principles of O. Henry’s narrative composition, surprise ending and incredible coincidences included, the tone is not characteristically the author’s. Current-Garcia (1965: 116) points out that very few of his stories “match the bleakness of ‘The Furnished Room’”. Irony and humor have vanished to give vent to a powerful description of a gloomy place. “This story illustrates another quality in the best of O. Henry’s fiction —that which makes places and localities articulate”, argues Arthur Hobson Quinn (1936: 521-49). However, on this occasion O. Henry uses a literary formula unprecedented in his short fiction: the haunted house motif of the Gothic tradition. Dale Bailey (1999), following Leslie Fiedler’s suggestions, argues that very few other subgenres are politically more subversive for it provides a diagnosis of the cultural ills by provoking “our fears about ourselves and about our societies” and questioning everything “we hold to be true —about class, about race, about gender, about American history itself” (1999: 6). Gothic tales are not only politically aware but deeply “concerned about ethical problems” (Just 1997: 25). From the 1839 publication of “The Fall of the House of Usher” the haunted house tale has become a deep-rooted tradition in American fiction. The setting —formulaic even in its minor details— is a defining symbol. Whereas the Gothic castle stood for the old values and lifestyle of an aristocracy in its death throes, Hawthorne’s celebrated *House of the Seven Gables* was the first to dislocate the conventions of the gothic novel by converting the house into the vehicle to express “all that is corrupt in American ideology” (Bailey 1999: 8): political power, social justice or distribution of wealth.

Bailey provides a useful chart of the obligatory ingredients of the haunted house formula. First, he mentions that the setting is an old house with “a troubled history”, “disturbed by supernatural events” (1999: 56). The setting of O. Henry’s story is a Lower Manhattan flophouse. The narrator tells us that the temporary tenants’ life-stories may be dull and unexciting but occasionally there can be found “a ghost or two in the wake of all these vagrant guests” (O. Henry 1953: 99). The young man “prowls” along the streets “after dark” in search of a room, and he finally rings the bell of the “twelfth house”. The sound of the bell is “faint” as if it came from “some remote, hollow depths” (O. Henry 1953: 99). Later on, after taking the haunted room, he hears his dead beloved’s call and smells her perfume through his “finer senses” (O. Henry 1953: 102). Secondly, Bailey points out

several possible climaxes of the cliché tale: either the house is destroyed or it continues to exist. In “The Furnished Room” the whole building is slowly crumbling away, and although no destruction takes place, it is clear that everything is going through a slow process of putrefaction. Bailey mentions that since Poe’s celebrated story, the haunted house has become “a prism through which to refract issues of social class and economy” (Bailey 1999: 57), and this is definitely the symbolic role assigned in our story. Like the house of Usher, Mrs. Purdy’s brownstone fulfils an antagonistic role insofar as it becomes the graveyard of those ill-equipped to challenge new living conditions.

Conclusions

O. Henry’s narrative poses important questions about which ideological assumptions are being dislocated in the Progressive Era. In a world where long-standing principles are being put to the test in order to yield to new patterns of conduct and changing identities, the most visible symptom of this disruption of values is the disbelief in any pre-established set of rules. I have attempted to demonstrate that a welter of literary traditions —Horatio Alger’s stories, melodramatic and Gothic elements, tall tale ingredients and crime stories— are carefully gathered in O. Henry’s fiction in order to be either spoofed or subverted. To readers this systematic use of parody becomes an unmitigated source of bewilderment and distrust for they realize that their expectations will inevitably be overturned sooner or later. “Distill[ing] true meaning” in his narrative, Current-Garcia noted long ago, can only be accomplished through “deceitful immediacies” (1965: 97). What remains is a masquerade whereby the ritual rules are closely observed even though the spirit of the ceremony is gone. If, as John Fiske once held, Darwinism marked the “period of decomposition of orthodoxies” (qtd. in Loewenberg 1935: 233), O. Henry’s narrative maps out the tension caused by the suspension of any belief. Guidelines are written only to be flouted. The result is not only a rigmorole of signs and countersigns, but the reconfirmation of the epistemological uncertainty which defines our approach to the world. Gender identities and social roles or types, the categories we use to make sense of a society in a non-stop state of flux, contain little or no value. O. Henry’s characters live in a universe of masks and symptoms. The criteria which set the boundaries between what is true and what is not are no longer operative. What is left is, in Baudrillard’s words, “a precession of simulacra” (1998: 166), visual emblems of a meaning which cannot be retrieved. Poverty may be only an empty show (as in “While the Auto Waits”), and being rich only consists in feigning to indulge in what one assumes that the wealthy people do (even though one can make the mistake of

putting ice cubes in a glass of champagne). The important thing in the social scenario is to show simulations, to become, like Mr. Chandler (“Lost on Dress Parade” 1904), “an exhibit as well as a gazer” in an attempt to be “a wealthy idler” (O. Henry 1953: 92) at least for a day, and to save as much money as possible to spend it lavishly in front of others. Consumption has become a carnivalesque festival insofar as it has replaced the driving force of evolution —struggle for existence— for the urgent need to keep up appearances.

It is no mere coincidence that Darwinian postulates also fail to predict human responses in the social contest. Veblen’s barbarian/primitive dichotomy as the basis of the gender duality (men and women) and social classes (employers and workers) does not help to classify O. Henry’s characters. If evolution is not producing the multiplication of the best as expected but the victory of the unfit —as I have shown in the analysis of “The Furnished Room”— no criterion can be reliable.

In the story he left unfinished at his death, “The Dream”, O. Henry draws the blurred contours of a landscape that is partly real and partly a phantasmagoria. “Murray dreamed a dream”. This is the opening line and from this point onwards we ignore how much of the story has happened and how much is illusory. The moment he is sitting on the electric chair, condemned to death —he has killed his wife— he dreams that his execution is a nightmare from which he is on the verge of waking up. He is at home, takes his sweetheart in his arms and kisses his child. Happiness is real, the execution was only a bad dream. Yet his certainty —and ours— vanishes when he hears the prison warden turn on the machine. The ambiguous ending —he “had dreamed the wrong dream”— gives the story a Chinese-box structure and a creepy edge, and leaves the problem purportedly unsolved. The borderline between one dimension and the other is so imprecise that our resolve to choose this or that version wavers at the last second: is his execution factual or imaginary? Maybe by placing his narrative in the context of these postmodern ideas we can unearth some of the ideological reasons underlying O. Henry’s intentional indeterminacy concerning every aspect of his craft.

Notes

1. The title and the date in brackets allude to the volume of collected stories. When only the date is included, I am referring to its first published version in the literary magazine.

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“Truth is held in disrepute”: O. Henry and the dismantling of paradigms

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BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE CENTURY: THE POSTCOLONIAL IMAGINATION IN THE “NEW” FICTIONS OF THE CANADAS

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Shortly after some of the most renowned Canadian literary and cultural critics came to grips with the ways in which Canada could be labelled *postcolonial*, the term started to be reworked, under the impetus of national and international critiques that urged for a revision that went beyond the consideration of the country as a ‘second world’ (Brydon 1995), or a ground for settlement along with, or against, the First Nations, the only peoples that could be named postcolonial for their resistance to, and complicity with, some of the dominant forms that displaced their cultures (Hutcheon 1991; Bennett 1993-1994).¹ “There is a delicious irony in the fact that Canada’s dubious ontological status has found a reflection in other literatures of the postcolonial world and given Canada an international presence”, Magdalene Redekop states. “The openness to new constructions, the provisional nature of those constructions, the ironic play that affirms a mutual humanity”, she continues, “all these are part of what makes Canada a nation that welcomes creative invasion” (2004: 274). And, although that *invasion* has contributed to the reshaping of the Canadian postcolonial, the very term is inherently endowed with a penchant for self-revision.² First, the presumed homogenisation that has loomed historically over the term and the field of theory that it names has certainly triggered a reworking in Canada and elsewhere, coinciding with the coming of age of the discipline and the increasing relevance of fields, such as Subaltern, Queer Studies or Ecocriticism, which were initially built up, at least partially, on

30 postcolonial foundations. Second, the unstoppable power of the newly deployed relations between the local and the international in a global arena of analysis has relegated to a secondary ground some of the so far irreducible peculiarities of the two former scenes. All in all, the Canadian case deserves to be taken with the necessary cautions, since its specificity has been the reason for its being frequently overlooked or encapsulated with other, almost *but not quite* similar, situations of postcolonial subjectivity (Slemon 2003: 324n2). As a settler-invader territory (Brydon 1995), Canada offers a number of situations that few other Commonwealth zones have: the presence of the first Nations, diversified into particular ethnicities and endlessly displaced and wiped out by European invaders, the existence of a dual settler population linked to two pugnacious mother countries, internal rivalries between these peoples, and, once solidified as state, the establishment of a vertical mosaic/kaleidoscope whose roots date back to an officially bicultural social paradigm that largely ignored, when it did not obliterate, the multicultural diversity that Canada hosted from early on in its constitution as a dominion. Last, but not least, the proximity of the neo-colonial power *par excellence* to the Canadian borders is a factor to bear in mind, especially when the great bulk of the Canadian population lives near the US frontier. Given all these circumstances, it is not strange that, as Linda Hutcheon observes, when Canadians are asked in a survey, “as Canadian as...”, they responded “as possible, under the circumstances” (1991: 19). Although insignificant, the anecdote is symbolic of the lack of national consciousness that has been taken as the icon of a state that endlessly produces its own identity in a helpless process of fabrication, in the end symptomatic of a pervasive lack in the psychoanalytical sense (Keohane 1997).

This paper centres on the contemporary theoretical revision of the Canadian postcolonial to eventually propose a close relation between that revisionary strength and the creativity of the fictions indirectly touched by the recent Canadian multicultural presence. In consonance with previous historical periods, there is a heavy reliance on the rewriting of history and relevant historical moments for previous national-building processes. However, now the focus of these fictions is on the *Canadian*-Canadian engagement with the postcolonial, a thorough revision of the concept undertaken by the descendants of the oldest Canadian immigrants. In their novels already published in this century, the colonial, as much as the postcolonial, is a matter of degrees, and also of regional and communal histories veiled to favour the ossification of the national/state mirage.

The transcultural boom that occurred in the last twenty years of the past century endowed the revision of the Canadian postcolonial with a noticeable impulse. Thus, ‘new’ fictions like Lewis DeSoto’s *A Blade of Grass* (2003) or Austin Clarke’s *The Polished Hoe* (2003), even though they are located in contemporary South Africa and the Caribbean respectively, with almost no mention of Canada, have

contributed their bit to the rewriting of the Canadian nation in posing different, spatially and historically loaded circumstances with an immediate counterpart in the Canadian contexts of nation building. At the opening of the new century, the Canadian national ethos is more aware than ever of the relevance of community and region and the precarious balance in which they all have stood, and will stand to give shape to the conglomerate called nation-state beyond the turn of the century.

In frenetic succession, the last thirty years of the 20th century bore witness to the Canadian nationalist zeal of the 1970s, emblematised in novels like Atwood’s *Surfacing* (1972), immediately followed by an ironic approach to the earlier constructions of nation and culture in the mid-eighties of the *Canadian postmodern* (Hutcheon 1988), represented in turn by historiographical metafictional works like George Bowering’s *Burning Water* (1980) and *Caprice* (1987) or Michael Ondaatje’s *In the Skin of a Lion* (1987). These historiographical claims were soon complicated by the space sociologically given to the multicultural agenda and its fictional offspring in texts like Joy Kogawa’s *Obasan* (1981) or Denise Chong’s *The Concubine’s Children* (1995). The late nineties, once the transcultural deluge had solidified, were characterized by a literary and cultural affirmation supported on the shifting social relations opened by an ongoing *reecriture* of official histories, natural encounters, dual foundational myths and the public voicing of stories of colonialism in pre- and post-war Canada. Wayson Choy’s *The Jade Peony* (1995), Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *The Englishman’s Boy* (1996) or Kerry Sakamoto’s *The Electrical Field* (1998), on the day to day life in Vancouver’s Chinatown, the bloodiest episode in the Western expansion, and the contemporary psychological sequels of the Japanese eviction and segregation during WWII, easily stand together in this wide-ranging panorama of fiction at the end of the 20th century. As we move into the 21st, however, this *grosso modo* picture expands beyond the Canadian borders, opting for an eloquent dialogue between the national and the international, inside and outside the Canadian state. *One Hundred Million Hearts* (2003), Sakamoto’s latest text to date, for example, leads the way back to a mostly nebulous Japan for its second generation Japanese Canadian characters. “During the war my father learned to shoot a rifle, lunge with his bayonet and march the perimeter of Okayama Second Middle School, knees high and arms swinging”, the narrator Miyo recalls. “He had been born in Vancouver but sent to Japan for schooling, then to a farther away place he called Manchukuo. I couldn’t find it in my map of the world” (2003: 1).

From the 1990s on, the questioning of traditional models of national culture brought about by postcolonial theory within the kaleidoscope accounted for the implemented coalescence of multiple Canadas within the state space, all of them subject to continuous shape-shifting in their morphology depending on issues of

positionality and historical grounding within the state scenes. Narratives such as Ann-Marie MacDonald's *Fall on Your Knees* (1996), on the intersecting marginalities of the Cape Breton Piper sisters and their family secrets (Rukszto 2000; Howells 2003: 103-125), or her newest, published after the opening of the century, *The Way the Crow Flies* ([2003] 2004), reveal the juxtaposed peripheries of the Canadian postcolonial. In the last of MacDonald's novels, Mimi McCarthy is of Acadian origin and the derangement of her people by the Anglos is a heavy weight on her consciousness that leads her to say repeatedly that she is very good at moving, being used to rapid packing and unpacking (MacDonald 2004: 84), now as the wife of a Canadian pilot, Jack. In their struggle with the English, the Acadians were the historical losers, as in the present of the novel are innocent teenagers accused of molestation and murder to conceal an international plot to host a Nazi scientist in Canada under US coverage, or as are the abused girls who are raped by their teacher. One of the victims, Madeleine McCarthy, imagines her first day at school in the Air Force base where they stay for a while in Southern Ontario in these terms:

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On the first day of school, the flag of our country will be raised. Not our flag, precisely, but the Red Ensign: the Canadian coat of arms, and in the upper left corner, the Union Jack. Canada does not have an official flag, we are not officially a country, we are just a dominion. What's a dominion we're not sure. It is the name of a grocery store chain. (MacDonald 2004: 34)

Madeleine's early confusion is however more seriously echoed in her father's military attitude that forces him to receive direct orders from the US Pentagon, thus obviating the national military hierarchy to surreptitiously shelter a war criminal.

A further instance of the multifarious Canadian postcolonial comes with Wayne Johnston's *The Colony of Unrequited Dreams* ([1998] 2000), which reconstructs the life of Joey Smallwood, the first Newfoundland premier, interwoven with the history of this territory up to its adherence to Confederation in 1948. Since the 17th century, Newfoundland has represented the most extreme case within Canadian national, nationalist and postcolonial problematics. Between 1600 and 1825, it was ruled by British governors that hardly ever lived on the island. When the rest of the country was flocking for Confederation between 1867 and 1871, Newfoundland was not, and did not even have colonial status until 1825. For almost a century, between 1855 and 1934, it was a self-governing colony of Britain, which fostered a timid nationalist awareness. The nationalist expectations reached their summit when its parliament was suspended in 1934, when there emerged the dual option of either accompanying the Confederate provinces or asking for a different status. It was in 1948 that Newfoundlanders opted for ascribing to

Confederation in a referendum that also gave Smallwood regional power. Through a text that mingles Smallwood’s first person narratives, historical reconstructions of daily affairs, clips from newspapers and other documents like personal letters or memoirs, we listen to the premier’s voice when explaining that “[p]erhaps we Newfoundlanders had been fooled by our geography into thinking that we could be a country, perhaps we believed that nothing short of achieving nationhood could we live up to the land itself [sic][...]. It seemed so nation-like in its discreetness” (Johnston 2000: 154). As a whole, the novel “[...] emphasises how nation, [...] is the product of an ongoing negotiation between its constituent parts”. It “use[s] allegory for more critical and postcolonial purposes, disrupting the unilateral semiotic correspondence on which it can rely and suggesting instead that the narrative of nation is subject to multiple readings” (Wylie 2002: 134-135). The segmentation of Newfoundlanders and their territory either in favour or against Confederation epitomises the continuous multiplication of periphery within periphery so conspicuous in the Canadian case, which makes it impossible to distinguish a single Canada, and advocates, instead, the plural existence of the Canadas.

Together with the echoes of Acadians and Newfoundlanders, the voices of the Natives resound anew but still tangentially in non-specialised critical forums: the Ojibwa in Ruby Slipperjack’s *Silent Words* (1992), the Beothuk in Johnston’s metafiction, or the Cree in Tomson Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998) prepare the ground for turn-of-the century novels like Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* ([2000] 2001), on the Haisla people on the coast of British Columbia. Through the eyes of the young female protagonist, her daily reality and her powers to see and talk to the dead can hardly conceal a political agenda concerned with claiming the rights of the First Nations, and, what is more, the appraisal of the Haisla culture and the denunciation of white settler oppression:

As we drove Mick played Elvis and homemade tapes that his friends had sent him, with songs like “FBI Lies”, “Fuck the Oppressors”, and my favourite, “I Shot Custer” [...]. Abba was absolutely forbidden in Mick’s cassette desk.

“She’s got to know about these things”, Mick would say to Dad, who was disturbed by a note from one of my teachers. She’d forced us to read a book that said that the Indians on the northwest coast of British Columbia had killed and eaten people as religious sacrifices. My teacher had made us each read a paragraph out loud. When my turn came, I sat there shaking absolutely furious.

Mama told me it was just pretend, they eating people, like drinking Christ’s blood at Communion. (Robinson 2001: 68-69)

Double and treble forms of colonialism are reflected, refracted and multiplied in the eyes of the newcomers, the Natives and the WASP Canadian population.

Recently Quebec has finally achieved Ottawa's approval of a document stating its official acknowledgement as a nation in its own right while being attached to the Canadian state. In the early 1990s, Canadian fiction was commenting *in passim* on this impossible relationship of closeness and simultaneous independence. Two examples illustrate this. In "Wilderness Tips" ([1991] 1998), the piece-title in Margaret Atwood's well-known collection, George's thoughts on the matter are described:

George takes one more look at the paper. Quebec is talking Separatism; there are Mohawks behind the barricades near Montreal, and people are throwing stones at them; word is the country is falling apart. George is not worried: he's been in countries that were falling apart. There can be opportunities. As for the fuss people have made about language, he does not understand it. What's a second language, or a third, or a fourth? George himself speaks five, if you count Russian, which he would prefer not to. As for the stone-throwing, it's typical. Not bombs, not bullets: just stones. Even the uproar is muted. (Atwood 1998: 199)

34 Meanwhile, Kristjana Gunnars' novel *The Substance of Forgetting* (1992) described the English-French liaison as one of lovers trapped by a dynamics of willing fusion and parallel repulsion, where the eventual *jouissance* was synonymous with the loss of each group's identity. In the novel, these lovers remind us of a fluid Canadian state that is immune to the conspicuous stasis of such a formation. In turn, the slipperiness of nations in interaction, but refusing assimilation, is reminiscent of hide-and-seek love games. Mirroring the classical Canadian duality, Gunnars' lovers make of an abiding desire the principle whereby they exist: "Perhaps we are together because Jules is a Quebec separatist and we are in the United States" (Gunnars 1992: 15), the anonymous narrator dubitatively reflects. "Perhaps it is just his presence, one spirit desires the other, one language desiring the presence of another. Bilingualism. My English desires his French. Without the other language, my words have no significance" (Gunnars 1992: 47-48), she affirms later, letting us see the supplementary nature that imbibes the seemingly dual Canadian scene.

