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# [ The Terminal Kaleidoscope: Edward Ka-Spel's Poetry in the Age of Postmodernity ]

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**[Abstract]** *The paper studies the poetry of the British experimental musician and poet/lyricist Edward Ka-Spel. Its main objective is to relate Ka-spel's writing to the theories of the postmodern, both in the aesthetic sense of postmodernism as well as in the philosophical-ideological sense of postmodernity. The article also maintains throughout that Ka-spel continues to write in the lineage of high modernism and can therefore be considered a genuine exponent of the avant-garde. While the first part of the paper interrogates the theoretical implications of Ka-spel's relationship with the postmodern, the second, more practical part turns to close reading as the main tool for exploring the complexities and intricacies of Ka-spel's poetic imagery.*

**[Keywords]** *postmodernity; postmodernism; fragmentation; repetition; dystopia; unity*

It has been argued by postmodern theorists on several occasions that in the present age, marked by an acute feeling of the end of history, including the history of art, there is no room left for authentic experimentation or innovation, because everything has simply already been done. The French guru of postmodern theory, Jean Baudrillard, stated that “all that are left are pieces. All that remains to be done is to play with the pieces. Playing with the pieces – that is postmodern” (Baudrillard 25). Similarly, though arguing from an entirely different philosophical and ideological perspective, the American Marxist theorist Fredric Jameson writes:

The writers and artists of the present day will no longer be able to invent new styles and words – they’ve already been invented; only a limited number of combinations are possible; the unique ones have been thought of already... In a world in which stylistic innovation is no longer possible, all that is left is to imitate dead styles, to speak through the masks and the voices of the styles in the imaginary museum. (168–9)

However, these pessimistic, end-of-history views of the artistic possibilities of the present day have been at least partly disproved by some great works of art that the postmodern era has spawned. Although the pastiche-like character of many of these works fits in with Baudrillard’s notion of “playing with the pieces”, they also disprove Baudrillard in their ability to still produce and transmit substantial meaning, of which the French theorist believed our days are utterly devoid. The area of poetic experimentation is a fruitful field to prove this point. Although the days of unique experiments carried out by various avant-garde movements of high modernism are probably gone, the possibilities of combination and interplay seem to be inexhaustible, and they can give rise to complex and valuable writings.

The British artist Edward Ka-Spel, arguably the most prolific musician and lyricist alive, has now been negotiating the promises and contradictions of the postmodern for nearly forty years – as the frontman of the Anglo-Dutch band The Legendary Pink Dots, often dubbed the kings of imaginative music, or as a solo artist. His haunting lyrics hail from the indefinite interstices between discovery and loss, memory and amnesia, painful immanence and liberating transcendence. Both musically and lyrically, he is relentlessly experimental; his art is informed by the “postmodern condition”, defined by another French postmodernist *par excellence*, Jean François Lyotard, as follows:

It is] the condition of the literatures and arts that have no assigned addressee and no regulating ideal, yet in which value is regularly measured on the stock of experimentation. Or, to put dramatically, in which it is measured by the distortion that is inflicted upon the materials, the forms and the structures of sensibility and thought. (16)

Ka-Spel’s music and lyrics indeed inflict a lot of distortions upon the material, but it is only the latter that will be the subject of interest in this essay. Ka-Spel has always seen his music and lyrics as inseparable, but fans and critics alike have long recognized that

the lyrics could easily stand on their own, as they are nothing short of deeply imaginative poetry. This line of thought has been pursued most persistently by the San Francisco-based editor and publisher K. Janene-Nelson, whose painstaking care and effort finally translated Ka-Spel's lyrics into poetry proper in the shape of a beautifully illustrated and illuminated collection entitled *Love and Loud Colours*, published in 2002.

The rich visual aspect of the book, drawing on a vast array of sources from medieval Parisian calligraphy to Serbo-Cyrillic iconography, does not merely compensate for the absence of music, but rather proves that Edward Ka-Spel's words are equally at home in the textual-visual field as they are in the territory of the textual-audial. As such, Ka-Spel's poems display close affinities with the theories of, say, Carlo Belloli, who was convinced that "poetry was bound to escape from the pages of a book," who believed that the poet should be "a semantic architect systematically seeking a new space medium, an open site which is to be found neither in the library nor on the wall," and whose ultimate goal was "to fully represent the relationship of word, sound and visuality" (Solt). Moreover, if Ka-Spel often takes up the haunting sense of loss, so pronounced in the postmodern age, and turns it into a playful piece of writing, he is tapping into what Eugen Gomringer – an advocate, like Belloli, of "concrete poetry" – celebrates as a poem/object "made concrete through play-activity" (Gomringer). Since both Gomringer and Belloli are related with the postmodern of the aesthetic variety, i.e. with *postmodernism* as a continuation and further elaboration of high modernism, Ka-Spel's affinity with these figures clearly situates him on the same family tree.

It can be argued, though, that Ka-Spel's art is also postmodern in the sense of *postmodernity*, meaning that it operates from an all-pervasive network of plurality, fragmentation and repetitiveness – just some of the keywords of postmodernity, but all of them featuring quite heavily in his poetry. Equally, subjectivity is constantly undermined and split by Ka-Spel. His poems often feature a first-person voice or narrator, presumably Ka-Spel himself, but the identity of this subject is inherently unstable, free-floating and disjointed, roughly along the lines of Roland Barthes' discussion of the role of the writer: "The writer is always on the blind spot of systems, adrift; he is the joker in the pack, a mana, a zero degree, the dummy in the game: necessary to the meaning (battle), but himself deprived of fixed meaning" (Barthes 35). In fact, Ka-Spel's poems deconstruct the self so thoroughly that they invoke Michel Foucault's definition of the self as "a complex and variable function of discourse" (Foucault 138). Indeed, the labyrinthine character of Ka-Spel's writing would seem to lend a lot of credibility to another postmodern dictum formulated by Roland Barthes, regarding the relationship between textuality and subjectivity:

Whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in this tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving; lost in this tissue – this texture – the subject unmakes himself, like a spider dissolving in the constructive secretions of its web. (64)

Yet, for all his affinities with the postmodern both in its aesthetic and philosophical guise, Ka-Spel's poems are also informed by conscious and unconscious longing for lost absolutes and certainties. The fragmented nature of his work might reflect the already-discussed "postmodern condition", but it also speaks of a heart-felt loss of totalizing and universal perspectives from which to study life or create art. Though celebrated by postmodern theory as a loss of something that never existed in the first place except as a world-shaping myth, the crack in human consciousness this loss has caused seems to be real enough to make it one of the main themes of Ka-Spel's poems.

Loss, confusion and longing for unity operate on many levels in Ka-Spel's poems, since his creative method is "the terminal kaleidoscope", a self-coined term for the idea that lends his words and music their outlandish, other-wordly feel; the idea that the ultimate reality beyond fragmentation and separation is one of unbound creative patterning of a unified field. The inner multiverse of the mind is what Ka-Spel paints in the brightest colours, and in the process "expresses the inexpressible", as his publisher puts it in Introduction to *Love and Loud Colours* (Ka-Spel IX). He pushes his themes to the limit, and from the cacophony of voices harvests pure joy – even in places where those voices suffer or break down.

A frequent motif, as has already been suggested, is that of the blending, or mingling – of disparate senses, identities, even religions. The result may not always be pleasurable, but the altered state of consciousness that accompanies this imaginative act nevertheless yields a fresh perspective, as in "Through your eyes I watched the red sun burst / and slowly melt into a dead sea / Through your senses I kissed dying time" (Ka-Spel, "Crushed Velvet" 5). In the same poem, we hear "the mountain laugh / the banshee cry, the statue of Mohammed roll the dice / to plastic Buddha, screaming 'Christ! Another six - / I guess it's time to pack my things, / head back slowly to Nirvana'" (5). Here, within no more than two verses, the reader encounters the head figures of three major global religions, all centred around the divine number six, as appearing on the face of a dice. In this rather predictable game, the number is always six, Buddha is a New-Age fake, Mohammed is a forbidden statue and Christ a mere turn of phrase. Yet, even in this truly postmodern, rather flat condition, something remains of the longing for that which transcends our alienation, as beautifully expressed in the poem's final line: "So it goes we stand alone by standing stones and turn them into circles." It is worth mentioning, perhaps, that the musical rendition of "Crushed Velvet" is built around an axis of discordant industrial noise, thus evoking early avant-garde experiments of Luigi Russolo, the Italian futurist who wrote that "we must break this restricted circle (sic!) of pure sounds and conquer the infinite variety of noise-sounds" (Lombardi).

Similar questioning of our cosmic abandonment appears in "Zero Zero", a kind of lament on the impossibility to solve basic ontological conundrums: "No doors deep inside this corridor of space and time / if space and time exist..." (Ka-Spel 6) The poem would seem to invoke Einstein's famous thought about God not playing dice, thus providing a fine echo of the previous poem, with its bored, dice-playing prophets. Einstein's general relativity, however, does not satisfy the ever-doubtful speaker, and nor does general rela-

tivity's shadow twin quantum mechanics, since after "we tried splitting quarks", we still "need a sign – is anybody there? Are you listening?" (6). Interestingly, elsewhere, Ka-Spel expresses an optimistic belief, or rather the willingness to believe, "in the nobility of the human spirit." ("A Velvet Resurrection" 111) Here, he actually revisits the ontological questioning of "Zero Zero" by stating that "I want to believe mankind will never be too arrogant to / abandon its quest for an ultimate answer" and that "this ultimate answer remains a simple question". Quite what that question might be is not specified. After all, even the speaker finally admits that "you've caught me at a bad moment / and I can't" (111).

Both "Zero Zero" and "A Velvet Resurrection" also exemplify Ka-Spel's obsession with space, or rather spaces, which often appear to have the peculiar ability to entrap and enclose his speakers/characters in their very vastness and openness, very much like wide and open philosophical questions do. One such experience of being trapped in a lonely corner of the space-time continuum is related in "Hallway":

Shipwrecked in this gaping hole in time. In this lost museum that's forever closed inside. A place where nothing dies, it only crumbles. And I fumble. The statues turn their backs and just collapse in piles of ashes, remnants, fragments, ruins, trash. They torched this temple years ago, but they left the ghosts to moan on glowing coal – in a hall that leads to a hall – that leads to a hall – that leads to a hall... (89)

The prevalent atmosphere of doom and decay speaks through these images where things appear to only exist in the form of endless fragmentary copies of themselves, and thus, once again, in a postmodern condition where fragments and ruins are all that there is and where the seeming openness and freedom is but a "gaping hole in time". However, the unifying idea of the "terminal kaleidoscope" once again comes to the rescue, and the fragmentation and crumbling which looks so hopeless and desperate in "Hallway" does not appear as irredeemable in some of the other poems. For example, in "The Lovers, Part 2", fatal fragmentation and decay is portrayed as just one possible state of existence where "it only takes a push – china doll will fall apart" (143). Fortunately, a repositioning of the pieces in the terminal kaleidoscope may lead to an entirely different – and a lot more blissful – state of being in which "it only takes a touch – and china doll will start to dance". In the last line of this poem, as if faced by a Shakespearean question of "to be or not to be," the speaker takes a clear stance in the imperative: "Dance, china doll!" (143). Thus, the unification of fragments, the smoothing out of cracks is another frequent motif of Ka-Spel's imagery, and although it is often just desired rather than fully achieved, it remains one of the most tangible manifestations of the "terminal kaleidoscope" in Ka-Spel's poetry. Or, as he puts it himself in "With Wings": "The Crippled soul unites and prepares for the long journey home" (145).

