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From the Editor

The editorial board of the *Polish Journal of English Studies* welcomes you all to our tenth anniversary issue. It has been ten years since we started our journey and now we are truly proud of what we have achieved. We look back on the eighteen volumes filled with scholarship and hope that there are many more ahead of us.

When we started our work it was our purpose to create a journal which would address every aspect of English studies. We have expanded the range of presented topics and disciplines with every issue. And yet we are aware of the fact that there are still topics that have not been presented. If you feel that your field of academic interest belongs to them, the only remedy is to submit a proposal.

The present issue is perfect proof of the broadness of our interests. We begin with literary studies – this time we offer a wide selection of studies in the works of a British, an Australian, an Irish, and an American writer, showcasing the variety of the field of literary English studies. We proceed with yet another paper on history of English language, two papers in sociolinguistics, and finally a paper which combines the topic of language taboo with translation studies.

Although we are the academic journal of the Polish Association for the Study of English, it has always been our aim to be as inclusive and international as possible, inviting scholars from all over the world. We have succeeded in this by publishing articles written by academics from over thirty countries and the number has grown with every issue. From the very beginning we have operated as a Diamond Open Access journal; we do not charge our authors or our readers, and the costs of our operations are covered by the Polish Association for the Study of English. We have also made sure to be included in the most important full-text data bases and listed in bibliographies such as ABELL and MLA International Bibliography.

Our work is done now, but only temporarily, as we are already planning the second 2024 issue which will be dedicated to E. M. Forster on the centenary of the publication of his novel *A Passage to India*. It will be available in December 2024. If you would like to contribute, submissions to the volume are welcome by the end of September. We are also looking forward to your submissions on any subject within the English Studies, which will be considered for publication in 2025. We are also happy to publish book reviews.

I would like to end this brief introduction by expressing my gratitude to all those who have helped us during these ten years. I want to thank my co-editor-in-chief during the first seven years of our activities, Prof. Jacek Fabiszak, our managing editors Dr Weronika Szemińska and Anna Wołosz-Sosnowska, our language editor Dr Marcin Tereszewski, our technical editors Dr Łukasz Karpiński and Dr Marcin Klag, the board of the PASE, our numerous reviewers, and all those who were with us through the years including all the scholars who have submitted their work for publication. Last but not least, I would like to thank all the readers whose interest makes our work a worthy enterprise.

Krzysztof Fordoński
Editor-in-chief of the *Polish Journal of English Studies*

The Feminine/Domestic Landscape and a Search for Identity in Deborah Levy's *Real Estate*

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyse the question of a personal search for identity as well as the broader cultural concept of "feminine identity" in relation to domesticity and landscape in Deborah Levy's *Real Estate*, published in 2021. The third and last instalment of Levy's "A Living Autobiography" series is an account of a woman's search for identity in the context of major life changes: no longer a wife, no longer a mother living with her children, and no longer young, the narrator (who is and is not the author, according to Levy herself) examines her own relationship with home, homeland, and houses in various geographical locations, including her dream house – her unreal estate. The spectral dream house, positioned at the intersection of the past, the present, and the future, together with land and a very specific type of fluid landscape, constitute an object of the narrator's profound desire. By expanding on the topic of this longing, Levy engages in reflection on women's wanting and its habitual subjugation to the needs of others. The paper demonstrates how in this way Levy enters into a dialogue with Sigmund Freud and his famous unanswered question "Was will das Weib?" Most importantly, it is shown how the narrator generally considers women's – including female artists' – place at home and in culture within patriarchy. Applying a feminist and gender studies perspective, as well as by combining hauntology with housing studies, this paper examines the key symbolism of *Real Estate* and ultimately reads the book as a feminist writer's manifesto declaring "my books are my real estate," while placing it against the background of older feminist tradition, represented by such writers as Virginia Woolf, Betty Friedan, and Annette Kolodny.

Keywords: gender, femininity, feminism, domesticity, patriarchy, home, house, dream house, housing studies, landscape, identity, hauntology.

Introduction

Deborah Levy is a British writer who was born in 1959 in South Africa. When she was nine, her family fled persecution related to the Apartheid, and settled

in London, where she still lives. Levy started her writing career as a playwright; she has written poetry, but mostly fiction, and is perhaps best known for her Man Booker Prize or Booker Prize-nominated novels: *Swimming Home* (2011), *Hot Milk* (2016), and *The Man Who Saw Everything* (2019).

However, the book I will focus on in this paper is non-fiction and the third instalment of what Levy has called "A Living Autobiography." Part I, *Things I Don't Want to Know*, was published in 2013, commissioned by a publisher as a response to George Orwell's 1946 essay "Why I Write." Part II, *The Cost of Living* came out in 2018, and was followed by *Real Estate* in 2021. The author does not plan to write Part IV of her Living Autobiography, and (for now) considers this project to be completed (Politics… 2021; Vancouver Writers… 2021). All the three books are highly interconnected: non-chronological, hybrid – including memoir, travel writing, as well as political and philosophical critique (Vancouver Writers… 2021; Louisiana… 2022; The American Library… 2022). All are narrated by the same persona, whom in multiple interviews Levy has defined as "like myself but not quite myself" (The Center… 2021; Edbookfest 2022; Louisiana… 2022), which justifies the application of the term "autofiction" to the trilogy. For all these reasons, my reading concentrated on *Real Estate* will, nonetheless, refer to the preceding volumes.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the connection between a search for identity and the domestic landscape, as well as the broader cultural concept of "feminine identity" in Deborah Levy's *Real Estate*. I will explore this topic from a feminist and gender studies perspective, as well as by combining hauntology with housing studies. First, I will explain the choice of my interdisciplinary methodology. Secondly, I will discuss the topic on an individual level, and then place it in a broader cultural and historical context, in both instances pointing out key symbolism of *Real Estate*. Finally, I will demonstrate how the book can be interpreted as a feminist writer's manifesto declaring "my books are my real estate," while assessing it in comparison to such earlier feminist writers as Virginia Woolf and Betty Friedan, among others.

The Paper's Methodology

Part I of Levy's "Living Autobiography," *Things I Don't Want to Know*, already sets the tone for the trilogy, which is characterised by the personal made political, and by the author's sparse, economic style. Levy declares herself

to be a modernist (Louisiana… 2022) and acknowledges her debt to many writers, from Montaigne to Virginia Woolf to James Baldwin (ibid.). In fact, her autobiographical writing is highly intertextual, as it includes citations from many authors. Arguably, the longest and the most recurrent quotations inspiring the most engaged dialogues in Levy's autofiction come from two feminist writers: Marguerite Duras and Simone de Beauvoir. This choice corresponds with Levy's own feminist, antipatriarchal views, which informs the first two elements of my methodological set: the feminist and gender studies perspective.

The hauntological approach stems from the fact that in *Real Estate* Levy refers to one of the key hauntologists, Mark Fisher, and shapes the book around the conceptual framework of spectrality. In fact, the whole Living Autobiography is haunted by recurrent ghosts: Levy's younger selves from childhood, through adolescence to early middle age, Levy's parents, Levy's marriage, and a problem she calls "the undocumented life" (The American Library… 2022) of "a missing female character" (Levy 2021, 18). This character can be understood in two ways: as the narrator's own identity at a point of the particular transition she undergoes, and, more broadly, as such a character in mainstream literature, film and culture.

This female character is very closely linked to domesticity, which becomes problematised especially in *Real Estate*. In fact, one more set of ghosts haunting Levy's Living Autobiography has to do with home and housing: ranging from Levy's homeland in South Africa, through "the Family House" (Levy 2019, 15) – the marital home, now gone, to the imaginary dream house, which the narrator longs for. The above list of spectral homes already justifies an application of housing studies inflected by hauntology to interpreting *Real Estate*, but the book, and the trilogy as a whole, contains even more housing: the author's two writing sheds, the post-separation and post-divorce apartment in London, and several temporary dwellings, especially rented houses in Majorca and Greece, the "empty nest" apartment in Paris, and others. Finally, it will be shown how in *Real Estate* the term "real estate" acquires a new, metaphorical, literary meaning.

Spectral Unreal Estate: The Dream House for the Self

After the end of her marriage, the death of her mother, and the dismantling of the family house, replaced with an apartment in a large shabby block of flats in north London (Levy 2019, 19) – all described in *The Cost of Living* – the narrator of *Real Estate*, Levy's "I and not I," her literary *alter ego*, faces another major life

change. No longer a wife, she is about to turn sixty, and soon she will no longer be a mother living with her children. Her younger daughter is about to move out to go to university, and her new home is about to become an empty nest. The narrator wonders about her new identity: "I had no idea how to be a nearly sixty-year-old female character" (Levy 2021, 188), living alone, "required to make another life all over again" (8), and faced with the challenge: "how to live a creative life in old age" (124). Trying to find an answer to these questions, the narrator embarks on several literal and literary journeys: her work takes her to India and to Paris, where she first tries out the empty nest condition, as the Paris flat is genuinely almost empty, and surprisingly not a bad way to live (temporarily). However, even more importantly, the narrator takes us, the readers, on an imaginary journey across her perception of the everyday and familiar, even banal London settings, and above all invites us to her dream house, surrounded by ever-changing, distant landscapes.

The book's opening is already symptomatic of this mode of defamiliarization and displacement, and yet paradoxical putting of things in the right place exactly by their transplantation from one context to another. In wintertime English weather, the narrator buys a small banana tree, which soon begins to grow rapidly and, in a surreal manner, becomes *one* solution to the budding empty-nest-syndrome problem. According to the narrator's daughters, their mother develops an obsession with the plant to the point of treating it like her "third child" (7) – one that will not leave. The second chapter also begins with exotic plants, which surround the writer's new writing shed she is renting as her workplace. It is owned by a man from New Zealand who reconstructed a tropical forest in London NW8. As the narrator says, he was haunted by his homeland (10), and she understands it so well, because she is also haunted by *her* homeland, equally exotic South Africa; and even more so, she is haunted by the idea of her dream house, of which the writing shed – so different from her crumbling apartment block – is a small-scale replica, being "very close to the life [she] wanted" (12).

The topic of what the narrator wants – and the object of her desire being a house (cf. Garber 2000) – begins to be formulated on the very first page of *Real Estate*, right after the introduction of the banana tree, sold to the narrator by a woman whose long fake eyelashes – again surreally, in the narrator's imagination – "stretched all the way from the […] grey cobblestones of East London to the deserts and mountains of New Mexico" (Levy 2021, 1). Typically, what might seem like an incongruous clash of incompatible sceneries is rendered

entirely harmonious by Levy conjuring her mental landscapes before the read-
ers' eyes. The next, immediate, and natural association is with Georgia O'Keeffe,
her painted flowers, and her "final house" in Santa Fe – "a place to live and
work at her own pace" (2), which Levy visited, and whose oval fireplace made
her feel at home (3). She felt the same way as the painter: "I was also searching
for a house in which I could live and work and make a world at my own pace"
(3), she says. But she also admits that "even in my imagination this home was
blurred, undefined, not real, or not realistic, or lacked realism" (3). What is very
real is the "yearning for a grand old house" (3–4), which the author added to her
"imagined property portfolio" – in this sense owning "some unreal estate" (4).

Gradually, it becomes more developed: it starts with O'Keeffe's oval fireplace,
then acquires a pomegranate tree in the garden, "fountains and wells, remark-
able circular stairways, mosaic floors" (4). Even though the narrator "could not
place it geographically" (4), it was "obviously situated in a hot climate" (5), near
a lake, the sea, the ocean (5–6), and then a river replacing the fountains (61), be-
cause of Levy's need to swim every day (5). "Yes. I wanted a house. And a garden.
I wanted land" (46), declares the narrator; but in this gradation it is land, in fact
a specific type of landscape that takes priority, as "a humble wooden cabin" (6)
would be sufficient as long as it was near a body of water – which would be the ac-
tual place where the narrator is most at home, swimming representing the essence
of free movement. Clearly, the landscape is fluid in a double sense, because of the
closeness to water,[1] and because it keeps evolving. As the narrator says,

> I trawled the flea markets and vintage shops collecting stuff for
> my unreal estate in the Mediterranean. [...] I was collecting things for
> a parallel life, or a life not yet lived, a life that was waiting to be made.
> In a way, these objects resembled the early drafts of a novel. (226)

In this sense, the wish for this property is not only creative, but intensely exis-
tential, central to self-identity. As the author says, "I want that house more than
anything else. I want the deeds to that house"; "I have been carrying that house
inside me all my life"; "I would fall apart without that house to look forward

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[1] The crucial role of water brings to mind the influence of the French feminist writers, so frequent-
ly seen in Levy's work, even if not always mentioned by name: in particular, Hélène Cixous and
Luce Irigaray come to mind due to their characteristic association of femininity with fluidity.

to" (83). In a hauntological fashion, the wish for the dream house collapses time, merging the past, the present and the future: the house is futuristic, but spectrally present; it is also old, and thus from the past. As mentioned, the narrator quotes Mark Fisher saying: "Home is where the haunt is" (13). Similarly, in her book, *Hauntology*, Katy Shaw points out the etymology of the word "haunt," namely the fact that

> [it] carries spatial connotations, through reference to a home, or the journey back to an original dwelling place. In Derrida's theory of the spectral, the home is not a safe site, but rather exists as a borderland in which liminal states exist side by side. (2018, 18)

This takes us to *Real Estate's* broader cultural context of the domestic space as traditionally a feminine landscape, and not necessarily a safe site for women, as Levy reminds us through her philosophical and political, because personal, reflections.

She Wants It: Patriarchal Culture and the Missing Female Character

The reason why her dream house haunts the author is economic: she could not afford it due to her "precarious income" (Levy 2021, 26, 4) from being self-employed, and from her early fifties onwards unmarried, and thus independent meaning self-reliant, which is risky for any artist, let alone one over fifty and a woman. As Levy writes in *The Cost of Living*, leaving her marriage, even though it was "the best thing she ever did" (2019, 14), cost her the family house and a shift from financial security to financial austerity (50).

One idea of boosting her income, while realising her untapped potential, is to become a scriptwriter. In yet another version of her fluid dream house, Levy's narrator sees herself "typing at the edge of [her] swimming pool in California" (89). The dream continues in *Real Estate*, where the narrator's friend suggested a sure way to make money: "I should come up with a likeable female character who marries the male lead by the end of the film. Be pragmatic, [the friend] insisted, nail the deal, write the script and acquire your house" (Levy 2021, 82). However, the narrator does not want to write such a script, and follow the familiar patriarchal and commercial scenario, which would mean selling out to it, while promoting it. She is bored with "the same old performance of masculinity

and femininity, written for the major [male] and minor [female] characters" (Levy 2019, 88), and has made a different pitch to film executives. She proposed what has been haunting her for two volumes now: the missing female character – with "desires and conflicts that are not all about men" (Levy 2021, 74), who exists like a male character often does in films, but a female never does, namely:

> she follows all her desires, every single one of them. She is ruthless in pursuit of her vocation, takes up every job offer while her family pine for her. […] she has many affairs with people she will never fully commit to. (77)

In response to this film idea, "the kindest female executive laughed" (77), and "the cruellest female executive asked [her] how the audience were supposed to like such a character" (78) – not a question asked about male characters.[2] Needless to say, the idea was rejected.

What this illustrates is what the writer, director and producer, Jill Soloway, described in her book *She Wants It*, quoting from the writer and critic Lili Loofbourow (2018): the male glance – fully internalised by the female executives. "The male glance is the opposite of the male gaze. Rather than linger lovingly on the parts it wants most to penetrate, it looks, assumes, and moves on" (Loofbourow 2018); or as Soloway puts it, it offers "a farted *pfft* review out of the side of [the] mouth" (2019, 48) given to a story a woman artist wants to tell.[3]

Reflecting on her own rejection, Levy's narrator unmistakably, as she so often does, evokes the domestic landscape, which is traditionally a feminine landscape. She "guessed that no woman around that table" – that decision-making table, at which they are now seated –

> had [herself] ruthlessly pursued her own dreams and desires at the expense of everyone else. In fact, I knew we felt guilty every time

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2   The question is still asked, including about much younger women, as demonstrated by the 2024 autobiographical book on the fashion industry *How to Make Herself Agreeable to Everyone: A Memoir* by the American supermodel and activist Cameron Russel (born in 1987).
3   In the context of the newly emergent #MeToo movement, the frequency of such rejections makes Soloway wonder about all the money in the film industry that has been paid to women for their silence, for keeping quiet about sexual harassment, instead of for their words, stories, and art (2019, 212–213). It is a valid question that would be worth quantifying in a scientific study; however, due to non-disclosure agreements, fully reliable data would be impossible to obtain.

> we absented ourselves from the wishes and desires of those who
> depend on us for their well-being and for cash flow. (Levy 2021, 78)

In this sense, the abovementioned technique of transplanting images can be seen at work again in Levy's writing. Superimposed upon the CEO decision-making table at which the female executives are seated is the family table at home – where they are mentally seated at the same time due to their sense of domestic responsibility, unlike their male colleagues. That spectral table illustrates how a patriarchally gendered home inhabits most women who carry it around as "a borderland in which liminal states exist side by side" (Shaw 2018, 18). In this way, the memorable line from Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse*: "Think of a kitchen table [...] when you're not there" (1981a, 234) can be evoked, acquiring a new meaning: these words uttered by Andrew Ramsay to Lily Briscoe may be seen as symbolic of the dominant, patriarchal message given to a woman artist (or any professional woman) not only by men, but also by women who have, usually unknowingly, internalised patriarchal norms and thus collude in its preservation, as Gerda Lerner points out in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986).[4]

This is why the missing female character is still so missing. Even if she passes through the gatekeepers, some of them female, those behind the means of production, the money, she is not there for long, like *Thelma & Louise* (1991). For her female character's mobility and freedom Levy uses the metaphor of "a high horse"[5] rather than a car, but she still reaches the same conclusion:

> Is a woman steering her high horse, with desires of her own,
> likeable?
> Only if she steers her horse off the cliff. She is allowed to be exceptionally skilled at dying. (Levy 2021, 79)

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4 Importantly, the question of women's own collusion with patriarchy is a very complex one. As Walby points out, avoiding generalisations and essentialism, "this is not a consequence of false consciousness, but of [individual women's] perception of their own real interests in a patriarchal society not of their making. This is a form of accommodation to patriarchal power" (1997, 126).

5 Inspired by two antique wooden sculptures of horses in Levy's apartment. Additionally, Levy gives some thought to her electric bikes, allowing her freedom of movement, although without the spiritual and transcendental dimension offered by swimming. More importantly, Levy uses several shoes metaphors in her Living Autobiography. Some literally, others figuratively, they are all "character shoes," connected with a fashioning of one's own identity, and with wanting, this time through consumption of branded goods, a consumer's ticket to participation in chosen fashion trends and subcultures – also major components of "the self" in the context of capitalism.

The reference to the cliff is not an accidental turn of phrase but suggests a very specific landscape and associations. Again, typically for Levy, evoked by the one word is, on the one hand, the corporate glass cliff,[6] and, on the other, one more desert scenery: specifically, the iconic final image of Ridley Scott's epic drama of two female outlaws flying in their car above the Grand Canyon.

Conclusions

It is undoubtedly a depressing conclusion to reach about the feminine landscape – i.e. its dominant cultural representation in a Western book published in 2021. Deborah Levy's outlook is certainly shaped generationally, and she is more optimistic about her own daughters and their generation. Levy's narrator, however, despite her high feminist awareness (she rides this high horse herself), was still subjected to patriarchal familial norms in her marital life, and she still recognises omnipresent patriarchal rules. What she paints in the entire Living Autobiography is a very binary gender landscape, informed not by the most contemporary gender theories, but by the subjective lived experience of one nearly sixty-year-old, South-African-British, white, cis-gender, heterosexual middle-class woman. From where this one person is standing, the picture is, perforce, limited and looks essentialistic. There are many girls and women in *Real Estate*, but – apart from some authors Levy quotes – no named major male characters, only anonymous misogynistic male writers and her nameless "best male friend" whom she does not seem to like very much. There is a gender war, and it is black and white: women are good, long-suffering; men are quite or downright bad; women are afflicted by men in this snapshot, not by other women, too. It is a small interior of patriarchy, not a panorama. The book by no means aims to be a comprehensive overview of the Western gender landscape up to the early 21st century – for which the reader is better referred to e.g. Judith Butler's *Who's Afraid of Gender?* (2024). Yet, in its very private way, *Real Estate* is nonetheless political.

The very epigraph to *Real Estate* refers to "this feminine landscape" – in a quotation form Paul Éluard's poem "Ecstasy" – written from the heterosexual male gaze perspective: "I'm in front of this feminine landscape / Like a branch in the

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6   "The 'glass cliff' thesis holds that women who break through the glass ceiling into the upper echelons of management tend to be placed in more precarious leadership positions than men. As a result, they are more exposed to criticism than men and are more likely to be held responsible for negative outcomes, even if they were not set in train by them" (Werner 2014, 11).

fire" (trans. Peter Read). Levy flips the point of view, makes it female, cultural and social, in which case the feminine landscape is not an object of desire – consuming, but pleasurably; rather, it consumes her, and her desire – she is not supposed to have any just for herself. And yet she does.

Levy is really haunted by the same questions:

> Why was I so preoccupied with the phantasy of various unattainable houses and why was I still searching for a missing female character? If I could not find her in real life, why not invent her on the page? (2021, 227)

> Who is she? That is the question I was starting to ask in all my books. Not who am I, though that comes into it. How does *she* get along in a world that has avoided her? (254)

With some progress, more in literature, less in cinema, the world keeps avoiding her – in accordance with Mark Fisher's hauntological definition of the logic of lost futures (2022): capitalist culture keeps thoughtlessly reproducing itself. Being patriarchal, it keeps itself trapped in a vicious circle. As recent studies show, rather than becoming more egalitarian, its inequality is being very strongly reinforced by today's media and communications technologies (King's College… 2024), including AI (Scott et al. 2023). In "What Is Hauntology?", Fisher observed that "[t]he future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production" (2012, 16) – however, the present cultural production follows algorithmic past formulas forestalling any truly new future(s) (Fisher 2022). What about *Real Estate*? Is it trapped too, or does it offer anything new?

It is mainly, although not solely, *déjà vu*. It is a book about a woman's wanting, and wanting to want. The narrator makes it very clear what she personally wants and repeats it many times. Still, she has to insist on her right to this personal desire unattached to men. However, on a more general level, old patterns are repeated: "You never know what a woman really wants because she's always being told what she wants" (Levy 2021, 164), the narrator says, partly sarcastically, partly employing Bakhtinian heteroglossia. This invites the question if Sigmund Freud's "Was will das Weib?" ("What does the woman want?"; qtd. in Friedan 2013, 110) is really still a cultural question, still with the

19th-century singular woman, as if singular "feminine identity" has ever exist-ed. It is clear that Freud still haunts *Real Estate*, as he did Betty Friedan's 1963 *The Feminine Mystique* (2013). However, while addressing the same problems, and reiterating some of the same complaints, there is a significant difference in tone between Friedan's incendiary feminist sociological and cultural analy-sis, which, after all, provided the spark for the Second Wave of Feminism, and Levy's feminist poetical autofiction. The difference lies in women's anger man-agement in culture, inspiring yet another question: what would happen if it was not so well managed?

   "I was furious about the pain that men inflict on women and girls. I mean, I had always been furious, but life had to go on," Levy writes (2021, 137–138). Her writing is not furious; it is very controlled, although there is fury simmering underneath the elegant calm sentences, the author's patient interweaving of se-lect images and concepts. In this self-restraint, Levy follows Virginia Woolf's recommendation for women writers from the 1929 essay "Women and Fiction" (1958). Her dream house is *a room of her own*, "a place to live and work at her own pace" (Levy 2021, 2). In fact, Levy's very last words in *Real Estate* directly refer to Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (Politics… 2021). Taking us to yet another landscape, all-male "Oxbridge" and its inaccessible manicured lawns, the words "play on the grass" (Levy 2021, 297) calmly encourage women to stray from the path and to "audaciously trespass" on patriarchy's turf (Woolf 2018b, 6). On this land, not hers, Levy has been building her *real* "real estate": as she declares, "my books are my real estate" (297). Creating these literary homes for her ideas is her intervention into changing the cultural landscape in which we live.

        In the final assessment, one may wonder about Levy's continua-tion of a feminist strategy from nearly a century ago: what was "audacious" in Woolf's times, must appear only tame today. Silhouettes of obsolete ideals of "feminine identity" may peak through *Real Estate's* final image, (un)wit-tingly (?) re-enacted in gentle and ladylike, even childlike (supposedly) mere "playing on the grass." However, conversely, a dismissal of such a string of associations as trivial and inconsequential because they are "feminine" may be evidence of "the male glance" at work, which Woolf recognised ninety years before Loofbourow coined the term, writing about "what appears insignificant to a man" (1958, 81). As Annette Kolodny observed in her 1980 symbolical-ly titled essay, feminist literary criticism, and women's writing still require "Dancing Through the Minefield."

One more idea from the history of feminist thought echoed in *Real Estate* is worth mentioning in this limited space: Levy's optimistic (albeit vague) vision of how the feminine domestic landscape could be reappropriated and reclaimed, forming yet another ghost from the past:

> Domestic space, if it is not societally inflicted on women, if it is not an affliction bestowed on us, by patriarchy, can be a powerful space. (138)

> There are many resourceful and imaginative modern women who are heads of their households. […] they experience the full weight of patriarchy's hostility to their holding dominant power in the family. […] After all, if she can create another sort of household, she can create another sort of world order. (164)

This fantasy of a domestic space without men is reminiscent of a late 1970s feminist conceptualisation described as "a separatist strategy" by Sylvia Walby in her *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1997, 102). Realistically, however, it must be deemed far from being able to "create another sort of *world* order" (added emphasis): this kind of female utopia may offer a refuge from the patriarchal world order, but not really an alternative to it.

Feminism, as ever, remains a pluralistic field, which even individual feminist texts can demonstrate (cf. Kolodny 2001, 2162–2163). In the end, it is Levy's symbol of women's "riding a high horse" that stands out, offering more than comforting wishful thinking. Levy's "high horse" echoes Lerner's final diagnosis for any attempt at toppling patriarchy:

> Perhaps the greatest challenge to thinking women is the challenge to move from the desire for safety and approval to the most "unfeminine" quality of all – that of intellectual arrogance, the supreme hubris, which asserts to itself the right to reorder the world. The hubris of the god-makers, the hubris of the male system-builders. (Lerner 1986, 228)

Not inviting men to this new system is not an option – another challenge is to include everyone. There is also a challenge here for women who think

of themselves as embracing feminist views: to become aware of their own unconscious patriarchal indoctrination, to start thinking of women who are different from the patriarchal norm, and from themselves, as those who *make* a difference, as – to state a simple, yet often overlooked fact – difference does not happen on its own, but rather has to be made, acted out, lived, and not just, however creatively, imagined.

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John Banville's Novels of the Early Twenties: Terminations and Turns

Barbara Puschmann-Nalenz

Abstract: The article starts from the observation that Irish fiction has recently shown a diversification, which can be summarised as follows: on the one hand there are works addressing the history of Ireland, on the other hand we see novels focusing on post-national topics (cf. Haekel). John Banville, who under the pseudonym of Benjamin Black also wrote crime novels, is a renowned representative of narrative fiction informed by contemporary philosophy and aesthetics, exploring questions such as memory, cognition, and personal identity. My article reveals how in his latest (and allegedly last) literary novel *The Singularities* (2022) his highly sophisticated character narration reaches a terminal point, as self-reflexivity, textual referentiality, and abstraction become unsettling.

However, the complexity of placing his work in literary history has intensified by the appearance of three more novels published between 2020 and 2023 under Banville's own name despite the supposed finality of *The Singularities*. Surprisingly, *Snow* (2020), *April in Spain* (2021) and *The Lock-Up* (2023) revisit dismal topics from Irish national history. These thematically (trans)national fictions also enhance the propositions of realism in Banville's work. They present another hybrid form of narrative genres, blending crime fiction and historical novel, infused with philosophical reflection. The writer evades a categorisation. With *The Singularities*, Banville wishes to take his departure from the philosophical novel, as it seems with the intention to continue writing his new kind of murder mystery. *The Lock-Up* will be followed by another crime novel in October 2024.

The Singularities, I wish to show in my analysis, points at the exhaustion due to a self-reflexive probing of the subject, the unreliability of knowledge, and the impossibility of truthful representation. Reality appears gloomy, yet in the end art surfaces as a source of freedom and imaginativeness for the individual and prospering kinds of fellowship.

Keywords: referentiality, identity, historical crime fiction, hybridity, realism.

1. Introduction: Parallel Courses in Irish Fiction, and Banville's Postmillennial Novels

Criticism notices that Irish narrative literature has lately spread into two main directions under the influence of the socio-economic changes during the years 1990 to 2008 (Haekel 2020, 19). One development, continued from previous decades, exemplifies a national brand of the historical novel. It focuses on socio-political topics with a tradition in the Irish cultural imagination, above all the country's postcolonial struggles, renewed armed conflicts in Northern Ireland starting in the 1970s, the role and influence of the Catholic Church in the Republic, marriage, and the family with its dysfunctions (cf. 23). With specifications, I maintain that novels by Sebastian Barry, Anna Burns, and Anne Enright still evince such a commitment to traditional subject matters of Irish narrative fiction. Currently, the thematic scope includes former social taboos such as homosexuality, alcoholism, social divisions, or child abuse. Yet Colm Tóibín claims that Irish fiction should reach a post-national stage, a contention that Haekel tests (23), with the result that, especially in Sally Rooney's novels, the impact of Irish history is diminished. Instead, individual worries and concerns of global importance predominate. (31)

If one purpose of this article remains placing Banville's novels within the recent history of *Irish* fiction, I contend that the textual analysis of *The Singularities*, his swansong – or so he claims, elucidates this objective. My reading may disclose the reason for his turn from the postmodern novel in English to a preference for Irish historical (crime) fiction. A second and more general aim is to illuminate the significance of the author's latest step for current developments in post-postmodern narrative literature.

In his pre-millennial literary works Banville has long given priority to thematically post-national and philosophically poststructuralist fields; his novels did not reflect Irish issues but linked up with another literary tradition and canon. As the title of a critical article published in 2000 summarises his interests: "The Case of John Banville: Postmodern Love, Postmodern Death and God-Like Authors" (Wondrich 2000). Since the 1970s, his fiction has transcended borders and boundaries, addressed science and the figures of scientists as well as anthropological issues, among which personal identity receives a special emphasis. Phenomenological questions about the perception of reality are reflected in the characters' minds, while remembering and memory remain a primary concern,

so that one protagonist in Banville's latest 'highbrow' novel, the writer William Jaybey,[1] notices: "Mysterious are the ways in which memory works, I've often had cause to remark it, as you know" (Banville 2022, 156). Though occasionally considered congenial with Vladimir Nabokov, Banville himself mentioned two writers as the main inspirational sources of his artistic achievement: one, the Irishman W.B. Yeats, the second, Henry James, a Briton of American origin and unmistakeably a model for Banville's stylistic perfection (Charney, interview).

However, among the author's novels published in the present decade under his 'real' name count three works marginally dealt with here that are rooted in the national-historical tradition. *Snow* (2020) fictionalises the reprocessing of the social split in and by an oppressive culture in the Irish Republic, telling the history of child abuse located in the narrative past with its present catastrophic outcome in an institution led by the Church. Under generic aspects, *Snow* epitomises the hybridisation between 'serious' art and the crime novel, the latter constituting a sub-genre to which Banville has contributed seven volumes after 2000 under the pseudonym of Benjamin Black. Only a year after *Snow*, the novel *April in Spain* (2021) again thematised a dilemma from the grim political and moral history of Ireland. It highlights leading figures in public life hushing up their trespasses by corruption and violence. In the story, the perpetrators presumably avoid their imminent fall thanks to the female protagonist's disappearance. Regarding its plot and character constellation, the book equally employs crime fiction templates. Like *Snow*, it adopts the detective figure Strafford and in addition the Dublin pathologist Quirke, characters familiar from the 'Benjamin Black novels' published by Macmillan. Finally, in 2023 there appeared John Banville's latest crime book, titled *The Lock-Up* and like *Snow* and *April in Spain* brought out by Faber & Faber, a superior literary publishing house. Episodes of the plot in *The Lock-Up* thematise the role of the Church and clerics in or immediately after WWII, widespread contemporary corruption in politics, and the elite's endeavour to suppress sensitive information. The general aim remains to protect institutions and men in powerful positions while hypocritically sacrificing less influential, predominantly female, individuals considered a danger to their reputation and status. Appearances are to be kept up at all costs and

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1   Leo Robson (2022a) in *the New York times* and Alex Clark in *The Guardian* (2022) point at the barely veiled phonetic similarity of "Jaybey" with 'J.B.', the historical author's initials. The protagonist's first name 'William' is identical with Banville's second Christian name.

leaks or inspections stopped by assassination. Regarding authorities in Ireland and the experts for revealing lawbreaking offences, the inherited split between the Anglo-Irish descendants from a Big House and the 'native' Irish social climbers – joined by post-war immigrants – characterises the crew in *The Lock-Up*. Like *April in Spain*, the novel extends the spatial cosmos beyond Irish borders to other, mostly European, countries, while the temporal scope is enlarged to include also elements from Germany's grave history and a past which is not over. The impact of the historical-cultural background can curb a primarily aesthetic evaluation.

The question, to which I will come back towards the end of this essay, concerns the reason why the writer has abandoned one twentieth-century tradition and set up another type of fictional narrative in the short literary history of the twenty-first century. For his new venture, he adopts generic formats of the detective novel in works thematically imbued by historical curses or unmentionables, which are not exclusively Irish. This recent triad, launched by a publisher of decidedly 'highbrow' literature, presently runs parallel to the author's famous works of narrative art, which he claims to have conclusively abandoned with *The Singularities*. The study of this novel, I propose, will disclose the motive for his resolution and contribute to the argument about the directions of *Irish* fiction – and more generally of *narrative fiction in English*.

