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From the Editors

This issue of *Polish Journal of English Studies* addresses unsettling issues found in selected works of fiction and a period in the history of Britain which is rarely analysed in history coursebooks. Authors of articles are interested in, on the one hand, highlighting the treatment of the rejected and/or silenced in contemporary literature and, on the other, the instability of political formations allegedly impervious to crises. Ema Jelínková's text is a scrutiny of two short stories by the Scottish writer Ali Smith, which characteristically address the recurrent themes of her fiction. Deploying Bakhtinian heteroglossia, Jelínková focuses on how Smith gives voice to the marginalised and how she creates spaces for a dialogue, emphasising what the characters have in common. Ewa Kowal, in turn, looks at Mohsin Hamid's novel *Exit West* from a postcolonial perspective, exploring the thorny issue of migration. She compliments her reading by delving into the question of the formal decision made by the writer to present the story through the lens of magical realism. She finds the form as politically charged as the narrative itself, an argument she presents in a most convincing manner. Tuhin Shuvra Sen's article addresses the revision of mythical and ancient representations of female agency in Pat Barker's variation on *The Iliad*. It emphasises Barker's restoration of a woman's central place in Western culture and letters by providing space for a woman's voice. Finally, György Borus analyses in his essay a most turbulent period in British (political) history (1806–1812), attempting to fathom the reasons for the difficulties and troubles that the Whig government had to face and deal with. He also ponders on the causes of the crises and the inefficacy with which government officials handled them.

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From Silence to Dialogic Discourse in Selected Short Stories by Ali Smith[1]

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Abstract: This paper focuses on the contemporary Scottish writer Ali Smith, specifically on the motifs of silence, voice, and Bakhtinian dialogism in her short stories "The Hanging Girl" and "The College". A brief introduction to the relevant history, traditions, and concepts in Scottish writing in general and Scottish women's writing in particular is provided to contextualise Smith's fiction and illustrate how the author engages with her cultural heritage and how she updates it to address current issues. The selected stories are representative of Smith's work in that they deal with the recurrent themes of loss, death, and longing for a genuine human connection. Smith explores manifestations of otherness in all senses of the word and pushes the possibilities of heteroglot interillumination of perspectives to give a voice to those who have been silenced, forgotten, or repressed by the dominant monoglot discourse. The stories in question, as well as Smith's other fiction, include multiple voices and juxtapose different views while refraining from allowing any single of them to dominate the others. Ultimately, Smith's forceful stories of human interest establish conditions of dialogic heteroglossia to draw attention to what we share as human beings rather than what makes us different from one another.

Keywords: Ali Smith, Scottish literature, Bakhtin, dialogism, silence

Before undertaking to analyse in depth the specific details of Ali Smith's dialogic literary texts, one needs to be aware of the broader context in which they have been created. Much to Smith's chagrin, she is conventionally pigeonholed by contemporary criticism as a Scottish lesbian woman writer. While these labels are certainly not untrue and may provide a helpful starting point for a first-time reader, they are inevitably grossly reductive. Filing Smith under the category of Scottish women's writing, narrowed down even further by the attribute

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of sexuality, might misleadingly imply that the writer's overarching agenda is to engage directly with questions of nationalism, feminism, and sexual identity. This could have been the case with writers emerging at the onset of what retrospectively came to be known as the second Scottish literary renaissance, a powerful revitalisation and new flourishing of Scottish literature starting in the early 1980s. However, it does not apply to the strictly apolitical Ali Smith, whose works exhibit no overt agenda apart from the artistic one: "Art's the whole point," she explains her motivation (Wagner 2015, 53). Even so, Smith cannot help her art emerging from the Scottish background, just as she cannot help her happening to be a woman, both of which have traditionally been rather less favourable circumstances to nourish creative writing.

Ali Smith embarked on her literary career in the early 1990s, well after the publication of the monumental *Lanark: A Life in Four Books* (1981), the ground-breaking first novel by the iconoclast and doyen of Scottish letters, Alasdair Gray, which was a major milestone that arguably ignited the rise of Scottish writing from a neglected periphery to the position of a force to be reckoned with. Before *Lanark* and before a host of new writers directly or indirectly inspired either by the book or by its charismatic author, the standing of Scottish literature was perhaps as precarious as the standing of the stateless Scottish nation within the convenient but problematic construct of the United Kingdom. The 1707 Act of Union, which joined into a single political entity the formerly sovereign kingdoms of Scotland and England, respectively, was a bond of reason rather than a bond of love. An ensuing series of attempts to restore Scottish independence, known collectively as the Jacobite risings, culminated in the decisive Battle of Culloden in 1746, where the Scottish rebels were crushed, and repercussions followed with the aim of suppressing the Scottish spirit and individuality manifested in indigenous culture and traditional ways of life. Renewed calls for a free Scotland, leading up to a failed devolution referendum in 1979, a successful second attempt in 1997, and an independence referendum in 2014, testify to the fact that the idea of a sovereign state is by no means a matter of the bygone past.

Given the deeply rooted continuing tensions between the two nations that share a single state, it follows that Scottish writers start from a particularly difficult position, as often as not divided between defiant national pride and a gnawing sense of their own inadequacy, even inferiority, and parochiality. The intrinsic ambivalence informing the Scottish perspective is exemplified by Robert Louis Stevenson's seminal novella *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886),

which revolves around the ideas of duality, duplicity, and doubles and which has inspired numerous retellings, reimaginings, and indirect nods by later authors. In various shapes, the motif of duality therefore continues to reappear in Scottish literature up to the present; Gray's *Lanark*, already mentioned above, is based on the mirroring of seemingly different fictional worlds and characters, and the trope of ghostly doubles is also present in Ali Smith's stories, as will be discussed further on. While certainly not unique to Scotland, duality forms such a strongly perceived part of the Scottish character that it has earned a term of its own, "Caledonian antisyzygy", coined by G. Gregory Smith, who concludes on the subject thus: "If therefore Scottish history and life are, as an old northern writer said of something else, 'varied with a clean contrair [sic] spirit,' we need not be surprised to find that in his literature the Scot presents two aspects which appear contradictory. Oxymoron was ever the bravest figure, and we must not forget that disorderly order is order after all" (Smith 1919, 4–5).

One last general observation that is pertinent specifically to Scottish women's writing has to do with the traditionally overtly masculine nature of Scottish culture in general and its literature in particular. Apart from rare exceptions, the most notable being the prodigious Scottish writer in exile Muriel Spark, there has been little space allowed either to fully-fledged female protagonists or indeed to female writers. To begin with, Scotland's literature struggled to forge its own peculiar identity and fell back on defining itself in negative terms, that is, in opposition to England's literature. This strategy can be well illustrated by means of the now internationally recognised Irvine Welsh, whose *Trainspotting*, both as a book (1993) and a film (1996), startled its first audiences with its authentic rendition of urban working-class dialect and its unflinching portrayal of the sordid realities of Edinburgh's housing-scheme low-lifes. Kirstin Innes aptly summarises the ambivalent contribution of this cult classic as follows:

> Whereas there can be no doubt that *Trainspotting* has successfully ruptured the hegemony of middle-class Standard English narration, the novel's popularity has helped facilitate the reconsolidation of other hegemonic structures. The much-fêted new visibility of Scottish culture, which coincides with the working-class male's literary enfranchisement, appears to be won at the expense of women, gay men and ethnic minorities, whose voices are silenced by the new literature's blatant misogyny, homophobia and racism. (Innes 2007, 303)

Welsh's book epitomises the noisy masculinity and the calculated anti-English stance characteristic of the type of Scottish writing which is somewhat burdened by its self-imposed task of consciously setting an appropriate direction for a post-devolution national literature and which tends to err in simply substituting one dominant discourse for another.

Ali Smith, poignantly dubbed "a writer of otherness" (McRae and Carter 2004, 138), comments along the same lines on the relative novelty in Scotland of the voices of women and other previously unheard minorities:

> People are particularly keen to categorize themselves as different
> . . . from English . . . To be Scottish is to be separate; that's why . .
> . Scottish women's writing has only really been given a place . . .
> in the last ten years . . . The idea that there are other forms of dif-
> ference apart from this one. (Gonda 1995, 5; ellipses in the original)

Smith positively embraces difference and otherness in all senses of the word in that she typically works with the least likely candidates for characters, giving space not only to social outcasts, the inarticulate, young children at one end and the dying at the other, but also the outright dead and their ghosts. Reflecting on her creative process, Smith observes that to her "everything has voice", even suggesting that "everything is voice", and goes on to elaborate on her preoccupation with the authority of voice: "At every point there's a calibration of voice happening, and what's interesting to me really is what the calibration is, where it's coming from, who's got the authority to have the voice" (Beer 2013, 138). Smith is, however, completely uninterested in establishing any single authoritative voice to guide her narrative; quite the contrary, she refuses to prefer one voice over another and lets multiple voices overlap, leaving it up to the readers to construct their version of the story out of the often contradictory accounts. Working on the small scale of everyday ordinary lives that are inconsequential in the grand scheme of things, she eschews a unitary voice and a master narrative in favour of "a narrative free-for-all", as she terms it (Beer 2013, 146).

The evolving stance of Scottish literature, with Ali Smith representing the culmination of its current democratic direction, can be fruitfully described in terms of M. M. Bakhtin's dialogic theory of discourse in the novel, which is certainly also applicable to short fiction, and which does not regard literary language as an isolated entity but rather considers its broader sociopolitical ramifications.

Bakhtin's case for dialogism turns on the premise that human language "is never unitary" and that any attempts to impose unity will result in creating an artificial construct hovering dangerously "in isolation from the concrete, ideological conceptualizations that fill it, and in isolation from the uninterrupted process of historical becoming that is a characteristic of all living language" (Bakhtin 1981, 288). The establishment of a single unitary language, which Bakhtin terms the condition of monoglossia, represents the dictatorship of the centripetal forces that push towards uniformity and thus engage in a conflict with the decentralising centrifugal forces, which promote the inevitable existence of multiple languages, termed polyglossia (Bakhtin 1981, 270–72). Bakhtin argues for a disruption of the hegemonic monoglot discourse and for free rein to be given to heteroglossia, which he understands as an "internally dialogized interillumination" or "interanimation of languages" (Bakhtin 1981, 363, 51). In the history of the novelistic discourse, Bakhtin identifies two major factors that drive heteroglossia forwards: one of them is the already-mentioned natural state of polyglossia, while the other is the anarchic power of laughter generated by "parodic-travestying literature" which offers a "corrective reality that is always richer, more fundamental and most importantly *too contradictory and heteroglot* to be fitted into a high and straightforward genre" (Bakhtin 1981, 50, 55; italics in the original).

In keeping with the above theoretical observations as formulated by Bakhtin, the writing of Ali Smith represents what Peter Clandfield and Christian Lloyd describe as "redevelopment fiction", a new strain in Scottish literature that marks a shift from the national to the international, from the local to the global, and in the case of Ali Smith also from explicitly Scottish settings, characters, and themes to concerns with a more universal resonance (Clandfield and Lloyd 2007, 124). Clandfield and Lloyd argue that "rather than cultivating pathos or disaffection", which are typical of devolutionary fiction, more recent Scottish writings "acknowledge the inevitability of redevelopment and insist that literature can help map and guide the process of renovation, as well as challenge any grandiose, ideologically motivated attempts to channel and dictate its course" (Clandfield and Lloyd 2007, 131). Smith certainly steers clear of the grandiose, and while she unrepentantly challenges authority, she does not do so in an aggressive manner or in order to replace one set of beliefs with another. Instead, she offers insights into the perceptions of multiple competing parties and disturbs her readers' complacency by drawing attention to previously neglected perspectives and unheard voices. In Bakhtinian terms, Smith rejects the hegem-

ony of monoglossia and absorbs in her fictional discourse the plurality of polyglossia, letting the various languages and idioms interact, interanimate, and interilluminate one another. Olga Roebuck poignantly characterises Smith's approach as a quest to cast a spotlight on the "authenticity of a specific experience rather than speaking on behalf of some collective identity" (Roebuck 2019, 122). Despite Smith's penchant for quirky characters and on-the-edge experiences, often revolving around the themes of breakdown, loss, and death, the author seeks to highlight what members of the human race, alive or dead, have in common rather than what divides us.

Although Smith focuses on the private over the public and the personal over the political, she does not avoid addressing current topical issues, however indirectly, weaving them into a story of human interest rather than making them the sole point of her narrative. A case in point is "The Hanging Girl" from her second collection, *Other Stories and Other Stories* (1999). This deeply disturbing short story opens with a depiction of a young girl's public hanging, which is staged as a film set, complete with a television crew, since the execution will be both televised live and available as playback for viewers who wish to watch again. An episode in the television series *This Is My Death*, the presentation of the hanging resembles a theatre performance or, even more, a reality show:

> Here I go here I go here I go again the big number one more time ladies and gentlemen put your hands together please for this little lady a singer a swinger in the performance of a lifetime (music applause) start spreading the noose I'm leaving today slow slow build it build it up blast it out thank you thank you ladiesangentlemen I'm a little hoarse forgive me my throat's a little tight for it today but a very warm welcome to the show I'm your (g)host for this evening morning afternoon evening morning afternoon. (Smith 2004, 16)

This is the only moment in the story when the victim is allowed to speak, alas, not in a voice of her own, which is literally stuck in her throat, but almost as a mechanical medium used to reproduce a script written by someone else. As Jess Orr notes, Smith here alludes to Walter Benjamin's critical essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), updating Benjamin's concerns to the present era of routinely televised violence, actual and fictional, side by side to the point of their mutual confusion:

> When watching news images of war-torn countries and human suf-
> fering, for example, spectators may feel as though they are watch-
> ing a fictional film, due to the sophisticated special effects they have
> become used to encountering. In this regard, our responses to ac-
> tual real-life horrors have been pre-empted by cinematic depictions
> and can become almost automatic. (Orr 2019, 56)

In this respect, Smith's shock technique in the story forcefully illustrates how by being constantly exposed to brutal scenes, we have become desensitised inasmuch as we perceive suffering and death as banal occurrences and even trade them as commodities.

Even the short extract from the girl's last speech quoted above makes it clear that instances of chilling irony and gallows humour abound in her utterance, which can be described, in line with Bakhtin, as a parodic discourse, in other words, "an intentional dialogized hybrid" presenting "a dialogue between points of view" in that "two 'languages' (both intra-lingual) come together and to a certain extent are crossed with each other: the language being parodied and the language that parodies" (Bakhtin 1981, 75–76). Unable to use a language entirely of her own making, and probably not being in possession of such language in the first place, the hanging girl adapts the stock phrases of show presenters and twists them sufficiently so as to convey a parodying, travestying, or carnivalesque effect, as Bakhtin would have it. Despite the girl's clever appropriation of the hegemonic monoglossia, a truly dialogic discourse is not established at the moment because an essential party is missing – that of a responsive listener. Bakhtin calls this requirement "an *active* understanding, one that discourse senses as resistance or support enriching the discourse", as opposed to "a passive understanding of discourse", which only involves "an understanding of an utterance's *neutral signification* and not its *actual meaning*" (Bakhtin 1981, 280–81; italics in the original). Apart from the film crew, who busy themselves with the technical aspects of the job and do not seem to notice the horrendousness of the task at all, the spectators of the execution remain unseen, safe in the anonymity of their homes. With no perceptive audience available and no hope of any active understanding taking place, the victim resorts to silence for the rest of the story, muted by the monolithic discourse of monoglossia.