Sometimes, though, the terminal kaleidoscope reshapes itself into an image totally inaccessible to ordinary human consciousness, where the language creaks and bends as it struggles to "express the inexpressible". This happens in "A Space Between", a poem allegedly based on Ka-Spel's near-death experience. Language has been lent to uses – in

fables or allegories – where plants, animals or even inanimate objects are invested with human characteristics. Here, it is stretched even further, as if in order to capture an experience outside the limits of ordinary consciousness, the author is left with just one option – to anthropomorphize situations, to give personalities and feelings to a whole web of far-reaching, albeit short-lived circumstances. This is what the poem comes up with:

Billy was a car crash – all he ever knew was pain. Lived a milli-milli-milli-second; never born again. Though no one saw him coming, plenty witnessed his remains – laid a wreath, yet they never knew him. Me? I'm just the rain. Laid poor Billy to eternal rest, eternal rust. I soaked the dust that covers him, I wait for all the others. (They all have names.) (120)

A car crash called Billy is made to feel all the pain and loneliness of his grotesquely short existence. Consequently, the reader is invited to feel not just for the victims of the car crash but for the car crash itself. Nothing short of stepping outside the box of regular thinking or ordinary imagining will do in order to appreciate the lyrical power of such courageous images.

Yet things can become even more mind-boggling in Edward Ka-Spel's world. Replace a car crash with a plane crash and you will get "The Unlikely Event", a poem written months BEFORE, not after 9/11, and therefore hailed as one of Ka-Spel's most visionary moments. This time, his dark imaginings lead the reader to an aisle full of screaming passengers, whose lives are about to be sacrificed to the will of Allah. The narrator remains cool, though:

My neighbour sinks his head between his knees.  
Plane's tilted forty-five degrees.  
Outside it's freezing, though God knows,  
now I need a  
drink. (144)

The speaker here seems to be dismissive of his own impending demise and drily focuses on the objective facts of the situation:

On channel nine the dotted line stops short  
a mile away  
from Dallas.  
But we're on a roll, shall dig a hole so deep that  
we'll strike oil.  
Black gold, that Texas tea.  
It's 3:15, I hear your voice mail.  
Are you with your secret lover, Lover? (144)

There is something almost unbearably disturbing in the notion of a passenger flying towards his death while calling his wife to say goodbye and wish her good luck even if she is with her secret lover. On the part of the reader, it arguably requires the same leap of

imagination as in the case of the previous poem. The passenger's act of selfless love in the face of death may bring him nothing short of redemption, while the author remains in full control of his art, alluring the reader into his fragmented world which every now and then reveals a magnificent whole. Where it does not, the yearning for unity itself remains the promise, as in "These fragments are glued to my sails. /... And I blew you a kiss / but I missed, / and you left me like this. I fade away, float away" ("Malice through the Looking Glass," 81). At other times, the fragmentation and flatness of existence appears irreversible and redemption too far out of hand. An afterlife might come in handy, but in some of Ka-Spel's poems, the post-mortal world feels closer to the spectral, shadowy underworld of the Egyptians or Greeks rather than the ecstatic paradise of Christianity or Islam. In fact, Ka-Spel turns the afterlife into a dystopian version of the here and now, where the robotic, the mechanic and the endlessly repetitive are the only reasonable shots at immortality:

My robotic afterlife  
was tainted with rejection.  
I'd gaze at my reflection and see rust.  
Let's form a club for all the clones that never made it.  
Techno lepers, cyber chumps, prosthetic paupers  
plunging pliers in your pocket... ("Mekkanikk" 102)

The dystopian impulse, only hinted at in this poem, is fully unleashed in "New Tomorrow", a deeply unsettling vision of a Huxley-style brave new world, charming in its intoxicating beauty yet sinister because all-embracing:

And we have watched the sun roll down the mountain  
to a frozen lake. We heard our laughs  
go on forever  
deep inside a crystal cave.  
We told them as they plunged the needle,  
pledging our escape  
from the all-embracing arms of New Tomorrow –  
We shall see our kingdom come! (84)

The final stanza of the poem contains all the motives typical of Ka-Spel's imagery: there is the oxymoronic rolling of the sun down to a frozen lake, the maddeningly repetitive laughter going on forever, and finally there is the religious incantation of the concluding line. Ka-Spel is not easily deceived by the showy colours and the fireworks of "New Tomorrow" and would actually prefer a spell of cloudy weather, as in "Waiting for the Cloud" where "the river was a rainbow stew / the fishes choked and cursed. / We saw it all in colour / now we're waiting for the cloud" (44). Here the dystopian meets the environmental, in a special kaleidoscopic constellation enabled by Ka-Spel's particular sensitivity unafraid of the wildest ranges of imagination. In fact, Ka-Spel insists that a careful rearrangement of perception might enable us to cut a radically different route through

the evolutionary maze, a route which might summon the best, rather than the worst of humanity:

If we'd never taken anything, but only given –  
If we could forgive, forget, and rearrange the patterns.  
If you'd never thrown a stone or split the atom –  
bitten the apple –  
...  
We'd be dolphins. ("Evolution" 69)

The passage might well have been written by Theodor W. Adorno, but unlike him, Ka-Spel actually still believes that poetry is possible. In a postmodern age where transcendence has been flattened out into a consumerist marketplace, Ka-Spel invites the reader to re-expand themselves through the power of imagination and love. Since for all the desperate fragmentation and "this hollowed ground" of contemporary life, "we shall push and we shall pull and we shall rise / above it all / We shall fly above it all" ("This Hollowed Ground" 47).

The poems from *Love and Loud Colours* that arguably best encapsulate Ka-Spel's problematic and therefore creative relationship with the postmodern are those written as short prose. When set to music, these epic pieces are almost always delivered as a dramatic monologue gradually drowned in a river of psychedelic noise. These pieces are, once again, fragmentary in nature, and tend to contain all Ka-Spel's trademark themes and motives. Examples of such prosaic pieces include the already discussed "Hallway" or "A Velvet Resurrection", but the one piece that truly captures the essence of Ka-Spel's imagery is undoubtedly "Godless," which can be found roughly half-way through the collection. The poem starts, somewhat typically for Ka-Spel, in an empty apartment that quickly turns into something resembling an inescapable prison cell: "First of all the room vibrated. Then there was a second wave, more intense. Pictures fell from the wall... A crack appeared in the ceiling" (80). So here it is – a narrator caught in what seems to be an earthquake, his room cracking and falling like the House of Usher, yet preserving his keen eye for detail and time-keeping: "Flakes of plaster piled up on the carpet. It was a new carpet. The lights went out. After eighteen minutes the first wall collapsed; I was not injured" (80). The survival instinct obviously urges the narrator to crawl out of the room, but he soon realizes that life's big questions are not always answered by what one is escaping from but rather what one is escaping *to*: "I decided to crawl through the debris to get outside. There was nothing outside." Engulfed by overpowering nothingness, he comes to the realization that he is "a fragment, detached from time and space. Forgotten, rejected" (80). The hopeless fragmentation and meaninglessness of existence is all the narrator finds outside the doors of his collapsed dwelling. In other words, he finds his own postmodern condition. The task now is to bridge this depthless abyss – by contact, by love, by transcendence: "A face desperate for a name, but finding none. Always on the point of recognition, hovering above an answer, but not finding one. Thirsty for contact, but finding none" (80). Entrapped in an endless repetition of the same, the narrator nev-

ertheless keeps searching, questioning, trying to transcend his alienation by a simple act of human contact and communication. In this way, the poem keeps the hope and promise alive and the question “Were you ever there?” does not ring hollow in “a nothing that goes on forever” (80).

Edward Ka-Spel, an experimental artist equally linked to postmodernism (in his kaleidoscopic musical and lyrical interventions) and postmodernity (particularly in his choice of themes), shows us that well into the twenty-first century, and in spite of postmodernity claiming otherwise, “life has a meaning, you know” (147). Both musically and lyrically, Ka-Spel combines various forms of poetic experimentation, associated with the 20th-century avant-garde, in surprising, novel ways, and thus proves that “the postmodern condition” in which we live, far from being a hindrance to poetry, can actually be one of its powerful engines.

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# [ Power over Bare Life: The War on Terror in Post-9/11 British and American War and Political Drama ]

**Michala Rusňáková**

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**[Abstract]** *The article discusses the concept of sovereign power over individuals presented in three contemporary British and American theatre plays, specifically in Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom by Vera Brittain and Gillian Slovo, Frances Ya-Chu Cowhig's Lidless and Yussef El Guindi's Back of the Throat. The focus of the paper is on the representation of suspected terrorists, their imprisonment, abuse and torture. The plays are examined from the perspective of Girard's concept of scapegoat, Foucault's biopolitics and torture, and Agamben's sovereign power over bare life and state of exception, in order to show mechanisms applied by the US government to deny the suspects of their freedom and human rights.*

**[Keywords]** *Brittain and Slovo; Ya-Chu Cowhig; El Guindi; post 9/11 war drama; Guantanamo; detainees; torture; Foucault; Agamben; Girard*

## [1] Introduction

The number of British and American war plays written during most of the 20th century is highly disproportionate to the importance of the theme. In the United Kingdom, the crucial reasons were censorship and the alleged unreadiness of the audience to face the atrocities of war. In the United States, war plays have been in danger of being perceived as unpatriotic and thus unacceptable for the American audience. This tendency slowly began to alter (at least in the United Kingdom) with the “revolutionary sixties”, the rise of documentary drama and the emergence of in-yer-face theatre. However, as Boll states, “the bibliographical record on this subject remains rather thin” and “critics only recently recognised the continuous representation of war and conflict on stage as a reason enough to identify ‘war and conflict plays’ as a literary genre in its own right” (3).