2. Cross-Linking and Digressions of *The Singularities*

With the announcement of the finality of his 2022 novel, Banville's imaginative explorations of memory, the nature and perception of reality, and the absorption in abstract thinking have come to an end, if we believe the writer (cf. Cummins, interview; Self 2022; Clark 2022). With the closing words of *The Singularities*, "to mark a full, and infinitely full, stop" (Banville 2022, 308), the author additionally raises speculations about a proposed discontinuity of his art. This makes a closer look at Banville's 'last' cerebral novel – which cannot yet profit from a distant evaluation – even more intriguing.

The types and strategies of referentialising employed in this narrative are of special significance for the proceeding of my argument. 'Reference' and 'referential' remain emotive words in post-structuralist criticism. The analysis wishes to point out the graded distinctions and different modes of reference and (self-)reflectedness in *The Singularities* – methods as diverse as poetic intertextuality, recapitulation of fictional characters and events, or the inclusion of current

philosophical and scientific discourse. Banville's narrative unfolds the figural representations of reflectivity counter to linear time and irrespective of the sequence of occurrences in the story. In this novel, characters especially from *The Infinities* (2009),[2] including the patriarch Adam Godley and his family, but also the winged and slightly malicious deity, reappear. *The Singularities* seasons the spatial setting familiar from the 2009 novel with suggestions of an alternative global history.[3] From *The Blue Guitar* (2015) the narrative also carries on epistemological themes of the poststructuralist literary course. Only few topographical hints at the locations, such as the (ugly) Big House in an Irish landscape or the street name "Hunger Road" (Banville 2022, 23, 97), recalling the Great Famine, prompt rural Ireland as the setting of *The Singularities*.

The observation of extreme self-referentiality throughout Banville's *oeuvre* prompts a critic to investigate twentieth-century French theorists, especially Jean Baudrillard, about philosophical ideas that artistically emerge in the novels. His argument that 'reality' can only be comprehended as an exchange of models or simulacra, forming "an uninterrupted circuit without reference or circumference" (*Simulacra* 6; qtd. from Friberg-Harnesk 2018, 10, 173), matches features of Banville's fiction. In the writer's later literary narratives, the 'recycling' of characters and their preoccupations, of incidents or spatial elements is striking. Quoting Christopher Horrocks, Friberg-Harnesk locates the intellectual position of such an "infinite replay of all that happened before" (173) in Baudrillard's works and is certain that an examination of his philosophy can shed more light on Banville's fiction (9).[4] In fact, the occupation with theories and abstraction proves central in *The Singularities* as well.

The chief activity of the main characters, including the super-human intradiegetic narrator, remains philosophising on various topics. Especially the narrative experiments with diverse ways of referentialising as a philosophical manner strike the eye. Apart from the self-referentiality in Banville's *oeuvre*, an encyclopaedic intertextuality gains prominence. Using manifold literary

2   The title *The Infinities* intertextually recalls "you numberless infinities/ Of souls" from Donne's *Holy Sonnets* 7, a poem from which *The Singularities* quotes "the round earth's imagin'd corners" (83).
3   Reduction of CO_2, the renaming of New York City as Nieuw Amsterdam following "the Dutch war against America" (192), or the utilisation of green hydrogen-driven cars or processed-seawater-fuelled vehicles are among the (un)believable changes.
4   Hedda Friberg-Harnesk's monograph analyses seven of Banville's novels and two plays from between 1997 and 2015 through Baudrillard's works. She traces the component of a 'reiteration of the same' in *The Blue Guitar* (2015) as a case study (2018, 173–192).

and non-literary allusions or citations, disparate textual fragments pervade this novel. Intertextual references reach from Pontius Pilate as quoted in the Bible (Banville 2022, 261) over Shakespeare's plays (cf. 25, 82, 307), Donne's *Holy Sonnets* (83), and Rilke's poems (308) to the libretto of *Fidelio*'s choir of prisoners enjoying light and air in a brief, rapturous instant: "O welche Lust!" (88). In the first protagonist Felix Mordaunt, the experiencing consciousness of the novel's opening part and himself a released prisoner, the association with the opera triggers philosophical ruminations. He begins to realise – what is self-evident to the monitoring invisible consciousness behind his free indirect discourse – that human individuals living in 'freedom' and celebrating 'liberty' only "persist in dreaming themselves free" (88).

Examples of the impact of intertextual reminiscences also involve parodic paraphrases of Heisenberg's formula of the uncertainty relation, namely "that every increase in our knowledge of the nature of reality acts directly upon that reality", which renders all results of preliminary recognition relative and augurs a dead end to representation. Concerning the 'progress' of science, Mordaunt has learned in approximately twenty years in gaol how "Godley has shown that just by speculating about it in certain specialised ways we are steadily wearing out the world" (90). Evolution and regression apparently conflate if one follows "Godley's radical re-evaluation of all things", which caused despair in many scholars before it became a widely accepted theory:

> Except that in those years such advance as there was had taken the form of recession, and showed our universe to be as a diminishing ball of fluff under an empty bed in an uninhabited mansion in a tangled wood on a frozen island on a dying planet floating in retrograde motion amid the illimitable darknesses of the multispace. No progress, then, only regress; no expansion, only shrinkage. (90)

The mundane imagery used in Mordaunt's reflection on the necessary epistemic revisions regarding man and evolution emphasises the shock of disenchantment, which the publication of Godley's Theorem meant for deterministic believers, creationists, intellectuals, and Darwinists alike. If we follow the argument of Godley the late scientist, an elating increase in knowledge means a reciprocal dispiriting emotional stirring caused by the insight into the diminutive role of the earth, its inhabitants and their expectations. In Mordaunt's, the

focaliser's, re-conceptualisation, the origins of the human 'We', whom he imagines as conscious and cerebral individuals, can by no means be pictured as apes on the savannah fashioning a flint into an axe-head. They must be conceived as the singularities manifest merely as "infinitesimal points of infinite mass" (90). The novel's paratextual title-definition, quoted from a dictionary, explains as the last of the meanings of "singularity": "a point in space-time at which matter is compressed to an infinitely great density" (2).

Although the focaliser's struggle with Enlightenment principles is violent, Mordaunt's recollection of Godley's theories reflects contemporary research in mathematics and (astro)physics. Therefore, the literary narrative practices referentiality also with regard to fundamental knowledge about humanity and society (cf. Robson 2022a). Like several fictions of renowned British authors, Banville's novel refers to the sciences to inspire his literary narrative.

3. Modal and Structural Attributes of *The Singularities*

The construction of the narrative text intertwines two main storylines, which both deny the unities of time and of action but conflate in the place. The characters are brought together in the pastoral setting of a Country House that has been renamed "Arden" since the original name "Coolgrange House" was found somehow disturbing (Banville 2022, 18, 101). Generally, names of places or persons are often revealed as volatile, misleading, deceiving, or ambiguous, with New York, Arcady, Paris, and Helen as examples. The country estate Arden House is already familiar to readers of *The Infinities*, together with its dead owner, the celebrity Professor Adam Godley, who like his first wife Dorothy and his daughter Petra maintains a spectral presence in *The Singularities* after his demise at the end of *The Infinities*.

The focaliser of the opening narrative strand in Part I, Felix Mordaunt alias Fred(die) Montgomery, a convicted murderer, is known as the first-person narrator from *The Book of Evidence* (1989), *Ghosts* (1993), and *Athena* (1995). 'Later' he became the aging inmate of the "open prison" Hirnea House and is now released-on-license. From a regular Victorian gaol, he was transferred to the detention house "for the ordinarily insane" (Banville 2022, 5), where he served the remains of a life sentence for killing a young woman. The victim of the murder was a housemaid who had surprised him while robbing a precious painting from Whitewater House, the neighbouring stately home of his friend Anna Behrens (134, 137, cf. O'Connell 2013, 51–52). Mordaunt believes, and tries to make

other people believe, that Arden House alias Coolgrange is his birthplace and that he was an aspiring and promising mathematician himself, very much like Adam Godley Sr. To the (supposed) home of his youth Mordaunt returns as "a free man, or freeish" (Banville 2022, 90), furnished by his former cellmate with a new name, clothed in old-fashioned, respectable garments and driving an expensive if hired red Sprite sports car. Yet not only does he seek reminiscences of his former life – Mordaunt is also sought out or traced by figures from different stages of his past: his cellmate Billy who comes to collect the Sprite, Anna the lady-friend from his youth, and Rex the dog. At Arden manor, he will meet the (rather sloppy) second-generation Godleys, that is Adam Jr., whose sister Petra has committed suicide, and he meets Adam's wife the beautiful Helen, a former actress with an alcohol problem ever since she lost her children (205). At Arden, Mordaunt also encounters the decrepit widow (second wife) of Adam Sr. as well as the ancient servants – members of the erstwhile owner family Blount. Mordaunt's moves are closely observed and followed up by a generally invisible, seemingly nameless presence, the god of this universe. He converses with an addressee with whom the reader may identify or not, because s/he is supposed to see the invisible, like Rex the dog. Despite many details familiar to the reader of Banville's novels, the general volatility influences the recipient through the literally mercurial narrative presentation, which renders it almost impossible to form a coherent reading experience except for some frivolous amusement. Occasionally using first-person narrative, the god from Greek mythology reminds his audience of earlier encounters in *The Infinities*:

> And I, where am I? Perched at ease as is my wont up here among the chimney pots, enjoying the panoptic view. We have met already, in one of the intervals of my faltering infinitude. Hello, yes, me again! See how my winged helm gleams in the morning radiance. (Banville 2022, 5)

If the portrayal of Mordaunt's chronotope and its actants already evinces vicissitudes as crucial for human life the opening of a second plotline, which puts the biographer Jaybey and his biographee Godley Sr. centre stage, enhances contingency and uncertainties as principal features of a postmodern novel. During his lifetime, the powerful intellect of the late Adam Godley Sr. revealed the fictionality of the world-concept we all held/hold to be true and updated.

Instead of the heliocentric *universe*, Adam Godley devised and claimed the verity of the *multiverse*, which is of infinitely multiple or parallel worlds. His so-called revised "Brahma theory" (4; passim) was published at the time in a "world-shaking paper" (178) that earned him a reputation of the same rank as Rheticus and Copernicus, Kepler, Newton, or Einstein (180). For Godley established radical uncertainty – a self-defeating doctrine – as a comprehensive principle effective to the point where he "puts even self-identity in doubt" (4). He also contended "radical egalitarianism", by which he meant "equal significance, equal worth, or […] equal insignificance, equal worthlessness" for "all phenomena, in which he included human beings" (173). Consequently, radical indifference was assumed to have been his persuasion.

To give posthumously due honour to this famed mathematician and scientist, Adam Godley Jr. realises his plan to engage a well-known writer to carry out research on his father's life and compose the world-famous patriarch's 'true' biography. That the proposed narrative genre is an especially unstable one, participating in and drawing from fact and fiction alike, makes Dr (or, alternatively, Professor) William Jaybey, already author of *The Invention of the Past*, the ideal choice. *The Invention of the Past* recalls Banville's novel *Shroud* (2002), starring Axel Vander, a protagonist with a politically questionable history who re-invents himself (Banville 2022, 192–193), comparably to Wolfgang Kessler in *The Lock-Up*. The fictive monograph in *Shroud* created by Jaybey was his attempt to unmask the protagonist Vander, whom he now calls a mountebank (Banville 2022, 161). Thus, Jaybey positions himself as a writer who specialises in uncovering cases that illustrate inconstancy or simulation; yet *The Singularities* shows how a general unreliability and uncertainty, with the latter even suspending the first-mentioned, and vice versa, are also taking a toll on Jaybey [J.B.] himself.[5] An unexpected erotic allure fatefully emerges as a certain, yet moot experience induced by the overwhelming visual appearance of the female protagonist.[6] Upon his arrival at Arden, where to Mordaunt is commissioned to drive him in the "lipstick-coloured" (102) Sprite motorcar, Jaybey incurably falls in love at first sight with the Lady of the Manor, graced

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5   In this context, Friberg-Harnesk's statement that "Baudrillard's engagement with his own theories and their implications seems to have affected him personally" (2018, 14) explains why he stopped working on simulation.

6   Anja Müller (2004) and Elke d'Hoker (2004) have studied the importance of visuality and visual perception as representational strategy in Banville's earlier novels.

by the appearance of a goddess, who greets him as "the biographer bloke" (103).[7] A former actress, Helen Godley can avail herself of different speech registers and accents as she was able to put on costumes, postures, or roles as she pleased or was asked to do (e.g. 31).

In *The Singularities*, the fictional writer's erotic agitation interacts with the pressure to create a supreme work of historiography. The combination of desire and unfulfilled love with artistic productivity resumes a traditional motif of literature and the arts. Jaybey's rapture is doomed, because Helen the beautiful but desperate almost ignores him and eventually sleeps with Mordaunt the murderer, the man least interested in having a love affair there and then. Until the end, she pursues Mordaunt even though he rejects her. Anna Behrens is similarly stalking Mordaunt, soliciting him with the wish to be killed by him to put an end to her life of illness (143). While at first it remains unclear whether he will fulfil her wish his demeanour repeatedly leaves no doubt that Mordaunt feels bothered by women and their mere presence.

In Jaybey, the already familiar superhuman figure who acts as controller of Mordaunt has taken shape: Hermes or Mercury, son of Zeus, the herald to deities and speedy guide for humans. Hermes, the god of merchants, thieves, and liars, assumes Jaybey's guise and voice to tell the biographer's experience in first-person narrative (see e.g. 95–109), while the divinity uses free indirect speech for the narration of Mordaunt's focalisation. Even though reluctant to reveal his 'true' name Hermes discloses his descent when struck by Cupid's arrow at the sight of Helen Godley, simultaneously with his impersonation Jaybey:

> Even we, in our eternal home up there on Olympus, even we don't understand it, and so we never tire of trying to know how it feels to have the experience; think of all the disguises, from swans and bulls to showers of gold coin, that my father Zeus assumed to have his way with this or that earthly girl of the moment. It's all beyond reason, yes, but what does reason avail, in matters of the heart? I ask you.   (Banville 2022, 102)

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7   To express the sublime or eminent with metaphors that can be termed banal is a characteristic of Jaybey, the distinguished writer, as of Mordaunt the criminal. When passionately adoring Helen, Jaybey realises "I know that a moment will come, sooner rather than later, when a cold blast will blow and knock love's soufflé flat as a pancake" (149). And so, it happens.

Love and desire become a recurrent theme in the novel with varying actants at different points in time: The erotic adventures of the deceased philanderer Adam Godley Sr. occupy the infatuated biographer's research as well as the angry retrospective of Adam's daughter-in-law (223). Jaybey, suffering from unrequited passion for Helen Godley, – who herself seeks sex without finding pleasure, remains desolate, attracting disgrace by his dejection. Yet with the discovery of Godley's secret "Venetian Testament" (252–259), he hopes to be in possession of the ultimate source for the biography project, which will crown his professional career! Jaybey, for whom reading the testament with the story of Adam's last love causes another emotional tumult, briefly rejoices – only to be later stupefied by the revelation that it is a "packet of untruths" (303). The fickleness of everything that seems certain leads Jaybey to an impasse.

The supreme divine perspective accounts for the comedy and at times for satirical digressions of the narrative (e.g. Banville 2022, 91, 179). In *The Infinities*, the antecedent of *The Singularities* regarding most of the *dramatis personae*, a comic perspectival hue softened Adam the scientist's upsetting brilliance as well as personal tragedies. The impact of human misfortunes and despondence continues with variations in the 2022 novel, where the display of dark comedy in the deadly serious asserts itself as a hallmark of Banville's works. His subversive irony causes some critics to compare him with another Irish writer: Samuel Beckett, who repeatedly addressed the impossibility to continue trying to capture reality in narrative.

Returning to Arden House as 'a free man', Mordaunt finds that he has to stay apart from the manor together with the servants and to share the housekeeper's cottage. His mind is extremely busy, since simple actions or trivial occurrences unstoppably trigger associations or cogitation, plaguing and haunting him. The figural narrative situation, distinct from, though fused with, the authorial divine, exhibits Felix Mordaunt alias Freddie Montgomery as experiencing compulsive self-reflexivity and reasoning about eventualities. A scene when he enters Ivy Blount's home reveals his mental disquiet:

> Stepping over a threshold always marks, for him, a series of tiny but significant transitions: outdoors to indoors, light to shade, that-he to this-he. Nothing like the slammer to intensify the self's awareness of its self, inexistent or otherwise. (111)

For the reflector figure, a released prison inmate, the material doorstep acts as an important signifier. Crossing a "threshold" implies the concept of 'transition' or trespassing. On the story level, the signifier calls upon Mordaunt's volatile identity, his different masks and roles chosen according to situational demands. The conclusive sentence of the above quotation, however, addresses general problems of identity and cognition. To proclaim the self as "inexistent or otherwise" subverts and exhausts all certainties, foreshadowing also the finality of a canonised literary tradition.

The divine voice, greater than Mordaunt the human focaliser, implies that any member of the addressed community – the superior, enlightened "*We*" who profit from epistemic narration – is already lucid regarding his (her?) ultimate contingency: (wo)man's freedom is a dream, randomness the real condition. Left insecure, the reflective protagonist Mordaunt fears that he might be going insane, even though he contends, "it is a metamadness" (88), corresponding to Godley's so-called "super-phys" (89) or "meta-mathematics (183) of his Brahma theory. Mordaunt is convinced that his own precarious state of mind still excels the ordinary madness of the seemingly sane, who do not realise that each of the singularities that constitute the humankind knows only one of the infinite versions of 'reality', and nothing positively. With his fundamental scepticism, Mordaunt seems to approach the ancient philosophers, e.g. Socrates from Greek antiquity, or Michel de Montaigne in the sixteenth century. Yet Mordaunt's scepticism is not guided by certified moral categories such as humility because of the limitedness of the human mind. His haughtiness – led by the supercilious divinity behind him – reflects a disdain of certainties and those who believe in them. Consequently, human knowledge becomes completely unreliable or, at best, provisional, circumscribed, and perishable. Together with its communication, it may be surpassed or undermined any time and infinitely. To distinguish dissembling or simulating from verity seems impractical.

With the structural move from the first narrative strand to the second, a modal difference also occurs. Mordaunt's life history and thoughts are told in third-person or free indirect discourse, interspersed with direct speech in the scenic presentation of encounters at Arden, and with the pondering of other characters. When Jaybey enters the stage, a shift in narration and perspective takes place before the end of Part I. Henceforth, his confessional disclosures alternate with the murderer's focalisation. The biographer's first-person narrative about his settling-in after his upsetting erotic experience, which triggers

memories of his earliest infatuation, culminates in his strange confrontation with decline, mortality, and transience (144–164). Before he immerses himself in working on the biography of the illustrious Adam Godley Sr. in the famous Sky Room, he explores the house, whose materiality preserves the memories of its past. During his strolls, he faces a being he belatedly comes to identify as an old woman resting on a divan under a heap of covers and shawls. She is Ursula, Adam Sr.'s decrepit widow, suffering from dementia, a madwoman in the attic as from Victorian fiction, hidden as far away from the centre of the house as possible, and usually cared for by Miss Blount, the housekeeper and member of the former owner family.

Thus, the biographer's initiation to Arden on behalf of his honourable project ostentatiously connects amorousness with mortality, a recurrent coupling among Banville's motifs. Jaybey's studies reveal the younger years of the dead genius Adam Godley as disappointing, if the writer believes the letters and reports. Godley, in his early thirties, found himself isolated and academically vague, desperate about making scientific progress in "Arcady" (180), situated on the other side of the Atlantic. While Anna Behrens can save his mental state, his companion Gabriel Swan achieves to have a short paper published in a special-ised quarterly (183–184), obviously under his friend's name. This paper contains Godley's bizarre theorem, later referred to as "Brahma theory". With financial support from wealthy Anna, the publication in book form shortly follows, titled "*The Singularities Paper* by Adam Godley", with a dedication to Swan dropped in later editions. Apart from the theory of a 'multiverse' and radical uncertainty, it contains Godley's animistic ideas about the preponderance of *matter*, by which he proclaims the invalidity of classifying boundaries in Nature. Matter is not dead at all, "Matter, Godley insisted, is not mere, that is, is not nebulous or inert; on the contrary, it is alive, even at the lowest level, and therefore is immanent with an awareness of itself as existent: is, in other words, conscious" (172). "Leg-end-making" (187) immediately sets in after the publication, regarding the prov-idence of the theory and diverse responses from the scientific community as well as commendations on Godley's personality, who himself fervently contributes to the mythmaking.

Jaybey's work, in contrast, strictly follows academic principles: he scruti-nises other biographies or evaluates witnesses, discloses his sources, and adds deep-searching endnotes to Part II of the novel, containing the first draft of his biography. Jaybey faces tormenting problems of cognition during his enterprise,

because 'factual reality' recedes into an ever more ungraspable distance, a shaking experience that protagonists of fictions from Borges to Nabokov undergo. Banville's novelistic representation satirises the supposed value regarding human knowledge that Jaybey the writer still believes in.[8]

The decisive documentary evidence, the original manuscript of the "Singularities Paper", becomes the object of Jaybey's search in Part III, which resumes two central motifs especially of *The Blue Guitar*: the quest, and stealing. Mordaunt is still a burglar and a thief, who also continuously steals objects from Arden House (231–234), but the famous manuscript is not to be found.

An assertive moment for Jaybey's research seems to proceed from the access gained through Godley's son to the late master's "vault", a room known as the Library (193). Yet "The papers themselves are not all that mysterious" (194), Jaybey gathers. During this guided historical discovery tour, he cannot stop thinking of his "carnal obsession" for Helen Godley – "It's her flesh I'm after, not her soul" (198). Pondering about a term for the finer distinctions her sensual appeal exerts on him he finds it not as simple, "lust is not the word; it's too, well, it's too lusty" (201). He utters his doubts about his gifts as a biographer to Adam Jr. and reflects about the "truth" that he wants to stick to when writing, comparing it to the nature of lies. Because to him an ethical dimension with an emphasis on responsibility and emotional values appears indivisible from the appreciation of scientific fame:

> If Adam Godley was great, where did his greatness lie […] beyond the confines of his work? He treated his wives abominably, did who knows what to who knows how many girls […] and comprehensively mistreated his children, making a mess of this so needy, young-old fellow in front of me, and driving the other one to do away with herself. He exploited his friends, or those who aspired to be such, and struck down his rivals without mercy and with much dark delight. (199–200)

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8   Robson's second review (2022b) on *The Singularities* was entitled "Things as They Aren't", an ambiguous definition of the novel, applicable to the subjects of the epistemic digressions as well as to the simulations adopted by a central character. A comment submitted on X (twitter) (accessed June 28, 2023), protests: "there is no greater horror, no greater threat to mental health, general sanity, life expectancy, than re-reading something you wrote 6+ months ago". Leo Robson's tweet response states that he does not agree.

"[A] practised and crafty dissembler" (170), as the biographer also realises, "Godley was not only a liar, he also had a genius for embellishing a falsehood" (171). The late patriarch carefully promoted an image of himself as a man of "simple pleasures and humble pastimes", enjoying "those morality tales of our time" such as Western movies with good guys and bad guys and justice prevailing (187). Shocked by his discoveries, Jaybey, with his dignified notion of himself as a writer and diligent researcher, resolves, "what dirt remains still hidden I'll make it my business to dish" (200), whatever the consequences. We expect more revelations about Godley Sr., which will even transgress "the confines of his work" and ruin his fame as a scientist who achieved a sea change. The final blow to Jaybey's scholarly project will come at a presumptuous gathering: unhappy Helen Godley wants to celebrate her 40th birthday on a large scale, the date of her birthday coinciding with that of the death of her little son. In tune with a tradition of literary history, a big party is building up as the climax of William Jaybey's and Felix Mordaunt's stay at Arden.

With Mordaunt and Jaybey, the narrative also establishes two contrasting concepts of masculinity. The biographer's self-reflexivity, his sensitivity combined with scrupulous introspection, and a nagging insecurity are juxtaposed to the determined callousness, which in the felon amalgamates with a sharp intellect. To the reader, the perspectival return to Mordaunt and his stratagems appears almost as a relief following Jaybey's qualms, narrated as interior monologue, and a doleful scene with the Godleys. For Mordaunt and Anna Behrens are about to conspire together for a deal that is 'real', 'factual', and promising: Anna seriously wants him to kill her (215), ordering "Do!", when he remembers "Don't, the girl, the woman, the maid had said, that summer day long ago, in a strangely firm, clear voice" (231), before he killed her. In return for the ambiguous favour she is asking Mordaunt, Anna offers him the precious original manuscript of Godley's *Singularities Paper*, since long ago in her possession. Mordaunt's earlier statement that "human motivation is a mystery" (210) no longer seems valid. Abandoning his entanglement in elaborate musings about death and dying or imprisonment, from whose gloom the deity distances himself (244), Mordaunt realises that an undoubtable material opportunity lies beyond his impending departure from Arden. However, he cannot leave before Helen will surprisingly turn up to have sex with him in the housekeeper's cottage.

Contradictory revelations continue, regarding Adam Godley's private affairs as well as his scientific career. To Jaybey, Helen delivers an account of her

father-in-law's lecherousness. Whereas the celebrity himself would be amused at the broad ignorance about his philandering, the biographer is appalled at "Adam Godley's multitudinous loves" (224) when mapping out a chapter about these episodes with conscientious accurateness. The rumours about Godley's 'last love', the nineteen-year-old girl in wintry Venice, seem little trustworthy to Jaybey, when Mordaunt surprises the younger Adam in the junk room, holding his retrieval. It is not the "Brahma" manuscript, but his father's "Venetian Testament" about his "final amour fou" some weeks after his first wife Dorothy had committed suicide (278), carefully stored by Petra before she also killed herself (253).

Jaybey the scholar exults at the indubitable proof of an authentic source for the biography and immediately revises his own pejorative judgement in having believed Adam Godley a scoundrel and "a base rascal, a straw man, a pack of lies" (256). Yet the biographer cannot be certain about the validity of this confessional manuscript the genius left behind. Jaybey ponders: "Is it a fiction, a fantasy, the record of a dream? Was it written for the writer's own diversion […] or had he a darker purpose in mind? […] Could it be a forgery? […] Is it all a hoax, a booby trap?" set for future researchers? (263) Despite the late scientist's surprising passion for the girl and his emotional suffering, to which the document testifies, the biographer mistrusts it: "Her subject was art and artists" – is she herself imaginary? (278) Or "Was she […] merely – merely! – a projection of Petra, his daughter?" (279) The polyvalence of the written text is exposed with Jaybey remaining doubtful. Uncertainty is affirmed.

When the party, symbol of incongruous gathering and hasty dissolution, starts with Helen Godley as host, the characters come together and meet the sundry guests, some of them apparently mysterious or dubious. Several times the divine commentator interferes in first-person narrative with remarks on the company. He also lets the addressee catch a glimpse of a future that will be enlightened globally by the reduced output of CO_2 or personally by Helen's "judicial separation reluctantly agreed to by Adam the Broken-Hearted", followed by her fabulous financial, mental and social climb (283). The intervention of the divinity even dissolves the bipolar use of narrative modes on behalf of the two male protagonists: towards the end, the omniscient Hermes presents Jaybey from an aloof point-of-view, a position he also takes to the addressee, from whom further information is wilfully withheld (295). Indisputably, a god is the director who orchestrates this performance – the party on the fictional and the

narrative on the metafictional level. Due to the divine reign, Jaybey finally encounters Benjamin Grace, a close friend of the deceased, the Emeritus Fellow of Poststructuralist Studies (79), or, alluding to the community's peculiar 'jargon', of "Burble Burble at the University of Babble Babble" (292), who is an unyielding deconstructionist. With "his neat little cloven hoofs" (299) and his table manners Benny's features as predatory animal are reinforced together with the exhibition of his bright intellect. The fear and aversion he evokes in Jaybey come close to *panic terror*.[9] Already variously disenchanted, the biographer tries to evade further revelations as long as possible. He

> really couldn't face facing Benny Grace, not just yet. He turned and retreated through the house, displacing air, fleet as a god, for of course he is a god, he is me, as I am he, as they are all me and mine, my made-up creatures, *entheos* briefly, for their brief moment on this patch of earth I've lent them, patches themselves, inspired mechanicals. (292, italics in original)[10]

In the story of *The Singularities*, nothing and nobody is what they were or seem to be at present: the novel tells of "Things as They Aren't" (Robson 2022b). This heading of an ephemeral review upturns a line from a Wallace Stevens-poem on art and the artist, quoted as an epitaph in *The Blue Guitar*. In the novel at hand, error, deceptiveness, and falsehood prevail where facts or authenticity are presumed. Even though the poststructuralist Grace appears as a monster to the ethically minded Jaybey, Baudrillard's ideas on simulation and simulacra triumph, transpiring the novel's adherence to the tradition of poststructuralist philosophy and aesthetics. The protagonist's uncertainty about voices, originals or identities mocks human understanding. *The Singularities* carries on epistemic elements known from *The Blue Guitar* and *The Infinities* where Friberg-Harnesk has traced several components of Jean Baudrillard's orders of simulation. Banville's notion of a dissolution of borderlines between the divine, the human, fauna and flora,

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9   In *The Infinities*, the scientist Benny Grace impersonated the Greek god Pan, whose physical appearance was half-human and half-beast, with hoofs of a goat instead of feet (cf. Friberg-Harnesk 2018, 138).

10   The Greek word *entheos* means "a god within, possessed or inspired by a god, divine". The word 'enthusiasm' is derived from 'entheos'='divinely inspired' (Merriam-Webster). In antiquity, the term portrayed poets and artists.

and additionally between animate nature and the "mechanical" also correlates with the philosopher's theories (cf. Friberg-Harnesk 2018, 166–167).

Jaybey-the-man also presents an impersonation of Hermes the god. Amalgamation into an ambiguous nature, not a separate simulacrum ("copy") becomes the result in this case. Regarding the characters in *The Singularities* the god claims that "they are all me", even though he keeps an observing distance to Felix Mordaunt, a replacement of Freddie Montgomery. Mordaunt represents a faked identity or palimpsest, but physically he is still the same man. The above quote from *The Singularities* reaffirms that all are the god's similitudes and property, which conjures up the belief of creationists as well as the awareness of virtual reality and SF fans, or the cognizance of fiction writers.

A physically disagreeable and intellectually humiliating presence, Benjamin Grace, "with easy dismissiveness" metes out the final blow to the scholarly writer and his grand project (Banville 2022, 302). Grace has more disillusionment in store for the mortal Jaybey, which will incapacitate his professional ambitions that insinuated, "even the simulacrum of the life of such a man would be a thing of note, or so he had supposed" (304–305). Benjamin Grace destroys this assumption, because he claims that all is fiction or a lie (302) what Godley wrote in the Venetian Testament or elsewhere. Benjamin Grace refers to the famous mathematician as the Lord's "self-appointed rival" (301) as an omnipotent creator, who would have committed suicide had he found the strength. Considering the Brahma theory of animate matter, infinite multiverses, and boundless relativism, Adam Godley "filched it all from Gaby Swan" (304), formerly his friend, who died early in mental derangement attributed to Godley's maliciousness (178). Benjamin Grace contends, "no wonder he and Gabriel Swan were close, for both were arch tricksters" (304), a familiar epithet also of Hermes. Of the two mathematicians, Swan was the brilliant, imaginative one and Godley the imitator and profiteer, according to Grace. A cynic as deconstructionist, he assures Jaybey that he need not finish his laborious work, since nobody will want to publish his biography of Adam Godley containing the unbelievable (and unreliable) 'truth' about this great man (304) – readers would much rather believe the lies.

The counterweight to uncertainty-without-prospect surfaces in the second narrative strand at another spot of the dissolving birthday party, where Mordaunt takes a resolute departure from Arden, rumination, and intoxicated Helen Godley, who suspects him of being about to "seeing to [his] floozie". "In a manner of speaking, yes" (306), he soberly answers. With his exit from the unifying place,

he envisages a new (or renewed) daring enterprise at the neighbouring Country House. Mordaunt leaves enriched "by cunning and stealth" (305) and the premonition that much more will come in shortly when he, "her designated executioner" (235), takes care of Anna Behrens in her stately home. He intends to subsequently sell his reward, the manuscript of the Brahma theory, to the shady son of an Italian arts dealer of doubtful reputation (306, see 266) – an ironical hint at the connectivity of imaginative creativity which both art and science need and display.

The closing scene of this drama about the male protagonists' bifurcating paths, however, alludes to *The Tempest*. Like Shakespeare's last (?) play, Banville's novel promotes a "thing of darkness", acknowledged by its/his master. But this narrative equally advocates a miraculous epiphany, chasing gloom, tragedy, and despair with a show and music: the return of "Prospero's Magic Circus", which the clinking, rattling, and the flying colours announce from far away (307). The circus appears as a fleeting counterpoint to the Gothic of crime as well as to the joyless birthday party where food, drink, and dismaying gossip predominated instead of revelry. With the entrance of the circus, the fictional narrative also delves into yet another layer of the 'as if' or the 'make-believe world', which acting, simulation, and simulacra present. The symbolic order comes into sight and within one's reach when through the magician a marvel materialises.

On the historical level, this appearance of the wonderful in the drive to the mansion that bears the name of Shakespeare's wonderland bridges the past decades back to Banville's novels *Birchwood* (1973) and *Ghosts* (1993), where references to Prospero and *The Tempest* are numerous (cf. O'Connell 2013, 94). The first-mentioned still shows the author's early affiliation with the 'Irish canon', because it addresses the afflictions of Ireland with themes and motifs, some of which *The Singularities* seizes again: the Big House, madness, crime, failure, loss and grief, at times represented with farcical traits. In *Birchwood*, the protagonist Gabriel Godkin meets a travelling troupe of performers who call themselves "Prospero's Circus", a name closing the gap between the theatre and the fairground – a comparison which in Shakespeare's time was still a more common view. In Banville's fictions, the appearance of the entertainers presents a polyvalent, ambiguous signifier. Gabriel Godkin in *Birchwood* joins the travelling artists in his quest for his missing twin and shares their needy wandering life. To Helen Godley, the former actress, 'Prospero's Circus' promises the craved-for relief and enchantment in a disheartening world replete with saddening experiences – the Sprite with Mordaunt having vanished in a dust cloud on the road.

