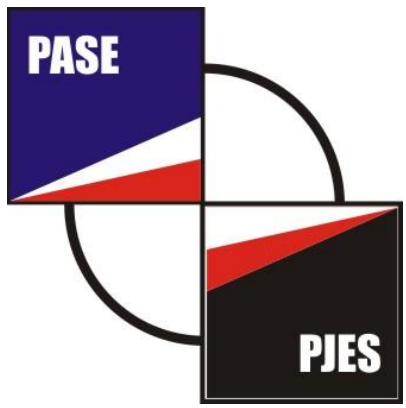

POLISH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

Journal of the Polish Association for the Study of English (PASE)

No. 3.1

Polish Association for the Study of English

Warsaw 2017

Publisher:
Polish Association for the Study of English
ul. Hoża 69, 00-681 Warszawa

Cover Design:
Dr Łukasz Karpiński

Contents

From the Editors

Dear Friends and Readers,

We would like to welcome you wholeheartedly to the first issue of our journal in 2017 – the third year of our activity. For this issue we have prepared a selection of four scholarly articles dealing with cultural and literary topics. We also have three conference reports – one of which was organised by our society – and two book reviews. The selection seems modest even to us so we invite you all wholeheartedly to submit your papers as well as opinions and memories of conferences you organised or attended and books that you read.

We are still at an early stage of our history and we plan to expand both in size and in variety. We are especially willing to hear from linguists: the literary bias of our first issues reflects only the type of papers which have been submitted so far for publication, it is by no means intended. Our intention from the very beginning was to make our definition of English Studies as broad as possible. However, we cannot expand without our authors and, as the second issue of 2017 dedicated to E. M. Forster is already largely completed, we would like to finish this very brief introduction by inviting all of you to submit your papers, reviews, and calls for papers to our forthcoming 2018 issue.

Jacek Fabiszak
Krzysztof Fordoński

So Death Does Touch the Resurrection. Religion, Literature and the Nuclear Bomb

Dominika Oramus

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to present the religious and the literary inspirations of the Los Alamos narratives by focusing on Oppenheimer, who both provides the literary contexts for the story of the bomb and becomes a hero of the tales that emerge. My principal sources are Richard Rhodes's *Making of the Atomic Bomb*, a Pulitzer-winning detailed factual account of how the nuclear weapon was conceived and produced, as well as fictional or semi-fictional depictions of the life Oppenheimer and his men led in the New Mexico desert. The latter include *Principles of American Nuclear Chemistry* by MIT graduate professor-turned-novelist Thomas McMahon; *Los Alamos*, a thriller by Joseph Kanon; and *Atomic Dreams. The Lost Journal of Robert Oppenheimer*, a graphic novel by Jonathan Elias and Jazan Wild.

Keywords: physics and religion, Robert Oppenheimer, Los Alamos, the Manhattan Project

Robert Oppenheimer, the director of the best known scientific project in the twentieth century personally responsible for the creation of the Los Alamos atom bomb, once noted that 'taken as a story of human achievement, and human blindness, the discoveries in science are among great epics' (Rhodes 1986, I). The Manhattan Project, climaxing in the New Mexico desert with the first man-made nuclear explosion, does make for an epic story which can be, and often is, narrated in a grand and lofty style. This modern epic marked a turning point in human history and the dawn of a new kind of civilization. The making of the atomic bomb ushered in the beginning of the Cold War, the atomic era, and American military hegemony. Moreover, for the first time in history, the human race became capable of self-annihilation and to survive, it had to restrain its violent instincts.

It was at Los Alamos that people saw a nuclear explosion for the first time when the new weapon was tested in the spring of 1945. Those who were at the test site left vivid descriptions of the events in their letters, memoires, interviews and books. It seems that the common denominator of their accounts is a prevailing feeling of the novelty of seeing what no one has ever seen before. The spectators emphasize their inability to express themselves as their prior experiences contained nothing from which to draw a comparison: 'the atom bomb did not fit into any preconceptions possessed by anybody' (Rhodes 1986, 674). As a result, the Los Alamos reports are full of approximations and parallels and, interestingly, these are religion and literature – metaphysical poetry, Shakespeare's dramas, Greek myths, Sanskrit epic poetry – that serve as the vehicles of these metaphors. Los Alamos is where the humanities and the natural sciences meet: not only does cultural heritage serve to express the awe nuclear explosions evoke but, conversely, the story of Los Alamos becomes the subject of numerous books, from factual reports to novels and comic strips.

The aim of this paper is to present the religious and the literary inspirations of the Los Alamos narratives by focusing on Robert Oppenheimer, who both provides the literary contexts for the story of the bomb and becomes a hero of the tales that emerge. My principal sources are Richard Rhodes's *Making of the Atomic Bomb*, a Pulitzer-winning detailed factual account of how the nuclear weapon was conceived and produced,[1] as well as fictional or semi-fictional depictions of the life Robert Oppenheimer and his men led in the New Mexico desert. The latter include *Principles of American Nuclear Chemistry* by MIT graduate professor-turned-novelist Thomas McMahon; *Los Alamos*, a thriller by Joseph Kanon;[2] and *Atomic Dreams. The Lost Journal of Robert Oppenheimer*, a graphic novel by Jonathan Elias and Jazan Wild.[3]

Robert Oppenheimer was born in the United States into an aristocratic German-Jewish family. Brought up in high society, he was a frail but brilliant child, 'repulsively good' (Rhodes 1986, 119) at everything at school. He grew

[1] Richard Rhodes is an American historian and author of non-fiction. *The Making of the Atomic Bomb* is his most famous book.

[2] Joseph Kanon is an American author of thriller and spy novels set in the 1940s. *Los Alamos* is his first novel. It was written in 1997 and immediately became a bestseller.

[3] *Atomic Dreams* was released in July 2009 and became the first graphic novel to be downloaded in over 200 countries. This dream-like story of the race to build the first atomic bomb is now a classic.

up to be an outstanding figure: very tall and very thin with arresting blue-grey eyes and an extremely narrow frame. As a talented young man, he dabbled in every subject, learnt numerous languages, collected all pieces of interesting information he found, and tried his hand at different branches of science, yet he had a self-destructive drive and he constantly felt a sense of loss, resulting in a serious psychological crisis. Finally, having made up his mind, he went to Europe to specialize in physics as a student of Ernest Rutherford. Working in the laboratories, he took a keen interest in religion. He was also interested in ancient Hindu culture and became 'overeducated in these fields which lie outside the scientific tradition' (Rhodes 1986, 149). After his return to the United States, Robert Oppenheimer taught at Berkley and soon earned the reputation of being one of the country's most brilliant young physicists. He became involved in American attempts to construct a nuclear weapon very early: he is reported to have drawn a scheme of an atom bomb on the blackboard of his office at Berkley, just after the discovery of fission. Soon, he gathered around him an informal group of brilliant scientists, whom he half-jokingly called the 'luminaries', in order to share ideas and discuss problems connected to nuclear chemistry. During these talks, a variety of technical and philosophical issues were raised: would the atomic bomb trigger the explosion of the nitrogen in the atmosphere and of the hydrogen in the ocean? Is it perhaps better to accept the slavery of the Nazis than to run the risk of procuring the final catastrophe, the destruction of the planet? Or could the production of a deadly weapon be justified by the fact that its very existence would stop all wars? People who knew Robert Oppenheimer when General Leslie R. Groves asked him to direct the atom bomb project and oversee all the scientists involved remember him as a tall, nervous and intent man, who seemed to be 'like a young Einstein and, at the same time, like an overgrown choir boy' (Rhodes 1986, 443).

As previously mentioned, the Manhattan Project has been described in numerous writings of those working in the secret laboratories at Los Alamos and their families. Trying to express their feelings at the test site and in the desert, they often looked to religion and literature. The emotional tension they felt resulted from a number of frustrating circumstances: the war effort; having to leave behind homes and friends, in some cases as refugees; moving down to the middle of the unfriendly New Mexican desert; and living in a secluded, secret place under constant surveillance. Most understood that they were all dealing with a very dangerous and possibly uncontrollable force and watching

phenomena no human had ever seen or studied before. The absolutely unique situation of being the first caused many to resort to religious or philosophical discourse, and they described the bomb in the context of famous literary works on Humankind and its place in the Universe. It was Oppenheimer's education and erudition that made the Los Alamos narratives so full of literary allusions: from the very beginning of the construction of the labs, he provoked numerous discussions on death, destruction, resurrection and rebirth; he set the tone of the debates, making the people at Los Alamos both work on the bomb and reflect upon what they were doing.

It is within this dual frame of hope and despair, killing and saving lives, that the new weapon was discussed. Oppenheimer was familiar with the current European debate on the decline of the West and its pre-World War I values. It was precisely just after the Great War that Sigmund Freud wrote *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, essays in which he described the death drive as superior, older and stronger than sexual instincts. The latter paper called the entirety of human civilization a mistake: for societies to function, each individual is forced to renounce his or her natural drives and desires and to repress narcissism and self-love, replacing them with respect for the rights of fellow-citizens. Such a forced respect means that every new-born baby is in but a few years taught to control its natural instincts and become a moral being. This is favourable for society as a whole, but frustrates each and every individual. Internalized aggression in the moment of stress 'is sent back where it came from, i.e., directed against the ego' (Freud 1994, 792), and thence neuroses. The common good is built on personal repression, Freud said, and the day the human race chose the narrow path leading to civilization was the day we renounced happiness forever. Towards the end of the paper Freud defines one of the major causes of contemporary anxiety:

> Men have brought their powers of subduing the forces of nature to such a pitch that by using them they would now easily exterminate one another to the last man. They know this – hence arises a great part of their current unrest, their dejection, their mood of apprehension (Freud 1994, 802).

'We don't have time for seminars on civilization and its discontents,' the fictitious Robert Oppenheimer says in Kanon's novel *Los Alamos* when

he learns that Leo Szilard and other pacifists are trying to prevent the Trinity tests (Kanon 1998, 435). Aware of the century-long discussions on progress and the price humanity pays for it, the Oppenheimer of the novel wants the bomb to be made and is ready to accept the burden. Surprisingly, at the very moment of the explosion, he does not feel terrified or guilty like everybody else. 'The worst part is I was pleased when it went off. It worked' (Kanon 1998, 513), he says as the deadly violet light fades away. Yet he immediately adds that future generations will hold him to blame, and when his colleagues compare him to Prometheus, who also brought humanity a new dangerous power, he is not willing to accept the compliment. 'Fire was a gift. This is curse' (Kanon 1998, 513), he replies.[4] The second cliché Kanon evokes is when he compares Robert Oppenheimer to Alfred Nobel, who, having invented dynamite, hoped that such a deadly substance would by its very existence end all wars as no one would risk killing so many soldiers in one explosion. Oppenheimer is not nearly as naive, yet he does retain some hope that, perhaps in the future, learning the secrets of nature will actually make people wiser. 'A little learning is a dangerous thing,' he says echoing Alexander Pope's famous remark, 'a lot isn't. Maybe it's what we need (…) I'm going to hope for the best' (Kanon 1998, 515).

Robert Oppenheimer's reputation of a humanist and an erudite who enjoyed literature and is himself a poet accompanied him from Berkley to Los Alamos. 'The frail figure' (McMahon 2003, 167) of Oppenheimer with his hollow cheeks and anxious eyes, which exists in the memories of people who were at Los Alamos with him, became a literary construct: the embodiment of a restless spirit, a Gothic mad scientist, or a Romantic tormented genius. He was the scientific Director of the project. The military chief, Leslie Groves, seemed to be his direct opposite: a big stout soldier with a tanned face and energetic manners who looked like 'somebody T. E. Lawrence might have bought a horse from before he set off across Sahara' (McMahon 2003, 94). This comparison to Lawrence of Arabia is very telling; the Los Alamos experience of living in the desert, among the natives, in some secret place during wartime is itself a literary motif, and an 'epic' adventure. Filled with war, exotic settings and espionage, it bore a striking resemblance to a Hollywood production.

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[4] Yet the comparison stuck and Oppenheimer is still frequently likened to the ancient Greek Titan, as in the award-winning biography *American Prometheus: The Triumph and Tragedy of J. Robert Oppenheimer* (2005) by Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin.

From the very first days of the desert labs, the scientists gathered in Los Alamos talked about religion and literature, compared their own fate to the lives of diverse literary characters, and read and performed in their scarce leisure time. As early as in April 1943, when the first small group of Robert Oppenheimer's team started working, their evening pastime was to read aloud passages from Shakespeare's *The Tempest.* According to Rhodes, they found Prospero's monologues very inspiring: the idea of being lost in a wilderness far from civilization and striving to master the powers of nature, control them and make them serve humankind was very appealing to them as they sat in military barracks in the middle of the New Mexican desert setting up labs to create the world's deadliest weapon.

The very territory of the site was organized with references to literary tradition. Naming streets, alleys and centres was Oppenheimer's job and he later admitted that he looked for inspiration in his readings. The most prominent place, the nuclear test site, he called TRINITY, and the same name was given to the main street in the barrack village. Some years after the war, when he was writing down his memories, Leslie Groves asked Robert Oppenheimer in a letter about his reasons for selecting TRINITY as the code name. Surprisingly, Oppenheimer claimed that in naming places he had in mind John Donne's poem *To God My God in My Sickness*, and he found himself often repeating the lines –

> As West and East
> In all flatt Maps – and I am one – are one
> So death doth touch the Resurrection.

The comparison of a dying man's body to the map, the flat plane stretching from the East to the West – from where the Sun rises to where it sets – from the symbolic place of birth to the symbolic place of death – obsessed Oppenheimer. The setting sun is sure to rise again in the morning, and in most human religions after death there comes rebirth; in the Hindu tradition that he studied, this takes the form of reincarnation. The association of the atomic blast with the Sun also comes from Oppenheimer. The set simile describing the blast as 'brighter than a thousand suns' originates in the verse of the *Bhagavad-Gita*, which Oppenheimer recalled reading at the site. That phrase was later used by Austrian Robert Jungk in his book *Brighter than a Thousand Suns: A Personal History of the Atomic Scientists*, and by J. G. Ballard in his famous novel *Empire*

of the Sun, set in south-east Asia at the time of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki explosions. Ballard symbolically calls the United States a new Empire of the Sun, an empire that harnessed the nuclear blast to outshine the natural sun, which had stood for the Japanese empire and can be found on its flag.

Yet in the lines of John Donne, quoted by Oppenheimer to explain the origins of the TRINITY codename, the word 'Trinity' is not used. In fact, Oppenheimer claimed that he had blended references to his favourite *To God My God in My Sickness* with another poem of the same author, *Batter My Heart Three-Personned God*. In the latter poem, God is evoked in his triune identity; similarly, in the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the supreme deity takes on three avatars: Brahma the Creator, Vishnu the Saviour, and Shiva the Destroyer, who together represent the cycle of life and death. This reflects Robert Oppenheimer's obsession, the paradoxical hope that dying leads to resurrection and that producing a lethal weapon may also lead to the end of the war and thus redeem its makers. His love for the *Bhagavad-Gita*[5] and his constant references to it in Los Alamos became a legend. Oppenheimer had 'discovered *Gita* at Harvard; at Berkley he had learned Sanskrit… to set himself closer to the text… a worn pink copy occupied an honoured place on the bookshelf [in his study in Los Alamos]' (Rhodes 1986, 662).

The *Bhagavad-Gita* was written in the form of a dialogue between Arjuna, the warlord prince, and Krishna, the principal avatar of Vishnu. In it, Krishna offers numerous pieces of advice on the human condition, truths which sound simple but can be mediated and elaborated upon. Oppenheimer knew some of the book by heart and referred to it often when asked to speak in public, especially when asked without any time to prepare as was the case on the day President Roosevelt died during the last months of the war. In order to calm his people and persuade them that the new president, Harry Truman, would let them keep working on the secret project, he told them: 'In the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita it says "Man is a creature whose substance is faith. What his faith is, he is," the faith of Roosevelt is one that is shared by millions of men and women" (Rhodes 1986, 614). He spoke to his heterogeneous group of scientists and their families, representatives of different nationalities and religions, many of whom were fugitives, and all of whom loathed the war and hated the Nazis. The references to the Bhagavad-Gita

[5] This 700 stanza-long devotional poem incorporated into the great Aryan epic the *Mahabharata* was written during the time when in Europe the Greek culture was in decline.

had a universal ring and gave the impression of reaching beyond cultural differences.

According to his fellow scientists, Oppenheimer sought solace in reading the *Gita* in moments of anxiety. During the night preceding the TRINITY test, he is said to have translated a quatrain of the poem:

> In battle, in forest, at the precipice in the mountains
> On the dark great sea, in the midst of javelins and arrows
> In sleep, in confusion, in the depths of shame
> The good deeds a man has done before defend him (Rhodes 1986, 663).

This is the 'universal' moral lesson that the old Hindu religious literature can give all of us, believers and unbelievers, Jews and gentiles alike. On the day of the test explosion, Oppenheimer was very anxious, simultaneously wishing for the success of the bomb and apprehensive about the far-reaching effects of that success. As he watched the blast, his head was full of the *Bhagavad-Gita* that he had read and translated the previous night. Later he wrote:

> The blast has passed… I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture… Vishnu is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty and to impress him he takes on his multiarmed form and says: 'Now I am became Death, the destroyer of worlds'. I suppose we all thought that, one way or another (Rhodes 1986, 676).

Thus, in describing the completely new experience of a human-controlled nuclear explosion, he finds a frame for his complicated emotions in a very old cultural tradition. In his mind, the eastern epic parallels Western Greek myths, both cultures influence his understanding of what the human mastery of nuclear power really means. The bomb is a challenge, but it also represents new hope for the human race, a chance to mature and enter a new level of self-awareness:

> We thought of the legend of Prometheus of that deep sense of guilt in man's new power, that reflects his recognition of evil,

> and his long knowledge of it. We know that it was a new world, but even more, we knew that novelty itself was a very thing in human life, that all our ways are related to it (Rhodes 1986, 707).

Thus, Oppenheimer was both sensitive and articulate. He was able to use his extensive readings to give voice to very subtle mixtures of emotion. Moreover, his literary tastes influenced the way the Trinity explosion entered popular imagination. The references he used – comparing the blast to intensified sunlight, evoking Donne's religious poetry, and referencing the Hindu epic about Vishnu the Destroyer – all became part of cultural tradition. Although the remark of his fellow scientist, George Kistiakovsky, just after the explosion 'Now we are all sons of the bitches' (Rhodes 1986, 675) was described by Oppenheimer as 'the best thing anybody said after the test' (Rhodes 1986, 675), it is Oppenheimer's poetic associations that are now canonical.

One part of Oppenheimer's appeal, which makes him attractive to popular fiction authors, is his vulnerability. He was the kind of boss his subordinates tried to protect and defend. Tormented from the inside and out, he suffered for Los Alamos, for his people and for the bomb; at least in the popular renderings of his story. *Atomic Dreams. The Lost Journal of Robert Oppenheimer*, a comic book by Jonathan Elias and Jazan Wild, is an example of a popular, half-mythic account of Oppenheimer's life narrated in terms of guilt, suffering and atonement. In this cartoon, a long, long, time ago, somewhere in the desert in Apache territory, an atrocious murder takes place in which a man kills his brother. At this moment, the primordial evil awakes and exclaims, anticipating Oppenheimer's love for the *Bhagavad-Gita*: 'I am become death! The destroyer of worlds!' (Elias and Wild 2009, no pagination).

Many centuries later, during the Second World War, Oppenheimer is summoned by Groves to join the project and become the scientific director of the laboratories. 'When Uncle Sam picks your number… you don't ask questions' (Elias and Wilde, no pagination), he says and boards the train South. Yet his mind is far from quiet, he knows that that the war and the project are 'that damned nightmare again… Id, ego, superego. Freud would have a field day' (Elias and Wild 2009, no pagination). Not only is he tormented by moral doubts and excessive self-awareness, but he also has more down-to-earth problems: Groves must defend him to the White House officials who call him 'the friend of the Reds.' Groves declares: 'he is brilliant. He's no commie.'