The relatively recent recognition of war drama as a stand-alone genre is, in fact, related to the rise of New War Plays. As the term implies, these are plays focused on the wars that have taken place in the last three decades. Nevertheless, the New Wars are called new because they differ greatly in many aspects from the previous ones. As Kaldor, who first coined the term, explains, starting with the Gulf War a “new type of organized violence developed”, violence of a political nature which “involve[s] a blurring of the distinction between war, [...] organized crime [...] and large-scale violations of human rights” (1-2). The New Wars theory was consequently applied by Boll in the description of the New War Plays. According to her, “the New War Plays examine the roots of human aggression and the wars that result by exploring contemporary society’s position towards what is taboo and ‘sacred’ [...] and] portray the state of exception as the norm in times of war” (9). The three plays analyzed in this paper correspond with this definition as they focus on the War on Terror, i.e. the ongoing global conflict that the United States launched soon after the 9/11 attacks. These plays, however, are unique because at their center are suspected terrorists. More specifically, in *Back of the Throat* by Yussef El Guindi the main character Khaled is interrogated and abused in his flat by two agents because of his presumed cooperation with Asfoor, a dead terrorist. The other two plays, *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom* (hereafter *Guantanamo*) by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo and *Lidless* by Francis Ya-Chu Cowhig, concentrate on some of the suspected terrorists that have been captured by the US army, labeled as illegal combatants, and imprisoned and tortured in the Guantanamo Bay detention camp.

The three plays were selected specifically because they give voice to those who are unheard, visibility to the unseen, and attention to the ignored. In fact, *Guantanamo* was “one of the earliest theatrical responses” to the stories recounted by the first released British detainees (de Waal 181) and it “appeared in advance of a widespread public understanding that Guantanamo was both an illegal detention camp and that it permitted the use of torture” (Colleran 9). Through their play, Brittain and Slovo therefore helped to expose the atrocities to the public and campaigned for the release of the detainees. It is worth mentioning that the key message of the play is intensified by the use of authentic material, such as interviews, letters, and public speeches, and that the play was

premiered at London's Tricycle Theatre, which "over the last 15 years [... has] been at the epicenter of the revival in documentary performance in the UK" (Megson 195). Thus, unlike the other two plays analyzed in this paper, *Guantanamo* is classified as documentary or verbatim drama.

This paper aims to examine how the suspects are given voice in these plays, how the authors described who these men are and how they ended up as suspects of terrorism. This topic is approached through Girard's concept of scapegoat. Furthermore, Agamben's theory of bare life is used to analyze how the characters were stripped of their human rights. Last but not least, the question of how a supposedly democratic country in the 21<sup>st</sup> century can capture, illegally imprison, and torture citizens of their own as well as other nations will be addressed via Foucault's perspective on biopolitics and torture, taking into consideration Agamben's concept of sovereign power and state of exception.

## [2] Scapegoating

Since 2002, about 780 men have been detained at the military prison in Guantanamo Bay, while the overall number of those that were interrogated in other places remains unknown. In the verbatim play *Guantanamo*, these men are represented by four British prisoners – Bisher al-Rawi, Jamal Al-Harith, Moazzam Begg, and Ruhel Ahmed – and in *Lidless* by one of the main characters Bashir. *Back of the Throat* differs from the previous two plays as Khaled is not imprisoned. He is interrogated and abused by agents in his own home somewhere in the United States. Although Colleran describes the capture of prisoners in the first act of *Guantanamo* as random (174), the plays encourage a different perspective.

According to René Girard, in times of crisis human relationships fall apart and people stand in opposition; thus, they look for a cause of the crisis either in the whole society or in a specific group of people (12–56). Similarly, Clive Stafford Smith, a character in *Guantanamo*, explains that the mechanism of hatred of the detainees reminds him of the hatred people feel towards people on death row: "It's all about hatred. About how you get a huge group of people to hate a small group of people [...] and blame them all for the problems in the world" (Brittain and Slovo 33). In *Back of the Throat* Bartlett, one of the agents abusing Khaled, claims:

One more thing: at no time should you think this is an ethnic thing. Your ethnicity has nothing to do with it other than the fact that your background happens to be the place where most of this crap is coming from. So naturally the focus is going to be on you. It's not profiling, it's deduction. You're a Muslim and an Arab. Those are the bad asses currently making life a living hell, and so we'll gravitate towards you and your ilk until other bad asses from other races make a nuisance of themselves. Right? Yesterday the Irish and the Poles, today it's you. Tomorrow it might be the Dutch. (El Guindi 151)

Bartlett articulates the prejudice and suspicion under which Muslims and/or Arabs have lived since 9/11. Despite the obvious contradiction in his statements, it is true that ethnicity or religious affiliation cannot, due to sheer numbers, possibly be the only criterion. Nevertheless, it is an important one. According to Girard, scapegoats are often foreigners or ethnic or religious minorities because they differ from the majority and they are seen as strange, abnormal, with difficulties adapting (12–20). The assumed terrorists imprisoned in Guantanamo are mainly Muslims that were captured in Afghanistan or Pakistan, where the government of the United States offered significant financial rewards. They included citizens of 49 different countries, more than half of them from countries other than Afghanistan or Pakistan (data obtained from *The New York Times* online project *The Guantánamo Docket*, Scheinkman, et al). In *Guantanamo*, it is Moazamm Begg, a British citizen, who went to Afghanistan with his wife and children to open an elementary school there. When the Americans bombarded Kabul he fled with his whole family to Islamabad, where he was arrested in front of his children by two Americans assisted by two Pakistanis. Jamal al-Harith, another character in the play, who went to Pakistan on tableeg, was handed over to the Taliban and then by the new government to American soldiers. Ruhel Ahmed, also a British citizen, was captured in Afghanistan. Last but not least, Bisher al-Rawi was arrested in Gambia. His case is especially interesting because he was arrested together with his brother Wahab al-Rawi, who was released after 27 days even though they might have been regarded with the same suspicion. Mark Jennings, the family lawyer, casts light on the situation when he states that “the only difference between [the two brothers] is that Wahab al-Rawi has British citizenship and Bisher doesn’t” (El Guindi 17). Bisher is, in fact, an Iraqi citizen, which is apparently more suspect in Gambia. These men are, therefore, foreigners not only from the American perspective but also from the perspective of those who sold them to the US government.

In *Guantanamo* it often comes to Jamal’s mind that he does not belong there because he is from Manchester (Brittain and Slovo 34). In *Back of the Throat*, Yussef El Guindi elaborates on this paradox, in which the majority point of view is accepted by the members of minority, in detail. The main character of his play, Khaled, understands that he meets the criteria of persecution, feels the urgency to explain and justify himself, and repeatedly claims that he is not religious, he does not speak Arabic, he is a citizen, the United States is his country as well, and his interests are the same as those of the majority (El Guindi 137–148).

Other criteria for persecution are, according to Girard, accusations of “violent crimes which choose as object those people whom it is most criminal to attack [...] Then there are sexual crimes: rape, incest, bestiality. The ones most frequently invoked transgress the taboos that are considered the strictest in the society in question” (15). These accusations can be also found in the two plays. In *Guantanamo*, the character Donald Rumsfeld, the Secretary of Defense, proudly declares in his public speech that the government succeeded in the apprehension of a large number of people that were trained to “kill innocent people – [...] not other soldiers” (Brittain and Slovo 24). In *Back of the Throat*, Bartlett accuses Khaled of zoophilia, because he found in his flat a porn magazine with a picture

of naked women leaning on a cow, and later of pedophilia without any apparent reason (El Guindi 148). Within their interaction, the accusations are obviously used as a tool for humiliation and the establishment of Bartlett's superiority and power. To the audience, however, they communicate how the mechanism of persecution works. *Guantanamo* forces the reader to face their own tendencies to yield to stereotypes of persecution and constantly consider the probability of the innocence or guilt of individual characters. For example, when Mr. Begg describes his son Moazzam's life before the arrest by explaining how he decided to open a religious books and clothing store in England or how he decided to open a school in Afghanistan, it may be difficult for readers to resist the idea that there might be, after all, something suspicious in Moazzam's behavior. Acquaintance with other detainees is constructed in the same way. The brothers Bisher and Wahab admit they were friends with Abu Qatada, who at the time of the publication of the play was repeatedly charged and detained in the UK for collaborating with a terrorist organization and was acquitted ten years later, in 2014 in Amman (BBC).

Proving the suspects' membership of a terrorist organization is not, in fact, crucial, as Girard demonstrates using the example of Jewish doctors, who were accused of "poisoning, a crime that deprives the accused of any legal protection just as bluntly as any accusation directly involving magic. Poisoning is so easy to conceal especially for a doctor that it is impossible to prove the crime and *therefore there is no need to prove it*" (47). A similar type of reasoning is often applied to detainees held in Guantanamo, but also elsewhere, as in the notorious Abu Ghraib. In *Guantanamo*, this practice is demonstrated in the following exchange at a press conference:

NEWSPAPERMAN 1. But have you determined [the detainees'] status individually, on an individual?

RUMSFELD. Yes, indeed, individually.

NEWSPAPERMAN 1. So you know which are al Qaeda and which are Taliban?

RUMSFELD. 'Determined' is a tough word. We have determined as much as one can determine when you're dealing with people who may or may not tell the truth. (Brittain and Slovo 24–25)

Terrorist organizations are said to be complex and sophisticated networks in remote territories whose members live and move around the world. These members have multiple identities and apparently, as explained by Mr. Rumsfeld, once they are captured and interrogated they may even lie; it is thus not necessary to prove their membership of the network because it would be too difficult, if not impossible. Another frequently used argument that Girard also mentions is the belief that it is not possible for the suspects to be innocent because no one would treat innocent people like this (47). Carl, the second agent in *Back of the Throat*, articulates this directly in a conversation with Khaled when he asks: "If you were innocent, why would I have kicked you?" (El Guindi 171).

### [3] Reducing to bare life

In the 21st century, scapegoating does not lead to ritual sacrifice that would reestablish understanding and a sense of belonging in society as it did in the past. Nevertheless, today's society is willing to accept a sacrifice as significant: the scapegoats' freedom and human rights. While a scapegoat, as Boll states, is "the person who has become a taboo" (65), or more precisely, who has become a social taboo, *homo sacer* is "a *political* taboo of our society" (9 emphasis added). The concept of *homo sacer* was introduced by Giorgio Agamben, who elaborates on Foucault's biopolitics and claims that at the end of the 17th century, European democracy "placed at the center of its battle against absolutism not *bios*, the qualified life of the citizen, but *zoe* – the bare, anonymous life that is as such taken into the sovereign ban" (Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* 123). Agamben describes "two extreme limits of the order, the sovereign and *homo sacer*" – which are correlative and are distinct "from both the natural order and the regular juridical order" (*Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* 87). *Homo sacer* is an outcast of society, simultaneously sacred and damned, as he cannot be sacrificed and, at the same time, killing him or perpetrating violence on him is not punished. The sovereign, by contrast, has the almighty power to create a state of exception "that binds and, at the same time, abandons the living being to law" (Agamben, *State of Exception* 1). It is the sovereign that places the *homines sacri* in the state of exception.