Taking into account this succinct fictional sample from the 1990s, and as further evidence of the theory-creative writing bond, it is not strange that a number of critical volumes on literature and culture proposed shortly after the turn of the century a paradigmatic change, a *refiguration* or *reconfiguration*, in Canadian society (Maufort and Bellarsi 2002), in the cultural/literary productions in fields as diverse, though related, as women's writing (Howells 2003) or the national literary canon, which is now read through queer lenses (Dickinson 1999), for instance, or *homotextually* (Goldie 2003). "If national identity is superseded or eroded by other identificatory markers", Coral Ann Howells affirms, "then it is

time to refashion that ‘ugly oversized dress’ into more appropriate dimensions, though not the time to throw it away and go naked” (2003: 203). And indeed, far from a transition of the nation into the *postnational* (Davey 1997), the 1990s adumbrated a new envisioning of the national collective immersed in a dialogue of moving borders, a new way for postcolonial Canadianness, since “[b]eing Canadian consists in a constant renegotiation of cultural boundaries” (Maufort 2002: 11). This common, and, for years, widely accepted view is no impediment to appreciating how Canadianness and the postcolonial condition share that continuous concern with rubbing out and drawing anew their limits, ever attentive to the ongoing changes in identity constitution.

Therefore, if a similar attention to revision binds Canadianness and the postcolonial condition, it is appropriate to wonder how this may affect postcolonial theory and postcolonial Canadian fiction, emphasising the ways in which their *newness* is being produced. In a general context, Kanishka Chowdhury asserts that *newness* features prominently in contemporary postcolonial theory by means of its concern with three different concepts. First, by drawing heavily on the work by Anthony Appiah concerning liberal cosmopolitanism; second, by relying on the ideas by Etienne Balibar, postnationalism; and third, by referring to disjuncture, based on the premises of diaspora and the movement of people/s across borders by Arjun Appadurai or Homi K. Bhabha. In Chowdhury’s view, these three approaches have dictated the path for much postcolonial theory, which in this form has parted ways with Marxist analysis, since it makes no room for the relevance of capital, market consumption and its assumptions (Chowdhury 2006: 135-138). “Contemporary postcolonial theoretical production [...], while offering much in its demystification of colonial ideologies and structures of power”, Chowdhury affirms, “has, in its modern incarnation, especially in its allegiance to the ‘new’, disavowed the Marxist tradition for an interpretive model that highlights cultural ambiguity, hybridity and cosmopolitanism” (2006: 130). This affirmation is also valid for much of the postcolonial theory produced in Canada, I would argue, which increasingly incorporates ideas proposed by ‘third world’ critics.

In Canada, the social models have officially implanted ideals like cosmopolitanism, certainly advocated by the contemporary trends of diaspora, the disjuncture of the transnational population, which in turn, has impelled a serious reconsideration of nation and culture in their most traditional guises. Much of the questioning of these conceptions of nation and its Enlightenment equation to the state was launched in the 1990s by postcolonial theory and its search for a wide-encompassing model of nation (Bhabha 1990, 1994), albeit free from the stasis inimical to the state. The Canadian postcolonial of the 1990s has undergone a process of specialisation, as Enoch Padolsky affirms (2004), since, on the one hand, the diversity of the population precludes a homogeneous postcolonial for all, and

on the other, the resonances of antinationalist tendencies in contemporary postcolonial theory forces the postcolonial in Canada to rather focus on issues of culture and national clashes. Undoubtedly, this reconsideration has been brought about by the difficult balance that the massive arrival of immigrants brought to the image of the nation-state. In theory, flows, cosmopolitanism and a presumed postnationalism define and have defined Canadian society, as well as the attempts made at its theorisation.

In many cases Canadian fiction and theory have unveiled their mutual dependence in such a form that it is not always easy to ascertain which goes first. The case of postcolonial theory and the fictions produced in Canada that can be labelled postcolonial is a further instance of that close liaison. Has postcolonial theory paved the way for the production of these fictions, or, conversely, have these fictions produced in the 1990s and on the edge of the century led postcolonial theory by the hand? Although it is impossible to affirm that every single novel includes some complicity with theoretical ideas, a vast number do. And, no less important, not all of them are by academics or writers well informed on the issues of academia. Finally, the fictions that can be said to unveil a serious questioning of ideas of nation and culture, the postcolonial condition of Canada, new views on the social models, etc. are not exclusively the literary production of immigrants in Canada or transcultural writers more or less directly concerned with the real counterparts of the fictional models of their books. This attests to that already mentioned symbiosis between theory and fiction, but now in the hands of authors that, traditionally, have been tangentially concerned with the political potentiality that a re-inscription of the postcolonial may have for their own location within the national spectrum.

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Increasingly, the mirage-like category *Canadian* is inflected imaginatively speaking with the different. This inflection, moreover, transcends the tokenism synonymous with a restraint of the foreign presence, and, consequently, the contention of difference that features cultural diversity (Bhabha 1994: 36). Now it is “*Canadian-Canadians* who ‘recognise’ other cultural groups, primarily for their ‘contributions’ to Canadian culture, identity and nation-building, and in so doing help to differentiate the Canadian project of nation-building from that of other nation-states” (Mackey 1999: 89). The fictions of the *Canadian-Canadian*, therefore, are increasingly sympathetic towards liberal cosmopolitanism, disjuncture and a presumed postnationalism that is continually adopted, reshaped and adapted to multiple necessities. These three concepts unfold in fiction in the variety of ways in which the ‘new’ imagiNation is being materialised.

The fiction produced since the beginning of the century has made of the Canadian ontological problem a question to be exhaustively addressed by rewriting and inscribing anew the myths of foundation or western expansion. This tendency is a

consequence of the fact that “Canada was created [...] out of ideas, out of conversation and imagination. [...] Canada is still a creation of the mind, as much, if not more so, than a physical and tangible space that we know through experience” (Martin 2006: 2). The telling of these experiences presents identities in perpetual change, narratives that sometimes supplement each other, views of any identity as inheritance, but also as performance. In showing such a field of contrast Canadian writing seems to state that “[...] [a]t the end of a century in which the world witnessed perhaps too much history, and wearied of it, there are signs of a renewed and reconfigured appreciation of it [...]” (Wylie et al. 2002: 1). Those new appreciations question once again the classical “where is here?” (Frye 1971: 220), the query that has nurtured a massive volume of creative and theoretical literature for more than thirty years, but now ready to explore the past with a renovated metatextual and metafictional acuteness on issues of foundation and settlement. Canadian new-millennium novels like Douglas Glover’s *Elle* (2003) or Guy Vanderhaeghe’s *The Last Crossing* ([2002] 2003), to which I now turn, revise different periods of the long colonisation of Canada, from the 16th century explorations of the St. Lawrence River to the late 19th century settlement on the western plains of Alberta and Saskatchewan. Whereas the former dramatises the abandonment of the historical Marguerite de Roverbal by her fellow explorers in Jacques Cartier’s third expedition up the Saint Lawrence, the latter is also a tale of expeditionary geographical and personal discovery, as Charles Gaunt comes to grips with himself while looking for his twin, Simon, seemingly stranded among the Crow Natives.

In Glover’s text, the fictional Marguerite de Roverbal, Elle, gives us her account of being isolated and turns her story into a vitriolic critique of the colonialist mentality of discovery and settlement (Wylie 2003). The creation of subjectivity produced by her memoir interweaves race, gender and sexuality, three elements that turn colonialism upside down, using for that purpose the same circumstances brought to the fore by the colonialist enterprise, that is, issues of supremacy, the encounter with the non-self and the struggle of forces that are inverted in Elle’s writing (Ball 2005: 86-87). Although she promptly claims that “I must be the first French woman to set foot in this world, the first of the General expedition to land, the first colonist in Canada” (Glover 2003: 37), her wayward gender sets her apart, quite near the non-European. Such a stance paradoxically enables her to go against the grain and undermine issues of foundation, the authority of the national fathers, and the very ontology of Canada. Thus, “[t]he mere existence of Canada constitutes a refutation of the first principle of Christian cosmology, expressed by St. Isidore in the seventh century, ‘that beyond the Ocean there is no land’” (Glover 2003: 58; Turner 1995: 1-18). This assumed marginality endows her with greater authority to question the basis of any national/state foundation:

And I wonder about a country founded by such disparate heroes as Richard and the Sieur de Roberval, who, if combined, still might not amount to a real man. Poor Canada, destined always to be on the edge of things, inimical to books and writing, plagued by insects in the summer and ice in the winter, populated by the sons and daughters of ambitious, narrow, pious, impecunious Protestants and inarticulate but lusty Catholic tennis players, not to mention the rest of the expedition [...], every kind of rogue except heretics, traitors and counterfeiters who were deemed unsuitable to the dignity of our pious expedition. (Glover 2003: 43)

In a different form, *The Last Crossing* complicates the construction of the west and its myth of exploration through a multivocal account of colonisation which undermines in several ways the duality self/other essential in the establishment of the nation. It depicts the expansion of a group of men that follow the tracks of the missing British man Simon Gaunt, who, as part of an evangelising mission led by Reverend Obadiah Witherspoon, vanishes in a snow blizzard in the 1870s, somewhere between present-day northern Montana and southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. In the polyphonic narration individually given by the group of seven questers, subjectivity and otherness are continually constructed and deconstructed, culture and civilisation defined by a temporary, partial otherness that uncovers nothing but hybridity in the origin of the early Canadian foundations. In this sense, and as a symbol of that hybridity, the origin of Simon's rescue party is the most diverse in being formed by Americans, a Canadian, the British Gaunt brothers, and Jerry Potts, the Scot-Cree pathfinder so fundamental in the white commercial dealings with the Blackfeet of the Northwest Territories.

Charles Gaunt falsifies the official story to avoid the shattering of the performativity of colonialist Englishness and assert his rights over the history of colonisation (Kuester 2000: 277-292; Bölling 2004). Charles' report once back in England after his incursion into the Canadian west leaves out part of the circumstances in which his second brother, Addington, died after having been involved in a murder. Most importantly, Charles' memory disremembers the fact that Simon was actually found, but did not want to leave his new life among the Crow. The account of Simon's preaching among the heathen and his *going* Native is concealed, not only because it questions the colonialist agenda of white superiority and evangelisation, but also because Simon's life with the Crow is shared with a man/woman healer. Their coexistence, however, disrupts Victorian morality as well as most of the precepts supporting the colonialist agenda. On the one hand, Simon's homosexuality directly interrogates the heterosexist construction of the male conqueror who demands and accomplishes the impregnation, literal and metaphorical, of the other, woman and land. Among the Crow, on the other hand, his life with the healer Talks Different counteracts the colonialist interest in reproduction and appropriation of the land and its natives.³ S/he and Simon have

adopted a child of dead Crow parents, he is now *Born of a Horse*, and it is the *bote* that claims “I am the one who saved him. Named him. He is mine” (Vanderhaeghe 2003: 350).

While *The Last Crossing* exposes the westward expansion as a reification of culture and nation that functions to preserve a mirage of originality, as well as the need to colonise the other, *Elle* disrupts the myth of the early foundation, the male explorer and his taming of the wild as the first step for civilisation and progress in North America. The differences of these *new Canadian-Canadian* fictions notwithstanding, they both show “Canada [as] a mental rather than a historical space. It was an idyllic construction of nature and adventure”, where “Europeanness as whiteness translates into Canada and this provides it with an imagined community” (Bannerji 2004: 289-90). More recently, as Bannerji goes on, “[f]ractured by race, gender, class and long-standing colonial rivalries, the construction of Canada entails two major forms of interconnected crises —that of citizenship and that of the legitimization of the national state formation” (2004: 292).

As the 20th century came to an end, the postcolonial theory of the 1990s, with its early emphasis on counteracting the centred state model, gave way to fields of theory and fiction or fiction/theory such as Gender/Queer Theory and Ecocriticism. In particular, I would like to engage the relevance of the latter by briefly examining Jane Urquhart’s *A Map of Glass* (2005). The text renders Canada a territory apt for the continuous re-inscription of a subject in process that looks back onto nature to reconfigure the borders of its subjectivity and the ways in which it is determined by issues of site and place. As inheritance of the early postcolonialism, beneath this territory there lies an abiding questioning of the humanist subject as centre and motor of progress. In Canada, the taming of hostile nature implied the first step towards civilisation, whereas the second was the founding of a settlement in the clearing, indeed the cornerstone for the grafting on of the European civilisation and its reproduction. Many Canadian novels throughout the last thirty years have been critical of this approach to nature and landscape for its deployment of colonialist and patriarchal technologies of representation. In the early 1970s Marian Engel’s *Bear* (1976) turned the explorer into a female librarian, Lou, who rejects any form of settlement or domesticity, and opts in turn for a conciliatory integration in the environment of her voluntary exile. More recently, *Away* (1993), also by Urquhart, portrayed the establishment in Canada of an Irish family whose women have been *away* for generations, all of them following the trail of that first matriarch whose soul was robbed by a castaway thrown up by the waves onto the shores of Ireland. Once in Canada, she also opts for staying far from domesticity to live and die in the midst of the woods, far from the marital and familial regime. In different ways these novels formulated anew the role given to women in the colonialist production of civilisation, by rewriting a

historically inherited, assumed relation with the landscape, and, consequently, they posited the earliest basic ground for a recent ecocritical awareness in fiction.

Contemporary Ecocriticism aims at reformulating the distance mediating between the individual and the surrounding space, to eventually achieve a reconsidered public and private discourse of nation/community belonging. For all the relevance that nature and the wilderness have historically enjoyed in CanLit, it is not strange that Ecocriticism gains ground every day. As a critical mode, it consists basically of a return to nature in search of answers to the dilemmas posed by civilisation and human progress. As its name indicates, it also relies on an ecological consciousness allied with green postulates, and the denunciation of those human conducts endangering the survival of landscapes and their diversity. Scrutinising contemporary Canadian writing it is clear that nature has been and still is being read in several ways: from the enemy to be kept at bay in order to root civilisation in a distinctive catalyst other than the nationalist movements. It has also been considered as the negative counterpart of the definition of civilisation, as well as the foundational essence endowing with coherence and cohesiveness the collective self. And last, but not least, it is now the element that distinguishes the local from the *indistinguishable* global (Angus 1997).

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Somewhere between the local landscapes and the internationally common concern with ecology, human tracks in the colonial wilderness are still bound to the colonisation of the north, south, east and west. Jane Urquhart's *A Map of Glass* opts for staying in the east to make of the Saint Lawrence River the vehicle for the telling of a story that links colonisation to environmental degradation, while also interweaving the pastoral and the apocalyptic featuring Ecocriticism (Garrard 2004: 6). With its attention to cartographical representation, two-dimensional and tactile, and the maps of human experience tailored around the 19th century Woodman settlers, the novel renders the return to nature that articulates the reverse of progress. In that inverse path the natural artist Jerome McNaughton and the map-maker Sylvia Bradley find their contemporary identities via the reading and investigation of the diaries written by the cartographer and historian Andrew Woodman. After his death in the contemporary Timber Island, Woodman inadvertently triggers a backward archaeological recovery and genealogical discovery of his ancestors through the interest hosted by his lover Sylvia and Jerome, the fence-portraitist, unwilling finder of Woodman's corpse within a floating iceberg during the spring thaw: "the day that you found Andrew you became the present, the end of the story, the reply to the last unanswered question" (Urquhart 2005: 75), Sylvia tells Jerome. And indeed, the novel leads us from the 20th to the 19th century and vice versa with intersecting tracks that cross on the contemporary deserted Timber Island, and on the flourishing timber trade centre that had been back in the 19th century, when boats departed from there and went

down the river to Quebec and upstream to load the valuable cargo of a flourishing wood industry.

Such a former industry is held responsible for the destruction of the landscape and the soil after deforestation. The present landscape of Timber Island and the surroundings are barren and Jerome goes there interested in the traces of the people who had lived there, still perceptible at such an enclave located exactly at the meeting of Lake Ontario and the Saint Lawrence. “Jerome [...] was drawn to the abandoned scraps of any material, peeling paints, worn surfaces, sun bleaching, rust, rot, the effects of prolonged moisture, as well as to the larger shifts of erosion, and weather and season” (Urquhart 2005: 11-12), we read in a passage where the decrepit human landscape parallels the previous natural decline that started at a moment of vigorous human activity. When the artist wanted a renewal of his identity induced by a return to nature, Jerome found that vitality in the abandoned landscape, although his search was for that essence that Canadian nationalist movements situated in nature (Berger 1966). “Grim was what Jerome was after. Grimness, uncertainty, difficulty of access—a hermit in a winter setting, the figure concentrated and small against the cold, blues, and whites and greys that made up the atmosphere of the landscape, the season” (Urquhart 2005: 10).

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Jerome’s trip to the recondite Timber Island echoes the journey in which the historian and geographer Andrew Woodman died. Woodman, a member of the old Woodman family involved in the timber exploitation, goes to the island looking for a communion with that same nature that his ancestors devastated. For Andrew, unlike Jerome, the visit to Timber Island was the occasion of the retaliation of nature: all the power that his ancestors used to change the landscape turns onto him, and that vengeful nature is eventually assuaged in that image of a frozen corpse enclosed within the iceberg crystal.

It took Jerome’s mind some time to interpret the visual information being transmitted. Some of the smaller icebergs had moved closer to the island during the night and were now lined up like docked rowboats near the shore. [...] Jerome [...] was about to pull the camera from his pocket when he noticed a large mass of ice that contained within it a blurred bundle of cloth that seemed both enclosed in the ice and emerging from it. [...] It was then that Jerome saw the outstretched hands, the bent head, the frozen wisps of grey hair and he heard his own voice announcing the discovery. ‘A man!’ [...]. (Urquhart 2005: 31)

However, Andrew’s stay on Timber Island was motivated by his will to find there traces of the family, although they were unavoidably linked to death and degradation: “Andrew never forgot that his own family was involved. He could never let go of the picture of a raped landscape” (Urquhart 2005: 99). And indeed, as the generations of Andrew’s forebears succeed one another and their timber

business declines, they open a hotel, The Ballagh Oisín, in the area, on one of the banks of the river. However, that hotel bears witness to rich soil turning into the barren sand that ends up by invading the hotel's facilities. "During the autumn that followed Marie's death, dunes had completely swallowed her flowerbeds at the rear of the house. [...] Furthermore, the last time that he had opened one of its ovens, Branwell [Andrew's grandfather] had been appalled by the sight of the tiny dunes that had formed inside it [...]" (Urquhart 2005: 280-281). The inner and the outer spaces blend to bespeak a decrepitude brought about by the Woodmans. "The old settlers [Andrew] had once told [Sylvia], had left nothing behind but a statement of labour, a biography of stones" (Urquhart 2005: 37).

Parallel to those maps of degradation that the novel creates, Sylvia also makes her own maps, translations into the tactile for her visually disabled friend Julia. These maps are her own way of transferring the realities around and inflecting them with her view. Jerome does the same with his art, and in both cases, nature or geography is the portrayed object. Nature also links them through their common concern with Sylvia's former lover; Sylvia, Jerome and Andrew belong to that peculiar saga of ambushed characters of Canadian literature that nature has charmed and, as a result, endlessly go back to it to live, and die as well. "Andrew felt that he had been destined to become a historical geographer", Sylvia tells Jerome. "He told me that the mistakes of his ancestors had made this a kind of dynastic necessity. Unlike his forebears, [...] he paid careful attention to the landscape, to its present and to the past embedded in the present" (Urquhart 2005: 77). Nature links the present and the past of Timber Island, therefore, but also Jerome and Sylvia through Andrew, himself tied to nature in life and death. The attention bestowed to it in *A Map of Glass* is part and parcel of the contemporary relevance of natural dilemmas, but it certainly reflects much of what the future should be, also in cultural and literary affairs. No less important, this attention to nature also reinscribes the subject within new angles of the national and cultural preoccupations connected to the space and site in which individuals dwell. Much of the literary production that appeared on and beyond the edge of the century is now exploring the blooming relations determined by individuals who did not consider themselves postcolonial, and their nexus to the space that they inhabit and the national formations that they constitute (Corse, 1997; Kertzer, 1998). These fictions are informed by theoretical postulates that advocate the changeability and fluidity of national entities, as well as the lack of univocal representations of the subject *vis-à-vis* nature, or the stories construed as the history of settlement and colonisation, to mention just two of the fields nourishing, as well as nurtured by, the early postcolonial of the 1990s, but now moving beyond the edge of the century.