"The Hanging Girl" then moves on from the eponymous object of the spectacle to the subject that is being entertained by it, embodied by the unremarkable

Pauline Gaitskill, who suddenly finds her health failing for no apparent reason. She accordingly seeks help at institutions of health and social care but finds the system deeply dysfunctional, meeting with a lack of interest and disrespect, even hostility and humiliation. Pauline recalls an ominous incident at her and her partner's housewarming party just before she fell ill, when the television was running in the background, showing at intervals footage of heaps of dead bodies, which the intoxicated hostess and her guests deemed irresistibly hilarious at that moment. The ghosts that she was laughing at, however, return to haunt her, and Pauline soon starts seeing, or hallucinating, the hanged girl with the noose still around her neck. When the girl materialises to her hanging from a lamppost and, once the rope is cut, landing limp on the ground, Pauline instinctively rushes to scoop her up and invites the ghost to stay at her home. The two become unlikely friends, with Pauline beginning to look increasingly like a ghost herself, losing weight and wasting away. Pauline concentrates all her efforts on lovingly caring for the girl's ghost, trying to make her feel welcome, safe, and at home, comforting the girl so that she does not feel different because of the noose that she keeps on wearing and refuses to have removed, perhaps because she feels that it is integral to her identity and cannot be simply cut off from her:

> I tell her, to comfort her, because she must need comfort, that there's nothing so strange or different about it, that she's missing nothing, that it's the same for everyone; every one of us falling through air with one end of the rope attached to our birthdates till the rope pulls tight. Some people just have less far to fall, I say. (Smith 2004, 27)

Pauline is the only one to see the hanging girl, acknowledge her, and embrace her as she is, thus accepting a collective responsibility for any past wrongdoings instead of looking away or dismissing her own attempts at rectification as "displaced guilt", as Pauline's therapist puts it (Smith 2004, 30). Indeed, as Jorge Sacido-Romero suggests, the hanging girl can be read as symbolising a "ghost of the past that calls for an ethical transformation of the world inhabited by those who deny its existence to preserve a cynically inhumane, ludicrously rigid, and secretly obscene social functioning" (Sacido-Romero 2016, 99).

Along with numerous other stories by Smith, "The Hanging Girl" offers a strikingly original treatment of the theme of individual trauma, which, accord-

ing to Gemma López Sánchez, "has come to describe a whole cultural *Zeitgeist*" and which, in Smith's fiction, is typically represented "through repression and silence" (López Sánchez 2010, 44, 46). The hanging girl does not speak, ostensibly because she is dead, but also because she happens to be a victim of trauma which is unspeakable and politely unspoken of; in other words, she embodies a voice that has been repressed. She is reduced to re-enacting her traumatic experience again and again in different ways, exploring various places in Pauline's house to hang herself from. However perversely, by deliberately hanging herself rather than being hanged by order of an external, imposed authority, the girl comes to enjoy being hanged as a pastime and even uses hanging from unexpected places to amuse her hostess, as the latter believes. In bringing the spectral visitor to her home, Pauline does not invite death over the threshold but effectively explores new ways of experiencing life, since "the spectre intrudes upon the tradition-steeped living," Stephen M. Levin argues, "creating significant struggles that nonetheless hold the potential to restore life to the living" (Levin 2013, 38). Even though the spectral girl remains deprived of speech, she connects with Pauline intimately on a non-verbal level through symbolic gestures conveying friendship, trust, and love, such as when she lets Pauline tuck her in for the night, breathes with her as one being, and puts her hand on Pauline's heart. Pauline sings for her little friend, as singing is "a universal language", and continues to talk at her despite the fact that the girl shows neither any understanding of language nor any interest in grasping the concept (Smith 2004, 26). Ultimately, each of them sticks to her own preferred means of communication without forcing it on the other, so that previously gaping "silences are filled up with meaning, love and life", as López Sánchez sums up (López Sánchez 2010, 55).

In the conclusion of the short story, Pauline finds herself entirely alienated from the world of the living and comes to identify herself with the dead girl up to the moment when she re-enacts the girl's plunge to death on the gallows by jumping off the garage roof and breaking her leg on impact. The subversive carnivalesque strain underlying the story comes to the foreground again in the closing scene, which neatly refers back to the opening paragraphs describing the original hanging, as after her haphazard jump, "Pauline lay on the grass with her leg jutted up. Tears streamed across her face and she was laughing" (Smith 2004, 34). The responding police officer called by a neighbour dismisses Pauline's anarchic laughter as hysteria, but there seems to be more depth to her apparently unmotivated mirth. That is, notwithstanding the pain of the broken

leg, Pauline experienced an intoxicating moment of transcendental connection when her ghost friend summoned multitudes of creatures like herself, forming "a great greyed carpet studded with lost things", all gathering to watch Pauline's free fall: "The silence like a cheer going up, roaring round my head when, flung into the air, diving like a bad swimmer into it, I went over the edge" (Smith 2004, 35). The crucial difference between the girl's death by hanging and Pauline's leap of faith from the roof lies in the respective audiences of the events: the former was observed by indifferent or invisible spectators, while the latter was accompanied by a supportive crowd, whose silence Pauline confidently interpreted as roaring cheers of encouragement. At the beginning of their relationship, Pauline perceived the ghost girl's silence as an absence of language; however, her initial impression evolved into an understanding of silence as a language in its own right, perhaps the only viable language fully belonging to the speaker, considering Bakhtin's maxim that "language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker's intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others" (Bakhtin 1981, 294).

Loss of voice, silence, and solipsism on one hand and a painful desire for communication, connection, and understanding on the other hand also underlie another of Smith's hallmark stories, "The College", from her first collection, *Free Love and Other Stories* (1995). On the surface an almost quotidian story of young Alex's struggle to come to terms with her sister Gillian's death in a diving accident, on closer reading it turns out to be a characteristically multifaceted narrative touching on a range of themes, including Smith's preoccupation with the authority of voice. Smith likes to experiment with a juxtaposition of contending voices without ascribing authority over the others to any one voice. As Daniel Lea observes:

> Stylistically her writing embraces fragmentation and multi-perspectivalism to reflect the crumbling of singular, authoritarian voices in contemporary discourses. Her narratives are filled with contrasting points of view, invoked in a restless marriage of difference and competitiveness, each seeking the privilege of primacy. The voices explain the world as it appears to them, but none are allowed the satisfaction of authoring the truths of others' experience. (Lea 2016, 27)

A hostile clash of competing voices is shown in what should have been a harmless exchange of trivial remarks but instead immediately turns into an inexplicable conflict symptomatic of a deeply seated discord in the dead girl's family, where the parents are separated but still maintain an on-and-off relationship, much to Alex's chagrin:

> This was a very different England from home, like a foreign country really. . . . When she'd said that as they drove past the colleges her father had said it *was* a foreign country, either that or a different planet, and her mother had got angry and said it was a beautiful place and that Gillian had loved it here. A silence had filled the car. (Smith 1995, 89; italics in the original)

Apart from this ill-advised remark, Alex refrains from initiating conversation, gives monosyllabic answers, and resorts to silence throughout most of the story, but underneath her composed appearance she boils with anger and in her internal monologue she lashes out at the world. Her defiance goes beyond the ordinary teenage angst because she feels that she is alone in her bereavement and cannot even begin to understand the outright frivolousness of her parents, who go about their business as usual and fail to as much as notice their surviving daughter's anguish. Alex seems paralysed by the trauma of her sister's death and exasperated by the fact that the world does not come to a standstill and that the people with whom she has brief encounters do not acknowledge Gillian's untimely demise as the only thing that matters, in Alex's eyes.

The outward action of the short story consists of the family taking a trip to the college attended by Gillian to be there for the delivery and placement on the premises of a wooden bench with an inscribed dedication to the deceased. While the sentiment is surely commendable, the execution fails to rise to the piety of the occasion, starting already with the delivery men unloading the heavy bench quite unceremoniously, "shifting the weight to and from each other, first to get it out of the van and then as a kind of game, calling to each other when one caught the other out" (Smith 1995, 87). The family and two college representatives then stand awkwardly in front of the bench, not as a tightly-knit group of mourners united by their common loss but rather as an almost random selection of solipsistic individuals, too engrossed in their own concerns to offer a meaningful tribute to the memory of Gillian. When Alex later wanders around alone and sits down

on a different bench in a different garden, her personal physical and mental space is invaded by a condescending National Trust employee, who educates Alex at length about the rare roses cultivated here. Alex remains outwardly calm but is so irritated by the woman's imposing manner that when the latter leaves, she destroys several of the cherished roses in displaced rage because the flowers mean nothing to her: "Because what right had this old woman beside her to be this old? What right had she to think this stuff was important?" (Smith 1995, 99)

Because Alex's parents, as if ignorant of the sobriety of the occasion, are at the moment drunk on love, they somewhat perversely decide to extend their stay and go on a trip in the area to revisit the mother's old favourite spot and rekindle the spark. Embarrassed and annoyed by their decision, Alex chooses a similarly perverse diversion, accepts a lift offered to her by a kind stranger who mistakenly thinks that she is waiting for one, and travels on her own to Brighton. With no particular purpose in mind, she ends up spending the day at an amusement arcade playing shooting games, perhaps feeling closer to her dead sister when her character in the game dies repeatedly. Alex's loss of life in a computer game is matched with her other figurative death, that is, Alex appears to be as good as dead to her parents, who are too preoccupied with reigniting their romantic relationship to remember that they still have one daughter to look after. Remembering and its opposite, forgetting, constitute one of the motifs present not only in "The College" but recurring throughout the body of Smith's work. Rachael Sumner comments on Smith's perception of forgetting as follows: "At best this may be regarded as a form of apathy. At worst it is an act of violence committed against memory—a deliberate erasure of inconvenient truths" (Sumner 2019, 135). Alex desperately wants for her sister not to be forgotten and eventually arrives at a point of tentative reconciliation with Gillian's departure and reaffirmation of the fact that she is still alive. When Alex leaves the arcade where she was re-enacting Gillian's death, she proceeds to assume Gillian's voice, which coincides with her own, as she stands on the beach, fearlessly exposing herself to a raging storm, and in what proves to be a cathartic experience, she starts screaming insults at the sea which took Gillian's life.

The conclusion of the story is characteristic of Smith's preoccupation with deeply personal, private, and often trivial incidents which culminate in "moments of affirmation or even epiphany which run just below the surface of the quotidian", thus "suggesting that life, and indeed identity, is made up from such brief and fragmentary moments" (Lumsden 162). Before Alex finds re-

lease for her voice in the storm, whose violence resonates with her language, she prefers to keep quiet because she is discouraged from speaking her mind by the overpowering monoglossia of the adult discourse. Though articulate and quick-thinking, by law and convention she is a child, and as such she is kept at the bottom of the social hierarchy, in which adults, by virtue of nothing other than their age, look down on her, dismiss her, address her condescendingly, or even talk about her in the third person while she is standing next to them, as when the college representative inquires "*if Young Alex would like a lemonade*" (Smith 1995, 89; italics in the original). When Alex is heard, her voice sounds with unflinching honesty and her critical undertone invites dialogue, which, however, threatens to subvert the established dominant discourse, and hence it is repressed as undesirable. Unlike "The Hanging Girl", which concludes in a tentative heteroglossia represented by the bond between Pauline and her spectral companion, "The College" does not allow the conditions of heteroglossia to be established, but it does succeed in cracking the monolith of monoglossia by acknowledging the polyglot existence of dissenting voices and guiding the young protagonist to find a voice of her own.

Ali Smith is a protean writer who likes to test the limits of fiction with her daring narrative experiments, her witty yet profound wordplay, and her preoccupation with retrieving voices that were lost, forgotten, and repressed by the hegemonic monoglossia of literary language, which, in Bakhtin's words, "is frequently socially homogeneous, as the oral and written language of a dominant social group", and hence may not be readily accepting of heterogeneous discourses from the margins (Bakhtin 1981, 289–90). Despite her depictions of often extreme experiences and eccentric characters, Smith's stories remain easily relatable by virtue of her overarching concern with aspects of humanity. As Lea argues:

> Some of the stories critique the nature of individualism in a contemporary world where intimacy has given way to solipsism, but often they address more universal concerns with love and its failure, death, the search for meaning, the human compulsion to tell stories, and—encompassing all of these—the problems of connecting with other human beings. (Lea 2016, 28)

Smith recognises that in order to forge meaningful connections with one another, we need to shift the focus from our differences to what we have in com-

mon, which involves considering with equal weight multiple perspectives and opening up to a polyglot multitude of voices, striving for their inclusive dialogic coexistence rather than allowing them to compete for exclusive power. Smith's narratives teem with manifestations of otherness, appearances of strangers, and other challenges to established patterns of thought and behaviour. Ultimately, Smith urges us to meet otherness without preformed judgement and embrace the conditions of heteroglossia, or, as she phrases it, "if we don't pay attention to the things that happen when something enters our world from outside, and if every dominant narrative tells us to dislike it, then I don't know how we'll manage to stay human" (Beer 2013, 142).

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Immense Risks: the Migrant Crisis, Magical Realism, and Realist "Magic" in Mohsin Hamid's Novel *Exit West*

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyse Mohsin Hamid's 2017 *Exit West* as a literary response to the 2015 migrant crisis. Hamid's fourth novel will be shown as, on the one hand, a formal departure from his previous works, but on the other, a continuation of the most important thematic threads in the author's output. The paper demonstrates how Hamid takes on the risky challenge of capturing the migrant experience by offering a nuanced response to the refugee crisis, which opens up the novel to interpretations from the perspectives of postcolonial studies, trauma theory, and socioliterature. Furthermore, Hamid's use of the technique of magical realism will be examined as a metaphor and an ellipsis; however, it will be argued that the novel's politically subversive potential lies elsewhere: in the formally realist vision of an optimistic resolution to the migrant crisis. This ending, for many readers unrealistic and fantastical, if not "magical," offers a "radical political engagement with the future," as it provides the author's unflagging expression of support for what he calls "impurity," as well as his appeal for strategic hope and optimism in the face of the currently dominant political discourse of fear and division.

Keywords: migrant crisis, immigrant novel, magical realism, postcolonial literature, socioliterature.

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse Mohsin Hamid's 2017 *Exit West* as a literary response to the 2015 migrant crisis. To do this, I will reflect on dominant Western representations of the crisis in other, visual, media. Secondly, the aim is to compare this novel to the author's previous three works in formal and thematic terms. Consequently, the paper considers the author's first-time use of magical realism, and shows that *Exit West*, on the one hand, belongs to the magical realist tradition of protest; however, it uses the technique only to a limi-

ted degree. Unlike in classical examples of the magical realist genre, it is not the single element of magical realism (examined as a metaphor and an ellipsis) that conveys the novel's politically subversive message. Rather, this role is fulfilled by Hamid's formally realist vision of a resolution to the migrant crisis, which can be interpreted as fantastical and even "magical" because it is optimistic. In the end, *Exit West* will be read as a nuanced literary response to the migrant crisis, engaged in political activism, promoting "impurity" and calling for strategic optimism, whose readings can be located at an intersection of postcolonial studies, trauma theory, and socioliterature.[2]

DISPLACEMENT

A decade before the beginning of the so-called European migrant or refugee crisis in 2015,[3] Zygmunt Bauman wrote about "[r]efugees, asylum seekers, immigrants [as] the waste products of globalization" (2006, 66). In his book, *Wasted Lives: Modernity and its Outcasts*, Bauman put forward an explanation for the predominant responses to the already visible crisis:

> In addition to representing the "great unknown" which all "strangers in our midst" embody, these particular outsiders, refugees, bring home distant noises of war and the stench of gutted homes and scorched villages that cannot but remind the settled how easily the cocoon of their safe and familiar (safe because familiar) routine may be pierced or crushed and how deceptive the security of their settlement must be. The refugee, as Bertold Brecht pointed out in *Die Landschaft des Exils*, is "ein Bote des Unglücks" (a harbinger of ill tidings). (66–67)

For this reason, Bauman wrote, refugees and immigrants "are uniquely suitable for the role of the effigy to be burnt at the spectre of 'global forces,' feared and resented for doing their job without consulting those whom its outcome is bound to affect" (66). Recognising the scapegoating mechanism at work, Bauman also

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2   As well as housing studies, due to the novel's intense engagement with the ideas of home, homeland, and displacement. However, additional focus on this area goes beyond the scope of this study.
3   The term or its variety (the UN Refugee Agency speaks of "Europe's refugee crisis" in 2015 [Spindler 2015]) betrays Eurocentrism and Western-centrism, but also serves to distinguish from others the recent stage in the much older and larger phenomenon of migration.

identified the prototypical "Other's" uncanny doppelgänger role: "After all, asylum seekers and 'economic migrants' are collective replicas (an alter ego? [...] mirror-images?, caricatures?) of the new power elite of the globalized world, widely (and with reason) suspected to be the true villain of the piece" (66). The unlikely likeness is further justified: "Like that elite, [economic migrants and refugees] are untied to any place, shifty, unpredictable. Like the elite, they epitomize the unfathomable 'space of flows' where the roots of the present-day precariousness of the human condition are sunk" (66). This paradoxical affinity explains why, in the philosopher's words,

> [s]eeking in vain for other, more adequate outlets, fears and anxieties rub off on targets close to hand and re-emerge as popular resentment and fear of the "aliens nearby." Uncertainty cannot be defused or dispersed in a direct confrontation with the other embodiment of extraterritoriality: the global elite drifting beyond the reach of human control. That elite is much too powerful to be confronted and challenged pointblank, even if its exact location was known (which it is not). Refugees, on the other hand, are a clearly visible, and sitting target for the surplus anguish. (66)

By 2020, globally, anguish has become even more surplus, and targeting migrants, and even non-migrant descendents of migrants, continues to be central to European and American politics. Migration was a crucial factor determining the results of both the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK, and the 2016 US presidential elections. Undoubtedly, it is for this reason that, in its sixth edition, *World Happiness Report 2018* focused on migration. Its *Overview* reminds us that "rural-urban migration within countries is an age-old phenomenon" (Helliwell, Lyard and Sachs 2018, 5) and "has been far larger than international migration, and remains so, especially in the developing world" (4). Nonetheless,

> large-scale international migration has increased greatly in recent years due to globalisation [...]. In 1990 there were in the world 153 million people living outside the country where they were born. By 2015 this number had risen to 244 million, of whom about 10% were refugees. (5)

As Hendriks, Burger, Ray and Esipova (2018) point out,

> This raises important questions in our globalizing world, where
> more than 700 million people currently say they would like to move
> permanently to another country if they had the opportunity, and
> where the international migrant population is expected to increase
> from the current 250 million to an estimated 400 million people
> in 2050. (46)

REPRESENTATION

Impressive as these figures are, and were during the 2015 migrant crisis, it was probably not numbers that spread panic among large sections of European and American public. Even more impactful were the images of events and its participants, at times televised live or livestreamed on social media or reported shortly after through not infrequently shocking photographs and videos – sometimes made by the migrants themselves.