According to Boll, "the New War Plays portray people in various stages of losing or having lost their status of *bios*, having been reduced to bare life in form of the *homo sacer*" (59). Moreover, one of the crucial messages of *Guantanamo* is the revelation that such a reduction to bare life was a "decision made at the highest levels" (Brittain 216). Her play, in addition, exposes the mechanisms that enable the US government to imprison and torture almost 800 men of different citizenships in a secluded camp despite the Geneva Conventions; or, as Hesford expresses it, the play shows "the ethical implications of designating the detainees as 'enemy combatants', instead of prisoners of war protected by international laws governing their treatment" (36). In the play two approaches to this issue are taken, i.e. demonstration and explanation. Two pairs of characters are successively brought to the stage – government representatives and legal experts. In their speeches, the Vice President Dick Cheney and the Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld declare that these prisoners are not considered prisoners of war but they are so-called unlawful combatants. While the two government representatives demonstrate the mechanism, the two lawyers explain it. First, Lord Justice Johan Steyn points out that President Bush had already called the detainees killers at the beginning of their imprisonment before any steps, such as an interrogation or a criminal trial, were taken. Later Gareth Peirce, a lawyer, describes some of the rhetorical devices that the US government used to persuade the public of the validity of the "unlawful combatants" label:

There are a number of concepts which are deliberately confused by the American administration. It seized people for purposes that are clearly the obtaining of in-

formation and having seized those people, it transferred them to a place which it believed would be beyond the reach of courts in America. It claimed that it had seized people on the battlefield, there were frequent references to capture on battlefield, and then, having presented it to the world in this way, found itself stuck with the immediate response, well if these are prisoners of war, they are entitled to give name, rank and number and no more, and they deserve to be treated as the Geneva Convention dictates and not to be made the subject of interrogation. So having at first grabbed the nearest label, finding that it meant that were international treaty obligations to provide prisoners of war with rights, the regime very quickly had redefined what it had, and therefore it said these were unlawful combatants who were not wearing uniform and were not conforming to the norms of warfare. (Brittain and Slovo 25–26)

In this manner they were stripped of all human rights and reduced to bare life. Thus, they stand outside the legal system not only of the United States but of law as such.

In *Lidless* the issue of bare life is approached in much subtler and more concealed manner. For instance, in the following exchange between Bashir, a former Guantanamo prisoner, and Rhiannon, a young girl, a parallel to reduction of the prisoners to homo sacer can be drawn:

RHIANNON. They ask at the store if the animal's going to be a pet. If you say yes, you sign a form that says you understand your pet is a living thing that needs food and water, blah, blah, blah. If you don't sign it, it's not a pet.

BASHIR. So the animal's quality of life depends on whether you classify it pet or a non-pet?

RHIANNON. There's no such thing as non-pets. They're called feeders.  
(Cowhig 30)

Similar to the detainees, an animal's conditions of its life, even its right to live, is decided based on the categorization declared by the person in charge, the sovereign. The animal is given the status of a living thing only when the customer designates it a pet. The classification as pet or feeder evokes the political frames described by Butler, who states that "certain lives are perceived as lives while others, though apparently living, fail to assume perceptual form as such" (24).

Another thought-provoking remark is later made by Bashir again, this time in his conversation with Alice, his former interrogator in Guantanamo, who confesses that her only recollection from the time in the camp is of iguanas.

ALICE. Iguanas. That's all I remember about Gitmo. Iguanas crossing the road. I was so scared of hitting one and having to pay a fucking ten thousand dollar fine.

BASHIR. The iguanas were lucky. The Endangered Species Act was enforced. (El Guindi 43)

It is suitable for Bashir to be the one who connects the dots and shows the bigger picture to the audience, as he is the one who has the personal experience. He is the one who was submitted to complete control at the hands of the sovereign's mercy. Unfortunately, Alice seems not to be able to grasp the meaning of his gentle remark. The irony of iguanas being protected and their lives being literally given a price by the US government, the same government that claims the imprisoned people stand outside any law, have no rights and their lives have no value, is lost on her.

El Guindi's approach to the reduction to bare life differs significantly from the above-mentioned writers. In his play *Back of the Throat*, he uses an increasing feeling of threat in the way Harold Pinter does in his comedies of menace, picturing the power of the sovereign over bare life and the incursion on individual human rights within the microcosm of Khaled's flat. Here many hierarchical layers are omitted, and Bartlett and Carl, the two agents, operate as a contemporary sovereign with absolute power over the homo sacer, Khaled. First, they try to declare that they are in charge. When Khaled repetitively states that he has rights and refuses to continue in the conversation without the presence of his lawyer, Bartlett answers "no you don't, you've been misinformed" and that the only right that Khaled has "is the right to cooperate with [the] intelligence and do the right thing" (El Guindi 148). When Khaled does not react according to their wishes, Carl decides to reestablish their authority with physical violence. From Carl's viewpoint, Khaled "thinks there's some script [they]'re supposed to follow and that will protect him" and so he suggests bringing "the full weight of [their] authority to bear on him. With the aim of making him adjust his expectation as to what options are available to him" (El Guindi 170). By the end of the play the distribution of power is clear even to Khaled, as he was physically attacked couple of times and eventually stripped when Carl and Bartlett decided to see whether he has a tattoo on his penis.

## [4] Torture

In his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Michel Foucault describes the turning-point in the punishment of prisoners that took place at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century in Western European countries, specifically France and England. He explains how the public punishment, torture and execution of prisoners became an undesirable phenomenon. Despite a certain irregularity in the process, it can be stated that within several decades torture disappeared not only from public spaces but in general, ceasing to function as a demonstration of judicial power (Foucault 3–32). A century and a half later, the United Nations General Assembly ratified the *Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment* which was subsequently signed by 167 countries around the world. Regardless of the convention, torture perpetrated on citizens of their own as well as other countries still occurs not only in countries with totalitarian regimes but also in countries that are generally considered democratic guardians of freedom and human rights. Specifically, in the United States of America, where President Bush and his administration established for this purpose a detention camp at Guantanamo Bay

and declared it a place beyond law or order and the protection of the courts, a place labeled by many a legal black hole or as de Wall expresses it, “the fundamental biopolitical paradigm” (182). As Hughes states, “a state of exception is produced by means of a performance – a declaration” (4–5) and “a camp is where the state of exception is given form” (126). Originally, Agamben used the state of exception concept to describe the establishment of Nazi concentration camps. The Guantanamo Bay detention camp, however, also answers his characterization: “in the camp, the state of exception, which was essentially a temporary suspension of the rule of law on the basis of a factual state of danger, is now given a permanent spatial arrangement, which as such nevertheless remains outside the normal order” (Agamben, *State of Exception* 168).

In *Guantanamo*, the lawlessness is openly admitted by American soldiers who, similarly to Bartlett and Carl mentioned above, claim “there’s no law here, it does not apply” (Brittain and Slovo 35). The treatment of detainees is depicted in detail. In fact, there are cages on the stage with actors trapped in them. They never speak and do not leave when the play is over. In this way, their silenced voice as well as the endlessness of their imprisonment is depicted. It is important to mention, however, that their torture is not directly shown to the audience. The fact that during their stay in Guantanamo, they are exposed to attacks of spiders, scorpions, and mice, beaten and kicked during interrogations, held in chains in so-called stress positions, starved or fed the same food for years, held in solitary confinement, denied medical help and legal representation, never informed why they are held or for how long or what they are accused of, or that many of them, of course, suffer from health and/or mental issues for years even after the release – all these things are described by members of their families and lawyers. While Hesford claims that “the characters’ stories are presented to the audience in long, isolated stretches of verbatim readings from testimonies and letters [...that] accumulate and begin to create a polyphonic subjectivity” (35), it can be also considered a useful method in avoiding audience voyeurism; as Boll states, trauma should be displayed “in an instance of haunting” as it “seems to be an adequate way to negotiate the question of the ethics of representing what is, essentially, unrepresentable” (96).

The torture is, in fact, not presented directly in *Lidless* either. Here, the temporal distance is much more significant, as most of the play takes place about fifteen years after Bashir was imprisoned. Thus, the interrogations appear mainly in the reminiscences of the two main characters, Bashir and Alice. At the beginning of the play, Alice introduces a new technique of interrogation. As Friedman explains, female soldiers are used as a “weapon of war” (607) and “sexuality [...] an intelligence tool” (606). The strategy that was specifically designed by the American administration to force Muslim detainees to cooperate is called the “Invasion of Space by a Female”. Alice explains to Riva, her friend, the reason: “these guys, with their fasting and praying – they can shut you out. Go anywhere in their heads. That bullshit ’bout waterboarding, the inhumanity of it – it’s missing the point. These guys believe there’s a special place in heaven, with extra virgins and shit, for people who die by drowning. All you do when you waterboard is give ’em extra credit for the ever after. We gotta make ’em stop believing. Make it matter whether they

live or die. What we gotta do is, damn their soul” (Cowhig 8). Riva, an Iraqi doctor, warns her not to bruise the detainee but at the same time advises her: “tell him you’re menstruating. Rub something red onto your hands. If he thinks you’re on your period – he’ll go crazy” (Cowhig 9); she thus takes the new method to a whole other level. In the course of the play, it becomes clear that Alice raped Bashir, which leads to horrible consequences for both of them as well as for the members of their families.

Guantanamo, of course, is not the only place where a state of exception is materialized. As explicated in *Guantanamo* by Clive Stafford Smith, who runs a legal charity representing Guantanamo Bay detainees, “none of [the people that they think are] real bad dudes are in Guantanamo Bay, because the American Government would never put them there while there is a possibility that we’ll get jurisdiction to litigate to get them out of there. So all of them are in Bagram air force and places like that” (Brittain and Slovo 26). Furthermore, the practice called “outsourcing torture” (Mayer) is described by another character, Gareth Peirce. She states there are “700 in Guantanamo, [there are] however many thousands around the world, distributed in places where Guantanamo would probably look quite humane. And there is a process of shipping people for instance to Egypt, where you know they’ll be tortured. [You] torture something out of them, then get them back to Guantanamo. [It’s] a grotesque international redistribution” (Brittain and Slovo 27). In this manner, the prisoners are excluded from the American judicial legal system not only on the abstract or theoretical level, but also on the practical and physical one.