Notes

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². Moss (2003) and Sugars (2004) are the most recent examples of the contemporary interest in the revision of the Canadian postcolonial, thus carrying on much of the spirit that governed other groundbreaking works such as Hebble et al. (1997) or Verduyn (1998). Whereas the last two attempted to accommodate contemporary literary critique within the moving scene of Canadian ethnicities through accepted Canadian postcolonial lenses, Moss's work assembles essays that start by questioning the ontological validity of that frame, and Sugars'

reads the postcolonial as a tool to renovate state-centred models of nation and culture.

³. Simon's sexuality remains unclear till we find him among the Crow with the *bote*. Before, several clues scattered through Charles' representation of their infancy in England point towards it tentatively (Vanderhaege 2003: 202, 203). His sexual dissidence is in this case paired to his ideological dissent in joining the sect led by the Reverend Obadiah Witherspoon. Among the ruling principles of the group is the belief in the Red Indians' being descendants of the Tribes of Israel (Vanderhaege 2003: 213, 218). Although nothing is explicitly said on the group's sexual politics, through Charles' evasive references can be found comments like “[...] I saw one of the men casually place his arm on Simon's shoulders. [...] [T]he men appeared to be on familiar terms with him. Something about the scene I had witnessed struck me as sinister” (Vanderhaege 2003: 210). Although implicit, sodomy lurks in the atmosphere of Charles' description. Shortly before this passage, Simon had asked Charles to reflect on an excerpt from Rousseau's life in which a sodomite attempted to seduce him (Vanderhaege 2003: 203).

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“FINDING ANOTHER FACE INSIDE MY FACE”: THE SEMIOTICS OF MIME IN EDGAR NKOSI WHITE’S RACIALIZED DRAMATURGIES

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From Cicero to Oscar Wilde, the human face has been generally perceived as the mirror of the mind and the soul; the eyes, as both windows and interpreters of our inner Selves. These associations become especially significant when applied to the theatrical field: for in the artistic game of communication that is established between playwrights, actors and audience, the character’s face plays a key role in both representing and creating the complex but highly communicative discourse of the unsaid. In the same way, Tadeusz Kowzan regards facial mime as the system of kinetic signs that is closest to verbal expression. Indeed, the actor’s face can generate a large number of signs, all of them conveying the feelings, sensations and thoughts experienced by the actor during the performance (Kowzan 1992: 172). At the same time, as Kowzan contends, mime constitutes —together with gesture— the most personal and individualized expressive mode in the theatre (Kowzan 1992: 172), submitted as it is to the performer’s physical, psychological and actoral idiosyncrasies.

In this light, Anne Ubersfeld’s statement that the practical and theoretical complexity of the analysis of mime is almost infinite (1997: 224) is far from being hyperbolic. However, the mimic design of some dramatists enables the observation of certain constant features that do not necessarily depend on the actors’ peculiarities. This kind of mimic design lends itself to dramaturgical analysis¹ that, in turn, can throw light on the work of the playwright and his/her representation

of the world. If the dramatist's work develops around a thematic concern that speaks from and about a very specific corporeal reality so that consequently, the theatricalized body becomes the central subject and object of a complex social discourse, the study of mime in this playwright's drama becomes even more revealing. This is the case with the dramatic production of Edgar Nkosi White,² whose plays reflect a corporeal discourse of the unsaid that is persistently loaded with racialized implications.

Beyond the social discourse that predominates in the work of this Afro-Caribbean playwright, facial expressivity performs different functions in his playtexts. Eye-expression, for instance, often acquires a spatial value which complements the austerity of the playwright's stage designs.³ In some cases, the eye-expressions of Edgar Nkosi White's characters are specific enough to almost act as "actor furniture", to use Jindřich Honzl's term (1976: 82); that is to say, the eye-movements of some of his characters recreate a stage property which the audience does not see yet is led to imagine.⁴ However, it is the reality of racial oppression and its effects that underpins most of the facial expressions of Edgar Nkosi White's figures. Here, an analysis of the semiotics of mime in Edgar Nkosi White's drama will show his mimic design to be a potent vehicle whereby the complexities of the phenomenon of racialism may be theatricalized. At the same time, an analysis will also be made of the discourse of ambivalence that tinges the racialized face—and, by extension, the racialized body—in the way these are presented in Edgar Nkosi White's dramatic work. The observation of the double axis of eye- and mouth-expression—which, as Anne Ubersfeld points out, determines mime (1997: 224)—will serve as an ordering principle to attain both objectives.

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Starting with the first axis, eye-expressions underlining the conflictive potential of a line, gesture or movement stand out as the most abundant in the author's dramaturgies. Hence, faces connoting concern (White 1989: 258), nervousness (White 1984a: 17), embarrassment (White 1989: 260), cunning (White 1970b: 155), suspicion (White 1984b: 53; White 1985a: 109), defiance (White 1985a: 104), disdain (White 2001: 68) or anger (White 1983d: 96), constitute indexical signs of the varied types of tensions that unsettle Black and White victims and oppressors in discriminatory situations or in circumstances derived from a racist background.⁵ Mimic signs which indicate a moment of sudden, uncontrolled emotion (White 1983c: 18; White 1985a: 142), as well as facial expressions of gravity (White 1983c: 12) or sadness (White 1985c: 80; White 1985a: 113), may also be understood as underscoring the wounds that marginalization inflicts upon the victim.⁶

All the signs of conflict conveyed through the expressivity of the eyes in Edgar Nkosi White's theatre can be said to portray the effects of racial oppression close-

up. The magnified vision they offer of this reality not only enables appreciation of a physical score of suffering in miniature, but also casts light on a striking coincidence between racialism as a social phenomenon and the art of acting itself. In the theatre spectators are not accustomed to regarding mimic expressions of emotions as a response to an *external* situation,⁷ as Anne Ubersfeld observes (1997: 227), whilst mimic signs are in fact the result of an interaction between the actor and the other actors or signs in the performance. More particularly, and resorting again to Anne Ubersfeld's words, emotions reflected in an actor's mime do not correspond to the expression of a transcendental Self, but are rather the reflection of an aggression that may well be invisible (1997: 227) but which is at work in the play. Likewise within the context of racialism, in order to interpret the victim's, or even the oppressor's mimic variations as being *externally* stimulated and not the product of some inner motivation, it is necessary to be well-acquainted with the mechanics of racial oppression. Only those familiar with this form of discrimination are able to rapidly apprehend its signs as being externally-generated, and thereby to read the victim's facial expression adequately.

This is demonstrated in Edgar Nkosi White's theatre every time a character alludes to the faces of the oppressed and what is harboured in them. In *Les Femmes Noires*, which presents the lonely, alienated lives of African American women in New York, a girl called Carolyn wants to tell her mother about "those faces" which she sees on the streets: "Black faces. So many tribes. Eyes crazy" (White 1985b: 173). The mental hallucinations suffered by a Black beggar called Cipo in the same play can be interpreted in a similar way: "My mind gets flooded with voices and faces, too many faces" (White 1985b: 174). As these lines show, the stamp of White-on-Black oppression is often concentrated on the eyes of the victim. This is reflected in *The Life and Times of J. Walter Smintheus*, a fictional biography of an African American sociologist who finishes his days in a mental institution. In a letter to Smintheus, his friend Robert evokes their first encounter at university by saying: "[...] I could see in your eyes the same animal furtiveness that was in mine. That is, in the eyes of all black students at big Ivy League colleges. We know we don't belong here" (White 1973b: 15). Smintheus observes the same mark of oppression in the Black prostitute that becomes his lover when he tells her that "the implications of [her] eyes hurt [him] too much" (White 1973b: 62). The same occurs to the Black South African protagonist of *The Boot Dance* when, looking at photographs of himself when he first went to England, he tells another character: "The eyes [...] see the eyes different" (White 1985b: 130).⁸

The haunting power of eyes and faces is enhanced even further in Edgar Nkosi White's work whenever the oppressor's face is verbally depicted with a deadened expression. This kind of inexpressivity is perceived as deadly by the alienated onlooker. Hence, in the play *Ritual by Water*, which presents the connections

between two generations of Caribbean migrants in London, the protagonist says he does not want to die in England “where people already look like death” (White 1984b: 51). By the same token, in *The Boot Dance* Lazarus explains how his father alluded to White people as “the dead” or as “the souls of the dead come back” (White 1985a: 100). Nevertheless, this type of inexpressive mime also characterizes the victim’s face, implicitly in *Like Them That Dream* when Sparrow describes his marginalized existence in New York by saying that “death was in [his] mouth, in [his] eyes [...]” (White 1983d: 123). Interestingly enough, allusion to unfeeling faces may imply a momentary reproduction of this effect by the actor who is speaking. Through the eradication of mimic expressivity in the actor’s facial mask, the playwright signifies the anaesthetization, even zombification of the Self to which racialism ultimately leads.

Whereas the facial signs cited above underline the negativity implicit in racist situations and the range of conflictive emotions they are capable of generating, other mimic expressions reproduced through the eyes of Edgar Nkosi White’s figures seem to contradict the negation of Selfhood to which the victim of racial oppression is submitted and in which the oppressor, albeit indirectly, is also entrapped. As a matter of fact, this mimic paradox of signifiers and signifieds could be understood as a theatrical necessity; for dramatic conflict is born out of oppositions and the performing arts in general are nurtured from contrasts. Hence, totally disparate traditions of actor training, such as Konstantin Stanislavski’s ‘system’ or the highly codified Nô Theatre, coincide in the need to counterpoint the performance of a dominant emotion with calculated touches of the opposite feeling or attitude. Following this contrastive principle, the performer ensures the attention of the spectator through a polytonal physical score. Beyond this performative strategy, however, the contradictory manifestations of mime inscribed in Edgar Nkosi White’s plays are expressive vehicles through which aspects of oppression that may not be conveyed otherwise are acted out, thereby demonstrating, again in Anne Ubersfeld’s words, that mime can express what cannot be communicated through other corporeal manifestations (1997: 229).

In this way, the playwright re-presents the peculiar degree of unsettling happiness felt by a victim of racialism when recognizing, even understanding, his/her own experience through the eyes of another character. This is mirrored in *Ritual by Water*, for example, when a West Indian boy called Silence stares at his tutor’s girlfriend “intently for a long time” and then tells her: “You just look like my mother” (White 1984b: 55). It is the power of Silence’s gaze that makes the female character realize to what extent he has captured her essence as a West Indian woman surviving in White-dominated England, leading her to admit later in the play:

He had some extraordinary eyes. I felt absolutely naked [...]. But really it was like he could see right through you. I didn't know what to say [...]. He frightened me but at the same time I felt I knew him. Still I was helpless [...]. This is such a funny country. You don't ever know quite what you are [...]. But he really did have the most amazing eyes [...]. (White 1984b: 55)

At this point, it is important to emphasize the extent to which Silence's eye-expression is an actional one. Thus far, the characters' eyes have been described as vehicles of the actors'—and hence, characters'—expression when confronted with an external stimulus. Silence's 'intentional' look, on the other hand, becomes the expression of a statement; it is a stimulus itself. It is for this reason that the term 'gaze' becomes more appropriate here, with both its philosophical and theatrical implications. "That second spine which is the gaze", as Eugenio Barba puts it,⁹ is indeed a challenging, even interrogating tool through which Edgar Nkosi White theatricalizes the complex subjectivity of the racially oppressed. As reflected in the words quoted above, recognizing the gaze of the oppressed or even one's own oppression through the eyes of 'the other' can either nullify any attempt to speak or make speech itself an insufficient means of communication. The peculiar power of the gaze to counteract the victimizing power of racialism is also reflected in *The Nine Night* through the eyes of an ageing West Indian character, which are "luminous and childlike" (White 1984a: 12) and resist the sense of disappointment reflected in his words; or, by a different token, in the gaze of a young Caribbean boy in the same play, who is said to have "the blood-shot eyes of a raver" in which a resistant attitude towards discrimination is contained (White 1984a: 7). The gaze of these characters hence refracts the preservation of dignity in deprived scenarios, as with the mixture of beauty and sadness that Sparrow observes in Sharon's gaze in *Like Them That Dream*: "Your eyes are the difference between the way the world should be and the way it really is", he says (White 1983d: 85).

Closely connected with this, and also very frequent in Edgar Nkosi White's work, are inscriptions of what could be denominated 'seductive', even 'lustful' gazes, with which marginalized characters momentarily acquire the status of 'Subject' they are most of the time denied. Examples are found in *Fun in Lethe* (White 1970a: 76), *The Wonderful Yeare* (White 1970c: 205), *Ritual by Water* (White 1984b: 40, 66), *Redemption Song* (White 1985c: 32, 48, 64) and *The Boot Dance* (White 1985a: 103).¹⁰ These intense ways of looking contribute to a peculiar kinetics of desire and affection in Edgar Nkosi White's theatre. Indeed, looks of seduction in the author's work generate, in Susan Melrose's terms, a counteractive "force-field"¹¹ (1994: 53) that undermines the inferiorizing power of a predominant mime of negativity and suffering. With seductive and lust-filled looks, sparks of life are introduced into the playwright's conflictive mimic designs, momentarily melting the "frosted glass"

through which people “look[-] at each other”, as a character in *The Mummer’s Play* puts it (White 1970b: 133).

The observation of mouth-movement, the ‘second facial axis’ in Anne Ubersfeld’s classification, leads to similar conclusions when applied to Edgar Nkosi White’s characters. Thus, half-open or widely-open lips are implicitly present in the dramatist’s work to convey various degrees of surprise (White 1983a: 161), puzzlement (White 1985c: 39), shock (White 1985a: 137) or even catatonia (White 1973b: 5, 64),¹² which racial rejection produces in both oppressor and victim. At the same time, though, his plays contain many examples of mouth-expression that undermine the aforementioned dominant mime of hate and sorrow. Through them, it is again demonstrated to what extent theatrical discourse often has, at least, one contradictory duplicity. Thus, smiling and laughing faces abound in Edgar Nkosi White’s drama, counterpointing the negative attitudes and feelings evoked by his characters’ looks and reinforcing those gazes that inject degrees of counteractive force-fields. These mimic features deserve special attention, particularly because of their important presence in the playwright’s work in quantitative terms and also due to their highly paradoxical load. To be sure, smiles and laughter may be deemed highly bizarre mime traits in Edgar Nkosi White’s *oeuvre* if his work is perceived as consistently dramatizing racial oppression. Yet, a closer look at their distinct connotations provides the key to understand their central role in the dramatist’s portrayal of racism.

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Happy faces are, on the one hand, indexical signs of characterization. Hence, the cheerful disposition of some of Edgar Nkosi White’s oppressed figures is reflected in their smiles or sudden bursts of laughter, thereby favouring contrast to other serious or sad-looking figures in the same play (White 1970a: 97; White 1970b: 133; White 1972: 17; White 1973b: 19, 36; White 1973a: 86; White 1983d: 83, 92, 125; White 1984a: 11, 30; White 1984b: 43, 47, 50; White 1985c: 17, 36-7, 41, 46, 45, 65; White 1985a: 92, 130; White 1985b: 153, 165, 190; White 2001: 45, 52; White 2002: 279).¹³ At a more symbolic level, the oppressed and, yet, smiling characters of Edgar Nkosi White’s plays could be perceived as promoting a fossilized image of the victim of racialism and of Black people in particular. That is to say, the numerous laughing Black faces in his work might be read as perpetuating the stereotypical depiction of Black people as *naïve* and servile, which is especially problematic if the historical background of such an image is taken into account.

The *cliché* of the ever-smiling Black man is indeed one of the oldest, most widespread racist constructions. Dating back to the times of slavery, it has strong connections with types such as that of the faithful, good Christian slave or ‘Uncle-Tom’ type, or the caricaturesque ‘Zip Coon’ of black-face minstrels in the

nineteenth and twentieth centuries. “The smile of the black man, the *grin*”, as Frantz Fanon says, “seems to have captured the interest of a number of writers” (1986: 49). This smile has been historically interpreted, even constructed, from the Whites’ point of view. In this connection Frantz Fanon quotes Bernard Wolfe’s thoughts: “It pleases us to portray the Negro showing us all his teeth in a smile made for us. And his smile as we see it—as we make it—always means a *gift* [...]” (1986: 49). This enforced ‘gift’ is still offered today through the industry of tourism and neo-colonial visions of underdeveloped regions.

Of all Edgar Nkosi White’s plays, it is *Redemption Song* that more clearly presents Black smiles as generated by a neo-colonial backdrop. The play’s protagonist, a West Indian poet that returns to his homeland after a long exile, needs to be taught about the servile value of smiling in the Caribbean. Thus, his father tells him, “[s]ometimes you must grin until you can do better” (White 1985c: 76). Similarly, his old friend points at his own teeth, teaching him a similar lesson: “These here so your life preservers. Them keep you afloat. If you want to get through in this place that’s what you have to do. Is best you learn now” (White 1985c: 62).

Not all the smiles and laughs in Edgar Nkosi White’s work are, however, collaborative, enslaving “gifts” to White figures. Enacted as they are in very different contexts, most of them generate a wide range of differentiated connotations. For this reason, their outstanding presence in the dramatist’s mimic designs does not foster the use of a racist stereotype *per se*. Instead, the smiling and laughing faces of the author’s oppressed critically re-present Black people’s position of servitude in past and present-time racist societies. As anthropologist Geoffrey Gorer puts it:

The blacks are kept in their obsequious attitude by the extreme penalties of fear and force, and this is common knowledge to both the whites and blacks. Nevertheless, the whites demand that the blacks be always smiling, attentive, and friendly in all their relationships with them [...]. (In Fanon 1986: 49-50)

Edgar Nkosi White depicts this “demand” in *Millennium 7*, for example, when an old African American woman called Naomi says: “They expect you to be smiling and cheerful all the time” (White 2002: 272). As reflected in Geoffrey Gorer’s thoughts, smiles are a deceptive yet intrinsic component in the reality of White-on-Black oppression.

In this light, other complementary meanings underlying Edgar Nkosi White’s smiling characters can be better comprehended. Thus, some of the happy-looking faces in the playwright’s work may be also understood as reflecting a resilient disposition in the face of subjugation and adversity. Langston’s face in *The Lovesong for Langston* is a case in point, above all in the scene in which the poet smiles while scrubbing the

ship's deck, confounding the Sailors with his positive attitude in such harsh conditions and, in so doing, misleading them into thinking that he is "simple" (White 2001: 21). From the beginning of the play, however, Langston's mother refers to her son's capacity to "laugh at the damnedest things" (White 2001: 3).

Resilient smiles become collective signs of resistance when exchanged between members of the same community. Many of Edgar Nkosi White's characters smile to each other or laugh together, thereby creating strong bonds of complicity that make the effects of racism slightly more endurable. The healing influence which laughter exerts on marginalized groups is hence reflected in several of the author's plays (White 1970a: 74, 80-1, 83; White 1970b: 136; White 1970c: 183, 185, 187, 201; White 1973b: 34; White 1973a: 73, 141; White 1983b: 198; White 1984b: 52, 55, 58, 60, 69; White 1985c: 45; White 1985b: 163; White 1989: 257). All these pieces demonstrate, in the words of David Krasner, to what extent —

[l]aughter within a group blurs self-awareness, heightening a sense of commonality with those who partake in it. In the process, laughter secures group solidarity [...]. Shared laughter extinguishes an isolated existence, deepening one's connections and sense of common interests. (1997: 137)

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Indeed, when laughter is shown to be contagious amongst Edgar Nkosi White's oppressed figures, the circle of isolation that alienates these characters from others is momentarily broken, while at the same time enhancing the capacity of marginalized figures to distance themselves from their everyday plights, as done through more individualized forms of smiling.

In distinct dramatic circumstances, laughter may become a sign of parody whereby the power of the oppressor is challenged or, at least, undermined. As such it is also reflected in Edgar Nkosi White's plays, especially every time a racially-oppressed character mocks the racist structure either by teasing the oppressors, be they present or not (White 1970a: 109; White 1970c: 237; White 1971: 146; White 1973b: 61; White 1983c: 52; White 1984a: 12; White 1984b: 42; White 1985c: 53);¹⁴ or by laughing at the absurdity of his/her own subjugated position (White 1970a: 79; White 1973a: 115; White 1983c: 75; White 1985c: 41; White 1985b: 158; White 1989: 269).¹⁵ These are partial manifestations of the "carnival laughter" defined by Mikhail Bakhtin which "is directed at all and everyone" (1984: 11) and with its "gay relativity" and "ambivalence" allows the oppressed to vent their sorrows in an act of subversive derision.