Added to the initial, if not instantaneous, images of the migrant crisis have been varied, either directly or indirectly expressed, reactions and commentaries. Next to journalists', politicians' and "experts'" reports and predictions, artistic responses have also emerged, so far most numerous from visual artists[4] and filmmakers.[5] As the film critic Steve Rose has observed, migration is "one of the biggest challenges facing humanity today. But film-makers from Michael Haneke to Ai Weiwei have struggled to represent this highly sensitive issue" (2018). And as "Europe's film-makers have begun to respond, to the extent that

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4   Such as Banu Cennetoğlu (Higgins 2018) and especially Ai Weiwei (Barnes 2016; Pogrebin 2016; Tan 2016; Andrews 2017, Calderwood 2017; Hoffman 2017; Marchildon 2017; Pogrebin 2018; Ai 2018).
5   To name some titles of films created in direct response to the refugee crisis: David Fedele's *The Land Between* (2014), Panos Karkanevatos's *Riverbanks* (2015), Jacques Audiard's *Dheepan* (2015), Jonas Carpignano's *Mediterranea* (2015), Gianfranco Rosi's *Fire at Sea* (2016), Daniel Mulloy's short film *Home* (2016), Daphne Matziaraki's short film *4.1 Miles* (2016), Ellen Martinez and Steph Ching's *After Spring* (2016), Guido Hendrikx's *Stranger in Paradise* (2016), Simon Verhoeven's *Willkommen bei den Hartmanns* (2016), Luca Guadagnino's *A Bigger Splash* (2016), Alejandro González Iñárritu's "immersive VR installation-drama about immigrants" (Bradshaw 2017) *Carne Y Arena* (2017), Orban Wallace's *Another News Story* (2017), Francis Lee's *God's Own Country* (2017), Aki Kaurismäki's *The Other Side of Hope* (2017), Gabrielle Brady's *Island of the Hungry Ghosts* (2018). Three more films, which address the problem of migration and migrants metaphorically, are worth mentioning: the 2018 Oscar winner for Best Director, Guillermo del Toro's *The Shape of Water* (2017), and Paul King's *Paddington* (2014) and *Paddington 2* (2017).

a nod to the migrant crisis is almost becoming obligatory at the awards-friendly end of the business" (Rose 2018), at times their works "run the risk of being artful and exploitative" (Phillips 2018).

It appears that in representing "this highly sensitive issue" and in addressing "one of the biggest challenges facing humanity today" there is no failsafe strategy. This statement is equally applicable to literature. James Wood has expressed this fact best in his review of *Go, Went, Gone* (2017), a novel by the German author Jenny Erpenbeck about an aging German academic who becomes acquainted with a group of African migrants: "The risks inherent in making fiction out of the encounter between privileged Europeans and powerless dark-skinned non-Europeans are immense: earnestness without rigor, the mere confirmation of the right kind of political 'concern,' sentimental didacticism" (2017).

One more danger, to echo Bauman's words quoted at the beginning, stems from the vast asymmetry of power between those privileged to represent and those (predominantly not self-)represented. As David Morley writes in *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*, "[i]f the West commonly represents the land of the migrant's dreams, for the West itself the migrant is often still figured as the scapegoat" (2000, 155). This stems from "the conventional fears of host communities of being polluted by incoming foreigners" (155), which give rise to "symbols of impurity [and] rituals of purifications" (155): historically, Morley observes, "strangers were often held at the city gates, as a 'purifying filter,' preventing them contaminating civil society" (222).

IMPURITY

In her seminal work, *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, the anthropologist Mary Douglas states that "there is no such thing as dirt; no single item is dirty apart from a particular system of classification in which it *does not fit*" (2007, xvii, emphasis added); consequently, "dirt" is "the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter" (44). A key tool for "systematic ordering and classification" is the creation of borders. However, as Morley observes, today, "[i]n this world of hypermobility not only are we often engaged in border-crossings of one kind or another, but the nature and functions of borders themselves are shifting" (Morley 2000, 225).

Few kinds of literature address this problem as much (and as literally) as migration or migrant literature. An example of the genre of immigrant novel, first defined in the early 1980s (Boelhower 1981), is Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*. The

writer's fourth novel was published in 2017, "coincidentally in the midst of controversy surrounding President Donald Trump's travel ban affecting majority--Muslim countries" (Day 2020), as part of his larger border-strengthening and wall-building plan. As in Hamid's previous works, in his latest novel the author confirms himself to be "a writer able to speak directly of and to the moment," showing that he "doesn't shy away from wrestling with some of the most uncomfortable realities of the Brexit/Trump age" (Scholes 2017). In fact, one critic calls *Exit West* "the first great post-Brexit novel" (Freeman 2016), while another states that it "feels immediately canonical,[6] so firm and unerring is Hamid's understanding of our time and its most pressing questions"[7] (Tolentino 2017).

As Carl Wilkinson rightly observes, "Mohsin Hamid has been circling the idea of displacement throughout his career as a novelist"[8] (2017), which encourages us "to read the author's preoccupations into his biography: Hamid, after all, is a child of globalisation himself" (Wilkinson 2017). As we read on the author's official website, he was "[b]orn in Lahore, he has spent about half his life there and much of the rest in London, New York, and California". He now lives in Pakistan, but at the same time "possess[es] a British passport and once possessed an American green card," and "[m]ost of [his] education has been in the American system" (Hamid 2014); consequently, he feels both at home and foreign in all the above countries (Day 2020). He describes himself as a "mongrel":

> I'm a mongrel through and through. Some of us look like mongrels. [...] Some of us are mongrels inside. [...] I'm that second type of mongrel. I've lived on both coasts of the Pacific and the Atlantic and far up the Asian land mass alongside an empty river that once flowed down to the Indian Ocean via the Arabian Sea. (Hamid 2017c)

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6   Bearing in mind how exclusive the traditional "literary canon" has been, one may wonder how much Hamid, a postcolonial writer, would care for his work's potential canonisation.

7   The book was listed as "one of *The New York Times Book Review's* 10 Best Books of 2017" (Nguyen 2017), and was shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize 2017 (Day 2020).

8   Hamid's debut novel *Moth Smoke* (2000) addresses social mobility and its limitations within Pakistan's class system; *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007) recounts the story of a Pakistani man, first as an aspiring capitalist in post-9/11 America and then back in Pakistan as the titular anti-American "reluctant fundamentalist"; *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* (2013), the most directly similar book to *Exit West*, focuses on migration from rural to urban areas in Asia and the main character's climb up the capitalist ladder.

Although himself a member of economically privileged international intellectual elites, Hamid identifies with migrants and refugees, and likewise, imagines himself into their plight:

> It's a frightening time for mongrels. Purity seems to be all the rage. In a rage. [...]. [I]n Pakistan, quite literally the "land of the pure," where I live, we see a murderous attachment to purity so pronounced that no human being is pure enough to be safe. Sometimes I feel a sense of impending apocalypse. Driving home with my children or lying in bed with my wife, I imagine that our ancient city might go the way of those other ancient cities that straddle the hinge between Asia, Europe and Africa – the cities we read about in our newspapers and watch on our screens. I imagine a bloodbath. I imagine fleeing. I imagine leaving loved ones behind. I don't think this will happen. I think it is unlikely. But the fear is often with me. (Hamid 2017c)

Responding to the global rise of nationalism in a 2018 essay, Hamid asserts: "We are all impure," thus reclaiming the term, reappropriating it for positive use, since "[e]very child is a combination of genetic material from two different sources." However, he continues,

> because many of us deny our impurity,[9] those who are most obviously impure among us require allies. And one of their most important allies is literature. Writing.[10] Reading. When, sitting alone, we read a book, something profoundly strange occurs. We are by ourselves. We are only ourselves. And yet we contain within us the thoughts of another person, the writer. We become something bizarre. Something manifestly impure. A being with the thoughts of two beings inside it. (Hamid 2018)

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9   Hamid has written in praise of impurity also using the term "hybridity" (Hamid 2015, xiii). For more see Kowal 2017b.

10   Arguably, some literature and writing can also be, and historically have been, the enemy of those declared "most obviously impure."

THE BOOK

Exit West itself can be seen as "impure": as an immigrant novel[11] about crossing borders, it is also a "genre-blurring novel" (Sandhu 2017), thus iconically representing its "content" through its form. Like all of Hamid's novels, it also tells a love story: the two young main characters, Saeed and Nadia, meet as students in an unnamed city of an unnamed country (which brings to mind e.g. Aleppo in Syria or Mosul in Iraq). The novel's very first sentence informs us that the city is "swollen by refugees but still mostly at peace, or at least not yet openly at war" (Hamid 2017a, 1). However, this disturbing situation, which so far everyone seems to be taking in their stride (perhaps due to [over]familiarity with it) quickly deteriorates. Successive parts of the city are violently taken over by either of the warring sides, and soon after Saeed's mother has been killed, the couple decide to flee the country. They find out about mysterious and secret doors which, for a certain price, instantaneously teleport one to distant, happier, lands. They take the risk, and first travel to a Greek island, then to London, and finally to California. In each location they encounter both more migrants and refugees such as themselves, from various parts of the world, and the locals – some of whom treat them with hostility, while others provide help. However, globally, the conflict is resolved through a peaceful and culturally productive accommodation of the migrants into the host countries. The novel does not offer a conventional happy ending for its love story: after their long journey the couple split up and build relationships with other people.[12] The novel ends in the future, when "[h]alf a century later" (227), the former lovers meet as old friends, back in their hometown, now at peace again.

Exit West is told in what by now appears to be Hamid's characteristic voice (rather than an individual character creation); the novel's third-person editorial omniscient narrator[13] presents the shifting points of view of both main characters, as well as, briefly, a few marginal ones. Such a conventional and

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11   In addition, according to Gheorghiu, "[t]he absence of the elements that could make up a historical novel and the presence of some very topical 'intertexts of the world' embedded in the narrative [...] may justify the inclusion of *Exit West* in the fuzzy category of historiographic metafiction, even without an overt signalling of the *meta*-dimension" (2018, 86).

12   Religious Saeed marries a Muslim preacher's daughter, while non-religious and progressive Nadia (who covers herself in a black robe only for protection against men) falls in love with a woman.

13   This verbose and gently ironic (rather than ironically verbose) narrator sounds very much like the narrators in Hamid's last two novels, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* and *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*.

fairly loose narrative format is a departure from Hamid's previous writing, which in each of the three books featured an experimental structure.[14] This time Hamid "doesn't exert as tight a narrative grip as he did in previous novels" (Sandhu 2017); accordingly, *Exit West* is much simpler in form and has the feel of a fable.

The two features: simplicity and a fairy-tale-like quality in the form of one fantastical element are interconnected and can be interpreted as the author's chosen approach to addressing the difficult topic of the refugee crisis. While, as William Giraldi observes, Hamid "takes the […] Middle Eastern migrant crisis and injects a wizardry, an allegorical urgency, that declares this book's intention to be art" (2017), he demonstrably does not want to declare it "too artful," and thus gives up his typical inclination to experiment, and to show off his consistent mastery of a rare and challenging narrative structure. Perhaps this is because in the context of this story formal unconventionality would have attracted too much attention to itself – away from the subject matter, and thus would have been morally inappropriate. It would have also been less effective, while Hamid evidently wants to convey a clear message (specified by the end of this paper).

The author acknowledged that the simple story-telling that he adopted resulted from both his personal life (raising two children) and the world that surrounded him: "Now that I think about it, it does feel like a novel written by someone with two small kids" (in Wilkinson 2017). As his interviewer tells us, "Reading children's books and conjuring up stories has made him reconsider his work as a novelist" (Wilkinson 2017):

> I'm still interested in the form of the novel [...] but I'm less con-
> cerned with using my novels to question how the novel works.
> Now what's much more pressing is how a story can become
> as powerful as it needs to be to do the things that it needs to do.
> I'm looking at the world around me with alarm and wondering
> what the most powerful type of story is that I can write. (Hamid
> in Wilkinson 2017)

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14   *Moth Smoke* – multiple subjective and unreliable first- and second-person narrators with indi-
vidual voices taking turns to tell the story, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* – second-person dramatic
monologue, *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia* – second-person parody of the self-help genre. For
more see Kowal 2017a, Kowal 2014, and 2017b respectively.

OPEN DOORS

Despite the current global political trends going in the opposite direction, "[t]hroughout his oeuvre, Hamid envisions an interconnected world in which East and West inevitably meet as a consequence of complicated histories of colonization and globalization" (Nguyen 2017). In *Exit West* this interconnectivity is very direct and created through the novel's one supernatural element, namely teleportation through magical doors opening in place of ordinary doors. Hamid's migrants are not "held at the city gates," there is no "purifying filter" (Morley 2000, 222); rather, in a potentially provocative materialisation of the most sensationalist media coverage, they can appear in one's bedroom, as if having stepped out directly from one's TV screen – only to immediately disappear into the new surroundings.

The idea of the magical door in *Exit West* was borrowed not only from what Hamid was reading to his children, but also from what he himself read as a child. In an article where Hamid wrote about his childhood, and his sudden transplantation from Pakistan to the US and then to Pakistan again, the author recalled finding comfort in fantasy: "I read *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis. The idea of children passing through a wardrobe into a strange and magical land seemed entirely plausible to me" (Hamid 2017b). In terms of the composition of the novel, as we read in Wilkinson, "[t]he doors" – in the novelist's words, chosen as "the formal centre of this book"[15] – "allow Hamid to focus on the experience before and after th[e] escape" (2017). The author is not interested in the journey; as he said, "[t]he journey seems the most narratively interesting part, [...] but it is the least useful part. It's the lifetime up to the journey and the lifetime after that is important."

This is a radically different approach to the migrant crisis and migrants from the one that is predominant in visual (artistic, cinematic, as well as news media) depictions of the crisis and the migrants, who, with a few exceptions, are usually presented, firstly, on the move, in a boat or a dinghy, across a fence, on a road, in fact, fully identified with the motion, the flow (even when its current stage is stagnation and waiting), and, secondly, as a mass, without a past, and certainly without a future – or with both of them uniformly grim (with rare happier

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15   Another source of inspiration for this decision was Hamid's interest in technology (previously most visible in *How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia*): "[t]he idea grew from Hamid's observation of the way technology is changing how we connect. 'Sometimes [because of e.g. smartphones] we're totally mentally absent from the place that we are in, and it is very easy for us to mentally go to places where we are not. That gave rise to the doors in the novel'" (in Wilkinson 2017).

stories). Hamid opts for a different strategy, which the literary medium allows to a much greater degree than e.g. an art gallery installation, not to mention news media. As Khaled Hosseini says, "Stories are the best antidote to the dehumanisation caused by numbers. They restore our empathy" (2018).