The governmental agents agree to make Oppenheimer the Director but they warn that 'we'll tap every line and trail his every move' (Elias and Wild 2009, no pagination). Oppenheimer suffers constant invigilation; he is frustrated because 'every test fails' and the White House urges that he should 'show the world the demonstration of the bomb' (Elias and Wild 2009, no pagination). The primordial evil spirit awakens in the desert and whispers in his ear, 'face history, don't be lost in it,' while at the test site Groves asks: 'It's sort of like playing God, isn't it, Oppenheimer?' (Elias and Wild 2009, no pagination). The answer is the blaze and the words the spirit pronounces through Oppenheimer, 'I am become death! The destroyer of worlds!' (Elias and Wild 2009, no pagination), which are in fact a repetition of what the murderous brother had said millennia earlier in the same desert. The same evil spirit is shown on board Enola Gay and in Hiroshima after the blast; the narrator comments 'it tasted blood and liked it. All those years underground how hungry it became!' Robert Oppenheimer, a tool in the hands of history, evil spirits, politicians, agents and his own overly sophisticated mind, is shown suffering from pangs of consciousness and political accusations. Removed from the project after the war, he feels remorse and is punished and then rehabilitated. The cartoon ends abruptly with his death and cremation.

This graphic novel is popular and simplistic, with its evil Indian religion influencing the course of the Second World War, ghosts of the Hiroshima victims tormenting their killers and gory pictures of carnage. Yet its message is very similar to the suggestions made by the authors of far more serious Los Alamos narratives: Oppenheimer was made to produce the bomb and then punished for having produced it. The very same features which allowed him to succeed were later the reason for his downfall. In all, he seemed to be a very likeable and decent figure. Richard Rhodes pities Oppenheimer because he never received the Nobel Prize that many of his less talented colleagues got. As a very young scholar at the turn of the 1930s, Oppenheimer was interested not in mainstream research but the 'subtleties of the invisible cosmic margins' (Rhodes 1986, 150). His focus was on the 'dying stars,' hypothetical stellar objects whose existence he had predicted, but which were actually discovered only forty years later and named neutron stars and black holes. Had he still been alive in the 1970s, he would have undoubtedly received a Nobel for his juvenile stroke of genius (Rhodes 1986, 150). According to Rhodes, in Los Alamos Robert Oppenheimer made the project work

by turning the heterogeneous assembly of people into one team, and yet all the time the Director –

> carried private pain. He was kept under constant surveillance, his movements monitored and his rooms and telephones bugged, strangers observed his most intimate hours. His home life cannot have been happy. Kitty Oppenheimer responded to the stress of living in an isolated Los Alamos by drinking heavily. [Authorities] were convinced Oppenheimer was a Russian spy. They interrogated him frequently fishing names (Rhodes 1986, 570).

In Joseph Kanon's *Los Alamos*, the protagonist, Connolly, is a private detective sent to Los Alamos to discreetly find out who killed one of the scientists there. He observes this strange status of Oppenheimer: the boss whom everybody adores is at the same time the least secure and the most vulnerable of the scientists. Connolly discovers that before the murder, Oppenheimer withdrew a substantial sum of money and sent it to someone and demands an explanation. Aware that he is being accused of a crime, Oppenheimer answers bitterly:

> And you thought he was blackmailing me? What on earth about? Do you think there is a single thing about me the government doesn't already know? (…) Your left-wing friends. Your right-wing friends. (…) Your Jewish friends. Your old girlfriends. Your students. (…) Do you ever feel conflicting loyalties? (Kanon 1998, 150)

It turns out that the money in question was sent to his former girl-friend, Jean Tatlock, for her psychiatric treatment and Oppenheimer had never ceased to try to help her. These attempts cause him trouble because Jean was a communist. Nevertheless, after her death he feels guilty and the guilt for the prospective deaths of the bomb's future victims add to this feeling, 'a quick flash and (…) the Japanese finally startled out of their mad reverie (…) a hundred to save a thousand. A new kind of mathematics' (Kanon 1998, 230). Oppenheimer is described as a scapegoat, carrying all the guilt of this dehumanized arithmetic and he accepts this role voluntarily. At the test site,

he seems 'alarmingly thin, the eyes set deeply in their sockets, the bony fingers clutching the cigarette nearly skeletal. His voice, dry and scratchy, seemed to cry out for rest but instead his body was in constant motion pacing edgily' (Kanon 1998, 435).

Consumed by guilt, tormented by the authorities, and aware of all the subtle Freudian ironies of the situation, the Oppenheimer in the Los Alamos narratives discussed above grows to embody the project. He represents all the Euro-American intellectuals who produced the bomb and at the same time read Freud and Wells and believed in the inherent death-driven self-destructiveness of our civilization.

Oppenheimer's literary culture gave him a religious frame of reference to describe the genuinely new experience of the display of nuclear power. In his eyes, the scientists engaged in the project were like the heroes of Hindu and Greek epics or the personas of John Donne's poetry. At the same time, the story of Los Alamos itself has become a legend and a piece of twentieth century scientific folklore and Robert Oppenheimer is the narrative focus: his love

for physics and the desert, his description of the bomb as brighter than a thousand suns and of himself as Death, the Destroyer of Worlds, are now mythic.

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The Human(ist) Dimension of Caryl Phillips's Fiction through the Example of *Higher Ground* (1989)

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Abstract: The paper presents a critical rereading of Caryl Phillips's *Higher Ground* (1989), which tells the (hi)stories of a West African man, an African-American teenager and a Polish war refugee who set themselves against hostile socio-political systems. Originally published in 1989, but reprinted in 2006, the novel is an exemplary piece of Phillips's fiction that embodies all the characteristic elements of his writing: fragmentary narration, deep intertextuality and, most importantly, a purely humanist message that enables one to place the novel beyond the Black Atlantic or Afro-Caribbean canon, as Caryl Phillips is customarily read. The paper revolves around the issues of cultural identity, intercultural migrations, political radicalism and social exclusion, showing that Phillips's fiction constitutes a timeless and valuable source of knowledge about the socio-cultural condition of the contemporary West and thus deserves wider recognition on the European literary scene.

Keywords: Caryl Phillips, humanism, multiculturalism, migrants, migrations

Caryl Phillips is known for his complex, fragmentary novels, which confront readers with the anxieties of migrations, intolerance, cultural misunderstandings and racial discrimination. As Phillips once said, 'I believe passionately in the moral capacity of fiction to wrench us out of our ideological burrows' and, by forcing us into contact with *the other*, to open our eyes to the complexity of the world we live in, 'for literature *is* plurality in action' (Phillips 2011, 16; italics in the original). Thus Phillips sees literature as a space of cultural confrontation and he claims that the role of a writer is to facilitate intercultural dialogues and shape intercultural sensitivity. Needless to say, his message is especially significant today as our public discourse is becoming dominated by a nostalgic rhetoric, a possible return to the idealised past from before globalisation, where clear national and ethic boundaries define one's place

within the community (Bauman 2017, 3). It seems, however, that Phillips is still relatively little read beyond the Black Atlantic canon where, in turn, he is famous for such novels as *Cambridge* (1991), *Crossing the River* (1993) or *The Nature of Blood* (1997). Here, Phillips is usually tied to Paul Gilroy's vision of the African diasporic experience and classified as an African diasporic writer.[6] Nevertheless, Phillips's dedication to reclaiming the African voices from the abyss of history is only one aspect of his writing worth appreciating nowadays. Throughout his career, Phillips has been consistently focusing on the marginalised from all the possible ethnic groups, building parallels between African, Polish or Jewish pasts for example. '[D]isplacement, home/homelessness, race and identity, Eurocentrism, victimisation and complicity' (Schatteman 2009, xiv) are commonplace themes in his fiction and he does not shun from tackling difficult, or even openly political issues. He constructs protagonists who 'are highly ambiguous and deeply flawed' (Schatteman 2009, xiv) and whose moral choices puzzle readers. Consistently refusing to pass any moral judgement on his characters, Phillips provokes his readers into sympathising with his protagonists and thus rethinking their own socio-political positioning. His texts, then, 'resist the easy reduction of history and contemporary events to sloganeering' (Schatteman 2009, 53), so typical of today's political and media language.

Therefore, the 'human(ist)' dimension of Phillips's fiction suggested in the title points out the fact that, despite experimenting with narrative forms and voices, Phillips has always leaned towards conveying a broadly relatable vision of human experience that exceeds ethnic and national borders. This Phillipsian 'human-centrism' has nothing to do with endorsing an anthropocentric vision of the world, as the phrase is commonly defined today, and therefore Phillips's writings elude classifications into postcolonial, African diasporic or posthumanist veins.[7] This simple observation, though by no means

[6] Paul Gilroy advocated a transnational character of the African diasporic experience, which he presented in this book *The Black Atlantic* (1993); within its realms, he placed the Atlantic, understood as both the ocean and the symbolic space of transgression, at the heart of African migrations and argued for the existence of a common transnational identity of African diasporas across the world, which stems from their common experience of dislocation and slavery. Nowadays, his theory is approached with caution as the idea of a universal African experience is being contested within the African diaspora itself.

[7] Posthumanism as a trend in the humanities is usually associated with the works of the French sociologist Bruno Latour. It challenges humanism as an essentially anthropocentric worldview that

revolutionary, gains weight if placed within the context of a gradual departure from the postmodern contestation of *truth* that we observe today; more precisely, critics have started noticing a renewed longing for realism in fiction, understood here as a pursuit of 'meaning, truth, representational accuracy' in literature – the aesthetics which postmodern criticism regarded as compromised (Toth 2010, 1–23).[8] However, one needs to be adamant in stating that they do not mean a direct return to the nineteenth-century paradigm, but a return to epistemological seriousness in literature as a reaction against the postmodern distrust of *facts* that led to the rebirth of 'political and media populism' (Ferraris 2014, 3). In other words, as Arkadiusz Żychliński (2017, 187–198) puts it, people are once again hungry for truth in fiction, which marks a new chapter for confessional and testimonial narratives. Even though we do not yet know where this path may lead us, one may argue that it makes such writers as Caryl Phillips, with his unwavering focus on testimonial narrative traditions, well worth (re)reading and bringing forward to a wider readership.[9]

The present paper illustrates all the aforementioned aspects of Phillip's writing through *Higher Ground: A Novel in Three Parts* (1989), first published in 1989 and then reprinted in 2006, as it constitutes a good example of the hallmarks of Phillips's fiction. Firstly, the tripartite structure of the piece combines three distinct narrative voices into a single allegorical tale of non-belonging; as the author himself says, '[e]ach segment of the novel demanded a different point of attack' and gave him the opportunity to break away from 'the straitjacket of the third person [narration]' (Phillips 2009, 15). Secondly,

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discriminates against non-human entities. For more, see Bruno Latour's *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993).

[8] Realism as a movement based on the assumption that literary narratives convey truth about human experience (Watt 1957, 11), and a type of a narrative mode employed in the nineteenth-century historiography (White 2009, 23), was both 'a rhetoric and an ideology' (Duncan 1992, 6). Therefore, postmodern criticism departed from realism in favour of emphasising the ironic nature of narrative representations. Though postcolonial writers also contested realism in the said understanding, they nonetheless have always approached the postmodern deconstruction of truth and history with caution (Young 2004, 51). Rooted in an alternative set of historical and political experiences, they turned towards reclaiming their own *truth* and *history* reconceptualising realism as marvellous or allegorical. For more, see Hamish Dalley's *The Postcolonial Historical Novel: Realism, Allegory, and the Representation of Contested Pasts* (2014).

[9] Regrettably, so far only one of his novels has been translated into Polish – *A Distant Shore* published by Muza under the Polish title *Odległy brzeg*.

as Benedicte Lédént observes, *Higher Ground* is a perfect example of the deep referentiality characteristic of Phillips's fiction. It may be read through associations with slave narratives, African-American rap music, modernist literature, or the writings of Leo Tolstoy, Joseph Conrad, Wilson Harris, and Franz Fanon. Though Lédént (1996, 300–308) fully appreciates Phillips's intertextual potential, she nonetheless warns against seeing him as a predominantly counter-discursive writer, as such a view may overshadow the fact that his main artistic aim is to (re)tell Western history through an array of individual lives and voices. Therefore, *Higher Ground* may be seen an embodiment of Phillips's ambition to achieve 'his novelistic "higher ground"', which Susheila Nasta understands as 'artistic transcendence of the particularities of exile and dispossession so as to create a more general "literature of belonging"' (Nasta 2000, 64); he 'does not want to confine his alternative history to peoples of African descent as it would then become a form of cultural nationalism' (Nasta 2000, 64). Putting it differently, Caryl Phillips sees writing literature not so much as creating art but as creating a dialogue between himself and his readers that may open our eyes to different aspects of our own identity. The following analysis emphasises those aspects of Phillips's fiction, namely his ambition to create a widely relatable literature of belonging and to force his readers to critically assess Western history and our contemporary socio-political reality. As such, Phillips proves to be one of those writers whose vision of story-telling as a human(ist) mission may be of great value today; not only does it sensitise us to the experience of non-belonging but it also openly challenges a dehumanising vision of *the other* as the one that threatens the wellbeing of the West.

Broadly speaking, *Higher Ground* is a collection of three portrayals of individuals struggling to carve a niche for themselves within a hostile society. Within its realms, Phillips pays particular attention to how the protagonists redefine their identity, choosing either to adapt or to withdraw from the mainstream part of that society. The first part of the novel, entitled 'Heartland', takes the readers to the shores of West Africa and paints a crude image of the African life under colonial rule in the times of the slave trade. It may be read as an extended commentary on *becoming* the other within one's own homeland, poignantly shown through the example of the narrator – an unnamed West African man – who serves as a translator and intermediary between the natives and the Europeans. The action of 'Heartland' is symbolically stretched between two spaces, the trading post, known as the Fort,

and a nearby native African village, from which the slaves are procured for commerce, and which happens to be the narrator's birth place. The reader observes the everyday workings of the Fort and immediately notes that the system of colonial power has infiltrated both private and public spheres, and pushed the narrator into a morally ambiguous sphere in-between cultural adaptation and resistance (cf. Bhabha 2000, 101). Initially, it seems that the narrator has grown accustomed to his life and he seems able to appreciate certain aspects of it: '[w]ithin the confines of the Fort my position is secure, if low and often unbearable. I now find it difficult to conceive of a life either before or after this place. I need to feel safe' (Phillips 1989, 19). This illusory sense of safety, however, is unexpectedly shattered when one day his superior, Price, takes him on a journey to his very own village where he is to assist in procuring a girl that would satisfy Price's peculiar sexual appetites. When surrounded by his former African brothers, the man recognises the ambiguity of his positioning as belonging neither to the colonizers nor to the colonized. He sees himself '[m]arooned between them, knowing that neither fully trusts [him], that neither wants to be close to [him], neither recognises [his] smell or [his] posture' (Phillips 1989, 22). He knows that '[he is] easily identifiable as one who dwells with the enemy' (Phillips 1989, 24), and thus 'feel[s] uncomfortable conversing in our native tongue' (Phillips 1989, 33). At this very moment, then, 'the magnitude of [his] fall strikes [him]' (Phillips 1989, 22), but the reasons behind his choices are by no means easy to judge. 'I merely survive, and if survival is a crime then I am guilty' (Phillips 1989, 24), he says, but makes no excuses for his previous actions: '[y]ou see I have no excuses for my present circumstances, they were thrust upon me and I accepted them (…) I subsequently acquired some status in their [European] eyes and began to assist them in their trading' (Phillips 1989, 44).

Such reflections of the narrator echo the state of 'the unhomeliness', once famously described by Homi Bhabha, which is 'the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations' (Bhabha 2000, 13) and part of the migrant and refugee experience, although by no means limited to these groups. In fact, it does not seem unjustified to argue that 'unhomeliness' is a humanly universal experience, capturing the moment when one ceases to feel 'at home', or rather cannot attain the feeling of *being at home*, even if one is not homeless. As Bhabha says, this displacement is a direct result of cultural relocation, which may be physical or symbolic, and as such it happens to Phillips's narrator, who can no longer call Africa his home. In fact, such a displacement

is experienced by all the protagonists contextualised in *Higher Ground* which, in turn, makes them relatable to many a cross-cultural migrant. What seems most intriguing in 'Heartland', however, is not so much the very position of the narrator within the colonial world, but the strategy he employs to survive within its realms. More precisely, the Europeans running the Fort remain oblivious to the complexity of their translator's identity and they see him as an example of a successful cultural adaptation. 'I can fully appreciate the distance – the somewhat remarkable distance that you have travelled along the path of civilization' (Phillips 1989, 52), says the Governor.

The protagonist resorts to mimicry and he adopts, or rather imitates, the manners of the colonizer, which ultimately proves a subversive strategy allowing him to carve a niche within the body of a hostile system and to draw some benefits from its mechanisms (Bhabha 2004, 122–123). Mimicry, then, may prove successful as a strategy of survival, but the question truly asked by the narrator touches upon the morality of such a choice. In truth, such debates are not unfamiliar to postcolonial scholars and V. S. Naipaul, for example, is known to have been very harsh towards his West-Indian brothers, whom he saw as merely poor imitations of the West, failing to recognise the sociological and psychological complexity of mimicry and its subversive potential (Cudjoe 1988, 139). Phillips, however, seems to lean toward Bhabha's interpretation and, instead of being harsh towards his narrator, he suggests that in colonialism, much as in any other oppressive system, nobody is innocent of partial collaboration and therefore it is all too easy to pass moral judgements from the temporal and spatial distance. Significantly enough, and somewhat surprisingly, the already mentioned Governor discerns such a dubious quality of progress brought by the Europeans to Africa:

> [I]t is possible you [African people] may never recover from this [European] intrusion. I am led to believe that certain chiefs have been known to raid their own villages and seize people of custom, language and manners near to their own, then subject them to the whims of factors in exchange for brandy (Phillips 1989, 51).

The Governor intuitively acknowledges the fact that the Europeans have 'intruded' onto the African way of life, which, in turn, has brought about negative consequences. Nonetheless, he justifies the susceptibility

of the Africans to the corrupting effect of Europe by repeating clichés about their inborn barbarity. 'Imagine being able to pay a king or a chief in alcohol to round up his own people and reduce them to little more than horses', he observes, 'is it any wonder that there is some debate on whether you have in you the capacity for reason?' (Phillips 1989, 51). This unnerving remark strikes one even stronger if one sets his words against those of the chief of a native tribe. More precisely, when our narrator visits his village, the chief tries to extract from him a bunch of information about the slave trade, hoping for a negative answer: 'I am led to believe that they take our people to their country to work for them in the fields; to harvest their crops in servitude' (Phillips 1989, 41). In return, however, the narrator offers only silence: 'I can say nothing truthful that will alleviate their worry so I remain mute' (Phillips 1989, 42).

Using Slavoy Žižek's metaphor, Phillips presents his protagonists and the colonial world at the moment of denial, when all parties participate in the system, but are not yet ready to pierce the veil of ideological illusion that surrounds them (Žižek 2008, 15), which is well captured in the following words uttered by the narrator: 'regardless of the more obvious differences of our origins, we are all trapped by similar circumstances" (Phillips 1989, 20). To complicate this image even further, Phillips brings to light yet another element, namely the patriarchal structure of native Africa, drawing a parallel between two systems – colonial and tribal – on yet another level. In so doing, he allows his otherwise complacent protagonist to utilise his privileged position earned through mimicry to rescue the African girl he first helped to procure from the village. Once Price has abused her and irreversibly scarred her body, he asks the narrator to take her back to the village. The man, however, soon finds out that the Africans would not claim her back, as for them she is tainted. The Head Man of the village decides even that the narrator should take the girl back, and do with her as he pleases: 'You must take her and never return or you shall both lose your lives' (Phillips 1989, 42). Although the narrator initially refuses, he quickly realises that, should he leave her behind, she will surely die; thus he brings the girl back to the Fort, hides her in his quarters and cares for her, being well aware that he is risking his own head in the process. Surprisingly enough, the girl does not despise the man for the fact that he helped Price and she is fully aware of her own conditioning: 'My father had to disown me. (…) [i]n our tradition [the father] is able to give up a daughter more readily than he would his pride or his position

in the village" (Phillips 1989, 45). As one may nonetheless predict, the section ends sadly – the girl is discovered and the narrator locked up in the docks. There he awaits transportation to the colonies and his story goes full circle: now he is the lowest of the low and his place as a translator is taken by a young man, in whom he recognises ambitions akin to his own. As one reads, 'Price stands with the new "linguist", a young man who barks orders at us in our own language and then turns and converses with them in theirs" (Phillips 1989, 59). At this point in the narrative, the system proves more powerful than the individual.