There are at least two implications attached to this type of laughter in Edgar Nkosi White's work. On the one hand, it undermines the subservient smile whereby, as mentioned earlier, Black people have been stereotyped. Through parodic mime, the smile of servitude is turned on its head, divesting the oppressors —even if only

momentarily— from a position of superiority that is taken for granted and that includes a likeable self-image. In *The Nine Night*, the marginal existence of Afro-Caribbean exiles is re-presented through Hamon's parody of White Englishmen in the West Indies, which makes his old friend Ferret laugh. Hamon's mockery alludes to physical difference —“You know how they face get red as soon as the sun touch it?” (White 1984a: 12)— as well as to bodily behaviour —“When the rhythm of the music start to grab him— he jumped and tried to dance, man he look like a chicken when lighting strike it” (White 1984a: 12).

Hamon's farcical representation of his oppressors and Ferret's empathetic response towards it, as well as the mocking attitude of other figures with regard to their 'Others', illustrate at a mimic level “the double vision”, as Homi Bhabha puts it, which menacingly results from “mimicry” —in this case understood, as this scholar does, as “one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge” (1994: 85). Be they representative of (post)colonial subjects —and hence of “mimic men” proper— or simply of Black citizens assimilated into —yet at the same time rejected by— predominantly White societies, the mocking faces of Edgar Nkosi White's figures produce, resorting again to Homi Bhabha's words, “a partial vision” of the oppressor's “presence”, “a gaze of otherness” whereby “the observer becomes the observed and ‘partial’ representation rearticulates the whole notion of identity and alienates it from essence” (1994: 88-9).

On the other hand, the parodic laughter of Edgar Nkosi White's characters offers them temporary protection against the double, even triple oppression that they suffer within and without the same community as a result of their racial inferiorization. In fact, these multiple oppressions are often expressed in the form of laughter as well. In some cases it is the racist's laughter (White 1973b: 59; White 1973a: 108; White 1983d: 112, 118; White 1985c: 34-5); in other cases it is the laughter of division between members of the Black communities, who ridicule one another, failing to recognize that the marginalization of their peers is a sign of their own marginalization (White 1983c: 55, 135; White 1984b: 44-5; White 1989: 239; White 2001: 22, 41); and frequently it is the laughter of female characters, which is presented as another sign of the Black male's emasculation in racist contexts (White 1970a: 70, 76; White 1970b: 144; White 1985c: 21, 25, 70). All in all, these ‘other(ing)’ laughing faces contribute to presenting the (male) victim of racial discrimination as, in Ferret's words, “a figure of fun” (White 1984a: 13). At the same time, however, they are central to understanding the complex value of their own laughing mime when parodying the multi-layered exercise of social mockery to which they are submitted, hence becoming, for a short while, those who laugh longest.

Having considered the distinctive, often paradoxical meanings which intersect in the facial expressions of Edgar Nkosi White's figures through the axes marked by

eye- and mouth-movement, it is possible to affirm that the essential mime of his theatre conforms a polyhedric mask of ambivalence. The dramatist's mimic designs can be collectively regarded as a mask inasmuch as they conceal different faces behind the face that is on display. Where facial expressions of negativity are conveyed through eye-expression, they are contradicted by the positive message of the mouth, and vice versa; whilst mouth-expression seems to respond, the gaze interrogates. The distinct layers of expression in the mime of the oppressed actually reflect their quest for 'Selfhood', a search for the completion of the self which may be recognized in all its human, individuated traits. The protagonist of *The Crucificado* clearly expresses this quest by saying, "my job is finding another face inside my face" (White 1973a: 108).

At the same time, the mimic signs in Edgar Nkosi White's plays essentially conform a non-verbal discourse of ambivalence by enhancing stereotypes while at the same time subverting them, ultimately leading to inextricable contradictions that are at the heart of the complex phenomenon of racialism. It is once more the polysemic smiles and laughter in the author's playtexts that dramatize such ambivalence more vehemently. Thus, the White protagonist of *Segismundo's Tricycle* asks his Black servant, "[w]hy aren't you sad?" (White 1971: 149) —which implies at least a smiling disposition on the servant's part— to which the Black man replies, "I am sad" (White 1971: 150), thereby eliciting a distinct interpretation of his happy-looking face that underplays his apparently 'natural' optimism. Similarly, when Legion, the main character of *Redemption Song*, is stoned to death, a voice wonders if "[h]e laughing" while his body lies on the ground (White 1985c: 80). As conveyed by Sparrow's words in *Like Them That Dream* when he states that in America it is "[...] like you smile but you don't smile" (White 1983d: 115), the mimic expressivity of the oppressed is always an appearance covering a very different signified and yet aiming at truly experiencing what is shown on the surface —an attempt which, as with Legion's case, may be even sustained till the last breath. In this light it is possible to understand other composite facial expressions in Edgar Nkosi White's work, such as Hilda's recurrent laughing face in *Lament for Rastafari* during her poignant soliloquy on White-on-Black racism (White 1983c: 63-4), or Sparrow's 'angry' laughter about the same reality at the end of *Like Them That Dream* (White 1983d: 130).

As Marcel Gutwirth observes, laughter is universal but its occasion "is rigorously circumstance- and situation-bound"; therefore, as David Krasner contends, it "requires a knowledge of circumstances and relevancy" (1997: 139). This thought is applicable to any other mimic expression that can be observed within and without the theatrical arena. Through the myriad mimic signs which his characters produce, Edgar Nkosi White teaches reader and spectator about the multiple, often devious faces of racism. Further to contributing to his multi-layered portrayal of

racial oppression, around which his theatre evolves, the playwright's mimic designs also create a kaleidoscopic reflection of the human soul, in which recurrent but never identical faces mirror both our inner schisms and our social divisions. As one of his characters puts it in *The Wonderful Year*, "[t]here are too many faces but someday, it's got to make sense" (White 1970c: 184). The playwright's mimic designs constitute a vivid corporeal cartography in this search for meaning; or, to paraphrase Patrice Pavis' words about mime (1998: 292), it is in Edgar Nkosi White's theatrical faces that meaning draws signs on the flesh.

Notes

¹. Inevitably, examples of unique mimic styles developed by actors are more abundant. They are even found in accounts of aural performances that could only rely on the impression of audiences and which, therefore, lacked the more objective fixation of video-recording. A famous example was Anton Chekhov's fascination with Sarah Bernhard's fiery facial expressions. Yet, some dramatists have also left a legacy of distinctive facial designs marked at a dramaturgical level. This is the case of Tadeusz Kantor's characters with 'dead' faces in his Theatre of Death, for instance (Ubersfeld 1997: 225).

². Defined by scholar and actress Judy S. Stone as showing promise to become "the most important playwright since Walcott to emerge from the West Indies" (1994: 161), Edgar Nkosi White started writing for the stage in the 1970s. Since then, his plays have been performed mainly in the United States, Europe and the Caribbean. Reflecting the author's own diasporic trajectory, his dramatic production can be considered as part of Caribbean, African American or even Black British theatre. Geneviève Fabre (1983: 189-99) and Davis and Harris (1985: 278-82) dedicate a chapter to this author in anthologies of African American theatre, and Judy Stone does the same in her study of West Indian drama (1994: 161-7); M. Banham et al. have included an entry on him in their guide to African and Caribbean theatre (1994: 184). Playwright and theatre scholar

Michael McMillan has considered him one of the first authentic voices of Black British drama (Ugwu 1995: 198).

³. This is reflected in *That Generation*, a play about the lives of Caribbean migrants in London. When the female protagonist gets into her husband's apartment in London, her eyes roam around the room, conveying both its small dimensions and squalid conditions (White 1983: 195). A similar effect is created in *The Crucificado*, a tragedy about the connections between racial marginalization and drug-addiction, when a character named Soledada underlines the coffin-like quality of her house by "looking around the room" before she says: "They make these houses to die in" (White 1972: 137). In the play *Like Them That Dream*, which presents the experience of a South African man in the United States during apartheid, a panoramic eye-movement helps the Black South African protagonist start his description of the hospital where he works (White 1983: 99). Likewise in *Redemption Song*, a tragicomedy about a West Indian exile who returns to his homeland, the protagonist's look at the fictionalized Caribbean landscape enlarges the presentational space beyond the stage arena and creates a specific framework for his monologue (White 1985: 21). In the same play, the expression of the actors' eyes also tinges the space offstage with specific qualities: this occurs when Verity, the protagonist's ex-

girlfriend, expresses her concern with the neighbours' unseen presence by looking in different directions (White 1985: 51); or when Miss B, the protagonist's aunt, announces the arrival of different characters through the expressivity of her eyes before the audience are able to see them (White 1985: 24, 46).

4. For instance, in *The Wonderfull Yeare*, one of Edgar Nkosi White's early pieces, a window is created through the protagonist's stare (White 1970: 177).

5. In most of these cases, the playwright inscribes the specific quality of these looks in the stage directions. For example, in *I, Marcus Garvey*, Garvey's wife is supposed to give her husband "a long meaningful stare" after learning about a case of White-on-Black violence (White 1989: 258). The alleged concern in Amy's "meaningful" look is confirmed through her saying, a few lines later, "Marcus [...] Walk good", before Garvey walks off to assist the Black victim (White 1989: 258). Sometimes, however, the type of eye-expression that the actor should make or the reader ought to imagine is presented through the words of another character: in *Like Them That Dream*, the male protagonist uses an aside in order to describe the way Sharon, his new girlfriend, has just looked at him: "Funny enough, Nkosi, lately she's been giving me strange looks", he says, addressing his spiritual alter-ego (White 1983: 96). Later in the same scene, the strangeness in Sharon's eyes becomes clarified as a sign of her anger at the South African man's unwillingness to look for a job and his constant references to the racial nightmare from which he escaped in his homeland. After Sparrow's comment on Sharon's looks, another stage direction indicates that she "puts down a bag of groceries and stares at him, turns away and gives him a second look again", to which Sparrow adds: "I think I feel a breeze" (White 1983: 96).

6. In all these examples the inscription of eye-expression is made explicit in the stage directions. For instance, in *Lament for Rastafari*, an epic playtext about a Rastafarian's experience in the Caribbean, England and the United States, the playwright indicates that the protagonist's eyes are supposed to reveal the

character's emotion when leaving his homeland. The last stage direction of scene 4 says: "Somewhere in his eyes appear something very much like tears" (White 1983: 18). Tears are also said to appear in the eyes of the West Indian character of *The Boot Dance* when he tells Lazarus, the South African patient, that it takes "a whole heap of dancing" to make people "forgive [their] blackness" in England (White 1983: 142).

7. This is obviously part of the theatrical spell on the spectators, which is made possible through the 'willing suspension of disbelief' to which they are submitted by the signs produced by the actor. The thought that mimic signs are generated by intrinsic stimuli is even more widespread amongst audiences of Naturalistic plays due to the constructed character psychology they create. However, even the most purist of Stanislavskian actors resort to images and other external referents as catalysts to generate their inner actions and hence attain relevant mimic and gestural variations.

8. It should be clarified here that the processes or racialization for Black characters of different origins are only slightly nuanced in Edgar Nkosi White's dramaturgies. Even if in some of his plays, such as *Lament for Rastafari*, the racial plurality of the United States leads West Indian and African figures to regard it as a better destination for migrants, the presence of White-on-Black racism in the fictional lives of the African American characters stands out as a prominent marker of identity. In fact, the dramatist's portrayal of White-on-Black racism reformulates the diversity of his characters' national and cultural differences. The constant interaction between racism and space in his dramatic work results in a peculiar vision of the world, in which race and racial discrimination create their own borders and exiles, and the spatiality of regions, nations, cities and villages is reduced to the same 'nowhereness'. In this respect, the eye-expressions of some characters act as the corporeal map which, independently of their origin, situates these figures on one of the two sides of the racialized border.

9. Comment made during one of Barba's speeches at the last International

School of Theatre Anthropology (Seville, October 2004).

¹⁰. The playwright indicates the sensuality of all these gazes through the stage directions. In *Fun in Lethe*, for instance, Hamartia, a young West Indian poet that migrates to England, is said to "look intently" at Joyce, an "attractive, light-skinned, straight-haired" girl who has also arrived from the Caribbean and is staying with Hamartia's aunt in London (White 1970: 76). Complementing these explicit cases, there are implicit stage directions for sensual gazes in other plays, such as *The Lovesong for Langston*, a play dedicated to Langston Hughes. At the end of scene 11, a character named Anne tells the young poet: "I don't want to hear about any other women. Come, I have a kingdom for you" (White 2001: 45). The fade-out that follows confirms the sensual meaning of at least the second sentence, thereby suggesting the kind of mime that ought to precede it.

¹¹. In her "pro-theatrical reading" of dramatic texts, Susan Melrose distinguishes "force-fields" and "waves" that are perceived by the reader and derived from "non-commensurable multi-dimensional and multimodal abstractions from and for praxis, in which discourse is activated as one component" (1994: 53). To this scholar, the meaning of "force-fields" is "self-evident" (Melrose 1994: 53). Therefore, it is possible to understand the term literally and hence ascribe it to any form of reaction that a theatrical sign generates in the theatre's multilayered discourse. Given the highly subjective nature of mimic production—as stated earlier—and its subsequent personalized reception, it is adequate to associate distinct mimic signs to different "force-fields" due to the generalizing power of the term, as well as to its abstract and yet also material senses, which are close to the abstract-and-material character of mime itself. Needless to say, Susan Melrose's allusion to "force-fields" represents another way of recognizing the dynamic, energetic universe implicit in a playtext.

¹². Implicit mouth-movement may be detected in these plays through the presence of words and expressions such as "surprised"

(White 1983: 161), "wonderment" (White 1985: 39), "shock of recognition" (White 1985: 137), "in a catatonic state" (White 1973: 5) or "in a trancelike state [...] as if still speaking on the phone" (White 1973: 64). A more explicit case is found at the end of *The Life and Times of J. Walter Smintheus*, when the protagonist is shown again in the mental hospital. As the last didascalia reads, "his mouth is contorted" while the audience can hear his recorded voice (White 1973: 64). As in the previous example, the separation of mouth-movement and speech semiotizes the internal division that racialism has produced on this middle-class African American scholar; his mime recreates the frozen mask of mental alienation.

¹³. In all these cases, laughter is inscribed in the text as a spontaneous reaction excepting the smile on Pariah's face in *The Mummer's Play*, which is presented as a trait of characterization in the stage directions (White 1970: 133). Pariah is a young African American writer who struggles to survive in a society that does not acknowledge his art or his own humanity.

¹⁴. The characters' parodic attitude can be understood either through the context in which their laughter is said to appear or through the specific description of the character's attitude in the stage directions. For example, in *The Burghers of Calais*, a prisoner who acts as master of ceremonies is said to laugh "mockingly" while introducing a dramatization of the Scottsboro Boys case. In his prologue to the famous case of racial injustice, reference to the "excesses" of "certain former judges and lawyers" who convicted nine innocent African American teenagers for nineteen years leads to sarcastic laughter (White 1970: 5).

¹⁵. This kind of self-parodic laughter is understood through the verbal exchanges which generate it. For example, in the play *Fun in Lethe*, which presents the journey of a young Black poet through Britain, a character called Walter laughs when the protagonist says it is helpful not to be West Indian in England. Walter laughs at their own situation and says: "Yes, yes, very true. Don't be West Indian if you can help it" (White 1970: 79).

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DRAMATISING THE CONFLICTS OF NATION AND THE BODY: DISPLACEMENT IN CHARLOTTE AND EMILY BRONTË'S POETRY OF *HOME* AND *EXILE* DUALITIES

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Man has walked by the light of conflagrations, and amid the sound of falling cities; and now there is darkness, and long watching till it be morning.
(Carlyle, "Characteristics", 1831)

My dreams, the Gods of my religion, linger
In foreign lands, each sundered from his own,
And there has passed a cold destroying finger
O'er every image, and each sacred tone.
(Charlotte Brontë, "My Dreams", 1837)

Exile is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home.
(Edward Said, "The Mind of Winter", 1984)

In *Poetry as Survival*, Gregory Orr claims that the personal lyric not only translates or expresses human crisis but also has the role of transforming and regulating it, especially when the very integrity of the self is threatened:

Human culture 'invented' or evolved the personal lyric as a means of helping individuals survive the existential crises represented by extremities of subjectivity and also by such outer circumstances as poverty, suffering, pain, illness, violence, or loss [...]. This survival begins when we 'translate' our crisis into language —where we give it symbolic expression as an unfolding drama of self and the forces that assail it.
(Orr 2002: 4)

Thus, the best way to respond to the chaotic unpredictability of our political, social and emotional being is through what Orr designates as ‘the project of poem-making’ —“the personal lyric, the ‘I’ poem dramatizing inner and outer experience” (2002: 4).

One might argue that either philosophy or religion (or both) could also fulfil this role; but, for Orr, what distinguishes the personal lyric from these is that it “clings to embodied being”, in a kind of “sensuous incarnation”, as if “the personal lyric urges the self to *translate* its whole being into language” (2002: 29). If we believe, like Orr, that all thoughts and actions emanate from the body, then all we write is inseparable from it. Several poets, such as Walt Whitman, D. H. Lawrence and Dylan Thomas, have indeed stressed the importance of the bodily nature of self (or its material or physical support) in their poetry.

In order to carry the weight of the existential crises that torment it from without and within, the self in the personal lyric needs to be more than a stick figure ‘I [...] to incarnate and dramatize a full range of human feelings, thoughts, memories, and sensations [...]’. (Orr 2002: 37)

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I would add that the self relates not only to the microcosm of his/her body but also to the macrocosm or larger body of the nation. Benedict Anderson, in *Imagined Communities*, had also pointed to a connection between the history of the nation and individual biography, in which both are seen as narratives of identity and personhood (1983: 203). The lyric ‘I’ is, furthermore, recurrently concerned with questions of the location or dislocation of the self, as well as with notions of placement and displacement. The self in the personal lyric is either ‘home’ or ‘away’, facing internal or external division or fracture, and in search of a prospective identity (personal and national) or a chosen location.

In the Brontëan lyric, in particular, the conflicts of nation (whether they are presented in a real or fictionalised manner) are simultaneously reflected in the conflicts of the body itself, and the word ‘home’ —a metaphor for both ‘place’ and ‘being’— assumes different but related nuances (from the familiar hearth and the exalted homeland to the poet’s mind, Nature or God’s bosom). This latter meaning of the combined metaphor is present, namely, in Emily’s 1841 poem “I see around me tombstones grey”, in which the speaker declares: “We would not leave our native home / For *any* world beyond the Tomb” (ll. 41-42), and in her final composition (“Often rebuked, yet always back returning”), at the end of which she answers her own question concerning her own location and identity (my emphasis):

[...]

What have those lonely mountains worth revealing?

More glory and more grief than I can tell:

The earth that wakes one human heart to feeling
Can centre both the worlds of Heaven and Hell.
(ll. 17-20)

The Brontës' early writings are, as Carl Plasa suggested, "a striking blend of fantasy and history" (2004: xii). In spite of the wild imaginative flights that these records contain, they should be judged as responses to a 'history' because "they are very aware of and responsive to a multifarious and changing early nineteenth-century world", as Heather Glen, in her turn, has remarked (2002: 2). But the Brontës' very awareness of a historical (and existential) conflict was threatening to overwhelm them completely, namely by severely testing their faith and challenging their imaginative powers. The Puritan concept of life as moral warfare and divine election, that the sisters had constantly been subject to, added inner struggle to the battle against one's national enemies (embodied by the threats of imperial France). Nevertheless, as Houghton had remarked in relation to individual Puritanism,

[c]onscientious souls who tried to achieve a life of absolute purity and self-denial might experience an almost daily sense of failure, distressing in itself and frightening in its implications; [...] they were dismayed to find quite different ideals glaringly apparent in the world around them. (Houghton 1957: 62)

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Just how terribly exposed the Victorians were to a constant succession of shattering developments, and their long-term effects, is visible in Carlyle's confession in "Characteristics" (1831) that "[...] doubt storms in [...] through every avenue; inquiries of the deepest, painfulest sort must be engaged with [...] whereto no answer will be returned" (Carlyle [1838] 1896-1901: 3), and particularly in F. D. Maurice's 1833 comment:

We are crushed by the spirit of this world, by the horrible Babylonian oppression [...] of contradictory opinions, strifes, divisions, heresies, selfishness. We feel this spirit around us, above us, within us. It cramps our energies, kills our life, destroys our sympathy. (In Houghton 1957: 71)

But this apparently unexplained Victorian *malaise* had its source in very real fears and it would only be escaped by an energising drive towards expansionism. In fact, as one reads Charlotte and Emily Brontë's juvenile poetry (written mostly between 1829 and 1839), one becomes aware of a subtle but pervasive concern, or absorption, with their country's contemporary dilemmas or challenges (whether moral or political). On the one hand, deeply rooted national fears surface in disguise in the text of their poems, such as the fear of invasion (still felt in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars) and the fear of revolution —very much present

in the industrial conflicts of Luddism and the political demonstrations of the Chartists in their Yorkshire vicinity. The Brontës' fictionalised war poems should, consequently, be interpreted as a poetic reflection of their times.