As a fellow immigrant novelist, Viet Thanh Nguyen observes,

> How these doors work is not Hamid's concern. The doors can be manifestations of magic realism, fantasy or science fiction, or all three, but they simply stand in for the reality that refugees will try every door they can to get out. (2017)

The doors, or more precisely the teleportation they make possible can also be interpreted as a powerful metaphor for migration and what it entails. As Hamid said in an interview, "[s]ometimes unreality can feel more real" (in Freeman 2016). The author already used the idea of teleportation before, in his second novel, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*. In this post-9/11 novel, when the narrator is interviewed for a position at Underwood Samson, a consultancy firm based in New York, his task is to assess the value of a company whose only service line is "instantaneous travel. You step into its terminal in New York, and you immediately reappear in its terminal in London. Like a transporter on Star Trek" (Hamid 2007, 12). Changez's assessment is "[w]ildly overoptimistic," as his interviewer and future supervisor tells him, because his "assumptions on customers adopting this thing are way too high. Would you be willing to step into a machine, be dematerialized, and then recomposed thousands of miles away?" (13–14). In *Exit West* it turns out that very many desperate people would be willing to do exactly that, to take this immense risk. By migrating they first have to disintegrate, and then hope to reintegrate – on a personal as well as social level – through (various degrees of) assimilation into a host culture. Tragically, all too often the process ends at the very beginning, with the ultimate disintegration.

"It was said in those days that the passage was both like dying and like being born," says Hamid's narrator about the journey (Hamid 2017a, 98). This is how the doors and the teleportation are further described:

> A normal door [...] could become a special door, and it could happen without warning to any door at all. (69-70)

> [...] drawing close she was struck by its darkness,[16] its opacity, the
> way that it did not reveal what was on the other side, and also did
> not reflect what was on this side, and so felt equally like a begin-
> ning and an end [...]. [...] Nadia experienced a kind of extinguishing
> as she entered the blackness and a gasping struggle as she fought
> to exit it, and she felt cold and bruised and damp as she lay on the
> floor of the room at the other side, trembling and too spent at first
> to stand, and she thought, while she strained to fill her lungs, that
> this dampness must be her own sweat. (98)
> the doors out, which is to say the doors to richer destinations, were
> heavily guarded, but the doors in, the doors from poorer places,
> were mostly left unsecured, perhaps in the hope that people would
> go back to where they came from – although almost no one ever
> did – or perhaps because there were simply too many doors from
> too many poorer places to guard them all. (101)

The World Happiness Report 2018 confirms this unsurprising conclusion: "most migration is from less happy to happier places" (Helliwell, Huang, Wang, and Shiplett 2018, 39); "In general, those who move to happier countries than their own will gain in happiness, while those who move to unhappier countries will tend to lose" (Helliwell, Layard, and Sachs 2018, 10). Another way in which the teleportation door metaphor works in *Exit West* is that, without expressly saying so, it suggests an analogy: the difference between a rich place/a happy country and a poor place/an unhappy country is, qualitatively, comparable to the difference between England during World War II and the magical land of Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*.

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16   When the doors' darkness as well as the predominantly dark(er) skin of those who pass through them are mentioned for the first time in the novel, an intertextual link unmistakably teleports us to Joseph Conrad's most famous novel. Hamid clearly parodies it and its fixation on "darkness" when he writes: "the closet door was dark, darker than night, a rectangle of complete darkness – the heart of darkness. And out of this darkness, a man was emerging. He too was dark, with dark skin and dark, wooly hair. He wriggled with great effort, [...] as though pulling himself up against gravity, or against the rush of a monstrous tide. [...] With a final push he was through, trembling and sliding to the floor like a newborn foal. [...] His eyes rolled terribly. Yes: terribly. Or perhaps not so terribly. Perhaps they merely glanced about him" (Hamid 2017a, 6–7). Here, the migrant's animalisation is part of the parody. The tendency of Western filmmakers to depict migrants as a mass (admittedly, on the one hand inspired by their sheer numbers) creates an uncomfortable comparison with Conrad's and his European contemporaries' perception of Africans.

Furthermore, by relying on this metaphor, Hamid avoids the risk of mis-representation, sensational exploitation, or otherwise not giving justice to the migrants' experiences during their arduous journeys, which often constitute the unspeakable. In this way, the magical portal works as an ellipsis. It has the quality of economical efficacy, since the readers can immediately fill in the doors' "darkness," the information "gap," with at least partial meaning, relying on a large "database" of migrant crisis imagery supplied by other media.

The same can be said about Hamid's approach to depicting war and violence, where the unspeakable is even more likely to be accompanied by trauma. As Nguyen says, "[r]efusing to dwell on the morbidity of [war scenes], Hamid declines to turn the destruction of the city and its people into a spectacle" (2017). Rather, Nguyen continues,

> [e]xamining the destruction at a slight remove, Hamid discourages readers from pitying the city's residents. Instead, focusing on Saeed and Nadia, and removing the particularities of the city, the country and its customs, Hamid aims to increase the depth of a reader's em-pathy for characters who can be, or should be, just like the reader. The reader, of course, must think about what would happen if her own normal life was suddenly, unexpectedly upended by war. (2017)

Thus *Exit West* promotes empathy and identification with the refugees, but without overly universalising a refugee's or a migrant's experience. The novel offers only two universalist claims: "loss unites humanity, unites every human being" (Hamid 2017a: 202) and "We are all migrants through time" (209). Al-though undoubtedly well-meaning, such platitudes can be seen as inadvertently trivialising the plight of migrants; it is therefore fortunate that they are rare.

HOPE

Exit West, not only, as was said above, iconically represents its content through its form, but also – in fact, like most literature – serves as a kind of mental tele-portation device itself. Where Hamid wants to teleport us above all is a more hopeful future. While addressing a "highly sensitive issue," "one of the big-gest challenges facing humanity today," carrying immense risks for writers and all artists, "Hamid's traumatized fantasia" (Giraldi 2017), critics conclude, "is ultimately more hopeful than not" (Sandhu 2017). "In *Exit West*, [Hamid] imagines a hopeful, positive outcome to large-scale immigration that runs

counter to much popular anti-immigrant rhetoric" (Wilkinson 2017). Nguyen
calls Hamid's "gentle optimism, this refusal to descend into dystopia" what
is most surprising about his novel, stressing that it "does not lead to utopia,"
either (2017).

Utopia and dystopia are relative concepts. There is a moment in the novel
which would have seemed dystopian in the West three, even two decades ago,
but now merely echoes terrible events that have already happened on multiple
occasions in very ordinary, sometimes random locations. This is when ISIS-like
"[m]ilitants from Saeed and Nadia's country" who "crossed over to Vienna"
massacre unarmed people in the streets (Hamid 2017a: 104), triggering a mob
attack on innocent migrants on the one hand and a demonstration in their de-
fence on the other, also attacked by the mob. There are other moments where
Hamid imagines plausible scenarios of escalation of the already existing conflict
and consequent violence, which may appear fairly dystopian. In the novel's near-
-future London, there are more riots, and "nativist extremists," supported by some
politicians (132), advocate "wholesale slaughter" of migrants (156). After the local
authorities have cut off electricity in districts of the city populated by migrants
(some of them squat in the most expensive, and uninhabited, real estate in the
world), there are "murders and rapes and assaults as well" (142). In "dark Lon-
don, rubbish accrued, uncollected, and underground stations were sealed," with
trains running but avoiding these stops as if they were plague hotspots. Saeed
and Nadia hear that "military and paramilitary formations ha[ve] fully mobilized
and deployed in the city from all over the country" and they know that "the bat-
tle of London would be hopelessly one-sided" (159). "The operation to clear the
migrant ghetto" begins (159), with helicopters overhead, the military making "an-
nouncements to peacefully vacate the area," and with shooting (160).

It can easily be imagined that this development in the plot could lead
to an ending where "purity" (at least for the time being) has been success-
fully restored. But in the ending Hamid gives us, "the electricity and water
came on again" and "negotiations ensued" (165), leading to the emergence
of "a ring of new cities" able to accommodate migrants, "the London Halo,
one of innumerable human halos and satellites and constellations springing
up in the country and in the world" (167). In some places, this mix of cul-
tures even generates "a great creative flowering" (216), in music, in food. Such
a "remodelling of the Earth itself" (177) may, similarly, seem utopian (if not
naïve) to many readers.

It is up to us to decide which near-future scenario seems more desirable and/or likely in reality. But the novel is not a postmodernist game: the readers are not given parallel outcomes and a choice of their preference. There is only one ending in Hamid's fiction: a happy ending – for the migrants, some of "those who are most obviously impure among us," and for their allies. Hamid proposes that this choice is also available in reality, and encourages us to imagine it, as the first step to its realisation. While the supporters of "purity" are – and have long been – busy imagining, loudly inspiring, and increasingly effectively organising, Hamid urges their opponents, the defenders of "impurity," to do the same.

Hamid is not just optimistic, he is optimistic about optimism. He chooses optimism and promotes it as a political strategy, as an antidote to pessimism, apathy, and inaction. "[A] stance of optimism is not useless," he says (Hamid 2015, xiii):

> Hope is an active state. To hope you have to do stuff. You have to put your finger on the scale. It's important for people to imagine futures that do involve huge amounts of change and yet where our grandchildren can be all right. Writing this novel for me almost became a form of activism. (in Wilkinson 2017)

"The future is too important to be left to professional politicians," Hamid insists (2017b):

> And it is too important to be left to technologists either. Other imaginations from other human perspectives must stake competing claims. Radical, politically engaged fiction is required. This fiction need not focus on dystopias or utopias, though some of it probably will. Rather it needs to peer […] into where we might desirably go, as individuals, families, societies, cultures, nations, earthlings, organisms. This does not require setting fiction in the future. But it does require a radical political engagement with the future.

FROM MAGICAL REALISM TO REALIST "MAGIC"

It has been the aim if this paper to demonstrate that in *Exit West* Hamid offers a nuanced response to the 2015 migrant crisis, open to readings from at least several perspectives. Through its vision of a "reversed colonisation" of the West

(Gheorghiu 2018, 89), the novel can be read from the vantage point of postcolonial studies. The novel's elements of the unspeakable signalled through Hamid's use of the ellipsis invite interpretations informed by trauma theory (Piątek 2014, 33).

Both fields can be applied to an analysis of Hamid's use of magical realism as a technique by now much researched because very widely used on all continents (Hart 2003, 115) to express social protest, and to challenge hegemonic (e.g. Western, androcentric) epistemology and accounts of reality of those privileged to represent it (Ahmad, and Afsar 2014; Ahmad, Afsar, and Masood 2015; Sherratt-Bado 2018). This paper argues that Hamid, on the one hand, continues the magical realist tradition, but, on the other hand, relies on the technique only to a limited degree in comparison to such classical examples of the magical realist genre as Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (Ahmad, and Afsar 2014), Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (Upstone 2007), or Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (Łobodziec 2012). The result is that most of the novel's politically subversive potential is not carried by the single element of magical realism (teleportation), but rather by Hamid's formally realist vision of a resolution to the migrant crisis, which can be seen as fantastical and even "magical" because it is optimistic, and thus, for many readers, unrealistic. Nonetheless, Hamid calls for optimism and hope – as a political strategy and a form of activism – in defence of "impurity" and in the face of globally growing nationalism, and the dominant discourse of fear and division.

For this reason, one more, broader approach, encompassing the goals of both postcolonial and trauma theory, can be applied to interpreting Hamid's latest book, namely "socioliterature." Proposed by Kate Rose, the editor of the 2020 collection *Displaced: Literature of Indigeneity, Migration, and Trauma*, the category draws from feminism and ecocriticism, and "calls forth the full political and healing potentials of literature" (2). It also "designates literary analysis anchored in social criticism and transformation" (1), and highlights the role of the literary scholar and "literary analysis's largely untapped potential to serve society" (2).

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Summoning the Voices of the Silenced: Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, a Feminist Retelling of Homer's *The Iliad*

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Abstract: The Western literary tradition since its beginning has invariably foregrounded the experiences and perceptions of men suppressing the voices of women and, thus, relegated women's voices to the margins of history. In the male-written and male-dominated accounts of the ancient world, we do not get access to women's feelings and desires, their struggles and anguishes, and their dreams and accomplishments. Likewise, while Homer's *The Iliad* recounts the incidents of the mythic Trojan War lionizing the valiant and valorous feats of larger than life heroes, women in this timeless epic are reduced to objects, primarily sex-objects, used by conquering men to appease their overriding sense of masculinity and heroism. In essence, women in *The Iliad* are denied the opportunity to articulate their voices on the harrowing pretext that "*Silence becomes a woman*" (Barker 2018, 294). The Booker Prize winning author Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* is a sincere attempt to break that tradition of silence by retelling the story of the Trojan War from the perspective of the female voice of Briseis, a war prize and a sex slave. Barker's feminist revisionist mythological fiction allows the muted and undermined women of Homer's *The Iliad* to speak out, to make choices, to act, and to assert their feelings and opinions about their own lives. Offering a textual analysis of *The Silence of the Girls*, this paper aims at explaining how Barker, focusing on the depiction of feminine perspective and female experience, attempts to challenge the age-old patriarchal bias which suppresses the female voice and to provide a new representation of female subjectivity that counteracts the misogynist depiction of women in literatures based on myths.

Keywords: myth, *The Iliad*, silence, feminist retelling, female perspective

Myths, being deeply embedded in human experience, are considered to be the oldest composed sagas of the human race. They, recounting past events in the form of tales, set out to explore diverse human experience in this universe. De-

spite containing inflated exaggeration along with fantastical and supernatural elements, historians and myth-experts have invariably acknowledged the significance of myth in unfolding the past to the present time. Karen Armstrong, emphasizing on the significance of myth in enabling human beings to live more intensely within this real world, remarks:

> The myths gave explicit shape and form to a reality that people sensed intuitively. They told them how the gods behaved, not out of idle curiosity or because these tales were entertaining, but to enable men and women to imitate these powerful beings and experience divinity themselves. (Armstrong 2006, 5)

Transmission of these myths through both oral and written traditions from one generation to subsequent generations has added to the authenticity and acceptability of the embedded concepts contained in these myths. Thus, myths, in the course of time, start concocting human experience, shaping human beliefs, dictating human behavior, guiding human actions, and creating cultural history. Often these myths are constructed, consecrated and disseminated to both propagate and legitimize certain norms, practices, beliefs and rituals even though they endorse unequal power relations between the sexes. Therefore, patriarchal bias and gender prejudice can straightforwardly be discerned in almost all the mythological tales. Furthermore, as Simone de Beauvoir articulates, "Representation of the world, like the world itself, is the work of men; they describe it from their own point of view, which they confuse with absolute truth" (Beauvoir 1956, 162). Consequently, myths turn out to be powerful tools used by men to subordinate women and to tag women with a sexual identity immersed within the phallocentric power structure. In this context, Simone de Beauvoir in her *The Second Sex* astutely enunciates:

> A myth always implies a subject who projects his hopes and his fears towards a sky of transcendence. Women do not set themselves up as Subject and have erected no virile myth in which their projects are reflected; they have no religion or poetry of their own: they still dream through the dreams of men. Gods made by males are the gods they worship. Men have shaped for their own exaltation great virile figures: Hercules, Prometheus,

Parsifal; woman has only a secondary part to play in the destiny
of these heroes. (Beauvoir 1956, 162)

Patriarchal beliefs about women as reflected in myths are imposed on the human psyche in such a way as to be accepted as the transcendental reality. They likewise dictate the manners and norms of human society that guide the conduct of women and shape their roles and identities. On the whole, myths are always produced in a manner that ultimately allows certain perceptions of culture to be accepted as undeniable and factual. Accordingly, myths as a patriarchal instrument yield, preserve and prescribe a subordinate identity for women, which is perceived as natural. Approving Simone De Beauvoir's viewpoint, eminent American feminist critic Kate Millet in her path-breaking book *Sexual Politics* perceptively articulates:

As both the primitive and the civilized worlds are male worlds, the ideas which shaped culture in regard to the female were also of male design. The image of women as we know it is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs. These needs spring from a fear of the 'otherness' of woman. . . Whatever its origin, the function of the male sexual antipathy is to provide a means of control over a subordinate group and a rationale which justifies the inferior station of those in a lower order, 'explaining' the oppression of their lives. (Millet 2000, 46-47)

To Millet, "Primitive society practices its misogyny in terms of taboos and mana which evolve into explanatory myth" (Millet 2000, 51). She further opines, "Myth is, of course, a felicitous advance in the level of propaganda, since it so often bases its arguments on ethics or theories of origins" (Millet 2000, 51). She uses the Biblical myth of the Fall as an example to show the exploitation of myth at the hands of patriarchy, illustrating how the "earlier mana concepts of feminine evil have passed through a final literary phase to become highly influential ethical justifications of things as they are" (Millet 2000, 51). Overall, these myths have turned into exclusive tools in the hands of the patriarchy to represent women as subordinate individuals with no agency to control their own destinies. Therefore, women in Western literatures based on these myths have largely been portrayed as silent and passive creatures subject to control by the men in their families and tribes.