> It was, yes it was. Prospero's Magic Circus had returned, after all this time, and just for her. She thought of the juggler, his hip bones and exquisite wrists. She set off running down the slope of the garden, barefoot through the warm damp grass. Despite the wine, despite the years, she felt suddenly light and airy, as if a pair of little wings had sprouted at her ankles. (Banville 2022, 307)

Sensuous experiences, past and present, affirm her individuality and the self, with a comic element in the playful. The clown, who usually travels with the circus, appears as a grotesque figure but nonetheless relates to the actor and the artist. The painter Oliver Orme in *The Blue Guitar* describes himself as a clown (cf. Friberg-Harnesk 2018, 180–182), and William Jaybey contemplates the possibility that he is making a fool of himself with this biography and the biographee's Venetian Testament, which might be a practical joke (Banville 2022, 263). Helen's buoyancy in greeting Prospero's Circus almost keeps her flying like an unearthly creature. It was Dionysus, in whose service the theatre performances in ancient Greece took place, of whom the audience believed that he was inspiring humans with *entheos*, 'the god inside'. The outlook on Helen's 'third course' that proves neither a dead end nor a grave trespass thus marks the novel's closure.

4. Cornerstones of *The Singularities* in the Context of Contemporary Irish Fiction

Banville's 2022 novel stands out with a network of references on different levels, from the 'revival' of characters and their biographies from his earlier narratives via intertextual citations from diverse works to topical non-literary and nonfictional issues of contemporary society. A close look at *The Singularities* eventually requires a broad definition of 'referentiality', extending from represented self-reflexiveness to the thematisation of scientific subject matters. This 'web of references', as I would like to call it, reaches beyond the "Universe for His Past Creations" (Robson 2022a) in taking reflectiveness of the main characters on anthropological and epistemological notions to the end of the road. I submit that *The Singularities* states the "used-upness of certain forms", which in *The Literature of Exhaustion* (1967) John Barth famously claimed for a traditional, canonised form of novelistic production. Following *The Blue Guitar*, Banville's 'last' novel demonstrates an exhaustion of the possibilities and a departure from the propositions of the postmodern novel. Deconstruction

entails entropy with regard to human cognition and reaffirms its aspect of tragi-comedy. The tragic element materialises in an overwhelming futility experienced by the first-person narrator Jaybey, while entropy as the favourite idea of Professor Adam Godley's 'last love' does not waive the comical hue (Banville 2022, 268). The effect of tragi-comedy also spreads from the resoluteness of the offender's promising progress in 'real life'.

The different stations of awareness and reflectiveness, also exhausting Jaybey as the narrative subject, receive pride of place in this novel. They eclipse the story and the importance of its episodes and social events. The arduous substance manifests itself not in the plot – if it may be called that – but in the characters' wandering thoughts, sense perceptions, and emotions. They revolve around personal questions, intimate feelings and hardships, brushing issues of public and global importance, such as the whence and whereto of humankind, the origin of the universe, scientific progress or success vs. ethics, and epistemological problems. The novelist's representational strategies produce a textual network of high complexity without a linear time concept or the unity of action. Alternating narrative threads and narrators with the ensuing change between third-person and first-person or figural narrative situation allow an insight into the corresponding perspectives. Jaybey-the-man indulges in self-exposure, which often seems eccentric, adding to his vulnerability expressed with the immediacy of the narrative 'subject' – itself a questionable entity. The focaliser Mordaunt eventually realises the problem of personal identity, one of the recurring dilemmas of Banville's protagonists, in an un-philosophical, rationalistic way. Deliberately obfuscating his identity on record, Mordaunt claims the authority over the visibilisation of his self. Because of his reinvention, he can appear cool, determined, and vigorous, as long as the omniscient consciousness behind him does not show him reflecting on his near-death experience (240–241) or the strain of dissembling.[11] In contrast to Jaybey's sensitivity and defencelessness, the perpetrator released-on-license and ready to commit offence and homicide again if it is to his advantage strikes with his present robust lack of empathy and morality. The supernatural mediator as a distancing omniscient consciousness, however,

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11　Mark O'Connell (2013, 91–99) interprets Montgomery in *The Book of Evidence* and *Ghosts* on the background of psychoanalytic theories as a narcissistic character, who tries in vain to overcome in prison the division between his 'true self' and his 'false self'. Similarly split up are the 'internal' and 'external' self.

renders Mordaunt's calculating reflectiveness and acute observation plainly interesting without raising indignation about the lack of moral standards.[12]

Paradoxical traits or aporia conspicuously mark the central characters. Compared to the male protagonists, Helen Godley is seldom seen from inside, a rare view made feasible by the help of a benevolent (male) deity. Regardless of the power she sways over her ineffectual husband and the cultivated but shaky biographer the discrepant variants of the male gaze proffered by her unhappy admirer on the one hand and the released convict's indifference on the other hand discern her as wanting and melancholic. Jaybey's and Mordaunt's perceptions of Helen in the narrative present – foregrounding liquor, tearfulness, and sexual harassment (passive and active, past and present) – spark off heteronormative or at least traditional concepts. In quoting criticism about Banville's early works, Friberg-Harnesk agrees that his portrayals of women "leave the 'gender system untouched'" (6), which I wish to confirm with regard to *The Singularities*. The masculinities incorporated by Mordaunt and Jaybey are more differentiated, emphasising cognitive and spiritual performance, despite the dissimilitude of the men.[13] Intellect and a high complexity also mark the spectral Adam Godlley Sr. and his academic friend (or fiend) Grace.

Whereas mourning and depression, because of her experiences of loss and want, have left Helen downcast and disconnected, it is physical invalidity that weakens the minor female characters, namely old Mrs Ursula Godley, Anna Behrens, and Ivy Blount. The status of Cissy the art historian of the Testament remains unconfirmed. Hopelessness afflicted two women of the Godley family, who committed suicide: Adam Godley's proficient daughter Petra and his first wife Dorothy. The death of a woman – often by her own hand or a man's – recurs as a motif from Banville's earlier novels but is an event banned from the present action and relegated to the meta-narrative layer of *The Singularities*. Congruous with the paradigm of a tragi-comedy the saddening demise of several female characters lies in the past or the time to come. Especially representations

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12 Abeel's 1990 review of *The Book of Evidence* offers a perspicacious portrayal of this character: "Still, Freddie [as autobiographical first-person narrator] is very much his own man. In fact, he comes across with such immediacy, we almost empathize with him, even when he is most depraved. Acutely self-conscious and observant [...]" he seems to have barely changed 'in the meantime'. In *The Singularities*, his mediator Hermes compensates for Montgomery's/Mordaunt's sinister and menacing features.

13 See Zwierlein (2014, 184) about gendered melancholia, and her discussion of Juliana Schiesari's 1992 research.

of violent or induced death stay beyond the limits of this book's interests. The author relocates neutralisation or the killing of an individual to the 'crime novel' with its unshakable concept of reality.

Regarding *The Singularities*, the term 'characters' also invites a redefinition, since the hybridity of creatures and beings is manifest, rendering hybridity a trope. The narrative does not separate humanity from the divine sphere, as pictured in Jaybey or Helen. Nor is human divorced from animal nature, as shown in Rex the dog at the beginning and Professor Benjamin Grace at the end.[14] According to Godley, we may not even identify the material sphere as lacking life or consciousness (Banville 2022, 172). The expanding of hybridity as the posthumanist ontological state in beings of different kinds becomes comprehensive here. It is reflected in the generic hybridity of the three Quirke-and-Strafford crime books published by a highbrow house between 2020 and 2023.

With a terminal swerve, the end of *The Singularities* elicits the metafictional level. Surprisingly, with regard to the author's general predilection for the visual as for the invisible and spectral, this shifting is attained by a representation of auditory perceptions: the last sentence replaces the "tinny music" (307) of the approaching troupers with the scratching sound of the writer's steel pen, which definitively concludes this story with a final full stop (308). The rather inharmonious sound produced by the instruments of the writer and those of the travelling entertainers becomes apparent. The signifier and the signified, the producing and production of art, imperfect and disquieting, symbolically create the experience of life through magic.

To conclude, I return to my initial citation concerning different directions taken by the contemporary Irish novel, distinguishing the socio-political historical novel from the post-national type. The question arose where to place John Banville's literary narratives. He has long adhered to the aesthetics of postmodern fiction. Nonetheless, I would like to inscribe *The Singularities* with the motto: yet it is referential, in many ways. The author invokes philosophical and scientific knowledge, to revert with his recent "crime books" published under his own name to national-historical topics. *Snow*, *April in Spain*, and *The Lock-Up* also show the restitution of another (older?) aesthetic principle, namely of certainty

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14   The hybrid nature of the dog and the professor already revealed itself in *The Infinities*, which also uses the archetype of metamorphosis in the *Amphitryon* myth. Cf. Friberg-Harnesk on the similitude with "Baudrillard's notion that the demarcation lines of the human are becoming blurred" (2018, 146).

and realism, while they reveal that reflectiveness in character narration does not vanish when dealing with sensitive socio-political issues.

Banville personally announces the termination of the novel form he excels in. My reading of *The Singularities* demonstrates that we can attribute its extinction to the exhausted fountain of post-structuralism, which his new turn – it might be deemed a *return* – additionally confirms. The relinquishing of postmodernist criteria of fiction partakes in a current flow. In *Snow*, *April in Spain*, and *The Lock-Up*, philosophy takes second place behind the events and the solution of a riddle by the agents involved in uncovering the criminal deed. Figural auto-reflexivity, cogitation, and intertextuality, dominating *The Singularities*, lose their preponderance over plot and characters. A linear time sequence and teleological composition directed towards problem-solution reveal principles of a construction guided by logic and discipline – like the systematic investigation of a crime. The detective and the pathologist, complicated and thoughtful individuals with a biography that reflects the difficult history of Ireland, recur in Banville's new trilogy resonant with national-cultural and political topics of the past decades. Therefore, Banville comes to comply eventually with Tóibín's statement: "The purpose of much Irish fiction, it seems, is to become involved in the Irish argument" (Haekel 2020, 23) by what resembles a relapse into an older, familiar form. Yet Banville's new publishing house, proud of its list of the most eminent fiction writers, indicates a serious literary ambition. The new Quirke-trilogy reinstates the principles of *mimesis* and realism in narrative fiction parallel to the "full stop" concluding *The Singularities*. Banville's shift matches a literary development mainly remarked by recent criticism of contemporary *British* fiction.

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Neo-Victorianism in John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer*: Spectral and Textual Communications

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Abstract: The article analyses John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* (2004) as a neo-Victorian novel and places it against the backdrop of the multifarious definitions of the term. Like numerous other neo-Victorian novels, Harwood's narrative revolves around the modern protagonist's quest into the Victorian past. Gerard Freeman's amateur research into his family history leads to the discovery of manuscripts authored by his Victorian great-grandmother. Subsequently, the ghost stories that stimulate the protagonist's interest in an unknown part of his own ancestry are paralleled by his increasing sense of being haunted by Victorian spectres. This article argues that whereas, as a rule, in neo-Victorian fiction communication with the Victorian dead takes place either in the textual or the supernatural realm, Harwood's novel combines the two modes, mixing the textual and the spectral. The intertextual allusions, epistolary components as well as intersections between the fictional narratives and the protagonist's experience further obliterate the distinctions between literature and reality, between the living and the dead, between the Victorians and their twentieth-century descendants. It is argued that Harwood's novel represents an intricate combination of several modes typically employed in neo-Victorian fiction. The essential duality of *The Ghost Writer*, in which nineteenth-century and contemporary plots run in parallel and occasionally intersect, is another recurrent characteristic of neo-Victorian narratives; however, compared with "romances of the archive" such as Byatt's *Possession* (cf. Keen 2003), the protagonist's repeated encounters with the material and immaterial remnants of the past, rather than liberating him, ultimately entangle him even further in the textual fabric.

Keywords: neo-Victorian fiction, Gothic fiction, spectrality, intertextuality, John Harwood

Owing to the fact that neo-Victorianism is both a diverse and emergent trend in literature, there is as yet no consensus on its definition and shared generic characteristics (cf. Maier 2018, [pdf 2]). The term itself appears to have gained sufficient

critical currency to be regarded as being universally adopted; however, the alternative names such as Victoriana, retro-Victorian, post-Victorian (cf. Garrido 2023, 459) or Victorianist (Shastri 2001, 1) that have been previously proposed reflect a variety of possible engagements with the Victorian age in contemporary literature, and the corresponding critical efforts to establish the boundaries of the new genre. Still, the theoretical foundations of this field of study remain fluid (cf. Jones 2018, [pdf 4]). Since its inception, there have been debates concerning the scope and characteristics of the neo-Victorian, resulting in perspectives which tend either to restrict the designation of the term or, conversely, to open it up to comprise virtually all contemporary visitations of the Victorian age. Effectively, the definitions are oriented either towards exclusion or inclusion (cf. Arias 2020, 199). Representing the former approach, Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn (2010, 4) and Sally Shuttleworth (2014, 191) are inclined to limit the application of the term to self-conscious and self-questioning (re)interpretations of Victorianism. However, the latter, broader framework appears to prevail today in response to the increasing diversity of twenty-first century revivals of the legacy of nineteenth-century literature and culture. In *Neo-Victorian Fiction and Historical Narrative: The Victorians and Us*, Louisa Hadley puts forward an all-embracing, inclusive definition of neo-Victorian fiction as "contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era, at either the level of plot, structure, or both" (2010, 4). More recently, in view of "the omnipresence of neo-Victorianism on our bookshelves, theatre stages, television, cinema, and computer screens," Marie-Luise Kohlke champions the deployment the term "in the broadest globalised sense," extending it beyond the British context (2020, 208; cf. also Garrido 2023). Irrespective of the varied forms of the novelistic dialogue with the past, neo-Victorian fiction encompasses a remarkably wide array of themes. As Sarah E. Maier has observed, it lends itself to exploration in terms of its representation of "spectrality, spiritualism, family, trauma, gothic, cities, humour, biofiction, material culture, Empire, globalism, neo-characterization, freakery, feminism, and masculinities," and many other areas (Maier 2018, [pdf 4]).

This article discusses John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* (2004)[1] as illustrative of several aspects typical of neo-Victorian fiction. For one thing, it has features of the academic novel as well as detective fiction insofar as the contemporary strand of the plot is driven by the protagonist's inquiry into Victorian lives.

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1 Born in Tasmania in 1946, John Harwood is an Australian poet, literary critic and the author of three neo-Victorian novels: *The Ghost Writer* (2004), *The Seance* (2008) and *The Asylum* (2013).

However, the numerous texts he studies, which are incorporated into his own narrative, effectively constitute a parallel plot, or plots, so that the entire novel exhibits a complex, multi-level structure. In bringing together a contemporary and a nineteenth-century story linked by the motif of research into the past and a multiplication of its cast of characters, Harwood's novel resembles several well-known neo-Victorian narratives, such as A.S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990), Graham Swift's *Ever After* (1992) or Peter Ackroyd's *The Chemistry of Tears* (2012). Another frequent feature of much neo-Victorian fiction discernible in *The Ghost Writer* is its intertextual dimension. If neo-Victorian fiction is traced back to the 1960s, to groundbreaking works such as Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* (1966) and John Fowles's *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1969), then a creative, revisionist engagement with Victorian literature emerges as a recurrent aspect of neo-Victorianism. Whereas, unlike *Wide Sargasso Sea*, Harwood's book does not rewrite a particular classic, it still, like *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, relies in its embedded narratives on Victorian themes and generic conventions while alluding to a number of canonical texts. Yet, in contrast to the above-mentioned landmarks of neo-Victorian fiction, *The Ghost Writer* is also strongly indebted to the tradition of Gothic literature.[2] While neo-Gothicism must be regarded as another significant trend within neo-Victorianism (Michèle Roberts's *In the Red Kitchen* [1990] or Charles Palliser's *The Unburied* [1999] may serve as illustrations), a combination of intertextuality, metafictionality and Gothicism of the kind Harwood has achieved in his novel is far less frequent. That is why, I would argue, *The Ghost Writer* deserves more recognition as yet another manifestation of the potential of literary neo-Victorianism. The following analysis focuses especially on the interplay of textual and supernatural connections between the contemporary and the Victorian stories and characters, and the ostensible permeability of the boundaries between them.

Harwood's novel projects an intricately crafted fictional world, or, in the words of Peter Craven, "a cunning Chinese box" (2004, 53), in which the Victorian age and the twentieth century, three generations of a family, the dead and the living, the real and the imaginary, the natural and the supernatural, textual and spectral interact and influence one another. The book has been aptly described as "an echo chamber of voices" (Rafferty 2006). As in numerous other neo-Victorian novels,

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2 Considering all the three novels Harwood has published, Marie-Luise Kohlke associates him with the Gothic strand of neo-Victorian writing (Kohlke 2013, 208).

the contemporary character's preoccupation, or, indeed, obsession with the past is triggered by a discovery of its material traces. Ever since the narrator Gerard Freeman, a contemporary Australian born to parents of English heritage, finds a photograph of an unknown female relative and a bundle of papers among his mother's things, his life, from childhood until he is in his thirties – which is when the novel comes to an end – is dominated by his desire to investigate his English family's history. His first defiant entry into the forbidden territory of his mother's room has long-term consequences – as his retrospective narrative reveals, mentally he remains forever trapped in the obscure realm of disturbing past mysteries. It is not only the predictable problem of the past's obscurity that hinders his investigative project, but, in a more direct way, his mother's determined secrecy. All she is prepared to reveal in response to his inquiries are oblique hints which intrigue him further without elucidating anything. Indeed, years after her son's first glimpse of his ancestral history Phyllis Freeman dies while trying to destroy the remaining shreds of evidence. No longer impeded by his mother but at the same time deprived of the only witness, Gerard embarks on an obsessive quest. The clues that the protagonist gradually uncovers both reveal and conceal or mislead, pointing to more mysteries and complications. Gerard applies his professional skills (he becomes a librarian) to a personally motivated research. Yet, besides visits to actual locations in England, inquiries in libraries and public records offices, his search for the past also involves reading his great-grand-mother's ghost stories, himself being haunted by ghosts, and reliving, with a difference, his ancestors' or his great-grandmother's fictional characters' experiences, which places his own experience on the borderline between the real, the supernatural, and the textual. Also, as Susanne Gruss notes in her discussion of the novel, reading and interpreting the fictional texts and the life stories of his ancestors effectively becomes the narrator's quest for identity (2014, 124).

With multiple dualities at its core, connected by the motifs of research, or quest, *The Ghost Writer* affirms its affinity with numerous neo-Victorian fictions which, according to Kate Mitchell, "explore both our continuity with, and difference from, our Victorian forebears, and formulate our relationship to the period as a series of repetitions which produce both the shock of recognition and the fright of estrangement" (2010, 177). Concurring with Mitchell's claim, Nadine Boehm-Schnitker and Susanne Gruss observe that "[n]eo-Victorianism is concerned with repetitions and reiterations of that which is considered Victorian," and aver that, accordingly, some of the theoretical approaches adopted

in the study of the literary and cultural revisitations of the Victorian age are underpinned by the concept of return as employed in psychology, hauntology or trauma studies (2014, 4). Indeed, Rosario Arias and Patricia Pulham elevate the spectral to a defining feature of neo-Victorianism, contending that "[t]he spectral presence of the Victorian past is all around us" (2010, xi). Thus, they claim that the neo-Victorian novel is inherently uncanny:

> it often represents a 'double' of the Victorian text mimicking its language, style and plot; it plays with the conscious repetition of tropes, characters, and historical events; it reanimates Victorian genres, for example, the realist text, sensation fiction, the Victorian ghost story and in doing so, seemingly calls the contemporary novel's 'life' into question; it defamiliarizes our preconceptions of Victorian society; and it functions as a form of revenant, a ghostly visitor from the past that infiltrates our present. (2010, xv)

Hence, in their reading, the intertextuality of neo-Victorian fiction may be understood as a form of spectrality. As Arias and Pulham further argue, the textual traces of Victorian literature detectable in contemporary texts open up "multiple possibilities for re-enactment, reimagining, and reinterpretation" (2010, xix). Their focus on the connection between spectrality and textuality is informed by Julian Wolfreys's *Victorian Hauntings: Spectrality, Gothic, the Uncanny and Literature* (2002). Within the very broad framework that he has adopted, which largely overlaps with the notion of intertextuality, Wolfreys advances the view of a text's inherently haunted nature, due to its capacity to contain traces of other texts as well as to sustain a life, or afterlife, of its own, and giving a peculiar form of existence to textual realities and characters (Wolfreys 2013, 73).

Sally Shuttleworth, while acknowledging that neo-Victorianism encompasses a wide spectrum of works, emphasises the prominence of ghosts, mediums and spiritualism in the contemporary fictional evocations of the nineteenth century (2013, 183). Her observations are in line with Hilary M. Schor's discussion of A.S. Byatt's two novellas that constitute *Angels and Insects* (1992). Byatt both writes like the Victorian dead and engages in a dialogue with them – a method that Schor describes as "ghostwriting" (2000, 237). John Harwood's *The Ghost Writer* may be regarded as an overt exemplification of those approaches to neo-Victorian fiction that define it as a mediator between "the truly dead" Victorians and

their imaginatively resurrected "phantoms" (cf. Heilmann and Llewellyn 2014, 504). In *The Ghost Writer*, communication with the Victorian past takes place in two directions at once, backward and forward – much as the modern-day protagonist yearns to uncover the secrets lurking behind the half-glimpsed artefacts, the Victorian ghosts, in different guises, invade the present, which results in parallels, repetitions, re-enactments, and a permanently uncanny aspect to Gerard's experiences. The familial past, shrouded in mystery, intrigues and lures the protagonist so irresistibly that he breaks into his mother's dressing-table in search of the evidence that he suspects might be concealed there. This constitutes the beginning of the novel. Gerard's first encounter with his spectral ancestors, which he describes as an act of trespass, enables him to catch a glimpse of what is beyond the limits of the empirical present. The woman in the photograph he finds is unknown to him, yet strangely familiar: "I had never seen the woman in the photograph before, and yet I felt I knew her" (Harwood 2005, 4). This is also the first time in the story when the distinction between the living and the dead is obliterated. If the woman in the photograph seems to him to be alive, his mother, when she suddenly appears in the doorway and frantically beats him for his transgression, has a distinctly spectral appearance: "Tufts of hair stuck out from her head; the whites of her eyes seemed to be spilling out of their sockets" (Harwood 2005, 5). This episode is also the first in a series of encounters between the living and the dead, ghosts or revenants, the real and the imaginary, amounting to a baffling textual and supernatural game.

The title of the late nineteenth-century journal that Gerard finds together with the photograph, though is unable to read at the time, is *The Chameleon* – its name may be taken to refer to the constant exchanges and bewildering blurring of identities between the real-life and fictional characters in the novel. Soon the protagonist receives a letter from an English girl calling herself Alice Jessell and they develop an epistolary relationship lasting many years. As she refuses to meet him in person or even to send her photograph, he is left to conjuring up his own image of her. In his imagination, Alice becomes an incarnation of Pre-Raphaelite heroines, or the Lady of Shalott, or both – the Lady of Shalott as portrayed by the Pre-Raphaelites. But the network of references expands. After his mother's death, the adult protagonist at last has a chance to read his great-grandmother's tale published in the issue of *The Chameleon*. Certain parallels with his own situation are unmistakeable, and Alice, too, appears to resemble the heroine of the Victorian ghost story.

In his ancestress Viola Hatherley's Gothic tale "Seraphina," an upper-class debonair socialite abandons his lover, who subsequently commits suicide by drowning. After some time, Lord Edmund begins to glimpse a beautiful veiled female figure in the streets of London. He never meets the elusive woman, but his futile pursuit of her takes him to an obscure gallery where he sees and immediately buys a portrait of what seems to be his mysterious quarry. Edmund's fixation with the painted figure, who appears strangely animate, leads him to attempt to enter the world of the painting, which, in an alternative version of the ending, the newspapers report as his stepping into a river and drowning. The contemporary narrator recognises an uncanny resemblance to his own obsession with the invisible and unreachable Alice. Having read the story, Gerard has a dream in which Alice merges with Seraphina, and he partly identifies with Lord Edmund. However, whether he projects his own reading back onto his own experience, or whether his great-grandmother's story prophetically foreshadowed it is left unresolved. He may have been inspired by Pre-Raphaelite art, but so, as he speculates, may have been his Victorian ancestress. Effectively, the origin of the Alice/Seraphina image cannot be determined. Additionally, this episode highlights the ambiguity of the titular "ghost writer" – whereas Viola Hatherley was an author of ghost stories, there is a possibility that she also authored and shaped the life stories of her descendants, including Gerard. Under the latter interpretation, the contemporary protagonist's ontological status becomes questionable – as he is gradually entangled in the stories he reads, his own identity begins to shift between that of a real-life human being and that of an incarnation of his Victorian ancestors or a modern-day version of the fictional characters he encounters in the texts.

Invoking Derrida, Wolfreys states that the spectral, which is ontologically different both from alive and dead, is a third term, "emerging between, and yet not as part of, two negations: *neither*, *nor*." It "speaks of the limits of determination, while arriving beyond the terminal both in and of identification in either case (alive/dead) and not as an oppositional or dialectical term itself defined as part of some logical economy" (Wolfreys 2013, 70). Just as many characters in Harwood's novel, including the narrator himself, exist somewhere in between the categories of alive and dead, they also hover between text and reality. The Alice/Seraphina blend discussed above is illustrative of the entanglement of the spectral and the textual in Harwood's novel. Yet, as in the story of Lord Edmund in "Seraphina," the object of the narrator's desire, that is the truth about his

familial heritage, continues to elude him. The texts he finds, whether factual or fictional, offer only partial illuminations, open up some avenues of inquiry while closing others, contain gaps or contradictory and confusing information. Moreover, the constant exchange of letters (many of them quoted in the novel) with his invisible lover Alice both provides a continuing commentary on his quest and offers him new ideas. In the conclusion of the novel, Gerard finds himself trapped and narrowly avoids Lord Edmund's fatal end.

The protagonist's search for his family history requires him to study historical records, but in the course of his research he also comes across more Gothic tales by his Victorian great-grandmother. Again, as was the case with his original discovery, the way he gradually obtains further evidence remains ambiguous – this happens partly thanks to his own efforts, but partly seems to be as if supernaturally engineered, as if someone wanted the documents to come his way and offer him more tantalising clues. For instance, whereas Gerard's study of administrative records in the Reading Room of the British Museum (Harwood 2005, 77) proves fruitless, he finds there a copy of another story by Viola Hatherley, called "The Gift of Flight," the opening scene of which takes place in the very same location: the Reading Room of the British Museum. Its protagonist, like Gerard, lives in vague anticipation of finding a book that will illuminate her own experience. The tale, with distinctly Gothic features of mystery, haunting, secrecy and forbidden love, also contains the motifs of a fatal attraction to a portrait of a dead woman, flight, fall, and near murder or suicide. Hence, the story resonates not only with Gerard's experience (both prior and subsequent to his reading of the story), but also with the other stories by Viola Hatherley (there are four of them in total) included in the novel. Not only does the frame collapse into the fable, as Peter Craven described the structure of *The Ghost Writer* (Craven 2004, 54), but the book turns out to be a veritable intratextual mirror hall of stories that reflect, repeat, resemble, or, indeed, distort one another.

The boundaries between the stories are further blurred by the inclusion of yet another level: just like Gerard, the characters in Viola Hatherley's tales experience dreams, hallucinations, or episodes taking place in the murky zone between reality and delusion. These incidents develop into stories in their own right which are embedded within the main narratives. Sometimes the fictitious characters also come across texts which appear to be related to their situation. For instance, in "The Gift of Flight" Julia reads an account of a scene which she subsequently sees enacted in the street as soon as she leaves the

library. In another reversal of time, and another transgression of the text-reality boundary, Julia finds a newspaper report of her lover's suicide, and arrives at his flat in time to prevent it from happening. The recurring echoing between life and fiction disrupts the customary relationship between art and reality, with art as its mirror, implying that in Harwood's novel it may well be two-directional. The meaning of Gerard's mother's enigmatic remark, "One came true," turns out to refer to one of the tales in which Viola Hatherley appears to have unwittingly pre-scripted the lives of her granddaughters, and possibly also that of her great-grandson.

Notwithstanding the wide spectrum of definitions of the neo-Victorian, it is widely recognised to be "a double movement," hovering between the past and the present, traversing the boundaries of time, enabling interactions and encounters between texts, cultures, individuals and communities (cf. Arias 2020, 199). Hence, Rosario Arias describes neo-Victorian fiction as "Janus-faced" (2020, 199). Its theoreticians, whether implicitly or overtly, often invoke Simon Joyce's metaphor of the rearview mirror in discussions of the ways in which the Victorian age is portrayed in contemporary fiction. In "The Victorians in the Rearview Mirror" Joyce argues that in the process of looking backward towards the nineteenth century through contemporary lenses we inevitably see our own reflection. By employing this metaphor, Joyce stresses the processes of mediation and distortion which influence contemporary re-imaginings of the Victorian age (2007, 3). Discussing literal references to mirrors, glass and windows in selected neo-Victorian fiction, Heilmann and Llewellyn comment that those invisible barriers "could usefully be viewed as the textual layering of the contemporary novel and its Victorian narrative, the text becoming almost a glass permitting a double-viewed reflection" (2010, 144). Yet the complex structure and multiple textual layering of Harwood's novel entail not just a double view, but multiple reflections. The experience known to drivers glancing into the rearview mirror, described by Joyce as "the paradoxical sense of looking forward to see what's behind us" (2007, 3), is intensified in the case of Gerard Freeman, who appears to be caught in a network of multi-directional glances.

The narrator's story is a record of his confused (and confusing) meandering between manifold replications and refractions. The idyllic country house Staplefield, which he remembers from his mother's recollections, seems not to have existed as he fails to find any records of such a place when he arrives in England. However, he comes upon Staplefield as a fictional location in one of his

great-grandmother's stories. In yet another twist, Gerard discovers that it did have a real-life counterpart, or perhaps even two, in his family history. This discovery makes the protagonist realise that his great-grandmother's tale "The Revenant" is to be studied not only for its connections with her other fiction, but also for its mirroring of reality – yet not only the reality that had happened, but also that which was about to happen. Typical of the convoluted structure of the entire novel, the tale itself contains two narrative strands, with one repeating, with a difference, the other. Its main character, a young girl called Cordelia, becomes strangely fascinated by her grandmother's disturbingly life-like portrait, before she discovers the tragic story of Imogen's unhappy marriage, her romantic affair with the portrait painter, and her husband's revenge on both his wife and the artist. The theme of a deadly fascination with a painting, known from "Seraphina," is employed here again – the husband who bankrupted and possibly killed the painter and appropriated his collection is believed to have subsequently suffered from a curse contained in the paintings. The collection remains in the ancestral mansion and has retained its lethal properties. The young lawyer who comes to examine the family's legacy and eventually becomes engaged to Cordelia might be the titular revenant – a reincarnation of the painter, or perhaps also of Imogen's husband, the painter's arch-enemy. Indeed, Cordelia's eerie experience is that whenever Harry inspects the art collection he seems to adopt a different personality. But Cordelia herself likes to put on her grandmother's veil and pose as her ghost. Competing for Harry's love leads to enmity between Cordelia and her sister. The final scene, in which Cordelia discovers her sister's romance with her fiancé, ends in the lovers' fatal fall down the staircase (an echo of what happens in the tale "The Flight").

While reading the story, Gerard begins to suspect that it anticipated a real-life conflict between his own mother and her sister, and becomes convinced that his mother's murder of her sibling must be at the heart of the family's secret. Mark Llewellyn suggests that in Harwood's novel the Gothic tales become histories, "in the sense that they provide [the protagonist] with the investigative and interpretative clues" (2010, 37). Gerard gradually realises that of the four tales by Viola Hatherley he has found "The Revenant" is the most relevant to his research. The interpenetration of the contemporary narrator's experience and the trials of the fictitious characters created by his great-grandmother is highlighted by the fragmentation of the Victorian tale. Gerard finds its subsequent sections over a period of time so that the tale and his own search for the past

proceed as if in parallel. The Victorian Gothic continues to invade the present. If, as Arias and Pulham contend, in neo-Victorian fiction the Victorian text functions as "a form of revenant, a ghostly visitor from the past that infiltrates our present" (2010, xv), then in Harwood's novel the revenant in the embedded story called "Revenant" is also the story itself, and it may be said to self-consciously name its own haunting status.

A structural principle of *The Ghost Writer* is that the boundaries between different realms of being, between the Victorian and the contemporary, are not so much transcended as erased. The protagonist discovers that he himself is yet another in the series of revenants. Having chanced upon a photograph of his mother with her infant son, he then finds a record of his own death. Only some time later does he realise that the baby in the picture was not himself but an elder brother whose existence had been kept secret from him, and that he, i.e. the narrator of the novel, was named after his dead sibling. In the ending of *The Ghost Writer* Gerard Freeman is caught in a veritable vortex of accumulated echoes and cross-references – a neo-Victorian character exemplarily entangled in spectral and textual repetitions. He finds himself searching for evidence in his ancestors' abandoned family mansion, which appears to be haunted. A ghostly but living woman, dressed in white, appears, intent on killing him. She turns out to be his mother's aged sister Anne. Rather than being murdered by his mother, as he had assumed, Anne had spent her life consumed by the desire for revenge. Unable to reach her sister, she now wants to vent her anger on the next generation.