The administration of torture portrayed in these plays takes the audience centuries back to what Peirce in *Guantanamo* calls “medieval horror” (Brittain and Slovo 41). The reversion of the practice, however, is much more significant. Foucault explains that the mixture of investigation and punishment is tightly related to a concept of guilt not seen in a binary perspective as guilty vs. innocent but rather as a scale. The arrested person is already perceived as guilty because he or she is suspected of doing something (41–42). Such a perspective on guilt, in which it is not the plaintiff’s task to prove someone is guilty but to what degree, moreover using any means necessary, not only wrecks the concept of the presumption of innocence but also causes a paradigm shift that can have crucial implications in everyone’s life. As Greg Powell, a lawyer of one of the prisoners, describes in *Guantanamo*:

if you fall under suspicion, you can be subject to a special tribunal, you can be made subject to special measures if you like, and you could be electronically tagged, you could be denied access to certain people, you could be put in a certain geographical area, you could be limited where you go. All those features that I just described can be made applicable to you, so effectively you have this fantastic level of social control by some individuals inside the community. [...] You can’t start to think like this unless something like Guantanamo exists. In a way is an experiment but it leads you on into a much more controlling social control criminal justice system. (Brittain and Slovo 42)

## [5] Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to examine how those who are usually not heard are given voice in contemporary war and political theatre plays. Specifically, it focused on the people suspected of terrorism and the ways in which they have been treated by the government of the United States and its political and military representatives in the course of the war on terror. The analysis of the three selected plays shows that these people are often persecuted because of their ethnicity and/or religious affiliation. In addition, the characters also meet the criteria of persecution defined by Girard in *Scapegoating*, as they are foreigners in the countries from which they were kidnapped and sent to Guantanamo, they are accused of attacking the most innocent members of the society, i.e. civilians, and in the case of Khaled in *Back of the Throat* also of sexual perversion. The plays show that the prisoners are deprived of their freedom and human rights, reduced to bare life and placed in a state of exception outside any law. The dehumanization is executed by the sovereign, the US administration, simply by classifying them as unlawful combatants. The plays were therefore analyzed through the perspective of Giorgio Agamben's concept of homo sacer, sovereign and state of exception. *Guantanamo* explicitly comments, through the monologues of some characters, on the practices and rhetorical devices applied by the US government. *Back of the Throat* depicts two agents that become a contemporary sovereign and make their suspect Khaled understand that he has no rights. In *Lidless*, the reduction to homo sacer is pointed out by Bashir in the comparison of the alleged worthlessness of prisoners' lives and the importance and value of iguanas protected by US law. Finally, the paper focused on the representation of torture in the plays, drawing on Foucault's views. While Khaled in *Back of the Throat* is physically attacked and violently stripped on the stage, the other two plays do not directly show the torture. *Guantanamo* uses the testimonies of the detainees and their letters to speak instead. Similarly, in *Lidless*, the torture is also mainly discussed, especially in the conversations between Bashir, the former detainee, and Alice, his former interrogator. Moreover, during the play it is revealed that Alice in fact raped Bashir. The two latter plays also show that the torture practices were specifically adjusted to the detainees' cultural and religious beliefs. In this way, the plays help the audience to reconsider their perspective on and perception of war and those who are, voluntarily or not, involved in it, and warn them about the consequences such government practices might have for them.

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# [ Heavy Silence and Horrible Grief: Reconstructing the Past and Securing the Future through Magical Realism in Joseph Skibell's *A Blessing on the Moon* ]

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**[Abstract]** *This article deals with Joseph Skibell's A Blessing on the Moon. It aims to show how the author provides a graspable representation of an ineffable event like the Holocaust by using magical realism and Jewish tradition, ritual and folk belief, thus coming forward with an alternative (hi)story that is different from the dominant history. The article focuses on the importance of remembering and storytelling in order to overcome the trauma of the Holocaust. The author also argues that the protagonist's ability to restore the moon symbolises the possibility that Jewish history – despite the trauma of the Holocaust – has not come to an end.*

**[Keywords]** *Holocaust; memory; horrible grief; inexpressible trauma; heavy silence*

## [1] Introduction

In “Making Sense of the World”, Joseph Skibell tells Andrew Beierle about his grandfather’s escape to the United States (along with two of his brothers) to survive the Holocaust, as well as about his (Skibell’s) concern with the horrific death of his relatives during the Holocaust:

When I was growing up, my grandfather and two of his brothers were living in my town. They never talked at all about these people, and as a normally sensitive child, I picked up on it. That silence was very palpable for me. As a child, I assumed that there was some sort of shame in it. Instead, I realized later that it was just horrible, horrible grief. (Beierle)

The statement shows the unspeakable trauma of the Holocaust and the survivors’ reluctance to talk about it because of the brutality it entailed. Just like other writers from the second and third generations of Holocaust survivors who have no experience of these horrific events, Skibell attempts to recover a family history which, apart from some photographs, has completely disappeared with the passage of time. Through the ghostly figure of Chaim, he attempts to access a past he has never experienced, to reconstruct this inaccessible past from an imaginative standpoint, and to revive his great-grandfather out of silence. By giving voice to Chaim Skibelski, he has actually given the oppressed and murdered Jews a voice and thus enabled them to narrate their untold stories.

*A Blessing on the Moon* can be considered an attempt to revive the victims of the Holocaust and to place them on the border between fantasy and reality in order to give them a voice. Although Skibell attempted to revive his great-grandfather and other Jewish victims, he received criticism because of his allegedly disrespectful style of representing the victims. According to Michelle Ephraim, although Skibell uses the name of his great-grandfather as the narrator in the novel, academics and researchers have criticised the book for going against “the unspoken rules of Holocaust fiction by representing Jewish victims not as heroic martyrs, but as a group laden with human imperfections... Skibell’s novel fails [...] because the author neglects a social responsibility to represent victims with the utmost reverence” (qtd. in Kersell 20). Although Ephraim criticised Skibell for not showing respect to the murdered Jews and for depicting them as a group of people with human errors instead of mythifying them, it is this natural depiction which makes the reader empathise with the victims. Chaim Skibelski’s portrayal as an ordinary human being, no different from the rest of us, wins our empathy for him, thus emphasising rather than reducing the horror of the events. It can thus be claimed that Skibell depicts Chaim as a representative of the oppressed Jews, his voice providing us with an alternative history which is very different from the one written by the dominant authorities, and which is thus unknown to the outside world.

In *A Blessing on the Moon*, Skibell employs magical realism using Jewish folktales in telling the story of one of his forefathers. By using supernatural elements and bringing dead Jews back to life in the novel, Skibell makes the victimised stronger than the victi-

misers. This article aims to show how the author provides a graspable representation of an inexpressible event like the Holocaust by using magical realism and Jewish tradition, ritual and folk tales, thus coming forward with an alternative (hi)story that is different from the dominant history. It shows how the protagonist Chaim represents the suffering of the entire Jewish race through his own grief, traumatised and obsessed with the past, and how Chaim becomes the mouthpiece of the Jewish people. The article also argues that Chaim's ability to restore the moon symbolises the possibility that Jewish history – despite the trauma of the Holocaust – has not come to an end. Last but not least, the article focuses on the importance of remembering and storytelling in order to overcome the trauma of the Holocaust.

## **[2] Magical Realism and Its Association with Trauma**

The term 'magical realism' has been defined and applied by authors and researchers from different parts of the world in a complex and paradoxical way. Although the term was initially coined to depict a trend in German painting, its focus later shifted to literature, particularly to fiction. Magical realism is the very opposite of what is called the absolutist and the traditional. Through magical events, writers can find new viewpoints and open new windows through which they can see the world differently and thus provide us with a different perception of reality. Magical realist writers, according to Abrams, fuse a sharply carved realism in presenting everyday events and deceptive details along with fantastical elements and materials that originated from myths and tales (Abrams 196). Identified traits of magical realism include the coexistence of the real and the imaginary, dexterous time shifts, complicated narratives and stories, various uses of dreams, myths, magic, rituals, folk and fairy stories, and the use of opposites or dualities. The repetitive narrative in a magical realist novel exists in parallel with a distorted sense of time, space and identity. The use of opposites or dualities enables authors to analyse any given event from more than one point of view and thus leads the reader closer to the truth or reality.

Magical realism can be considered an alternative form of writing which is used to challenge the dominant writing (official history) by representing traumatic events from the standpoint of the oppressed. Now, the question is how magical realism accesses and recreates the impenetrable and unreachable reality of various traumatic events from a more apprehensible point of view. Through multiple perspectives on reality and the disruption of categories, magical realist writers create a fictional realm, employing empathy and imagination to turn traumatic memory into a narrative. This particular narrative technique wraps traumatic events in mist and magic, presenting them to the reader in a graspable way so as not to disgust or repel readers. Magical realism is able to portray violent and traumatic events by mixing them with myth and magic, but at the same time it succeeds in conveying the intended message to the reader without distorting the view of

history. In this sense, magical realism should not, and must not, be considered an escape from violent or fatal situations, but rather a universal approach to representing social, cultural and political reality and violent historical events. A magical realist text dealing with trauma (personal and historical) provides characters with relief via the supernatural, but it does not distort our (or their) sense of reality.

Writing a piece of literature on the Holocaust without having direct experience of the events sometimes becomes problematic, as most critics of Holocaust literature are inclined to question the authority of a proxy witness's voice on the basis of their background, religion or connection to the event. However, since the survivors' generation is slowly disappearing and very soon there will be no authentic voices alive to speak about the Holocaust, witness accounts have been replaced by more fictional literary representations of the events. This type of representation might be less reliable than witness/survivor accounts, but it still possesses a legitimacy of its own. Ortner brings to light the complex condition of the post-war generations and at the same time their responsibility in relating the traumatic stories of their forefathers (Ortner 83). Jonathan Safran Foer and Joseph Skibell have described how they inherited silence over the Holocaust trauma from their parents, who in turn had inherited the same silence from their parents; they never talked about the Holocaust but it haunted their dining table like a dense layer of fog.

According to Rothberg, two approaches to the literary representation of the Holocaust are dominant, which he labels "realist and antirealist" (Rothberg 3). He explains these approaches:

By realist I mean both an epistemological claim that the Holocaust is knowable and a representational claim that this knowledge can be translated into a familiar mimetic universe... By antirealist I mean both a claim that the Holocaust is not knowable or would be knowable only under radically new regimes of knowledge and that it cannot be captured in traditional representational schemata. (Rothberg 3–4)

I argue that magical realism fits into the antirealist approach to the Holocaust due to its subversive, transgressive and unconventional representational features. Magical realism, according to Jenni Adams, "offers an important strategy in attempts to continue the project of Holocaust representation into the post-testimonial era, permitting a form of literary engagement with these events that nevertheless acknowledges its ethical and experiential distance from the real" (1–2). It can be depicted and employed as a response to the difficulties and risks inherent in Holocaust representation. John Burt Foster Jr. has suggested that magical realism "characteristically responded to the harshness of modern history by developing a compensatory vision" (Foster 271). Magical realism thus provides an artistic and intellectual solution to the issue of understanding and representing the genocide.