To counteract the recurrent practice of presenting the stereotyped images of women with restricted possibilities drawn from traditional myths in classical literature, women writers of late have started retelling these myths by replacing the male perspective by a female perspective hitherto ignored. These retellings of ancient myths offer a new representation of female subjectivity that defies the orthodox patriarchal beliefs which assert women as inferior, and underscore the issue of female autonomy. Feminist revisionism of myths is analogous to the re-arrogation of the male privilege with a view to achieving female intents and goals. Retelling a particular myth from a female point of view with an added feminist edge enables the women authors to recreate the images of women in a different way to how they are represented in traditional classical literature composed by male writers. This avant-garde practice of retelling myths from a feminist perspective also promotes and fosters gender consciousness in contemporary women. Reading myths from a female perspective essentially has the profound potential not only to reveal how much the traditional mythical literary texts written from a male perspective contribute to the suppression of women, but also challenge the androcentric premise of these cultural texts. Feminist theorists and writers in recent times revise myths to lend meaning and purpose until now denied to women. In this context, acclaimed feminist poet and critic Adrienne Rich in her essay "When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision" pronounces:

> Re-vision – the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction – is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. (Rich 1972, 18)

For Rich, this self-knowledge is essential for women to untangle themselves from the vicious web of male domination reflected in and perpetuated by the mythical literary texts which time and again render women muzzled and voiceless creatures in the grand scheme of male affairs.

French feminist critic Hélène Cixous in her essay "Castration or Decapitation?" deplores the fact that the only choice available for women is forced decapitation. They can retain their heads only on condition that they remain completely silent. This imposed silence decapitates the feminine metaphorical-

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ly, prohibiting her from speaking anything meaningful and substantial. Making a distinction between speaking and talking, she claims that women talk and chatter ceaselessly, "but they don't actually *speak*, they have nothing to say" (Cixous 1981, 49). Citing the story of Little Red Riding Hood, she goes on to explore the place of women in phallocentric history and observes:

> . . . she is laid, ever caught in her chain of metaphors, metaphors that organize culture . . . ever her moon to the masculine sun, nature to culture, concavity to masculine convexity, matter to form, immobility/inertia to the march of progress, terrain trod by the masculine footstep, vessel. . . . While man is obviously the active, the upright, the productive . . . and besides, that's how it happens in History. (Cixous 1981, 44)

Towards the end of her essay she persuades women writers to write not as writers but as women, since femininity in writing has the potential of transforming the phallocentric history. It is by feminine writing and accepting the challenge of speaking that women can create their own space by rejecting the enforced space of silence. Cixous feels that writings by women on women can be a means of resistance and a mode of bringing about change in history. Thus, she perceptively articulates:

> If women were to set themselves to transform History, it can safely be said that every aspect of History would be completely altered. Instead of being made by man, History's task would be to make woman, to produce her. And it's at this point that work by women themselves on women might be brought into play, which would benefit not only women but all humanity. (Cixous 1981, 50)

In like manner, Cixous makes a rallying cry for women to break out of the snare of silence in her seminal essay "The Laugh of the Medusa". Deconstructing the prevailing myth of Medusa as a monstrous woman decapitated for her powers to snare, transfix and petrify the onlookers, Cixous offers her feminist critique through the figure of the laughing Medusa, who flaunts her femininity and sexuality by denouncing her representation in popular mythology as a symbol of feminine terror and incomprehensible feminine sexuality. To Cixous, the

beheading of Medusa is a masculine ploy to throttle woman's power of expression and to render her incapacitated. Denouncing male writing that "has been run by a libidinal and cultural- hence political, typically masculine- economy" (Cixous 1976, 879), she ruefully says:

> We the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen, our wind knocked out of us, we the labyrinths, the ladders, the trampled spaces, the bevies- we are black and we are beautiful. (Cixous 1976, 878)

Hence, the repression of women has incessantly, consciously and frighteningly been perpetuated in this locus adorned with the mystifying charms of fiction "where woman has never *her* turn to speak" (Cixous 1976, 879). Accentuating the extraordinary potential of women as writers, Cixous propounds the concept of *l'ecriture feminine*, which has the power to subvert the phallocentric discourse of masculine writing. For Cixous, women's writing, a *new insurgent* writing, can serve as a foundation for women's dissident thought, which has the exceptional power of transforming the phallocentric social and cultural structures. She sees woman's writing her "self" as "an act that will also be marked by woman's *seizing* the occasion to *speak*, hence her shattering entry into history, which has always been based on her *suppression*" (Cixous 1976, 880). On the whole, a feminine text, in Cixous's opinion, possesses the tremendous subversive power of bringing about "an upheaval of the old property crust, carrier of masculine investments" (Cixous 1976, 888) as well as breaking apart the Western cultural representations of female identity along with the myths associated with womanhood.

Retelling of myths from a feminist perspective has dominated the recent arena of Western literary fiction, bringing prestigious literary awards and accolades to the writers undertaking this subject. Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*, Ursula K. Le Guin's *Lavinia*, Natalie Haynes's *The Children of Jocasta* and *A Thousand Ships*, Kamila Shamsie's *Home Fire*, Madeline Miller's *Circe*, and Daisy Johnson's *Everything Under* are some of the novels that give female characters of classical myths the voice they have conventionally been deprived of by male classical writers. In Madeline Miller's acclaimed novel *Circe*, an ingeniously subversive retelling of Homer's *The Odyssey*, the eponymous spokeswoman Circe, the vilified witch of Homer's tale, both fumes over her unfair portrayal in the epic and mocks the Western classical literary tradition of demeaning the status of women:

> I was not surprised by the portrait of myself: the proud witch un-
> done before the hero's sword, kneeling and begging for mercy.
> Humbling women seems to me a chief pastime of poets. As if there
> can be no story unless we crawl and weep. (Miller 2019, 181)

Following the contemporary feat of literary revisionism, Pat Barker in her Wom-
en's Prize for Fiction 2019 shortlisted novel *The Silence of the Girls* concentrates
on representing the feelings and experiences of the women characters who are,
for the most part, portrayed as the silent victims of colossal masculine rage and
fierceness in Homer's *The Iliad*. Barker in her revisionist mythological fiction has
given a feminist tinge to the hitherto overlooked and unheard voice of Briseis,
the queen of Lyrnessus, who has been turned into Achilles's "bed-girl" after
the fall of her city. Shifting the focus from the mighty, agile and valiant heroes
of the Trojan War to a widowed and enslaved woman, Barker, through Briseis's
eyes, has given us a glimpse into the dreadful lives of the captured and caged
women who are given over as spoils of war to the victorious men. Briseis is just
one among those thousands of women – the sex-slaves, the nurses, the cooks,
the cleaners, the weavers, the concubines, the subhuman – who are erased from
the pages of Homer's grand narrative. As a matter of fact, in *The Silence of the
Girls*, Briseis's journey through her life in Greek rape-camps candidly represents
a subjugated woman's quest for an individual identity and personal freedom
in the face of innumerable hazards and uncertain odds.

Barker's *The Silence of the Girls*, written in three parts, begins with Achilles's
raid of Lyrnessus, one of Troy's neighboring kingdoms and Briseis's home,
which Achilles and his invading men have sacked and destroyed. Killing her
four brothers and her husband King Mynes, Achilles not much later choses Bri-
seis to be his concubine as a trophy of victory. Nevertheless, Barker reveals her
intention of telling us a woman-centered account of the Trojan War from the
very beginning of her revisionist novel. In an effort to end the silence of women
depicted in Homer's *The Iliad*, which depicts mortal women merely as either
wailing chorus grieving for the dead or enticing bodies to be sought-after, cher-
ished, abused, assaulted, raped, sacrificed, owned or fought over, Barker, unlike
Homer, introduces us to her protagonist Briseis even before Achilles and Agam-
emnon start falling out over her. Though Homer has used women as the pretexts
for the war and squabble, it is, as Barker's retelling deftly demonstrates, men's
ego which initiates the battles between Hellenic and Trojan forces as well as the

angry quarrels between mighty heroes. Barker's main intention, rather than glorifying the heroic exploits of mighty men, is to reveal Trojan War's violent brutalities and grim atrocities on women who mostly remain disembodied names in Homer's *The Iliad*. In the first twenty odd pages of Barker's novel, we see that the fall of Lyrnessus is the end of a typical day for the men: the Greek warriors leave triumphant killing, destroying, pillaging, raping and drinking, while all the Lyrnessusian men lie dead. But, it is the beginning of new horrors and afflictions for the women. The matter-of-fact narration goes, "Another successful raid, another city destroyed, men and boys killed, women and girls enslaved, – all in all, a good day. And there was still the night to come" (Barker 2018, 26–27). The novel then chronicles the haggard and agonizing lives of Briseis and other enslaved Trojan women in the Greek encampments. Surprisingly enough, the heroic feats and conducts of triumphant warriors do not look at all commendable when viewed from the perspective of the captive Trojan women whom they abuse in every possible way. All these celebrated classical heroes and warriors look outrageously vainglorious and ruthless wrongdoers in Barker's tale, as Briseis sternly utters, "Great Achilles. Brilliant Achilles, shining Achilles, godlike Achilles . . . How the epithets pile up. We never called him any of those things; we called him 'the butcher'" (Barker 2018, 3). Instantaneously, the readers pick up a different interpretation of the glorified deeds of the classical heroes than what is presented in Homer's heroic poem.

The events in Barker's novel are carried forward mostly through Briseis's voice in a first-person narration. Occasionally, Barker switches into third-person narration, in part two and part three, focusing on Achilles's thoughts and actions. The third-person narration, apart from contributing to the construction of the story line, helps in the thorough portrayal of Achilles, who, rather than being an outright boorish and bloodthirsty villainous male for Barker's feminist tale, is also an accomplished musician, a genuine friend, a sincere host, a frightened abandoned child, an adroit leader and a worried father. Nonetheless, Briseis's eyes and voice are the prime focus all through Barker's novel. Being "a thing" completely in Achilles's power, Briseis is no more than a collection of body parts to him in his bed. In her objectified existence conditioned only to obey, Barker has not imposed any superhuman ability and dubious gift on Briseis enabling her either to defend defiantly or to escape deviously. Later, when Agamemnon as the commander-in-chief of the Greek army wants Briseis as a replacement for his concubine Chryseis, Achilles's decision to pull out from fighting for the

Greek army has nothing to do with his feeling for Briseis whom he refers in the vilest terms as "scrape", "trifle", "pile of steaming dog shit", and "it". On the contrary, he is overridingly concerned about his offended pride and slighted status. But it is also noteworthy that despite all that she must bear as a slave woman, Briseis also knows how to retain her sense of worth and agency. When she is told by Nestor to forget her past life, she immediately knows that forgetting is exactly what she must not do. Straightaway, she, standing at the centre of that baying mob, starts remembering and visualizing herself going back to her vibrant past life in Lyrnessus. She ruminates, "I pushed them back, out of the arena, down the beach and up on to the ships. I did it. *Me*, Alone. I sent the murdering fleets home" (Barker 2018, 21). Her inherent desire to reclaim her personhood is also evident when she feels that she will even agree to marry Achilles, the person who kills her brothers and husband, at Patroclus's hint that he can make Achilles marry her. Briseis reflects, "Yes, I was a slave, and a slave will do anything, anything at all, so stop being a thing and become a person again" (Barker 2018, 93). Briseis's sense of worth manifests itself as well when she decides on leaving for Agamemnon's compound thinking "I wasn't going to be dragged away, I'd keep my head up and not look back. I wouldn't give Agamemnon the satisfaction of seeing my fear" (Barker 2018, 107).

Briseis's position as Agamemnon's concubine at his compound does not necessarily bring any change in her essential status as a slave. She is rather apprehensive that Agamemnon will soon grow tired of her and will hand her over to his men for common use, a fate which she considers worse than that of Patroclus's dogs. Her particular duty in Agamemnon's compound is to pour wine for his guests every evening and, by doing so, she serves the purpose of enabling Agamemnon to show others his supreme authority as the commander-in-chief. On such occasion, Briseis reflects:

> Men crave meaning into women's faces; messages addressed to other men. . . Here in Agamemnon's compound, it was: *Look at her, Achilles' prize. I took her away from him just as I can take your prize away from you. I can take everything you have.* (Barker 2018, 120)

In addition, Briseis has to face the accusatory stares and slurs of men for the countless deaths of the Greeks in the battlefield since Achilles withdraws himself from the war. Even Achilles later blames her for Patroclus's death: ". . . the girl,

the bloody girl, the cause of all the trouble" (Barker 2018, 155), just as Helen has been blamed by both the Greeks and the Trojans for the Trojan War: "The eyes, the hair, the tits, the lips That launched a thousand battleships . . ." (Barker 2018, 201). However, throughout *The Silence of the Girls*, we are provided with an insight into the ways these women respond to the innumerable adversities they encounter in their subjugated existence. Their subtle responses enable them to hold on to whatever agency they can exercise within their confined existence. Helen, for instance, deliberately makes herself invisible throughout the period of war by busying herself with stitching the tapestries, which is for her a way of fighting back to establish her individuality. In this context, Briseis narrates:

> What I came away with was a sense of Helen seizing control of her own story. She was so isolated in the city, so powerless – even at my age, I could see that – and those tapestries were a way of saying: I'm here. *Me.* A person, not just an object to be looked at and fought over. (Barker 2018, 130)

Likewise, Briseis also makes a statement of her own individual existence by immersing herself in her newfound work in the hospital tents. She says:

> I lost myself in that work – and I found myself too. . . I really started to think: *I can do this.* And that belief took me a step further away from being just Achilles' bed-girl – or Agamemnon's spittoon. (Barker 2018, 140)

Thus, in Barker's feminist retelling, Briseis, together with other women, has been bestowed with the subtle yet genuine agency of displaying her aptitude in the way she deals with her experience at the Greek camp and her relationships with other women around her.

Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* further illustrates how classical myths and history treat men and women differently by offering an absorbing version of one of the most moving moments of *The Iliad*. When Priam, alone and unarmed, comes in the dark to the enemy camp to plead with Achilles to return the dead-body of his son Hector, the old Trojan king says: "*I do what no man before me has ever done, I kiss the hands of the man who killed my son*" (Barker 2018, 267). However, these heartbreaking words of supplication keep Briseis unmoved, for Barker makes her

protagonist speak out a potent and fitting rejoinder to Priam's words, which immediately draws our attention to the similar and even worse untold horrors suffered by women in the war: "*And I do what countless women before me have been forced to do. I spread my legs for the man who killed my husband and my brothers*" (Barker 2018, 267). In fact, all the Trojan women – Hecuba, Andromache, Cassandra, Polyxena, Iphis, Hecamede, Uza, Ritsa, Tecmessa, Chryseis and innumerable others – have suffered even worse ignominies at the hands of the conquering Greek heroes and Barker's rendition of their collective anguish through Briseis in *The Silence of the Girls* offers us a unique opportunity to review the events of *The Iliad* from the perspective of these countless enslaved women. Also, in Barker's revisionist tale, we see these women still making small choices and doing acts which are marks of their empowerment even in their restricted life. Arianna chooses death over slavery, Tecmessa enjoys eating dainty and establishes a loving familial existence with her captor Ajax, Ritsa relishes her work as a nurse in the hospital, Briseis out of compassion spreads a sheet of pure white linen over the face of Hector's mutilated corpse, Briseis also attempts first to escape to Troy hiding in Priam's cart and then comes back from the middle of the road, Polyxena bravely prefers to die on Achilles's burial mound than to live and be a slave, Cassandra unfalteringly follows Agamemnon's aides to be his mistress – all these instances of willful deeds and choices, though not too significant to be penned in detail in *The Iliad*, find a vivid expression in *The Silence of the Girls*, and, thus, Barker's novel convincingly breaks the silenced women free of the conventions of the masculine epic.