Even though the fire that Gerard accidentally starts engulfs the woman and the house with all its dark secrets, his final escape cannot be interpreted as a liberation. What happens to him, including the circumstances of his escape, is clearly a replication of some of the motifs found in his great-grandmother's Gothic tales. His spectral aunt is not only connected with the veiled, elusive women in those tales; she turns out to be also his mysterious correspondent Alice Jessel, whose name connotes both Alice in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* and Miss Jessel, the governess in Henry James's *Turn of the Screw*.[3] Nor can one miss her affinity with Wilkie Collins's "woman in white," or Charles Dickens's Miss Havisham. Yet when Anne, her bridal dress and her obsession with revenge are finally destroyed, the protagonist realises that his life has been empty,

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3   The Gothic tales recounted in the novel have been likened to those by M.R. James (Craven 2004, 51).

wasted and predetermined by other people's scripts. Ultimately, Gerard feels devastated and hollow: "with nothing to hold me to the earth, and no life to re-live" (Harwood 2005, 374). However, the one thing that he retrieves from the burning house is another typescript by his Victorian great-grandmother: "I felt the weight of the manuscript tugging at my shirt, and began precariously to de-scend" (Harwood 2005, 374). If the novel is read in terms of the protagonist's quest for identity, then this quest fails. The ending of the story intimates that he is going to spend his subsequent years studying yet another text, haunted by the spectral and textual echoes of the past, with no life of his own, animated only by communication with the revenants.

John Harwood has produced a novel of impressive and bewildering formal complexity, in which the boundaries between the originals and replicas, the real, the textual and the supernatural have been deliberately obliterated. The motifs of research and detection, Gothicism as well as plot and character multiplication exemplify some of the potential inherent in neo-Victorianism. As an intensely metafictional narrative, *The Ghost Writer* is underlain by overt references to the literary heritage. However, while the persistent echoing and mirroring makes for a formally successful literary project, on the level of the story it entraps the protagonist so that, contrary to what might be expected, the discovery of the truth does not bring him a sense of accomplishment or the satisfaction of closure. In this respect, *The Ghost Writer* offers an alternative to numerous neo-Victorian novels in which delving into the past eventually brings some form of uplifting illumination or reparation. In the much better known *Possession*, the contempo-rary literary critics find themselves repeating, with a difference, the story of the Victorian poets they study: "Roland thought, partly with precise postmodern-ist pleasure, and partly with a real element of superstitious dread, that he and Maud were being driven by a plot or fate that seemed, at least possibly, to be not their plot or fate but that of those others" (Byatt 2002, 421). The experience, how-ever, proves to be rejuvenating and energising. In the conclusion of her novel, Byatt shows that "the quest for truth, though necessarily unfinished, does lead to an improved understanding of the past, one that is positively beneficial, not baneful" (Keen 2003, 54). The fact that Harwood's protagonist feels downcast rather than elated probably ought to be attributed to his inability to leave the "echo chamber of voices" and endorse the perspective of a dispassionate re-searcher, or that of a reader who can derive postmodernist pleasure from appre-ciating the writer's adroit play with neo-Victorian modes.

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"Jolted into Submission": Masters and Slaves in Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*

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Abstract: In Paul Auster's *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*, characters who resemble free individuals turn into slaves. In both novels, the major characters find meaning in life by willingly submitting to a superior power. Both characters who exhibit traits of passivity become slaves as they experience weightlessness or levitation. This article uses a qualitative approach and thematic analysis to identify and analyze the theme of slavery in the two novels. It explores Nash's reliance on chance, his fear of freedom, and his potential for becoming a slave, and examines the relationship between master and slave in *Mr. Vertigo* from a liberal humanist point of view. This study is the first of its kind to explore the theme of slavery in Auster's novels. Furthermore, it delves into the metaphoric meaning of levitation. While Walt and Nash appear as free agents, they are in fact slaves. Instead of clarifying the real imbalance in the relationship between the characters, the texts conceal and romanticize their master-slave associations. Paradoxically, the masters are portrayed as comic characters in *The Music of Chance*, and Nash feels free when he is imprisoned. Moreover, in *Mr. Vertigo,* the master who tortures Walt physically and mentally is portrayed as a father figure and a sympathetic character. The texts valorize weightlessness, passivity, and submission to a superior power, and thus can be considered reactionary.

Keywords: Paul Auster**,** chance, Erich Fromm, freedom, Hegel, master, *Mr. Vertigo*, slave, *The Music of Chance*

Introduction

Submission to and Fascination with Authority

Submission to and fascination with authority is a recurrent theme in Paul Auster's novels. In most of his novels, this theme manifests in the way a minor

or weaker character attempts to transform into a stronger character, an attempt that results in the loss of identity or an identity crisis in either one or both characters. Quinn's fascination with Stillman in *The City of Glass,* Blue's obsession with Black in *Ghosts*, the unnamed narrator's doubling of Fanshaw in *The Locked Room,* Fogg's inexplicable patience with the domineering Effing in *Moon Palace*, Peter Aeron's strong attraction to Benjamin Sach in *Leviathan*, David Zimmer's admiration for Hector Mann in *The Book of Illusions*, Trause's dwarfing of Sidney Orr in *Oracle Night,* and Adam Walker's strange relationship with Rudolf Born in *Invisible* exemplify such power relations. In two novels by Paul Auster, *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo,* the psychologically weaker character allows himself to be enslaved by the stronger character; the major characters, Nash, and Walt, are passive subjects who accept their plight as inevitable. Both find meaning in life in willingly submitting to a superior power and both seemingly enjoy a state of servitude. In *The Music of Chance*, Nash experiences euphoria and weightlessness, which is remarkably similar to Walt's levitation in *Mr. Vertigo*. In these novels, "weightlessness" and levitation are valorized, but as Eagleton argues, this is no cause for celebration: "An electron has no fixed positionality either, but we do not congratulate it on its emancipated position … the postmodern subject is … strangely free-floating, contingent, aleatory, and so a kind of caricatured version of the negative liberty of the liberal self" (Eagleton 1996, 89).

The present study uses qualitative analysis to analyze and identify power relations and the theme of slavery in *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*. This study is the first to investigate slavery in Auster's novels. While slavery may be abolished in various parts of the world, it still exists in the human psyche in covert forms, which is why the subject is important. The argument of this essay, which incorporates library research, focuses on Fromm's thesis about man's fear of freedom, overt authority, anonymous authority, and the mutual dependence of the master and the slave. Although there are frequent references to postmodern thinkers in this article, the argument is based on the essentialism of liberal humanist critics. Postmodernism's distrust of logic and reason has made it politically impotent and unfit to pass moral judgments. As Richard Wolin observes, postmodernists "overarching pessimism about prospects for progressive political change… seems conductive to resignation and inaction" (Wolin 2004, 12). As liberal humanism provides value judgments for discussing the themes of fascination with power, freedom, slavery,

agency, and contingency, the writers have selected it to juxtapose the romanti-cization of the master-slave relationship that prevails in these two novels. The romanticization of the master-slave relation could have social ramifications like susceptibility to an abuse of power in social and political circumstances. The present study aims to explain the passivity of the major characters in *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo* and find an answer to the question why they willingly embrace slavery. It also explores the relation between the master and the slave in the novels and tries to relate it to a larger political context to find if the valorization of passive characters and an appreciation of their weightlessness can be read politically.

The Power of Chance

Chance dominates *The Music of Chance*. Steven Belletto sees the thematization of chance in the novel as the persistence of the power of the Cold War, which "concerns some of its key tropes_ totalitarianism versus democracy, control versus freedom, the individual and the state…" (2012, 130). Belletto also ob-serves that "American visions of reality could be authored in ways reminiscent of Soviet reality" (2012, 29), thus challenging the notion that American democ-racy equals personal freedom.

In studying the phenomenon of chance in Auster's novels, Steven Alford finds a connection between reliance on chance and epistemological assump-tions about the meaninglessness of the universe (1995, 615). Meanwhile, Eyal Dotan foregrounds chance and its relation to gambling as popular enter-tainment in capitalist America. He observes that all characters have gained wealth by chance, which can only happen in a capitalist society (2000, 164). Observing that Nash vacillates between agency and contingency, Brenden Martin maintains that embracing the contingent creates a chance of victory and salvation for the individual. In other words, it is important to embrace what chance has in store for the individual (2008, 64–65). Auster, himself, emphasizes the role of chance in life. In an interview with McCaffery and Gregory, he states, "The very day I finished writing *The Music of Chance* – which is a book about walls and slavery and freedom – the Berlin Wall came down. There's no conclusion to be drawn from this, but every time I think of it, I start to shake" (2013, 17).

The Music of Chance: A Critique of American Capitalism?

Many critics consider *The Music of Chance* to be a critique of American capitalism. (Woods 1995, 145; Varvogli 2001, 114; Shiloh 2002, 196; Colebrook 2010, 146). Warren Oberman, who concurs with Woods and Shiloh, views Auster's depiction of gambling as a means of criticizing the enslavement of modern people (2004, 199). However, as the text romanticizes and justifies Nash's indifference and irresponsibility, his irrational decisions, his reliance on chance, his unwillingness to confront authorities, and his submission to superior power, its capacity as a critique of American capitalism appears somewhat debilitated.

Nash is unwilling to confront authorities; it is only Pozzi who resists and objects. Nash reaches the extremity of perceiving Pozzi as the real source of danger. Because he is unwilling or unable to make moral judgments, Nash finally reconciles with Pozzi's murderer. This reconciliation, however, is not frowned upon by all critics. Christopher Donavan, for example, hails Nash's relationship with Murks as displaying "the most redeeming human moments" (2004, 76). Clara Sarmento also expresses a similar critical vein when she compares Nash with Auster and the act of building the wall to the process of writings, acts which imbue the lives of the author and character with meaning (22–23). Donavan's positive view about the relation between Nash and the murderer of his best friend show a general tendency of Auster critics to either ignore the real relationship between characters or to romanticize the relationship. Pozzi and Nash are the victims of Murks and the slaves of the millionaires. It is very unlikely that there could be a foundation for friendship between a master and a slave. Similarly, Sarmento sees the absurd task of building the wall as Nash's search for truth and meaning. This shows how the critic is willing to ignore Nash's servitude and his deliberate submission to the authority of the millionaires. Perhaps fear could explain the motivation of the victim to befriend the master and to find freedom in slavery.

Nash's fear of authorities increases to such an extent that, even in his dreams, he cannot escape. After his attempt to escape fails, Nash has a recurrent dream. He dreams that he leaves the trailer and walks toward the fence. However, every time he comes to the fence, the dream stops. When he tries to analyze the dream, he gradually remembers a part of this recurrent dream that had previously failed his memory: Murks is pointing a gun at his back and gently pulling the trigger. This explains Nash's unwillingness to confront authority. Nashe's overriding

fear has impinged on his logical thought and moral behavior and he is desperately trying to protect himself.

Philosophical Perspectives on the Master-Slave Relationship

Many philosophers have addressed the master-slave relationship. To throw light on the complicated relationship between the masters and the slaves in *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*, this study takes advantage of the views of diverse philosophers such as Hegel, Kojève, Nietzsche, Fromm, Foucault and Agamben. Due to their profound insights into power dynamics, human consciousness and social structures, these thinkers are essential in understanding the master-slave relationship. Each philosopher builds upon the ideas of his predecessors to offer unique perspectives on the complexities of domination and submission. Studied chronologically, the perspectives offered by these philosophers show the evolution of thought on the master-slave relationship. Hegel's examination of the struggle for recognition between master and slave as a driving force in the development of consciousness, Kojève's conception of men as eternal masters or eternal slaves, Nietzsche's division of morality into master morality and slave morality and Fromm's study of the psychology of authoritarianism and freedom will be briefly reviewed. Although the study depends mainly on the views of the humanistic philosopher Erich Fromm, it also takes advantage of the views of poststructuralist philosophers Michael Foucault and Georgio Agamben. Foucault's analysis of power dynamics and how they shape social institutions provides a critical perspective on the dynamics of domination and subjugation. And Agamben's examination of the ways in which power can strip individuals of their humanity and subject them to a state of exception or slavery throws light on the way power operates.

Hegel's Master Slave Dialectic

Nash's unconscious fear of death evokes the fear the slave experiences in Hegel's discussion of the relation between master and slave in the master-slave dialectic. In *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel gives a detailed account of how the human spirit or mind can move from a simple state of consciousness of things to "absolute knowledge". Basically, the dialectical movement occurs inside the mind: the mind first gains a consciousness of itself and then transcends to a higher

level of consciousness. The dialectic being metaphoric, Hegel chooses the names Master and Slave to show the conflict between these states of consciousness. The master represents simple consciousness, and the slave stands for the new consciousness. Consciousness wants recognition not only within itself, but also in other consciousnesses. Hence, the application of the master slave dialectic to the social realm. To Hegel, the entire process is based on a conflict:

> The Master relates himself to the Slave mediatory, through the in-dependent existent, for this is what captures the Slave; this is his chain, from which he could not free himself in [mortal] battle. The Slave thus proved himself to be dependent consciousness, which has its "independence" only in Thinghood. The Master, on the oth-er hand, is the power in charge of this independent existence, for he proved in battle that such existence has only negative worth for him […] the Master has the Slave under his power. In like manner, the Master is related mediately through the Slave to the Thing: the slave orients himself in principle as a self-consciousness, and thus is related negatively to the Thing […] (1994, 58–59)

What makes the master dominate the slave is his independent existence and what makes a slave subordinate to the master is his dependent existence, ruled by his fear. However, Hegel asserts that in the battle between the master and the slave, none is the winner. The slave depends on the master for his existence, but the master is not entirely independent of the slave for his existence; he too, needs the slave to extend a sense of self. The confrontation between the two consciousness levels inevitably results in a death struggle. In this battle, the master finds out that the recognition he was seeking is not possible because it is offered by an "object" that is not free to offer it. How-ever, the struggle ends when the slave "works the thing over" and consents to being a slave. It is only when this agreement is achieved that the "negation of the Thing" occurs. The two consciousnesses, the subject and the object, live on in a dialectic and dynamic relation that provides the possibility of change where the slave overcomes his fear of death and frees himself. There is also the possibility that the difference is dissolved, and the master and the slave acquire the realization that they are equal. The struggle between master and slave is essential for the development of self-consciousness and freedom.

Hegel's master slave dialectic throws light on the relationship between Nash and Pozzi, on the one hand, and Murks and the Millionaires, on the other hand. As a slave, Pozzi overcomes his fear of death, confronts the masters and faces death. Nash's relation with Murks and the millionaires shows the mutual need of the master and the slave for each other, although Nash's inevitable death shows that the conflict is dissolved.

Commenting on Hegel's passage on mastery and slavery, Alexander Kojève[1] departs from the Cartesian definition of the individual as a thinking thing. Kojève views the master-slave relationship as a fundamental dynamic in human history and the pursuit of recognition. For Kojève, "man is never simply man. He is always, necessarily, and essentially, either master or slave" (1980, 8). Kojève gives an elaborate interpretation of this either/or situation. Nichols, for instance, argues that Kojève's emphasis on desire as the sole motivation of the self draws a distinct line between master and slave. The master or the "thinking self" is driven by superior desires and is ready to risk his life for recognition, but the slave is driven by animal desires motivated by the instinct for self-preservation (2007, 25–26). Shadia Drurin agrees that Kojève sees men as eternal slaves or eternal masters. The slave is the loser in the battle of consciousnesses because he is overwhelmed by a fear of death to such an extent that he accepts any condition set by the master who, on the contrary, has overcome his fear of death. Hence, the slave accepts the dependent life granted him by the other, content to live the life of a slave. The master, on the contrary, is the real consciousness that exists for itself, with no need for the consciousness of the slave, which is one with "the natural world of Things" – the animal life. Thus, the slave is a "bestial being" for not being able to risk his life for freedom, while the master has already achieved the status of human because of his fight with the fear of death and by his overcoming this fear (1994, 27). In *The Music of Chance* and *Mr. Vertigo*, the masters remain masters until the end, and the slaves seem to be born into a state of bondage. The fixed social roles for the characters reduce the possibility of change to zero.

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1   In *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*, Mark Lilla considers Kojève an intellectual, who like Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, Karl Jaspers, Carl Schmitt, Walter Benjamin, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida, has gone astray. Lilla criticizes Kojève for his Napoleonic, end of history, end of philosophy, lack of class consciousness, anti-enlightenment view and "refined philosophical neutrality" in the face of war (2006, 115–136).

Admiration for the Master Morality

Kojeve's discussion of the master-slave relation invokes Nietzsche's conception of master-slave morality where Nietzsche divides morality into master morality and slave morality and admires master morality. To Nietzsche, destruction, opposition, and conquest in slave morality epitomize evil qualities. On the contrary, opposition, danger, and struggle are considered positive qualities in master morality because they result in power. The master regards security and harmlessness as negative slave values. Nietzsche believes that slave morality advocates being humble, selfless, and kind only because slaves are weak and think of self-preservation. Judeo-Christian myths which offer the advocates of slave morality the possibility of a better afterlife, Nietzsche observes, show that slaves are as obsessed with power as masters are; only their revenge is a "most spiritual revenge" (1967, 33–34). According to Nietzsche, "there are absolutely no moral phenomena, only a moral interpretation of the phenomena" (2002, 64). This shows lack of a moral standpoint which results in romanticizing violence and admiring power.

Fear of Freedom

In his influential book, *The Fear of Freedom*, Eric Fromm explains a prevailing tendency in human beings, which explains a propensity in Nash. Fromm argues that we willingly part with our freedom by submitting to an authority or by complying with dominant norms because we are afraid of freedom. He elucidates that freedom in modern society becomes a "burden" because it brings feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anxiety (2002, 115–116). Furthermore, Fromm believes that this fear of freedom results in submission to an authority, "[…] modern man, free from Medieval ties, was not free to build a meaningful life based on reason and love, hence sought new security in submission to a leader, race or state" (Fromm 2001, x). Initially, Nash is totally free. This freedom is illustrated in his travelling across America in his car at a high speed. As he drives, "the music would carry him into a realm of weightlessness" (Auster 1990, 18). Adding to this form of freedom with altered states of consciousness, he has minimized his social and personal commitments. However, as his freedom increases, his ability to maintain it, decreases. He entangles himself in a situation that brings about his enslavement. Fromm calls this mechanism of escape "authoritarianism". This masochistic mechanism is prevalent in individuals who

suffer from feelings of inferiority, insignificance, and helplessness, thus creating a paradoxical dynamic between freedom and conformity.

> These persons show a tendency to belittle themselves, to make themselves weak, and not to master things. Quite regularly these people show a marked dependence on powers outside themselves, on other people, or institutions, or nature. They tend not to assert themselves, not to do what they want, but to submit to the factual or alleged orders of these outside forces. (Fromm 2002, 122)

Fromm identifies two types of authority: "overt" and "anonymous". He regards "overt authority" as the authority of an institution or a ruler who tells people what to do, directly. With the development of modern societies, external authority is supplemented by a conscience or common sense. Fromm calls this kind of authority the "anonymous authority" and considers it more dangerous because it works from inside the individual to satisfy the needs of the status quo (Fromm 2002, 143–144). Nash's case demonstrates both "overt authority" and "anonymous authority". "Overt authority" is the authority of the millionaires who remain inaccessible in a Kafkaesque castle. It is also represented in the authority of their agent Murks, who supervises the building of a wall, armed with a gun. However, Nash has internalized the logic of the dominant power and feels inwardly worthy only if he works like a slave. Thus, he perceives the hardships of the job as "a chance to redeem" himself, "a way to atone for his recklessness and self-pity" (Auster 1990, 127).

Nash is controlled by what Foucault calls "the inspecting gaze". Gaze is used in the Foucauldian sense in which the individual is subjected to various forms of social control. Even if Murks is absent from the scene, Nash will do his job automatically. The presence of the armed Murks is necessary only for Pozzi, who resists and objects to the injustice of the system. After Pozzi's murder, Nash never thinks about running away. He has transformed into his own overseer, caught in the system of surveillance that Foucault, in an interview with Jean-Pierre Barou and Michelle Perrot, explains thus:

> the system of surveillance involves very little expense. There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under

its weight will end by interiorizing to the point that he is his own
overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and
against, himself. A superb formula: power exercised continuously
and for what turns out to be a minimal cost […] (1980, 154)

"Docile Bodies", "Bare life"

Barone observes that Nash and Pozzi live under the laws governing insane asy-
lums or prisons (1995, 65). Foucault shows the erasure of the limit between the
political subject and the living subject, which marks the biopolitical, through
which modern sovereignty is manifest. According to Foucault, "discipline pro-
duces subjected and practiced bodies, 'docile' bodies. Discipline increases the
forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these forces
(in political terms of obedience)" (1995, 138). "Docile bodies" are individuals
who have been subjected to disciplinary practices that regulate and control their
behaviors. These practices shape individuals into obedient subjects who conform
to social norms. The master exercises power over the slave, shaping the slave's
behavior through coercion and domination. The slave becomes a "docile body"
who obeys the commands of the master in order to avoid punishment. The slave
internalizes the master's authority and adopts a submissive attitude in order
to survive under the power of the master. Nash has become a docile body who
is subjected to the discipline of the millionaires and has consequently become
compliant. However, Foucault sees power as a force that is in constant circula-
tion: "Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not
only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position
of simultaneously undergoing and exercising its power" (Foucault 1980, 98).

Georgio Agamben's "bare life" is similar to the position of slave in the mas-
ter-slave relationship. The slave is reduced to a state of bare life where his or her
existence is reduced to mere survival. In this state, the slave is stripped of political
and legal protections and treated as disposable, existing only to serve the master.
Excluded from the protections and privileges of social life, the slave experiences
reduced agency and humanity and is subjected to domination and control.

The life caught in the sovereign ban is the life that is originarily sa-
cred – that is, that may be killed but not sacrificed – and, in this sense,
the production of bare life is the originary activity of sovereignty.

> The sacredness of life, which is invoked today as an absolutely fundamental right in opposition to sovereign power, in fact originally expresses precisely both life's subjection to a power over death and life's irreparable exposure in the relation of abandonment. (Agamben 1998, 53)

Foucault's "docile bodies" and Agamben's "bare life" highlight the ways in which power operates on the bodies and lives of individuals, controlling their subjectivities and determining their status in the society. Both raise questions about the nature of power and the limitations of human agency.

The Distribution of Power

Foucault and Fromm are divided over the issue of power and its distribution. As a liberal humanist, Fromm is interested in how and why an individual willingly hands his freedom to superior power. This, Fromm purports, is done because people want to overcome their feelings of insignificance and powerlessness (Fromm 2001, 230). Foucault tries to find out how power affects individuals through complex structures (Foucault 1982, 784). Foucault neglects ethical issues in his consideration of power. *The Music of Chance* also lacks distinctions between good and evil: the cruel millionaires appear funny and pathetic, and the murderer Murks is so kind that Nash cannot reject his offer of friendship. In the novel, violence is normalized because of the funny and childish behavior of the millionaires. Shiloh, who compares the novel to *The Castle*, observes that Kafka and Auster represent a kind of violence that occurs around us and looks too normal for us to notice (Shiloh 2011, 108).

When the millionaires give a tour of the house, there is a foreshadowing of what will happen to the protagonists after the poker game. Flower shows off "the City of the World", a miniature scale-model rendering of a city with lifelike buildings and human figures: "If you look at the Prison, you'll see that all the prisoners are working happily […] that they all have smiles on their faces. That's because they are glad they have been punished for their crimes […]" (Auster 1990, 80). Like the prisoners in "the City of the World", Nash and Pozzi will have to work hard, "to recover the goodness within them". Hence, Nash first confronts the utopia of the millionaires in Stone's room and then experiences life in that "utopia". In reality, Nash becomes one of those wooden figures in the

prison of "the City of the World", thinking happy thoughts about his imprisonment and the redeeming effect of work. The bank, the library, and the hall of justice correspond to Althusser's "ideological state apparatuses", institutions that serve to perpetuate the injustices of a capitalist society. According to Althusser, the values these institutions represent could seem contradictory, but they all function to preserve the dominant power structures in society. However, unlike "repressive state apparatuses" – the army, for instance – there is no apparent use of force. By constantly exposing the subject to interpellation, these institutions assign diverse roles to the individual (Althusser 1993, 15–51).

Walt: Tortured but Happy

Apparently, there is nothing to link Nash to "Walt the Wonder Boy". Nash is a former firefighter in his thirties living in late twentieth century America. Walt is a man writing about his childhood and adulthood in early twentieth century America. However, the two characters are quite similar. Both are forced to slave for a master, both enjoy this servitude, and both experience a state of weightlessness, a weightlessness which results in Walt's levitation. In *The Music of Chance*, the millionaires make Nash and Pozzi slave for them, and in *Mr. Vertigo*, Master Yehudi exploits and enslaves Walt. Thus, money is a determining factor in both novels. Moreover, in both novels the major character's anger is misdirected at a boy; Nash hates Murk's grandchild, like Walt, who hates Yusef. Furthermore, the novels are similar in that the major characters travel across America. The most crucial parallels, however, are the novels' portrayal of master-slave relations and the depiction of slaves who are pleased with their servitude.

Master Yehudi tortures Walt mentally and physically. He buries him alive to teach him levitation. "You're no better than an animal […] a piece of human nothingness" (Auster 1994, 3). This is the first thing that Master Yehudi says to Walt and manages to destroy Walt's self-confidence:

> I didn't give a damn about myself anymore. That must have been how he wanted me to feel-all jangled up and lost inside. If you don't see any reason to go on living, it's hard to care much about what happens to you. You tell yourself you want to be dead […] (Auster 1994, 6)

As Walt narrated the story of his life at the age of 77, he is dead when the reader reads the story because he has given the manuscript to his lawyer to be presented to his nephew, Daniel Quinn.[2] Although Walt, the old man, narrates the story of his life, it is Walt the young boy who the reader confronts. When he writes about his childhood, Walt the boy is not only the narrator, but also the focaliser. He has prejudices against Black people, Indians, and Jews, and is thus depicted as a fallible narrator.[3] Walt tries to escape four times but is always found by the ubiquitous Master Yehudi. In his fourth attempt to escape, he reaches the neighboring town. Caught in a blizzard, he knocks at a door only to find Master Yehudi in the house. "The bastard was inside my head, sucking out the juices of my brain, and not even my innermost thoughts could be hidden from him" (Auster 1994, 27). Thus, the master is given supernatural characteristics and all possibility of escape is ruled out for Walt.

The Superhuman Master

Master Yehudi assumes superhuman proportions in the eyes of a boy. The realization that he is no more than a slave and can never run away from Master Yehudi makes Walt gravely ill. Referring to his illness, Walt says: "I had been *jolted into submission* […] crushed by the knowledge that I would never triumph against him […] and when I woke from the nightmare of my near death, the hatred festering inside me had been transformed into love (Auster 1994, 35). Like Nash, who cannot even dream of running away, Walt has internalized the master's gaze to such an extent that he can no longer think of running away. Besides, Walt yearns for the master's love and affection, "I needed the master

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2   Daniel Quinn is the name of the major character in the first part of *The New York Trilogy*. However, this is not the only example of intertextuality in the novel. Walt and Master Yehudi spend more than one month at a small beach house on the Cape Cod shore in a place called Timbuktu. Timbuktu is the name Mr. Bones, a dog, gives to the "other world". Thus, the name foreshadows Master Yehudi's impending death. Although Auster wrote *Timbuktu*, after *Mr. Vertigo*, he must have incubated the idea of the novel long before he wrote it . In *The Country of Last Things* Auster recycles this name, Quinn, once more. This name appears in the passport Anna Blume retrieves. In *Hand to Mouth*, Auster writes that "I signed my articles with a pseudonym, just to keep things interesting. Quinn was the name I chose for myself" (Auster 1997, 61).

3   Walt's fallibility is an advantage for Master Yehudi. The master has saved the life of an Indian woman and a Black boy. The boy not only fails to understand the importance of what the Master has done, but also shudders at the thought of having to live in the same house with a Jew, an Indian woman, and a Black boy. This justifies the master's cruelty.

to love me again […] I hungered for the master's affections […]. I had learned that everything I was, flowed directly from him. He had made me in his own image […]." (Auster 1994, 57). Regarding the nature of this love, Fromm believes that "the tendency will always be to repress the feeling of hatred and sometimes even to replace it by a feeling of blind admiration. This has two functions: (1) to remove the painful and dangerous feelings of hatred and (2) to soften the feeling of humiliation. If the person who rules over me is so wonderful or perfect, then I should not be ashamed of obeying him (Fromm 2002, 142). Foucault refers to this tendency as "the fascism in our heads": "The strategic adversary is fascism […] the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us […]" (Foucault 2000, xiii). Agamben's "bare life" also explains Walt's situation. Constantly humiliated and tortured by Master Yehudi, Walt is reduced to a state of bare life and stripped of legal protection. As all his attempts at flight prove futile, he realizes that he his life is insignificant and he exists solely to serve the Master.

Walt remains faithful to Master Yehudi, even after the master's death. After he kills Slim, he finds another master, Bingo. Psychologically, it is evident that he cannot live without a master. However, the second master cannot help him overcome his feeling of emptiness,

> Master Yehudi was still dead, and all the Bingos in the world couldn't begin to make up for him. I strutted around Chicago as if I were going places, as if I were a regular Mr. Somebody, but underneath it all, I was no one. Without the master I was no one, and I wasn't going anywhere. (Auster 1994, 240)

Master Yehudi does not leave Walt even after he learns that Walt cannot levitate. Fromm explains that, although we expect a masochistic person to show signs of dependence, we hardly expect the sadist to depend on anyone. However, despite the apparent strength of the sadist, he is mutually dependent on his victim. The sadist needs his victim intensely, because the presence of the victim convinces him that he is strong (Fromm 2002, 125). Thus, the master needs Walt as much as Walt needs him, especially when he knows that cancer will not give him enough time to look for and train another slave. Fromm believes that both attitudes – submission and domination, which are rooted in man's need

to transcend his feelings of loneliness and worthlessness results in the loss of integrity and freedom of the individual (Fromm 2001, 24).

Father-Son or Master-Slave Relationship?

The novel masquerades the association between Master Yehudi and Walt as a father-son relationship. Most critics of the novel have viewed the relationship as between a father and a son. Varvogli (2001, 158–159), Brown (2007, 106, 109), and Arce (2016, 129), consider the association between the master and Walt as a parental relationship and mention their similarity to father, Geppetto and Pinocchio. In an interview with Applewhite, Auster himself emphasized the similarity between Master Yehudi and Walt to Geppetto and Pinocchio (Applewhite 2013, 97). The most extreme view is expressed by Barone, who maintains that Master Yehudi died so that Walt could live (1995, 21). Hence, the novel and popular critique perpetuate a perception of the relationship between master and slave as a family tie, while ignoring its dysfunctionality.

The Love-Hate Relationship Between the Master and the Slave

Undoubtedly, the slave-master relationship breeds ambivalence. Master Yehudi first asks Walt to pull the trigger, but Walt refuses to do so. Nor does he try to stop him. The only explanation for Walt's behavior could be his ambivalence toward the master. He loves the master, yet he hates him. After Walt's headaches, the master suggests changing Walt's name to Mr. Vertigo. On the surface, this refers to his actual vertigo after the performances. However, when he names his night club, Mr. Vertigo, the name takes on a symbolic meaning. Mr. Vertigo is Walt himself because he cannot make up his mind between love and hatred, submission and rebellion, captivity and freedom. Walt has no control over his life. Fromm fully agrees with Marx, who believes that a human being "does not regard himself as independent unless he is his own master, and he is only his own master when he owes his existence to himself" (Fromm 1994, 73).

The Master-Slave Cycle

Walt's alter ego emerges late in his life. Yusef awakens in him the feeling he must have awakened in the master: To dominate and to tame.

> The boy has the devil in him. He's brash and rude and incorrigible,
> but he's lit up with the fire of Life. Watching Yusef I now know
> what the Master saw in me [. . .] This boy has the gift too. If I could
> ever pluck up my courage to speak to his mother, I'd take him un-
> der my wing in a second. In three years, I'd turn him into the next
> Wonder Boy. He'd start where I left off and before long he'd go.
> farther than anyone else has ever gone. The problem is the thirty
> three steps […]. Even I'm sickened. by the thought of it. Having
> gone through all that cruelty and torture myself, how could I bear
> to inflict it upon somebody else? They don't make men like Master
> Yehudi anymore, and they don't make boys like me either: stupid,
> susceptible, stubborn. We lived in a different world back then […].
> People wouldn't stand for it. They'd call in the cops, they'd write
> their congressmen, they'd consult their family physician. We're not
> as tough as we used to be and may be the world's a better place
> because of it. (Auster 1994, 291–292)

Walt admits that there was cruelty and torture involved in his training, yet
he approves of the project, looking nostalgically at the past. At the beginning,
there is a man and a young boy: a master and a slave. At the end of the novel,
the pattern repeats: a man and a young boy and the possibility of a master-slave
relationship. Although the relationship fails to materialize, this is what Walt
wants. The circular structure of the novel suggests that the action is continuous
and repetitive. At the end of the novel Walt, wondering if the harsh method
used by the master was the only possible method, instructs the reader on how
to levitate. Ideologically, this is the climax of the novel:

> Deep down, I don't believe it takes any special talent for a person
> to lift himself off the ground and hover in the air. You must learn
> to stop being yourself […]. You must let yourself evaporate. Let
> your muscles go limp, breathe until you feel your soul pouring out
> of you, and then shut your eyes […] The emptiness inside your
> body grows lighter than the air around you. Little by little, you
> begin to weigh less than nothing. You shut your eyes; you spread
> your arms; you let yourself evaporate. And then, little by little you
> lift yourself off the ground. Like so. (Auster 1994, 293)

Walt has an alternative to the master's cruel methods. He cannot do to Yusef what the master has done to him because it was too cruel. Walt's method is not cruel at all. He asks the reader to stop being herself/himself. Despite the difference in strategy, both methods mean the same thing: a state of non-existence. Levitation finds a symbolic meaning when it is explained as a state of nonexistence. Walt explains his first levitation as having "no more thoughts in my head, no more feelings in my heart. I was weightless inside my own body, floating on a placid wave of nothingness, utterly detached and indifferent to the world around me" (Auster 1994, 62).