Victorian society, particularly in the period before 1850, was shot through, from top to bottom, with the dread of some wild outbreak of the masses that would overthrow the established order and confiscate private property. [...] [T]he growing bitterness of class feeling, often issuing in physical violence and repressive force, made the threat of revolution tangible and immediate to an extent unknown in England today. From 1815 to 1850 the tension [...] was almost constantly at the breaking point. After the war, economic depression and a reactionary Tory policy created the social atmosphere in which a whole generation of Victorians grew up. (Houghton 1957: 55-56)

On the other hand, the increasing nationalism of the nineteenth century brought with it the glorification of the English heroes (their voyages and their battles, their heroic lives and no less heroic deaths) and the revival of the heroic romance. This nationalistic pride and enthusiasm, related to England's victory over the French and her growing expansionism overseas, seem, thus, to emerge in the Brontëan compositions that hero-worship soldiers, explorers and missionaries (notably, the characters of Lord Nelson and the Duke of Wellington). As Martin Green has argued, the tradition of heroic travel and exploration literature "charged England's will with the energy to go into the world and explore, conquer, and rule", thus functioning as an "energizing myth of empire" (1979: 3).

When the Victorian period began, all the prerequisites for hero worship were present: the enthusiastic temper, the conception of the superior being, the revival of Homeric mythology and medieval ballad, the identification of great art with the grand style, the popularity of Scott and Byron, and the living presence of Napoleonic soldiers and sailors. [...] [I]t promised to answer some of the deepest needs and problems of the age. (Houghton 1957: 310)

When she was only thirteen, in July 1829, Charlotte Brontë wrote one of her first extant poems in collaboration with her brother Branwell, "High minded Frenchmen love not the Ghost" —an allusion to the impending victory of Nelson over Napoleon, through an image of the ghostly form of this national hero riding "the clouds of pain / With the eye of an eagle" (ll. 2-3).¹ This is to be taken as a warning to the 'Kingdom of France' of "the storm that is drawing nigh" —an omen of defeat present in "the troubled shimmering air" which foretells surrender to Nelson for the French, who "shall bow at his knees" (ll. 3, 14-15). Thus, the motives of war (the conflict between nations) and of nationalism (the praise of a national hero) are present from the very beginning of the Brontës' literary partnership. It is from recent British history that they draw their stories in the form of poems.

This process would eventually become more sophisticated with time, in the sense that inner and outer conflict (body and nation) would be symbolically merged in many compositions. This is the case of one of Emily's poems (dated from 1837) dedicated to the Gondalian wars, in which the warrior's frenzy in the heat of the battle gives way to a nightmarish despair (my emphasis):

[...]
'Twas over— all the Battle's madness
The bursting fires the cannon's roar
The yells, the groans the frenzied gladness
The death the danger warmed no more

In plundered churches piled with dead
The weary charger neighed for food
The wornout soldier laid his head
Neath roofless chambers splashed with blood

I could not sleep through that wild seigh
My heart had fiercely burned and bounded
The outward tumult seemed to assuage
The inward tempest it surrounded
[...].
(ll. 9-20)²

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Thomas Pavel, in "Exile as Romance and as Tragedy", argues that "a loss of homeland sometimes affects the characters of [...] romance and tragedy; the former specializing in metaphorical exile, the latter occasionally focusing on exile proper" (1998: 28). As avid readers of both genres (in the form of Scott's novels and Shakespeare's tragedies), the Brontës, and Emily in particular, absorbed the neoplatonic vision of earthly life as 'exile' that informs these plots as a whole. But they also looked at the character of the political exile with interest, namely the exiled monarchs (male and female), whose predicaments of power they explored poetically: dramatic loss of life, demotion from power, captivity, incest and (un)faithful love. If, in its narrow sense, exile means a political banishment (most famously, Napoleon's), in its broad sense it designates every kind of estrangement or displacement, from the physical and geographical to the spiritual (often equated with death in the Brontëan lyric). It appears not only as a major historical phenomenon, but also as a theoretical reflection about individual and cultural identity, intimately bound up with problems of nationalism, racism, and war.

In the fictionalised colonies of the Brontës, one can also find a paradoxical but interesting mixture of fear and attraction for what is culturally and racially different. As Plasa has noticed, particularly in relation to Charlotte, in the colonial spaces that the Brontës invented, there is a combination of "fear and loathing of the racial other

with desire and fascination” (Plasa 2004: xii). The sagas of *Angrïa* and *Gondal*, whose poems often portray colonial drama fictionally, prove, in Dessewffy’s words, that “the curiosity they felt toward the exoticism of the alien turned into an astonishment over their own personalities split into irreconcilable roles” (1998: 353). One of the roles into which Charlotte Brontë’s personality more often split was the dark double figure of the coloniser/exiled Zamorna, for whose Gothicised orientalism she felt both attraction and repulsion. But as Charlotte switches the perspective from external to internal worlds, she often engages in a visionary trance, through which she escapes from the English school of drudgery and exile and ventures out to Africa, “a far and bright continent”. In delineating this space of colonial vision, Brontë seems to underline the extent to which her occupation of that imaginative space is a strategy of survival. In “A single word— a magic spring” (1837), the trance descends on her all of a sudden and her foot treads the war-shaken shores of the Calabar, upon whose distant river banks her colonisers had long been building and settling their ‘cities’ (my emphasis):

[...]
I cannot tell and none can tell
How flashed the mighty stream
At once, as on the vision fell
Its silent, written name.

The Calabar! The Calabar!
The sacred land it laves,
I little thought, *so lone, so far*
To hear its rolling waves.

To see and hear them in their course
As clear, as they who stand
And watch the unbridled torrent force
Its way through *Angrïa’s land*.

[...]
The eye with *sleepless day-dreams* dim,
The cheek with vigils pale,
On the rolling water gaze
As it sweeps beneath that sky
Where the sun’s descending rays
In the path of twilight die.

[...]
(ll. 5-16, 21-26)

These often contradictory challenges and motives are not openly or continuously present in the poetry of the sisters, though. Rather, most poetic compositions or

fragments seem to reflect in a very diffused or indirect way important, even decisive, historical moments (whether real or fictionalised) that are frequently transformed into private conflicts, *i.e.*, intense personal dramas or 'dramatic monologues'. The Brontës appear, therefore, to absorb those general national concerns into their private imaginative spheres, where they recreate personal or fictive instances of intense conflict or struggle. In many of these more climactic moments, the lyric 'body' or 'subject' seems to move or travel beyond itself in an evasive attempt to overcome social and political coercions that both confine and displace. Literal exile derived from a personal conflict (even if spoken by a fictionalised heroine) occurs in many compositions, as is the case of Charlotte's "Mementos", an 1846 poem (my emphasis):

[...]

She bore in silence —but when passion
Surged in her soul with ceaseless foam,
The storm at last brought desolation,
And *drove her exiled from her home.*

And silent still, she straight assembled
The wrecks of strength her soul retained;
For though *the wasted body* trembled,
The unconquered mind, to quail, disdained.

She crossed the sea —now lone she wanders
By Seine's, or Rhine's, or Arno's flow:
Fain would I know *if distance renders*
Relief or comfort to her woe.

[...]

(ll. 189-200)

But metaphorical exile or displacement, derived also from personal suffering and in the form of mental or spiritual escape, seems to be even more recurrent in the poetry of the sisters. In fact, they have two long poems in which the description of this mental displacement (from a forcefully exiled and confined body) is very similar and detailed; they are Charlotte's "Retrospection" (1835) and Emily's "A little while, a little while" (1838), coincidentally written when they were both away from Haworth, 'exiled' in their respective teaching posts, at Roe Head and Law Hill. We can, thus, compare the elder sister's lines with the ones left to us by the younger, and note that the *home* and *exile* dualities or dilemmas that they both experienced are presented through the same vital and recurrent contrast between dark gloom and bright light (my emphasis):

[...]

Where was I ere one hour had passed:
Still listening to that dreary blast,
Still in that *mirthless lifeless room*,
Cramped, chilled, and deadened by its gloom?

No! thanks to that *bright darling dream*,
Its power had shot one kindling gleam,
Its voice had sent one wakening cry,
And bade me lay my sorrows by,
And called me earnestly to come,
And borne me to *my moorland home*.
I heard no more the senseless sound
Of task and chat that hummed around,
I saw no more that grisly night
Closing the day's sepulchral light.

The vision's spell had deepened o'er me:
Its lands, its scenes were spread before me,
In one short hour a hundred homes
Had roofed me with their lordly domes,
And I had sat by fires whose light
Flashed wide o'er halls of regal height,
[...]

(Charlotte Brontë, ll. 69-88)

[...]

Where wilt thou go my harassed heart?
Full many a land invites thee now;
And places near, and far apart
Have rest for thee, my weary brow—
[...]

The house is old, the trees are bare
And moonless bends the misty dome
But what on earth is half so dear—
So longed for as *the hearth of home?*
[...]

Shall I go there? Or shall I seek
Another clime, another sky—
Where tongues familiar music speak
In accents dear to memory?

Yes, as I mused, *the naked room*,
The flickering firelight died away

And from the midst of cheerless gloom
I passed to bright, unclouded day—
[...]

A heaven so clear, an earth so calm,
So sweet, so soft, so hushed an air
And, deepening still the dreamlike charm,
Wild moor sheep feeding every where—
[...]

Even as I stood with raptured eye
Absorbed in bliss so deep and dear
My hour of rest had fled by
And given me back to weary care—
(Emily Brontë, ll. 1-16, 21-28, 33-36, 45-48)

In both cases, 'home' proves to be just a momentary stop where the women poets' travelling mind detains itself, the mere but vitally necessary passage-way for the much remoter and fantastic destination to which they are bound —the imaginary of *Angria* and *Gondal*, their childhood *locus*. In both cases, their *reverie* is abruptly interrupted by a Porlockian incident or the drear reality of daily task.

The theme of exile (or the exilic character proper), besides being a haunting subject in the poetry of the Brontës, thus seems also to constitute a fit image for the woman poet's personal predicament. Paradoxically, whether they choose to stay at home or are compelled to leave, they remain 'exiles'. The concept of the woman's 'place' itself becomes then problematic, as Janet Wolff suggested in *Geography and Gender*,

[...] for the woman writer who is either geographically displaced [...] or culturally marginalized [...] it may be her very identity as woman which enables a radical revision of home and exile. (1984: 7)

On the other hand, for Caren Kaplan, "each metaphor of displacement includes referentially a concept of placement, dwelling, location, or position" (1996: 144) and "the claiming of a world space for women raises temporal questions as well as spatial considerations, questions of history as well as place" (1996: 162). But 'exile' also functions for Edward Said as a "specific zone for the exploration of the relationship between nation, identity, and location" (1984: 117).

The exile knows that [...] homes are always provisional. Borders and barriers, which enclose us within the safety of familiar territory, can also become prisons. [...] Exiles cross borders, break barriers of thought and experience. (1984: 170)

So, at a time when the words ‘home’ and ‘nation’ were being exalted in Britain, but in which their respective meanings were also shifting dramatically, the Brontës described themselves as trapped inbetween worlds: the public and the private, the national and the foreign, the familiar and the strange, the real and the imaginary, the body and the soul. The recurrent use of dual metaphors in the sisters’ poems seems to confirm precisely the dualistic nature of their thought, which materialises in a combination of sometimes radical opposites: invasion/evasion, home/exile, placement/displacement, confinement/release, heaven/hell, life/death.

One of the compositions which best express displacement, and the duality/ambiguity of these themes, is Emily’s 1839 poem “Lines by Claudia”, in which the woman speaker’s own country may be Gondal or, alternatively, England. This depends on whether Claudia is an imaginary Gondalian heroine or an Englishwoman banished during the Interregnum for being a supporter of Charles I (my emphasis):

[...]
I did not dream remembrance still
Clasped round my heart its fetters chill
But I am sure the soul is free
To leave its clay a little while
Or how *in exile misery*
Could I have seen my country smile

In English fields my limbs were laid
With English turf beneath my head
My spirit wandered o’er that shore
Where nought but it may wander more

Yet if *the soul can thus return*
I need not and will not mourn
And *vainly did ye drive me far*
With leagues of ocean stretched between
My mortal flesh you might debar
But not the eternal fire within
[...].
(ll. 15-24)

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The separation between body and spirit/mind, very probably caused by a real or symbolic death (exile), makes it possible for the speaker to somehow ‘return’ to her homeland and witness its victory or devastation, allowing as well two different readings of the poem: either that Claudia’s body lay exiled in England while her spirit wandered in her own country or that both body and spirit returned from exile to visit her own country, England.

The Brontës' 'body' or lyric subject, whether personal or fictionalised (in the realms of *Angria* and *Gondal*), experiences many different instances of 'displacement': departure, uprooting, evasion, transportation, confinement and even burial or entombing, all of which—real or symbolic—cannot be fully understood outside the specific historical context and place they found themselves in. A small poem, "The Orphan Child", inserted in the novel *Jane Eyre* (1847), seems to summarise adequately the existential question that contextualises location, through the plaintive voice of the weary speaker: "Why did they send me so far and lonely, / Up where the moors spread and grey rocks are piled?" (ll. 5-6). A generation and family of poets who had emerged directly out of decades of political and military strife, at home and abroad, could not but be profoundly affected by an almost permanent state of warfare and, consequently, symbolically represent their lives as a continuous struggle (a strenuous path for the weary traveller) and their own selves as divided or fractured. It is, thus, not surprising that Emily Brontë refers to her time as "This time of overwhelming fear" and that, in "Enough of Thought..." (1845), she acknowledges her own inner strife or division through the desperate words of a philosopher:

[...]
Three Gods, within this little frame,
Are warring night and day—

Heaven could not hold them all, and yet
They all are held in me
And must be mine till I forget
My present entity—
[...].
(ll. 17-20)

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In such an unstable, divided world as the Brontës' world certainly was, the search for, and discovery of, a congenial *locus* or place where to rewrite history and their story was indispensable, vital; it was the only way left for these women poets to assert their own identities given the limitations and constrictions of their society, as Anne Brontë's famous appeal at her imposed exile in Thorp Green duly testifies: "[...] To our beloved land I'll flee, / *Our land of thought and soul*, [...] Beyond the world's control" ("Call me away...", ll. 5-8, in Chitham 1979). In just a few lines, the poet reveals that this intellectual and affective site is an experience which is closely shared and protected from outside influence by the sisters.

In *Exile and Creativity*, Susan Suleiman asks if this distance caused by exile could be "a falling away from some original wholeness and source of creativity" or on the contrary "a spur to creativity" (1998: 1). I would answer, with the three Brontës in mind, that sometimes the home that one leaves and 'a home away from home', which one creates, have more in common than one would like to admit.

For Michael Seidel, in *Exile and the Narrative Imagination*, the writer ‘comes home’ in the writing itself, “by weaving ‘here’ and ‘there’ together in the space of the imagination, the writer uses fiction to resolve the worst terrors of dislocation and anomie” (1986: ix). Kaplan also refers to this expanded sense of ‘exile’ as authorship and of the artist as displaced person (1996: 39), namely in the works of Harry Levin, for whom ‘exile’ or detachment becomes a ‘vocational imperative’ or “the necessary precondition of all original thought” (1966: 38). For Levin, the exile is homesick at home or away, and exilic displacement becomes the sign of the creative, contemplative life (1966: 38).

We have seen, in this context, that the minds of the Brontës may feel dislocated both when they are ‘away’ and at ‘home’; moments when the homely realm, though comforting and inspiring, cannot compete with the richer exuberance of the imaginary ones. Charlotte was the first, in 1836, to recognise and pay a tribute to this creative power, which was significantly embodied in the poet-soldier figure of Zamorna, her protagonist and, like his creator, a displaced artist:

[...]
I owe him something. He has held
A lofty burning lamp to me,
[...]
And he has given a steady spring
To what I had of poetry.
[...]
He’s moved the principle of life
Through all I’ve written or sung or said
[...].
 (“But once again, but once again”, ll. 136-143, 150-151)

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In a poem of 1844 that she dedicated “To Imagination”, Emily Brontë also paid her tribute to this “benignant power” (l. 34) personified as a friend, whose “phantom bliss” she welcomes at every “evening’s quiet hour” (ll. 31-34), particularly when the poet is “weary with the long day’s care / [...] And lost and ready to despair” (ll. 1-3). In the poem, the duality of *home* and *exile* is represented in relation to the poet’s ‘body’ by the strongly contrasting spheres of the “world within” and the “world without”. Voluntary displacement occurs from “Nature’s sad reality” (l. 20), where “Danger and guilt and darkness lie” (l. 14) and where the subject feels totally dislocated, to a profoundly intimate and creative realm:

[...] a bright untroubled sky
Warm with ten thousand mingled rays
Of suns that know no winter days—
[...].
(ll.16-18)

Such a bright spot is located “within our bosom’s bound” (l. 15), where the speaker claims that only Imagination and she herself rule, “Have undisputed sovereignty” (ll. 11-12). Therefore, ‘home’ is not just that familiar physical location from which the self’s body is severed but the place where the mind is, the original source of wholeness and creativity.

Christine Brooke-Rose’s illuminating article on the nature of literary exile (“Exsul”) becomes doubly pertinent in this context because the linguistic image she uses to describe the Poet (an ‘exsul’ or banished man/woman) is strangely similar to Emily’s own, including the similarity of the “island of exile” with the imaginary island of Gondal:

Ultimately, is not every poet or ‘poetic novelist’ an exile of sorts, looking in from outside onto *a bright, desirable image in the mind’s eye, of the little world created [...]*? An imagined world, an ‘inner circle’, within the island of exile, is that not also an island, the reader or writer exile, exsul? (1998: 22)

If the poet ‘comes home’ in the very act of writing, as Seidel has suggested, it is exilic displacement which paradoxically acts as a ‘spur to creativity’, as Suleiman in her turn points out. In “Plead for Me” (1844), Emily finally asks her “God of Visions” (presumably, Imagination) to explain to us readers “why she has chosen” him, thus interpreting her ‘vocational imperative’ (in Levin’s terms) both as a sort of strange exilic fate and as a heretical form of self-worship (my emphasis):

[...]
No radiant angel, speak and say
Why *I did cast the world away*:

Why I have persevered to shun
The common paths that others run
And on a strange road journeyed on;
[...]

[...]
And *gave my spirit to adore*
Thee, ever present, phantom thing,
My Slave, my Comrade and my King!
[...]

And I am wrong to worship where
Faith cannot doubt, nor Hope despair,
Since *my own soul can grant my prayer?*
[...]
(ll. 9-13, 23-24, 36-38)

To finalise, one cannot help connecting Gregory Orr's idea of the personal lyric 'as survival', as a transformation of human crisis and as a safeguard of the integrity of the self in a chaotic world by 'dramatising inner and outer experience', with the notion of 'exile as authorship' and of the author as a displaced artist, and specially with the need felt by the poet for a certain detachment or distancing from outer reality, in order to re-organise his/her disintegrated self through the strategies of contemplation and creation. But aren't these, ultimately, a writer's strategies for 'coming home', to his/her own place and being?