The narrator of 'Heartland' chose the path of partial adaptation which, although ultimately unsuccessful, nonetheless allowed him to survive and to take an active stance against the system. The second section of the novel, entitled 'The Cargo Rap', shows a contrary image of a young man who refuses to accept any moral compromise in his struggles with the world, but who experiences his own 'unhomeliness' just as strongly as the narrator. 'The Cargo Rap' is written in the form of letters, dated from January 1967 to August 1968, authored by an African-American man, Rudi Williams, and sent from prison to his friends and family. Rudi, as he himself claims, is imprisoned for merely attempting to steal forty dollars, and unfairly kept in a high security facility. The image of the boy that emanates from his letters, however, shows an angry young man from an impoverished background who is accused of participation in an armed robbery and who continues to challenge the guards and fellow prisoners, which, in turn, results in solitary confinement. The primary feeling emanating from Rudi's letters is that of hatred towards America, white people, and everything they stand for. His dismissal of America and American culture takes at times caricature forms; for example, he accuses his own mother of a slave mentality whenever she warns him against getting into trouble (Phillips 1989, 64) and he claims that '[t]he sooner our professional slaves die', a category into which he includes all Afro-Americans participating in the system, 'the better for us [the Africans] all' (Phillips 1989, 73). On top of this, he admires Malcolm X's uncompromising struggles, and especially his decision to adopt Islam: 'the only religion for the black man is an African religion, preferably Islam. (…) [T]he one religion to be avoided is that of Christianity' (Phillips 1989, 75). At the same time, Rudi idealises the communist regimes and supports the development of communism in Africa, justifying the use of violence in reshaping the world. 'I try now to marry my political reading with the African-American experience' (Phillips 1989, 79), he says,

and the ideology Rudi propels may be called a radical version of pan-Africanism married with communism.

Although beyond doubt very emotional, Rudi's letters nonetheless convey an image of the American society that strikes one as uncomfortably contemporary. 'Men are not naturally brutal', he says in the context of the crime rate in the Afro-American community, '[i]t is their environment that makes them so' (Phillips 1989, 71). This environment for Rudi was a life on the streets, among guns and crime, where he got his girlfriend pregnant very early and, immediately after, he went to jail, never actually meeting his daughter. His America, therefore, is a very denial of the American dream, where everything is possible; an especially powerful moment of contrast between the ideology of success and reality comes when Rudi places himself alongside the famous people of colour, such as Toussaint for example, claiming that they prove that one should '[n]ever let anybody tell you that the odds are too long. Anything can be achieved given the right mental attitude' (Phillips 1989, 118). His own case painfully contradicts this rule as he very acutely remembers a teacher who recognised in him the potential for greater things: 'it was he who told me that I had some talent; that I might one day become a clerk. He did not mention doctor, lawyer, judge, professor, or nuclear physicist' (Phillips 1989, 76). Being a clerk, then, is a synonym of success for a talented African-American boy and Rudi himself has little hope for affirm-ative action – a political programme aimed to guarantee African-American youth equal education – to change the status quo. As he writes:

> Do they seriously believe that by having ten black and then white students they are advancing the cause of racial harmony in America? (…) When you speak to most African-American men the failure of integration as a viable social experiment becomes startlingly clear. Most of us don't want a damn thing to do with them (…) We do not want to be integrated into their lives any more than they want to integrate with us (Phillips 1989, 115).

According to Rudi, the gap between the two communities is impossible to bridge and his words strike a surprising tone with the present day situation in America where African-Americans still voice their concerns about systemic

discrimination, and especially police abuse, and therefore they remain reluctant to trust the system and the privileged groups.[10]

Rudi's observations on racial tensions in America go even further than the animosities between white and black communities. More precisely, when Rudi comments on a common dislike of a movie, *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner,*[11] watched by the prisoners from all possible American racial groups, he notes that, although they all agreed as to the poor quality of the movie, '[they] did not like the fact that [they] all agreed' (Phillips 1989, 154). This seemingly innocent remark echoes Bauman's well-known concerns about the failure of multiculturalism as a programme of social reform. Although supported by the state both in America and Europe, it did not facilitate integration; instead, under the disguise of respecting cultural differences, it solidified the ghetto-like mentality of minority and majority groups, contributing to the problems with social integration noticeable even among the second and third generation immigrants (Bauman 2011, 46). Moreover, in his anger at the system, Rudi resembles not only a representative of a cultural minority, but also an average frustrated young man of today's West. Seeing no chance to better their fate, such angry young men vent their frustration though voting for radical political parties or, most dangerously, resort to violence. As Terry Eagleton writes in *Holy Terror* (2005), the ideology of endless progress 'for which nothing is impossible once you put your mind to it has exhausted its potential for social change, but even so it still remains part and parcel of the American and capitalist dream. One cannot, however, remain impervious to the fact that it discriminates against those who simply cannot make it, and this group is growing alarmingly strong in the West. 'Failure, for this crassly hubristic doctrine, is simply lack of will-power' and it 'dehumanizes the very humanity it acclaims', argues Eagleton. 'There are citizens of the United States for whom the word "can't" is as pernicious as the word "communist"' (Eagleton 2005, 104). Thus, the communist bug with which Phillips infected Rudy gains a deeper dimension. Although no longer read in its original political context of a struggle between Soviet and Western blocks,

[10] Those interested may place Rudi's letters in the context of the ongoing, and still unresolved, debate on crime rates within the African-American community and the US police force's likability to kill an African-American offender rather than a white one (Stolberg and Williams 2017, A9).

[11] The film was made in 1967. It contextualises the issue of a mixed-race marriage, reflecting the debates of the American public of the time.

it remains a powerful symbol of an ideological exhaustion of the West and late capitalism to which, as of yet, we have no answer. One thing we know for sure, however, is that the West fails to face up to the problems of people like Rudi, and the result may be political violence, because the 'anger of the excluded and abandoned is a uniquely rich ore from which constant supplies of profuse political capital can be extracted' (Bauman 2017, 69).

Undoubtedly, 'The Cargo Rap' is the most emotional part of the novel, and the next section, 'Higher Ground', significantly lowers the tension evoked by Rudi, confronting us with a calmer yet equally profound image of a social outcast who refuses to adapt to the mainstream society but, at the same time, does not find strength within herself to rebel against the dominant order. The main protagonist of the section is Irina, a Polish-Jewish woman, who arrives in England as a war refugee and carries within herself deep traumas connected with anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. Her narrative imitates that of the stream of consciousness, providing us with a deeply personal image of a grand historical moment that the readers are invited to witness from a very personal and intimate perspective of an individual victim. Not organised linearly, the story travels with Irina's memories and takes us back to Poland, where Irina's family, as many Polish-Jewish families at that time, runs a small trading establishment. There, they live their quiet middle-class life until the growing wave of anti-Semitism starts ruining their world. As Phillips rightly suggests, the racial tension grew successively stronger in Poland even before the invasion of Nazi Germany, but the family refused to discuss the problem for fear that voicing their concerns would make them even more real. The silence, however, is broken when Irina's sister, Rachel, gets badly beaten, and probably abused, which triggers in her the onset of a severe depression. As Irina admits 'the attack was not unexpected' and 'Rachel (…) had once suggested that they should discuss the "problem" with Mama'. Irina 'said no for she had noticed that Mama was showing signs of tired resignation, and had formed a habit of speaking to strangers with her eyes lowered' (…) (Phillips 1989, 191). In truth, the mother herself 'wanted to leave and go away to England or America, for what happened to Rachel frightened her, but papa was against it' (Phillips 1989, 191). As such, their combined family inertia leads up to the moment when Poland is invaded by the Nazis, and Rachel is too ill to travel, so only Irina, carefully equipped by her parents, has her chance to escape. Thus, she lands all alone in a foreign country where, as "Irina

was not to know (…) the Irene-Irina-Irene-Irina-Irene-Irina-Irene problem would begin' (Phillips 1989, 183).

Irina's emigration means not only a physical journey between two radically different countries, but also a transition between identities, namely, between Irena – as her name would truly sound in Polish – and Irene, its English counterpart. The woman is never allowed to forget that she is an immigrant form a poor, faraway country, 'a Polish bitch', as she remembers being called, and she never calls England her home. Moreover, due to her prolonged trauma, Irina herself sabotages any attempts at integration into society and displays a paradoxical attitude to her past; on the one hand, she cherishes some of the things that remind her of her former life, such as the pictures of her family (Phillips 1989, 183), but on the other, she despises books, which filled her pre-war house and which have, in a way, failed her. In her new, sparsely furnished room, '[t]here were no books, despite the fact that a book can neither expel nor despise you' (Phillips 1989, 175), as '[s]he had ensured that there could be no comfort in [literature]' (Phillips 1989, 176). Thus, Irina symbolically loses faith in the power of literature, and especially in the promise of the meaningful connections between people that it represents. It is all the more symbolic therefore that when she decides to commit suicide, she crafts it after Anna Karenina, as if openly manifesting to the world that she has lost her trust in human kindness. As the narrator recalls: '[i]t was over ten years since Irene had travelled down to London and tried to throw herself under the train (like Anna Karenina)' and then '[she has] been taken to hospital (but not for her bruises)' (Phillips 1989, 200). In the hospital, in turn, she has 'learn[ed] to hate friendships proffered and attempted attachments and imagined love' (Phillips 1989, 200), battling the symptoms of depression and trauma.

It may seem surprising that Irina's story finds an allegorical conclusion in her last relationship on which she embarks after her release from the hospital. Entering into her post-hospital life, Irina once again tries to open herself up to feelings and she meets Louis, an immigrant from the West-Indies, with whom she is ready to make '[o]ne last effort. Just to hold on to him' (Phillips 1989, 201). What binds them is the fact that Louis is well familiar with racial discrimination and racial violence, and well used to hearing words like: '[y]ou're quite good-looking for a coloured' (Phillips 1989, 194). He is also an immigrant who, much as Irina, does not see England as his home. Irina has every right to think that '[t]he light on her face [is] a lesson, a book that

she hoped he would want to read' (Phillips 1989, 216), and her hope for a relationship is based on the poignancy of experiences which she intuitively recognises. Louis, however, although initially fascinated by this eerily different woman, ultimately 'look[s] away from her' (Phillips 1989, 216), claiming to be leaving England and its racialist atmosphere where he sees no place for himself and his ambitions. Symbolically, then, he refuses to read Irina's story, declaring that '[he's] going back to where [he] come[s] from' (Phillips 1989, 214), which brings the loneliness of Irina's immigrant life even more sharply to light. The last recounted scene of the novel shows Irina looking through the window, 'more fearful of the morning, for ever lost without the sustaining love' (Phillips 1989, 218) and humming a line 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one' (Phillips 1989, 217) as if looking for comfort beyond the human world, which has failed her. It is not fortuitous, then, that the title of the section echoes the title of the novel, which, in turn, is a line from a religious hymn, 'Lord plant my feet on higher ground'; as such, it alludes to Irina's hope for a salvation that she retains despite her experiences, ending the story in nostalgic but hopeful tones.

'Higher Ground' is a multilayered story of trauma and depression, which may be read on at least two more levels. Firstly, it seems notable that Irina and Louis meet in Britain, the heart of the multinational empire, where they both, although coming from two ends of the world, occupy a similar space demarcated for the foreigners. The foreigner, as Derrida (2000, 11–14) writes, is not necessarily different from the host in skin colour, culture or language. After all, Irina is white, they both speak English and Louis, although of African origin, comes from the West Indies, where he must have been raised 'the English way' (cf. Phillips and Phillips 1999).[12] However, Irina and Louis do not *feel* at home in England, but their displacement is as much a result of their personal decision as it is a consequence of their social status as guests in England. The hospitality extended to them by the state is by no means absolute and they are continuously reminded of their otherness. This, in turn, reflects the very fact that no Western state accepts foreigners unconditionally (Derrida 2000, 25). Not only does it demand to know the foreigner's identity, but also it retains the very right to arbitrarily choose whom to allow into

[12] *Windrush: The Irresistible Rise of Multi-Racial Britain* (1999) remains a powerful record of the West-Indian migrant experience and its complex relationship with England, which the West-Indians regarded as their homeland, but which has not reciprocated their feelings (1999, 12).

its body, and whom to expel, which derives from the wish to retain sovereignty, as Derrida said, or to protect the borders, as the media call it today. Thus, there exists 'the necessity (…) of choosing, electing, filtering, selecting their [the state's] invitees, visitors, or guests, those to whom they decide to grant asylum, the right of visiting, or hospitality' (Derrida 2000, 54) and hospitality no longer functions without this power. Hence, 'a certain injustice (…) begins right away, from the very threshold of the right to hospitality" (Derrida 2000, 54) and Phillips seems to have aptly captured its complexity, constructing a parallel not only between Poles, Jews, West-Indians, but all migrants who are seen as temporary additions to the society, even if the length of their stay, just as in Irina's case, extends well beyond ten years.[13] Displacement, then, is a state of instability, which may be said to extend the original context of Bhabha's 'unhomeliness' as a subjective feeling toward the social status of a foreigner as a guest. As such, it makes Irina's experience highly relatable both to those who have experienced various forms of forced and wilful migrations as well as those who turn to fiction to understand the migrant positioning in today's world.

Secondly, as we live in a world where 'the truth' about the past is waged like a weapon in identity wars (Bauman 2017, 66), Irina reminds us that history is not an abstract, nameless force, but a story of people like her, whose ordinary, relatable lives are rarely part of official historiography. In other words, depending on the historical moment, we all may relive Irina's experience of displacement and non-belonging, just like many of today's nameless migrants who continue to confront themselves with unwelcoming institutions of the West. Although we have been taught this lesson many a time, it seems that today, when the triumph of liberal democracy has by no means marked the end of history, as Francis Fukuyama famously hoped, but transformed into a new wave of populism, we need it to be reminded of it once more. In other words, people like Caryl Phillips, who have lived their lives with an acute sense of racial inequality still persisting in the West, have never lost sight of the fact that history, including all its inglorious chapters, forever remains part of the present. Already in his first collection of essays published in 1987, *The European Tribe*, in which Phillips looks at European history through the prism of his own journeys, Phillips

[13] Phillips uses a similar comparison in his other works, for example in *The Nature of Blood* (1997), where he evokes to the same purpose the figure of Othello.

warns his readers that one of Europe's gravest sins is its continuous tolerance of racism masked under the pretence of multiculturalism. Europe, he notes, 'still look[s] askance at "strangers"', and allows 'right-wing extremism' to live on in its political life and public discourse. Through the example of Britain, he notes that one of the vehicles of political popularity is the promise of '"expulsion" of all "New Commonwealth" immigrants' (Phillips 2000 [1987], 127–128). Needless to say, Phillips's observations sound like a premonition of the Brexit referendum debate (Phillips 1987, 127) and point towards the problems that Phillips will then continuously confront himself with in his fiction, including *Higher Ground* – a dehumanisation of *the other,* who is seen as an enemy and not as a fellow human being.

However, it would be unfair to say that Phillips's vision of Europe as a socio-political organism is entirely negative. In the very same essay, he expresses his idealistic hope that, in the future, Europe may embrace its complex history and become a moral centre of the contemporary world, teaching others about the effects of radicalism (Phillips 1987, 127). In yet another of his essay collections, *Colour Me English* (2011), Phillips too voices his belief that story-telling is a powerful tool that may trigger 'compassion born of familiarity towards our fellow human beings, be they Christian, Jew, Muslim, black, brown, white'. The (re)birth of this compassion, he says, 'truly is my hope for Europe' and 'the writer has a crucial part to play in this' (Phillips 2011, 17; italics in the original). Hence, novels such as *Higher Ground*, whose protagonists struggle with unhomeliness, political violence and social rejection, are the means helping Phillips to communicate his human(ist) worldview. In other words, Phillips purposefully places human beings at the heart of his fiction and, in so doing, he somehow reclaims the very word *humanism,* which in today's literary debates oftentimes comes across as dated, or even suspicious, due to its connotations with anthropocentrism. Phillips's texts are *humanist* insofar as they make us rediscover our own experience of *being human* as a universal value that goes beyond race, ethnicity or time. As Maria Janion once said, literature and literary criticism are there to make sure that history is not solidified into a homogenous narrative (Janion 2017 [1996], 17) – the battle which Caryl Phillips has been fighting for years and which he beautifully captured through the metaphor of Irina's face being a book that waits to be read. Therefore, it does not seem unreasonable to hope that, as people start turning towards literature for realism of representation, fiction may fight its way back into the mainstream

discourse, spreading empathy and undermining the hate speech that permeates the media, and especially the Internet. Hence, although Irina ultimately loses her faith in literature, Phillips himself does not, and he continues to show the humanity of his flawed protagonists under all the socio-political circumstances that it is possible to imagine. One may even risk a statement that today's Europe needs both writers like Phillips and those who, to paraphrase Shelley, would help scatter his words among mankind.

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From Vivid to Darker 'Shades of the War' – Sumis Sukkar's Fictionalization of Syrian Trauma

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Abstract: This article is devoted to Sumia Sukkar, a young British author, whose debut novel *The Boy from Aleppo Who Painted the War* seems an important voice in debates on the repercussions of the Syrian conflict. The novelist's decision, due to her national descent (she is of Syrian origin), to create a fictional narrative, which serves more as a moral intervention in matters of public concern, derives from Sukkar's personal conviction that one cannot hold aloof from the carnage going on in Syria. Although written in 2013, the book, with its emphasis on the unending war 'games' and unrelenting violence in the Middle East, turns out to be even more valid today than before. With this voice of moderation, Western readers have been given yet another chance to delve into the nature of the Syrian conflict, presented from the position of a devout Muslim believer as well as a person of ethical integrity. Hers is the narrative in which changing colors symbolically reflect a slow deterioration of individual mindsets. In this sense, Sukkar's novel seems more like an important attempt to 'find an adequate objective correlative' that in a comprehensive way enables one to gain insight into traumas of the local conflict/war.

Keywords: the Syrian war, trauma, political and moral intervention, colors and symbolism, 'personal testimony'

Ariel Dorfman, a Chilean novelist, speaking of the Latin American literary field, notes how often 'local narratives' have underscored the interdependence of such 'distant' domains as politics and fiction. In his opinion, political agendas are compelled to encroach on the area of the imaginary to illuminate the predicaments of a given community, a religious/ethnic group or society. This conclusion pertains especially to regional writings of South America as marked by some expectations of the public that concern not only cultural

eloquence but also discernible socio-political referentiality of literary productions. Imposed on various authors, they are to prompt adequate reactions whenever a serious 'crisis' begins to transform the social fabric of a specific national framework (Dorfman 2007, 88). The question, of course, is how one construes the very term 'crisis'. If contextualized by references to political changeovers in South American countries, its designation boils down to turbulent revolutionary processes, which usually sell promises to challenge, rather than maintain, the status quo of internal relations. Regarding the objective of this article, the idea of 'crisis' – if formulated accordingly – falls short of moral profoundness, and thus needs to be completed by depicting any societal conundrums in terms of humanitarian dimension as well as by ethical reflection.

Such a perspective that acknowledges the role of literature as a potential tool for personal and moral intervention in matters of public concern is not discretionary but mandatory, unless one tends to hold aloof from the carnage in Syria that has left its imprint on the local population and far beyond. Apparently, Sumia Sukkar, a young British novelist, was of the same mind while writing her debut novel *The Boy from Aleppo Who Painted the War*. Though written in 2013, a few years later, the book, with its emphasis on the unending war 'games' and unrelenting aggression in the Middle East, appears to be even more valid today than before. But Sukkar's narrative is also worth considering for other reasons. Firstly, with this voice of moderation, Western readers have been given a good chance to delve deeper into the nature of the Syrian conflict. Elaborated on from the position of a devout Muslim believer and a person of moral integrity,[14] Sukkar's story undoubtedly examines the dimensionality of Syrian torments. As she declared in an interview conducted by Jack Little (2013), it is her religious and moral identification that shall prefix the tag of a British and secular writer. In this regard, any attempt to associate her with a manipulative religious/political zealot would be an unforgivable mistake. Secondly, some of Sukkar's relatives happen to live in Damascus, so an inspiration for writing the novel came from 'stories she had heard from family

[14] To outline Sukkar's general approach to her own 'ethical' writing, I propose considering Brigit Naumann's reflection on 'the process of […] value-making', observable in referential literature. As she claims, an ethical stance in literary works is not so much tantamount to 'teaching any particular lessons'. Rather, what comes to the fore is '[…] the ability to question established notions of value and initiating processes of change' (Naumann 2008b: 135). Sukkar, in this sense, appears both as a witness and an informer trying to trigger serious reactions on the part of the public.

members still stuck in Syria' (Wilson, 2014). Hence, drawn upon the actual experiences of Syrian civilians, the author's version of the conflict's ramifications passes the criterion of a close-to-authentic expression of different shades of cumulative traumas as inflicted by the bloodshed.