### [3] “Everyone I Know Has Disappeared into the Ash”: Traumatic Memories and Alternative Voices

The reader encounters the issue of trauma from the very first scene of the novel: the death scene of Chaim and his fellow Jews. Just like the massacre scenes in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* (depicting the Jallianwala Bagh massacre) and Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* (depicting the killing of protesting labourers), Skibell is also short of words:

They rounded us up, took us out to the forests. We stood there, shivering, like trees in uneven rows, and one by one we fell. No one was brave enough to turn and look. Guns kept cracking in the air. Something pushed into my head. It was hard, like a rock. I fell. But I was secretly giddy. I thought they had missed me.

[...]

I was lying in a pit with all my neighbors, true, but I was ecstatic... And later, as dusk gathered, I climbed out of the grave [...] and I ran through the forests. Nobody saw me. (Skibell 3–4)

This quotation shows the brutality of the soldiers and the helplessness of the Jews. It also shows Chaim's desire to be alive, which is a universal phenomenon. In depicting the entire scene, Skibell relies on physical sensation rather than on language. Everything happens so quickly that, apart from being violent, this scene also seems exciting to Skibell.

It is crucial for the reader to accept that even after his death, Chaim will behave like any normal human being, and that he will be able to communicate with the world of the living in an intelligible way. The unconditional acceptance of a dead person as a living one strongly indicates the use of magical realist techniques in the novel. Being a dead person, Chaim could well be considered an unreliable narrator: one significant feature of magical realism. Thus, the story he tells from the perspectives of the victimised will obviously be different from a story told from the perspective of the victimisers, as he himself has faced atrocity and even returned to the world of the living after his death. The process of working through trauma, which is manifested in Chaim's suffering and wandering after his death, reaches its peak in the very last part of the novel, when Chaim sets out on a mission for the mysterious moon that will finally be returned to the sky. The accomplishment of his mission will restore not only his life but also the future of the entire Jewish race as portrayed in the novel. Apart from Chaim's trauma, the novel is also characterised by what LaCapra has called the “contagiousness of trauma” (LaCapra 81), which is shown by the condition of Ola, a Polish girl; LaCapra terms her situation “surrogate victimage” (LaCapra 114). The dirty conditions of her room, according to Grimwood, “come gradually to resemble those of a concentration camp's barracks, rendering visible through her illness what has been covered over by law, society, and her family: the

disappearance and murder of the Jews” (Grimwood 93–94). Comparing the condition of Ola’s room with that of a concentration camp indicates the omnipresence of trauma in the novel.

Renders notes that magical realist writers eliminate the difference between reality and magic and create exactly the sense of uncertainty and discomfort that is required to shift the terror of the Holocaust to the reader (Renders 10). She states that Skibell takes the reader into a magical world consisting of “the walking dead Jews, the falling moon, Jesus and Mary floating in a carriage, the transformation of a rabbi into a crow, the talking wolves, the magical healing river, the talking head of the German, and other magical elements as if they were really there in the reality of the novel” (Renders 10). Again, after emerging from his grave, Chaim walks to his village and notices some strange phenomena: “A dozen workmen were lifting all the memories into carts and driving off... In front of every house were piles of vows and promises, all in broken pieces. How I could see such things, I cannot tell you” (Skibell 4). The broken pieces of memories and promises actually refer to the unfulfilled dreams or desires of the dead Jews, and Chaim is not at all astonished by the magical fact that he can see abstract objects or concepts, such as memories and promises, just like he can see material objects. Another magical event takes place after Chaim’s death, when he finds himself capable of understanding the language of animals such as pigs and goats: “‘Can we rely on the villagers for protection?’ one of the pigs says, his voice quavering with rage. ‘Think again, my friends,’ a goat warns, shaking his gray beard, although none of them seems convinced” (Skibell 7). This quotation might refer to the fact that the unimaginable extent of the atrocity of the Holocaust forces even animals to be concerned and scared, and thus shows their lack of confidence in the villagers.

Furthermore, when Chaim realises that he is dead yet is still able to think and feel, he does not seem to be surprised and accepts this magical fact as a part of reality. He even discusses the ordinary life of the people who have occupied his residence:

AT HOME, ANDRZEJ and his cousins are playing cards. A bottle of potato vodka stands in the middle of their green-felt card table. There are small tumblers for everyone.

“If the yids want the moon,” Big Andrzej says, removing one of my best cigars from between his teeth, “then what’s it to us?” [...] “Let them keep it,” he says. “They’re the only ones who ever used it. It’s not as if they took the sun.”

“Now that *would* be a crime,” his wife says, moving through the room with an armful of dirty plates. (Skibell 26)

To emphasise the realism of the scene, Skibell seems to describe ordinary and everyday features of life – a family playing cards, a bottle of vodka, Andrzej’s cigar, a woman washing the dishes – in great detail. The magical or impossible fact that the moon is missing from the sky seems just a part of everyday conversation, a part of ordinary life. This unquestioned coexistence of mundane events and magical elements suggests that the employment of magical realism in the text displays a deeper understanding of sorrow and suffering.

It can be asserted that many magical realist elements in Skibell's novel symbolically convey a sense of trauma. When Chaim is threatened and attacked by the same soldier who shot him at the beginning of the novel – “‘One step more,’ he says, ‘and I’ll kill you again’” (Skibell 93) – this can be read as a sign of the repetitive compulsion characterising the process of acting out trauma. However, this time Chaim understands that the soldier cannot shoot and kill him because he is already dead; he therefore fights back. The appearance of a dead person – here a murdered soldier – in the midst of reality is a typical feature of magical realism. Because of the subversive power of magical realism, the power hierarchy is reversed, as the perpetrator (the soldier) depends on the pity of the victim (Chaim). By bringing the dead Jews back to life in his novel, Skibell makes the victims more powerful than their killers.

Decavele states: “Since magical realism draws on temporal and spatial confusion to disorientate its characters and readers, it is only a small step for the mode to simulate traumatic disorientation” (25). Chaim loses track of time after his death, and after surviving his incineration at Hotel Amfortas, he experiences a complete loss of his sense of space: “I feel like a sleepwalker who awakens far from his home with no idea how he arrived here” (Skibell 187). This loss of sense of time and space, which is a magical realist element, indicates that Chaim is engulfed with a high level of trauma. Again, the return of the traumatic event gives Chaim the chance to face the event of his death once again, and thus enables him to overcome his trauma. The persistence of traumatic memories is also evident in the scene where Chaim sits with his family members around a dinner table at the beautiful Hotel Amfortas and talks about the way each of them died. The grandson's light-hearted account of a grave event such as a medical killing makes Chaim think of the heinous crimes committed by the victimisers.

In order to remove the family's silence over the Holocaust trauma by turning it into an imaginary story, Skibell employs fairy tales, (Yiddish) folk tales and culture, myth and magic – all of which are elements of magical realism. In analysing the use of fairy tales to narrate the story of the Holocaust, Grimwood argues, “Children and grandchildren of survivors often write from the perspective of having grown up with the more disturbing aspects of their family's history functioning as their childhood stories’ (Grimwood 86). Views from childhood then re-emerge in the work of writers from the second and third generation, as is the case in *A Blessing on the Moon* (86–87). Skibell finds an interesting association between the imaginative reconstruction of the Holocaust and its foreshadowing in the tales of the Grimm Brothers: “[I]t always struck me how much the Holocaust [...] seemed foreshadowed in the tales of the Brothers Grimm: [T]he oven in Hansel and Gretel becomes the ovens of Auschwitz; the pied piper [...] of Hamelin is the story of World War II” (Skibell 261).

“Hansel!” one of the middle bakers calls out, and he and his fellows move towards a large pantry. “Hansel, stick your finger out so I can see if you are fat enough!” The others respond with jovial laughter. The men open the pantry door, disappearing inside.

“There will again be sweetness in the world,” the head baker sings, rubbing his hands in glee. (180–182)

The laughter of the bakers shows that they know the tale of Hansel and Gretel and that they see its association with the Holocaust. The head baker's ecstasy resembles the joyful imagination of the fairytale witch of her dinner.

Skibell's liking for Yiddish folk tales is quite evident in his novel, which includes several references to the *Mayseh Book*. The name of the book is mentioned twice: first, in the title of the first part (“From the *Mayseh Book*”), and second, when Chaim refers to it after his house is occupied by the Andrzej family: “Upstairs are three more sons, big snoring lummoxes, asleep in Ester's and my bed. Fully clothed they are, with even their boots on. It's like a fairy tale from the *Mayseh Book*!” (Skibell 6). The “animal metamorphosis”, one of the three types of metamorphosis found in the *Mayseh Book* (Starck-Adler 156), is evident in Skibell's novel: the transformation of the Rabbi into a crow (Skibell 5); the ability of animals such as goats and pigs to talk (7); and the ability of the leader of the wolf pack to stand on its back legs and talk just like a man and its claim to know Chaim (Skibell 89–91). Again, the magical disappearance of the moon from the sky is drawn from the Yiddish folktale of two Hasidic Jews who reach the moon by boat. After arriving on the moon, they discover silver, and out of greed, they overload the boat with the precious metal. The boat falls from the sky and pulls the moon down with it, leaving the world in darkness (Skibell 43). However, the depiction of these events in Skibell's novel differs from those in the original tales due to the magical realist emphasis on comprehensive images of experiential sensations or perceptions, creating a realistic ambiance; as Faris states, “the descriptions in magical realism detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world” (7). Skibell's skillful inclusion of Jewish mythology in his magical realist novel has added another layer to the representation of the Jewish people's traumatic experience.

#### [4] Individualising Intense Grief, Extreme Traumatization and Obsession with the Past

Unlike other products of imagination, pain can rarely be depicted in language (Arva 83) because pain is “objectless, it cannot easily be objectified in any form, material or verbal. But it is also its objectlessness that may give rise to imagining...” (Scarry 161–162). Scarry's statement is very interesting as it hints at the subjectivity of pain. With regard to Scarry's statement, Arva remarks:

If imagination compensates for the objectlessness of pain, it follows that [...] magical realism succeed[s] in stimulating pain by turning it into objects (images) that literary language can convey more suitably (in regard to their unspeakable nature) and more effectively (in terms of their accessibility by both author and reader). (Arva 83)

It can be surmised from *Arva* that through magical realist language, human perception translates an unspeakable or inexpressible condition (pain or trauma) into a decipherable image and tangible reality. This is evident in the case of Chaim, as Skibell attempts to turn his sorrow and suffering into a narrative. In his attempt to revive his great-grandfather, Skibell always reminds the reader that Chaim is dead and that although the presence of death is explicitly visible throughout the whole novel – bullet marks, non-stop bleeding, the decay of the body – Chaim displays most of the attributes of the living: he thinks, acts, and shows various emotions. With the help of magical realist narrative, Chaim, a dead and mutilated Jew, is shown to possess all the features of a living person.