Notes

1. All the poems by Charlotte Brontë quoted in this article can be found in Tom Winniffrith's 1984 edition, *The Poems of Charlotte Brontë. A New Annotated and Enlarged Edition of Shakespeare Head Brontë* (Oxford and New York: Basil Blackwell).

2. All the poems by Emily Brontë quoted in this article can be found in Derek Roper and Edward Chitham's 1995 edition, *The Poems of Emily Brontë* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).

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“KEEPING GOING”: ALQUIMIA, VIOLENCIA Y SACRIFICIO EN LA POESÍA DE SEAMUS HEANEY

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Iniciaremos nuestro análisis sobre la poesía de Seamus Heaney con unas breves pinceladas sobre la alquimia,¹ contexto simbólico que sustentará buena parte de nuestras posteriores apreciaciones sobre el poeta norirlandés. Comencemos, así pues, con la doble simbología del movimiento que el filósofo Gaston Bachelard destaca en la alquimia, y más concretamente en el proceso de destilación del alambique: “En todas partes y en un solo acto algo sube porque algo desciende” (1958: 322). De hecho, según el filósofo francés, la subida de la materia volátil y excelsa en la alquimia es sólo posible gracias al hecho de que la *impureza terrestre* es retenida abajo, ofreciendo así el necesario impulso o resorte terreno antagónico para la sublimación aérea. El descenso favorece la ascensión. De ahí que en la alquimia tradicional se soliera añadir impurezas a la materia a purificar, para permitir así una más fácil sublimación de la sustancia pura, atraída por la pureza aérea. De esta manera, los alquimistas “ensucian para limpiar mejor” (1958: 323). En otro lugar Bachelard afirma, en este mismo sentido, que la alquimia implementa un “proceso dialéctico: ensuciar *para* limpiar —corromper *para* regenerar— perder *para* salvar —perderse *para* salvarse—” (1994: 280). Por todo ello, “la corrupción y la podredumbre son consideradas funciones *positivas*, indispensables para una germinación normal” (1994: 280). Según esta simbología, el estiércol, por ejemplo, “es así una suerte de fuerza de atracción para todo lo que es impuro, el estiércol es un absceso de fijación para la impureza de las semillas” (1994: 282). Es este tipo de

imaginería de revalorización de *lo sucio*, por otro lado, la que puede sustentar los valores positivos de la mezcla simbólica agua-tierra: “Si reflexionamos un poco en esta extraña intuición del valor de la sustancia sucia, entenderemos mejor ciertas atracciones por el lodo” (1994: 282). La discriminación de la pureza se hace más ostensible —y, por tanto, más fácil para su separación— cuanto más impuro es el todo que la contiene.

Así pues, la discriminación de lo celestial es posible por su mezcolanza con lo terrenal. El lastre terreno permite la vaporación aérea. No se trata, en cualquier caso, de una discriminación *discriminatoria*, pues estas dos materias (tierra-aire, impureza-pureza) y fuerzas (arriba-abajo, ascendente-descendente) representan “una dualidad dinámica en la que materia e impulso actúan en sentido inverso permaneciendo estrechamente solidarios” (1958: 324). La alquimia, por tanto —al igual que otras tantas simbologías de la sublimación o la purificación—, no pertenece tan sólo a una poética aérea. El *resultado* así puede parecerlo (sin duda no el resultado final, evaporación licuada); no obstante, existe todo un *proceso* necesario para la caracterización simbólica global en el que no ha de obviarse —a nuestro entender— la poética contraria y complementaria, condición *sine qua non*, precisamente, para esa *discriminación aérea* final. En las manos del alquimista, en nuestras propias manos, se halla el alambique crítico-simbólico con el que otorgar uno de los dos sentidos posibles a la otra *discriminación* terrena. Utilizando esta misma analogía, la poesía de Seamus Heaney es marcadamente *alquímica*: en ella *sobresale* (especialmente en sus colecciones más recientes), a primera vista, la sublimación aérea; no obstante, en nuestra opinión, con frecuencia la crítica ha obviado su sólido soporte terreno, ya como trampolín hacia las alturas, ya como elemento —la tierra— en constante dialéctica y tensión con el aire.² Tomando prestadas las palabras de Bachelard y su apreciación sobre la alquimia,

Puede decirse que las operaciones modernas de destilación y de sublimación son operaciones de una sola flecha: ↑, mientras que en el pensamiento del alquimista son ambas operaciones de dos flechas: ↓↑, dos flechas suavemente unidas como dos sollicitaciones contrarias. (1958: 323)

Con todo ello, podemos afirmar que el alambique y la propia alquimia constituyen sendos símbolos —más concreto el primero, más abstracto el segundo— de la complementariedad de los contrarios. De la necesidad de la oposición parcial para la complementariedad global. De la complementariedad —en el más amplio sentido simbólico— de la tierra y el cielo. No en vano, con independencia de metas áureas y celestes, “la destilación alquímica (lo mismo que la sublimación) procede de la doble imaginación material de la tierra y el aire” (Bachelard 1958: 322). Algo muy similar ocurre en la poesía de Seamus Heaney, donde las revelaciones poéticas se disciernen en una vaporosa línea que separa lo tangible de lo ininteligible, lo material

de lo espiritual. Es más, existen apreciaciones críticas que no sólo destacan una interacción y equilibrio entre espiritualismo aéreo y materialismo terreno, sino que expresan que el primero es inseparable del segundo. En otras palabras, que la visión o imaginación no se consiguen *a pesar* de la materialidad, sino *a través* de la misma. El arraigo terreno no constituye, por tanto, una barrera a superar para la génesis del trascendentalismo, sino que éste se encuentra en algún lugar recóndito de la propia materialidad, accesible a través de la meditación poética. Es lo que Colin Meir denomina en la poesía de Seamus Heaney como “that preoccupation with the real as the bedrock of the ideal, with the body as the vehicle of the spirit” (1996: 71). En este sentido, también George Morgan opina que en la obra heaneyana el poema es más que descripción (1989: 134). Mientras que buena parte de la crítica ha destacado —especialmente en sus primeras colecciones— el carácter sensorial de la poesía del norirlandés, otros como este último han destacado la dimensión espiritual contenida en la patente terrenidad de sus versos, lo cual revalida la susodicha simbiosis entre trascendentalismo y materialismo. La imaginación de Heaney, opina Morgan, se gesta no sólo a nivel sensorial sino también a través de símbolos que esconden signos y significados ocultos en la realidad física, pero que revelan la dimensión psíquica y espiritual del hombre (1989: 127-128). En consecuencia, la simbología terrena, al igual que la aérea, también es potencialmente espiritual o trascendental. La visión y la imaginación no existen en una meta-realidad intangible, no son lugares vedados a la existencia material, sino que, por el contrario, están contenidos dentro de ella.

En el sentido más bachelardiano de la *imaginación material* de los elementos, Morgan aduce que el norirlandés se aferra en su poesía al mundo físico, a la materialidad de la tierra, del agua, del bosque, pero su vista trasciende lo puramente sensorial para alcanzar un estado en el que materialidad y espiritualidad quedan fundidas en una, produciendo así una realidad más profunda e intensa (1989: 128). Este proceso en el que la realidad física adquiere tintes metafísicos o trascendentales es denominado por Morgan como *la alquimia de la tierra* (1989: 128), la cual abre una dimensión mágica que conecta el mundo de los sentidos con el mundo extrasensorial (1989: 127). Según Morgan, la transformación alquímica de la tierra no es sólo una metáfora, sino un proceso mental y espiritual que vincula materialidad y espiritualidad en la poesía heaneyana (1989: 129). Curiosamente, este crítico observa dicho proceso de transformación espiritual de la tierra incluso en aquellos poemas considerados como arquetipo de la primera poesía terrena del norirlandés, los *bog poems* (1989: 129), mostrando así una vinculación entre materialidad y metafísica (entre simbolismo terreno y aéreo, por tanto) que contradice el análisis *sensorial* de la primera poesía terrena de Seamus Heaney. Otra evidencia más de que cualquier tipo de *división* de la poesía de Heaney a partir de los elementos (tierra/aire) puede ser, cuando menos, problemática, pues en la propia

manifestación heaneyiana de los mismos encontramos, a tenor de análisis como los de Morgan, una temprana interdependencia.

* * *

El poema “Keeping Going”, perteneciente a la colección *The Spirit Level* (1996), muestra buena parte de los valores alquímicos anteriormente expuestos. La cal y el agua juntas producen una mezcla *gris-acuosa* (*watery grey*) que, distribuida sobre los muros por un cepillo de encalado (*whitewash brush*) —símbolo principal a lo largo del poema—, hace renacer la blancura primaveral de la granja familiar *Mossbawn* (1996: 10, vv. 9-18). Este recuerdo de la infancia despierta vivamente la curiosidad del joven pre-poeta: ¿cómo una materia gris y húmeda podía tornar, finalmente, en aquella capa seca de límpida blancura? “All that worked like magic” (1996: 10, v. 18), expresa el joven Heaney, asombrado, entusiasmado. A nuestro juicio, y como veremos más adelante, se trata éste de un *pre-conocimiento terreno* (1996: 5) que también ofrecerá al poeta adulto una valiosa lección para sus versos. Siguiendo con nuestro argumento sobre la materia legamosa, cabe destacar también la benignidad del estiércol. Aquel *foretime* (1996: 11, v. 31) en el que el muchacho vivía, anterior a la afrenta y a la bala en la frente, “smelled of hill-fort clay / And cattle dung” (1996: 11, vv. 34-35). Ambos, barro y estiércol, conforman los recuerdos de aquella vida de campo, casi bucólica, parapetada en la infancia de los aciagos años posteriores en Irlanda del Norte. Al final del poema, cuando Hugh Heaney —hermano del escritor y a quien está dedicado el mismo— se recupera de un mareo que sufre, sujetándose entre dos vacas, es el olor del estiércol el que lo avienta, volviendo finalmente en sí (1996: 12, vv. 75-77). El gris y la mixtura lodosa, no obstante, también aparecen manchados de sangre... Ambientada en una escena shakesperiana de Macbeth y las tres brujas, Heaney recuerda otra de la infancia en la que su madre le insta a cuidarse de malas compañías en el colegio al que iba a entrar. Frente a la cacerola, que hace las veces del caldero clarividente de las hechiceras de Shakespeare, la madre del joven Heaney remueve con un palo (*potstick*)³ una papilla, *gruel*⁴ (1996: 11, vv. 38-46), la misma que tan sólo unas líneas después constituye la materia gris de un reservista a tiempo parcial asesinado en Irlanda del Norte: “Grey matter like *gruel* flecked with blood / In spatters on the whitewash” (nótese la aliteración) (1996: 11, vv. 50-51). El blanco retorna ahora en gris; la magia es brutalmente asesinada por la cruda realidad del sectarismo. Cabría preguntarse aquí por la conocida sentencia de aquellas tres brujas: “Fair is foul, and foul is fair”...⁵

Detengámonos en aquel poder blanqueador de la cal, el cual ejemplifica lo que denominaremos *simbolismo de la alquimia*. Anteriormente advertíamos que uno de los principios básicos de esta ciencia milenaria era la purificación de lo terrenal. Para conseguir tal fin, se necesita de la *suciedad* para derivar de ella la pureza. Una es

inseparable de la otra para lograr la ansiada sublimación de la materia. Allí destacamos la complementariedad dual de tal simbología, al igual que la del movimiento ascendente-descendente. En *The Spirit Level* (1996) encontramos notables ejemplos de esta imaginería. Uno de ellos es precisamente el de la cal. Para conseguir la blancura de los muros, el niño-poeta se percató de una etapa previa menos candorosa, como denotaba aquel *gris acuoso* de la mezcla, o como denota la expresión “the slop of the actual job” (nótese la asonancia) (1996: 10, v. 15), referente a la actividad del encalado. La asonancia parece conseguir un efecto onomatopéyico en imitación de los brochazos desde el cubo hasta la pared, reproduciendo en la regurgitación repetitiva de la *o* el sema acuático-peyorativo de la palabra *slop*.⁶ No obstante, tras las manchas y las salpicaduras, la pared tornaba “whiter and whiter” (1996: 10, v. 18). Algo similar ocurre con la paleta del albañil en ‘Damsun’: “I loved especially the trowel’s shine, / Its edge and apex always coming clean / And brightening itself by mucking in” (1996: 15, vv.17-19). Destaca a primera vista la paradoja entre el hecho de embadurnar la paleta en la argamasa (*ensuciar*), y el resultado de sacarla *limpia* de la mezcla. En este caso, el hierro manchado de la mezcla tierra-agua no se oscurece o ennegrece a la vista (¿o la imaginación?) del poeta, sino más bien todo lo contrario, portador de claridad refulgente (*brightening*). En un vuelco alquímico, pues, lo que desciende en oscuridad y suciedad, asciende luciente y limpio.⁷ “Bogging in” (1996: 41, v. 9) es también la ocupación de Caedmon, poeta y granjero reverenciado por Heaney en “Whitby-sur-Moyola”. Como en el caso del propio norirlandés, el primer poeta anglosajón es descrito como figura liminar entre el arpa y el arado, enlodándose (*bogging in*) al igual que la paleta del albañil (*mucking in*), surgiendo así ante nuestros ojos como “the perfect yardman [...] [who] had worked his angel stint” (1996: 41, vv. 3, 6). Nótese la admiración de Heaney por personajes —y siguiendo con la misma expresión simbólica— que *se mojan*, trabajadores que manchan sus manos y adquieren así grandeza sin manilla: “Oh, Caedmon was the real thing all right” (1996: 41, v. 16). En la poética heaneyiana, el cielo se toca en la mácula del barro.

El movimiento también es de vital importancia en el oficio de albañil: “Over and over, the slur, the scrape and mix / As he retrowelled and retrowelled and laid down / Courses of glum mortar” (1996: 15, vv. 13-15). Este movimiento dual, de abajo a arriba, de la cubeta al muro, y vuelta a empezar, complementa el simbolismo dual de una *mezcla* —tierra y agua— igual de *triste* (*glum*) y legamosa que la de la cal en “Keeping Going”; pero igual de efectiva: ésta blanquea un muro; aquélla lo construye. El proceso de confección de ambas mezclas es igual de antiestético; el resultado, igual de *mágico*. No es de extrañar que ante los ojos de un niño aquello fuera “puro arte de magia” (Heaney 2000: 43, v. 18). A través del lenguaje, Heaney redescubre el embrujo de estos pequeños milagros de la imaginación *material*. Como el de la paleta del albañil, que penetra [↓] en la cubeta de

argamasa para ascender [↑] con su borde y vértice *limpios y brillantes* (1996: 15, vv. 17-19). Precisamente lo mismo que ocurría en la alquimia, donde la materia a destilar era previamente *ensuciada* en la *impureza* terrenal. Al principio de nuestro artículo destacamos la *revalorización* de la tierra y el movimiento descendente en la comprensión del fenómeno alquímico. En los versos de Heaney, como podemos observar en este y otros muchos ejemplos, ocurre lo mismo. Hasta tal punto que en ocasiones se invierten los términos, de manera que la esencia no asciende de la cucúrbita, sino que se adentra en sus profundidades. De ahí la centralidad del movimiento descendente y las profundidades subterráneas en los versos del norirlandés. Continuando con la paleta, cabe señalar que su magia se descubre en otra pequeña paradoja: “It looked light but felt heavy as a weapon, / Yet when he lifted it there was no strain” (1996: 15, vv. 20-21). Arriba-abajo, limpio-sucio, mate-brillante y pesado-ligero son las dualidades con las que juega la pluma de Heaney para mostrarnos, a través del verso, la enorme potencialidad de la transmutación y el movimiento.

El simbolismo de la alquimia, como adelantamos con anterioridad, ofrece a Seamus Heaney una consoladora lección para la vida real. ¿Qué mayor promesa, en una sociedad asolada por el conflicto, que la de convertir lo sucio, como por arte de magia, en algo limpio y radiante? ¿Qué mayor bendición alquímica que la de derivar blancura de negrura, en el tiempo que ésta tarda en secarse sobre una pared, sin otra ayuda que tierra, agua y aquel mágico cepillo de encalado? Mas no hay mayor certeza, en cualquier caso, que la de no poder resucitar vida una vez seca la última sangre... Ante tal certidumbre, poco puede hacer el verso alquímico de Heaney. Poco pueden hacer, asimismo, aquéllos que se han mostrado fieles a las víctimas permaneciendo en el lugar de los acontecimientos. Como su hermano Hugh, quien aún recorre con su tractor las calles sobre cuyas paredes tantas víctimas han vertido su vida, en espasmódicos brochazos:

My dear brother, you have good stamina.
 You stay on where it happens. Your big tractor
 Pulls up at the Diamond, you wave at people,
 You shout and laugh above the revs, you keep
 Old roads open by driving on the new ones.
 [...]
 But you cannot make the dead walk or right wrong.
 (1996: 12, vv. 66-70, 73)

Conocido es el auto-tormento que se inflige Heaney a lo largo de su carrera por preservar su poesía del requerimiento socio-político por parte de la comunidad católica norirlandesa; por no poder, al igual que su hermano, hacer que los muertos vuelvan a caminar, o *lo malo bueno* —nótese la llamativa aliteración entre los mo-

nosílabos (*to*) *right wrong*. Cuando otras responsabilidades sociales y políticas apremian, no en vano, el propio acto de la escritura supone ya para el norirlandés una destacable fuente de remordimiento.⁸ No obstante, tras la muerte sólo queda —para Heaney y para Hugh, para el individuo y el colectivo— el consuelo de la palabra, la promesa del futuro. Es ahí donde la alquimia poética irrumpe con mayor fuerza reparativa. Frecuentemente la crítica ha centrado sus interpretaciones en la mirada consolatoria de Heaney para con las víctimas, inculpándole en ocasiones de un irresolutivo estancamiento en el pasado.⁹ Sin embargo, pensamos que no se ha de soslayar aquella otra mirada hacia el futuro que el poeta concede al poder de la palabra. En este sentido se ha de entender, a nuestro juicio, la frecuente imaginaria del *sacrificio* en sus versos: esperar vida tras la muerte, sublimar optimismo de la desesperanza. En “Keeping Going” el chivo expiatorio es un reservista que, *armado (toting)* con el paquete que contiene su almuerzo (1996: 12, v. 55), muere asesinado, presumiblemente, a manos del IRA. Tras el certero balazo en la frente, su cuerpo cae “past the *tarred* strip, / Feeding the gutter with his copious blood” (el énfasis es nuestro) (1996: 12, vv. 64-65). Ya en versos anteriores de este mismo poema Heaney adelantaba la ominosa negrura del alquitrán, cuya misteriosa sombra penetraba en el muro recién encalado en forma de “tar border”, “a black divide” (1996: 10, vv. 21, 22). El mismo valor mortal posee, recordemos, en “Punishment”. En él Heaney traza un paralelismo entre una joven asesinada por adulterio en la Edad de Bronce, preservada en las ciénagas del norte de Europa, y otras tantas jóvenes irlandesas en Irlanda del Norte que, durante el apogeo del conflicto, y como castigo por sus romances con los soldados ingleses que ocupaban el Ulster (origen de frecuentes actos de espionaje), eran bañadas en alquitrán y emplumadas (el énfasis es nuestro):

Little adulteress,
before they punished you
you were flaxen-haired,
undernourished, and your
tar-black face was beautiful.
My poor scapegoat,

I almost love you
but would have cast, I know,
the stones of silence.

[...]

I who have stood dumb
when your betraying sisters,
cauled in *tar*,
wept by the railings

who would connive
in civilized outrage
yet understand the exact
and tribal, intimate revenge.
(1975: 30-31, vv. 23-31, 37-44)

En *North* (1975) eran ellas, republicanas. En *The Spirit Level* (1996) es él, unionista. Protagonistas y cabezas de turco, en dos poemas diferentes, de una misma historia de violencia fratricida. Al igual que en la guerra de Troya, temática de fondo de “Mycenae Lookout”, “The war put all men mad, / horned, horsed or roof-posted, / the boasting and the bested” (1996: 36, 4, vv. 46-48). Ante tal desesperanza —he aquí el poder de la alquimia— tan sólo cabe esperar —al menos soñar, imaginar— que la materia gris del reservista torne de nuevo blanca sobre el muro *sediento* de sangre, como la cal grisácea sobre las blancas paredes de *Mossbawn*. López Colomé traduce *parched* (adjetivo que califica el muro contra el que el reservista es forzado y asesinado) como *reseco* (Heaney 2000: 47, v. 53). Nosotros optaríamos por su personificación en ente *sediento* que demanda el sacrificio. Como los fantasmas que pocas páginas después, en “Damson”, regresan de ultratumba, también sedientos de sangre, “Ghosts with their tongues out for a lick of blood” (1996: 16, v. 25), enardecidos por los nudillos sangrantes de un albañil que construye —cíclica ironía— otro muro. Heaney pide al albañil, en primera instancia, que utilice su paleta como la espada de Odiseo “that dug the trench and cut the throat / Of the sacrificial lamb” (1996: 16, vv. 33-34). El cordero del sacrificio constituye un símbolo más de la violencia expiatoria desatada, diestramente entretejida —como vemos— a lo largo del poemario.