As Sukkar asserted, in writing the novel, she attempted first and foremost at 'speaking her mind' and 'raising awareness' by thematizing 'the pain and suffering' (Little, 2013). For these reasons, the format of her narrative avoids any unnecessary textual complexities to accentuate some uneasy (mis)fortunes of a single Syrian family. From the very outset, a strong light is thrown on their ordinary life in Aleppo, which is about to change dramatically along with the outbreak of spontaneous protests against Bashar al-Assad's regime. The main narrator – Adam, a fourteen-year-old boy suffering from Asperger's syndrome, is informed by his sister Yasmine that life as he knew it has come to an end: 'Adam Habibi, you're old enough to understand this is the beginning of a war' (*BA*, 1).[15] Unlike all the other members of this family, who do not intend to hide themselves behind the veil of ignorance, Adam – with a distorted perception of reality, even though witnessing firsthand some of the atrocities, remains incapable of developing a greater sense of awareness: 'I wonder what is going on. (…) It can't really be a war. No one is dressed in army clothes. On the screen, there are huge groups of people on the streets protesting with banners but I can't read them from here' (*BA*, 8). Regardless of the narrator's inherent 'innocence', the reader – perusing the text with one's wisdom of hindsight – gains an early insight into changing shapes and colors of the human catastrophe as evolving in Syria.

Although Sukkar, having in mind the weight of this subject-matter and her objective to make 'literature a potent source of change' (Little, 2013), expresses little interest in rewriting literary tropes. Her referential narrative is not entirely lacking in borrowings from other canonical works of fiction. One of such intertexts leads us to Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*. Be it slightly over-excessive, Sukkar's digression is only seemingly based on a false analogy. In order to grasp its essence, let us consider the protagonist's reasons for redirecting his (and our) thought to the European masterpiece: 'The day is going by slowly. (…) I walk into my room and think about what book to read today. I have just borrowed *Death in Venice* (…) from the library. (…) The main

[15] Henceforth, for any references to Sukkar's novel the 'BA' initials are to be used.

character's name looks ***grey*** (…). Gustav Aschenbach is a very ***dark*** name (…). I don't want to finish the book in case it upsets me' (*BA*, 11) (emphasis mine – R. B.). Only by confronting Adam's 'ignorance' with some critical readings of Mann's story will it become evident that such a juxtaposition is far from being unintentional. André Brink, speaking of its content, indicated – inter alia – that one of the key aspects of the novella relates to the dualism of the character's name. 'Aschenbach', as underlined by Brink, is a composite of two separate terms, namely 'death and life'. Mann's protagonist, on his journey to Venice, begins a travel/journey '(…) away from the familiar environment and the strictly ordered existence (…) to a wilderness'. In a nutshell, this decision to leave behind the familiar is simultaneously a decision to 'turn towards death' (Brink 1998, 174). Whether with full awareness or without, Adam (from Sukkar's novel) shall eventually have to embrace (like Mann's protagonist) a turn towards darkness and recognize the devastating impact of the Syrian conflict upon the life of his own family.

Another reason for acknowledging the validity of Sukkar's textual references to Mann's fiction is related to potential limitations a context-specific language imposes both upon its user and addressee. Driven by intense emotions of psychological or aesthetic nature, Aschenbach finds dressing any of the overwhelming aesthetic experiences in adequate words impossible.[16] Although Sukkar's novel concerns no dispute over 'words' that would fully encapsulate *the ungraspable beauty* (Mann's theme), it provides an intriguing narrative about a young mind with a limited scope of perception, whose language should, by definition, impede the reader's in-depth picturing of the humanitarian crisis in the beleaguered city of Aleppo. Contrary to what might be expected, Adam's limitations, his specific non-analytical perception/depiction of the Syrian tragedy, as marked by unengaged neutrality and honesty, bring an adverse effect. The pictures of violence, resounding with ghastly horror, rush through some textual cracks simply and directly into the reader's consciousness, yet without any intervention of politicized commentaries. It is so since the unrelenting pressure of the conflict does not allow Adam to stay immune to an ongoing radicalization of the outside world. Therefore,

[16] Analyzing Gustav Aschenbach, Brink (1998, 178) points at the character's difficulty in overcoming 'the limits of language' on finding in the real world an object of irresistible beauty which has to be verbally 'reproduced'.

what comes to the fore is just a visual picturing of life in Aleppo that no longer can be re-projected in vivid colors:

> All I can see from here is a group of people with banners marching on, and an ambulance in the far distance. (…) My fingers start to tremble and twitch. I back way from the door and sit in the corner of the corridor towards the wall. I grind my teeth trying to ignore the ***dark*** thoughts that start clouding my mind. I can't see the wall in front of me any more; I can only see ***grey*** triangles covering my vision (*BA*, 16; emphasis mine – R. B.).

With hindsight, it is rather undeniable that the magnitude of the Syrian catastrophe has been assessed many a time by various media covers or through journalistic accounts. Yet the fundamental question is whether what has been conveyed meets the needs of writing on Syrian devastations? Provided that the war is still brewing, it seems like a rhetorical question. Most apparently, the (reading) public shows no signs of stopping short of stories shedding light on the local drama. And even though a comprehensive (media-like) evaluation of the local humanitarian disaster must be aimed at, central to having noteworthy examinations of the war activities are – to use Karl Schlögel's terminology – individualized (also in fictionalized formats) 'mental maps'. Regardless of their individual character, which often results in 'radical subjectivization of one's imaginings' of the brutalization of personal and collective spaces (2009, 242) (translation mine – R. B.), they might turn out to be an enormous asset to the public/to the outside world. This conclusion fits in Sukkar's fictional thematization of Adam's internalization and further (re)presentation of most obscure and nasty shapes of the escalating Syrian violence.

To identify the abnormal, the protagonist is first exposed to disruptions of the habitual. In order to achieve such an effect, the novelist sets the main character, as indicated before, across the backdrop of darkening and fading colors. Initial stages of the transition, from the order into disarray of the surrounding reality, are painted in ***burgundy***. This is the moment when Adam's thoughts begin to grow shadowy as the familiar undergoes a slow process of deconstruction, yet the truth remains dormant: '(…) going to school disturbs my dark thoughts and I notice many banners on the ground ripped up with red paint on them. The streets still haven't been cleaned. There is usually

somebody who cleans the streets every morning. Nothing is normal today' (*BA*, 28). Does the Asperger's syndrome explain the character's ambiguous shifting of perspective? Yes and no. Sukkar's construction of this character alludes to more general patterns of disavowal, when individual mindsets attempt to keep ramifications of armed conflicts at bay. As Elleke Boehmer claims (2012, 36), whenever a gross crisis is at issue, different 'narratives reveal (its) pervasive spirit'. This in turn leads to a presentation of characters as trying to remain mentally aloof from traumatic experiences. In part, that is the way Sukkar portrayed the protagonist of her novel. Trying to separate himself from the outside world, Adam asserts the following: 'If I do not think about it, I can erase the memory and it will be like there was just a light earthquake. I have always wished a board and rubber would appear in our minds when we close our eyes so we could rewrite our memories' (*BA*, 57). The above conclusion demarcates a specific abruptness within the protagonist's life-storytelling. According to Boehmer, whenever 'an inability to name or confront the latent problem' appears, one observes within a given narrative 'suspended action', which can be regarded as an 'indication of systemic disorder' (2012, 35). Here, it is the Syrian conflict which persistently intrudes into the order of a 'normal' life, disorienting and making the individual relapse to denial. In the case of Sukkar's protagonist, it relates to a constant struggle between intrusive manifestations of the cruelties of war and Adam's (dis)advantage of unawareness. Yet, detached from the real, even Adam eventually cannot avoid responding to what is happing beyond his personal safety zone: 'Our lives had a perfect routine that I was so comfortable living in, and now (…) [t]he war holds so much uncertainty above my head like a ***grey*** cloud waiting to pour and thunder down' (*BA*, 57).

All of the above might add up to an impression that a depiction of war traumas, when observed through a distorted lens of a fourteen-year-old boy, must be rather flawed. Therefore, the author proposes an alternative (yet complementary) insight into the actual pain and suffering inflicted by anonymous perpetrators upon innocent victims. This time it is Adam's sister, who, opposed to circumventing honest descriptions, relates in 'her own chapter' (the only one where the leading voice has been given to an adult) the disturbing experiences of a tortured mind. Yasmine's account turns into ***dark indigo*** to imply a gloomier and ultra-intense rendition of local brutality. As a potential political enemy, she has been abducted by 'soldiers' of the regime and subjected to 'coordinated destruction'. This term, used after Charles Tilly, denotes

actions undertaken by people most often representing an ideological or political organization whose sole objective, 'by deployment of coercive means', is to do 'damage to persons' or to 'annihilate' anyone who falls into the category of a political *other* (2003, 14). Fully conscious and equipped with adequate words, Yasmine bombards us with drastic descriptions of agony. With her uncensored language, one learns about the ugliest side/dramatic colors of the Syrian war:

> He comes closer and licks my belly button. I am on display. I start to repeat my prayers in my mind hoping I won't feel any pain. Only I do. I have never screamed this loud. I have never even thought my voice box could reach this high. He hooks the fish hook into my belly button and I look down to a river of blood pouring down to my knees. I scream and shout for the help of God with all my strength (*BA*, 100).

Unfortunately, the imprints of war, as always, are indelible and start resounding in *everyone's mindset*. One way or another, participating (involuntarily) in the atrocities, Syrians are doomed to befoul themselves with irresistible hatred. Yasmine is no exception. Even though her blasphemous thoughts are understandable, given what has been done to her, we see her becoming another cog in the machine of war: 'Curse you people (…) you ruined our lives (…) CURSE YOU! I have a war going on in my mind, feelings of fear, hatred and sorrow thrown into conflict with one another' (*BA*, 96). After Yasmine's testimony, the remainder of the book comes to the '(ab)normal', once again narrated by Adam. What has not changed, however, concerns the equally ominous colors by means of which Yasmine's brother continues to 'paint' other – devoid of any consolation – stories/pictures/drawings of contemporary Syria.

With the continuous gradation of tone, ***brown*** becomes another color to suggest an overwhelming sense of loneliness and isolation of the life in Aleppo. Wolfgang Hallet, discussing the necessity of literary discourse to touch upon ethical issues, points out that characters happen to be designed in a way as to 'offer the reader insights into psychological (states of mind)', which in turn allows one to see the full dimensionality of given 'socio-political spaces' (2008, 195). What is then Adam's mental framework? The longer he is exposed to the ashes of what used to be the city of vivid colors, the more

perplexed and despondent he becomes. With Yasmine and his brother Isa, both missing; with Khalid, Adam's brother, mutilated; with his mother, dead; and his father, on the verge of insanity, the young boy's disorientation makes him retreat to the claustrophobic room of childish, yet forgone innocence: 'I go to my room (…) I have a pile of drawings on my desk but I have no space to hang them on the wall. The top one is of Isa smiling (…). I try to speak to him but he isn't answering me. (…) Do you know where Yasmine is? (…) Come help me Isa. Come back Isa' (*BA*, 117). But seeking asylum by the young Syrian is to no avail. Given Hallet's view on a potential correlation between the characters' psychological profiles and the public realm they represent, Aleppo – its every nook and cranny – has changed into an entrapment, a maze of endless suffering, a place in which the dawn of each day brings another confirmation of the utter human despair.

In a description of Wilson's interview with Sukkar, one reads that her novel '(…) pulls no punches in its depiction of the reality of war in Syria' (Willson 2014). As indicated before, in order to enhance the impact of this narrative, the author gives voice to a politically unengaged and 'inoperative' minor who, due to his intellectual disabilities, is incapable of grading the scale or defining the actual nature of the Syrian cataclysm. Hence, a critical evaluation of the provided imagery seems to have been ceded to the text's recipients. To quote Hallet, ethical responses to a given story derive from two interrelated elements. Firstly, it becomes evident that some questions of moral gravity are inscribed into the very plot and its leading characters; secondly, 'the reader's own social space and life' enables him/her to read a given narrative's ethical significance (Hallet 2008, 197), which most apparently shall go far beyond a mere recognition of the text's 'literariness'. Thus, the latter part of Sukkar's book, more intensely than before, is imbued with some drastic scenes like the one below, which – as one may presume – leave no one (especially 'decent' individuals) indifferent:

> I push my head up to see better and the seven men that had their eyes covered and were leaning with their mouths open on the pavement now have blood all over them and broken faces. There is one man left and the soldier steps on his head and in my mind I can see the way his mouth cracks open in slow motion. Blood flies everywhere. I always read in books about violent scenes with blood everywhere but I was never able

> to imagine how blood can fly everywhere. Khalid pushes me down and tries to cover my eyes but I have seen everything and now I am shaking. How could this happen? Why did they do that to them?' (*BA*, 123).

Hence, apart from the protagonists' relative awareness and depiction of the acts of violence, there is still room for an inquiry into what else is needed for an in-depth understanding of the Syrian tragedy. The puzzle, I would argue, foregrounds the reader crossing the threshold of Adam's limited perspective. Should one corroborate the validity of Brigit Neumann's claim that '(…) literature is not a closed system, but a part of the principal meaning-making processes' (2008a, 335), then on the basis of Sukkar's narrative, and particularly in light of such fragments as the one about the 'blood all over the place', it is exactly up to the reading public to position themselves in a way as to acknowledge the conflict's barbarity.

Regardless of their potentially deficient insights into Syrian matters, Western readers would probably agree with Tilly's (2003, 75) assertion that whenever 'the boundaries' of a given socio-political order (working rather effectively in pre-war Syria) 'are blurred, violence increases and becomes more salient'. Equipped with this knowledge, we follow Sukkar's story as unfolding within the remaining parts of the novel, wherein Adam leads the narrative by painting the real through dull and depressing colors; and more importantly, by posing and leaving some groundbreaking questions for *others* (namely us) to answer:

> I remember when blood made me vomit and made my head spin, now blood is like water and body parts are parcels. I don't even know why there's war. Why is there a revolution? Why are they taking my family? What happened while I was painting and going to school? Why is everyone suddenly talking about politics when they used to talk about art, fashion, religion and travelling? 'What happened!' I shout and scream. 'What happened!' (*BA*, 148).

As underlined by Neumann, 'literary texts, alongside other artistic and non-artistic objectifications such as newspapers, Web sites, pictures or films, are products of their contexts' (2008b, 134). In this sense, the novel centers on Syrian war experiences trying to unveil the brutality of life in Aleppo,

which serves as a symbol of the local humanitarian catastrophe. To recognize the situation, in political/legal/moral terms, as an aberration, and to bring the atrocities to an end, one must be confronted with some of the most disturbing pictures of that distant, yet deepening crisis. Thus, the objective of Sukkar's narrative to highlight the intensification of Adam's thoughts by references to certain colors of despondency like ***dark blue***, ***brown*** or ***black***:

> I am painting the scene outside today. It looks scary. There is blood and in the distance there's a collapsed building. I'm painting the blood on the floor with real blood. I'm happy that I'm painting even though I am painting a sad scene. I finish the painting (…) taking a pencil and sketching Baba [Adam's father] holding Khalid's hands with blood dripping. I fill him in with different colors especially ***navy blue*** and ***black***. Because that's the way he made me feel (…) (*BA*, 171).

Beyond doubt, the reality of Syrian (non-)existence, as depicted by the author, seems to bring a devastating effect first on individual and further on collective mindsets. Particularly, the idea of collective consciousness might be of interest to this research. Astrid Erll or Ansgar Nűning, who reiterate their views on literary fiction as molding national experiences/mindsets, point out that narratives of this kind give room to '(…) conceiving of shared values and norms, establishing and maintaining concepts of collective identity' (2005, 275). Sukkar's fiction seems to play the role of an inverted version of such literature. Instead of highlighting a sense of shared Syrian identity, her work provides a national framework of Syria as shattered into pieces, thus bereft of any normative standards of socio-political coexistence. Syria today, as 'painted' in the text, appears as a reflection of Eliot's 'Waste Land'. With death, immorality and the lack of sympathy towards fellow-men, the author denied any presence of the imperative for interhuman (national) unity. The only constitutive element of the aforementioned identity, by means of which one has a chance to understand Syrian (mis-)fortunes, boils down to a sort of spiritual atrophy of the socio-political fabric. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Adam's young mind, trapped in this world, eventually loses the distinction of colors: 'I wanted to get up and paint but I had nowhere to paint. We were all rolled up under one cover like sardines. If someone had come in and seen us they might even have thought we were dead. Nobody

moved and hardly anybody breathed. There is no more color in Aleppo. Everything is ***grey***' (*BA*, 195) (emphasis mine – R. B.). In the end, most vexing of all is the question regarding any resolution to this nightmare. Some of the scenes, however, which end the novel provide us with ambiguous answers. Yasmine and Khalid have been reunited with the family. We see them leave Aleppo and head towards a potential safe haven in Damascus, with a chance to be relocated later on to one of the refugee camps in Turkey. Unfortunately, only Yasmine and Adam do reach their destination. No definite conclusion is given. Instead, Sukkar projects upon Adam a vision of the future, with a faintly projected optimism of the 'final chapter' to be nonetheless underlined with lingering pessimistic undertones.

Again, one observes Adam's shift of perspective as marked by another change of colors that serves to define his current mental condition. The protagonist's mind, at this point, is set on an '***apricot***' mode of thinking. Prior to such envisioned brightness, there is Adam's narrative which reveals how devastating effect that war in fact has had on him: 'I feel like I'm drowning. There are so many holes in my heart. I can't feel them up. I only have Yasmine left now. I miss the thought of mama smiling at me (…). I miss the look on Baba's face (…). I miss watching my brothers argue and tease' (*BA*, 245). At the very end of the story, in the final paragraph of the book, the reader observes Adam sitting in his aunt's home, in Damascus preparing himself once again for painting: 'He picks the color red and starts to fill in the sketch of Baba's face. He is smiling in the picture and there are no bags under his eyes. Our house is in the background. There is ***no grey color in sight***' (*BA*, 251) (emphasis mine – R. B.). An immediate interpretation might suggest that a victimized individual holds on to the vivid imagery where death, desolation and darkness have been superseded by life, high spirits and clarity. In a paradoxical twist, Adam tries to reestablish the colors of Syria, from which I infer that Sukkar places 'everyone involved' either in the realm of struggles for or resistances to groundbreaking experiences, a tactic rather typical of (post-)conflict societies.

Erin Daly and Jeremy Sarkin underline that what matters in a myriad of public narratives, wherein the dynamics of a socio-political changeover happens to be 'vividly' thematized, relates to the wrongs of the *seemingly* bygone. In accordance with their claim, what any post-conflict society '(…) takes from the past will determine in part how it brings its history into the future' (2007, 18). Given that, averting one's eyes from traumas of the past

turns out to be ineffective. Also, by assuming an escapist attitude to embrace a less discomforting prospect of the present, one is destined to be led astray. From a certain angle, what we find in the final section of Sukkar's story is a 'resolution' formulated accordingly. By leaving behind the 'conflict zone', people become ready and willing to acknowledge the (un)articulated policy of forgetting and denial. Therefore, the ultimate change of colors, the protagonist's abrupt dismissal of 'what-is-not-bright', though understandable, should be in fact read as a red light/a warning not to embrace a misguiding principle of non-remembering about the dark shadows of the Syrian war. By analogy, a good lesson has been provided by post-Troubles Northern Ireland, wherein some anonymous authors of recently painted Belfast murals hail a constructive approach to the nation in crisis. In a nutshell, it could be worded as follows – 'building our future, we need to examine what happened to us/with us in the past'.[17] In other words, any form of intentional amnesia has to be reckoned detrimental to healing both the individual and collective mindset.