Levitation

Contrary to what most critics say about the relation between Master Yehudi and Walt, there is no father-son relationship between the master and Walt. As the name Master and the master's cruelty suggest, it is the affiliation between a master and a slave. To learn levitation, Walt is subjected to all kinds of cruelty. The master wants him to stop being himself. He wants him to feel worthless. This is what every master expects every slave to do. Levitation could mean submitting one's will to the will of a superior power and becoming socially inactive, looking for the real in the air and seeing all that happens on the earth as unreal. In *Brooklyn Follies*, Tom, who has left his PhD dissertation unfinished to become a taxi driver, justifies his choice in words that could have been uttered by Nash or Walt: "Every destination is arbitrary, every decision is governed by chance. You float, you weave, you get there as fast as you can, but you don't have a say in the matter. You're a plaything of the gods […]." (Auster 2006, 30). Like Nash and Walt, Tom floats on the surface of existence.

Conclusion

The Music of Chance and *Mr. Vertigo* could be read as manifestos of submission: novels preaching passivity and inaction. This article draws upon Hegel's master slave dialectic to consider the relationship between Nash and the millionaires in *The Music of Chance*. Nash does not have to be coerced because he loves his servitude. He is initially controlled through what Fromm calls overt authority, but later becomes his own guard by internalizing the watcher's gaze. Fromm's "anonymous authority", like Foucault's notion of "gaze", explains why Nash has

become his own overseer. The novel normalizes bondage and slavery by disclosing how satisfied Nash is in prison. The novel also normalizes the violence of the millionaires because of their comic appearance. In *Mr. Vertigo*, the relation between Master Yehudi and Walt is portrayed as a father -son relationship. The master, who tortures Walt mentally and physically, is portrayed as a father figure. The article uses Fromm's insights about the relation between the sadist and the masochist to explain the relation between the domineering Master and the submissive Walt and their mutual dependence. *Mr. Vertigo* romanticizes Walt's levitation which is the result of incredible torture and pain. Similarly, Nash's aimless wanderings and his devotion to the absurd job of building a wall are romanticized and valorized. Nash feels free when he is imprisoned, and Walt develops such a devotion for his torturer that his life becomes meaningless without him. The weightlessness that both characters experience is symptomatic of the inability of the disheveled subject to stand on firm ground to embark on transformative action. Levitation, which could be read symbolically, is indifference toward what happens in one's immediate social context. Levitation could be translated to political paralysis and ethical stand-off. The ideology of the books could be considered reactionary because they invite the reader to silence, inaction, and submission. As the master-slave relationship is portrayed in a romanticized way the readers do not question the covertness and nuances of domination and submission in a society where such relationships are politically condoned.

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Isaiah, Daniel and Luke: Exploring Scriptural Material of Medieval Books of Hours in English[1]

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Abstract: This contribution examines five canticles found in four Middle English translations of the Book of Hours, with the focus on New Haven, Yale University Library, Beinecke MS 360. The texts of the canticles come from the Book of Isaiah, Book of Daniel and Gospel of Luke, and represent scriptural content of this medieval prayer book, next to the lessons from Job and selected psalms. Out of the seventeen extant medieval Books of Hours in English, four have been selected for this study: St. John's College, MS G. 24, British Library, MS Additional 17010, Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd. 11.82, and New Haven, Yale University Library, Beinecke MS 360. The former three have received an edition, while Beinecke MS 360 still remains to be edited and, to the best of my knowledge, has only recently begun to be analyzed in depth. Apart from the primers, selected for the present analysis are the two vernacular versions of the Bible available at that time, namely the Early and Late Version of the Wycliffite Bible. This study aims to establish the textual tradition of the canticles in the four Books of Hours with respect to each other and within the broader Wycliffite tradition. This will be achieved by comparing the texts with the use of text similarity measurements, and more specifically, the cosine distance method. The obtained results will be presented in tabular form and illustrated with fragments of the text. It is hoped that the analysis performed in this paper will shed light on the textual affinities of the scriptural content of Middle English primers. This study is parallel to the one presented in Hordyjewicz (2023), where my focus was on the nine lessons from the Book of Job.

Keywords: Book of Hours, Canticles, English primers, text similarity measurements, Wycliffite Bible

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1. Introduction

Ever since its emergence in the thirteenth century, the Book of Hours, a short and simple prayer book for lay folk, constituted an essential tool for private devotion in the daily life of the laity in medieval England (Blom 1979, 3; Duffy 2006, 4; Scott-Stokes 2006, 1). The foundation of these medieval prayer books are psalms and devotions, primarily the Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Duffy 2006, 5), but Books of Hours, or 'primers',[2] as they are also called (Kennedy 2014, 695), often do not conform to one fixed pattern. And so, the elements they contain can vary immensely, depending on, for instance, liturgical practices called 'Uses' (de Hamel 2003, 2; Blom 1979, 5).[3] Due to the cost of the manuscript production, Books of Hours were initially possessed only by the wealthy, but the invention of print in the fifteenth century soon made them available to a wider public (Duffy 2006, 4).

Currently, there are seventeen known manuscript Book of Hours in English, and the complete list of extant exemplars is provided by Kennedy (2014). The present study focuses on Beinecke MS 360, the last manuscript to have been discovered, whose text, to the best of my knowledge, has only recently begun to be analyzed in depth (cf. Hordyjewicz 2023). As far as the linguistic research on primers is concerned, it usually centers around psalms,[4] with other scriptural content being mostly left out.[5] Therefore, this analysis is devoted to five canticles (songs of praise): *Song of Ezekiel, Benedicte, Magnificat, Benedictus* and *Nunc dimittis* from the Book of Isaiah, Book of Daniel and Gospel of Luke (the first one found in the Office of the Dead the rest being part of the Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary).

The aim of this contribution is to trace the source of the above-mentioned texts as presented in Beinecke MS 360 by comparing them with five other texts: three vernacular primers as well as the first two complete translations of the Bible from Latin into (Middle) English, associated with John Wycliffe and referred

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2   Throughout this text, the terms 'primer' and 'Book of Hours' will be used interchangeably.
3   For instance, most Books of Hours in English follow the Use of Sarum, which was the liturgy of the Cathedral Church of Salisbury used in southern England from the late eleventh century until the English Reformation (de Hamel 2003, Blom 1979, Krick-Pridgeon 2018, Sutherland 2015).
4   Cf. for example, Hargreaves (1956), Kennedy (2014), Sutherland (2015 and 2017), Charzyńska-Wójcik and Wójcik (2023).
5   That is not to say, however, that there has been no research done in this regard. Cf. for example, Hargreaves (1956).

to in the literature as the Early and Late Version (henceforth EV and LV respectively). The passages from the Book of Daniel, Book of Isaiah and Gospel of Luke found in Beinecke MS 360 and the other three English primers will be thus analyzed with regard to their textual tradition, and the findings will be juxtaposed against the existing research on canticles as well as the claims circulating in the literature as to the textual tradition of the psalms contained in primers in English. In that regard, the present study is parallel to the one presented in Hordyjewicz (2023) on the nine lessons from the Book of Job.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 offers details of the chapters of the Book of Isaiah, Book of Daniel and Gospel of Luke from which the five canticles are taken and provides a short description of the texts selected for the analysis. Section 3 discusses the applied methodology, which is grounded in digital humanities and enables comparative analysis expressed in terms of objective mathematical values. Section 4 presents the obtained similarity scores, displayed in tabular form. The conclusions are formulated in Section 5.

2. The texts

As signaled above, the subject of this study are five canticles (*Song of Ezekiel*, *Benedicte*, *Magnificat, Benedictus* and *Nunc dimittis*) from the Book of Daniel, Book of Isaiah and Gospel of Luke, found in six English translations: four of them contained in Books of Hours for the Use of Sarum and two in complete Bibles. The texts come from the following chapters of the Wycliffite Bible (the numbering given here follows Forshall and Madden's edition): *Song of Ezekiel* – Is. xxxviii. 10-20, *Benedicte* – Dan. iii. 57-90, *Magnificat* – Luke i. 46-55, *Benedictus* – i. 68-79, and *Nunc dimittis* – ii. 29-32.

The main focus of the present analysis is Beinecke MS 360 titled *Psalter and Hours*, produced in England between 1400 and 1415 and purchased from Henry Fletcher in 1965 by John Edwin and Frederick W. Beinecke. As signaled above, it has received no editions yet and has only recently begun to be analyzed in depth (cf. Hordyjewicz 2023), and so, the text of its canticles has been edited for the purpose of this study. The other primers with which Beinecke MS 360 is compared have their respective editions. The edition of St. John's College, MS G. 24 (henceforth St. John's, MS G. 24) was produced by Henry Littlehales in 1891. The manuscript itself was created in the late fourteenth century and Littlehales's (1891) edition represents it verbatim, without even

expanding the abbreviations, the editor's aim being to reproduce the original as closely as possible. The edition of British Library, MS Additional 17010 (henceforth BL, MS Add. 17010) was produced by William Maskell in 1846, and the editor dates the text to 1410 at the latest. The original manuscript has no title, and although at the end of the eighteenth century the words 'Hours of Virgin Mary' were written on the binding (Maskell 1846, xxxii), the editor deems it inadequate with respect to its contents and instead calls it 'The Prymer in English'. The edition of Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd. 11.82 (henceforth CUL, MS Dd. 11.82) was produced by Littlehales in 1895. CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 comes from the first half of the fifteenth century and contains, in the words of the editor, 'only the indispensable contents of a primer, with no additions of any kind' (Littlehales 1895, vii).

The final two texts analyzed here come from the Early and Late Version of the Wycliffite Bible. As signaled above, the Wycliffite Bible, completed in the late fourteenth century, was the first complete translation of the whole Bible, consisting of two renditions known as EV and LV and commonly associated with the Oxford philosopher and theologian John Wycliffe (cf. Daniell 2003; Dove 2007; Kenyon 1895; Metzger 2001; Norton 2000, Solopova 2016). The texts relied on here come from Forshall and Madden's (1850) edition of EV and LV and are the following: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS. Douce 369 (EV) and British Library, MS Royal I. C. 8 (LV). It has to be noted that Forshall and Madden's edition includes textual variants from several other manuscripts collated partly or throughout. Since the aim of the present analysis is to compare the selected text of the primers with an actual text rather than a collation, these variants have been discarded.

3. Methodology[6]

The first step in preparing the texts for a digital analysis was to transcribe them into a single Word file, excluding the elements not considered relevant for the analysis such as titles and short prayers. Moreover, the continuous texts of St. John's, MS G. 24, BL, MS Add. 17010, and Beinecke MS 360 were split into verses, with all the texts adjusted to the divisions made in Forshall and

6   The methodology presented in this paper was also applied in Hordyjewicz (2023), and was first proposed by Charzyńska-Wójcik (2021).

Madden's edition of EV. As signaled above, Beinecke MS 360 was the only text with no edition to rely on, so its canticles were transcribed by the author of this contribution from the manuscript available at https://collections.library.yale.edu/catalog/10269839. There were, however, certain elements that could not be preserved, such as medieval punctuation marks and abbreviations, and so the former were replaced by their modern equivalents, and the latter were expanded and italicized.

Regarding the texts of St. John's, MS G. 24, CUL, MS Dd. 11.82, and BL, MS Add. 17010, only the first two editions required editorial modifications in order to be suitable for a digital analysis. When it comes to St. John's, MS G. 24, this concerned medieval punctuation marks and abbreviations that were kept by the editor. As regards CUL, MS Dd. 11.82, the only necessary modification was expanding and italicizing the ampersand (&), making it indistinguishable from all the other abbreviations already expanded and italicized by the editor. As far as Forshall and Madden's edition is concerned, its texts were copied directly from the Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse, where the edition is made available both as an OCR-ed text and as scans. The text presented there did not require any modifications for the purposes of this analysis.

The texts examined in this study were created long before English spelling was standardized,[7] and as a result include a considerable degree of spelling variation. For the digital analysis to measure textual discrepancies disregarding differences in spelling, it was necessary to normalize the orthography of the texts, i.e. replace all the variants of a given word with a single shared form. In effect, differences in the spelling of the same word were not treated as meaningful. In order to ensure the consistency of the process, it was performed with the use of a software called VARD – from Variant Detector (cf. Baron 2008). VARD is a semi-automatic tool designed to aid digital analyses of texts containing a large amount of spelling variation (Baron and Rayson 2008, 2). Spelling normalization followed the general principle of providing one stable modern form spelling (and lemmatization with regard to verbs) whenever a given word was listed in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED Online 2022). When a given word had no modern equivalent, basic headword

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7   As far as the timing of the process is concerned, researchers place it in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Rutkowska 2013, 48), the mid seventeenth century (Nevalainen 2012, 151), and at the end of the seventeenth century (Scragg 1974, 80; Howard-Hill 2006, 18).

form was selected from the *Middle English Dictionary* (Lewis et al. 1952-2001).

The canticles were compared by performing text similarity measurements, which rely on calculating length distance between texts represented as vectors, using the numeric features of text (number of types and tokens)[8] and bag-of-words text analysis models (Wang and Dong 2020, 2, 7). Among the many available ways of calculating the distance between texts represented as vectors, the one selected for this analysis was performed with the use of the cosine distance method. The cosine similarity score is obtained by computing the cosine of the angle between the two vectors (Wang and Dong 2020, 3), i.e. whether they are pointing in roughly the same direction. If two vectors are at 90 degrees to each other, the cosine value equals 0. And so, the smaller the angle, the closer the cosine value to 1 and the greater similarity between the compared texts.[9] In effect, the cosine values obtained in the calculations range from 0 to 1, with 0 indicating that the two texts do not share a single item (i.e. are completely different) and 1 meaning that the compared texts are identical (Han et al. 2012, 77-78; Charzyńska-Wójcik and Wójcik 2022, 4). It has to be noted that the texts of the canticles will be compared on an individual basis, the aim being to trace the textual tradition of each individual canticle and not all the texts as a whole. All the calculations were performed with the use of R software (R Core Team 2020), a freely available software environment (Magali and Gries 2020, 376).

4. Results

As signaled above, the results obtained in the present study will be analyzed against the existing research on canticles and that on the lessons from the Book of Job as well as the psalms as far as the textual tradition is concerned to verify whether the scriptural contents of the Books of Hours follow a single tradition or represent a heterogeneous collection of texts.

When it comes to the canticles, Hargreaves (1956) claims that *Magnificat*

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8   In a contribution assessing textual similarities between sixteenth-century translations of Psalm 6, Wójcik (in press) proposes to reconceptualize as basic textual units (types) not individual words (as is done here) but n-grams (sequences of 2 words). By replacing individual words with sequences of words and calculating the cosine distance based on these units Wójcik effectively implements word-order differences into what is still a bag-of-words method.

9   Textual analyses inherently rely on positive or zero values of any dimension: a word either is present in a given text (positive value) or not (zero value). This restricts the mutual positioning of the vectors to the angle within the range of 0°-90°.

and *Benedictus* found in BL, MS Add. 17010 resemble the text of EV, while CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 shows close connection to LV. The remaining canticles are not discussed by the author at all. When it comes to Beinecke MS 360, Dove (2007) includes it in her *Index of manuscripts of the Wycliffite Bible* and claims that the canticles found in the text are part of LV. As regards the textual traditions of the nine lessons contained in the primers, they were established in a parallel study presented in Hordyjewicz (2023). Although CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 follow the tradition of LV for eight lessons, in the final lesson only BL, MS Add. 17010 shows greater similarity to the text of LV than that of EV. On the other hand, Beinecke MS 360 and St. John's, MS G. 24 follow both EV and LV and mostly come from the same source with respect to particular lessons. As far as the psalms are concerned, Kennedy (2014) and Sutherland (2015 and 2016) note that Beinecke MS 360 bears a close connection to the text of LV. CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 are also said to come from LV (cf. Hargreaves 1956; Kennedy 2014; Sutherland 2015). The text of St. John's, MS G. 24, however, is claimed to exhibit greater similarity to EV (cf. Kennedy 2014; Sutherland 2015) or classified as an independent rendition (cf. Hargreaves 1956). It is the purpose of this study to establish the textual tradition of the canticles in the analyzed texts and compare the obtained similarity scores against the above-mentioned findings, with special attention paid to the text of Beinecke MS 360. I am going to focus on tracing the textual affinities of the primers' versions of the canticles with respect to the EV and LV, with the assumption that the greater the similarity between the two versions of the Wycliffite Bible, the more similar the degree of resemblance between the primers and EV and LV.

For each canticle all six texts were compared, resulting in five tables with 36 scores each and a total of 180 scores. Almost half of the scores are superfluous as the similarity scores are calculated for each pair of texts to the effect that not only is text A compared to text B but also text B is compared to text A, with the two calculations producing the same results. The repeating results are indicated in the tables by the grey area. The lowest obtained score is 0.737 (cf. Table 2) and the highest indicates identity, i.e. 1 (cf. Table 4). Similarity scores obtained for each canticle are presented in Tables 1-5 below, with underlining used to mark the highest score (excluding the calculation presenting the similarity of the text to itself, which is at the level of 1 by definition) and bold type marking the lowest score (a convention which will be applied in the remaining

canticles as well). Due to the limitations of space, only the scores for the first canticle will be illustrated with the actual text.

	EV	LV	B360	G. 24	Dd.11. 82	Add.17010
EV	1	0.962	0.959	0.953	0.96	0.966
LV	0.962	1	0.993	**0.927**	0.988	0.992
B360	0.959	0.993	1	0.931	0.988	0.992
G. 24	0.953	0.927	0.931	1	**0.927**	0.933
Dd.11. 82	0.96	0.988	0.988	0.927	1	0.986
Add.17010	0.966	0.992	0.992	0.933	0.986	1

Table 1. Similarity scores for *Song of Ezekiel* from the Book of Isaiah

In the first canticle, *Song of Ezekiel*, the similarity scores range between 0.927-0.993. When it comes to EV and LV, although the texts show fairly high resemblance to each other, the score is the second lowest out of all the canticles (0.961). And so, the scores between the primers and the two versions of the Wycliffite Bible are quite varied. As regards Beinecke MS 360, it is nearly identical with the text of LV (with the score of 0.993, the highest in *Song of Ezekiel* but also the highest out of all the canticles), and fairly similar to the text of EV (0.959). CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 also bear a striking resemblance to LV (with the scores 0.988 and 0.992 respectively), while their similarity to EV is noticeably lower (with the scores 0.96 and 0.966 respectively). St. John's, MS G. 24, on the other hand, is more similar to the text of EV (0.953), while the score between its text and that of LV is the lowest of all (0.927). The score is fully consonant with the observation that St. John's, MS G. 24 diverges from the other three primers (with the score of 0.931 for Beinecke MS 360, 0.927 for CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and 0.933 for BL, MS Add. 17010), while their texts show very high similarity to one another (with the score of 0.988 between Beinecke MS 360 and CUL, MS Dd. 11.82, 0.992 between Beinecke MS 360 and BL, MS Add. 17010, and 0.988 between CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010). In (1) below I present the normalized text of *Song of Ezekiel*, with bold type used to mark elements that differ across the texts. It has to be noted, however, that this does not mean that one should expect each text to exhibit divergences with respect to all the marked elements. Rather, bold type should be treated as an indicator that a given word or phrase is different (or not present) in at least one version.

(1)

EV   MY GENERATION BE TAKEN AWAY, AND **ALL** FOLDED **UP** FROM ME, AS **A** TABERNACLE OF SHEPHERDS. **CUT OF** BE AS OF A **WEAVER** MY LIFE; WHILE IT I **WEAVED**, HE **UNDERCUT** ME. FROM **EARLY UNTO EVEN** THOU

LV   MY GENERATION BE TAKEN AWAY, AND **BE** FOLDED **TOGETHER** FROM ME, AS **THE** TABERNACLE OF SHEPHERDS **BE FOLDED TO-GETHER**. MY LIFE BE **CUT DOWN** AS OF A **WEB**; HE **CUT DOWN** ME, THE WHILE I **WAS WEAVED** IT. FROM THE **MORROW-TIDE** `**TILL TO THE EVENTIDE** THOU

B360   MY GENERATION BE TAKEN AWAY AND **BE** FOLDED **TOGETH-ER** FROM ME; AS **THE** TABERNACLE OF SHEPHERDS **BE FOLDED TOGETHER**. MY LIFE BE SO **CUT DOWN** AS OF A **WEB**; HE **CUT DOWN** ME; THE WHILE I **WAS WEAVED** IT FROM THE **MOR-ROW-TIDETILL** TO **THE EVENTIDE** THOU

EV   SHALL END ME; I HOPED **UNTO** THE **MORROW**; AS A LION, SO HE **TO BRUISED ALL** MY BONES. FROM **EARLY** `UNTO **EVEN** THOU SHALL

LV   SHALL END ME; I HOPED **TILL TO** THE **MORROW-TIDE**; AS A LION, SO HE **ALL TO BROKE ALL** MY BONES. FROM THE **MOR-ROW-TIDE** TILL TO **THE EVENTIDE** THOU SHALL

B360   SHALL END ME. I HOPED **TILL TO THE MORROW-TIDE**; AS A LION SO HE **ALL TO BROKE** MY BONES FROM THE **MOR-ROW-TIDE** TILL TO **THE EVENTIDE** THOU SHALL

EV   END ME; AS THE BIRD OF A SWALLOW, SO I SHALL CRY; SWEET-LY I SHALL **THINK** AS A CULVER. **ALL TO FEEBLED BE** MY EYES, BEHOLDING **UP IN HEIGHT**. LORD, **FORCE** I SUFFER,

LV   END ME; AS THE BIRD OF A SWALLOW, SO I SHALL CRY; I SHALL **BETHINK** AS A CULVER. MY EYES BEHOLDING **A HIGH**, **BE MADE FEEBLE**. LORD, I SUFFER **VIOLENCE**,

B360   END ME; AS THE BIRD OF A SWALLOW SO I SHALL CRY; I SHALL **BETHINK** AS A CULVER MY EYES BEHOLDING **A HIGH**; **BE MADE FEEBLE** LORD I SUFFER **VIOLENCE**

EV   ANSWER THOU FOR ME; WHAT SHALL I SAY, **OR** WHAT SHALL ANSWER TO ME, WHEN **I MYSELF** HAVE DO? I SHALL **EFT THINK** TO THEE ALL MY YEARS, IN THE BITTERNESS OF MY SOUL.

LV   ANSWER THOU FOR ME; WHAT SHALL I SAY, **EITHER** WHAT SHALL ANSWER TO ME, WHEN `**I MYSELF** HAVE DO? I SHALL **BE-THINK** TO THEE ALL MY YEARS, IN THE BITTERNESS OF MY SOUL.

B360   ANSWER THOU FOR ME; WHAT SHALL I SAY. **OR** WHAT SHALL **HE** ANSWER TO ME WHEN **HE** HAVE DO I SHALL **BETHINK** TO THEE IN ALL MY YEARS; IN THE BITTERNESS OF MY SOUL

EV   LORD, IF **THUS IT BE LIVED**, AND IN SUCH THINGS **THE LIFE OF** MY SPIRIT, THOU SHALL CHASTISE ME, AND QUICKEN ME;

LV   LORD, IF **ME LIVE SO**, AND **THE LIFE OF** MY SPIRIT **BE** IN SUCH THINGS, THOU SHALL CHASTISE ME, AND **SHALL** QUICKEN ME.

B360   LORD IF **ME LIFE HAVE LIVED SO** AND IF MY SPIRIT **BE** IN SUCH THINGS. THOU SHALL CHASTISE ME AND **SHALL** QUICKEN ME.

EV   LO! IN PEACE MY BITTERNESS MOST BITTER. THOU FORSOOTH HAVE DELIVERED **OUT** MY SOUL, THAT IT **SHOULD NOT PERISH**; THOU HAVE **THROW AFAR** BEHIND THY BACK ALL MY SINS.

LV   LO! MY BITTERNESS **BE** MOST BITTER IN PEACE; FORSOOTH THOU HAVE DELIVERED MY SOUL, THAT IT **PERISHED NOT**; THOU HAVE **CAST AWAY** BEHIND THY BACK ALL MY SINS.

B360   LO MY BITTERNESS **BE** MOST BITTER IN PEACE FORSOOTH THOU HAVE DELIVERED MY SOUL THAT IT **PERISH NOT**; THOU HAVE **CAST AWAY** BEHIND THY BACK ALL MY SINS

EV   FOR HELL SHALL NOT KNOWLEDGE TO THEE, **NOR** DEATH SHALL PRAISE THEE; **AND** THEY SHALL NOT ABIDE THY TRUTH, THAT **GO DOWN** INTO THE LAKE.

LV   FOR NOT HELL SHALL KNOWLEDGE TO THEE, **NEITHER** DEATH SHALL PRAISE THEE; THEY THAT **GONE DOWN** INTO THE LAKE, SHALL NOT ABIDE THY TRUTH.

B360   FOR NOT HELL SHALL KNOWLEDGE TO THEE; **NEITHER** DEATH SHALL PRAISE THEE THEY THAT **GO DOWN** INTO THE LAKE SHALL NOT ABIDE THY TRUTH

EV   **LIVING, LIVING**, HE SHALL KNOWLEDGE TO THEE, AS AND I TODAY; THE FATHER TO **THE** SONS KNOW SHALL MAKE THY TRUTH.

LV   **A LIVING MAN, A LIVING MAN,** HE SHALL KNOWLEDGE TO THEE, AS AND I TODAY; THE FATHER SHALL MAKE KNOWN THY TRUTH TO SONS.

B360   **A LIVING MAN A LIVING MAN** HE SHALL KNOWLEDGE TO THEE AS AND I TODAY. THE FATHER SHALL MAKE KNOWN THY TRUTH TO SONS

EV   LORD, MAKE ME SAFE, AND OUR PSALMS WE SHALL SING ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIFE IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.

LV   LORD, MAKE **THOU** ME SAFE, AND WE SHALL SING OUR PSALMS **IN** ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIFE IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD.

B360   LORD MAKE **THOU** ME SAFE AND WE SHALL SING OUR PSALMS **IN** ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIFE IN THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

As is clear, there are diverse lexical choices to be observed, though, as reflected by the similarity scores, they are significantly more frequent between Beinecke MS 360 and EV than Beinecke MS 360 and LV. In the former case, they concern nouns (for instance *force* vs. *violence*), verbs (for instance *throw afar* vs. *cast away*) and prepositions (for instance *unto the morrow* vs. *till the morrow*), with single cases of differing articles (*a tabernacle* vs. *the tabernacle*), conjunctions (*nor* vs. *neither*) and pronouns (*it* vs. *me*). In the latter case only individual instances of differing nouns (*middle* vs. *midst*) and conjunctions (*either* vs. *or*) can be observed. As regards grammatical differences, they are fairly limited and concern verb tense with regard to the primer and LV (for instance *live* vs. *have lived*) and different verb constructions when it comes to the primer and EV (for instance *should not perish* vs. *perish not*). These differences resulted in the score 0.959 between Beinecke MS 360 and EV and 0.993 between Beinecke MS 360 and LV. The remaining part of this section will present and briefly discuss the similarity scores obtained for the other canticles.

	EV	LV	B360	G. 24	Dd.11. 82	Add.17010
EV	1	0.939	0.825	0.799	0.816	0.807
LV	0.939	1	0.766	**0.737**	0.758	0.747
B360	0.825	0.766	1	0.995	0.987	<u>0.996</u>
G. 24	0.799	0.737	0.995	1	0.989	<u>0.996</u>
Dd.11. 82	0.816	0.758	0.987	0.989	1	0.994
Add.17010	0.807	0.747	0.996	0.996	0.994	1

Table 2. Similarity scores for *Benedicte* from the Book of Daniel

Out of the five canticles, *Benedicte* is the longest and exhibits the greatest range of divergences (0.737-0.996). Even though the similarity score between the two versions of the Wycliffite Bible is fairly high (0.939), it is the lowest among all the canticles. The primers are thus expected to exhibit even more varying degree of (dis)similarity to EV and LV than was the case of *Song of Ezekiel*. And so, the texts of Beinecke MS 360, St. John's, MS G. 24, CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 diverge significantly from LV (with the scores 0.766, 0.737, 0.758, and 0.747 respectively), with also very low scores for the text of EV (0.825 for Beinecke MS 360, 0.799 for St. John's, MS G. 24, 0.816 for CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and 0.807 for BL, MS Add. 17010). However, interestingly enough, the primers exhibit very high similarity scores between one another, ranging from 0.987-0.996 (with the highest score between Beinecke MS 360 and BL, MS Add. 17010 as well as St. John's, MS G. 24 and BL, MS Add. 17010), which might suggest an influence of a text (or texts) other than EV and LV.[10]

	EV	LV	B360	G. 24	Dd.11. 82	Add.17010
EV	1	0.973	0.916	**0.903**	0.97	0.967
LV	0.973	1	0.92	0.912	<u>0.997</u>	0.976
B360	0.916	0.92	1	0.983	0.921	0.928
G. 24	0.903	0.912	0.983	1	0.913	0.915
Dd.11. 82	0.97	0.997	0.921	0.913	1	0.976
Add.17010	0.967	0.976	0.928	0.915	0.976	1

Table 3. Similarity scores for *Magnificat* from the Gospel of Luke

In *Magnificat*, the similarity scores range between 0.903-0.997. The score between EV and LV is significantly higher here than in *Benedicte* (0.973), and

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10 This, however, falls outside the scope of the analysis presented in this contribution.

so each of the primers exhibits a similar similarity score with respect to both versions. The highest score can be observed between CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and LV (0.997), though the primer is also fairly similar to the text of EV (0.97). BL, MS Add. 17010 also shows great resemblance to LV (0.976), with only slightly lower score for EV (0.967). When it comes to Beinecke MS 360 and St. John's, MS G. 24, both texts exhibit an almost identical degree of (dis)similarity to both versions of the Wycliffite Bible (with the scores 0.92 and 0.912 for EV and 0.916 and 0.903 for LV respectively), though the scores are significantly lower than is the case with the other two primers. It is also worth noting that the score between CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 is high (0.976), and so is the score between Beinecke MS 360 and St. John's, MS G. 24 (0.983).

	EV	LV	B360	G. 24	Dd.11. 82	Add.17010
EV	1	0.988	0.961	0.969	0.987	0.968
LV	0.988	1	0.966	0.974	1	0.972
B360	0.961	0.966	1	0.979	0.963	0.994
G. 24	0.969	0.974	0.979	1	0.971	0.98
Dd.11. 82	0.987	1	0.963	0.971	1	0.969
Add.17010	0.968	0.972	0.994	0.98	0.969	1

Table 4. Similarity scores for *Benedictus* from the Gospel of Luke

Benedictus exhibits the smallest range of divergences (0.961-1). When it comes to the two versions of the Wycliffite Bible, they are nearly identical, with the highest score out of all the canticles (0.988), and so the four primers are expected to exhibit a very similar degree of resemblance to both EV and LV. Moreover, here we encounter two identical texts, which is a rare occurrence in analyses such as the one presented in this study, and in this case concerns CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and LV. Likewise, the similarity between the primer and the text of EV is also very high (0.987). As regards Beinecke MS 360, it exhibits, not surprisingly, an almost identical degree of similarity to EV and LV (with the scores 0.961 and 0.966 respectively). The scores between the other two primers and EV and LV are also almost identical, with the scores 0.969 and 0.974 for St. John's, MS G. 24, and 0.968 and 0.972 for BL, MS Add. 17010. Also, but not surprisingly considering their resemblance to both EV and LV, all four primers exhibit high similarity to one another (with the scores ranging from 0.963-994).

	EV	LV	B360	G. 24	Dd.11. 82	Add.17010
EV	1	0.968	0.825	0.835	0.89	0.926
LV	0.968	1	0.86	0.857	0.946	0.954
B360	0.825	0.86	1	0.962	0.878	0.841
G. 24	0.835	0.857	0.962	1	0.86	**0.809**
Dd.11. 82	0.89	0.946	0.878	0.86	1	0.912
Add.17010	0.926	0.954	0.841	0.809	0.912	1

Table 5. Similarity scores for *Nunc dimittis* from the Gospel of Luke

The scores obtained for *Nunc dimittis*, which is the last and the shortest canticle, range from 0.809-0.968. Out of the six texts, EV and LV exhibit the greatest similarity (0.968) and so the scores between the primers and EV and LV are diverse (as was the case with *Song of Ezekiel* and *Benedicte*). When it comes to Beinecke MS 360 and St. John's, MS G.24 bear no close connection to either EV (with the scores 0.825 and 0.835 respectively) or LV (with the scores 0.86 and 0.857 respectively), but exhibit a high degree of similarity to each other (0.962). CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010, however, show fairly high resemblance to the LV (with the with the scores 0.946 and 0.954 respectively). And while the similarity between CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 is relatively low (0.912), the texts diverge even more from Beinecke MS 360 and St. John's, MS G. 24 (with the scores ranging from 0.809-0.878).