Skibell shows enormous imaginative power, using supernatural elements as well as Jewish myth and folklore to access a past which has long been buried, and to depict the sorrow and suffering of Jews during the Holocaust. He thus comes up with a history which is unknown, and has long been unknowable, to the outside world. Janet Burstein notes:

A “dead and mutilated Jew”, [Chaim] haunts this world, wishing to leave but unable to let it go. He cannot be healed or restored to life, and before he is released into forgetfulness he will need to wander the earth, listening to the sorrows of others both alive and dead, asking unanswerable questions about forgiveness and responsibility. (125)

Thus, Chaim's suffering is not only his own, but that of the entire Jewish community. He is remembered and magically brought back to life as the mouthpiece of his community. The act of remembering is very significant as a way of accessing (at least partial) knowledge and understanding of inexpressible past events. Unless and until a traumatic event is remembered and talked about, people cannot have a comprehensive idea about the event and victims cannot have control over it.

Skibell depicts a scene in which some non-Jewish people – being motivated by greed and probably by anti-Semitism – assist the Nazis in rounding up Jews (Skibell 9–10). He also shows how Chaim's family home was occupied by intruders (Skibell 12). According to Dean, both scenes represent historical truth: the first scene includes the involvement of non-Jewish people in persecuting and executing Jews, and the second illustrates what happens when survivors return to their homes only to find that their neighbours are living in their houses and are reluctant to return their properties to them (Dean 94–95). Chaim's experiences in the novel point to the fact that Skibell's novel is based on survivors' tales and historical facts. After returning to their homes, many survivors were isolated from their communities and were unable to resume their former lives. Thus, they faced a sort of legal death in the community.

Cathy Caruth states that in the case of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), “the overwhelming events of the past repeatedly possess, in intrusive images and thoughts, the one who has lived through them” (151). Caruth's statement refers to the possessiveness of trauma through disturbing images and recurring thoughts. Chaim seems to be full of intense grief over having lost his family members and his town's people, as well

as suffering an acute sense of guilt for having survived. Again, Chaim's possession by the past and the extreme sense of loss is symbolised by his eternal bleeding. This bleeding is described in quite the same magical realist manner in which Márquez depicted the movement of blood in the mysterious death of José Arcadio in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*:

The bleeding has begun again [and] I feel it gurgling down my neck, leaking from the wounds in the back of my head... Because I no longer breathe, I'm able to pull the knot remarkably tight. But the blood simply reroutes itself and emerges from the star-like pattern of holes across my back and chest. It drains into my pockets and pools there, eventually cascading like a fountain. (Skibell 18–19)

Here, a normal substance like blood is defamiliarised by the magical realist narrative, thus imbuing the scene with a magical aura. This is an example of what Christopher Warnes terms 'irreverent magical realism', in which an ordinary object is depicted as having mysterious characteristics. The weird movement of blood and Chaim's inability to get rid of it may also refer to his continuous struggle with traumatic experiences.

The miserable condition of the headless German soldier also shows the lack of control: "[...] the head shouts frantic commands to its body – 'Over here! Schnell! Schnell!' – but, of course, the body is deaf without its ears" (Skibell 94). The constant mentioning of bullet holes also represents the ubiquity of suffering: "The water rises in the tub, seeping through my bullet holes, filling the hollows of my body with its creeping warmth" (Skibell 67). Chaim even fails to enjoy his food because of the exhaustion caused by the death of his family members and friends. The intense grief, extreme traumatising, and obsession with the past stop Chaim from enjoying food; the faces of his dead family members float in front of his eyes. Arva says: "Chaim's feelings of estrangement, caused by his unique experience of loss, the continuing sense of guilt for having survived, and the breakdown in communication with non-witnesses, are characteristic of most Holocaust survivors" (237).

## [5] Restoring Life and Storytelling

In order to overcome trauma, we need to remember the past and to turn this traumatic memory into a readable narrative. As Laub suggests:

The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories; they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive. There is, in each survivor, an imperative need to *tell* and thus to come to *know* one's story [...]. One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life. (Laub, "Truth and Testimony" 63)

Laub's statement highlights the fact that it is only through storytelling, and thus confronting the past, that one can gain a better understanding of one's life. However, Laub stresses the necessity of an empathetic listener and/or reader, as he notes that healing

trauma requires “an empathic listener, or [...] an *addressable other*, an other who can hear the anguish of one’s memories and thus affirm and recognize their realness” (Laub, “Bearing Witness” 68).

The necessity of narrating one’s story and the significance of an enthusiastic listener are explained in Skibell’s novel when Chaim tries to share his stories with the Polish peasants but does not find any way out. Ola and the two Hasidic Jews, Zalman and Kalman, are the only living persons with whom Chaim can share his stories. Ola is traumatised seeing the suffering of the Jews, and feels sympathy with Chaim. According to Grimwood, Ola suffers from pangs of conscience: it is “her grief and distress [by realising what actually happened] that lead to her fatal illness” (Grimwood 93). However, it is interesting to note that Chaim himself is also unwilling to listen to stories of other traumatised people, a phenomenon which sheds light on the difficulty of being an empathetic listener and the possibility of being vicariously traumatised. However, the healing act does not occur here, as Chaim fails to face the past and share his story with others.

When survivors – both in real life and magical realist stories – fail to narrate their stories orally, they may resort to writing. Unable to find any willing listener, Chaim starts writing down all his thoughts in an old ledger book. Although initially it seems to work, the longer he is dead, the more his endeavour fails: “[...] but my words are as dry and my sentences are as circular as wood shavings” (Skibell 39). This sentence also points to the concept of the repetitive nature of trauma, and refers to the necessity of a non-linear or circular narrative capable of representing this circular, repetitive trauma. However, his language fails him when it comes to writing down his traumatisation, and in the scene where Chaim fails to read a letter written by the Rabbi:

“Yes, I got your note. Only how could I read it, scrawled in that pigeon scratch, you shouldn’t be offended.”

“Chaimka,” the jaw of his beak slackens. “That was Yiddish.”

“Yiddish?” I say. Impossible! (Skibell 67)

He is surprised to find that the note was written in Yiddish, a language he should definitely understand. Chaim fails to depict his traumatic situation in his native language, which is very much linear and, to some extent, direct. The high degree of his trauma demands an extraordinary narrative far beyond the ordinary, a subversive narrative capable of penetrating the strong defence of traumatic events and thus voicing the unspeakable and the unspoken.

The desire to tell stories of traumatic events is well associated with the issue of memory and the disruption of identity. By not remembering the past and relating it to the present by means of a suitable narrative, one is more likely to be dissociated from one’s past – which may ultimately result in a fragmented self and identity. Traumatized subjects need to create narratives – often filled with myth, magic and imagination – so that they can gain control over their past and present life. Since Chaim fails to bear witness to his traumatic events due to the lack of a suitable narrative, both in speech and in writing, he gradually loses his personal history, all his memories, and, ultimately, his identity.

Chaim has suffered greatly throughout the whole novel, but his actual journey begins after the death of Ola. Initially, he spent much of his time within his old home, caring for the sick Ola. When he visits the mass grave of his fellow Jews for the first time, he talks with them; the second time, he sets them free. The scene where a Jewish voice from the grave is heard by Chaim, who is also a dead man, defies the order of the rational world but is presented in a matter-of-fact manner in the midst of ordinary reality. The existence, acceptance and the rising of the dead in the midst of reality – a typical characteristic of magical realism – demonstrates the strength of Jewish victims even after their death. Another interesting fact about the narrative is that the protagonist and narrator Chaim dies at the very beginning of the novel and that he continues to narrate his story as a dead man. The fact that our narrator is unreliable (since he is dead) hints at one significant aspect of the magical realist narrative: multiple versions of truth and reality. Through this unreliable narrator, an alternative history, an unknown world, is exposed to the reader.

The reappearance of the soldier who previously killed Chaim gives him the opportunity to deal with the injustice of his death. The head confesses the horror of the soldier's action: "I have done things, Herr Jude, during the last days of my life, that I never dreamed possible, things which, as a child or as a young man, I would not have believed myself capable. I don't need to detail them to you. You are only too familiar with the kind of thing I mean" (Skibell 111). It is significant that the same head that earlier talked with Chaim in a snobbish and derogatory tone – "I'm not prepared to argue the theoretics of warfare here and now with a *dead Jew*" (Skibell 98; emphasis added) – is now addressing him as "Herr Jude", acknowledging the terror of the soldier's action, and recognising Chaim's victimisation. Again, since Chaim is addressed with a general rather than a particular name, it might also be possible that the head (the German soldier) has killed more Jews than just Chaim, and that it is now acknowledging the victimisation of all those killed by it or, even, all the Jews murdered during the Holocaust. Through the subversive power of magical realism, Skibell disrupts the binary border between victims and victimisers and transforms the vulnerable and weak Chaim into a much more privileged person who is now stronger than the very soldier who previously killed him. By making Chaim more powerful than his victimisers, Skibell tries to give back to the whole Jewish community their human dignity.

## [6] Journey of the Dead Jews: Restoring the Moon and Securing the Future

Although initially the luxurious Hotel Amfortas, which Chaim and his fellow Jews encounter during their after-death journey, seems to be a resting place for Jews, it is the representation of a concentration camp. Depicting the horror of the concentration camp and the Holocaust in general proves to be a very difficult task for Skibell, since he has never had any access to that experience. In order to recreate the trauma of the concentration camp during the Holocaust, he introduces the elegant Hotel Amfortas in the novel, and shows an association between the two. Just like the real concentration camps of the Holocaust,

this fictional hotel is also deceptive. Under the disguise of a sumptuous outer appearance, it is actually a graveyard for Jewish people, where all the members of Chaim's family die for the second time. Since the reality of the camps is not accessible to either Skibell or other second- or third-generation witnesses, Skibell creates the magnificent and seductive Hotel Amfortas "as a means for allowing the intergenerational witness entry into the event by drawing on a more accessible representation" (Dean 108). What Dean does not include in her discussion is that in order to revive the silenced stories of the ancestors, intergenerational witnesses like Skibell must resort to imagination. However, sometimes ordinary imagination fails to represent events like the Holocaust. Magical realism enables them to use their out-of-the-ordinary type of imagination and to expose the cruelties of the Holocaust, and thus provides us with a marginalised version of history.

The story of the absence of the moon is examined frequently in the novel. Ola asks Chaim "to [...] take her to the roof to search for the moon" (Skibell 39), but later she exclaims: "It's cracked!" (Skibell 46). The absence of the moon is a recurring topic of conversation among the victimised Jews: "'Do I have the moon?' [...] 'Do you have the moon? No, but still, we're all thieves! We're all to blame!'" (Skibell 81). Grimwood explains that, since ancient times, the moon and the lunar cycle have played a major role in Jewish tradition and religion, where it is considered a symbol of Israel, undergoing the phases of waning and waxing parallel to Israel's cycles of historic rise and fall (Grimwood 90). The novel's title itself refers to a Jewish tradition which requests "that the moon should be blessed on its reappearance each month" (Grimwood 90). In the novel, Chaim and the two Hasidic Jews use this tradition when attempting to restore the moon to the sky. The suffering of Jews is presented symbolically by a magical event – the disappearance of the moon from the sky. In other words, Skibell compares the unimaginable extent of the Holocaust violence with the bizarre incidence of the disappearance of the moon: a magical and to some extent impossible event which is shown in the midst of reality. Now, by giving Chaim the challenging task of returning the moon to the sky, Skibell actually gives him an opportunity to restore the future of the Jewish race despite the Holocaust.