Overall, it seems of utmost importance to conclude with the status of the author and her narrative. To answer the question, posed for the entire analysis, I would like to draw on Nadine Gordimer's conclusions pertaining to 'political writing'. From her perspective, it is crucial not to forget, even if inadvertently, that 'morals and politics have a family connection. Politics' ancestry is morality (…). If fiction accepts the third presence within the sheets it is in full cognizance of (…) politics' in writing should denote (Gordimer 2000, 5). First, our understanding of what is political in fiction must be consistent with her stipulation that such narratives cannot be constructed and construed as siding with 'politicized' standpoints. As she claimed, literature of the kind which gets involved in matters of public significance has more to do with ethical intervention. Especially, if an author has been nurtured in an 'unsafe environment' or identifies him/herself with a similar milieu. When his/her mindset perfectly understands the logic of a given war/conflict, he/she becomes part of a certain historical context and finds it paradigmatic to 'document' the pain and suffering. It merits a quick reminder that Sukkar, when interviewed, went so far as to reveal – *expressis verbis* – that

[17] See Belfast tourist guidelines, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5IZF0E8deEI, date of access: 03.06.2017. For a detailed analysis of contemporary Northern Irish fiction, which deals with that troublesome legacy of the past, see Bartnik (2017).

she 'felt compelled to write it all' (2014); that the objective was to speak her mind and raise awareness about the Syrian predicament by constructing an unorthodox but sincere presentation of the local trauma. In this manner, she has placed herself in line with those novelists whose moral standards of decency have never allowed them to remain indifferent towards humanitarian crises/human tragedies/war apocalypses. Therefore, I recognize Sukkar as a moralist and her novel as an important fictional framework for ethical reflections on the disconcerting atrophy of life in contemporary Syria.

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Alternative Ascendancies: Anglo-Irish Identities in the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract: The common perception of the Anglo-Irish, or the Protestant Ascendancy – the Anglophone, predominantly Church-of-Ireland, and essentially Britocentric aristocracy, gentry, and professional class, which played a dominant role in the social, economic, political, and cultural life of Ireland from the seventeenth to the early twentieth century – is of a community which, despite its privileged position in Irish society, was nonetheless, in consequence of its colonial roots and its isolation from and distrust of the country's Catholic majority, paradoxically always a community in decline, passively clinging to the memories of the past and unable to play a constructive role in the formation of the cultural identity of a modern, independent Ireland. The paper takes an issue with this interpretation of the contribution of the Ascendancy to Irish culture, particularly in the nineteenth century; taking the examples of three Romantic and Victorian Ascendancy writers, Lady Morgan, Sir Samuel Ferguson, and George Moore, it argues that their vision of Ireland was much more open-minded, inclusive, and progressive than the popular myths of the Ascendancy, such as in particular the tradition of Big House fiction, would lead most readers to believe.

Key words: Anglo-Irish identity, Ireland, 19th century, Protestant Ascendancy

Speaking on 11 June 1925 in the Senate of the Irish Free State as it debated the proposal to effectively outlaw divorce in Ireland, William Butler Yeats said:

> I think it is tragic that within three years of this country gaining its independence we should be discussing a measure which a minority of this nation considers to be grossly oppressive. I am proud to consider myself a typical man of that minority.

> We against whom you have done this thing are no petty people. We are one of the great stocks of Europe. We are the people of Burke; we are the people of Grattan; we are the people of Swift, the people of Emmet, the people of Parnell. We have created the most of the modern literature of this country. We have created the best of its political intelligence. Yet I do not altogether regret what has happened. I shall be able to find out, if not I, my children will be able to find out whether we have lost our stamina or not. You have defined our position and given us a popular following. If we have not lost our stamina then your victory will be brief, and your defeat final, and when it comes this nation may be transformed (Pearce 1961, 99).

Yeats's passionate defence of the right of Irish Protestants not to be subjected to the imposition of legislation based on the teachings of the Catholic Church in the area of family life constituted one of the most powerful expressions of what was perhaps the most significant social dilemma facing post-independence Ireland: the definition of the role, in the public life of the country and in its social and cultural make-up, of its minority Protestant community, and in particular of its most influential section – the predominantly Anglican aristocracy, gentry, and upper-middle-class business and professional circles, descended, for the most part, from Anglo-Norman and/or English settlers and maintaining a distinctive (if hybrid) Anglo-Irish identity, based on a combination of a broad immersion in and commitment to British culture and values on the one hand and a strong sense of rootedness in the specific regional context of Ireland on the other. This section of Irish society, known from the late 18th century as the Protestant Ascendancy, had from the seventeenth century dominated the social, economic, political, and cultural life of Ireland, even if from the beginning of the nineteenth century its near-total grip on power began to loosen as a result of the gradual emancipation of the country's Catholic majority. As Ireland moved towards independence, the tension between its two cultural traditions and mentalities became more and more pronounced: the Protestant Ascendancy's dual sense of British as well as Irish identity, and the multidimensional British and Irish culture they espoused, stood in direct opposition to the concept of Irishness which underpinned the thinking of the more radical supporters of the pro-independence movement, and which would eventually find its expression

in the Constitution of Ireland, adopted in 1937 under the influence of arguably the most powerful ideologue and politician of early and mid-twentieth-century Ireland, Éamon de Valera. The world of the Ascendancy – aristocratic, Anglophone, Anglican, relatively liberal and outward-looking in social terms, and concentrated around the 'Big Houses' on their country estates on the one hand, and around Dublin's Trinity College and the opulent Georgian mansions in Merrion Square and other fashionable areas in the southern part of the city on the other – could not have been more different from an ideal of Ireland which lay at the heart of the ideology which was to shape the newly-formed Irish state in the early years of its existence – an Ireland that was essentially rustic, plebeian, inward-looking, socially conservative, monolithically Catholic, deeply rooted in its Gaelic heritage, and defining itself primarily through its fierce, not to say obsessive, opposition to, and rejection of, all things British. It is, therefore, hardly surprising that the emergence of a new Ireland in the 1920s dramatically accelerated the ongoing process of the erosion of the social, economic, and cultural position of the Ascendancy; within a few years, a significant proportion of Anglo-Irish families left the country, while those who remained found themselves, as a community, for the most part marginalised in the new political reality of the Irish Free State. The demise of the Ascendancy as a social class found its symbolic expression in the disappearance from the Irish landscape of the Big Houses, a process which was initiated by the methodical burning, by the Irish Republican Army, of nearly 300 Ascendancy properties during the British-Irish War (1919–1921) and the subsequent Irish Civil War (1922–1923), and which continued as a number of estates which escaped destruction during that period gradually fell into neglect and disrepair and were eventually demolished, often despite their historical and cultural associations and significance – as was the case, for example, with the Gregory family home in Coole Park, Co. Galway, the iconic symbol of the Irish Literary Revival immortalised by Yeats in poems such as 'The Wild Swans at Coole', 'Coole Park, 1929', and 'Coole and Ballylee, 1931'.

The central significance of the image of the Big House as a symbol of the Protestant Ascendancy lies, indeed, at the very heart of the distinctive literary and cultural heritage of the Anglo-Irish – a tradition which played a dominant role in the literature of Ireland in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Drawing a parallel between the literature of Ascendancy Ireland and the writing of nineteenth-century Russia on the one hand,

and the literature of the post-Civil-War American South on the other, Julian Moynahan writes:

> A paradox of this literature (…) is that it flowers just when the social formation producing it enters a phase of contraction and decline. As Anglo-Irish literature 'arises', the Anglo-Irish begin to go down in the world. (…) It appears that the relation between accomplishment in literary pursuits and in the world is often inverse. The literary muse, at least in certain periods, dearly loves a loser (Moynahan 1995, 9–10).

A result of that paradox is that works constituting the literature of Ascendancy Ireland in general, and the tradition of Big House fiction in particular, tend to be melancholy and elegiac rather than upbeat and celebratory, focusing on the isolation of the Big Houses and the alienation of their privileged, affluent, Anglophone, Anglican, and broadly pro-British inhabitants in an environment physically if not economically dominated by poor Catholic tenant farmers, increasingly self-aware of their disadvantaged socio-economic position and gradually more and more vocal in their opposition to the existing social and political order.

This is precisely what characterises the vision of provincial Ireland in the novel generally recognised as the founding text of the Anglo-Irish tradition, Maria Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* (1800), a semi-satirical, semi-sentimental story of the fall of an Ascendancy family of the Rackrents, whose combination of selfishness, improvidence, and naivety eventually results in the loss of their eponymous estate to Jason Quirk, a ruthless and manipulative lawyer son of the family's old retainer, representative of the new, up-and-coming Catholic middle class which was, at the turn of the nineteenth century, beginning to undermine the Ascendancy establishment. In her later, more complex works, such as *The Absentee* (1812) and *Ormond* (1817), Edgeworth on the one hand maintains her criticism of such common aspects of the socio-economic model prevalent across Ascendancy Ireland as absentee landlordism and unfair treatment of tenants, while on the other hand proposing alternative solutions aimed at safeguarding the future of the Ascendancy through a rationalisation and modernisation of the operation of their estates; her vision is, however, quite conservative in its unquestioning acceptance of the underlying principles of the existing social and economic

order, and in its promotion of eighteenth-century-style enlightened aristocratic paternalism, personified by Edgeworth's idealised landlord, *Ormond*'s Sir Herbert Annaly.

In the Victorian and Edwardian era, the Big Houses remained, on the surface of things, the key symbols of the continued power and influence of the Ascendancy, and of the apparent stability of the existing social order. At the same time, the more incisive studies of the Anglo-Irish society of the period reflected the increasing vulnerability of the Ascendancy world, both in terms of the economic impact of land agitation and reforms which removed many of the privileges previously enjoyed by the landed aristocracy and gentry, and as regards the more subtle processes of the undermining of traditional Ascendancy values by the often ruthless intruders from outside of their own community. This is what happens in the best works of Somerville and Ross – two Irish women novelists, Edith Somerville and Violet Martin (who wrote under the name of Martin Ross), who jointly published a range of works of fiction depicting the life of the Ascendancy class at the turn of the century. Their short stories *Some Experiences of an Irish RM* (1899), *Further Experiences of an Irish RM* (1908), and *In Mr Knox's Country* (1915) may be humorous accounts of the social life of Irish country gentry, focusing around various comic incidents of daily life, parties, hunting expeditions, and other rural pursuits; however, their best novel, *The Real Charlotte* (1894), a rich panorama of a rural Irish community the focal point of which is Bruff, the home of the local Anglo-Irish family of the Dysarts, offers a much more pessimistic vision of the Ascendancy world: the Dysarts are the dominant presence in the community in name only, with Sir Benjamin Dysart suffering from physical paralysis, and his children, Christopher and Pamela, being unable to act assertively and decisively, whether in the social sphere or in their personal lives – while real power in the community is exercised by the ruthless middle-class social climbers, the land agent Roddy Lambert and the ambitious and manipulative Charlotte Mullen.

The dramatic social changes of the 1920s and the physical destruction of many of the ancestral homes of the Ascendancy added a new dimension to post-independence Big House fiction – an elegiac tone of nostalgic sentiment for a tradition which may well have outlived its time, and which may well have been doomed to be consigned to the past, but whose demise had been cruelly – and ultimately undeservedly – accelerated by the circumstances of history. Perhaps the best example of that kind of response to the collapse

of the world of the Anglo-Irish is Elizabeth Bowen's *The Last September* (1929) – a subtle, delicate, and yet entirely unsentimental study of an Anglo-Irish family circle during the British-Irish War. In its vision of the spiritual and emotional sterility of the Naylor family and their friends, Bowen's novel resembles *The Real Charlotte*: both works diagnose the Ascendancy as a social class which is defined by its past, and which may be tentatively clinging on to its present, but which appears to have no vision of the future, and is therefore living on borrowed time, doomed to lose its privileged position and to dissolve in the new social reality of a new post-Ascendancy Ireland. Bowen's novel goes, however, one step further than *The Real Charlotte*: the poignant closing paragraphs of *The Last September*, describing the burning of the Naylors' house at Danielstown, not only mark the symbolic end of the world of the Protestant Ascendancy, but also, at the same time, give birth to a new national myth:

> For in February, before those leaves had visibly budded, the death – execution, rather – of the three houses, Danielstown, Castle Trent, Mount Isabel, occurred in the same night. A fearful scarlet ate up the hard spring darkness; indeed, it seemed that an extra day, unreckoned, had come to an abortive birth that these things might happen. It seemed, looking from east to west at the sky tall with scarlet, that the country itself was burning; while to the north the neck of mountains before Mount Isabel was frightfully outlined. The roads in unnatural dusk ran dark with movement, secretive or terrified; not a tree, brushed pale by wind from the flames, not a cabin pressed in despair to the bosom of night, not a gate too starkly visible but had its place in the design of order and panic. At Danielstown, half-way up the avenue under the beeches, the thin iron gate twanged (missed its latch, remained swinging aghast) as the last unlit car slid out with the executioners bland from accomplished duty. The sound of the last car widened, gave itself to the open and empty country and was demolished. Then the first wave of a silence that was to be ultimate flowed back, confident, to the steps. Above the steps, the door stood open hospitably upon a furnace.

> Sir Richard and Lady Naylor, not saying anything, did not look at each other, for in the light from the sky they saw too distinctly (Bowen [1929] 1998, 206).

The heritage of the Ascendancy, embodied in the tradition of the Big House novel, continues to provide an important source of inspiration to Irish writers to the present day – examples of twentieth and indeed twenty-first-century practitioners of this sub-genre of fiction include authors such as Molly Keane, William Trevor, and Jennifer Johnston. However varied their responses to that tradition are, they all ultimately take as their starting point the conventional image of the world of the Ascendancy shaped and preserved in the Irish national consciousness through the power of narratives which between them constitute one of the key components of the modern Irish national mythology. The communal identity of the Anglo-Irish that lies at the heart of the myth of the Ascendancy is therefore something of a mixture of the traits of the Rack-rents, the Annalys, the Dysarts, the Naylors, and other families from the fictional Big Houses – unquestioningly supportive of the existing social order, broadly Britocentric in terms of their cultural attitudes, loyal to the Church of Ireland if not necessarily very devout, respectable if occasionally eccentric, reasonably well-educated but not particularly imaginative – but, most importantly, essentially passive, unable or unwilling to move with the times, to recognise the inevitability of the impending end of their world, or indeed to put up any form of effective resistance.

And yet, paradoxically, well-established in the cultural imagination of the Irish people and in the popular perception of Irish history and culture as this vision of the Ascendancy is, the literature of nineteenth-century Ireland reveals, on closer inspection, a much more varied picture – one which demonstrates that it is misleading to talk about Ascendancy culture and about its literary imagination as if it was a homogeneous entity. The literary heritage of the Anglo-Irish class turns out, on closer scrutiny, to be indeed a much richer and much more dynamic body of work than the popular perception of their place and role in Irish history might suggest, reflecting a level of diversity, complexity and indeed paradoxicality of cultural identities that could be found among the nineteenth-century Ascendancy establishment that goes far beyond the conventional perception of that class both within and outside of Ireland. Nineteenth-century Irish literature thus simultaneously both constructs and undermines its own vision of the world, offering its readers a multiplicity

of stories, ideas, and images which between them call into question many of the received perceptions of, and assumptions about, the past and the present of Ireland and its people.

One early example of that kind of diversity within the Ascendancy world is provided by the life and career of Sydney, Lady Morgan (1778?–1859). The elder of the two daughters of an Irish actor and theatre manager of Catholic descent, Robert Owenson, and his English Methodist wife Jane Hill, Sydney Owenson had none of the privileged upbringing of her contemporary Maria Edgeworth: Robert Owenson's changing fortunes in the volatile world of the theatre meant that periods of the family's relative prosperity were interspersed with times of significantly reduced financial circumstances, which forced Sydney to seek employment as a governess or a lady companion with Ascendancy families. By a stroke of good fortune, all of Sydney Owenson's employers recognised her intelligence and her creative potential, and encouraged her in her intellectual and artistic pursuits; she soon began to publish poetry and fiction, and in 1806 produced a novel which turned out not only to play a defining role in her own future life and literary career, but also to have brought a new dimension into the history of Irish literature – *The Wild Irish Girl*, a key text in the development of Irish Romantic Nationalism.

Published in London and designed essentially as a fictional introduction to Ireland for relatively uninformed English readers, *The Wild Irish Girl* is constructed as a conventional travel narrative: the main section of the novel consists of an epistolary account, written by a young English aristocrat Horatio M___, of his experiences as he travels across Ireland while on a visit to his father's estates on the country's Atlantic coast. Horatio's initially reluctant and prejudiced approach to Ireland – he is effectively banished there by his father as a punishment for his assorted financial as well as romantic misdemeanours – is gradually replaced by a sense of curiosity and indeed awe as he embarks on what is effectively an extended course of practical study of Irish history and culture. In a manner typical of the period, reminiscent of Edgeworth's *Castle Rackrent* and foreshadowing the approach Sir Walter Scott would take, in relation to Scotland, in his Waverley novels, Owenson supplements Horatio's first-person record of his time in Ireland by extensive annotations, some of them scholarly and antiquarian and some anecdotal in character, on a range of matters relating to the country's ancient language, history, and traditions. This is, however, where the parallels with *Castle Rackrent* end: while Edgeworth, a quintessentially Ascendancy writer, tends

to think about the Gaelic heritage of Ireland and its traditional ways of living in terms of mere anthropological curiosities, Owenson, by bringing her narrator right into the middle of what is still left of ancient Ireland, embraces and celebrates the country's Gaelic past. Following an accident sustained while climbing the crumbling walls of the half-ruined Castle of Inismore, Horatio becomes a guest of its owner, the Prince of Inismore, one of the last surviving members of old Gaelic aristocracy, and the symbol of the fast-fading glory of old, pre-Ascendancy Ireland:

> What a contrast to this saintly being [Father John, the Inismore chaplain] now struck my view; a form almost gigantic in stature, yet gently thrown forward by evident infirmity; limbs of Herculean mould, and a countenance rather furrowed by the inroads of vehement passions, than the deep trace of years. Eyes still emanating the ferocity of an unsubdued spirit, yet tempered by a strong trait of benevolence; which, like a glory, irradiated a broad expansive brow, a mouth on which even yet the spirit of convivial enjoyment seemed to hover, though shaded by two large whiskers on the upper lip, which still preserved their ebon hue; while time or grief had bleached the scattered hairs, which hung their snows upon the manly temple. The drapery which covered this striking figure was singularly appropriate, and, as I have since been told, strictly conformable to the ancient costume of the Irish nobles (Owenson 1806, 1:143–145).

Horatio soon falls in love with the Prince of Inismore's daughter, Lady Glorvina – a harp-playing, erudite, passionately patriotic young woman who introduces him to the traditional culture of her nation. Their eventual marriage becomes a symbol of Owenson's vision for the future of Ireland – one that is, in its recognition of the diversity of the country's heritages, and in its plea for their peaceful co-existence, strikingly modern, particularly when compared to the conservative views of her contemporaries such as Maria Edgeworth:

> In this the dearest, most sacred, and most lasting of all human ties, let the names of Inismore and M___ be inseparably blended, and the distinctions of English and Irish, of protestant

> and catholic, for ever buried. And, while you look forward with hope to this family alliance being prophetically typical of a national unity of interests and affections between those who may be factiously severed, but who are naturally allied, lend your own individual efforts towards the consummation of an event so devoutly to be wished by every liberal mind, by every benevolent heart (Owenson 1806, 3:258–259).

The popular success of *The Wild Irish Girl* made Sydney Owenson's name, on the Dublin literary stage as well as in London, though her unorthodox views caused a considerable amount of controversy and disquiet among the Ascendancy establishment. This, however, did not deter Owenson from pursuing her liberal agenda, both as a writer and through the influence she began to exert as an increasingly significant figure on the broader Irish cultural and social scene: known now as Lady Morgan (she married, in 1812, a Dublin doctor Sir Charles Morgan), she created, in her house in the fashionable Kildare Street, a prominent literary *salon*. Her interests were manifold: she supported the cause of the educational and social emancipation of women (it is worth noting that in 1837, she was to become the first woman writer to be awarded an annual civil-list pension), and she was highly critical of the conservative regimes which, following the Treaty of Vienna, resumed control over France and the Italian states – her memoirs of travel to those countries, appreciated by radicals such as Byron, got her into trouble with both conservative critics in Britain and the authorities across a number of countries in Europe, from which both her books and she herself were at various points banned. It was, however, in the context of Ireland that Lady Morgan made political points that were the most controversial from the point of view of her own Ascendancy class – her novel *O'Donnel* (1814) gave an early and strong expression of support to what would, some ten years later, become the key issue in Irish politics – the question of the political emancipation of Roman Catholics.