As it happens, in *The Silence of the Girls*, despite being dispossessed of everything that used to define them, these women rally and survive. Their voices are heard as they grieve over their loss and strive to retain their sense of individuality in whatever circumstances this masculine affair of Trojan War has forced upon them. Briseis also realizes eventually that these enslaved women will leave behind a legacy which these conquering men will never be able to forget: "*We're going to survive – our songs, our stories*" (Barker 2018, 296). In addition, seeing Hector's widow, Andromache, with her only child killed in the most outrageous manner, being allocated to Achilles's pimply adolescent son Pyrrhus and to be expected tonight to spread her legs for the son of the man who has killed her husband, Briseis states:

> Yes, the death of young men in battle is a tragedy – I'd lost four
> brothers, I didn't need anybody to tell me that. A tragedy worthy

> of any number of laments – but theirs is not the worst fate. I looked
> at Andromache, who'd have to live the rest of her amputated life
> as a slave, and I thought: *We need a new song*. (Barker 2018, 313–14)

Sophie Gilbert in her review of Barker's novel has precisely written that "*The Silence of the Girls* is the new song Briseis dreams of: a narrative that weighs what war means to women" (Gilbert 2018). Towards the end, Briseis, feeling Achilles's baby kicking inside her womb, is glad that she, unlike Arianna or Polyxena, has chosen life and, thus, will be able to sing the songs of women to posterity. As Briseis turns her back on Achilles's burial mound, her optimistic yet firm conviction closes Barker's feminist revisionist novel: "His story. *His*, not mine. It ends at his grave. . . Now, my own story can begin" (Barker 2018, 324). Thus, Barker's feminist retelling of Homer's *The Iliad* ends in a note of sanguinity for her female protagonist Briseis, who cherishes a desire to start life anew as an individual having the powers of agency and assertion. Barker's laudable attempt to highlight a facet of female existence in a patriarchal world has successfully inspired many of her readers to interrogate the presupposed gender hierarchies and orthodox socio-moral conventions of their respective culture. What is more, attempting to liberate the women characters from the confines of subjugated and marginalized existence as depicted in Homer's classical epic based on ancient Greek mythology, Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* has, in essence, efficaciously challenged the age-old patriarchal norms and notions that suppress and subjugate the so-called weaker sex.

On the whole, Pat Barker in *The Silence of the Girls* handpicks a "trophy" woman character from Homer's *The Iliad* mentioned a mere ten odd times in the course of the entire epic poem only to refer to her exquisite physical beauty and charm, and reclaims Briseis as the heroine by placing her at the center of her revisionist novel. The feminist light that Barker sheds on the events of the Trojan War serves to illuminate specifics we have not discerned or thought over earlier. Lucy Scholes in her review has also focused on exactly the same premise of Barker's novel: "In seeing a legend differently, Barker also makes us rethink history" (Scholes 2018). Barker's novel is, indeed, a summoning of those hushed female voices which have been forcefully silenced by the phallocentric structure of human culture and history. To conclude, Pat Barker's *The Silence of the Girls* is specifically pertinent for our present time when women across the globe are raising their voices against gender repression and, hence, retelling Homer's *The Iliad*, the archetypal tale of larger-than-life men, from a woman's perspective is incontrovertibly apposite.

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Political Instability and Whig Inefficiency in Britain in the Post-Pitt Era

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Abstract: The years from 1806 to 1812 were remarkably unstable in British politics. The beginning of this period saw one of the few occasions during the reigns of George III and his two sons (1760-1837) when the Whigs tried to provide stable government, but the Ministry of All the Talents managed to remain in power only for little more than a year. The special character of the political system, the deaths of two great leaders, the difficulties of fighting the war against France, personal rivalries, divisive political issues and George III's illness all combined to make this era utterly unstable. This article seeks to explain the reasons for the ineffectiveness of the Whig-dominated administration and discusses the factors that contributed to the failure of the Tory governments up to 1812.

The political instability of the early nineteenth century started with the death of the great rivals, William Pitt the Younger and Charles James Fox. These two great men had dominated politics since 1783. They had faced each other in the House of Commons for more than twenty years, and always from the same side of the chamber. Pitt was Prime Minister after December 1783 for most of the remaining twenty-two years of his life, while Fox held high office only during the last seven months before his death. Pitt died in January 1806, and Fox in September of the same year, after a few months as Foreign Secretary in William Grenville's government, the Ministry of All the Talents. This short-lived ministry was the only Whig-dominated government between 1783 and 1830. It is surprising that the Whigs should have been so ineffective during that long period. Between 1807 and 1812 the Tory ministries were particularly weak. On at least four occasions the Whigs had an excellent chance of coming to power, but each time they failed. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to account for the two main aspects of the period from 1806 and 1812: instability and the weaknesses of the Whigs.

The key to understanding these questions is the peculiar nature of the political system of the time. The Whig historians of the nineteenth century were unable to provide acceptable explanations for the occasional instabilities and the failures of their intellectual forefathers because they completely misunderstood the politics of the previous century. They assumed the existence of strong political parties upon which a cabinet system of government could rest. They believed that the political system of their own time had come into existence well before the middle of the eighteenth century. The Whig historian, Thomas Erskine May, for example, described the political system of the early eighteenth century in the following way.

> Instead of dangerous conflicts between the crown and Parliament, there succeeded struggles between rival parties for parliamentary majorities; and the successful party wielded all the power of the state. Upon ministers, therefore, devolved the entire burthen of public affairs: they relieved the crown of its cares and perils, but, at the same time, they appropriated nearly all its authority. The king reigned, but his ministers governed. (May 1868, 3)

All this, of course, still lay in the future, even in 1806. We have to emphasise that the political system at this time was still of an "eighteenth-century character". That is, there were no really disciplined and well-organised parties in Parliament. There was no clear, two-party confrontation. The House of Commons consisted of a number of political groups, factions, and many unattached members.[17] This is not to argue that parties were non-existent or had no significance at all during the Long Eighteenth Century (1688-1832). As Frank O'Gorman has also emphasized, "certain periods – for example, the reign of Anne, the 1780s, the period after 1815 – exhibited powerful party characteristics while others – the 1750s, the late 1790s and the late 1820s – manifestly do not" (O'Gorman 1981, 450-451). During the period under discussion a gradual realignment of political groups occurred, which eventually led to the emergence of a new and much more stable party system after 1812.

Until 1806, the great leaders, Fox and Pitt, were able to separate politicians into two main groups, and thus simplified and solidified politics. After their deaths, however, a process of disintegration started. A medley of political groups and fac-

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[17] For more information on the nature of politics at this time see O'Gorman 1987. For a concise survey of the six sessions of the 1807-1812 Parliament see The History of Parliament Online.

tions, with a large number of members not permanently attached to any of them, took the place of 'Foxites' and 'Pittites' (Roberts 1965, 330; O'Gorman 1981, 468). Under these circumstances, the king's power and personal responsibility increased. Since the basis of parliamentary government – a stable party system – did not exist, the ruler had to intervene in politics and exercise his political influence. It was the king who had to choose his ministers from among parliamentary leaders, who – after being appointed – tried to create a reliable parliamentary majority for themselves. Political stability depended partly on the willingness of the parliamentary leaders to co-operate and partly on royal decision and support. The politics of the period from 1806 to 1812 should be studied in view of all this.

After Pitt's death, his friends felt unable to govern without him, so George III was obliged to admit Fox to high office. However, it was William Grenville, not Fox, who was commissioned to form a government.[18] Thus came into being the administration to which – ironically in view of its poor performance – contemporaries attached the label 'Ministry of All the Talents'.[19] The new government had two important aims: it wanted to end the war against Napoleon, and it desired to lift some of the restrictions which lay upon the Roman Catholics. In neither objective was it successful.[20]

The Ministry of All Talents (February 1806-March 1807) was an awkward combination of four different groups: the Foxites, the followers of Grenville, politicians attached to the Prince of Wales, and the Addigtonians, that is, the supporters of Viscount Sidmouth. The ministry's unity depended upon its members' willingness to sink issues on which they had formerly been at odds. This meant, for example, that the Foxite leadership was bound to disappoint the expectations of its backbenchers who had been fed on irresponsible opposition rhetoric. Grenville and Sidmouth represented conservative influences which were likely to clash with the more reformist ideas of Fox's friends. On the Catholic question,

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18   This development was a bitter disappointment to the former followers of Pitt who had all looked to Grenville – the first cousin of William Pitt the Younger – as the new leader of the Pittites. Viscount Lowther, for example, wrote of Grenville that "I can no longer consider him as the Man he was, and I am afraid, with all the Fairness of Character which hitherto distinguished him, he has become the Instrument by which others have raised themselves to Power." Quoted in McQuiston 1971, 505-506.
19   It was in January 1804 that the Foxites (a group of about 130) and the Grenvilles (a group of 16) became allies. Besides providing the basis for the Ministry of All the Talents, this alliance considerably determined the activities of the Whigs for more than a decade. See Willis 1972.
20   The only – although very important – achievement of the Ministry of All the Talents was the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. It must be mentioned, however, that the government was divided on this issue and, therefore, the ending of the slave trade was not a government measure. See Harvey 1972, 629-630.

Sidmouth was a die-hard, and on the subject of negotiations with France, he was even more inflexible than Grenville. Moreover, both these questions were likely to lead to conflict with the king (Christie 1985, 270-271).

The Ministry of All the Talents was not any more successful in diplomacy and war than the Pitt Government had been. An attempt by Fox to initiate peace negotiations with Napoleon failed.[21] The various military and naval actions "lacked any general strategic purpose and failed to secure any permanently successful results" (Briggs 1979, 150). Naval operations in the Mediterranean were active but the Baltic was neglected. Napoleon managed to play off Prussia against Britain in February 1806 by persuading the former to annex Hanover. It was only after the battle of Jena and the annihilation of the Prussian army by the French that the British made peace with Prussia.[22] After these unfortunate developments, Britain should have supported Russia but owing to a series of diplomatic blunders alliance with the last potential anti-French power was also lost. Russian requests for naval cooperation in the Mediterranean, a loan of six million pounds, and British coastal raids on Holland and France were, on the whole, ignored by the Ministry of All the Talents, and after March 1807, the new Foreign Secretary, George Canning, was unable to regain the confidence of Alexander I.[23] All in all, the war policy of the "Talents" was a failure. Nevertheless, it was not this, but the other main issue, Catholic emancipation, that brought the government down.

In 1805 the Catholic demand for political emancipation was becoming stronger in Ireland. James Ryan, a young rich Catholic merchant, was trying to bring the management of Catholic affairs into his own hands. Largely as a result of this effort, a petition for Catholic Emancipation was about to be presented to Parliament. This development created serious embarrassment for Fox when the Ministry of All the Talents took office early in 1806. Fox was aware of the risks involved in dealing with this question and suggested that the petition should not be presented. In exchange, he promised to support the Catholics in every possible way. Ryan accepted the deal by which he immediately laid himself open to attacks from his political rivals. A meeting in March 1806 reversed Ryan's decision, put an end to his domination, and formed a more broadly based Catholic Association to co-ordinate and intensify the agitation (Roberts 1965, 10-11; 1935, 61).

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21 For details see Butterfield 1962.
22 On George III's efforts to represent the interests of his German dominions see Riotte 2007, 78-85.
23 The Russian Tsar signed the Treaty of Tilsit with Napoleon on 7 July 1807. For details see Roach 1983 and Harvey 1972, 633-634.

The continued Catholic pressure during 1806-07 led the Ministry into a politically fatal confrontation with George III. Fearing the strengthening of a Catholic agitation, the cabinet concluded at the beginning of 1807 that concessions must be made. The government decided to extend the right of Catholics to serve in the army, which was established in Ireland in 1793, to the rest of the United Kingdom. This recommendation, however, came nowhere near to resolving the problems of Catholics. According to Ian Christie, to the Irish Catholics, this measure "was wholly marginal and in no way likely to reduce popular agitation in Ireland, as the government hoped" (1985, 279). Such crucial issues as the right of Catholics to enter Parliament and their ability to become members of borough corporations were not even considered.

George III agreed to extend the rights of Catholics to serve in the army to the entire United Kingdom, but in the meantime, the ministers pushed their demands further on two points. The plan that they adopted would allow Catholics to be appointed generals on the staff. This was something which had been excluded in the Irish Act of 1793. The ministers' formula would also end discrimination against Protestant nonconformists. This scheme was brought forward in the Commons as a separate Bill, that is, without consulting the king the ministers had gone far beyond what he was willing to accept. Sidmouth, who opposed Catholic relief, drew the king's attention to all this. George III informed the cabinet of his refusal to support its policy, and, in the face of royal resistance, Grenville and his colleagues decided to abandon the Bill. The king, angered by the sly attempts of his Ministers to introduce Catholic officers into the army, asked Grenville for a written promise that such attempts would not be repeated. The Prime Minister refused this, the government resigned, and in March 1807 it was replaced by a new administration led by the elderly Duke of Portland (Roberts 1935, 61-77; Christie 1985, 279).[24]

24   This was the second premiership of William Cavendish-Bentinck, 3rd Duke of Portland, who was the titular head of a short-lived coalition government in 1783. According to Frank O'Gorman, the period after the elections of 1784 was of great significance from the viewpoint of party development since "almost all groups and individuals opposed to the court came together under Portland and Fox's leadership." The Whig Party "acquired much of the apparatus of a modern, bureaucratic party." It was due to these developments, "upon this secure foundation that in the second decade of the nineteenth century there could emerge finally and permanently the two party duality of Whig and Tory" (O'Gorman 1981, 464-465).

This is how the Ministry of All Talents, the only predominantly Whig minis-
try between 1783 and 1831, fell.[25] Who should be blamed for this? Did the king
force his ministers out by trickery or can we accuse the ministers of having used
dishonest methods? In Ian Christie's view, the king's demand for the written
pledge "is clearly to be explained by the fact that the ministers had deliberately
misled him over the extent of the concessions they were bringing before Parlia-
ment" (1985, 280). They were trying to smuggle the new Bill past him. George
III decided to turn his ministers out not simply because he disagreed with their
policy, but because he felt he could no longer trust them.

The fall of the government was not popular with the general public. Although
the king appeared to be the champions of constitutional progress, the king was
more representative of public opinion. George III stood by his coronation oath
and the Protestant constitution (Christie 1985, 279-280; Roberts 1965, 13-34).

The new Prime Minister, the Duke of Portland, was old, ill, and ineffective.
He was unable to inspire or lead. During his two and a half years in office,
he made no speeches at all in the House of Commons. His major service was
to lend the prestige of his name to the cabinet, about half of which consisted
of nonentities. In the House of Lords, the defence of the administration fell upon
Lord Eldon, the Lord Chancellor, and Hawkesbury (later Earl of Liverpool), who
became Home Secretary. The front bench in the House of Commons included
George Canning, the Foreign Secretary, Lord Castlereagh, the Minister of War,
and Spencer Perceval, the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Leader of the House
of Commons.[26] The main issue uniting the administration was the vigorous
prosecution of the war. Over other issues, however, there were serious differ-
ences between ministers. On Catholic emancipation, a deep divide separated
the pro-Catholic Canning and Castlereagh from Perceval and Eldon who were
as much against giving concessions to the Irish Catholics as George III him-
self. Personal rivalries also weakened the administration. The ambitious Can-
ning held Castlereagh responsible for some bad decisions and military fiascos.
In March 1809 he announced that unless Castlereagh was removed from the War

25 For a full assessment of the ministry's governmental record see Harvey 1972. Harvey's study
is based on a pamphlet entitled *A Short Account of a Late Short Administration*, which is the Whigs'
own list and discussion of what they thought were their achievements.

26 The Portland Government had a clear majority in the House of Commons for the 1807 election
"returned 388 government supporters, 224 opposition members, 29 independents, 17 doubtfuls, and
12 designated neutrals " (Hay 2005, 12).

Office he would resign.[27] The sick and old Portland did not refuse Canning's request but kept delaying its fulfilment, so in September the impatient Canning resigned (Briggs 1979, 154-155).

The Whig opposition was unable to benefit from the disarray of the government. On the war, it remained defeatist. One Whig declared: "The next French battle will be fought in Ireland, or perhaps in Kent" (qtd. in Williams and Ramsden 1990, 162). The two main groups of the opposition, the Foxite Whigs and the followers of Grenville, were united only on the Catholic issue. The year 1807 had shown, however, that this was exactly the issue which made them unpopular with the king and the electorate. Parliamentary reform was more divisive than unifying. A group of radical Whigs led by Whitbread were in favour, but Grenville was strongly opposed and Earl Grey, the leader of the Foxite Whigs, was hesitant. Economic reform was fashionable again, but the failure of the Whigs to take action when they were in office in 1806 and 1807 made it difficult for them to mount a convincing campaign.