According to the data presented above, in over half of the canticles, the close similarity scores between all the four primers and EV and LV result from the high degree of resemblance between the two versions of the Wycliffite Bible (though it is not always the rule). When it comes to Beinecke MS 360 and St. John's, MS G.24, the texts follow the tradition of both EV and LV for two canticles, namely *Benedictus* and *Magnificat*, (with the scores ranging from 0.916-0.966 for Beinecke MS 360 and 0.903-0.974 for St. John's, MS G.24). In *Song of Ezekiel*, however, Beinecke MS 360 shows more resemblance to the text of LV (with the score of 0.993), while St. John's, MS G. 24 is more similar to EV (with the score of 0.953). Also, both texts bear no close similarity to either EV or LV in *Benedicte* and *Nunc dimittis* (with the scores ranging from 0.799-0.86 for Beinecke MS 360 and 0.737-0.857 for St. John's, MS G.24). As regards CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010, the texts follow the tradition of LV for four canticles, namely *Song of Ezekiel, Magnificat, Benedictus*, and *Nunc dimittis* (with the scores ranging from 0.946-1 for CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and 0.954-0.992 for BL, MS Add. 17010),

though the scores obtained for EV are only slightly lower (ranging from 0.89-0.987 for CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and 0.954-0.992 for BL, MS Add. 17010). In *Benedicte*, however, the primers diverge significantly from the text of LV (with the score of 0.758 for CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and 0.747 for BL, MS Add. 17010), while presenting higher scores for the text of EV (0.816 for CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and 0.807 for BL, MS Add. 17010). In Table 6 below, I present the summary of the observations found in the literature concerning the sources of the scriptural content of the four primers, juxtaposed against the data obtained in the present analysis.

| | The textual traditions proposed in the existing literature | | | | | The joint results obtained in the present study with respect to particular canticles |
| | canticles | | lessons | psalms | | |
	Hargreaves (1956) (*Magnificat and Benedictus*)	Dove (2007)	Hordyjewicz (2023)	Hargreaves (1956)	Kennedy (2014) and Sutherland (2015)	
Beinecke MS 360	—	LV	EV and LV	—	LV	LV, both, and neither
St. John's, MS G. 24	—	—	EV and LV	Independent rendition	EV	EV, both, and neither
CUL, MS Dd. 11.82	LV	—	LV	LV	LV	mostly LV
BL, MS Add. 17010	EV	—	LV	LV	LV	mostly LV

Table 6. The comparison of the findings circulating in the literature against the results obtained in the present study.

As transpires from the above, Beinecke MS 360 could be expected to either come from LV (based on the claims concerning the psalms) or follow both versions of the Wycliffite Bible (based on the findings on the lessons). As regards the other three primers, CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 could be expected to follow mostly the text of LV, whereas those found in St. John's, MS G. 24 – to diverge significantly from both versions of the Wycliffite Bible, or, as in the case of Beinecke MS 360, to follow both EV and LV. And so, according to the results obtained in the present analysis, the texts of CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 indeed show the greatest degree of similarity to LV in the majority of canticles. When it comes to Beinecke MS 360 and St. John's, MS G. 24, two out of five canticles exhibit equal degree of resemblance to both versions (which is the result of EV and LV being almost identical), while two other ones bear no close similarity to either EV or LV. In the remaining canticle, *Song of Ezekiel*, the two primers follow a different tradition (LV in the case of Beinecke MS 360 and EV with respect to St. John's, MS G. 24). As regards the textual traditions of the canticles, *Magnificat* and *Benedictus* in both CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 follow the tradition of LV, thus contradicting the claim made by Hargreaves (1956) that the two canticles found in BL, MS Add. 17010 show greater resemblance to EV. Importantly, however, the textual tradition for the canticles in Beinecke MS 360 proposed by Dove (2007) appears to be mostly confirmed by the data presented above, which adds credibility to all the other results obtained in the present study.

5. Conclusion

It appears then that, although the claims present in the literature concerning textual traditions of the canticles have been verified by the analysis performed in this study to a great extent, there are certain inconsistencies to be observed with regard to each of the primers. Therefore, when conducting linguistic research on the scriptural content of English Books of Hours, one must keep in mind the heterogeneous character of these medieval prayer books and examine as well as classify each text individually. In that regard, and as far as the established textual traditions are concerned, the results obtained in my study for the canticles from the Book of Isaiah, Book of Daniel and Gospel of Luke found in the text of Beinecke MS 360, St. John's G. 24, CUL, MS Dd. 11.82 and BL, MS Add. 17010 correspond with the findings presented in Hordyjewicz (2023) on the lessons from the Book of Job contained in the primers.

It is hoped that by exploring the textual sources of the English texts of canticles contained in medieval Books of Hours this contribution has shed sufficient light on the diversity and heterogeneity of textual traditions of medieval compilations and as such constitutes a stance in the ongoing discussion on the vernacular textual networks. On the methodological level, it has shown the benefits of relying on digital humanities tools for text similarity measurements, especially the cosine distance method, as far as analyses of historical texts are concerned.

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New Vistas on Cultural Awareness among English Foreign Language Teachers at the Algerian Primary Education

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Abstract: A recent initiative in the Algerian education sector suggests integrating English as a compulsory subject starting from the third grade of primary level. However, it was noticed that the conditions in which the initiative has been undertaken might require much more time because the interval between the decision of English incorporation and coursebook design was too short for a well-thought teaching material. Additionally, many researchers have disclosed the rationale and need for integrating the notion of culture in combination with foreign language teaching. However, questions remain as to the forms of work, content selection, strategies employed and technologies that provide pupils with active interactions, and complete immersion. The present study explores the degree of cultural awareness among ten English Foreign Language teachers working at the Department of Letters and English Language, University of Ain-Temouchent. It points out to the various strategies they use while incorporating culture in teaching English. The study relies on a structured interview held with the selected participants. The results revealed that despite the paucity of cultural awareness among the teachers, they exert much effort to help their young pupils build on communicative competencies of the target and local cultures without overlooking their national identity. The results of this study suggest that English foreign language classes should be equipped with trained teachers and manageable resources to help improve the quality of English teaching. Teachers also need to integrate cultural aspects adequately to help young learners enhance their capacities to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries. In the aftermath, the study ends with a conclusion and provides some recommendations.

Keywords: Culture, cultural awareness, English as a foreign language, learners, teachers, primary education

Introduction

To enhance the nation's position in the world's economy and business, the Algerian government has recently placed great value on the status of English in the national educational system. Starting from the school year (2022-2023) and, more particularly, from third grade of primary education, English has become a compulsory subject as it helps learners enhance their future educational standards, which is especially important considering the impact of technology and globalization.

Therefore, it seems essential to test the effectiveness of this political initiative and check whether it meets all the appropriate criteria to teach English as a foreign language (EFL). The present study explores EFL teachers' awareness on the importance of implementing the target culture in class without neglecting the local culture, identity, and national values with consideration given to the young age of pupils. In order to do so, this study draws upon the following question: How do teachers include the aspects of English culture inside the EFL classroom without neglecting their pupils' local culture and national values?

To answer this question, we have considered the following hypothesis: Teachers may use several techniques to integrate the target culture without falling into the trap of losing connection with the national values that represent the local culture. As such, this study draws on a structured interview held with ten EFL primary school teachers to test their cultural awareness and cultural competencies while teaching English, taking into account their cultural background. The analysis of data relies on a qualitative approach.

The Relationship between Language and Culture

To state the strong relationship between language and culture, Henry Brown stipulates that "Language is part of the culture and culture is a part of language; the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture" (Brown 1994, 165). Despite the complexity of these two concepts, the historical study of their relationship can be traced back to the eighteenth century, with the remarkable interpretations provided by scholars like Franz Boas (1858–1942), Edward Sapir (1884–1939), and Benjamin Whorf (1897–1941). These scholars emphasized the importance of the relationship between language, thought, and culture (qtd. in Sharifian 2015).

Studies of language and culture in Europe, at that time, were represented under the term "ethnolinguistics" (Duranti 2009, 33), relating two interdisciplinary fields of study. Ethnology, which is the systematic attempt to acquire and compare information on those non-European populations, which did not possess written records of their history and cultural heritage (Welz 2001) and linguistics. In the structural studies of this relationship, many determinations were taken from Sapir's (1964), Whorf's (1956), and Boas' (1966) interpretations of linguistic relativity, which considers the differences between languages, and how speakers use them in different settings while contributing to any analysis of social and cultural life.

Teaching Culture

"Teaching culture in parallel with teaching a foreign language is a very important element that cannot be neglected; the reason is that language is the means by which culture is clearly expressed" (Boudjelal 2023, 381). The fact that culture is a learned rather than an inherited concept leads us to talk about how one thinks of culture in the sense that its teaching helps humans to adapt to their environment and improve their understanding of foreign cultures.

Culture also helps develop and increase mutually useful relationships with international and intercultural audiences. Sydel Sokuvitz and George Amiso say in this respect,

> students should also focus on key public relations campaign strategies. These include an understanding of the communication challenges in the host country, such as the audience, the message, and media market" (Sokuvitz and Amiso, 2003 102).

As culture plays a crucial role in language teaching (Nguyen 2017), recent teaching methodologies tend to consider the target culture as a tool for teaching the foreign language rather than a subject taught separately, or as an additional fifth skill. Claire Kramsch affirms:

> Culture in language learning is not an expendable fifth skill, tacked on, so to speak, to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and

writing. It is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them. (Kramch 2013, as cited in Kizi 2020, 591)

Interestingly enough, during the process of language teaching, the cultural aspects should be included and tackled in every step. That is why, providing learners with more knowledge about socio-cultural backgrounds than they expect, will certainly help them acquire new terms easily and use the language effectively in different interactions and contexts to be able to interact with the target language speakers.

Additionally, the recent contributions to the goal of teaching foreign language culture identify the process of mastering foreign language communicative activity as intercultural communicative competence (Sun 2013). This process refers to the ability "to see relationships between different cultures-both external and internal to a society – and to mediate, that is interpret each in terms of the other, either for themselves or for other people" (Byram 1997, 10).

The intercultural communicative competence highlights the importance of teaching culture, for it contributes to an understanding of our cultural values and developing knowledge about other cultures to facilitate communication and create better social relationships. Thus, teachers should teach this skill to the learners in a way that enables them to communicate effectively in intercultural settings.

Integrating Culture in Teaching EFL

Teaching EFL considers teaching the linguistic properties of the English language alongside how these properties are used to express the social and cultural characteristics of the interlocutors. Following these words, Arif Nugroho points out the following:

As language teachers, we must be interested in the teaching of culture not because we necessarily want to teach the culture of the other country, but because we have to teach it. If we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates,

we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning. (Nugroho 2016, 1)

This interpretation shows the importance of integrating culture in language teaching to raise learners' awareness on how symbols of the language convey specific meaning in a particular context with a specific community having a specific culture. Interestingly enough, the Standards for Foreign Language Learning state, "the true content of the foreign language course is not the grammar and the vocabulary of the language, but the cultures expressed through that language" (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project 1999, 43).

Teaching culture helps learners to develop an understanding on peoples' behaviours –be they verbal or nonverbal – which are manipulated by their cultural values and social variables (Tomalin and Stempleski 1993). This idea will foster learners' awareness about how to use the target language with the target people properly, avoid any kind of misunderstanding or ambiguities, and respect the target culture.

However, when teaching English and its culture, teachers and learners alike must consider their own culture by preserving their local social, and cultural values and beliefs. In this vein, Tavares and Cavalcanti claim that the ultimate goal of integrating culture into language teaching should be "to increase students' awareness and to develop their curiosity towards the target culture and their own, to make comparisons among cultures" (Tavares and Cavalcanti 1996, 19). In other words, being aware of both the local and the target culture will not only broaden learners' cultural knowledge, but it will also foster their critical thinking.

Cultural Awareness in EFL Teaching

Teaching EFL or any other foreign language requires transmitting knowledge about the target language's properties and its cultural aspects. Michael Englebert says in this respect, "to teach a foreign language is also to teach a foreign culture" (Englebert 2004, 37). Consequently, teaching a new culture in a foreign language requires teachers to choose the exemplary cultural aspects to teach, and to be fully aware of the culture they are teaching.

There are various studies on the importance of cultural awareness and cross-cultural awareness enhancement in teaching EFL to succeed in EFL learning. Hans Stern states the following: "One of the most important aims of culture teaching is to help the learner gain an understanding of native speaker's perspective" (Stern

1992, 216). Brian Tomlinson believes that cultural awareness includes "a gradually developing inner sense of the equality of cultures, an increased understanding of your own and other people's cultures, and a positive interest in how cultures both connect and differ" (Tomlison, 2001)[1]. Accordingly, teachers need to, always, seek to develop their understanding and awareness of the target and source culture. After accomplishing such a task, EFL teachers must transmit this cultural knowledge to develop student's awareness of the culture under study.

Kincheloe and Staley (1985) focus on the significance of cultural awareness since they believe that perceiving different cultures provides learners with an awareness about other people and places. They also think that learners develop increased tolerance of the opposing elements of various cultures, which reduces the feelings of ethnocentrism and self-righteousness. Moreover, in a comparative study conducted by Farzad Rostami (2016), which explores the Iranian teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the role of culture in EFL teaching, the results revealed that teachers and learners display positive attitudes towards teaching culture, and the learners recognised the importance of culture in language teaching.

Methodological Concerns

a- Research Design

The research design refers to the overall strategy used to conduct research. It represents the appropriate plan to investigate the established research questions through data collection, analysis, and interpretation. According to William Trochim, a research design

> provides the glue that holds the research project together. A design is used to structure the research and show how all of the major parts of the research project work together to address the central research questions. (Trochim 2006, 1).

This study uses a qualitative approach to scrutinize teachers' awareness of integrating the cultural aspects in teaching English as a foreign language to young learners.

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1   Quoted in Tomlison and Masuhara 2004, 3.

b-Sampling

The sample population consists of ten English primary-level teachers who were selected for this study to answer the structured interview questions. These teachers are in charge of pupils studying in the third grade of primary education.

c-Research Tools

We conducted a structured interview with ten primary-level English teachers who teach at different primary schools in Tlemcen located in the northwest of Algeria. We considered the miscellaneous strategies they use while incorporating culture in teaching EFL following the teaching English starting from third-grade of primary school level.

d-Methods of Data Analysis

The current study relies on an interpretive analysis to detect teachers' experiences and cultural awareness via a structured interview. As its name suggests, interpretative analysis is an experiential qualitative research approach, which provides detailed interpretations of the account to understand people's existential experiences (Finlay 2011; Smith et al. 2009). This study aims to examine the teachers' experience of teaching EFL for third-grade primary school pupils, and explores their awareness of integrating cultural aspects in the EFL lessons.

e- The Interview Sections

The interview contains ten questions divided into three sections: teachers' experience, cultural integration, and teachers' awareness and recommendations. The interview questions start with an introductory paragraph, where we ask the teachers to answer the questions accordingly.

Teachers' Experience

This first section aims to gather information about the teachers' profiles and experiences.

Q1. The first question relates to the EFL teachers' teaching experience.

Q2. The second question aims to find out whether the teachers have ever experienced teaching in private or public schools.

Q3. The third question determines how the teachers perceive this experience.

Cultural Integration

The second section investigates the teachers' perceptions of cultural integration in language teaching.

Q1. The first question aims to examine how the teachers understand the meaning of culture.

Q2. The second question seeks to analyse how teachers perceive the relationship between language and culture.

Q3. The third question intends to examine the extent to which the integration of cultural aspects in EFL is important for the teachers.

Q4. The last question scrutinizes the teachers' perspectives about cultural integration at primary school.

Teachers' Awareness and Recommendations

The last section examines the teachers' attentiveness towards integrating culture in their EFL classes and the suggestions they can provide to enhance the quality of education.

Q1. The first question considers the teachers' experience, opinion and justification about the integration of target and local culture in the textbook.

Q2. The second question demonstrates how teachers integrate cultural aspects in class in light of the pupils' young age.

Q3. The last question tries to gather some recommendations from some of the teachers to facilitate the quality of the current textbook.

Analysis of the Teachers' Interview

This section analyses the structured interview held with the respondents. The data are analyzed qualitatively. The aim is to evaluate the teachers' experience, perspective, and awareness on cultural integration.

Teachers' Experience

Q1. For how long have you been teaching English?

All the teachers under investigation have been teaching English for six months even though they graduated long ago.

Q2. Where was your first experience? Was it in private or public school?

All the interviewed teachers claimed that this is their first experience in a public school, as they never had the chance to teach English. This is due to the lack of job positions in the past few years.

Q3. How do you describe this new teaching experience?

The respondents reported that this new teaching experience is sudden, strenuous and tough since they must consider their pupils' young age, needs and requirements. However, they also viewed this teaching experience as enjoyable, interactive, and insightful.

Cultural Integration

Q.1 Do you have an idea about what culture means?

Though each teacher had a different way of expressing the meaning of culture, their ideas of what culture means fall under one perspective: culture represents the values, beliefs, and lifestyles of a particular group who share the same geographic territory and national identity, including social habits and religious behaviours passed down from one generation to another.

Q2. How could you describe the language/culture relationship?

The teachers under investigation agreed on the interrelatedness of language and culture. They all perceive that language is a symbolic expression of a culture, as individuals cannot interact with a particular language unless they know what this language's culture entails.

Q3. To what extent do you feel the importance of cultural integration into English teaching?

Once again, all the respondents agreed on the importance and need of integrating culture into teaching English as a foreign language. However, only two of the ten interviewed teachers explained the reason for its integration relevance. They highlighted that cultural integration helps to not only enhance the pupils' motivation and engagement to learn the target language, but also to raise their awareness about its importance, display positive attitudes towards other

cultures, and understand their local cultural aspects to end up with successful interactions and intercultural communications.

Q4. What is your opinion about cultural integration in your teaching strategies?

The teachers admitted the lack of cultural integration into their lessons, and that culture is not fully covered. According to three respondents, learning a foreign language involves more than memorizing words. The teachers also need to acquaint the learners with foreign and local cultural values effectively.

Teachers' Awareness and Recommendations

Q1. Based on your teaching experience, is it suitable to integrate target and local culture within the curriculum? Why?

Four respondents claimed the significance of incorporating the target and local cultures simultaneously in the curriculum to help young learners understand their own culture along with other cultures to open them to the world. However, one teacher said that it is inappropriate to include both cultures within the curriculum, for this may confuse the learners. To avoid any confusion, he recommended the integration of the target culture only so that the learners can express thoughts and emotions through the language they are currently learning.

Q2. As a teacher of English, how do you integrate cultural aspects in class taking into account the young age of your pupils?

All the teachers agreed on practicing the language in real situations where young pupils can be able to see and hear what they are learning. Two teachers focused on using role-plays, pictures, and videos. They also focused on providing their pupils with the opportunity to see and listen to how foreign language speakers interact, as they believed that this would enable them to communicate effectively in real-life situations.

Q3. What would you suggest to improve the quality of EFL teaching following the government's new initiative?

The teachers provided some suggestions. First, they focused on teaching more vocabulary related to cultural aspects, particularly national identity, through simplified story texts with relevant topics. Second, they stated that relying on visual aids, such as pictures and videos, helps young learners focus and stay motivated to learn the target culture. They also stressed the necessity of simplifying the lessons, and providing activities that are more

practical to help them use English in real-life situations. Another important suggestion was to improve the teachers' training.

General Interpretation and Integration of the Main Results

The respondents are conscious enough about the importance of integrating target and local cultural aspects in their lessons, and they are constantly making effort to meet their pupils' intercultural needs. Unfortunately, the respondents lack effective training, necessary knowledge and materials to incorporate cultural components in their EFL classes. The results revealed that they still struggle and exert strenuous efforts to transmit the right amount of information needed for their young pupils to interact in real-life situations, and make up for the shortfalls of the current initiative.

Moreover, there is a controversy on which culture should receive more consideration when teaching English. Some respondents agreed that incorporating the local and the target culture simultaneously might create confusion and an overwhelming need to balance both cultural aspects. Other respondents insisted on integrating both cultures to build on the pupils' cultural awareness by focusing more on the local culture, as they believed that these pupils will express and spread our national values and identity in other countries.

We must not forget that the recent contributions to the goal of teaching foreign language culture identify the process of mastering foreign language communicative activity as intercultural communicative competence (Nguyen 2017). Nugroho believes that teachers must be interested in the teaching of culture not because they necessarily want to teach the culture of the other country, but because they have to teach it (Nugroho 2016). Following all the respondents' claims, the current situation of EFL teaching at primary level in the Algerian educational sector needs to be completely revised and considered without setting aside the significance of cultural incorporation.

Recommendations: Teaching Culture in EFL Classes

As teaching EFL is not fully achieved without teaching cultural aspects of the language, EFL classes should be a place where culture is taught straightforwardly, and in an explicit atmosphere. This should permit pupils to express

cultural elements freely and help them step out of their comfort zone by getting the chance to discuss and distinguish cultural similarities and differences. Therefore, EFL teachers need to adequately monitor their learners, familiarize them with cultural aspects and create a suitable atmosphere for teaching culture. To this end, the following techniques can be used:

a-Teaching Culture Explicitly

EFL teachers must create an appropriate atmosphere for teaching cultural aspects in their classes. This requires offering specific courses that tackle cultural aspects only. In these specific courses, learners acquire knowledge about particular cultural components and get the opportunity to observe, talk and discuss these components, and eventually use them through real-life interaction activities.

Moreover, teachers can present songs, poems, games, and dialogues about special occasions, family and history, via authentic material such as audio-visual materials. Audio-visual aids play a crucial role in creating an exciting and motivating atmosphere that helps young pupils excel in learning by using the language items in cultural interactions.

b- Teaching Culture Using Crawford-Lange and Lange Methodology

Various scholars suggested a set of techniques and methodologies to teach culture adequately. The methodology suggested by Crawford-Lange and Lange (1984) implies that for the culture learning process to be successful, it should consider the learners' perception of their local culture and recognize its significant elements, norms, and boundaries. It also entails understanding the language/culture relationship, and then being able to distinguish differences and similarities between cultures concerning how to interact adequately with each culture.

Consequently, this methodology passes through the three following steps: (1) the learners' exploration of their own culture, (2) the discovery of the relationship between language and culture, and (3) the learning of the heuristics for analyzing and comparing cultures (Paige et al. 2003, 8). This methodology provides a valuable way to contribute to the pupils' awareness and understanding of both cultures.

Teaching Culture via Cultural Dimensions

The EFL teaching and learning process should not only be concerned with abstract language teaching but also with raising awareness and providing knowledge of how to use that language in daily interactions mindful of what characteristics the language culture entails (Dufva 1994). Additionally, as soon as culture seems to be a dynamic system of symbols and meanings related to dimensions (Robinson 1988), teaching culture in EFL classes via cultural dimensions would be helpful. Therefore, EFL teachers can make use of the four cultural dimensions outlined by Adaskou et al. (1990) as follows:

Aesthetic dimensions: They look at culture through songs, literature, and media appropriate to the pupils' age and needs.

Sociological dimensions: They consider knowledge about nature and family organizations, which refer to interpersonal relationships and some basic cultural representations including customs.

Semantic dimensions: these dimensions reflect on the use of semantic features encompassing the conceptualization system, and we can provide learners with different perceptions of different cultural aspects by highlighting the conditions and mindsets that control their use.

Pragmatic dimensions: these dimensions consider the sociolinguistic patterns used regarding background knowledge, and social and paralinguistic skills. We can put it into use by providing learners with the necessary linguistic codes to succeed in establishing communication and intercultural competencies (Adaskou et al. 1990, 3–4).

Exposure to culture in EFL classes from the first day of instruction creates a sort of interculturality to local and target cultural awareness and understanding.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Teaching English as a foreign language in Algerian educational settings has always been a subject of hot debate due to globalization and technological progress. Today, the English language occupies a central role in different domains like economy and business. The Algerian authorities have always valued teaching English at different levels in the educational system, such as middle and high schools.

Moreover, more recently, the Algerian educational sector has witnessed the implementation of English at the third grade of primary education as a complementary step to its previous integration at middle and secondary levels. However, teaching English as a foreign language at any level does not only require teaching the linguistic aspects, but also the cultural components that may help in intensifying learners' cultural awareness and linguistic proficiency because of the inseparability of language and culture.

This study investigated the usefulness of integrating local and target cultures when teaching English as a foreign language at the primary level taking into consideration third grade pupils. The results revealed that the respondents lack the necessary knowledge and materials to incorporate cultural aspects in their lessons and that much effort is exerted in familiarizing their learners with target and local cultural aspects. This study tackled the issue on how EFL teachers include the aspects of English culture inside the EFL classroom without neglecting their pupils' local culture and national values. EFL teachers used several techniques to integrate the target culture without losing the national values that represent the local culture.

The Algerian educational authorities should provide EFL teachers, especially those teaching at primary level, with intensive training and suitable resources to help them improve the quality of their teaching. Additionally, the importance of cultural integration in EFL teaching should be more explicit in the designed syllabi, so that the learners can be aware of the strong relationship between language and culture. Finally, this paper lets the door open for further research regarding the impact of cultural integration on learners' educational attainment at primary education.

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Usage of English in Healthcare Settings:
A Study on Patients' Experiences
and Language Preference in Bangladesh

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Abstract: This study investigated the influence of English on patients' experiences in healthcare settings in Bangladesh. A survey was conducted among the patients to explore their English proficiency levels, comfort, and language preferences in medical settings. Statistical analyses showed a highly significant correlation between English proficiency and comfort level ($r = 0.797$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals with higher English proficiency levels felt more comfortable receiving medical services. It is important to note that other factors contributed to this relationship. The study also found that women reported lower levels of comfort with medical documents and drug labelling in English ($t(48) = 2.770$, $p < 0.05$). Additionally, level of education was found to be a significant factor influencing comfort levels ($F(5.44) = 7.85$, $p < 0.001$), with individuals with lower levels of education reporting more discomfort. Furthermore, this study provides strong evidence supporting a distinct preference for the native language Bangla in medical communication ($\chi2(2) = 38.680$, $p < 0.001$), particularly among individuals with lower levels of education. These findings emphasize the urgent need to implement healthcare policy improvements in Bangladesh that actively promote and foster native languages. This would ensure that all patients, regardless of their language proficiency or demographic background, receive equitable high-quality care in healthcare settings. Moreover, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse and discussion surrounding healthcare communication in multilingual societies, and strongly advocates the implementation of policies that prioritize and accommodate the linguistic preferences of patients.

Keywords: Language Proficiency, Patient Comfort, Healthcare Communication, Language Barrier, Patient-centred care

Introduction

Bangladesh, located in South Asia, shares its borders with India to the west, north, and east; Myanmar to the southeast; and the Bay of Bengal to the south. The region's strategic position and fertile land have historically attracted significant attention, resulting in a rich cultural and historical heritage. British colonial rule covertly or overtly from 1757 to 1947 (Schendel, 2020) deeply influenced socioeconomic and political structures, leading to the widespread use of English in Bangladeshi society. English was established as the language of instruction in educational institutions and the official language of governance and trade during the British colonial period. This historical legacy has continued to make English prominent in various sectors including healthcare.

Despite Bangla [i.e. Bengali] being the national language, English is widely used in medical documentation, prescriptions, and diagnostic reports. However, this practice presents challenges, particularly for patients with limited English proficiency, which hinders effective healthcare delivery and contributes to disparities in health. Globalization has further emphasized the importance of understanding the relationship between language proficiency and patient experience, particularly in linguistically diverse countries such as Bangladesh. The use of English in the healthcare sector, such as in medical prescriptions and documentation, often poses barriers to effective communication and healthcare delivery, especially for patients who primarily speak Bengali. The linguistic diversity of Bangladesh, including numerous indigenous languages and dialects, requires a healthcare system that can accommodate multiple languages in order to ensure effective communication and care delivery. The continued use of English in healthcare, influenced by both historical and global factors, presents complex challenges that must be addressed to improve delivery and ensure equitable access to healthcare services in Bangladesh.

Literature review

Language is an essential factor in healthcare as it impacts patient-provider communication, health literacy, and access to health services. Results from multiple studies have been compiled that underscore the importance of language in healthcare practices worldwide. Woloshin et al. (1997) highlighted the role of language as a medium for patients to obtain health-related information and make informed

decisions. Diviet et al. (2007) and Pytel et al. (2009) in the United States, Al-Khathami et al. (2010) in Saudi Arabia, Bischoff and Denhaerynck (2010) in Switzerland, Hannouna (2012) in the United Arab Emirates, Albrecht et al. (2013) in Germany, Friebe (2017) in Egypt, Ali and Watson (2018) in England, and de Moissac and Bowen (2019) in Canada all support the notion that language barriers can hinder effective healthcare delivery. They emphasized the importance of addressing language disparities in healthcare to ensure equitable access to quality care.

According to Yeo (2004), language serves a dual purpose as a means of communication and tool for exploring patients' health-related beliefs and attitudes. This perspective facilitates the integration of diverse belief systems in the healthcare domain. Additionally, the implementation of the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in the United States in 2001 responded to the challenges posed by linguistic diversity in healthcare. The goal of these standards is to rectify disparities in healthcare provision by guaranteeing that all patients, regardless of their linguistic backgrounds, receive customized services that are responsive to their individual needs.

Language Barriers in Healthcare

The issue of language barriers in healthcare is a pressing concern with significant implications for patient care across multiple systems. These challenges are especially acute in multilingual societies where English is frequently used as the primary language in medical settings. According to previous research, language barriers can have a negative impact on patients' comprehension, satisfaction, and overall care quality. Wolz (2015) found that language barriers can hinder the delivery of high-quality healthcare, resulting in difficulties in healthcare interactions. Therefore, it is recommended that professional interpreters improve patient satisfaction and communication. Hilal et al. (2020) also supported this viewpoint, stating that language barriers can lead to miscommunication, reduced satisfaction, reduced healthcare quality, and compromised patient safety. However, they acknowledged that the use of interpreter services can increase costs and treatment duration, whereas online translation tools may enhance healthcare quality and satisfaction.

According to Pancho et al. (1998), language barriers in healthcare are a complex issue that necessitate careful consideration of factors such as accessibility, cost, and service excellence. They emphasized the importance of providing

interpreter services in both inpatient and outpatient settings as well as the significance of interpreter certification and adherence to standardized protocols.

Relevant research on language barriers and patient outcomes includes a study by Squires et al. (2022), which found that patients receiving home care who preferred a language other than English faced a higher risk of hospital readmission after home healthcare, particularly those with limited English proficiency. This group of patients had a significantly higher readmission rate than English-speaking patients. Squires et al. (2022) found a similar trend and suggested that specialized care coordination services may be crucial in reducing readmission risks, particularly for Spanish-speaking patients who experience the highest rates of readmission. Studies have consistently shown that discordance in language between healthcare providers and patients exacerbates challenges in multilingual societies. Evidence supports the implementation of effective language services, including the use of professional interpreters and digital tools, to mitigate the negative impacts of language barriers on patient care and safety. These interventions are essential to ensure equitable and high-quality healthcare in increasingly diverse linguistic contexts.

English Proficiency and Patient Experiences

Recent studies have examined the dynamics of English proficiency in healthcare interactions, particularly its influence on patient experiences and outcomes. Paredes et al. (2018) emphasized the significant impact of English proficiency on patient-provider communication and shared decision-making, noting that lower levels are often associated with negative experiences. Yeheskal and Rawal (2019) analysed the patient experience of individuals with limited English proficiency (LEP) and identified communication barriers, issues with healthcare professional relationships, experiences of discrimination, and cultural safety concerns as major issues affecting their care. Chua et al. (2022) addressed the lack of comprehensive information on English proficiency and patient experiences, finding that LEP patients tend to have longer hospital stays but noted that LEP is not independently associated with ICU death, length of ICU stay, or the timing of palliative care consultation.

Squires et al. (2023) investigated the experiences of patients with limited English proficiency in the United States, focusing specifically on the challenges posed by language barriers and potential risks to patient safety. Additionally,

this study highlights the factors that can enhance patient safety and security in these situations. Similarly, Latif et al. (2022) examined the role of medical interpreters in palliative care and the experiences of patients with limited proficiency in English. They found a lack of information regarding patient experiences related to English proficiency and shed light on the challenges resulting from the absence of a verbatim interpretation of the term "palliative care." The studies reviewed here indicate that English proficiency is a critical factor in healthcare interactions and affects communication, patient-provider relationships, treatment outcomes, and hospital stays. The need for effective language interpretation services and educational initiatives targeting healthcare professionals is clear, emphasizing the importance of addressing language barriers to ensure equitable and safe healthcare for all patients regardless of their English proficiency.

Gender Disparities in Healthcare Communication

The interaction between gender and language proficiency is a unique obstacle in the healthcare communication domain. Gendered experiences in educational and societal settings influence individuals' English proficiency, and consequently, their healthcare experiences. In the healthcare sector, language proficiency plays a crucial role in ensuring effective communication and quality care for patients with limited English proficiency (LEP). Studies have shown that language barriers can lead to disparities in access to healthcare and health outcomes among older adults (Ponce et al., 2006). Patients with LEP who received interpreter services were more likely to be female, highlighting a gender difference in access to language services (Blay et al., 2018). Furthermore, a lack of cultural and linguistic competency can create barriers between LEP patients and the healthcare system, emphasizing the importance of addressing language needs in healthcare settings (Messias et al., 2009).

Research has also explored the impact of English language proficiency on health care outcomes among different groups. While current health literacy research often focuses on individuals with limited English proficiency, the effects of health literacy on health care outcomes at various English proficiency levels remain relatively unknown (Sarkar et al., 2015). Additionally, a study of the academic performance of medical students found that gender and English language proficiency can influence academic success, indicating broader implications of language proficiency beyond healthcare settings (Al-Mously et al., 2013).

Educational attainment and English linguistic Proficiency of Patients

The level of education and English linguistic proficiency of patients are closely related and have a significant impact on patient outcomes and the overall healthcare experience. Patients with limited English proficiency face significant barriers in accessing healthcare, leading to extended wait times, delayed referrals, inequitable treatment, higher rates of adverse events, and ultimately, poorer health outcomes compared to patients who are proficient in English (Messias et al., 2009).

The association between level of education and linguistic proficiency is well established, with higher levels of education often corresponding to greater English proficiency. Todorova and Hristova's (2022) study showed an association between the level of education and its impact on the lifestyle of patients undergoing haemodialysis, emphasizing the significance of education in equipping patients with vital information to effectively manage their condition and follow necessary guidelines. Knowledge acquisition plays a crucial role in enabling patients to adapt to new circumstances and enhances their overall quality of life.

Research question

In the context of globalized healthcare, the significance of language in patient-care provider interactions and its impact on healthcare results are becoming increasingly important, particularly in multilingual countries where English, although commonly used in the medical sector, may not be the primary language of the majority of the population. This study focused on Bangladesh, a country in which Bangla is the predominant language; however, English is frequently encountered in healthcare settings. Against this backdrop, this study addressed the following question:

> To what extent does the prevalence of English in the medical sector and the level of English proficiency among patients influence their understanding of medical information, experiences, and satisfaction with healthcare services in the predominantly Bangla [Bangali]-speaking population?