The basic framework of *O'Donnel* is, in some respects, similar to that of *The Wild Irish Girl* and numerous other Ascendancy novels of the period: it offers a picture of Ireland – in this case, particularly of the province of Ulster, which young Sydney Owenson got to know when her father briefly managed a travelling theatrical company there, and subsequently when she joined the household of the Duke and Duchess of Abercorn at Baron's Court,

Co. Tyrone – perceived largely from the perspective of English visitors; the focus of the story, at least in its opening sections, is on a party of English aristocrats and their associates as they travel along the north coast of Ireland en route to pay a visit to an acquaintance of theirs, a local Church of Ireland bishop. The narrative offers standard descriptions of the country and its people, as well as conventional, and often comic, anecdotes about eccentric rural inn-keepers and overturned carriages; however, as the story unfolds, the novel's plot takes an unexpected turn: the English visitors encounter a mysterious stranger, who eventually turns out to be a descendant of the noble family of the O'Donnels, the ancient kings of Donegal. As a Roman Catholic, and thus a victim of the anti-Catholic Penal Laws, Colonel O'Donnel, despite his aristocratic birth and gentleman's education, has been reduced to having to earn his living serving in foreign armies; he may be every inch a gentleman, loyal to the British crown and, despite his poverty, perfectly at home among British nobility, but his religion prevents him from taking a place he deserves in the Irish – and indeed British – society of his day. It is in that context that, in his early conversation with O'Donnel, the thoughtful Englishman Mr Glentworth, who, despite being an absentee landlord, does nonetheless display an excellent understanding of the condition of Ireland, conveys the novel's central political message:

> 'It is indeed,' said the stranger, 'an odd paradox, a most irrational expectation, that a participation in the blessings of good government, and a share in the conduct of the state, should dispose any set of men the more readily to conspiracy and rebellion. If these afford objects of apprehension and anxiety, what should not be feared from the jealousy of the excluded, and the despair of the disqualified.'
> 'Undoubtedly,' said Mr Glentworth. 'And this very *ascendancy* is not more an evidence of such apprehension, than it is the cause of their propriety. Ascendancy is a relative term; it is an assumption on one part of the population, at the immediate expense of the interests, happiness, and undisputed rights of the rest: not a superabundance of power and authority *added to the one scale*, but a portion of protection and security *taken from the other*. Where ascendancy is claimed by one tribe or case, over others, subsisting under the same government, there is little chance

> of internal union, or of safety for either party. For duties and rights are inseparable, and the voluntary dereliction of the first necessarily implies an abandonment of the second. The surest pledge, therefore, which can be given of the loyalty of the excluded, is their constant and unremitting efforts to be admitted to the rights and privileges of the government under which they live' (Owenson 1814, 1:211–212).

Lady Morgan's support for Catholic Emancipation finds its expression in the structure of the novel as well – as the story progresses, its focus shifts to the story of O'Donnel, and his faithful foster-brother and servant Patrick McRory, and to O'Donnel's eventual marriage to the former governess of Mr Glentworth's stepdaughters, who, by a number of twists of the novel's highly convoluted plot, inherits the familial estates of the O'Donnels, which she can then, through her marriage, return into her husband's rightful hands. In this way, the novel not only inverts the gender pattern of *The Wild Irish Girl*, but in doing so also undermines the underlying principle of Ascendancy authority: rather than, as was the case in the earlier novel, proposing a peaceful merger of the two traditions of Ireland under the (male) authority of the Protestant M___ family, *O'Donnel* recognises and supports the right of the displaced and underprivileged Old Irish/Catholic community to play its part in the life of modern Ireland. This is, of course, not to suggest that Lady Morgan advocates some form of Irish independence – her assumption throughout is that Catholic Emancipation should happen within the broad context of the British state – but her unequivocal support for the Catholic cause, symbolised by the choice of Colonel O'Donnel as the idealised eponymous hero of the novel, marks her off as one of the most outspokenly liberal, progressive voices in early nineteenth-century Ascendancy culture.

If Lady Morgan challenged mainstream Ascendancy opinion essentially through the expression of her liberal political opinions, the significance of the work of Sir Samuel Ferguson (1810–1886), a poet, translator, and literary critic, lies primarily in the way in which he transformed the public perception of the nature of Irish culture by promoting an inclusive, heterogeneous vision of Ireland's heritage, accommodating its Gaelic as well as Anglo-Saxon strands, and bringing it into the mainstream of Victorian Irish culture. Born, in Belfast, into an impoverished gentry family of Ulster Presbyterian stock, Ferguson trained as a lawyer and built up a career as a barrister, though his real interest

lay in literary and historical antiquarianism, which he pursued first as a personal interest, and subsequently as Deputy Keeper of the Public Records of Ireland, a prestigious civil service post to which he was appointed in 1867. His position as a prominent member of the Dublin Unionist establishment was consolidated when, in recognition of his archival work as well as his contribution to literature he was knighted in 1878, and elected President of the Royal Irish Academy in 1881.

Sir Samuel Ferguson was, of course, by no means the first collector and translator of Irish-language poetry: Charlotte Brooke published her *Reliques of Irish Poetry* in 1789, and James Hardiman's two-volume *Irish Minstrelsy, or Bardic Remains of Ireland*, a bilingual, extensively annotated collection of Irish poems from the Early Middle Ages to the modern period, with poetic translations by contemporaneous Irish poets such as Thomas Furlong, William Drummond, and John D'Alton, came out in 1831. It was in his extensive critique of Hardiman's work, published in 1834 in the newly-established *Dublin University Magazine*, which was to become Victorian Ireland's leading literary review, that Samuel Ferguson first formulated the key principles which were to determine the focus of his approach to the Irish literary heritage throughout his career:

> Let it first be our task to make the people of Ireland better acquainted with one another. We address in these pages the Protestant wealth and intelligence of the country, an interest acknowledged on all hands to be the depository of Ireland's fate for good or evil. The Protestants of Ireland are wealthy and intelligent beyond most classes, of their numbers, in the world: but their wealth has hitherto been insecure, because their intelligence has not embraced a thorough knowledge of the genius and disposition of their Catholic fellow-citizens. The genius of a people at large is not to be learned by the notes of Sunday tourists. The history of centuries must be gathered, published, studied and digested, before the Irish people can be known to the world, and to each other, as they ought to be. We hail, with daily-increasing pleasure, the spirit of research and liberality which is manifesting itself in all the branches of our national literature, but chiefly in our earlier history and antiquities – subjects of paramount importance to every people who respect,

> or even desire to respect themselves. Let us contribute our aid to the auspicious undertaking, and introduce the Saxon and the Scottish Protestant to an acquaintance with the poetic genius of a people hitherto unknown to them, as being known only in a character incompatible with sincerity or plain dealing (Ferguson 1834a, 457).

Ferguson's analysis of *Irish Minstrelsy*, while acknowledging its range and significance, takes issue with its central political message: he criticises what he perceives as Hardiman's anti-English prejudice, as well as his appropriation of the Gaelic heritage not only as an exclusive property of Ireland's Catholics, but also as an expression of the Jacobite – and thus anti-British – political sentiment:

> That the spirit of petty anti-Anglicism, sought to be imparted by Mr Hardiman throughout these annotations, is highly prejudicial to the best interests of the country, we should think will not be disputed by even the most enthusiastic advocates of Irish independence. A fretful, querulous, undignified malice, however provoked, can never be countenanced by the supporters of a manly opposition. Such rancorous and puerile malignity injures the party it would support, by justifying our want of confidence in their most generous protestations (Ferguson 1834b: 515).

Significant as Ferguson's critique of Hardiman's collection is as an expression of his position on matters of Irish cultural politics, it is, however, the role that it played in the development of Ferguson's own creative practice as a poet that is central to a full appreciation of his contribution to nineteenth-century Irish writing. At the end of the final instalment of his essay on Hardiman, Ferguson published an appendix which is, in effect, a mini-anthology of his own versions of a selection of poems included in *Irish Minstrelsy*. The nineteen poems, diverse in their historical origin and thematic range, constitute, in effect, Ferguson's first attempt to provide his own response to the Gaelic tradition of Ireland: though the majority of the poems are love songs, and the collection includes also celebrations of ancient Irish bards, of the beauty of the country's landscape, and of its tradition of generous hospitality, Ferguson does not, in line with his belief in representativeness

and inclusiveness, shy away from including a number of elegiac poems mourning the defeat of the old Gaelic order at the hands of the English. He is also concerned about the preservation, in his translations, of the aesthetic qualities of the Irish originals: he attempts to imitate their rhythm and compressed stylistic energy, which in his view can be lost in the more verbose style of Hardiman's translators, who aimed at closer textual paraphrase rather than attempting to render the spirit of the original texts. A good example of Ferguson's tone and style is offered by the opening of a rarely reprinted poem 'Agnew's Lamentation':

> My heart is in woe,
> And my soul is in trouble,
> For the mighty are low
> And abased are the noble:
>
> The sons of the Gael
> Are in exile and mourning;
> Worn, weary, and pale,
> As spent pilgrims returning;
>
> Or men who in flight
> From the field of disaster
> Beseech the black night
> On their flight to fall faster;
>
> Or seamen aghast,
> When their planks gape in sunder,
> And the waves, fierce and fast,
> Tumble through in hoarse thunder;
>
> Or men whom we see
> That have got their death omen:
> Such wretches are we
> In the chains of our foemen! (Ferguson 1834b, 532)[18]

[18] The corresponding section of the translation included in Hardiman's book, by Henry Grattan Curran, reads:

The same spirit of cultural sensitivity, openness, and inclusiveness that characterised Ferguson's early translations from the Irish can be discerned in his most important single literary work – the epic poem *Congal* (1872), a modern retelling of an ancient Ulster tale based around the life of a seventh-century king of the mediaeval kingdom of Ulaid (in the present-day counties of Antrim and Down). In his version of the tale, Ferguson offers a vision of a semi-legendary, semi-historical Ireland which is still in the process of defining its identity between traditional Celtic beliefs and Christianity, between the social model based on the dominant role of semi-independent clans and the evolving structures of feudal authority, and between a narrow local and regional perspective and an awareness of and involvement in the broader geographical, cultural, and political context, not just of the whole of Ireland, but also of other parts of the British Isles as well as Continental Europe: in the course of trying to build a coalition against

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'On the Downfall of the Gael'

Weep! weep! for agony and shame
With deepening gloom the Gael invest;
Fall'n is each proud and patriot name,
On which a nation's hope might rest.

What are they now? – a remnant spared,
Writing from desolation's tread -
Pale pilgrims, who the deep have dared,
And traced the sterile waste outspread

A shattered bark's disheartened crew
O'er-gazing from the crowded deck;
The sheeted wave that flashes through,
Or bursts above the labouring wreck.

Victims of every changing fate,
These shadows of the Gael of yore,
Whose bonds with worse corrosion eat,
Through breasts that panted free before (Hardiman 1831, 2:103–105).

his overlord and rival King Domnal, Congal travels not only to Scotland and Wales, but also to the lands of the Franks and the Saxons. The epic tone of the narrative is sustained throughout; the consistent, dignified rhythm of the poem's iambic heptameter underlines the heroic dimension of the story of Congal and his followers in a manner fully reminiscent of classical epic poetry:

> Of all the field Halt Kellach on his chair alone sat still,
> Where placed to view the battle on the airy, green-sloped hill:
> And, like a sea-rock that alone of all around stands fast,
> Mid scudding clouds, and hurrying waves, and hoarse tides racing past,
> So sat he rooted mid the rout; so, past his brazen chair
> Was poured the heavy-rolling tide of ruin and despair:
> And oft he cried to those who fled, with shrill, disdainful call,
> 'Stand fast: fear nothing: turn like men!' but none gave heed at all;
> Till, Druid Drostan hurrying by, like maniac horror-driven,
> He hailed him mid the long-hair'd rout, 'Bald-head, how fare my Seven?'
> 'Slain all,' was all the sage replied, as labouring on he went:
> Then Kellach leaned upon his couch, and said, 'I am content.'
> Nor spoke he more till Elar Derg cried, 'Old man of the chair,
> Courage: young Brasil still survives, and seeks thee everywhere,'
> And Brasil's self, emerging from the flying throng, appeared,
> Bloody and faint, but calling out incessant as he neared,
> 'Ho, father, I am with thee. Courage, father; I am here:
> Up; mount upon my shoulder: I have strength to bear thee clear.'
> And ran and knelt beside the chair, to heave him on his back;
> But as he stooped, even through the curls that clustered on his neck,
> An arrow smote him. Kellach said, ' Best so. I thank thee, God,
> That by no son of mine the path of shame will now be trod.'
> And leaned again upon his couch; and set his hoary head
> Awaiting death, with face as fixed as if already dead (Ferguson, *Congal*, 5:329–352).

In passages like this, Ferguson manages not only to manifest his fascination with Ireland's ancient Gaelic past, but also to elevate it to a level of imaginative intensity broadly comparable with some of the best work of his contemporaries: in consequence, in the history of Irish literature, *Congal* enjoys a place similar to that occupied, in the English literary tradition, by Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*. In one of the many paradoxes of Irish cultural history, it is thus owing to the work of Ferguson, a pillar of Dublin's Anglo-Irish establishment, that the ancient mythology, history, and traditions of Gaelic Ireland became recognised, in the mid-Victorian era, as an integral component of the country's shared cultural heritage.

The powerful influence of Sir Samuel Ferguson was, as acknowledged by W. B. Yeats in his poem 'To Ireland in the Coming Times', central to the development of the Irish Literary Revival – a movement dominated, as mentioned above, by Ascendancy figures such as Yeats himself, Lady Gregory, and John Millington Synge. However, the Revival's focus on Irish, and primarily Gaelic, history, tradition, and folklore mitigated against an interest in the culture of the Anglo-Irish – so it is hardly surprising that the most probing study of the Ascendancy world to have been produced by an author directly associated with the Revival should have come from a writer whose contribution to Irish literature has been not only overshadowed by the work of his contemporaries, but, it is tempting to think, almost actively neglected. George Moore (1852-1933) tends to be remembered in the context of his contribution to the mainstream English literary tradition: *A Mummer's Wife* (1885), one of the first naturalistic novels in English, is a disturbing study of alcoholism, while *Esther Waters* (1894) is in many ways a response to Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* in its unapologetically sympathetic study of a 'fallen woman' who manages to achieve a level of success in her valiant struggle to overcome the obstacles life continues to throw in her way. Among his Ireland-focused works, however, it is *A Drama in Muslin* (1886) that constitutes Moore's most significant artistic achievement; a Big House novel with a difference, it offers a challenging and controversial analysis of Ascendancy identity in the late nineteenth century.

The story of *A Drama in Muslin* is set among the aristocracy and gentry of Co. Galway during the early 1880s – a period of rural unrest following the founding, in 1879, of the Irish National Land League, an organisation aimed at supporting Irish tenant farmers against the landlords. As the story unfolds, it becomes clear that the Protestant Ascendancy is no longer

the socially homogeneous class that it used to be earlier in the century: the families of Galway landowners are a mixture of Protestants and Catholics, of old aristocrats and vulgar nouveaux-riches, of narrow-minded puritanical spinsters and unfulfilled wannabe artists. Representative of the social destabilisation of the Ascendancy class are the family of the Goulds:

> The Goulds were of an excellent county family. They had for certainly three generations lived in comfortable idleness, watching from their big square houses the different collections of hamlets toiling and moiling, and paying their rents every gale day. It was said that some ancestor, whose portrait still existed, had gone to India and come back with the money that had purchased the greater part of the property. But, be this as it may, in Galway three generations of landlordism are considered sufficient repentance for shopkeeping in Gort, not to speak of Calcutta. Since then the family history had been stainless. Father and son had in turn put their horses out to grass in April, had begun to train them again in August, had boasted at the Dublin horse-show of having been out cub-hunting, had ridden and drunk hard from the age of twenty to seventy. But, by dying at fifty-five, the late squire had deviated slightly from the regular line, and the son and heir being only twelve, a pause had come in the hereditary life of the Goulds. In the interim, however, May had apparently resolved to keep up the traditions so far as her sex was supposed to allow her (Moore 1886, 74).

The fact that the passage ends up zooming in on May Gould is not accidental: the novel as a whole looks at the Ascendancy of the 1880s from the perspective of the young women of that class – boarding-school educated, reasonably well-off, but ultimately seen, by their families, as little more than new offerings on the Dublin marriage market, making, under the watchful eyes of their mothers, their annual pilgrimage to the capital to stay in the fashionable Shelbourne Hotel and attend all the events of the social season in the hope of attracting the attention of eligible bachelors. The vision of Dublin Moore presents is devastating in its analysis of the city's – and by extension, the country's – spiritual and moral emptiness:

> The weary, the woebegone, the threadbare streets – yes, threadbare conveys the moral idea of Dublin in 1882. Stephen's Green, recently embellished by a wealthy nobleman with gravel walks, mounds and ponds, looked like a school-treat set out for the entertainment of charity children. And melancholy Merrion Square! broken pavements, unpainted hall-doors, rusty area railings, meagre outside curs hidden almost out of sight in the deep gutters – how infinitely pitiful!
>
> The Dublin streets stare the vacant and helpless stare of a beggar selling matches on a doorstep, and the feeble cries for amusement are like those of the child beneath the ragged shawl for the red gleam of a passing soldier's coat. On either side of you, there is the bawling ignorance or plaintive decay. Look at the houses! Like crones in borrowed bonnets some are fashionable with flowers in the rotting window frames – others languish in silly cheerfulness like women living on the proceeds of the pawnshop; others – those with brass-plates on the doors – are evil-smelling as the prescriptions of the threadbare doctor, bald as the bill of costs of the servile attorney. And the souls of the Dubliners blend and harmonise with their connatural surroundings.
>
> We are in a land of echoes and shadows. Lying, mincing, grimacing – careless of all but the pleasures of scandal and marriage, trailing their ignorance, arrogantly the poor shades go by. Gossip and waltz tunes are all that they know. (…) Catholic in name, they curse the Pope for not helping them in their affliction; moralists by tradition, they accept at their parties women who parade their lovers to the town from the top of a tramcar. In Dublin there is baptism in tea and communion in a cutlet (Moore 1886, 158–159).

Moore's criticism of the emptiness of Ireland's supposed attachment to traditional moral and religious values is indeed exemplified throughout the novel – despite the semblance of propriety and careful observance of the Victorian standards of respectability, the reality of the world of the Bartons, the Goulds, the Scullys, the Cullens, and their neighbours and associates

is that people have affairs, unmarried women go into hiding to give birth to secret illegitimate children, and eligible young men find women of their own social class much more sexually available than anyone in their social circle would have been prepared to admit. Religion, too, whether Protestant or Catholic, seems to be, in the lives of Moore's Ascendancy families, of very limited significance: seen by most people as either an irrelevance, or a mere routine of everyday life, or at most a mechanism of maintaining a level of social cohesion (as Mrs Barton says, 'religion is all that is respectable, 'tis you, 'tis me, it is the future of our children. Society could not hold together a moment without religion' (Moore 1886, 24)), it tends to attract few people other than socially and/or sexually unfulfilled women, who use it as a way of channelling their unspent energies and frustrated passions.

Moore's vision in *A Drama in Muslin* is not, however, altogether bleak: the novel's central character, the intelligent, thoughtful, resourceful, and empathetic Alice Barton manages to emerge from the problematic world of her social class, her family, and her religion not only personally unscathed, but indeed able to make positive choices in her own life as well as to offer support to others when circumstances require it. Despite her Catholic upbringing and the expectations of her family, Alice soon finds herself unable to accept the Christian worldview on the one hand, and the limitations imposed on her by her gender and social position on the other; she adopts a broadly secular moral vision, governed by a rational approach to life and a strong sense of compassion and empathy, and she asserts her personal and intellectual independence as she attempts to develop a career as an aspiring writer. In line with her ideals, Alice supports her friend May Gould, morally as well as financially, through the time of May's pregnancy and childbirth, and she remains loyal to her despite May's continued rejection, later on in her life, of the conventional restrictions of Victorian sexual morality. Even more significantly, Alice acts with tact, understanding, and generosity as she declines the lesbian advances of another of her friends, Lady Cecilia Cullen. As the novel draws to its close, Alice's final decision to defy the wishes of her family and the expectations of her social class and to marry, for love, a young doctor, a self-made man fully conscious of his lower-class background and deeply committed to the cause of social responsibility that he sees as integral element of his professional calling, offers a level of hope that is rare in Ascendancy fiction. Alice Barton and Edward Reed personify a more positive, progressive, optimistic future, suggesting that despite the problematic

nature of much of traditional Anglo-Irish life and values, there is nonetheless a potential among the Ascendancy, and among the new liberal Irish middle-class into which some sections of it are beginning to be transformed, to respond, and to lead a national response, to the moral and social challenges of the modern world. On their departure from the Bartons' estate of Brookfield, on the day of their wedding, the Reeds pay off the debt of a tenant family who are on the point of being evicted from their farm – a single gesture, maybe, but symbolic of a shift in thinking that is needed if the social tensions undermining the very existence of the Ascendancy class can begin to be addressed and rectified.