In September the Portland Ministry was nearing dissolution. The Prime Minister was mortally ill, and the great quarrel between Castlereagh and Canning now broke out openly. Castlereagh challenged Canning to a duel which ended with Canning being wounded in the thigh. Portland decided to resign, and Castlereagh followed his example.

The rump of the administration seemed unable to survive. In this situation, Perceval obtained the king's permission to approach Grey and Grenville with proposals for a broad-based coalition to carry on the war. Perceval hoped that the tension over Catholic emancipation might be brushed under the carpet. Grenville was ready to negotiate, Grey, however, rejected the idea of combined administration from the outset. His refusal might be put down to his party's traditional hatred of coalition and the desire to have complete control of administration. The Catholic question, even though it never got to the stage of discussion, may also have poisoned the political atmosphere. It also seems likely that in 1809 – as Ian Christie has put it – Grey "shrank from assuming responsibility for a war which he had no idea how to win" (Christie 1985, 289). He was afraid to take office because the difficulties of the situation were more than he could face.

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27 Animosity between Castlereagh and Canning can be traced back to the interlude between the first and second Pitt Governments (March 1801- May 1804), when Henry Addington was Prime Minister. While Castlereagh was ready to enter Addington's cabinet, Canning refused to support it and criticised its measures in opposition. See McQuiston 1971, 503.

George III now relied on the remaining ministers to continue in office, and he appointed Spencer Perceval Prime Minister. The only important change in the new ministry was that Canning was replaced by Wellesley at the Foreign Office. The War Department was given to Hawkesbury.

The next crisis came in the autumn of 1810. The king fell ill, which made the situation very uncertain for Perceval's government. Everything depended upon his recovery. At the end of the year, it became clear that there would have to be a Regency, and with that, the Whig hopes were raised. The Prince of Wales had old ties of personal friendship and political connection with Grey and his followers. As Regent, he might well be expected to turn out the Perceval administration and bring in his friends. The Tories were quite certain that they were to be dismissed. The Whigs were already celebrating their triumph, busily constructing cabinets. Nevertheless, at the end of January 1811, the Prince decided not to make an immediate change of administration. The main reason for this was the news that his father seemed to be on the road to recovery. The Prince feared that by placing in office a ministry the king disliked, he might jeopardise his return to health. This was a risk the Prince decided should not be taken, and with that, the Whig hopes of coming to power were also blighted.

Their next chance to get in was a year later, in February 1812. The possibility of George III's recovery now appeared remote, so the Regent was free to act, unrestrained by the fear of offending his father. The ministry was also in disarray, for Wellesley would not work with Perceval, while the rest of the cabinet did not wish to accept Wellesley in the premiership, at which he was now aiming. Thus, the opportunities of the Whigs seemed to be improving again. Nevertheless, by early 1812, the inclinations of the Prince were less clear-cut than they had been a year earlier. Twelve months of royal responsibility had resulted in a change in his views. On the question of Catholic emancipation, he was beginning to take the same line as his father had done. He still had a sentimental feeling for the Foxite Whigs, but he had none for Grenville, whose extreme pessimism regarding the outcome of the Peninsular War he did not like. At the same time, he had grown accustomed to dealing with Perceval and understood the importance of his ability to command the House of Commons. The Prince wanted a strong administration that was firmly committed to the war and was willing to postpone the Catholic question. It was clear that the Whigs did not fit well into such a scheme. The Prince invited Grey and Grenville to join a coalition government, but this was rejected by the two politicians and Perceval was con-

firmed in power. Wellesley, who had wished to become Prime Minister himself, resigned, but this did not wreck the government. Instead, by bringing in two influential politicians, Perceval strengthened it. Catholic emancipation was treated as an 'open question', which enabled both the anti-Catholic Sidmouth and the pro-Catholic Castlereagh to return to office.

These arrangements were temporarily thrown into disarray three months later when Perceval was assassinated by a madman in the lobby of the House of Commons. Liverpool, who took Perceval's place, was defeated in the House of Commons. New negotiations had to start, but it was impossible to create a different combination. Once again, by setting reasonable but unacceptable conditions the Regent ensured that Grey and Grenville would exclude themselves from any new arrangement. Liverpool was able to return to office with his old colleagues, and the general view that there was no alternative tended to increase parliamentary support for the government (Roberts 1965, 347-387; Christie 1985, 289-294).

With the blasting of Whig hopes the period of confusion in parliamentary politics also started to come to an end. By 1812 the various groups on the anti-Whig side were fusing together into a new Tory Party. As O'Gorman has explained, "the Church and King patriotism of the war, resistance to Catholic claims, the horror at radicalism reigning in many propertied quarters, the rejection of Foxite Whiggism and the organization of a political following together constitute the re-emergence of a Tory party in Britain between 1806 and 1815" (O'Gorman 1981, 459). Liverpool's stable administration was to last until 1827. The collapse of the Napoleonic system and the victory over France prevented this ministry from the parliamentary tribulations of its predecessors and enabled it to become strongly entrenched in power.

The Whigs were robbed of all hopes of power. Their failure to obtain office, however, was not only the result of personal considerations, the enmity of George III and the Regent. It was the result of the negative impression they made upon the people, the Members of Parliament, the king and the Regent, by their unpopular policies and internal divisions.[28] They were entirely out

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28 In his book on Whiggery during the reigns of George III and his two sons, Leslie Mitchell explains that "Whigs seemed to hold no common ground. Every issue engendered new disagreement. Every Whig seemed to be a party in his own right and, what was worse, to glory in the fact." At the same time, "Inertia, habit, the comforting warmth of tradition and custom all worked against Whig claims. They were acutely aware of not being in the majority in most years" (Mitchell 2007, 1; 8).

of tune with popular opinion. Their obstinate fidelity to Catholic Emancipation, the only issue which united them, made them very unpopular and was one of the main reasons for their failure to obtain office. Even more unfortunate was their attitude to the fortunes of the war. A considerable section of the party insisted, despite the clearest evidence, that an honourable peace could be achieved.[29] In opposition the Whigs criticised the measures of the government and the conduct of the generals, but "their criticisms were purely destructive: their objections frequently cancelled out each other; and they could not agree in championing any intelligent strategical plan" (Roberts 1965, 3). After the poor military record of the Ministry of All the Talents, their criticisms became even less effective. The Whigs even failed to make effective use of the new interest in parliamentary reform, over which they were anything but united.

The political events of the period from 1806 to 1812 make plain the still essentially "eighteenth-century character" of the political system. The right of the monarch to choose his ministers was still clearly recognised. Politics in Parliament was not yet dominated by a simple two-party confrontation. Instead, the legislative assembly consisted of several relatively small groups, some of which were not sure allies either of government or opposition (Christie 1985, 282-283; 295). In such circumstances, there should have been ample opportunity for the Whigs to extend the Grey-Grenville alliance to include some of these groups. Their internal divisions, the inflexibility of their leaders and their unpopular policies, however, made it impossible for them to compete successfully with their opponents.

It is certainly true, nevertheless, that the long period that the Whigs spent in opposition from 1783 onwards was to their advantage in the sense that it enabled them to become an organised party earlier than the Tories (Orme 2014, 589). The 'Cult of Fox', which began a number of years before the death of this most charismatic Whig leader, "helped coalesce different Whig factions into a more unified party" (Orme 2014, 590). The Whig ascendancy started after 1830 with changes in public attitudes, the decline in monarchical power and the development of parliamentary government based on strong and disciplined parties. It commenced when the royal assent became a formality and was no longer an obstacle in the way of political and social reforms. In 1832 the

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29 The majority of the party did accept that the continuation of the war was inevitable, but they had doubts about the effectiveness of a British military intervention on the Continent.

reform-friendly Whigs were able to carry out the parliamentary reform aims that the Foxite Whigs had developed during the 1790s (Ellis 1979, D1254) and the "political modernization of England" could at last begin.[30]

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30 On the effects of the Great Reform Act of 1832 see Phillips and Wetherell 1995.

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Book Reviews

Magda Dragu, 2020. *Form and Meaning in Avant-Garde Collage and Montage* (New York and London: Routledge)

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Form and Meaning in Avant-Garde Collage and Montage – an excellent new book by Dr Magda Dragu from Indiana University – is one in a recent series of Routledge's monographs on collage, the other volumes being Scarlett Higgins's *Collage and Literature: The Persistence of Vision* (2018) and my own *Collage in Twenty-First-Century Literature in English: Art of Crisis* (2019). Several years previously, seminal works on literary collage had been published by David Banash (*Collage Culture: Readymades, Meaning, and the Age of Consumption*, 2013) and Rona Cran (*Collage in Twentieth-Century Art, Literature, and Culture: Joseph Cornell, William Burroughs, Frank O'Hara, and Bob Dylan*, 2014). One hundred years after Pablo Picasso's *Still Life with Chair Caning*, widely regarded as the first work of collage, the form continues to attract critical attention and, as several of the above volumes testify, remains a very productive structural principle in literature and the visual arts.

Dragu's study, however, is concerned with the origins of collage and its importance to the Modernist avant-garde rather than with its continued relevance to contemporary art. Most of the works she focuses on date back to the first half of the twentieth century. Among the collage (and montage) practitioners she is particularly interested in are visual artists such as Picasso, Max Ernst, Kurt Schwitters, John Heartfield and László Moholy-Nagy (whose *Love Your Neighbor: Murder on the Railway* is the book's cover image), filmmakers – Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, composers – Charles Ives, Eric Satie and Igor Stravinsky, and writers – Guillaume Apollinaire and John Dos Passos. That alone shows the impressive scope of Dragu's volume, which comprises visual, filmic, musical and literary contributions to what Donald Barthelme called the "central principle of all art in the 20th century." Besides, the author draws on primary and secondary works released in several European languages. All of that justifies the claim that Form and Meaning is a definitive study on the avant-garde origins of collage and montage.

The main argument of Dragu's monograph is that the concepts of collage and montage should be regarded as distinct artistic strategies whose main difference is that the former generates heterogeneous and the latter homogeneous meaning. In other words, collage juxtaposes elements (often appropriated from other sources) in such a way as to preserve their individual character, whereas montage subjects those elements to a uniform meaning, which makes it far more suited to conveying a message (political or otherwise). Throughout the volume, Dragu details the ways in which the two practices interpenetrated in the work of several key avant-garde artists associated with Cubism and Dadaism.

The first part of the monograph, titled "Theories of intermediality: form and meaning," is concerned with the adopted methodology, namely the intermedial theories of Irina Rajewsky, Werner Wolf and Lars Elleström. Dragu examines the emergence of various concepts associated with intermediality, tracing their origins to Steven Paul Scher's and Wolf's analyses of the interrelations between literature and music. Among the discussed varieties are covert and overt intermediality, intracompositional and extracompositional intermediality, explicit and implicit intermedial references and many others. Dragu also explains the distinction between such similar-sounding notions as mixed media, mixed-media and multimedia. A reader not very well-versed in academic categorizations may feel occasionally lost in those theoretical considerations and confused by the jargon such as "(intramedia) semiotic intermodality," even though the author is very meticulous about clarifying the subtle differences between those notions.

Part Two, "Collage," is devoted to an analysis of chosen examples of visual, verbal and musical collages. Dragu begins by correcting what she sees as the popular misconception that "anyone can make a collage." Although seemingly effortless and undemanding, visual collage, she argues, is a complex structural principle that requires in-depth knowledge of the pictorial tradition. Among the many original observations she makes in that section is that text in visual collages is used in order to "confuse" rather than to "clarify" meaning, which is rooted in collage's earlier asserted inherently heterogeneous nature. The inner disunity is further enhanced by the incorporation of appropriated material, which, according to Dragu, has to remain unassimilated. (She goes so far as to say that "if the borrowed material is harmoniously integrated in the target text, one cannot talk of a verbal collage.") The chapter concerned with musical collage was, for me, the most illuminating, since ties between collage and music tend to be left out from most accounts of its artistic legacy. Dragu

presents the structure of *Fourth of July*, a section in Charles Ives's *Holidays Symphony* (1913), as the paradigm of musical collage, understood, after J. Peter Burkholder, as "the juxtaposition of multiple quotations, styles or textures so that each element maintains its individuality and the elements are perceived as excerpted from many sources." (That definition, it appears to me, would work just as well in reference to other kinds of collage.) In that piece, Ives mixes fragments of a number of patriotic songs played by various sections of the orchestra to evoke the chaos and commotion of street celebrations on Independence Day. In his *Concord Sonata* (1915), he mixes Beethoven's canonical "fate motif" with such songs as "Peter, Peter Pumpkin Eater," thus achieving a quintessentially collage-like marriage of the high and low.

In Part Three, titled "From collage to montage," the author considers a number of examples of photomontage and montage in film, literature and music. Dragu reminds the reader that the principle of photomontage was established by Dadaists and Russian Constructivists around the year 1919. She sees it as a development of collage, brought to life by Picasso and Braque in 1912, or, to be precise, as "an intermedial transposition of the technique of visual collage into the medium of photography." Dragu traces the gradual evolution from what she calls heterogeneous photomontage to the homogeneous type, whose aim is to communicate a clear meaning to the audience. It is the latter type that, in the hands of Berlin Dadaists such as John Heartfield, soon became a powerful tool of political propaganda. Political manipulation, Dragu demonstrates, was part of the aim of film montage – a technique theorized by Sergei Eisenstein, the author of such ideologically-engaged works as *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) and *October* (1928). In the chapter on literary montage, Dragu mentions the influence of another milestone of film montage – David Wark Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) – on Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), a novel composed, in the writer's own words, of "direct snapshots of life."

One has to admire the broad sweep and ambition of *Form and Meaning in Avant-Garde Collage and Montage* – a volume surveying the emergence and flourishing of two crucial artistic principles of Modernism across the visual arts, film, literature and music. Such an achievement requires a great deal of multi-disciplinary expertise and effort, which is evidenced in the volume's impressive bibliography comprising over 500 sources in several languages. The author's success in securing the copyright and the publisher's approval to include close to 70 illustrations also deserves the highest praise. (Otherwise, close analysis

of such literary works as Apollinaire's "Lettre-*Océan*," let alone of photomontages, would be much less rewarding.) More importantly, Dragu makes a number of original observations about the practice of collage and montage. I was, for instance, intrigued by her assertion that their subversion of meaning makes them indebted to the principle of figures of thought. One idea of which I remain to be convinced is the importance of authorial intention in the formal analysis of intermedial works. Dragu's claim that "one cannot talk about a filmic novel or a literary montage if the author did not intend to build his novel according to these techniques" appears problematic to me as it imposes on the critic the need to seek evidence for a given work's formal properties in paratextual (or, more precisely, epitextual) material. As a whole, Dragu's book is a much-needed, meticulously researched and highly original contribution to a field that is undergoing a resurgence of critical interest.

Emma Sutton and Tsung-Han Tsai (eds.), 2020. *Twenty-First-Century Readings of E. M. Forster's "Maurice"* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press)

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Surprising as it may be, this is the first book-length publication entirely devoted to E. M. Forster's *Maurice*. It appears almost fifty years after the novel's official introduction to the public (1971) and over a hundred years after its first manuscript was presented to Forster's friends (1913). The first critical voices regarding the novel tended to centre around one topic, that is homosexuality, be it of the characters or of Forster. As a result, other important issues, deftly interwoven into the novel's structure, have been generally neglected or marginalized. The book, therefore, strives at presenting *Maurice* anew by reflecting upon it from various perspectives and from different angles. The collection of essays adds significantly to the discussion on *Maurice* and its place amongst Forster's other writings.

The book is a product of the 2012 Forster conference sponsored and organized by the School of English at the University of St Andrews. The conference was prompted by the centenary of E. M. Forster's *Maurice.* The novel written before WWI but forced to wait for a "happier year" to be published, is quite special in Forster's oeuvre. Until it was eventually published posthumously in 1971, the book had been undergoing endless revisions by the author. And that constantly altered and modified version of the original manuscript had been privately offered to a very small and select readership (all details regarding the history of *Maurice* can be found in the Introduction as well as in the chapters, since the contributors frequently make references in their discussions to this creative process, too).