No en vano, volvemos a encontrar la simbología del sacrificio como motivo destacado en “Mycenae Lookout”, secuencia poemática *trasladada*¹⁰ del *Agamenón* de Esquilo. Recordemos que la historia clásica parte ya de un sacrificio: el de la hija (Ifigenia) de Agamenón y Clitemnestra, su esposa, para lograr que los dioses fueran favorables al rey de Micenas en su asalto a Troya (los vientos eran adversos a las tropas griegas, comandadas por Agamenón, una vez reunidas y listas para zarpar de la bahía de Áulide). En el poema de Heaney, Casandra ofrece, asimismo, no pocos paralelismos con las víctimas femeninas de “Punishment”. Entregada al rey Agamenón como parte del botín de guerra, la profetisa troyana se convierte en su amante y esclava, víctima del expolio, adúltera en cautiverio. Frente a la connivencia mostrada en el poema de *North* (1975), el irlandés declara sobre el lamentable estado de Casandra tras la guerra: “No such thing / as innocent / bystanding” (1996: 30, 2, vv. 1-3).¹¹ Sus palabras eran escuchadas por los griegos como el balido —de nuevo— de un cordero: “And then her Greek / words came, / a lamb / at lambing time” (1996: 32, 2, vv. 36-39). Palabras que advertían de la muerte de Agamenón

a su regreso a Micenas, pero que fueron —como en Troya, cuando vaticinó el ardid del caballo de madera— desatendidas. Finalmente, tanto ella como Agamenón mueren a manos de Clitemnestra y su amante, Egisto. Todo un ciclo expiatorio de crimen y esclavitud en el que la paz tan sólo se instala tras la extenuación: “And the peace had come upon us” (1996: 36, 4, v. 58).

Ante toda esta violencia, ¿cómo encontrar cura o consuelo? Heaney lo halla en la blancura de la cal, en la vuelta a la inocencia de tantos episodios de la infancia que pululan por su poesía. Todo ello, recordemos, “worked like magic” (1996: 10). La magia de lo cotidiano, desgraciadamente, no revive en el mundo de la violencia. No hace *andar* a los muertos. Tan sólo funciona en aquel pasado bucólico de granja y escuela. Quizá sí lo haga, por el contrario, la *magia del trabajo* poético, como el de tantos homónimos del escritor a lo largo y ancho del volumen: una alfarera en “To a Dutch Potter in Ireland”, un albañil en “Damson”, un arquitecto en “An Architect”, un sastre en “At Banagher”.¹² Todos ellos rememoran a Heaney de una u otra manera. A todos ellos Heaney rinde homenaje. Como ya lo hiciera a su oficio predilecto, el que profesaron su padre y sus antepasados, el que el propio Heaney profesa a través de su pluma desde el más temprano de sus poemas: “Between my finger and my thumb / the squat pen rests. / I’ll dig with it” (1966: 4, vv. 29-31). Aquel reservista en “Keeping Going” ya no volverá. Pero la *magia del trabajo* poético radica en conseguir, encalando conciencias, que otros tantos no se vayan. En evitar que su sacrificio, como el de tantas otras víctimas, no sea en balde. En ofrecer así, no sólo consuelo, sino *acción y resultados* para el futuro. En cierta manera, el poema sí que es aquel cepillo para la cal que dibuja blanco sobre gris, pues de la muerte sustrae el albor con el que mitigar la inercia trágicamente humana a presionar, en revancha, otro gatillo. La literatura aquí, pensamos, juega un papel muy importante. Heaney es consciente de ello, al igual que lo es de la arriesgada empresa de cargar con la “caja de ungüentos de la tierra” (Heaney 2000: 25). Dejando a un lado la duda, la tensión o el remordimiento que con frecuencia asolan al poeta, el norirlandés logra hacer alquimia de la poesía en *The Spirit Level* (1996). De ahí que en “Damson” el rojo de la sangre del albañil mude finalmente en el rojo de ciruelas, mermelada y vino que calma la ansiosa sed de los fantasmas de ultratumba. De ahí que, subyugado el primer instinto al contraataque, Heaney transmute el revés de la espada de Odiseo por el escudo-esparavel del albañil:

But not like him—

Builder, not sacker, your shield the mortar board—
Drive them back to the wine-dark taste of home,
The smell of damsons simmering in a pot,
Jam ladled thick and steaming down the sunlight.
(1996: 16, vv. 34-38)

A esta escena familiar es donde Heaney manda libar a los espectros sedientos de venganza. En ella se encuentra el unguento para las heridas aún no cerradas. La pluma del premio Nobel es, pues, como aquel viejo cepillo alquímico: destila esperanza de la congoja, transforma la funesta realidad norirlandesa en una poesía de beldad y compromiso pródigamente galardonados durante las últimas cuatro décadas. En la desesperanza, qué duda cabe, no basta tan sólo con esta alquimia reudentora del verso. Pero nos ayuda, en el peor de los casos, a levantarnos tras el contratiempo, a evitar nuevas caídas y, sobre todo, nos mantiene “keeping going” (1996: 12).

Notes

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¹. Para más información sobre esta actividad milenaria, considerada hoy en día —a pesar de su influjo esotérico— como una importante precursora de la química moderna, véase, por ejemplo, Guirao (1979) o Burckhardt (1976).

². Para más información sobre la tierra, el aire y la crítica heaneyiana véase nuestro artículo publicado en 2007 “And somewhere the dove rose”: Seamus Heaney y su fase aérea en la crítica literaria”.

³. *Potstick* es también la palabra empleada para el utensilio con el que se conseguía la mezcla cal-agua (1996: 10, v. 12). Las escenas quedan sutilmente vinculadas a través del vocabulario.

⁴. “A light, liquid food [...] made by boiling oatmeal (or occasionally some other farinaceous substance) in water or milk, sometimes with the addition of other ingredients, as butter, sugar, spices, onions, etc”. (*OED*, 2001). Esta mezcla fue parte habitual de la dieta de la clase pobre en épocas pasadas.

⁵. *Macbeth* 1.1.11 (Shakespeare 1998: 95).

⁶. “A splash of mud or slush”, “liquid or semi-liquid food of a weak, unappetizing kind”, o “refuse liquid of any kind”,

son algunas de las definiciones que de esta palabra podemos encontrar en el *OED* (2001).

⁷. En su artículo “Seamus Heaney and the alchemy of the earth”, George Morgan destaca la *limpieza* espiritual alcanzada a través de la *suciedad* del lodo, en el que Heaney se adentra en un conocido episodio de su infancia (Heaney 1980: 19): “Heaney’s imagination works not merely on a sensorial level but in terms of symbols [...]. A skinny dip becomes a form of baptism and a ritual marriage with the Earth Goddess, the archetypal roots of fertility, leaving the poet, *despite his darkened skin, cleaner, wiser, in harmony with himself and with the world*” (el énfasis es nuestro) (1989: 127-128).

⁸. Autores que destacan esta idea en la poesía de Seamus Heaney son Harold Bloom (1980: 137), Neil Corcoran (1987: 682), Seamus Deane (1985: 181) y R. J. C. Watt (1994: 231-232).

⁹. Véase, por ejemplo, Ciaran Carson (1975), Patricia Coughland (1997), Elizabeth Cullingford (1990) o David Lloyd (1997).

¹⁰. Distinguimos en nuestro método *traducción* y *traslación*. En ocasiones el traductor de poesía se limita a registrar de manera más o menos fiel en la lengua meta el

contenido semántico-estilístico de los versos en la lengua origen, mientras que en otras la actividad traductora puede *transgredir* significativamente los preceptos lingüísticos que impone la fidelidad al texto original. En este sentido, existen casos en que no hablaríamos de traducción propiamente dicha, sino que más bien se *traslada* algún contenido de un texto escrito en una lengua determinada (semántico, contextual, estilístico, métrico, etc.) a otro en una segunda lengua que mantiene una identidad notoriamente diferenciada de la del texto parcialmente traducido o *trasladado*. Para este tipo de traducción divergente del texto original proponemos el término *traslación*. Es éste el caso de “Mycenae Lookout”, poema inspirado en la tragedia de Esquilo que, sin embargo, difiere del original en la focalización de los eventos (el centinela que abre la tragedia clásica es aquí el narrador poético), así como —sobre todo— en la incorporación de la propia voz poética del irlandés. Más información y ejemplos prácticos dentro de la obra de Seamus Heaney pueden encontrarse en nuestro artículo “Traducción, traslación y la poesía de Seamus Heaney” (2004).

¹¹. El auto-revisionismo en la obra de Heaney es una constante que la crítica ha destacado con frecuencia (por ejemplo: Corcoran 1998: 23, O’Brien 2003: 6, Vendler 1998: 2, Watt 1994: 217).

¹². La identificación con el sastre es explícita en el poema: “Then all of a sudden there appears to me / The journeyman tailor *who was my antecedent*” (el énfasis es nuestro) (1996: 67, vv. 1-2) —es más, este sastre es literalmente su *antecesor*, pues, según Joyce Wilson, se trata del bisabuelo del poeta (1996: 150). Llama especialmente la atención de Heaney la labor de *recortar* y *recoser* prendas (1996: 67, v. 4), quizás como la propia labor de indagación y renovación poéticas. El escrutinio de los demás, como también ha declarado el poeta norirlandés con respecto a su propia obra (crítica literaria, medios de comunicación, etc.), es un elemento que disturba su labor artística: “So more power to him on the job there, *ill at ease / Under my scrutiny* in spite of years / Of being inscrutable” (el énfasis es nuestro) (1996: 67, vv. 13-15).

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RHETORIC AND REPRESENTATION. THE BRITISH AT WAR

Gabrielle Linke and Holger Rossow, eds.
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Despite the European claim that the continent has enjoyed the longest period of peace since World War II in the last four centuries, the essays in *Rhetoric and Representation* provide an overview of the various armed conflicts in which European countries —mainly the United Kingdom— have participated actively and of how popular and high culture products have reflected those struggles. This volume is a cohesive, well-structured collection of essays with a clear focus on the cultural and literary representation of conflict. The editors openly acknowledge the multidisciplinary approach offered by the different contributions while noting their insertion within the by definition interdisciplinary field of cultural studies. Disparate in content and object of analysis as the essays are, the editors manage to impose certain thematic and chronological order that is thoroughly explained in the Introduction. Thus, Linke and Rossow highlight the similarities between the fields of cultural studies and the increasingly successful area and degree courses in war studies, which center not only on warfare and its effects on society but also on the examination of propaganda material and cultural representations of war.

The first contribution to the volume centers on the paradoxical situation of the British population, who received with public enthusiasm Britain's declaration of war against Germany in 1914 despite their professed pacifism. Michael Paris links Britain's positive attitude toward the war to the long-sustained idealization in literature of the patriotic warrior defending the British Empire. He thus elaborates

on the different kinds of literary texts that from the mid-nineteenth century addressed mainly British young males with a view to promoting the desire and need both to defend the empire and to prove their courage and manliness through military action. Paris's criticism is launched at the sanitization and romanticization of battle in nineteenth-century novels like Sir Walter Scott's or Charles Kingsley's, and also at the representation of war as escapist fantasy —always abroad, of course— where the civilized chivalric warriors subdued the inferior “heathen”.

On an entirely different theme, Daniel Dornhofer provides interesting insights into the parallelism drawn by British punk and post-punk music bands like The Clash, Gang of Four, or The Levellers, between the 1640s' Civil War and the eighteen years of Thatcherite government. For this purpose, Dornhofer brings to bear his analysis of the bands' political affiliations, aesthetics, music and lyrics upon the similarities between King Charles I and Cromwell's tyrannical measures and the upheavals provoked by Thatcher's government in terms of racial conflict, the miners' strike of 1984-85 and what Dornhofer considers to be the civil war going on in Northern Ireland during the Iron Lady's regime.

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Moving from punk to classical music, Hartmut Möller explores how composer Benjamin Britten combined lyrics and poetry written by anti-war British authors like Wilfred Owen or W. H. Auden in the composition of his operas and cantatas, which became emblematic pro-peace compositions during and after World War II. The context of the Great War is precisely what brings together this and the following article, where Penny Summerfield unveils the double-standard applied to the inclusion of women into the work force during World War II, revealing the discrimination and belated political maneuvers obscured in hegemonic accounts of the phenomenon. Summerfield's illuminating and challenging critique concentrates on two main theses. Firstly, she shows that what has usually been depicted as a substantial progress toward women's 'equality' was but a partial *integration* into the work force and as members of a social unit. To this end, the author explains that increasing mechanization of the skilled production processes turned them into semi-skilled jobs thus degrading women's work, that equal pay was never even considered, and also that after the war only young single or black women remained in full-time jobs. Second, the establishment reinforced the gender divide and its clear-cut gender roles by the over-feminization of female workers' uniforms and use of make-up and, more outstandingly, by refusing to admit women as active members of the armed forces. As Summerfield argues, arming women would have undermined the traditional gender contract that women stay at home in times of war whilst men fight for the protection of women and children.

In the next article, Doris Teske explores the guiding principles and underpinning notion of experience in the teaching of the two World Wars in British schools. For

that purpose, she studies three current textbooks and other sources like museum exhibitions and institutional web sites to conclude that the teaching of history has evolved in the same direction as the academic discipline of history. That is, the focus has shifted from the learning of facts and figures to the fostering of an empathic understanding of the past through personal experience and its recovery through contact with authentic material.

Moving on to post World War II Britain, Christian Schmidt-Kilb approaches the Suez crisis of 1954 through Prime Minister Eden's maneuvers to vilify the Egyptian government as seen in his declarations and letters to US President Eisenhower together with the manipulation exerted by the colluding British press. Finally, Schmidt-Kilb shows how Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* corroborates the feeling that, after the Suez crisis, Britain's status as a world power was diminished to the benefit of the United States.

Thomas F. Schneider analyzes the content and motives of the representation of British soldiers in UNPROFOR peace units in Bosnia in the early 1990s in Peter Kosminsky's television miniseries *Warriors* (1999). The series, which avoids any mention of the reasons why the Yugoslavian Civil War broke out or of the interests of the factions involved, presents an unambiguous, Manichean distinction between good and evil, victims and perpetrators. Produced four years after the war was over, Schneider argues that the aim of the series was to have an influence on the NATO and British intervention in the Kosovo crisis in 1999. Not being allowed to take part and fight, the peace forces are portrayed as powerless and helpless in their role as observers, their mere presence seen as an interference that usually brings about death. The series thus appears to be a straightforward defense of military intervention against the UN ideal of 'peacekeeping' missions. Holger Rossow analyzes stances toward the Kosovo War of the UN in general and Tony Blair's in particular. He mainly focuses on the discourses that equated Milosevic's ethnic cleansing of the Kosovar Albanians to the Holocaust and on Blair's acknowledgment that British intervention was motivated also by national interest. While denouncing the lack of action in massacres where NATO and European interests are not endangered, Rossow rejects "the view that mixed motives undermine the legitimacy of humanitarian interventions" (2007: 172).

Eventually addressing armed conflict on British territory, Kathleen Starck posits that the study of the cultural representations of a conflict can provide an understanding of its history and complexity, which is an integral part of any peace process. Starting from this basic idea, Starck's enlightening contribution sets out to analyze the ways in which the wall murals of both unionist Protestants and republican Catholics in the Northern Irish conflict work to create a sense of unity, identity and community, while taking into account the issues of power and their

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construction of a social space, transforming public space through the use of paramilitary and political imagery.

Finally, Sebastian Berg's contribution focuses on the relation of British Muslim subjects and the British establishment after 9/11 and, more exceptionally, after the London tube and bus attacks on 7/7. By centering on an analysis of public discourses, Berg highlights the vicious circle provoked by Muslims' rejection of the British military intervention in the so-called 'war against terror', which has apparently radicalized their approach to Islamism. In turn, Blair's call for a process of assimilation that he tried to disguise as integration has widened the breach between the British Muslim and the British Christian and secular populations, raising the level of mutual hostility.

In general terms, this volume proves highly compelling and a good read for scholars engaged in the fields of war and peace studies but also for anyone with an interest in British society and history in general. It provides useful information on a variety of conflicts that have undeniable repercussions in British society but also worldwide. Furthermore, the social and political analyses carried out through the detailed scrutiny of cultural representations and texts of various kinds constitutes a good example of what cultural studies is—or was at its origin and should still be from an orthodox point of view.

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FORM AND MEANING IN DOROTHY M. RICHARDSON'S *PILGRIMAGE*

María Francisca Llantada Díaz
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That Dorothy Richardson does not occupy the position in modernist fiction that many critics believe she deserves has something to do with the difficulty of including her works in the syllabus. Unlike Joyce or Woolf, no single novel by Richardson can adequately represent her achievement and neither students nor teachers can be expected to tackle her thirteen-volume sequence. This is what Llantada has brilliantly done; she begins with a brief biographical note and goes on to place *Pilgrimage* in the modernist context. She reviews contemporary critical opinions that perceived the innovative method of the first volumes and compared it to that of avant-garde movements in the arts. Llantada traces central modernist features in Richardson from the presentation of a fragmentary surface (itself the result of new scientific concepts) to the underlying presence of mythological topoi and the romantic idea of the artist as shaman. Llantada succeeds in the difficult task of presenting a clear picture of the multiple connections of modernist fiction to ideas drawn from myth, religion and science and singles out the descent to the underworld, embodied by Persephone, Orpheus and Odysseus as especially productive of meaning. The formal characteristics of *Pilgrimage* (disconnectedness, plot interruptions and ellipses) are also traceable to modernist influence, and the same can be said of the use of myth to give meaning to the chaos and fragmentariness of life (28).

Chapter 4 (“Textual Analysis of *Pilgrimage*”) is to my mind a major contribution to Richardson studies, since it offers a comprehensive and at the same time nuanced

account of the narrative devices in the sequence. Llantada begins by identifying *Pilgrimage* as a “modernist stream-of-consciousness novel which uses narrative techniques such as narrated monologue or free indirect speech, psycho-narration, quoted monologue and paralepses” (31). She deploys concepts developed by Gérard Genette, Dorrit Cohn, Mieke Bal, Wayne Booth and others in her analysis of Richardson’s innovative methods of presentation and narration, but does not fail to notice her debts to previous masters of the art of fiction, for example, Richardson’s appropriation of Henry James’s notion of the dramatic scene or the importance of *The Ambassadors* as a prototype of focalised narration (37, 39). But it is the use of free indirect style in the sequence that takes up a good deal of space in the chapter, and rightly so since we are dealing here with one of the central narrative techniques of modern fiction which has Jane Austen as one of its early pioneers, a fact Llantada does not mention, which is surprising since she is obviously familiar with Booth’s *Rhetoric of Fiction*. Besides the thorough analysis of the fluctuating relations between narrator and protagonist in the thirteen novels, Llantada offers the reader a number of tables that visualize the main techniques and metaphors as well as some thematic aspects.