The overall picture that emerges from the study of the works of Lady Morgan, Sir Samuel Ferguson, and George Moore is therefore indicative of a level of diversity in the collective identity of the Ascendancy class that goes far beyond the common perception of that particular stratum of nineteenth-century Irish society as a community that is too set in its ways, too passive, too self-contained, too focused on the memories of its long-gone past to be able to find an effective voice and to play a meaningful role in the life of modern Ireland. It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse the reasons for the demise of the Ascendancy in the Irish Free State after 1922, and indeed for the perpetration, in the public perception of the Anglo-Irish heritage, of the melancholy, decadent vision of their decline and fall symbolised by the burning of the Big Houses – but it is tempting to think that that oversimplified interpretation of the contribution of the Ascendancy to Ireland's social history aligned rather well with the broader atmosphere of the parochialism and stagnation that prevailed in the social and cultural life of Ireland for much of the twentieth century. However, while in contemporary Ireland heirs to the Ascendancy tradition might not be seen as much more than 'a picturesque survival' (Bence-Jones 1987, 299), and while such social influence as they might still enjoy does not extend far beyond a small number of the more upmarket areas of central and southern Dublin, it is difficult to resist an impression that the dramatic social and cultural changes which have, over the last thirty years, transformed the Republic of Ireland into one of the most dynamic and advanced countries of Europe, are, in a metaphorical sense at least, a fulfilment of W.B. Yeats's dream of the final defeat of the forces of petty intolerance and narrow-mindedness against which he protested in his Senate speech. If that is indeed the case, then the modern, liberal, inclusive, open-minded, tolerant Ireland that has emerged since

the early 1990s may well owe a debt of gratitude to some of the half-forgotten writers and thinkers of its often neglected and underappreciated Ascendancy past.

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Review:
Grażyna Kiliańska Przybyło, 2017. *The Anatomy of Intercultural Encounters. A Sociolinguistic Cross- Cultural Study* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego)

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The monographic volume entitled *The Anatomy of Intercultural Encounters. A Sociolinguistic Cross-Cultural Study* by Grażyna Kiliańska Przybyło presents the theoretical basis for, as well as the empirical project devoted to, so-called *intercultural encounters,* in other words, intercultural interaction between different nationals and their perspective on them. The author interprets these encounters as *critical incidents.* The term critical incident refers to any episode that in a significant way affects the results of this episode, here an interactive act. The intercultural encounters described by the author come from the narrative texts of multilingual language users, university students representing two very distinct contexts, both geographically and culturally: Poland and Turkey.

The book consists of six chapters covering 196 pages, as well as an extensive bibliography of almost five hundred entries and seven appendices (50 pages). The book starts with chapter 1: 'Intercultural encounters' and is followed by chapter 2: 'Narrative Inquiry – Background', chapter 3: 'The scheme of the research study', charter 4: 'Narratives – Data presentation and analysis' and chapter 5: 'Questionnaires and scales' and finishes with chapter 6: 'Conclusions'.

Chapter 1: 'Intercultural encounters' (pp. 17–60) is meant to introduce an over-view of theoretical issues, defining the constructs and models of intercultural interaction between different nationals, so common in present day times of migration, travelling within and beyond national borders and generally, our great love of mobility and its promotion in different contexts, professional, educational and personal. In this book, the context

in question is academic and its participants are students; it is therefore a bit surprising that in the overview of studies, the author makes no reference to the study-abroad context which is naturally a very fast growing area of research. A great part of it embraces work on the effects of student mobility within Erasmus and Erasmus+ European projects. The chapter introduces a definition of an intercultural encounter (on the basis of Ting-Toomey 1999, Glaser et al. 2007 and Bystrov and Yermolenko 2011, among others) and discusses its role in developing one's identity in the process of communication and negotiation of meaning in different acts of interaction. The author also looks at the concept of an inter-cultural encounter and how it functions in a foreign language lesson (Mouse et al. 2003, Kriebernegg et al. 2014). Numerous sources cited here put emphasis on the role of language in these intercultural encounters, pointing out the significance of communicative competence, understood as grammatical, dis-course, socio-linguistic and strategic competences (Byram and Zarate 1995, Glaser et al. 2007, Niżegorodcew 2011). But above all, the author elaborates on the concept of intercultural pragmatics, which attributes effectiveness or possible communication problems and breakdowns to cultural differences and the non-native participants´ lack of awareness of them. (Aleksandrowicz-Pędich 2005). As intercultural encounters always have to be perceived as highly emotional episodes, this dimension is also discussed here on the basis of research by MacIntyre (2002), Kumar (2004) or Salo-Lee (2007), just to mention a few from a long list of the cited sources. Specific aspects of affectivity and emotions that are rightly assumed by the author to be especially significant in this context are empathy (Lewicka 2008), willingness to communicate and communication apprehension (McCroskey 1982, MacIntyre et al. 1998, Gałajda 2012). The author could also not fail to comment on the issues of stereotyping and culture shock, which are fundamental to intercultural communication. Following Glaser et al. (2007), the author introduces the three-dimensional concept of cultural intelligence (CQ), i.e. cognitive, motivational and behavioural. This model has been enriched here with the classical model of intercultural competence presented by Byram (2000, 2007) and accepted in numerous studies (e.g. Niżegorodcew 2011, Bandura 2011). This elaborate and multidimensional interpretation of intercultural encounters most obviously leads the author to pointing out the challenges they generate and illustrates them with an overview

of internationally conducted research projects demonstrating them in practice (for example, LARA, HERA or INCOPROMO). This overview not only focuses on the thematic issues of the studies but importantly, elaborates on the methodology used by the researchers. Perhaps a tabular presentation of the above would have made the text more coherent and reader-friendly. Unfortunately, it is only in the case of narrative texts that the author decided to use a tabular form of presentation. However, in terms of its general theoretical introduction to the empirical study presented in the book, it is thorough, fairly coherent and sufficient in the choice of constructs and themes discussed, as well as in the sources cited.

Charter 2: 'Narrative enquiry – Background' (pp. 61–80) relates directly to the empirical part presented in the chapters to follow, as it describes the main method of data collection used by the author in her project, i.e. a narrative text produced by each participant. Narrative texts have been adopted and adapted from literary and social sciences into language studies fairly recently, which most obviously was determined by the interest in qualitative methods, in an individual and his/her identity, perceptions, preferences, values etc. The chapter starts with a diachronic overview of narration as a method of research, in which the author emphasises that narrative texts have their roots in postmodernism, in which an individual is the creator and interpreter of his life-story and experiences. The author is mostly interested in postmodern ideas in the educational contexts; thus, the names of Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Pavlenko (2002, 2007) or Woods (2012) are cited here. The author believes that narration constitutes the basis for interaction, going so far as to say that there exists such a thing as narrative competence. This in fact is a belief first introduced by Bruner (1996) and elaborated on by Bell (2003), who points to the two-sided dimension of the concept. On the one hand, narrative competence plays a different role in different cultures and on the other, it is an expression of a given culture. Written narratives give shape to our experience and allow us to reflect for example on our identity, to monitor our behaviour and/or emotions. The chapter also offers different models of narrative text analysis, which are mostly based on one of the first advocates of narrative text use in language and education studies, Aneta Pavlenko. However, the author also uses other sources to comment on the cultural issues raised by means of narrative texts (Labov

1972, Maley 1989, McCarthy 1998, Hufeisen and Neuner 2004), The reader will also find here the characteristics of a narrative text, the steps to take when analysing it, as well as a discussion of positive and negative aspects of narrative as a research method. Also in this chapter, Kiliańska-Przybyło introduces the concept of a *critical incident*, which is fundamental to her empirical study. The critical incident is defined from different perspectives, but focusing here on the possibilities it offers in studying intercultural communication. The value of a critical incident has to be seen in its sole focus on an individual experience (encounter) and an either positive or negative appraisal in the act of interaction. This method has been successfully used in biographical studies of, for example Spencer-Oatey (2014) and Spencer-Oatey and Harch (2016). Chapter 2 offers an exhaustive presentation and discussion of the narrative text as used in qualitative studies of general and specifically intercultural communication and is appropriately narrowed down to focus on critical incidents as constitutive factors in researching individual experiences in encounters between representatives of different cultures, as well as idiosyncratic experiences of an individual in those acts of interaction. Chapter 2 concludes the theoretical part of the book. It demonstrates that the author is familiar with very many sources in the area of her interest both in terms of content and research methodology and she is able to select those which directly apply to her own research. I have only two critical comments here. The first relates to the content (as was pointed out earlier): no comment on study abroad research, which is increasingly important in investigating intercultural encounters. The other criticism relates to the form of presentation in bullet points in some parts, which can be a bit irritating in an academic text.

Charter 3: 'The scheme of the study' (pp. 81–102) opens the empirical part of the monograph. It is a detailed presentation of the nine objectives of the study, a profile of the sample selection, a description of the research methods and instruments used in the process of data collection. The objectives quoted by the author define the project as a descriptive as well as a diagnostic study, designed using a mixed paradigm of qualitative-quantitative methodology. The objectives are formulated clearly and coherently. The author focuses both on individual perceptions of intercultural competence, as expressed by the Polish and Turkish university students, and in relation to their group profile (languages known, cultural background). The aim

of the study is to describe, analyse and interpret intercultural encounters narrated by the subjects. It can be observed that the author´s main interest lies in the didactic dimension of the topic, as her aim seems to be the development of the cultural sensitivities of multilingual language users/learners in different contexts of international (intercultural) communication. It is also an important factor in the professional development of future teachers of a foreign language (which the subjects in this study intend to be). A series of mini-lectures and practical classes carried out in the form of pre-prepared scenarios implemented by Kiliańska-Przybyło in her treatment period of the study, make very interesting material for FL teachers and teacher trainers (some of them are included in the appendices). As mentioned earlier, the subjects participating in the project were all university students of English departments studying to be FL teachers. It is clear from the description that both groups received a similar professional training in terms of theoretical courses, practical methodology in EFL classes and school placements; however, there is no mention made of their language instruction and possible differences in language competence, which seems important as the data collection was done in English (a foreign language for both groups). So we can only assume that the students are fairly homogenous in terms of their language competence. in English. A more extensive analysis is carried out here in the case of Polish students, as unfortunately the author did not manage to recruit Turkish M.A. students to be a part of this interesting study. Nonetheless, it is worth mentioning that the participation of the Turkish students has to be praised, as it sets a good example of academic cooperation, here between Polish and Turkish academics. Kiliańska-Przybyło uses a mixed-method approach in her study, in which the adapted version of *Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory* was employed alongside narrative texts on the subjects´ selected experiences of intercultural encounters seen as critical incidents. The analyses are both qualitative and quantitative, by means of the statistical tool (LIWC), which is described in great details in this part of the book. Thus, it may serve as a good source of information for other researchers interested in quantitative types of research in educational/language contexts. The project design is quite elaborate, thus the coherent step-by-step description offered here allows the reader to follow the execution stage of the data collection. Unfortunately, some parts of the study were not commented on in this description (e.g. the pilot study

or the theoretical training). Nevertheless, the chapter offers sufficient information on the context, content, objectives, methodology and procedures implemented in the study.

In the first empirical chapter 4: 'Narratives – Data presentation and analysis' (pp. 103–138), Kiliańska-Przybyło focuses solely on the analysis of the collected data from the narrative texts produced by the students from all three groups of subjects. These analyses constitute the most interesting part of the book. They open with statistical data based on the language used by the students and its possible influence on intercultural encounters and the psychological, cognitive and perceptual processes involved. The data demonstrates visible differences between Polish and Turkish subjects, where for example the former were diagnosed as more confident, whereas the latter were found to be more inclusive. In relation to culture and identity, it was observed that Turkish subjects were more prone to take an emic view (from the subject´s own perspective), whereas Poles took an etic one (the observer´s perspective). The differences are discussed in more detail in this part of this book, however, they can only be treated as tendencies since individual differences will always play a role in communication and interaction encounters. In the second stage of narrative analysis, the author looks at them from a qualitative perspective, focusing among other things on the content of the critical episodes ('the most memorable encounter') reported in the narratives and found to be mostly based on communication issues, culture, development of knowledge and the affectivity involved in such an episode (presented in detail in Table 7). The aim of the study was not only diagnostic but also pragmatic: to develop students´ ability to reflect critically on their own contextualised experiences with the view to eradicating (or more realistically diminishing) the power of stereotyping in intercultural contacts and this worked very well for the subjects in the study. The author also presents here a structural analysis of the narrative materials; however it is not altogether clear what the purpose of this analysis is.

The aim of the data collected in the study and derived from the student questionnaires are presented in chapter 5: 'Questionnaires and scales – Data presentation and analysis' (pp. 139–172). The first stage of the study was to establish individual intercultural profiles of the students. This part of the analysis seems to be most interesting as it makes use of the explicit

metaphors (similes) coined by the subjects in response to the stimulus: *Meeting a foreigner is like…* The metaphoric perceptions uncovered via similes are enriched with the results of the *Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory* (CCAI), categorising intercultural behaviour in relation to four traits: emotional resilience, flexibility and openness, perceptual acuity and personal autonomy. Using thorough statistical analysis, the author established correlations (or their lack) between those traits within each of the groups of subjects and across the groups. The conclusions from the analysis are included in the final chapter of the book.

The closing chapter 6: 'Conclusions' (pp. 173–196) is a succinct overview of findings as it mainly succeeds in answering the research questions by synthesising numerous, extensive and detailed data from the earlier chapters. Thus, the reader will find here summarised differences between the two nationality groups, Polish and Turkish, which are, according to the author, determined by the socio-cultural context, age differences (B.A. versus M.A. students), language competence or straightforwardly, by the idiosyncratic features of every individual. In relation to perceptions of intercultural competence, the subjects demonstrate an inability to define the concept by going beyond pure factual and schematic knowledge. When comparing Polish and Turkish students´ perceptions of their experiences in intercultural encounters, she observes that the texts produced by Poles are more reflective than those written by Turks. In the case of Polish students, intercultural encounters were seen more as a way of developing communicative and general language competence (younger subjects), culture awareness (older learners) and in the case of Turkish subjects, this focus was more on developing cultural awareness and uncovering stereotypes. The study also demonstrates certain discrepancies between interpretations of qualitative versus quantitative data, which according to the author requires a closer look for the purposes of future research. An important benefit of this study, irrespective of its results and conclusions, is that all the participants certainly left it much more aware of the issues involved in making intercultural encounters successful on a personal level, as well as in the context of foreign language instruction and the need to focus on such issues when teaching a FL. The reader will be able to find many more interesting observations derived from this project in the concluding chapter. Therefore, not to anticipate

the discovery of the findings, I will not comment here in more details on the conclusions of this engrossing project.

To sum up my review, the following is what I find most valuable in this work. First of all, it is the very choice and timeliness of the topic – so important both for our individual well-being and success in intercultural encounters and in the educational context of a foreign language formal instruction, pronounced as the need for critical reflection on intercultural awareness issues. Secondly, the presentation of the theoretical background and overview of the studies in the area has allowed Kilianska-Przybylo to design an exciting and very complex mixed-method study. Thirdly, the book promotes qualitative methods, which reflect well the present-day trend in educational research worldwide. This project makes a great contribution to it. Fourthly, the project presented in this book is an excellent example of international cooperation between scholars working in similar areas. As to the form and structure, the book is written in good academic discourse, with only few language slips and stylistically awkward structures. The text is coherent and its arguments are presented logically and fully. However, occasionally, the reader will find some repetitiveness in the text (occasionally, the tabular and textual information and commentary overlap) and may object to a bullet-point presentation, style in this type of text. Two things seem to be missing and would be of great added value to the book and these are author and subject indexes. Other critical remarks were already expressed above.

I can recommend this book to researchers working in the area of intercultural competence, awareness and reflective approaches in educational contexts. This book is in my view valuable for any multilingual language user. But, most of all, I believe it is a good source of knowledge and stimulus for reflection for all teachers of foreign languages, irrespective of the stage of their professional career, be it in-service or pre-service.

Review:
Nicole Markotić (ed.), 2017. *Robert Kroetsch: Essays on His Works* (Oakville, ON: Guernica Editions)

Ahmed Joudar

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The volume, edited by Nicole Markotić, is a collection of essays dealing with Robert Kroetsch's works. The contributors discuss some of Kroetsch's novels, his poetry, and his critical writings to show the extent of his influence on Canadian literature. The volume consists of two parts. In the first part, there are eight critical articles which start with the introduction of editor Nicole Markotić. In his article, Markotić deals with Kroetsch's concept of *self*. He makes a comparison between 'us' and 'others' based on Kroetsch's writing. Thus, he discusses how Kroetsch uses the first-person subject 'I' in his poems, which reflects the absent picture of the narrator. Markotić also discusses Kroetsch's view of selfhood; he believes that the idea of *self* falsifies the writer's identity. He mentions Peter Thomas's accusation, where Thomas (1973, 54) argues that Kroetsch is 'a writer [who] either celebrates or triumphs over his origins, in which he chooses either to authenticate the otherness of his known world or absorbs it into the dance of self. For Kroetsch *Alberta* is an utterance in the first person'. Otherwise, Thomas (1996, 8) says that Kroetsch's works are a 'myth of self-renewing individuals'. The important idea that Markotić mentions in his essay is that Kroetsch's desire is for the writers and the readers to engage the identity of the past with the present.

The second essay, Anna Mandel's 'Uninventing Structures: Cultural Criticism and the Novels of Robert Kroetsch', successfully places some of Kroetsch's novels in connection to the works of Atwood, Cohen, Lee, Mitchell, and Ondaatje. Mandel claims that Kroetsch used parody, farce, myth, and metaphor to reflect history through his fiction. Ryan Fitzpatrick in his essay 'Does the city give us the poems? Or do the poems give us the city? Robert Kroetsch's Spatial Assemblages' discusses the spatial and poetic instabilities in Kroetsch's poem 'Seed Catalogue'. Fitzpatrick asserts that the locations of Kroetsch's poems are in-between distrust of an inherited

and overarching system. Therefore, Kroetsch's poems take part in complicating spatial production. He focuses on examining the cultural creation in Kroetsch's poem 'Seed Catalogue' which stands in the face of global or national space. He concludes that the ambivalence between *tradition* and *getting lost* is part of a complicated process in which 'tradition is not automatically bad and getting lost is not automatically good; rather, they both form practices that respectively stabilize and destabilize space' (73).

The next essay, in which George Bowering analyzes Kroetsch's 'Stone Hammer Poem', focuses on linguistic and formal usage. Bowering draws the readers' attention to focus on the field notes as the verb rather than the noun which Kroetsch uses in the poem. He asserts that the narrative impossibility in Kroetsch's writing of telling the self to recover the language which he describes as 'the earth of thought' (84).

In 'What the Crow Said: A Topos of Excess', Christine Jackman clarifies that the characters in the novel create 'grand fictions to account for things' (98). Jackman investigates whether Robert Kroetsch destroys or perpetuates binaries (feminine: masculine, light: dark). She recognizes that the binaries are not denied but that they have a dynamic relationship. Jackman also mentions that Kroetsch does not write only for the event, but he writes for both text and place where they act together. Jay Gamble in the essay '"The Shape of All Nothingness": Narrative Negativity in "I Wanted to Write a Manifesto"' discusses Robert Kroetsch's essay 'I Wanted to Write a Manifesto' to show to the readers how Kroetsch became a writer and explains his relationship with language. Gamble clarifies that Kroetsch's essay is located in-between creation and deception because the writer wants to write a manifesto but then produces an anti-manifesto.

Critic Jenna Butler in her essay 'Unbodying the Bawdy in Robert Kroetsch' criticizes Kroetsch's notion of 'body'. Butler clarifies that Kroetsch focuses in his texts on 'the body's propensity to alienate both women and men from themselves' (130). She mentions Raymond's words in *The Hornbooks of Rita K*, which makes a connection between the past and the present. Then, Butler clarifies that Kroetsch's writings discovered the body as a frontier between the past and the present. Butler refers to Kroetsch's using humour to allow the readers to access to 'the deepest human unbodying' (143). The essay written by Catherine Bates, titled 'Autobiography as Decoy in "The Puppeteer"', focuses on the relationship between the writer and the reader in the works of Kroetsch to elaborate that fiction is a master

which makes individual feel real. Bates opens her essay with an ambiguous statement: 'Kroetsch is a liar' (147) based on Kroetsch's view that 'every coherent story is a lie' (The Remembrance Day tapes, 42). She discusses the relationship between the writer and the reader in the production of text.