Once published, the novel was (too) quickly classified as a gay romance and, as a result, the scholarly attention it obtained was limited in scope and nature. Although Forster's collection of short stories published shortly after *Maurice*, i.e. *The Life to Come and Other Stories* (1972), prompted the researchers to have another look at the novel, it is only the twenty-first century that reintroduces the story about Alec and Maurice to wider audiences and offers a whole range of new readings of the text as well as discussions related to its style, narrative techniques, themes and mo-

tifs, the figure of the narrator and the novel's influence on other writers, fanfiction creators included. Nevertheless, although for some time now *Maurice* has ceased to be regarded only as a naïve and utopian work, the debate over *Maurice* seems to be still in need of moving beyond the queer studies towards more comprehensive and systematic readings. And *Twenty-First-Century Readings of E. M. Forster's "Maurice"* edited by Emma Sutton and Tsung-Han Tsai is definitely a step towards such a thorough *Maurice* study. As we can read in the Introduction, it focuses "exclusively on the novel and its legacies" (4) and, consequently, explores the text in a variety of contexts. The essays analyse the novel in relation to politics, philosophy, religion, queer studies, art and Aestheticism, film studies and fandom sequels.

The goal of the volume, as we read in the Introduction, is twofold. First, it aims at gathering in one place the most recent as well as past ideas referring to *Maurice* and its posthumous publication. Second, it strives at generating further exchange of ideas about the book, particularly when it comes to "the shifting constructions of queer and modernist canons" (5).

The book starts with an introductory chapter, which offers an extended description of the socio-political and historical background underlying the novel and its reception and effectively synthesizes the material of the volume. Among others things, the chapter offers a handful of information about the chronology and problems related to *Maurice* and its publication, its manuscripts, its place within the academic and non-academic circles. Also, the introductory chapter explains Forster's understanding of the term "queer" and how it functioned in the past, before the emergence of queer studies. As pointed out by the editors, several essays in the volume use the term 'queer' in Forster's manner, namely to indicate a certain style and type of writing which is highly complex, full of suggestiveness and in which homosexual identity is used as a means to communicate other substantial points at issue. Accordingly, the seemingly unambiguous, utopian story about male homosexuality turns out to be an intricate and disquieting tale of desire, social ostracism, religion, familial relations and much more. In addition, alongside the plot, there exist "marginalized networks and relationships" (5) which offer a comment on Forster's approach to politics, philosophy, art, or religion.

The collection of essays discusses the novel, on the one hand, in relation to the modernist times within which the text was written, considering its socio-political and cultural background, its writers and thinkers. On the other, the publication extensively comments on the reception of *Maurice* after its release in the second

half of the twentieth century, pointing out its links with the original manuscript and scrutinizing the fate of the novel after the year 2000. Most importantly, the publication sheds light upon other aspects, themes, and motifs of the novel that have been neglected due to the book's "homosexual love-story" label. Furthermore, as we can read in the Introduction, the chapters are meant to "gesture towards new ways to reassess some of Forster's other works" (17). For instance, through *Maurice*, the contributors frequently reflect on other characters from other novels by Forster. The Introduction, which in itself is a pleasure to read, effectively encourages us to explore the content of the collection.

The book is divided into three, thematically as well as chronologically organized, parts, which additionally expose many other cross-volume networks and connections. Each part is further subdivided into three chapters. The last pages of the book contain a comprehensive bibliography, notes on contributors, and the index of names and issues, the part always most welcomed by researchers.

Part one, "Forebears and Friends", is devoted to the influence of Oscar Wilde, Florence Barger, and Christopher Isherwood on Forster, and particularly, on his writing of *Maurice*. The selection of the names alone piques the reader's interest in the content of the chapter since they are not the most obvious choice (for when reflecting over the creation of the novel, we would rather think of Edward Carpenter and George Merrill, the people who the writer himself acknowledged as the most important for the process of writing *Maurice*). The opening essay by Joseph Bristow entitled "'An unspeakable of the Oscar Wilde sort': E. M. Forster, Maurice and the Legacy of Aestheticism", focuses on the way Wilde's aesthetics shaped Forster's understanding and perception of homosexuality. In the text, the connections with Wilde, paradoxically, are shown partially through the disconnection of the protagonist with the very figure: Maurice does not find anything remarkable about Oscar Wilde, unlike the judge Charles Darling presiding over the case of Lord Alfred Douglas (1913 libel case against Arthur Ransom). Yet, the connections are also suggested through the references to Hellenism and Aestheticism. In other words, Wildean elements in *Maurice* discussed by Bristow include both direct references (Maurice's conversations with doctors), and indirect ones (Maurice's views on art).

The second chapter, "Women In and Out: Forster, Social Purity and Florence Barger", by Gemma Moss, discusses the novel in the context of women and presents their very much negative and false image offered by Maurice. In her investigation, she employs a historical perspective, setting her analyses against the

social purity movement of the late 19th century. The author supplies facts about the movement, such as its origin, ideals or representatives. Next, Moss examines its influence on *Maurice*, for according to her, there is a close relationship between the movement's politics and the structure of *Maurice* as well as its theme. She comes to a conclusion that the radicalism and sexual conservatism of the movement should be counted among the main reasons why Forster almost excluded women from the novel and established a male narrator. Subsequently, she argues that Forster criticizes the movement, its social narrowmindedness and orthodoxy, rather than women. Illustrating her thesis, she also underlines the important role of Florence Barger during the creation of *Maurice.*

Charlotte Charteris, the author of the third chapter entitled "The Master and the Pupil. E. M. Forster, Christopher Isherwood and the Forging of a Queer Aesthetic", reveals the importance of yet another friend of Forster, namely Christopher Isherwood. The impact of the young writer on the older one is, according to her, visible in Forster's re-thinking of some ideas about *Maurice*. Meeting young Isherwood the same year when his mentor Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson died (1932), in the author's words, "truly galvanized this creative process, providing renewed impetus for the articulation of a queer culture" (76). Furthermore, Charteris sees the corelation between this relationship and the later ideas of Foucault. She argues that Forster's views on homosexuality presented in *Maurice* forestall those expressed in Foucault's "Friendship as a Way of Life". Charteris also looks closely at the language of *Maurice* and decides to centre her discussion around such terms as "leader", "leadership", "boss", "fascism", etc, rather than "culture" or "aesthetics", thus drawing her discussion towards the socio-political context of the novel. The chapter shows homosexuality as defined with a leader-follower dynamics within the context of the 1930s (the rase of fascism), where the "bossers" were the men of middle class and good financial standing and the "bossed" the "vulnerable", "victims", the young men of working class (the picture offered by the newspapers). Accordingly, the essay offers a convincing interpretation of the seemingly unequivocal textual surface. It turns out that in the process of close analysis of Forster's narrative, many of the conventional vocabulary items suggest a new, more convoluted and idiosyncratic meaning: they tell a story of a homosexual friendship viewed through the leader-follower structure. She supports her argument on the master-pupil (same sex) relation and its power dynamics by referencing the contemporary BBC television mini-series *A Very English Scandal* (2018) as well as Bethan Robert's novel

My Policeman (2012), which in turn clearly refers to the relationship between Forster and Buckingham. It shows that such relations are not rare and that the complications and struggles stemming from them are timeless.

Part two, entitled "Contemporary Context", begins with Anna Watson's "Flat pieces of cardboard stamped with a conventional design': Women and Narrative Exclusion in E. M. Forster's Maurice". The chapter clearly continues the discussion stared in the earlier essay by Gemma Moss, as Watson also draws our attention to the marginalized position of female characters in *Maurice*. However, she argues that this exclusion of women from the life of Maurice and Clive and generally from the public is done on purpose. In her own words, this is Forster's conscious project "to problematize the position of women in society and the role of man – even gay men – in perpetuating their oppression" (103). Watson convincingly demonstrates that in *Maurice*, by presenting female characters as marginalized figures, Forster actually strives to make the reader reflect over the socially muddled situation of women. In other words, the negligence of women in the novel mirrors their real-life marginalized position in society.

The second essay in this part, "Maurice: Beyond Body and Soul" contributed by Finn Fordham, treats about the titular notions of body and soul and their confluence. Fordham underlines the fact that these concepts would frequently feature in Modernist writers' discussions on homosexual identity and the identity as such. He gives several examples of writings (by Conrad, Woolf, Joyce, Lewis) in which the "soul" is considered. Subsequently, he argues that Forster in *Maurice* makes an effort to bind rather than separate the two elements in order to show that homosexuality is not merely spiritual or merely physical but it is both, additionally with the borders and the nature of each element hard to establish. As Fordham notices, Forster is himself uncertain as for the degree and type of this physical-spiritual relationship yet suggests that in *Maurice* windows can be viewed as symbolic constructions which "function as thresholds between spiritual and physical space. As framing of air, they combine the material with the immaterial. Crossing their boundary marks both transgression and unification" (150). And this lack of concrete answer, the blurred points of connections between body and soul as well as their mutual influences, he argues, was typical not only of Forster but generally of modernism. Moreover, this state of irresolution is further reinforced by Forster's employment of irony and experimentation expressed via, as Fordham says, "the textual confusion" visible in "the drafting and redrafting of the novel" (128), which stimulates hesitation and induces metaphysical questions.

Fordham's discussion is followed by the chapter on "*Maurice* and Religion", which also deals with 'soul' but this time in reference to the Church of England. The author of this essay, Krzysztof Fordoński, focuses on the function of this religious institution in the novel. He explains that religion only seemingly comes second to the law since the characters of the novel live, or rather are expected to live, according to religious teachings and regulations. Religious upbringing not only influences the way the characters think but also the way they are perceived by society. Consequently, they are invariably judged though religion and religious practices. Fordoński points out that Forster makes use of certain religious terminology and metaphors in order to stress, on the one hand, the importance of religion in the lives of the characters, and on the other, to underline the fact that it functions as an oppressive element, "a part of the system of control and repression" (155). Additionally, the author looks upon the Church of England as an institution, comments on its structure, power dynamics as well as buildings.

The third and final part of the book is entitled "Afterlives". The authors of the respective chapters deliberate over the place of *Maurice* in the contemporary, twenty-first century, culture. The first chapter by David Medalie, "A man embedded in society': Homosexuality and the 'Social Fabric' in Maurice and Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library*", which is an extended version of his article "The Line of *Maurice:* Forster, Hollinghurst and the 'Social Fabric" (*English Studies in Africa,* 60.1 [2017], 46-59) compares *Maurice* with Hollinghurst's *The Swimming-Pool Library*. Medalie discusses social forms of oppression when it comes to homosexual men presented in both books. The author contemplates the marginalization and alienation of gay men in the context of contemporary New Liberalism as well as the concepts of masculinity and manliness considered against the "social fabric" of Edwardian and Victorian times. Medalie argues that in *Maurice* Forster obviously comments on the vision of society. This is the society which, historically speaking, chose to treat male homosexuality as a deviation from the healthy and the normal, and to classify it as some sort of criminal activity. It would thus cherish the image that had nothing to do with the nature of same sex desire. But unlike in Hollinghurt's novel, where "devastating exile" is all that in the end awaits those who dare to be "heroic" and show their homosexual desire, Forster's characters manage to escape into the utopian greenwood.

The second chapter of this part, "Sexuality, Allegory and Interpretation: E. M. Forster's Maurice and Damon Galgut's Arctic Summer" by Howard J. Booth,

discusses the function of allegory within the two works which, similarly to the considerations offered in the previous chapter, "explore coming through in the face of society's hostility to homosexuality" (203). Booth examines the degree to which the forms of both texts are affected by this topic as well as over the degree of openness of each text in communicating and commenting on the issue of same-sex desire. In his analyses, the author points to different areas and levels of allegorical representations, for example, the intertextual (*The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan), the spatial (descriptions of the world dominated by "loss and ruination" (204)) or the narrative (the employment of a specific genre, in this case biofiction, in order to introduce the topic of homosexuality: a fictional Forster; employment of particular techniques). Booth concludes that Forster's *Maurice* is more open to interpretation than Galgut's *Arctic Summer*. Forster's use of allegory, according to the author, is "less straightforward as he moved to render the plot more believable and realistic" (214), which allows for different readings of the novel, while Galgut's application of allegory is subdued to the strictly controlled narrative form and directed towards the evocation of "political and creative possibilities" (228) and leaves thus no space for other voices.

The final chapter of part three, and at the same time the closing chapter of the book, entitled "Maurice without Ending: From Forster's Palimpsest to Fan-Text" by Claire Monk, starts off with a paradox embedded in Forster's novel: the *Maurice* finished in 1913 is at the same time still an unfinished text. On the one hand, this is due to Forster's endless re-writings and modifications of the manuscript and on the other, this is thanks to the present day fans who actively engage in writing sequels and develop the undeveloped, that is open, ending of the story. Monk suggests that the authors of the first reviews and comments that concentrated on highlighting the simplicity of plot of *Maurice* and on belittling the novel's aesthetic value refused to go deeper into their analyses just to mask the horror of admitting that the writer who committed such a "woman's-magazine fairy tale" (229) revolving around the interclass, same-sex love story, experienced such a life himself. And it is only the twenty-first century which may offer, according to Monk, a true re-evaluation of the novel. What is more, she argues that the professed generic simplicity of the text "stands as its great strength" (230) and is responsible for its survival. Following, the author discusses the reception of *Maurice*, both official and unofficial, in the present century but contextualizing the novel within its socio-political history. Monk takes a closer look at various novel's adaptations and paratexts as well as a number of fan creations available

online. Then, she outlines the development of *Maurice* as a book/text/film and discusses it in terms of the novel's reception. All in all, the words of Jesse Matz, which Monk quotes in her essay, may serve as a succinct conclusion to her own discussion. We read that it is obvious now, in the twenty-first century, indeed more than before, that *Maurice* "'even as it waits for its future […] looks to the past'; that "while waiting for its interpretative community to assemble [it is] perpetually revisited and refinished'" (231).

Summing up, within well over 250 pages, the contributors survey a broad area of material connected directly or indirectly with *Maurice*. Accordingly, the collection represents a broad spectrum of concepts dealing with the novel and its various contexts. The book raises important questions as for the directions of further research and discussion. The sources which the contributors recall and consult during their deliberations are representative of different areas of study, thus offering the reader a multidisciplinary view of *Maurice*. Nevertheless, the texts are interrelated due to the "queer" aspect discussed in a forsterian manner, the theme of same-sex love and desire and the issue of Christianity – the areas which clearly function as springboards to the reflections on other important topics, such as the position of women in society, the pitfalls of (sexual) education, the role of church.

The whole book as well as its individual parts facilitate and contribute to an understanding of the subject area under discussion. The arrangement of the collection is well thought out and logical and as a result the gradual development and the change of attitudes towards the novel are transparently and convincingly delineated. Consequently, the goals posed in the introductory part are well covered. The contributors conspicuously substantiate that the novel is far more than a homosexual romance, the plot-centered popular fiction, a simple reading. As they repeatedly demonstrate in their analyses, *Maurice* is truly exceptional among Forster's novels. The authors inexorably prove that the novel has more to offer than meets the eye. What is more, while reading the collection, it becomes self-evident that the book is written by scholars and researchers specializing in the life and works of E. M. Forster, which might suggest that the publication is intended for a similar readership. However, I would recommend this selection of essays also to those who simply want to enrich their knowledge about *Maurice* as well as about its author, to those who study and research English literature as well as to the fans and lovers of Forster's fiction. As for the language of the collection, even though each author has his or her own style

of writing, the general impression is that of coherence, clarity, and forcefulness. The whole publication reads very well and, accordingly, the respective chapters are seamlessly connected not only by the idea of the novel but also by the way *Maurice* is written about.

The closing part includes a comprehensive bibliography consisting of both well-established publications in Forster studies and the most recent sources. Additionally, some chapters include interesting and rarely seen material obtained from King's College Library in Cambridge, Special Collections and University Archives of the University of Oregon and the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library of the University of California, Los Angeles, which makes the collection still more attractive.

As a Forsterian myself, I have read *Maurice* or its parts several times and yet, to my surprise, this recent collection of essays makes me want to reach for the book once more, not only to re-read it for pleasure but above all to re-think certain points or to give more attention to those that have laid unnoticed, shrouded in thick layers of recognized and acknowledged interpretations. Henceforth, I would absolutely recommend the book. *Twenty-First-Century Readings* ... not only encapsulates and expands the present state of research concerning *Maurice* but above all, it invites and creates space for further *Maurice*-related discussions. Walking in Forster's steps, and thus following *Maurice* tradition, it finishes with an open ending. A real treat for the fans of *Maurice* and its author.

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