Therefore, this study aimed to determine the complexities of language barriers in healthcare, and their impact on patient care and satisfaction.

Methodology

Statistical Methodology

The dataset was compiled from individuals representing various demographic characteristics including age, sex, and educational qualifications. Inferential statistical methods were used to analyse the data. Pearson's correlation analysis was applied to assess the relationship between English proficiency and comfort levels in medical settings, while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to explore the variations in comfort levels across different educational attainment levels. Furthermore, Chi-square tests were conducted to examine the association between language choice and educational level.

Study Design

This study used a quantitative method to investigate the relationship between English proficiency and demographic factors on patient experiences in healthcare settings where English is the predominant language. Moreover, it investigates the impact of linguistic proficiency on patient interactions and perceptions in the medical context.

Participants

The study was conducted at Rajshahi Medical College Hospital, located in Rajshahi District, Bangladesh. A survey of 50 participants was conducted by random sampling. The participants were adults aged 18 years or older who were chosen to create a diverse group in terms of age, gender, and education level. This method was adopted to explore the influence of English language proficiency on healthcare delivery and patient outcomes in a specific setting.

Data Collection Method

In this study, data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed to examine various aspects of the participants' interactions with English in healthcare settings. The questionnaire is divided into several sections. The first section collected demographic information such as age, gender, and education level of the participants. The second section focused on English proficiency, in which participants self-rated their language skills based on a spectrum of non-native proficiencies. The third section examined participants' encounters with English in healthcare using

a 5-point Likert scale to measure the frequency of these encounters. Subsequent sections assessed participants' comfort levels in English-dominated healthcare environments and their perceptions of the quality of healthcare received, both rated on a 5-point Likert scale. To ensure wide accessibility and accommodate diverse respondent preferences, the questionnaire was disseminated in a paper format, allowing participation from a broad cross-section of patients. This method investigated the role of English in healthcare experiences among the Bangladeshi population.

Data Analysis Tools

The collected data were subsequently transformed into a SPSS file, which enabled us to conduct the required tests and analyses. Graphs and tables were generated using SPSS 25 and Excel to enhance the accessibility and visual interest of the data. The analysis produced valuable insights into the dataset, thus facilitating decision-making.

Research Ethics

This study strictly followed the ethical principles governing research involving human subjects. Prior to the survey, each individual provided informed consent, ensuring their complete understanding of the study's purpose, right to withdraw at any time, and confidentiality of their responses (Arellano et al., 2023).

Data analysis and result

The data collected through the questionnaire were subjected to thorough analysis using a combination of descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the demographic data and delineate the distribution patterns of the responses. Additionally, several inferential statistical techniques were employed to explore the relationships and impacts within the data. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate the association between the participants' English proficiency and their comfort level in English-dominated healthcare settings. Furthermore, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was applied to investigate potential variations in comfort levels among participants with different educational backgrounds. Statistical significance was set at a threshold of $P < 0.05$. These analytical tests revealed a comprehensive and strong relationship between language proficiency and healthcare experience in Bangladesh.

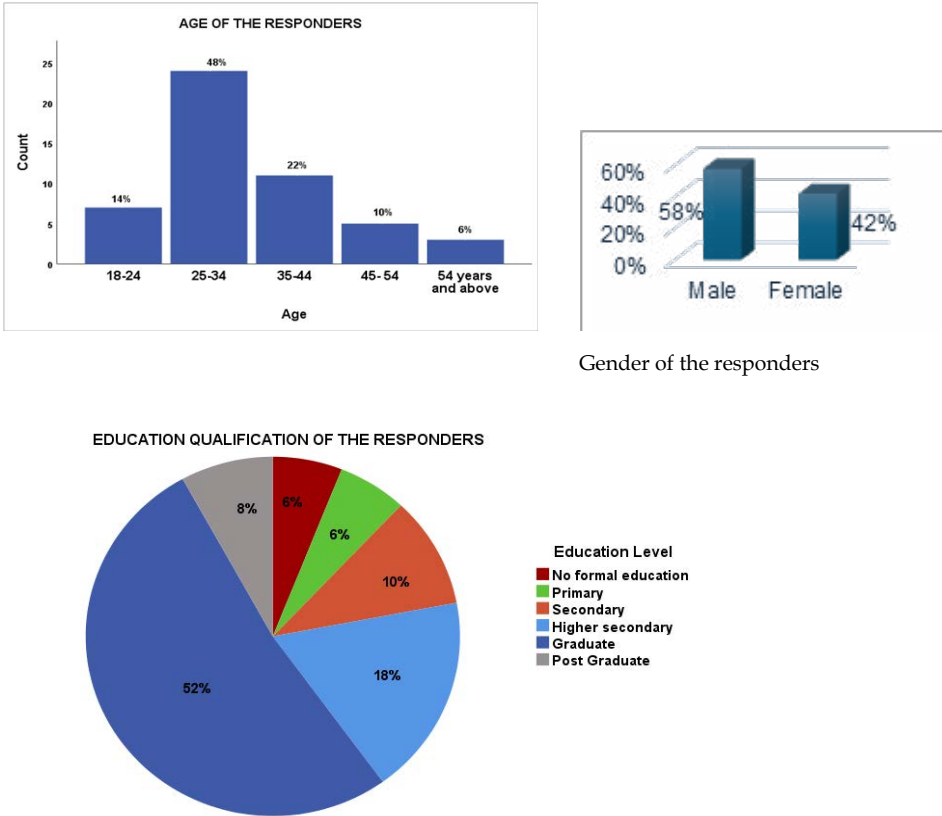## Socio-demographic Characteristic of the Participants

Gender of the responders

Figure 1: *Sociodemographic characteristic of the participants*

A thorough investigation into the demographic characteristics of a population subset originating from Bangladesh involved a meticulous analysis of a sample consisting of 50 patients. This sample was carefully selected to reflect the adult demographic composition of the nation accurately. Figure 1 shows the sociodemographic characteristics of the participants. Regarding sex distribution, the representative population demonstrated near-equilibrium, with males comprising 58% and females accounting for 42% of the sample. This balanced representation is essential to enhance the external validity of the study's conclusions across gender divisions.

The age distribution of the study participants demonstrated a marked inclination towards younger age groups, which aligns with the normal demographic trends observed in Bangladesh. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics 2020 reported that 54.9% of the population was aged between 15-49 years (Population & Housing Census 2022, Primary Report, 2022). Eighty percent of the respondents fell within the young adult bracket, ranging in age from 18 to 34 years. The predominance of youth demographics is vital to understanding the societal and cultural dimensions relevant to the interpretative framework of this study's findings.
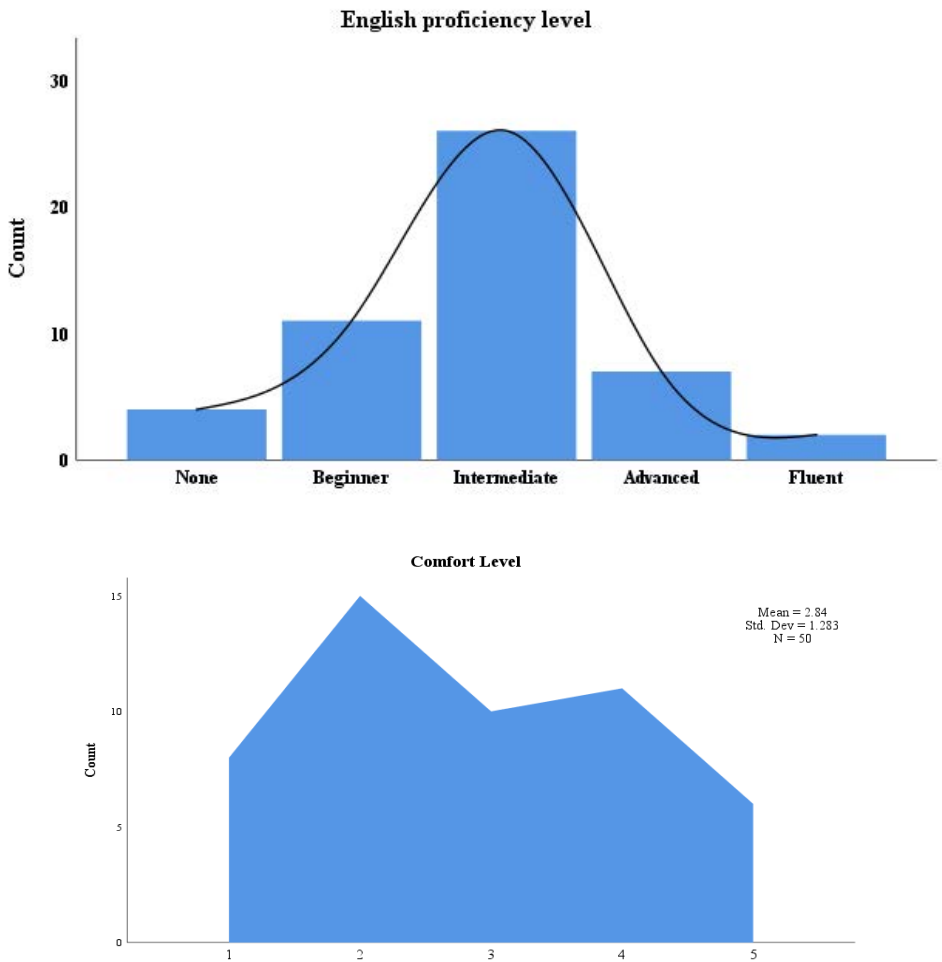

Figure 2: *English proficiency and comfort level of the participants*

Additionally, the educational backgrounds of the participants were characterized by considerable diversity. The sample encompassed a wide spectrum of education; 52% of the participants had completed undergraduate education, 18% had attained higher secondary education, and 8% held post-graduate qualifications. This heterogeneity in educational level is essential for a broad understanding of the effects of English linguistic dominance across various educational levels within the population.

Figure 2 presents the distribution of participants' English proficiency and comfort levels. The left panel of Figure 2 shows that the majority of participants (52%) self-reported their English proficiency as intermediate. Additionally, 14% of the participants indicated an advanced level of proficiency, whereas 4% categorized themselves as fluent. Conversely, 8% of the participants reported no proficiency in English and 22% were beginners. The right panel of Figure 2 shows the distribution of comfort levels in English in the medical setting. The data showed a left-skewed distribution, indicating that despite possessing a reasonable level of English proficiency, a substantial number of participants reported lower comfort levels when required to use English in medical contexts. The mean comfort level was moderately low, 2.8 on a 5-point scale.

These findings underscore a notable disparity between general English proficiency and comfort levels in medical settings, highlighting potential challenges in healthcare communication. Although a significant proportion of participants possessed an intermediate level of English proficiency, this did not necessarily correlate with higher comfort levels in specialized, high-pressure medical environments. This difference emphasizes the significant consequences of addressing language comfort, in addition to proficiency in enhancing patient experiences and outcomes in healthcare settings.

Perception on Uses of English in Medical Sector

Statement	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
Regularity of encountering English	4%	10%	2%	40%	44%

Table 1: *Frequency of encountering English in medical sector N = 50*

Table 1 presents the frequency of encountering English in the medical sector. Among the respondents (N = 50), 4% reported that they had never encountered

English, while 10% indicated that they had rarely encountered English. Only 2% of the participants sometimes encountered English. A significant proportion (40%) often encountered English and the highest percentage (44%) always encountered English. This suggests that English was frequently encountered by the majority of the respondents in the medical sector.

Statement	Yes	No	Unsure
Predominance of English in the medical sector creates a barrier	70%	18%	12%

Table 2: *English prevents patients from receiving quality treatment N = 50*

Table 2 presents the data on respondents' perceptions of whether English creates a barrier that prevents patients from receiving high-quality treatment. The majority of participants (70%) opined that the dominance of English in the medical field was a disadvantage for non-native English speakers. A total of 12% participants were unsure about the impact of English on the quality of treatment, while 18% believed that it posed no significant issue.

Preferred Language for Medical Document

Statement	Mean	Std. Deviation	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
Importance of medical documents to be available in Bangla	3.60	0.990	2%	7%	22%	46%	16%

Table 3: *Preference towards the language of medical documents N = 50*

Table 3 shows the importance of the medical documents [i.e., reports, prescriptions, and informational brochures] available in Bangla, with a mean of 3.60 (S.D = 0.990). A total of 46% of the respondents found it important to have documents in their mother language, while 16% rated it as "very important." This

suggests that the respondents emphasized the availability of medical documents in Bangla. As per the respondents, the use of English in the medical sector poses a threat to the quality of treatment. To mitigate this impact, patients preferred Bangla medical documents.

English Proficiency and Comfort Level in Medical Service

The scatterplot presented in Figure 3 illustrates the relationship between self-reported English proficiency and comfort levels in English-dominated medical settings among the study participants. The data showed an upward trend from left to right, indicating a positive correlation between English proficiency and comfort levels in the healthcare context. To quantify the strength and direction of this relationship, Pearson's correlation coefficient was calculated.
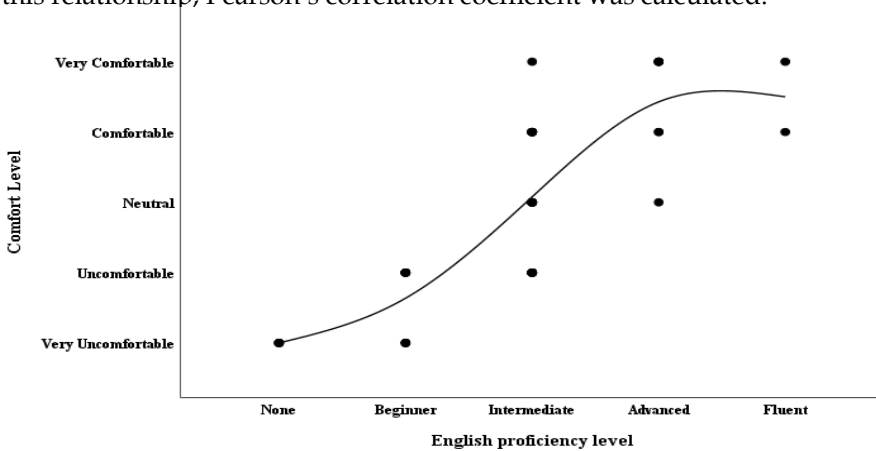

Figure 3: *Scatterplot of English Proficiency vs. Comfort Level*

The scatterplot demonstrates a clear positive relationship between English proficiency and comfort levels in medical settings, suggesting that higher English proficiency levels are associated with greater comfort. Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between English proficiency and comfort levels in medical settings. As shown in Table 4, the results indicated a strong positive correlation, suggesting that higher English proficiency is significantly associated with greater comfort in English-dominated medical settings.

Table 4 shows a statistically significant and strong positive correlation (r = .797) This finding suggests that individuals with higher English proficiency

are more comfortable with English-dominated medical environments. This correlation emphasizes the importance of language proficiency in patient comfort, indicating that improving patients' English skills could enhance their healthcare experiences and outcomes.

		Comfort Level
English proficiency level	Pearson Correlation	.797
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

Table 4: Correlation between English proficiency and comfort level N = 50

Gender and Comfort Level with English in Communication

An independent-samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in comfort in English in medical settings. The results indicated a statistically significant difference between male and female participants. Levene's test for Equality of Variances confirmed that the assumption of homogeneity of variances was met, $F(1, 48) = 0.746$, $p = .392$. Assuming equal variances, the t-test for Equality of Means showed $t(48) = 2.770$, $p = .008$, with a mean difference of 0.956, SE = 0.345, and a 95% CI [0.262, 1.649]. These results indicate that female participants reported significantly lower comfort levels in English than male participants. This significant gender difference in comfort with English in medical contexts suggests a need for gender-sensitive communication strategies in healthcare to ensure equitable patient experiences and outcomes.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for equality of means			
		F	Sig	t	Sig (2-tailed)	Mean difference	Std Error Difference
Comfort Level	**Equal variances assumed**	.746	.392	2.770	.008	.956	.345
	Equal variances not assumed	3.08	1.33	2.702	.010	.965	.354

Table 5: t-test for *Gender Differences in Comfort with English in Medical Settings*

The assumption of homogeneity of variances was fulfilled, as indicated by the non-significant Levene's test (p = .392). This result validates the use of the t-test to compare the means of the two different groups, highlighting a statistically significant lower comfort level with English among female participants compared to male participants.

Comfort Level in Medical Service across Different Education Levels

In the test of comfort levels in English in healthcare settings, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine disparities among individuals with different educational backgrounds. Figure 3 shows a set of boxplots that provide a graphical representation of the distribution of comfort levels categorized by education level.
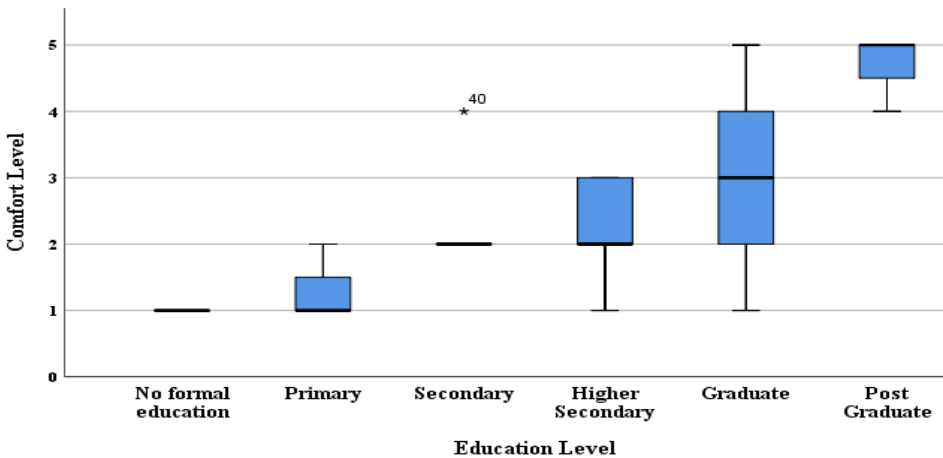
Figure 3: *Boxplot of educational background by Comfort Level*

The boxplots depicted in Figure 3 show a notable pattern, indicating that individuals with graduate and post-graduate qualifications reported higher levels of comfort than those with primary and secondary educational backgrounds. Moreover, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine the differences in comfort levels with English in medical settings across various levels of education.

Comfort Level	Sum of Squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig
Between Groups	38.065	5	7.613		
Within Groups	42.655	44	.969	7.853	.000
Total	80.720	49			

Table 6: *ANOVA table of level of education level and comfort*

Table 6 presents the ANOVA results for the relationship between level of education and comfort with English in medical settings. The analysis found a significant F-ratio, $F(5, 44) = 7.853$, $p < .001$, indicating that there were significant differences in comfort levels among the different educational groups. This indicates that level of education significantly influences how comfortable individuals feel about using English in medical environments. Higher educational levels are likely to be associated with greater comfort in these settings, emphasizing the importance of educational interventions to improve linguistic comfort in healthcare contexts. Therefore, a post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD was conducted to further explore the differences in comfort levels with English in medical settings across various education levels.

Multiple Comparisons				
Dependent Variable: Comfort Level				
Tukey HSD				
(I) Education Level	(J) Education Level	Mean Difference (I-J)	95% Confidence Interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
No formal education	Primary	-.333	-2.73	2.06
	Secondary	-1.400	-3.54	.74
	Higher Secondary	-1.333	-3.29	.62
	Graduate	-2.192[*]	-3.98	-.40
	Post Graduate	-3.750[*]	-5.99	-1.51

Primary	No formal education	.333	-2.06	2.73
	Secondary	-1.067	-3.21	1.08
	Higher Secondary	-1.000	-2.96	.96
	Graduate	-1.859*	-3.65	-.07
	Post Graduate	-3.417*	-5.66	-1.18
Secondary	No formal education	1.400	-.74	3.54
	Primary	1.067	-1.08	3.21
	Higher Secondary	.067	-1.57	1.70
	Graduate	-.792	-2.22	.64
	Post Graduate	-2.350*	-4.32	-.38
Higher Secondary	No formal education	1.333	-.62	3.29
	Primary	1.000	-.96	2.96
	Secondary	-.067	-1.70	1.57
	Graduate	-.859	-1.99	.28
	Post Graduate	-2.417*	-4.18	-.65
Graduate	No formal education	2.192*	.40	3.98
	Primary	1.859*	.07	3.65
	Secondary	.792	-.64	2.22
	Higher Secondary	.859	-.28	1.99
	Post Graduate	-1.558	-3.13	.02
Post Graduate	No formal education	3.750*	1.51	5.99
	Primary	3.417*	1.18	5.66
	Secondary	2.350*	.38	4.32
	Higher Secondary	2.417*	.65	4.18
	Graduate	1.558	-.02	3.13
*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level				

Table 7: *Post-hoc analyses of comfort level across different education level*

A Post-hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD test revealed significant differences in comfort levels with English across various educational levels (see Table 7). Specifically, individuals with no formal education reported significantly lower comfort levels than those with graduate (Mean Difference = -2.192, p = .008) and post-graduate (Mean Difference = -3.750, p < .001) education. Additionally, participants with primary education exhibited significantly lower comfort levels than those with graduate (Mean Difference = -1.859, p = .037) and post-graduate

(Mean Difference = -3.417, p = .001) education. Similarly, secondary education level participants showed significantly lower comfort levels than post-graduate individuals (Mean Difference = -2.350, p = .011). Participants with higher secondary education levels also reported significantly lower comfort levels than post-graduates (Mean Difference = -2.417, p = .002). These findings underscore the significant impact of educational attainment on comfort in English in medical settings, suggesting that higher educational level is associated with greater comfort. This highlights the necessity for educational interventions to enhance linguistic comfort in healthcare contexts, potentially improving communication and patient outcomes.

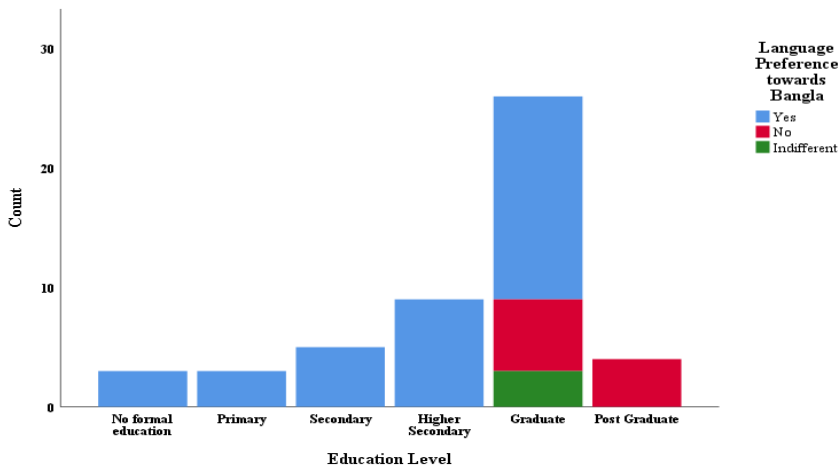**Language Preferences in Medical Communication and the Level of Education**

Figure 4: *Histogram of Language Preference by Education Level*

Figure 4 shows a visual representation of the distribution of language preferences relative to educational attainment among study participants. This indicates a trend wherein patients with higher levels of education showed a decrease in their preference for Bangla as a preferred language within the medical sector. Furthermore, a Chi-square test was conducted to examine the association between language preferences for medical communication and educational level.

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)	Point Probability
Pearson Chi-Square	24.740	10	.006	.016		
Likelihood Ratio	26.352	10	.003	.001		
Fisher's Exact Test	17.499			.016	.000	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	8.519	1	.004	.003		

Table 8: *Association between language preference for medical communication and education level N = 50*

Table 8 shows the results of the chi-square test, which indicated a significant association between language preference for medical communication and educational level, $\chi^2(10, N = 50) = 24.740$, p = .006. The Likelihood Ratio test also supported this finding, $\chi^2(10, N = 50) = 26.352$, p = .003. Fisher's Exact Test further confirmed this association, with an exact significance level of p = .016. Additionally, the Linear-by-Linear Association test revealed a significant linear trend, $\chi^2(1, N = 50) = 8.519$, p = .004. These results indicate that educational level significantly influences language preferences for medical communication. Higher education levels are likely to be associated with different language preferences, emphasizing the need for healthcare providers to consider educational backgrounds when addressing language needs in medical settings.

Patients' Language Preference for Medical Communication

When studying language choices for medical communication in Bangladesh, it was found that patients strongly prefer to communicate in their native language, Bangla. A significant majority of the study participants (74%) expressed a preference for Bangla over English in their medical interactions (see Table 9). Specifically, 37 of the 50 participants preferred Bangla for healthcare communication, highlighting its significant cultural preference.

Language Preference	Frequency	Percent	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Yes	37	74.0	37	16.7	20.3
No	10	20.0	10	16.7	-6.7
Indifferent	3	6.0	3	16.7	-13.7

Table 9: *Patients Language Preference for Medical Communication N = 50*

Table 9 provides a comprehensive overview of the patients' language preferences for medical communication. The data indicates a strong preference for Bangla, with the majority of participants expressing a preference for this language in the medical context. Only 20% of the participants preferred not to use Bangla and 6% were indifferent to the language used. Residual analysis further elucidates these preferences. The number of patients preferring Bangla (37) was significantly higher than expected (16.7), resulting in a positive residual of 20.3. Conversely, the numbers of patients who preferred not to use Bangla (10) and those who were indifferent (3) are both lower than the expected values, with negative residuals of -6.7 and -13.7, respectively.

These results highlight a clear preference for using Bangla in medical interactions with the patients. Moreover, a one-sample chi-square test was conducted to examine whether there was a significant preference for language use in medical communication with the patients. The results are summarized in Table 10.

	Language Preference towards Bangla
Chi-Square	38.680[a]
Df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000

Table 10: *One-Sample Chi-Square Test on Language Preference in Medical Communication*

The results of the one-sample chi-square test, $\chi^2(2, N = 50) = 38.680$, $p < .001$, indicate a statistically significant preference for Bangla in medical communication. This specifies that there is a significant language preference of patients, which is Bangla. the observed frequencies of language preferences differed significantly from the expected frequencies.

Validating and Reliability

The data analysis included all 50 cases in the dataset. This ensured the availability of a complete dataset for a strong analysis. All 50 cases were valid and represented 100% of the sample. No cases were excluded, resulting in a comprehensive dataset for subsequent statistical analysis. Cronbach's alpha was calculated to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the scale. The results, displayed in Table 11.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.714	.709	7

Table 11: *Reliability Analysis of Patient Experience with English in Medical Sector Scale*

Cronbach's alpha was used to examine the internal consistency and reliability of the seven-item scale designed to measure experience of the influence of English usage in the medical sector and patient experience with language. A Cronbach's alpha of .714, indicating good and relatively high (Taber, 2018). The scale comprises seven items.

According to Norman (2010), parametric statistics can be appropriately applied to Likert data, even in cases involving small sample sizes, unequal variances, and non-normal distributions, without the concern of erroneous results, suggesting that parametric tests with ordinal data are accepted. Moreover, the representation of the distribution of English proficiency and comfort levels was provided through both visual and statistical assessments. The inferential statistical analysis was initially visualized through graphs, and subsequently, the findings were presented in tabular form to affirm their reliability.

Conclusion

There is a significant language barrier to the use of English in medical settings in Bangladesh depending on the level of education. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (2022), the literacy rate among women in Bangladesh is lower than that of men. This has resulted in women relying on others for assistance with medical appointments and prescribed medications. Consequently, women often feel less comfortable in medical settings. Moreover, rural literacy is lower than urban literacy (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Therefore, it is estimated that people from rural areas with limited educational opportunities have more difficulty navigating healthcare. Physicians should use native languages in rural areas, particularly when dispensing medications, writing prescriptions, and providing diagnostic reports, to address these linguistic barriers effectively. Moreover, pharmaceutical companies should label drugs in the local language to ensure the linguistic rights of consumers. A strong preference for Bangla also predicts that using this language can

enhance patient comfort, understanding, and satisfaction in medical settings, ultimately contributing to a more effective healthcare delivery and improved patient outcomes. These initiatives have the potential to close the communication gap between healthcare providers and patients, thereby ensuring their comfort with treatment. This approach respects patients' language preferences while adhering to the principles of patient-centred care, which emphasizes the importance of clarity and understanding in patient-physician interactions. To foster linguistic human rights for all walks of people in Bangladesh, policymakers should promote native [regional, indigenous] languages, which can ensure the rights of consumers, equity in receiving medical services, and save patients from mistakes in drug consumption. The study has some limitations, primarily the small sample size and the exclusive use of quantitative methods without any qualitative approach. Future research could include qualitative methods to gain a deeper understanding of patients' perceptions and insights.

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Taboo in Translation in the Polish Versions of Philip Larkin's "This Be The Verse"

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Abstract. The presented article examines the notion of taboo in translation in Philip Larkin's poem "This Be The Verse" and its three Polish translations by Jerzy Jarniewicz, Jacek Dehnel and Maciej Froński. In the first part of the article, we find information on Larkin's reception in Poland and translations of his poems. We also learn that in addition to supporters such as Barańczak, Jarniewicz and Dehnel, he also had well-known opponents, the most famous of whom was Czesław Miłosz The second part of the article deals with the idea of different types of taboo is presented together with an analysis of Larkin's dealings with this notion. The types of taboo discussed here are: profanity, ancestors, immediate family and God. Larkin seens to be breaking all of them, yet retaining a classic verse structure and certain elegance that present a great challenge to his translators. In the third part, we look closer at the three Polish translations of "This Be The Verse", focusing on how the subsequent translators have dealt with its taboos. They all had a difficult task, which they accomplished in a variety of ways, all of which have been carefully researched and described. Finally, as the author, I also present my own version of Larkin's translation of the poem, but leave its assessment to subsequent researchers.

Introduction

It is difficult to say whether Philip Larkin has penetrated Polish poetic consciousness, although his presence in Polish poetry has been strongly supported by two literary theoreticians, translators and poets: Stanisław Barańczak and Jerzy Jarniewicz, the former as a translator, and Jarniewicz rather as a promoter of his poetry. They have recently been joined by Jacek Dehnel, who in 2007 published three of the poet's most important volumes of poetry in a book entitled *Zebrane*, and later, with reference to Barańczak, a volume entitled *Śnieg*

w kwietniową niedzielę.44 wiersze, and more recently his novel entitled in Polish
Zimowe królestwo (*A Girl in Winter*).

To Barańczak we owe first and foremost the volume of translations of Larkin's 44 poems, which was published in 1991 as number two of Biblioteczka Poetów Języka Angielskiego (the English Poets' Library) series, which shows the importance the translator attached to these poems (the first one was devoted to Emily Dickinson). In the introduction, entitled *Intensity of Sadness*, he presented not only a profile of the then little-known poet in Poland, but also a brief characterisation of his poems, together with their four most important elements: ordinariness, lack, unfulfillment and irony. Barańczak regarded Larkin as a poet of deep but also calm sadness that made him look at life and himself – especially himself – without unnecessary illusions. He also wrote of the poet's "profound honesty of thought" (1991, 12) and his apparent "inversion of the accepted norm" (1991, 13), when hope is hidden beneath a layer of pessimism.

After Barańczak, the baton was taken up by Jerzy Jarniewicz, who, as he writes (2018, 17-18), came into contact with Barańczak in the late 1980s precisely on issues related to Larkin and commented on his translations, which he read while they were still in typescript. Jarniewicz devoted two essays to Larkin in his 2001 book *W brzuchu wieloryba. Szkice o dwudziestowiecznej poezji brytyjskiej i irlandzkiej* (*In the Belly of the Whale. Sketches on Twentieth-Century British and Irish Poetry*), and then five years later a whole book, entitled *Larkin. Odsłuchiwanie wierszy* (*Larkin. Listening to His Poems*), and these are probably to date (including the short preface to Dehnel's selection) the most comprehensive analyses of the poet's work, important also in the Polish context, for in both we find reflections on reactions to Larkin in Poland. And these were both negative (Czesław Miłosz) and positive (Tomasz Majeran, Bronisław Maj).

However, as far as Jarniewicz's translations of Larkin are concerned, I counted only five, and all of them were printed a long time ago, in the fourth issue of 'Pismo artystyczno-literackie' from 1988. Jarniewicz himself explained this in an interview with Zofia Zaleska as follows:

> Indeed, the two authors you mentioned, who are important to me,
> I did not translate, although this does not mean that the ones
> I did translate I do not like! By no means. I think the trouble with
> Larkin or Eliot is that I know them too well, and this awareness
> would paralyse me when working on their texts. If an oeuvre has

been critically accompanied for many years and screened from all possible angles, then no translation of it satisfies afterwards. (Jarniewicz 2016, 206)[1]

Critical literary motifs also appear in the case of Jack Dehnel, who wrote an MA thesis on the translation of Larkin's verse[2] and a short afterword to his second selection of Larkin's poems, but was primarily concerned with translations of The Hermit of Hull. Dehnel also admits to a personal infatuation with these poems[3] and the influence they have had on his poetry.

This was completely different in the case of Czesław Miłosz, who, according to Jarniewicz (2001, 50-51), reacted to Larkin's poems very emotionally ('For me, this is repulsive. Disgusting poetry'), which he then tried to justify in an essay published in "Tygodnik Powszechny" in which he tried to rationalise his aversion. Jarniewicz tries to summarise his attitude:

In this essay [Miłosz] places Larkin's poetry on the map of contemporary culture, the direction of which is marked by the erosion of metaphysical sensibility and the disturbing phenomena associated with it: the decline of religiosity, commercialisation, massification, a wave of violence and pornography. (Jarniewicz 2006, 51)

Jarniewicz quips that "Larkin in Milosz's personal interpretation has little in common with the Larkin that emerges from a careful reading of his poems ..." (2006, 191). But is that all? Doesn't Larkin pose a threat to a certain traditional value model present in poetry or even more broadly: in literature and perhaps even culture in Poland? And how does Polish culture deal in its own language with these new ideas from across the English Channel?