The second part of the book is a series of twelve critical essays under the title 'A Flight of Lemons'. These essays focus on Kroetsch's poem 'Sketches of a Lemon'. The authors present twelve different readings of one poem, in which they try to identify permutation of postmodernism. These articles focus on the ways of Wallace Stevens's of 'Looking at a Blackbird', the exceeding of language and the limitation of imagery, the matter of tone to prove that Robert Kroetsch is a postmodern poet, the link between the world and words, and Kroetsch's playing with the words of the poem as the word *lemon* in the poem and its links to the season and its infinite duration, the accessibility and cleverness which combined in the syntax and diction of Kroetsch's breathing. One of the writers refers to the term *sketches*, which was used in the title of Kroetsch's poem. It shows that Kroetsch wrote a series of 12 sketches for his poem, but he did not complete them, while another writer tries to dissect the poem and scrutinizes its relationship with blackberries. The writers of these twelve different pieces on Robert Kroetsch's poem 'Sketches of a Lemon' give us different perspectives as well as discuss the diversity of meanings which the clever reader can taste.

The final part of the book is a conversation with Robert Kroetsch by a group of creative writing students, in which they discuss various topics such as the function of narration in poetry or the role of the physical landscape in creating ideas in the writer's mind. They also discuss whether the way of writing poetry is different if it depends on historical documents.

In sum, this collection of essays represents a kind of explicit illustration. It guides the reader, because Kroetsch's writings are exceptional in form and content. It is an excellent work illustrating the hidden aesthetic in the work of Kroetsch, which some writers did not deal with or dealt with in different ways.

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Epistemological Canons in Language, Literature and Cultural Studies
The 26th Annual Conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English
Conference Report

The 26th Annual Conference of the Polish Association for the Study of English was organized by the Institute of English and American Studies of University of Gdańsk between 22nd and 24th June 2017. The main theme of the conference was 'Epistemological Canons in Language, Literature and Cultural Studies' and it attracted attention of nearly one hundred scholars from Poland and abroad. The theme of the conference was as usual only a pretext for a great number of scholarly responses and those we witnessed in Gdańsk were truly impressive in their variety. The papers were divided into panels in literature, theatre studies, linguistics, translation studies, cultural studies, film studies, to mention but a few. The participants were forced to choose between as many as five panels at a time. The conference also offered an opportunity for the members of the PASE to debate on the future plans of our Association during the annual general meeting. The plenary lectures were delivered by Professor Christoph Bode (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, München), Professor Marek Wilczyński (Gdańsk University), Professor Christina Schäffner (Aston University, Birmingham), and Professor Małgorzata Grzegorzewska (Warsaw University).

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The 6th Conference
From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria
Conference Report

Like its predecessors, the 6th Conference *From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria* was hosted by the University of Warsaw on 27th–29th of September 2017. The conference sessions were held in the Department of English Studies, conveniently situated within walking distance of Warsaw Central Station. Professors Grażyna Bystydzieńska and Emma Harris supervised the work of the executive committee, including Prof. Dorota Babilas, Prof. Paweł Rutkowski and Dr. Lucyna Krawczyk-Żywko.

The conference has a ten-year-old history. Thus, its 2017 edition was a jubilee one. Its framework is succinctly described on the website in the following way:

> *From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria* is a biennial conference organized by the British Studies Centre of the University of Warsaw since 2007. The conference title highlights the timespan that is covered and provides a framework for the highly varied perceptions that contribute to a picture of the great themes that link the 18th and the 19th centuries.

Over the ten years, it has managed to attract such distinguished keynote speakers as: Professors Philip Allingham(Lakehead University), John Barrell (University of York), Roger Ebbatson (Roehampton University), Herbert Grabes (Justus-Liebig-Universität Giessen), Sarah Harrison (King's College, Cambridge), Michael Hollington (University of Kent), Jacek Hołówka (University of Warsaw), Donna Landry (University of Kent), Nigel Leask (University of Glasgow), Paddy Lyons (University of Glasgow), Alan Macfarlane (King's College, Cambridge), Anthony Mandal (Cardiff University), Oleg Polyakov (Vyatka State University of the Humanities), Adam S. Potkay (The College of William and Mary in Virginia), Iorwerth Prothero (University of Manchester), Natalia Soloviova (Lomonosov State University of Moscow), Brian Southam (Jane Austen Society), Jeremy Tambling, University of Manchester.

The conference has developed its publication series, which features five volumes of proceedings.

The conference began with the conferment of a volume of twenty-eight scholarly papers dedicated to professor Grażyna Bystydzieńska, written by her colleagues, pupils and friends, celebrating her scholarly achievement, her contribution to the advancement of the study of English literature in Poland and her involvement in the organization of the QAQV.

The conference was graced by the presence of three distinguished guest speakers.

Ann Heilman from School of English, Communication and Philosophy at the University of Cardiff, author of such books as, among others, *Metafiction and Metahistory in Contemporary Women's Writing* (2007), *Neo-Victorianism: The Victorians in the Twenty-First Century, 1999-2009* (2010), *George Moore: Influence and Collaboration* (2014), *Neo-/Victorian Biographilia and James Miranda Barry: A Study in Transgender and Transgenre* (to be published in 2018). In her keynote speech ('"Tell me your secret doctor James": Gender-crossing, life writing and the case of James Barry'), she presented the case of James Miranda Barry, who, born Margaret Ann Bulkley, lived his/her entire adult life as a man and pursued a successful career of a surgeon. In the speech, professor Heilman addressed the issues of biography and biofiction as well as trans-genderism and transgenre.

Paddy Lyons, senior lecturer in English literature at School of Critical Studies, University of Glasgow, specialist in the poetry and drama of the Restoration, literary theory and translation, co-editor of *Romantic Ireland: From Tone to Gonne; Fresh Perspectives on Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (2013), spoke on 'Alexander Pope and animal rights.' Against the background of eighteenth-century attitudes to animals, he discussed Pope's changing views on animal rights in *Windsor Forest* and *Essay on Man*.

Jarlath Killeen, Associate Professor, Academic Liason Officer for the School of English, author of five monographs including two on Oscar Wilde: *The Faiths of Oscar Wilde* (2005) and *The Fairy Tales of Oscar Wilde* (2007) – and three on Gothic literature: *Gothic Ireland* (2005), *Gothic Literature, 1825–1914* (2009), *The Emergence of Irish Gothic Fiction* (2013), talked, very much in a Gothic spirit, about 'Cleaning up the Dead: Vampires, Sanitation and Corpse Culture in Victorian England.'

The papers were presented by forty participants in two parallel, thematically arranged sections, covering a wide spectrum of eighteenth

and nineteenth-century related topics, including poetry, fiction, culture and the new media. The most richly represented and explored was Victorian literature, with essays devoted to such diverse writers as Charles Dickens (*A Christmas Carol*, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, *Bleak House*, *The Cricket of the Hearth*), Anthony Trollope, Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, George Eliot, Sheridan Le Fanu, Arthur Conan Doyle, Elizabeth Gaskell, Robert L. Stevenson, John Henry Newman and John Ruskin. The earlier fiction papers dealt with the works by Daniel Defoe and Walter Scott, Frances Burney, Henry Fielding, Jane Austen, Charles Lucas, and Mary Shelley. The few 'poetic' papers discussed the works of Alexander Pope, William Blake, William Wordsworth and Oscar Wilde. Uniquely, drama was represented by a study of Roman plots in John Dennis's tragedies. Neo-Victorian literature and steampunk featured in papers dealing with the modern depiction of Jack the Ripper and Steven Hunt's *The Court of the Air*.

Amongst the most fascinating cultural cum historical issues tackled in the presentations were the rogue art of William Hogarth, the Pre-Raphaelite fashion inspirations, representations of young Queen Victoria in film and in Gaetano Donizetti's operas, Polish-Irish relations, the nineteenth-century social settlement movement, landscaping Irishness, sport in Victorian society, literary echoes of Anglo-Swedish relations, and predictions of war in late-Victorian speculative writing. One other highlight of the conference was the Translation workshop 'Fun with a Fairy-Tale: W. M. Thackeray's *The Rose and the Ring* and its Polish Versions,' prepared and run by professor **Izabela Szymańska**, the University of Warsaw.

Delightful intellectual diversion was provided by *The Cheerful Hamlets* – a students' of English amateur theatrical group, whose performance of *Freshwater* by Virginia Woolf, her only play, entertained the conference participants at the end of the first day.

The conference was a genuine success. It provided a forum for an exchange of ideas concerning the wide range of topics discussed. Moreover, it was an inspiring event for its participants and a wonderful social event. We are looking forward to the next *From Queen Anne to Queen Victoria* conference to be held in 2019.

Anna Kędra-Kardela, Aleksandra Kędzierska

‘Fragmentary Writing in Contemporary British and American Fiction’ Conference Report

On 22–23 September 2017, an international conference on literary fragmentation was held in Wrocław. It was organized by Prof. Vanessa Guignery from École Normale Supérieure in Lyon and Dr Wojciech Drąg from the Institute of English Studies at the University of Wrocław. The event attracted 34 speakers from eleven countries – mostly from Poland, France and the United Kingdom.

The aim of the conference was to examine the legacy of what is known in French criticism as *l’écriture fragmentaire* in the light of the recent revival of experimental fiction. The last decades have brought a number of acclaimed novels in Britain and the US that illustrate their authors’ interest in fragmentary and multimodal structures. David Mitchell constructed *Cloud Atlas* (2005) out of six stories with different settings, characters and generic features. David Markson produced an 800-page-long tetralogy, culminating in *The Last Novel* (2007), which juxtaposes several thousand succinct anecdotes and quotations with metafictional references to the elusive authorial figure. The year 2014 saw the publication of three notable fragmentary novels: Will Eaves’s *The Absent Therapist* – an amalgam of the voices of 150 speakers, Richard McGuire’s *Here* – a graphic novel created out of over 150 images (non-chronologically arranged) of the same location throughout several million years, and Jenny Offill’s *Dept. of Speculation* – an account of a marriage crisis narrated with the use of several hundred loosely connected paragraphs. As the example of *Cloud Atlas* – alongside those of Zadie Smith’s *NW* (2012), Anne Enright’s *The Green Road* (2015) and, most recently, Julian Barnes’s *The Noise of Time* (2016) – demonstrates, fragmentation is not only the domain of niche, ‘experimental’ writing.

Although it has much earlier origins, fragmentation has been a vital aspect of twentieth- and twenty-first-century literature. Several canonical novels of modernism – such as *Ulysses* (1922) and *The Waves* (1931) – could be classified as fragmentary, since they are constructed in parts do not fully cohere. More radical examples of fragmented novels were written in the 1960s and 70s by authors sometimes associated with postmodernism: J. G. Ballard,

John Barth, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, B. S. Johnson and Gabriel Josipovici, among others. Despite the fact that many renowned novelists have contributed to fragmentary writing, the term itself is rarely used in Anglophone criticism. One of the goals of the conference was to postulate a renewed engagement with fragmentary literature. The scope was restricted to British and American fiction published after the year 1966. The call for papers encouraged participants to examine the typical ingredients of the fragmentary mode (such as enumeration, non-linearity and the unconventional layout of the page), the mechanics of organizing the disparate parts, and the various rationales for writing in fragments. Among the numerous critical notions that speakers were advised to consider in relation to the fragment were modernism and postmodernism, multimodality and multimediality, collage, montage and bricolage, card-shuffle texts, forking-path narratives, altered fictions and genre mash-ups.

The highlight of the conference were the keynote talks by three invited speakers. The first of them was Merritt Moseley – Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina at Asheville and author of critical monographs on David Lodge, Kingsley Amis, Julian Barnes, Michael Frayn, Pat Barker and Jonathan Coe. The inaugural lecture took place in Oratorium Marianum, one of the historic halls of the University of Wrocław, following the official opening by the Vice Dean of the Faculty of Letters Prof. Igor Borkowski. Entitled 'What Is Fragmentary Fiction? And How Is It Fragmentary?,' Prof. Moseley's talk was an attempt to classify fragmentary fiction by proposing three categories: the braid, the mosaic and the bricolage. Each of them was discussed with reference to a separate novel from the last year's Man Booker Prize shortlist.

The second keynote lecture was by Dr Alison Gibbons – Senior Lecturer at Sheffield Hallam University and the author of the widely cited *Multimodality, Cognition, and Multimodal Literature* (2011) and the co-editor (with Joe Bray and Brian McHale) of *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature* (2012). The title of her talk was 'Multimodality and Aesth-Ethics, or, Fragments and Spirals.' It was an investigation of Lance Olsen's novel *Theories of Forgetting* (2014) through the critical framework of Robert Smithson's notion of 'entropology' (a blend of entropy and anthropology) with the aim of outlining the relationship between fragmentation, multimodality and ethics.

The final plenary talk, on the second day of the conference, was delivered by Assistant Professor of English and American Literature at The John Paul II

Catholic University of Lublin – Prof. Grzegorz Maziarczyk, who is the author of *The Narratee in Contemporary British Fiction* (2005) and *The Novel as Book: Textual Materiality in Contemporary Fiction in English* (2013). Entitled 'Singularity, Multimodality, Transmediality: Fragmentary Future(s) of the Novel?,' Prof. Maziarczyk's lecture gave an overview of the recent departures from the supposedly transparent printed codex in response to the impact of other media. The aim of his presentation was to assess, within the theoretical framework of transmedial narratology, to what extent the new medial formats are inherently fragmentary. Among his examples were J. J. Abrams and Doug Dorst's *S.* (2013) and Samantha Gorman and Danny Cannizzaro's *Pry* (2015).

Besides keynote lectures, the conference programme included ten sessions of individual papers, which comprised 31 presentations. The first two parallel sessions were devoted to examining the relationships between the fragment and realism, and between fragmentation and identity. The former session featured contributions from Wojciech Drąg (University of Wrocław), Jarosław Hetman (Nicolaus Copernicus University, Toruń) and Corina Selejan (Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu), who focused on the uses of fragmentation in the works of David Markson, David Shields, David Foster Wallace and Tom McCarthy. The latter session contained contributions from Dominika Ferens, Paulina Pająk (both from the University of Wrocław) and Caroline Magnin (University Paris 4 – Sorbonne), and was devoted to the diaries of Virginia Woolf and Susan Sontag, contemporary Korean American writers and the representation of trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005). The first parallel session on the contemporary British novel centred on some of the most recent works of Ali Smith, Jeanette Winterson and Zadie Smith. The respective speakers were Alicia J. Rouverol (University of Manchester), Maria Antonietta Struzziero (Independent Scholar) and Trung Nguyên-Quang (University Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle). At the same time, the fiction of Robert Coover and J. G. Ballard was discussed by Lech Zdunkiewicz, Marcin Tereszewski (both from the University of Wrocław) and Tristan Ireson-Howells (Canterbury Christ Church University) during a session on the literature of the 1960s and 1970s. In the last session of the first day of the conference Hilary White (University of Manchester), Gerd Bayer (University of Erlangen) and Paweł Wojtas (University of Warsaw) focused on the fragmentary aspects of the novels by Ann Quin, David Mitchell and J. M. Coetzee, respectively.

On the second day, another five sessions of individual papers took place. In the second session on the contemporary British novel Magdalena Sawa (John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin) explored the aesthetic theory and artistic practice of Gabriel Josipovici, Tomasz Dobrogoszcz (University of Łódź) analyzed Michèle Roberts's *Impossible Saints* (1997), Bartosz Lutostański (independent scholar) compared B. S. Johnson's *The Unfortunates* (1969) and Eimear McBride's *A Girl is a Half-Formed Thing* (2013), and Vesna Ukić-Košta (University of Zadar) examined Janice Galloway's *The Trick Is to Keep Breathing* (1989). The parallel session on contemporary American fiction concentrated on the works by Gilbert Sorrentino, Harry Mathews, Richard Powers and Thomas Ligotti. The respective speakers were Saloua Karoui-Elounelli (University of Tunis), Iain McMaster (University of Edinburgh), Anne-Catherine Bascoul (University of Nice Sophia Antipolis) and Deborah Bridle (University of Nice Sophia Antipolis). In the next session – on the short story – Teresa Bruś (University of Wrocław) examined fragmentary lives in three collections of Julian Barnes's short fiction, David Malcolm (University of Gdańsk) considered the relationships between individual short stories in selected collections by Alan Garner, Lydia Davis, Michèle Roberts and Lucia Berlin, while Alessandro Guaita (Universities of Lisbon, Guelph and Perpignan) analyzed short fictions by J. D. Salinger, John Cheever and Raymond Carver with reference to the notions of the explicit and the implicit. At the same time, in the adjacent room, Alison Gibbons chaired a session on multimodality, which featured contributions from Katarzyna Bazarnik (Jagiellonian University), Mariano D'Ambrosio (University Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle) and Côme Martin (Paris Est – Créteil University/Sorbonne). The speakers focused on the relationship between fragmentation and the notions of liberature, polyphony and the shuffle narrative. In the closing session of the conference Zofia Kolbuszewska (University of Wrocław) discussed Suzanne Treister's *Hexen 2.0* (2012) as an autopoietic Wunderkammer of alternative history, whereas Ioannis Tsitsovits (University of Leuven) investigated the relationship between critical theory and the autobiographical in Maggie Nelson's *Bluets* (2009).

After the proceedings, the participants took part in several social activities, including a conference dinner in the historic hall of Klub Uniwersytecki, an evening out in the pub called 'Szajba' and a walking tour of Wrocław with art historian Anna Jezierska. The conference was made possible thanks to the financial help from the Faculty of Letters and the Institute of English

Studies at the University of Wrocław and from Institut d'Histoire des Représentations et des Idées dans les Modernités at École Normale Supérieure de Lyon. The scientific committee included Prof. Guignery, Dr. Drąg and Dr. Tereszewski, while the organizing committee was constituted by all of the above with the addition of five doctoral students from the University of Wrocław: Ewa Błasiak, Krzysztof Jański, Paulina Pająk, Agata Słowik and Angelika Szopa.

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Authors' Biodata

Ryszard Bartnik works as a tenured professor at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Department of Literary Studies and Literary Linguistics). As a teacher and academic, with expertise in the fields of contemporary British fiction and post-colonial studies, he specializes in studying potential correlations between novelistic writings and socio-political narratives, and their thematizations of such phenomena as 'trauma', 'memory', 'violence', 'reconciliation', 'divided societies' or 'fundamentalist thought'. The very recent book, published in 2017, was devoted to post-apartheid South African and post-Troubles Northern Irish literary narratives, and their authors tried to discuss/heal wounds of the past. His current scholarly interests are in how British 'new journalism' and 'fiction' have been tackling the question/problem of Brexit.

Marta Frątczak-Dąbrowska is an assistant professor at the Department of English Literature and Literary Linguistics, Faculty of English, Adam Mickiewicz University. She gained her PhD in postcolonial studies with a thesis on the contemporary Anglo Guyanese novel (Poznań, 2015), and is currently continuing her research in the field of Anglo Caribbean fiction and postcolonial economics. Her current research is supported by Polish National Science Centre.

Jan Jędrzejewski was educated at the University of Łódź, Poland (MA in English philology, 1985), and at Worcester College, University of Oxford (DPhil, 1992). He has taught at the University of Ulster since 1993; he became Senior Lecturer in 2001, and Professor of English and Comparative Literature in 2007. He served as Head of the School of English and History (2009–2014), and Dean of the Faculty of Arts (2014–2017). A specialist in nineteenth-century English literature, particularly the Victorian novel, Professor Jęrzejewski also has major interests in Irish literature in English and in comparative literature. He has published monographs on *Thomas Hardy and the Church* (1996) and *George Eliot* (2007), critical editions of Hardy and Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, as well as numerous journal articles and book chapters. He is currently

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Dominika Oramus is a professor at the Institute of English Studies University of Warsaw; author of books and articles on Angela Carter and J. G. Ballard as well as on science fiction and the poetics of postmodernism. She conducts MA and PhD seminars on British fiction of the 20th century. Her recent books are: *Charles Darwin's Looking Glass. The Theory of Evolution and the Life of its Author in Contemporary British Fiction and Non-Fiction* (Frankfurt am Main, 2015); *Grave New World. The Decline of the West in the Fiction of J. G. Ballard* (Toronto 2015) and *Ways of Pleasure. Angela Carter's Discourse of Delight in her Fiction and Non-Fiction* (Frankfurt am Main, 2016).