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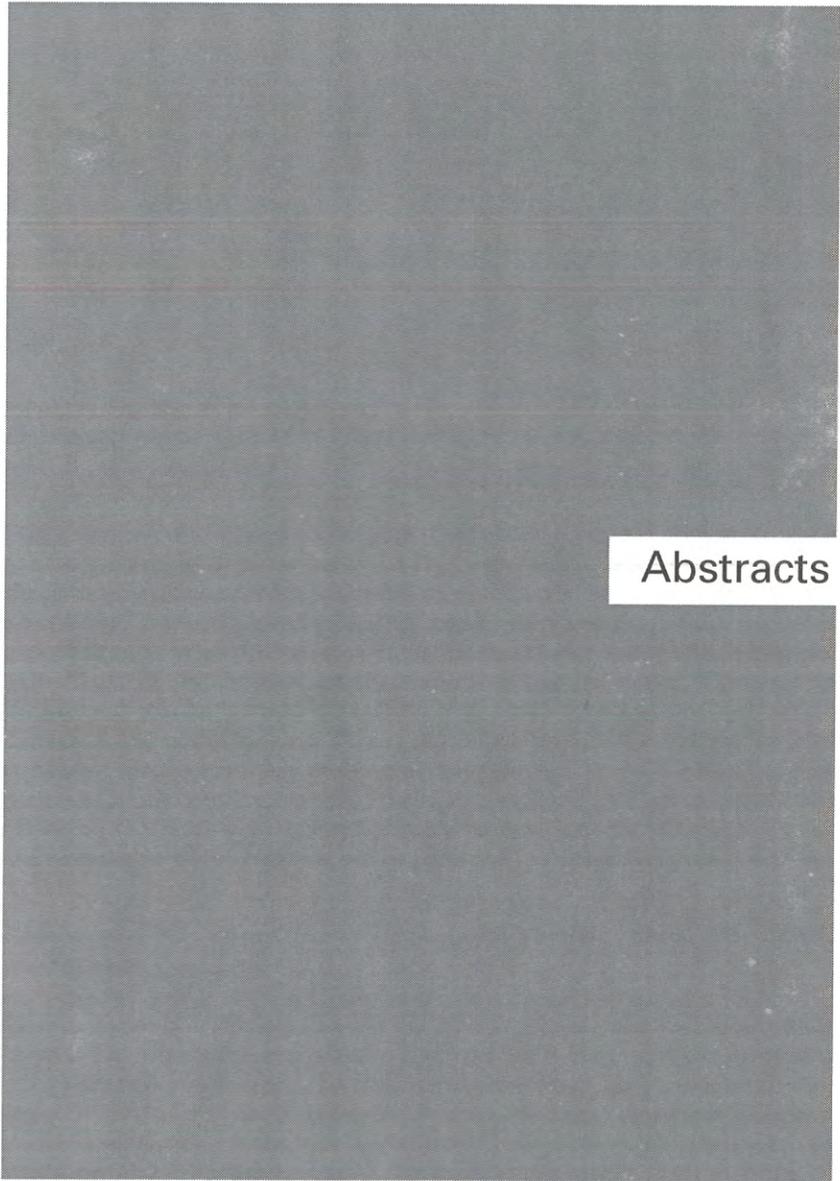
The narrative analysis is interrupted by a section on the quest myth and the *Bildungsroman*. This seems surprising at first, but is justified by the fact that a quest narrative “implies thinking about the quester’s future—in the form of anticipations—and it also means gathering together the most significant episodes of the past [...]— in the form of analepses” (68). Llantada goes on to study the temporal techniques (ellipses and pauses besides the two already mentioned) that shape the structure of *Pilgrimage* as a *Bildungsroman*, and at the end of this section she also provides tables that sum up the use of narrative time in the sequence. This important chapter concludes with the analysis of cinematic techniques and of letters. After this comprehensive and persuasive study of the various narrative devices in *Pilgrimage*, Llantada engages in what she calls “mythical analysis of *Pilgrimage*”, one that focuses on archetypal and religious motifs and that serves as an introduction to what I take to be the most debatable aspect of this study: the position granted to the Tarot as the structuring principle of *Pilgrimage*.

Llantada points out that the Tarot as a representation of the archetypal hero’s quest pattern was often used by visionary writers and shows in a chart the correspondences between the instalments of *Pilgrimage* and the arcana of the Tarot. Thus, *Pointed Roofs* corresponds with The Fool, *Backwater* and *Honeycomb* with The Magician, *The Tunnel* with The Papess and The Empress, *Interim* with The Emperor and The Pope, *Deadlock* with The Lovers and The Chariot, and so on. As is usually the case with archetypal criticism, the connections that the critic establishes are as difficult to prove as to disprove, since the evidence is often too slight and general. To give just two examples, when discussing the correspondence

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with *The Fool* in *Pointed Roofs*, Llantada observes that both Miriam and *The Fool* “have memories of what they are leaving behind, memories that will urge them onwards in their search to recover what they are about to lose, their primeval innocence” (112). This of course could be said of many protagonists, particularly in the *Bildungsroman* tradition. Equally unconvincing is the link the author establishes between Miriam’s experience of herself as separated from the rest of the world in *The Tunnel* and *The Papers* (132).

These objections do not detract from the overall value of the book which, as I stated at the beginning, is a major contribution to Richardson studies. It is a pity that such a scholarly work should lack an index. In a footnote on page 33 William James is identified as Henry James’s elder brother, which seems to me unnecessary for the intended readers of the book. *Form and Meaning in Dorothy M. Richardson’s Pilgrimage* is avowedly textual and as such fulfills its aims. Nevertheless one sometimes misses some more references to the rich and complex historical context in which the sequence was conceived and which is bound up with Miriam Henderson’s experience.



Abstracts

**"TRUTH IS HELD IN DISREPUTE":
O. HENRY AND THE DISMANTLING OF PARADIGMS**

Mauricio D. Aguilera Linde

Destabilization of principles and suspension of widely accepted beliefs pervade the conflicting ideological panorama of the Progressive Era. In a world dominated by the uprooting of long established traditions, O. Henry's short fiction becomes the site wherein Darwin-dictated principles, gender roles and genre rules are either dislocated or subverted. Following Boris M. Éjxenbaum's idea (1927) that the writer's use of parody lays bare the construction of his stories, I propose to demonstrate that an intentional breaking of generic expectations lies behind the narrator's use of multifarious literary formulas. Evolutionist axioms are also overruled, for dysgenic and not eugenic prevails over in the American society presented by the Southerner writer. Finally, by applying Veblen's sociological ideas (1899) to O. Henry's characters, I also aim to show that any attempt to classify them into types whose response can be predicted in the social contest is destined to fail.

Key words: O. Henry, short story, genre, parody, Social Darwinism, postmodernism

Dominado por la desestabilización de todos los principios y el cuestionamiento de las creencias más sólidas, el conflictivo panorama de la Era Progresista Americana se caracteriza por el declive de las tradiciones dominantes. En este contexto ideológico la ficción breve de O. Henry puede analizarse como un espacio discursivo donde se subvierten o interrogan las categorías darwinistas, el rol de la mujer o las reglas formales del género narrativo. Tomando como base la teoría de Boris M.

Éjxenbaum (1927) de que el uso consciente que el escritor hace de la parodia tiene como función enfatizar el carácter artificioso de los elementos estructurales de sus relatos, mi objetivo es demostrar en última instancia que, detrás del sinfín de fórmulas literarias empleadas por el narrador, se esconde la ruptura deliberada de cualquier expectativa genérica que pudiera formarse el lector. Los dictados evolucionistas también son desautorizados, pues, lejos de apoyar ideas eugenésicas, los finales muestran una clara prevalencia de elementos disgenésicos en la sociedad americana. Por último, la clasificación sociológica binaria (primitivos vs. bárbaros) de Veblen (1899) tampoco es útil para predecir las respuestas de los personajes de O. Henry en la lucha por la supervivencia.

Palabras clave: O. Henry, relato, género narrativo, parodia, Darwinismo social, posmodernismo.

BEYOND THE EDGE OF THE CENTURY: THE POSTCOLONIAL IMAGINATION IN THE 'NEW' FICTIONS OF THE CANADAS

Pedro M. Carmona Rodríguez

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Whereas the 1990s witnessed the establishment of the basic parameters within which Canada could be considered a postcolonial enclave, the new millennium, shortly after its opening, has seen the reworking of the Canadian postcolonial. The contemporary rethinking of the postcolonial condition of Canada has given place to new theoretical moves, partly uncovered when looking at the long-standing mutual nurture between theoretical and imaginative writing. This paper centres on this contemporary theoretical revision to eventually propose that this revisionary invigoration has mainly been launched from fictions by authors indirectly affected by the multicultural agenda of the 1980s and 1990s. As a corollary of the reconfiguration of the Canadian postcolonial, and its views on nation, culture and identity in the negative, the fictions published in the late 1990s and the early years of the new millennium show a penchant for writing the nation in multifarious forms that gradate the (post)colonial, while bringing to the fore regional and communal histories silenced for the welfare of the national/state mirage.

Key words: postcolonial, Canada, Canadian fiction, nation, nation building.

Mientras la década de los años noventa fue testigo del establecimiento de los parámetros básicos por los que Canadá puede considerarse un enclave poscolonial, poco después de su comienzo, el nuevo milenio ha traído consigo una reconceptualización de lo poscolonial en Canadá. El replanteamiento actual de la condición poscolonial de dicho país ha dado lugar a nuevos movimientos teóricos,

en parte aparecidos al observar la ya larga alimentación mutua entre escritura creativa y teórica. Este artículo se centra en esa revisión teórica con el fin de proponer que tal replanteamiento se ha propuesto desde las ficciones de aquellos autores tangencialmente afectados por la agenda multicultural de los años ochenta y noventa. A consecuencia de esa reconfiguración del pensamiento poscolonial en Canadá, y sus argumentos de nación, cultura e identidad en negativo, las narrativas publicadas en los tardíos noventa y en los primeros años del nuevo milenio muestran una predilección por narrar la nación de diversas maneras que gradúan la condición poscolonial, mientras subrayan las historias regionales y comunales a menudo acalladas para la preservación de un espejismo de estado-nación.

Palabras clave: poscolonial, Canadá, ficción canadiense, nación, conciencia nacional.

"FINDING ANOTHER FACE INSIDE MY FACE": THE SEMIOTICS OF MIME IN EDGAR NKOSI WHITE'S RACIALIZED DRAMATURGIES

Núria Casado Gual

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According to Tadeusz Kowzan, facial mime may be regarded as the system of kinetic signs that is closest to verbal expression. At the same time, as Kowzan contends, mime constitutes —together with gesture— the most personal and individualized expressive mode in the theatre, submitted as it is to the performer's physical, psychological and actoral idiosyncrasies. In the dramatic production of the Afro-Caribbean playwright Edgar Nkosi White, mimic expression plays a prominent role: indeed, a broad variety of facial inscriptions informs both the dialogues and stage directions of his plays. Even if the mimic signs devised by the author have differentiated functions and do not exist in isolation, complementing as they do other verbal and non-verbal signs, most of them expose the inner and external tensions underlying situations of racial oppression. Considering the double axis of eye- and mouth-expression that determines facial gesturality, this essay intends to analyze the mimic expressivity of Edgar Nkosi White's characters and its specific contribution to the author's theatricalization of the phenomenon of racialism. At a more general level, the mimic designs inscribed in Edgar Nkosi White's plays will be shown to unveil the discourse of ambivalence that tinges the racialized body when this is portrayed and represented from the victim's point of view.

Key words: Theatre semiotics, Afro-Caribbean theatre, African American theatre, racism, Edgar Nkosi White.

Según Tadeusz Kowzan, la mímica puede considerarse como el sistema de signos cinéticos que más se acerca a la expresión verbal. A la vez, tal y como afirma este autor, la mímica constituye, junto con el gesto, el modo expresivo más personal e individualizado del teatro, puesto que está sometido a las idiosincrasias físicas, psicológicas e interpretativas del actor. En la producción dramática del escritor afrocaribeño Edgar Nkosi White, la mímica juega un papel destacado: así, una gran variedad de movimientos faciales aparecen inscritos tanto en los diálogos de sus obras como en sus acotaciones escénicas. Los signos mímicos diseñados por el autor cumplen funciones diversas y no se encuentran aislados de otros signos teatrales verbales y no verbales, a los que complementan. Sin embargo, en su mayoría expresan las tensiones internas y externas que forman parte de situaciones marcadas por la opresión racial. Tomando como referencia el doble eje de expresión marcado por los ojos y la boca del actor, que determina la gestualidad facial, este artículo pretende analizar la expresividad mímica de los personajes de Edgar Nkosi White, así como su rol específico en la teatralización del fenómeno del racismo, reproducida en la obra de este autor. De forma más general, demostraremos cómo los diseños mímicos de las obras de Edgar Nkosi White reflejan el discurso ambivalente que tiñe el cuerpo racializado cuando éste se construye y representa desde el punto de vista de la víctima.

Palabras clave: Semiótica teatral, teatro afro-caribeño, teatro afro-americano, racismo, Edgar Nkosi White.

**DRAMATISING THE CONFLICTS OF NATION AND THE BODY:
DISPLACEMENT IN CHARLOTTE AND EMILY BRONTË'S
POETRY OF HOME AND EXILE DUALITIES**

Paula Alexandra Guimarães

For Gregory Orr, the best way to respond to the chaotic unpredictability of our being is through the personal lyric because it “dramatizes inner and outer experience” by “clinging to embodied being”. The self in the personal lyric of the Brontës (Charlotte and Emily) is either ‘home’ or ‘away’, facing internal or external division or fracture, and in search of a prospective identity (personal and national) or a chosen location. The conflicts of nation (whether they are presented in a real or fictionalised manner) are simultaneously reflected in the conflicts of the body itself; and the word ‘home’ —a metaphor for both ‘place’ and ‘being’— assumes different but related nuances (from the familiar hearth and the exalted homeland to the poet’s mind, Nature or God’s bosom). There is an evasive attempt to overcome social and political coercions that create both confinement and displacement, but whether the Brontës choose to stay at home or are compelled

to leave, they remain ‘exiles’. Ultimately, for these poets, it will be exile displacement which will act as a ‘spur to creativity’ and define authorship.

Key words: Body, home, nation, displacement, exile.

Para Gregory Orr, el mejor modo de responder al carácter caóticamente imprevisible de nuestro ser es a través de la lírica personal, puesto que “dramatiza la experiencia interna y externa”, “aferrándose al ser personificado”. El ser en la lírica personal de las hermanas Brontë (Charlotte y Emily) está o bien “en casa” o “fuera”, enfrentándose a una división o fractura interna o externa, y en busca de una posible identidad (personal y nacional) o una localización escogida. Los conflictos de nación (ya sean presentados de un modo real o ficcional) se reflejan simultáneamente en los conflictos del cuerpo mismo, y la palabra “hogar” —una metáfora tanto para “lugar” como para “ser”— asume matices diferentes pero relacionados (desde el hogar familiar y la patria exaltada a la mente del poeta, la naturaleza o el seno de Dios). Hay un intento evasivo de superar las coacciones sociales y políticas que crean tanto confinamiento como desplazamiento, pero bien hayan escogido quedarse en casa o bien se hayan visto obligadas a marcharse, las Brontë siguen siendo ‘exiliadas’. En última instancia, para estas poetisas, será el desplazamiento exiliado lo que actuará como una ‘espuela a la creatividad’ y definirá la autoría.

Palabras clave: Cuerpo, hogar, nación, desplazamiento, exilio.

**“KEEPING GOING”: ALQUIMIA, VIOLENCIA Y SACRIFICIO
EN LA POESÍA DE SEAMUS HEANEY**

Juan Ráez Padilla

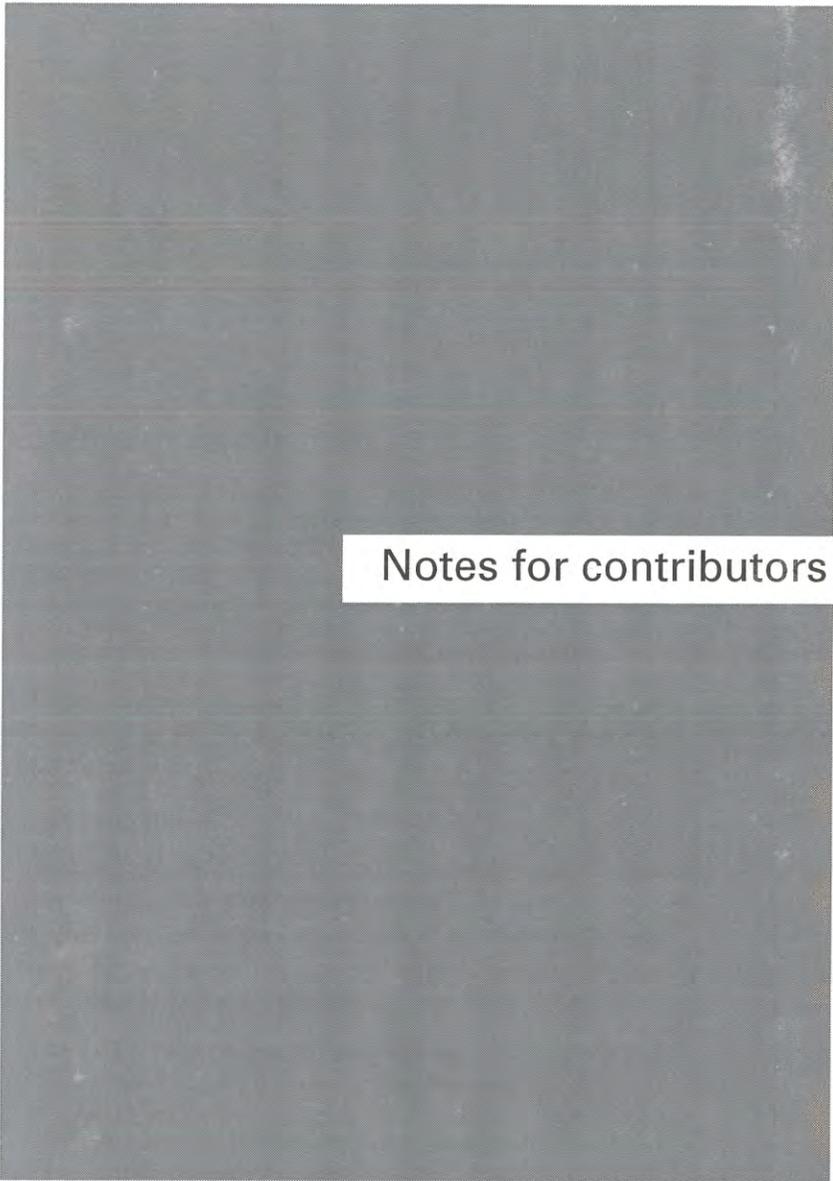
El presente artículo aborda, en primera instancia, ciertos valores de la simbología de la alquimia para, a posteriori, aplicarlos al estudio de la poesía de Seamus Heaney. Se destacan aspectos tales como la interdependencia entre materialidad terrena y espiritualidad aérea, entre el movimiento ascendente y el movimiento descendente, así como la sublimación de lo puro en y a través de la impureza y la sujeción. A la luz de estas consideraciones simbólico-alquímicas se analiza en la obra de Heaney —especialmente en su poema “Keeping Going”—, entre otras, la imagería del barro, el estiércol y la cal, desembocando esta última en la discusión sobre el *simbolismo de la alquimia* en la poesía del Premio Nobel norirlandés: la transmutación de *lo sucio* en beldad y blancura; la destilación de esperanza en la congoja; la evocación de la violencia y el sacrificio no desde una perspectiva inmovilista, irresolutiva, sino desde la creencia en la transmutación alquímica apprehendida en la magia del universo cotidiano.

Palabras clave: Seamus Heaney, simbología, alquimia, violencia, sacrificio.

Abstracts

The first part of this article analyses some values of the symbolism of alchemy which are then applied, in its second part, to the study of the poetry of Seamus Heaney. It highlights such aspects as the interrelationship between earthy materialism and airy spirituality, between upward and downward movement, as well as the sublimation of purity in and through impurity and dirtiness. Taking these symbolic values into consideration, we proceed to analyse in Heaney's work —especially in his poem "Keeping Going"— the imagery of mud, dung and lime. The last of these will lead to the discussion of the *symbolism of alchemy* in the poetry of the Northern Irish Nobel Prize winner: the transmutation of *dirtiness* into whiteness; the distillation of hope out of distress; the evocation of violence and sacrifice not from a motionless, undecided perspective, but from the belief in alchemic transmutation learned in the magic of everyday life.

Key words: Seamus Heaney, symbolism, alchemy, violence, sacrifice.



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