If we wanted to answer this question more fully, we would have to study most of Larkin's poetry and its translations, which is beyond the scope of this article. However, we can try to seek at least a partial answer by focusing on an analysis of one of Larkin's poems that has been translated at least a few times into Polish. We will first focus on the original and its

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1   All Polish quotations translated by Krzysztof Puławski unless stated otherwise
2   See Jarniewicz 2006 p. 190.
3   See https://www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/7028-rozmontowywanie-idealow.html, DOA 14.04.2024.

implications in the source and target cultures, in order to then see how these implications have been conveyed by subsequent translators. Finally, we will try to formulate general conclusions about how Larkin's poetry and ideas function in Polish.

This Be The Verse

This poem published in 1974 in the volume *High Windows* is perhaps one of Larkin's most recognisable works. This is not only because of its use of profanity, but also because of its general attack on cultural values that are not usually questioned. Just stepping outside tradition probably required a lot of imagination and intellectual courage, and for early readers of this poem must have been shocked. Although first impressions must have been quite familiar:

> THIS BE THE VERSE
> They fuck you up, your mum and dad
> They may not mean to, but they do
> They fill you with the faults they had
> And add some extra, just for you.
>
> But they were fucked up in their turn
> By fools in old-style hats and coats,
> Who half the time were soppy-stern
> And half at one another's throats.
>
> Man hands on misery to man.
> It deepens like a coastal shelf.
> Get out as early as you can,
> And don't have any kids yourself.

First of all, here we have a very poetic, solemn title, which comes from Robert Louis Stevenson's poem entitled "Requiem":

> This be the verse you grave for me:
> *Here he lies where he longed to be* (…)

Larkin says that this is what he has to convey to humanity and that this poem is a kind of his epitaph, and therefore of a solemn nature.[4] Moreover, he does so in a very traditional form, namely the iambic tetrameter so common in English poetry, with exact – which is not at all obvious in his case – rhymes in the abab pattern, as well as an internal rhyme in the second verse (to-do), and 'calm' assonances, successively on the m, f and l sounds. In addition, the poem, like much of traditional Anglo-Saxon poetry in general, is accentual-syllabic or simply musical in character.

Into this traditional framework, Larkin puts completely untraditional content. So much so, in fact, that there have even been doubts as to whether this poem should be taken seriously, a view opposed, for example, by Jerzy Jarniewicz (2006, 145–146). On the other hand, it is worth remembering that the notion of seriousness is heavily skewed in Larkin's work and there is always irony lurking somewhere behind it. If Angela Carter says in *Wise Children* that "Comedy is tragedy that happens to other people", then Larkin would probably argue that comedy is also tragedy that happens to ourselves.

So what is the poet telling us in his ironic-serious way? What content is so outrageous that it shatters this traditional framework of English verse?

1. Profanity

The first taboo that Larkin violates is linguistic in nature. Namely, it concerns the word 'fuck', which appears second in the poem itself and is then repeated in the same form in the first line of the second stanza. Despite the sexual connotations associated with having children, the primary meaning here is expressed by the phrasal verb "fuck somebody up", or, we could say, "fuck someone up mentally". At the same time, at the beginning we have the word in the present simple tense, as if this process is unrelentingly going on, whether the parents are alive or dead. And in the second stanza, the poet is already talking about the past.

Certainly, the use of this vulgarity even in the early 1970s was nothing new. As early as January 1956, Alan Ginsberg wrote in the fifth line of a poem entitled *America*: "Go fuck yourself with your atom bomb." Earlier, in the early 20th century, Ezra Pound cursed heavily in Canto XV, and before him words such as "harlot" or "whore" could be found in the poems of William Blake.

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4   Although there are exceptions, as those who have visited Sapanta Cemetery know.

Vulgarisms also appeared in Shakespeare, but rather in plays and usually indicating a lower class background.

The same applies to Polish culture. The father of Polish poetry, Jan Kochanowski, wrote morally daring (though nowadays hard to understand) works, although they were partly censored, but even what remains can shock schoolchildren:

> Łaziebnicy a kurwy jednym kształtem żyją,
> W tejże wannie i złego i dobrego myją.
> (Bath attendants and whores live in the same way,
> They accept a bad one and a good one in their bath.)

Jan Andrzej Morsztyn was even bolder with his piece *Nagrobek kusiowi*, which began with the words: "Kuś umarł, kpy w sieroctwie" ("Cock died, cunts are in mourning") only that, again, his profanity is already heavily archaic and not always comprehensible. However, even in the days before Larkin, we had poets who, like Julian Tuwim, could swear and used this skill.

Why, then, should we regard Larkin's profanity as exceptional? For two reasons. First, because of the aforementioned classic setting of the poem, in which the word "fuck" suddenly appears. Breaking a taboo is not just about using certain swear words, because that would be very easy, but about using them in a certain situation. As Peter J. Silzer wrote:

> Discussion of 'taboo' words must begin with an understanding of the relationship between language and culture. The term originally comes from Polynesian cultures, in which certain objects, actions and words were considered to exert harmful power on people. (…) Thus, speakers of a language had to avoid using certain names or words, just as they had to avoid offending cultural norms and religious beliefs. (Silzer 2005, 1073)

The taboo is not broken by Tony Harrison, who uses vulgarities in his poem "V" in opposition to official, smoothed-out language, but by John Cleese, for example, who used the word "fuck" in his eulogy at Graham Chapman's memorial

service.[5] In my opinion, this also applies to Larkin, who introduced it into such classic English verse.

Secondly, the use of profanity in contemporary poetry is not unique. As Wit Pietrzak (2015, 57) notes: "Today, no one is very much offended by vulgarisms in poetry anymore. On the contrary, their use can add spice to a verse or open up a completely unexpected interpretative path". They are usually used due to several basic reasons:

> - strong emotion (Pound, Ginsberg);
> - a desire to offend (Harrison, Tuwim);
> - social identification (Harrison);
> - a joke (Cleese, Tuwim)
> - a desire to shock (Cleese).

What is more, these reasons are not necessarily mutually exclusive, in fact they often overlap. In Larkin's case, on the other hand, we have the impression that at least four of the above reasons do not come into play, and the fifth seems highly questionable as well. Admittedly, he does use strong language, but in a very matter-of-fact way, disregarding, of course, the negative overtones of the phrase itself. Philip Larkin does not get angry, offended, aspire to a social group or make a joke – at least not at the informative level of the poem itself. Perhaps he wants to shock us with his choice of vocabulary, although this is not obvious.

2. Ancestors

The second taboo that Larkin addresses in his poem is that of the ancestors and what they have passed on to the next generation. Arguably one of the most deeply ingrained myths in our consciousness is that in the past things used to be better. People were kinder and relationships were more cordial and deepened. We naturally transfer this stereotype to our ancestors, understood as either deceased members of our family or citizens of our country, depending on the situation. The cult of ancestors is firmly rooted in English and Irish culture, but also, perhaps even to a greater extent, in Polish culture, and is of course linked to the idealisation of the dead.

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5   See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CkxCHybM6Ek. DOA: 04.14.2024.

This is particularly evident in the poetry of Larkin's early master, William Butler Yeats. It was he who wrote of the "great and passionate" in the poem "A Prayer on Going Into My House". For him they were both the family members of the poem "Pardon Old Fathers" and the illustrious Irishmen of Part II of the poem "Three Songs to the Same Tune". It was also Yeats who fascinatingly captured the mechanism of ancestral mythologisation in "Easter 1916", where he wrote:

> This other man I had dreamed
> A drunken, vainglorious lout.
> He had done most bitter wrong
> To some who are near my heart,
> Yet I number him in the song;
> He, too, has resigned his part
> In the casual comedy;
> He, too, has been changed in his turn,
> Transformed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born.

The tendency to idealise ancestors is also evident in Polish poetry, to mention Adam Mickiewicz's "Reduta Ordona", in which he made dead its alleged commander, who survived the battle. Besides, the past, the lands of the fathers, seemed particularly attractive to poets who left the former Polish lands after the partitions, and then to those who remained abroad after World War II.

Of course, such mythologising tendencies met with resistance in both Anglo-Saxon and Polish culture (the Beatniks, Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński, Julian Tuwim), but in Larkin's case it was of an unusually matter-of-fact and calm nature:

> But they were fucked up in their turn
> By fools in old-style hats and coats,
> Who half the time were soppy-stern
> And half at one another's throats.

Here, the ancestors are the old-fashioned fools, who, on the one hand, try to live up to some cloying formal requirements, but are unable to tame their own disgusting nature. And this is inherited by:

3. Mum and dad

Even more blunt than the criticism of the ancestors in this poem is the criticism of the parents, with which it begins, even if it is softened slightly in the second line:

> They fuck you up, your mum and dad.
> They may not mean to, but they do.

Firstly, as I wrote, Larkin uses the present tense here, as if to say that whether or not parents are alive, they still have a destructive effect on us. And that this is the essence of the family, which admittedly plays a lesser role in the English tradition than in Poland (or in some other countries).

Secondly, his criticism extends to both parents, including the mother, who occupies an ample place in poetry in general, and especially in Polish poetry. One may resent the father, but rather not the mother. Even in the well-known religious song "Serdeczna matko" we can read:

> Lecz kiedy Ojciec rozgniewany siecze
> Szczęśliwy kto się do Matki uciecze.
> (But when the angry Father waves the rod,
> Lucky is the one who seeks protection of his Mother.)

The anonymous author of this song is obviously referring to the human experience, although here he speaks of God and the Mother Mary, which leads to another taboo that Larkin breaks in his poem, as the world he presents is...

4. A world without God

Although Larkin speaks in his poem of unhappiness and a death that (may it be as soon as possible) terminates it, and even seems to encourage suicide, the world he presents is a world completely devoid of God. Here, there is not even a shadow of the doubt that lingered in the minds of poets of earlier generations, especially the Romantics. And since there is no question of God's existence, neither are there doubts about whether H/he is good or evil, as in Milton's *Paradise Lost* or Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

Larkin seems to be saying: this is our world, and we ourselves are entirely responsible for it and for being so fucked up. And that the only way to break this chain of ever-increasing misery is the....

5. Lack of children

The motif of life as a source of suffering appears in some religions, for example in Hinduism or Buddhism, but it does not seem probable that the author of "The Winter Palace" would refer to them:

> I spent my second quarter-century
> Losing what I had learnt at university

No, Larkin does not seek consolation in religions, either exotic or Christian, but on the basis of his own experience contradicts the basic injunction of the latter: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (The Bible 1978, 5). He is not only areligious but also antisocial. Thus, he breaks another taboo of equating population growth with development.

Larkin in translation

As I have already mentioned, we have two major collections of translations Larkin's poems in Polish, namely Stanisław Barańczak's and Jacek Dehnel's. It may be surprising to see Larkin absent from the third volume of *Poeci języka angielskiego* (*Poets of English*) anthology, published in 1974, since he already had an established poetic reputation at that time, but we had to wait until 1991 for *44 poems*.

What is Barańczak's Larkin like? The translator has stressed several times how important Larkin's formal side is, the artistry with which he constructs his poems and the fact that "the very phenomenon of poetry under his pen has reached absolute perfection" (1992, 326). Whereas a little further on he wrote:

> Torn from within by a sense of the meaninglessness of the world,
> Larkin at the same time seals this hole in himself with the glue
> of poetic meaning and fastens his own splits with the metal brack-
> ets of self-imposed formal rules. Larkin's despair does not appear

to be a pose precisely because it is incessantly muted, suppressed,
toned down by self-irony restrained by syntax, fenced off by the
barrier of regular verse or the lattice of a complicated stanza from
the abyss of an uncontrollable howl (...) (Barańczak 1992, 326)

Interestingly, the formal side of Larkin's poetry was also strongly empha-
sised by Jacek Dehnel, who said the following in an interview for the *Tygodnik
Powszechny*:

Larkin wrote in a very artful way and this, of course, creates great
difficulties for the translator, because, at the same time, there
is no cotton wool, no "poeticism" that can be translated freely,
added here, taken away there. These poems are as precise as Swiss
watches. I have retained the rhymes with their incredibly intricate
arrangements, because I believe that translating rhyming poetry
without rhymes makes no sense - but I have often abandoned exact
rhymes in favour of assonances. For a couple of reasons. Larkin
himself sometimes used inaccurate rhymes or rhymes "for the sake
of rhyming", which happens in English but not in our poetry: the
endings of rhymed words look the same but sound completely dif-
ferent. In Polish, inaccurate metre sounds much worse than in Eng-
lish, we have stronger accents and a different literary tradition,
so I kept a stricter metre than in the originals, so the rhyme skeleton
didn't have to be so precise. Above all, I was concerned with the
precision of the lecture: Larkin's poems are like very small tractates,
and if I had to lose something, I preferred to dispense with exact
rhyme and be closer to what Larkin is lecturing the reader.[6]

Although both translators agree on the technicalities concerning Larkin's po-
etry, their translations are different:

In Barańczak's selection and translation, however, Larkin's despair
is toned down (...) a certain specific feature of Larkin's poetry is also

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[6]   https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/te-wiersze-sa-precyzyjne-jak-szwajcarskie-zegar-
ki-131109, DOA 04.15.2024.

softened, consisting of a bluntness bordering on the obscene, a provocative unceremoniousness, perhaps even squirtish. These tones are also present in the poetry of The Hermit of Hull - and it is this Larkin that Jacek Dehnel brings back to us. Barańczak's translations are artfully refined. Sometimes his Larkin moves in a higher stylistic register than the original; Dehnel's Larkin can be rough - sometimes even perhaps too rough (...) (Rajewska, 2008)

We could probably observe these discrepancies when analysing "This Be The Verse", except that... it is missing from Barańczak's selection. We can guess that it could have been for censorial reasons, although the selection includes two other iconoclastic poems by Larkin, namely "High Windows" and "Annus Mirabilis". Besides, this poem had already appeared in print a few years earlier in a translation by Jerzy Jarniewicz, although not in a separate volume, but in the fourth issue of *Pismo literacko-artystyczne* in 1988. And it is from this, chronologically the first translation, that we will begin our analysis. Later, this poem appeared in various translations, often poor ones, on the Internet, so I propose to use only the versions printed in books or magazines, which will limit our selection to Jerzy Jarniewicz, Jacek Dehnel and Maciej Froński.

1. Jarniewicz and his multiple versions

Jarniewicz's translation of "This Be The Verse" has appeared in three different versions in several different sources, but originally the whole poem read as follows:

TAKI NIECH BĘDZIE WIERSZ
Tatuniek z mamcią ciebie spieprzyli.
Może nie chcieli, lecz tak było.
Wady ci swoje przekazali,
Dodając kilka nowych siłą.

Ale ich także spierdolili
Głupcy w niemodnych kapeluszach,
Pół dnia się sztywno roztkliwiając,
A drugie pół się wzajem dusząc.

Człek biedę daje człowiekowi,
Głębszą niż osad stuleci.
Wynieś się prędzej, pókiś zdrowy,
I sam nie majstruj żadnych dzieci.

So we have here the formal title, but a clearly softened initial vulgarity that only gains strength in the second stanza. The present tense in the first stanza has been replaced by the past tense, and although one can understand this choice (saying "pieprzą cię" in Polish would have a clearly sexual character), it does not seem the best, as it weakens the force of the message. There is also the suggestion, out of a need for rhyme (było-siłą), that the transmission of old vices took place peacefully, which again softens the meaning of the original. Doubts are also raised by the Polish diminutives, which in English are also diminutive ("mum and dad" – written against Anglo-Saxon tradition with a lower case letters), but different from Polish "tatuniek z mamcią", which, due to their exaggeratedly diminutive character, signal strong irony (in the case of "pure" diminutives we would have "mamusia i tatuś" – "mummy and daddy").

In the second stanza, we understand that the division of the daytime is metaphorical and this is not objectionable, whereas one may have doubts about the construction of the whole of this stanza, which in Polish implies that the "fucking up" of the parents and the ancestors' musings and disagreements are connected. But in Larkin the looks and behaviour of the characters are simply a part of their description.

The first line of the third stanza contains information similar to the original, but the word "człek", rare in Polish, changes its register to a more poetic an archaic one. Later, we can already see the differences in meaning: in Polish, poverty is deeper than the sediment of centuries, but probably constant in some way, while in English it deepens, then in the next verse the addition of the phrase "pókiś zdrowy", necessary because of the rhyme, makes us think generally of some kind of escape, not death (remember that the poem is meant to be an epitaph). The changes in register also occur in the last line when "majstrowanie dzieci" ("tinkering" i.e. making children) is mentioned, again indicating strong irony.

New version of this piece with a slightly altered title subsequently appeared in the *Tygodnik Powszechny* from the year 2000 and in the books *Larkin.*

Odsłuchiwanie wierszy and, with minor changes, *100 wierszy wypisanych z języka angielskiego*. So let's take a look at this latest one:

> TAKI NIECH BĘDZIE WIERSZ
> Tatko cię z mamcią spierdolili.
> Może nie chcieli, lecz tak było.
> Wady ci swoje przekazali,
> Dodając kilka nowych – siłą.
>
> Ale ich także spierdolili
> Głupcy w niemodnych kapeluszach,
> Pół dnia tkwiąc w ckliwej surowości,
> A drugie pół – wzajem się dusząc.
>
> Człowiek swą nędzę odziedzicza,
> Głębszą niż osad tysiącleci.
> Wynoś się prędzej, pókiś zdrowy,
> I sam nie majstruj żadnych dzieci.

Despite the similarity, we see a few differences here. The positions of several words have been changed, new punctuation marks have appeared and, above all, the lighter vulgarity has been replaced by a stronger one and both have become the same as in the original. Also slightly stronger are, firstly, the command "wynoś się" and, secondly, "osad tysiącleci" (the sediment of millennia) corresponding to the history of mankind (centuries tended to encompass Western civilisation). Jarniewicz has also replaced "tatuniek" with "tatko", which is slightly less marked for irony, and added the oxymoronic term 'cloying severity'. However, we still have the past tense here in the first stanza, as well as the encouragement to leave the world while we are healthy.

It seems that in the first translation Jarniewicz weakens the iconoclastic force of the poem, but we must remember that this was its first presentation in Poland and hence the changes. At the same time, the translator here makes Larkin more ironic than in the original, as if he did not believe in the intelligence of his readers. Perhaps rightly so, since English humour based on understatements (and overstatements) was not popular in Poland at the time, and is not always or fully recognised today either.

2. Jacek Dehnel's dialogue

As Ewa Rajewska wrote, Jacek Dehnel's translation enters into a polemic with Stanisław Barańczak's translations. However, since Barańczak did not translate this particular poem, let us see if he tries in some way to dialogue with Jarniewicz's translation.

> TO MOŻE TAKI WIERSZYK
> Jebią ci życie mamcia z tatkiem,
> Może i nie chcą, ale jebią,
> Oprócz win własnych na dokładkę
> Jeszcze ci kilka ekstra wrzepią.
>
> Lecz im zjebali życie inni,
> Głupcy w cylindrach i pelisach,
> Co albo byli mdławo-sztywni,
> Albo się chcieli pozagryzać.
>
> Człowiek drugiemu przekazuje
> Rozpacz, wciąż głębszą, jak dno rzeki.
> Zwiewaj stąd, póki możesz uciec -
> I nigdy nie miej własnych dzieci.

The Polish title with the diminutive "wierszyk" is different, but in combination with the forms "mamcia z tatkiem" it fulfils exactly the same, ironic, role as in Jarniewicz's work. Similarly, there is the term "nauseatingly stiff", although here we can doubt whether it was not Jarniewicz who decided on the amendment under the influence of Dehnel's reading, because in his version of the poem from 2006, he writes: "Half a day lingering in cloying severity" (2006, 145). What is new, however, is the use of the present tense in line with the original first stanza, which in turn has enabled a very imaginative use of the verb "jebać" (fuck), repeated three times rather than twice as in Larkin's, which adds to its power. Also new is the encouragement to leave the world while we can still do so and the already neutral plea not to have children.

The whole poem is written in colloquial Polish and seems stronger than Jarniewicz's version. The only misunderstanding in it is the statement that

despair is becoming deeper, like the bottom of a river. Dehnel meant here geological deepening of the river but even in such case we have to remember that this process can be stopped or reversed. What Larkin is referring to is the ocean shelf, which simply gets deeper and deeper. This image can, of course, change (or get neutralised) in translation, but we need something that will obviously increase or deepen.

3. Maciej Froński and affront

There could hardly be a better magazine to publish just this poem by Larkin than "Afront", and it was there that Maciej Fronski's translation appeared in issue 1-2 (16–17) of 2022:

> A NIECH TO IDZIE TAK
> Rżną ci psychikę rodziciele,
> Chcący, niechcący – rżną, aż kwili;
> Nie dość, że po nich wad masz wiele,
> Jeszcze by coś ci dołożyli.
>
> Lecz ich też kiedyś przeczołgali
> Durnie od fedor i od pelis,
> Co albo byli zdziecinniali,
> Albo się prawie pogryźć mieli.
>
> Pałeczka udręczenia coraz
> Cięższa przez pokolenia leci;
> Zwijaj się, póki jeszcze pora,
> I mieć nie próbuj własnych dzieci.

So let's see what an affront this new translation is. First of all, one is struck by the ambiguity of the title, which loses its direct reference to poetry and can refer, for example, to a speech or even a piece of music. Another novelty is the marked softening of the vulgarism, which, while it retains its ambiguous connotations, is also a common verb and sounds much weaker than the Polish "pierdolić" or "jebać". It goes on similarly; the person addressed by the lyrical subject **is** simply flawed by his parents, who **perhaps** add something to them.

In the next stanza, the word "fuck" appears in the version "przeczołgali" (to crawl), i.e., according to the online WSJP: "to bring about a situation in which someone feels humiliated or demeaned",[7] but not, after all, damaged for life. Also questionable is the phrase "Durnie od fedor i od pelis", which would be more indicative of people who have something to do with those garments rather than simply wearing them. Froński goes on to divide these fools into two groups: those who are childish and those with inclinations towards violence, disregarding the fact that in Larkin's poem they are exactly the same group of people.

This view of the world is decidedly softer than Larkin's, and it is no wonder that in the final stanza we get the impression that when the lyrical subject says "Zwijaj się, póki jeszcze pora", it is more about getting out of the situation rather than leaving life as such. That's because misfortune here is a baton – admittedly an increasingly heavy one – passed on in the relay of generations. And, as we know, the baton can be dropped, thrown away or refused altogether. The inevitability so obvious in Larkin's work disappears here.

Conclusions

At the outset, I would like to add that all the translations are accentual-syllabic and, although their rhymes are not always as regular as Larkin's, they still fit into the Polish poetic tradition, just as Larkin verses fit into the English one. The translators thus create the perfect backdrop for the semantic displays of iconoclasm. It is precisely such a traditional framework that is needed to shatter the taboos mentioned in the article, namely:

- use of profanity;
- ancestors;
- parents;
- divine presence in the world;
- social development.

So how do successive translators manage to do this? Jacek Dehnel is probably the best here, hitting yet another taboo with his colloquial Polish. Slightly milder is Jerzy Jarniewicz, who, let us remember, was a pioneer in this field. The mildest

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7   https://wsjp.pl/haslo/podglad/50667/przeczolgac/5150603/slownie, DOA 04.15.2024.

is Maciej Froński with the latest of the translations discussed here. Froński only gently nudges taboos, perhaps trying to irritate them, but certainly not to break them. He also creates, to a certain extent, an alternative version to the original and one that is more acceptable to a large proportion of poetry readers, as it confirms their "poetic" intuitions, about which Jerzy Jarniewicz (2012, 37) wrote with certain irony:

> In Poland there is still a smouldering belief in the special role of poetry, which is supposed to perform a soothsayer, almost religious function. (...) Even if these assumptions are no longer formulated explicitly today, they are often hidden in the form of other beliefs, for example, concerning the supposedly natural and obvious relationship of poetry - or more broadly: art - with metaphysics.

The translators of "This Be The Verse" thus face a choice. Either they will, at the very least, bend their translation to those implicit canons of poeticism that, we should add, accompany classical poets, and Larkin is already a classic. Or they will look for something new in the work, absent from the classic Polish poems, and try to highlight and emphasise it.

The former seems to be the case with Maciej Froński, and the latter to a greater extent with Jacek Dehnel, but also undoubtedly with Jerzy Jarniewicz.

Apart from this, all these translations have another important function, namely to constitute a translator's series, in the sense Edward Balcerzan (1968, 23–26) gave to the term, and at the same time to encourage further attempts to translate the poem. Two already existing ones are worth mentioning, namely those by Marceli Szpak[8] and Wioletta Grzegorzewska,[9] to which I would like to add, without comment, my own translation:

> NIECH TO BĘDZIE WIERSZ
> Jebią cię równo tata z mamą,
> Może i nie chcą, tak wychodzi,
> Do tych wad, które mieli sami
> Dodają kilka wyjątkowych.

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8   https://www.facebook.com/vogulepoland/posts/philip-larkin-to-mo%C5%BCe-taki-wierszykmamusia-z-tat%C4%85-zjebali-ci-w-g%C5%82owiemo%C5%BCe-nie-ch/1026696290760834. DOA 06.08.2024.

9   http://www.literackie.pl/przeklady.asp?idtekstu=3389&idautora=60&lang=. DOA 06.08.2024.

Ale ich także rozjebali
Głupcy w tużurku czy surducie,
Tacy na co dzień czułostkowi,
Ale gotowi cię udusić.

Niedolę dają jedni drugim,
A ta rozlewa się po świecie,
Więc przerwij wreszcie ciąg ten długi
I sam najlepiej nie miej dzieci.

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Heather Meek, 2023. *Reimagining Illness: Women Writers and Medicine in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Montreal & Kingston, London, Chicago: McGill-Queen's University Press)

The last decade has witnessed a significant increase in scholarship at the intersection of literary and medical studies, and the eighteenth century has been a particular subject of scrutiny. Such a focus is unsurprising, since the period is frequently considered to be one of growing interest in the human body and psyche, as well as corporeal and mental afflictions, and potential cures. The eighteenth century also marks an important shift in literary development, particularly in the British context, with 1719 seeing the publication of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, which is often viewed as the first British novel (for instance, by Margaret Drabble). The novel as a genre subsequently grew in popularity, leading to the formation of other subgenres (the sentimental novel, the Gothic novel, the picaresque novel, etc.). The period also saw a steady rise in the popularity of journals, diaries and collections of letters, as well as travelogues and political pamphlets. Appropriately termed the Age of Reason, the eighteenth century was conducive to the development of philosophical thought, which affected the approach towards different literary and medical matters. These overlapping topics have been explored in several volumes including *The Female Body in Medicine and Literature* (2011, edited by Andrew Mangham and Greta Depledge), *Medicine and Narration in the Eighteenth Century* (2013, edited by Sophie Vasset), Andrew Budd's *John Armstrong's "The Art of Preserving Health": Eighteenth-Century Sensibility in Practice* (2016), *Disease and Death in Eighteenth-Century Literature and Culture: Fashioning the Unfashionable* (2017, edited by Allan Ingram and Leigh Wetherall Dickson), *Literature and Medicine Volume 1: The Eighteenth Century* (2021, edited by Clark Lawlor and Andrew Mangham), *Literature & Medicine During the Eighteenth Century* (2022, edited by Marie Mulvey Roberts and Roy Porter), and *Novel Notions: Medical Discourse and the Mapping of the Imagination in Eighteenth-Century English Fiction* by Katherine E. Kickel (2023). Two

of the collections mentioned above (the 2017 and 2021 ones) include contributions by Heather Meek, whose 2023 work *Reimagining Illness: Women Writers and Medicine in Eighteenth-Century Britain* brilliantly complements the academic analysis situated between the worlds of literature and medicine (and to some degree philosophy, sociology, history and culture) in the long eighteenth century.

In her book, Meek discusses six female authors: Jane Barker (1652–1732), Anne Finch (1661–1720), Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689–1762), Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi (1741–1821), Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797) and Frances Burney (1752–1840). The term "long eighteenth century" aptly summarizes the time scope of the volume, for Barker's early forays into literature date back to the end of the seventeenth century, whereas in the case of Burney, Meek refers to her 1812 letter, even though Burney's most celebrated texts, *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, belong to the 1770s and 80s respectively. Although such a selection might initially seem random, Meek explains that "Barker, Finch, Montagu, Piozzi, Wollstonecraft, and Burney have been chosen as the primary subjects of this study because each of them can be understood as at once a major woman of letters and a medical thinker" (7). Undeniably, all six women demonstrate medical knowledge that they can translate into the language of (widely understood) literature. Moreover, they combine the discourse of eighteenth-century healthcare with literary tropes across different genres and literary conventions (prose, poetry, letters, pamphlets). Is this sufficient to justify examining them together, despite personal or generic differences? Meek's defense of such an authorial choice of protagonists appears valid, even though one would perhaps expect stronger reasoning, which could positively affect the overall perception of the book.

The first heroine of the volume, Jane Barker, certainly had ties to the medical world – not only did her brother Edward study medicine, but she herself "seems to have worked for a time as an unlicensed practitioner" (34). Meek positions Barker against several contemporary medical figures (such as Richard Lower), which proves particularly useful in the context of Barker's *Galesia Trilogy* and its depiction of female hysteria, for which Barker finds a cure: the rejection of marriage, female celibacy as a means of achieving autonomy, and the search for fulfillment in art. Meek underlines how revolutionary and unorthodox such opinions were at the beginning of the eighteenth century.

Anne Finch, the protagonist of the second chapter, also believed in the recuperative power of the artistic impulse. In her poetic output, Finch frequently refers to her own experiences, especially her struggle with spleen/melancholy

(these two terms interchangeably used by her). Meek notes that Finch "presents spleen both as a disabling condition and as a muse and companion" (67), thus portraying the illness from two perspectives: the medical and the literary. However, Finch's poetry goes further as it criticizes the contemporaneous male tendency to belittle female writing and ridicule female melancholy.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, the focus of chapter three, was equally critical of the male authorities of her time, especially in the realm of medicine. Meek emphasizes Montagu's status as the only figure in the volume whose writing actually contributed to major developments in medicine. Montagu's singularity seems justified due to her staunch support of smallpox inoculation, a method she first observed in Ottoman Constantinople. She promoted this early form of vaccination both personally (via letters to her friends and relatives) and more openly as pamphlets that she published anonymously. Her mission was surely motivated by her sense of duty toward her children. The topic of motherhood and its ordeals is also explored in the next chapter, devoted to Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi. According to Meek, Piozzi's "writings not only inform ideologies of motherhood but also engage with medical discourses of childrearing, midwifery, maternal grief, and hysteria" (135) and as such remain in dialogue with other chapters in the volume. Meek subtly, yet powerfully, narrates the story of a woman of letters whose traumatic life experiences (the loss of eight out of twelve children she had given birth to) affected her literary oeuvre.

The topic of motherhood is also present in the chapter on Mary Wollstonecraft, even though Meek concentrates mostly on the subject of consumption, as portrayed by Wollstonecraft in her two novels, *Mary: A Fiction* (1788) and *Maria: or, The Wrongs of Woman* (1798). Both novels demonstrate that Wollstonecraft advocated for gender equality not only in her feminist texts such as *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: with Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects* (1792), but also in her fiction. Therefore, the texts simultaneously imply that the personal is political, to use a phrase popularized by Carol Hanisch in the late 1960s. A similar approach was adopted by Frances Burney, the heroine of the final chapter, whose mastectomy letter is "an intensely personal yet carefully crafted piece of autobiographical writing and a medical document that offers a rare contribution to our understanding of breast cancer in the long eighteenth century" (193). Burney moves beyond a minute description of her health problems and the treatment she underwent to save her life to discuss

the dynamics between patients and doctors more broadly, frankly indicating that a female patient is more at risk of objectification and mental distress.

The volume reads very well, mainly thanks to its carefully crafted, coherent structure. It consists of six chapters, each devoted to one writer. Meek follows a chronological order, logically moving from Jane Barker, whose literary career started at the end of the seventeenth century, to Frances Burney's text written in the early nineteenth century. Preceding the analysis of the six female writers is an elaborate, detailed introduction that paints an intricate portrait of the eighteenth century and the events that led to such literary, medical and philosophical turmoil. Meek refers to numerous medical and literary predecessors of Barker and others, and she also quotes extensively from the public and private writings of various eighteenth-century authorities. As a result, she successfully situates her female protagonists against a very complex backdrop that certainly lacks homogeneity. Mixing literary, medical, philosophical and historical discourses might increase the risk of disorder and unintelligibility in the text, but Meek expertly combines attention to all the disciplines, thereby creating an informative, interdisciplinary narration.

Overall, Meek offers a genuinely insightful, multi-perspective overview of the literature of a period that was rife with intense intellectual tumult. Her analysis is accompanied by a thorough bibliography. As the author claims in the conclusion, one of her primary goals was "to illustrate how a group of major women writers drew on medical experience and discourse in ways that shaped their literary work – and thus to contribute in a broad sense to the process of recuperating eighteenth-century women writers" (220). She surely achieves this aim, inviting her readers on a fascinating journey that encompasses literature, history, philosophy, culture, sociology, and medicine.

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Jordan Tannahill, Max Posner, and Jez Butterworth, and songs by Michael Flanders and Tom Lehrer, among others. Puławski is the author of plays, three of which appeared in *Dialog* (4/2005, 4/2008, 7-8/2016), with which he also cooperates as a translator. He published one volume of poems called *Martwiątka* (*Deadlings*) (Białostocka Filologiczna Kolekcja, 2017) and a book of short-stories *Mikołajek w szkole Dobrej zmiany* (*Little Nicholas in Present-Day Polish School)*) (Kielce 2019) and a short novel *Pan Walczyk w mieście B* (*Mr Waltz in the city of B*). His main fields of interests are literary translations, poetry/songs and theatre.

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