This scene of returning the moon to the sky is perhaps the most strongly magical realist scene in the novel. Motivated and assisted by Zalman and Kalman, who are responsible for the disappearance of the moon and who have been waiting for it for fifty long years, Chaim starts searching for the moon, and ultimately finds it buried in a graveyard. The moon shows the damage done by years of war, which possibly suggests the burial of hope and faith under the weight of the killing of the Jews. Although hope is restored with the return of the moon to the sky, Chaim's observation that "the moon's surfaces are not clear, but have been mottled, as though with dark and purple bruises" (Skibell 243) signifies the lasting impact of the Holocaust on the history of the Jewish people. Alan L. Berger directly associates the moon with Jewish people when he asserts that the return of the moon to the sky stands for the possibility of the continuation of Jewish history after the Holocaust. Chaim's ability to "raise [and restore] the moon symbolizes the possibility that Jewish history – despite the trauma of the Holocaust – has not come to an end" (Berger 154).

At the end of the novel, while restoring the moon, Skibell presents us with the idea of storytelling and returning to Jewish culture. As Berger says: “Responding to the trauma of the Holocaust, Skibell’s novel embraces the cosmos of stories and folklore which, by utilizing the supernatural, defies at least momentarily the murder of the Jewish people and the indifference of the world” (Berger 155). It can be argued that the use of Jewish culture, myths and folklore enables Skibell to employ the supernatural so that he can defy the anti-Semitic attitude of people, make the Jewish people more powerful than their oppressors, and thus present us with a subversive version of the events of the Holocaust. Resorting to religious stories and folklore also enables Chaim to confront the Holocaust and its cruelty, and to advocate an alternative world free from violence and oppression.

## [7] Conclusion

In the novel, Skibell brings Chaim and other dead Jews back to life, and thus allows them to tell the whole world about the atrocities committed against them. I have demonstrated the necessity of an empathetic listener and/or reader in the process of healing, and the significance of fantasy, particularly magical realism, in the act of remembering. By recreating the reality of the Holocaust, magical realism enables Skibell to remember the forgotten souls, to show the unimaginable atrocities of the genocide and the injustice done to Jews, to give voices to those who can no longer speak, to recover a family story out of heavy silence and horrible grief, to access and reconstruct a past he has never had any direct access to, and, most importantly, to revive his great-grandfather.

## [Notes]

<sup>1</sup> The ‘Mayse-Bukh’, which was printed in 1602, is a collection of “*agadot* [tales] from the Talmud and the Mishnah” and Yiddish tales, legends and ancient myths of European Jews which are transmitted orally (Starck-Adler 156).

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# [ When Men Give Birth: Production and Reproduction in John Steinbeck's Selected Works ]

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**[Abstract]** *The main goal of this paper is to reach beneath the surface of John Steinbeck's literary works in order to analyse the metaphorical connections between the long-term violence, abuse or oppression of women and the depletion of the land portrayed in several of his novels. For this purpose, excerpts dealing with the topic of production and reproduction in the works In Dubious Battle, To a God Unknown, "The Forgotten Village", East of Eden and The Grapes of Wrath are analysed to explore Steinbeck's depiction of the connection between the land and the female body.*

**[Keywords]** *production; reproduction; ecofeminism; John Steinbeck; nature; land; ecology; women; metaphor; California; agriculture*

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## [1] Introduction

The connection to the land can be seen in almost every book by John Steinbeck. In the past two decades, the author has been resurrected especially by environmental critics. Nevertheless, there is one figure which frequently recurs in his work and is specifically characteristic of the author's perception of nature – a woman.

Undeniably, to read John Steinbeck from an ecofeminist perspective is a journey full of controversial topics and evaluations which diverge in their meaning – a journey which most probably does not bring clear conclusions to the one who walks it. However, it definitely does offer a distinct approach to Steinbeck's style of writing and the way he views both the land and women – an approach which undoubtedly has the potential to add to the ongoing discussions about the woman/nature relationship and its validity.

Therefore, the main goal of this article is to explore Steinbeck's literary works focusing on the metaphorical connections between the long-term violence towards, abuse or oppression of women and the depletion of the land portrayed in several of the writer's novels. The article deals with the topic of the production of the land and the biological reproduction of individuals, more precisely with Steinbeck's manner of linking the female body with the body of the land, his means of erasing female generative power and shifting it into the hands of men, or elevating the generative powers of women with the generative power of the land. For this purpose, five of Steinbeck's literary works are critically analysed: *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *To a God Unknown* (1933), *East of Eden* (1952), "The Forgotten Village" (1941) and, finally, *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939).

## [2] Woman Metaphor as an Ecofeminist Issue

While language is, without a doubt, not only an important part of literature but also (and primarily) an inseparable part of our society, sexist-naturist language could be viewed as an ecofeminist issue. For instance, Janis Birkeland argues that ecofeminism "offers a political analysis that explores the links between androcentrism and environmental destruction" and "begins with the realization that the exploitation of nature is intimately linked to Western Man's attitude toward women and tribal cultures" (18). She also adds that such values as the above-mentioned androcentrism or environmental destruction are deeply rooted within the minds of people living in the male-dominated West. Above all, Birkeland also blames patriarchal cultures for the woman-nature connection and for how both women and nature are controlled and exploited because of the establishment of this connection (18–20).

In fact, women are often "animalised" or "naturalised" in written or spoken words, which makes both them and nature – or animals – furtherly inferior to men, and thus condemns them to function as only servants in the male-dominated world. Warren explains that the language used to describe women and nature could be classified as sexist, stating that "the exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing them; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing them" (Warren 12).

In relation to Warren as well as in relation to Steinbeck, another concept which should be mentioned here is the feminisation of nature. Undeniably, the most discussed concept in ecofeminist circles is the concept of “Mother Nature” or “Mother Earth”, two archetypes used in both literature and everyday speech. This personification and feminisation of the planet (or nature) has become even stronger in the past years given the rising fear of climate change and other factors which could cause the eventual death of our “Gaia”. Chaia Heller comments on this phenomenon as follows: “In our modern iconography, nature became rendered as a victimized woman, a madonna-like angel to be idealized, protected, and saved from society’s inability to constrain itself” (219).

When it comes to Steinbeck himself, critics such as Peter Lisca or Mimi Reisel Gladstein often depict his writing as misogynist (Lisca 207, Gladstein XX). Such a statement is important in order to understand that Steinbeck did not necessarily use the woman metaphor in order to help the oppressed group, or to help the “Mother Earth”. Although his understanding of all men’s burden touched women too, critics have still profoundly disapproved of his misogynist portrayal of women – a portrayal which does not give women the same freedoms and the same humanity that are granted to Steinbeck’s men (Liang 1–6).

The main problem with Steinbeck’s women, as the above-mentioned scholarly critics often argue, is the narrowness of the writer’s female characters and therefore also the lack of different social roles assigned to them. Similar to other male authors of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Steinbeck tended to write his female characters more as objects which only complement the environment rather than actively shaping, changing or contributing to it. This especially applies to Steinbeck’s three main types of female characters – the “whore”, the “wife” and the “mother”. Probably the best conclusion on the critical viewpoint of the degradative way in which Steinbeck wrote females in his fiction is offered through the following words by Peter Lisca: “In the world of his fiction women do have a place, but they seem compelled to choose between home-making and whoredom” (207).

On the other hand, there are voices that have explored Steinbeck’s women, both in his novels and his personal life, such as the above-mentioned Peter Lisca or Sandra Beatty, and whose arguments or further analysis have given roots to different perspectives. One that is presented by Beatty even connects Steinbeck’s female characters with nature: “[B]ecause of their closeness to Nature and to the Creator Himself, [they] instinctively understand both human nature and life, which make the need to comprehend their implications and complexities unnecessary” (qtd. in Bryer 591). In addition, Nikki Marie Garcia, for example, wrote in support of Steinbeck’s “minor characters”. Women, according to her, play a role whose importance transcends the number of pages devoted to female characters throughout Steinbeck’s novels. Moreover, Garcia argues that the characters of Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* and Cathy in *East of Eden* might be used as a proof of Steinbeck’s attempt to break out from the traditional characterisation of the roles assigned to women at the time when he was writing (Garcia 23–34).

Undeniably, Steinbeck seems enchanted with the female body and everything that it is capable of. Above all, his tendency is to repeat a specific narrative which deals with

the production of the land as well as with female and oftentimes even animal reproduction. Childbirth is an important element in several of Steinbeck's novels, particularly in *In Dubious Battle*, *To a God Unknown*, "The Forgotten Village", *East of Eden* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. However, for Steinbeck's characters, childbirth is not only an ability which the female body possesses; it is an activity closely related to the production of the land, and most importantly, it is an activity which Steinbeck's male characters take away from the female body in order to allow the men to appropriate the whole process of creation. Julianna Restivo comments that Steinbeck's scenes of childbirth are supposed to evoke "favour of the masculine over the feminine" (117).

On the other hand, considering the fact that men are not present in the physiological processes of pregnancy or giving birth, one might begin to understand their need to produce, create and, most of all, appropriate. According to Akiko Suzue, Steinbeck even "thought of childbirth being too important to leave in the hands of women" (73). In reality, Steinbeck mostly deals with the issue of childbirth by moving the female "to the side" and by appropriating the process of production as well as the process of birth. In different words, Steinbeck is ultimately allowing his male characters to "give birth", either through their land or through the female body – and if they are robbed of the ability to produce and reproduce, the men gradually become weaker and the female-led childbirth or female leadership generally ends in disaster, as happens in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Restivo explains the behaviour of Steinbeck's male characters by stating that the majority of them clearly feel the need to "re-appropriate the powers lost to men" by annexing and taking full domination over the land (Restivo 118). To conclude this introduction into "male birth", it would be appropriate to relate this theme more closely to the production that is associated with the land.

### [3] In Dubious Battle

First published in 1936, *In Dubious Battle* is a novel whose central plot is dominated by the organisation of men for revolution. The phalanx narrative<sup>2</sup> which Steinbeck uses in the book recounts events which have the purpose of giving men full control over the production of the land. Even so, Steinbeck does not resist dedicating certain parts of the novel to the female body and female generative power, as if he saw no other way than to include the process of childbirth as a part of the dreamed-of revolution. However, as John Seelye points out, *In Dubious Battle* is "intensely male-centred, with only marginal roles for women" (27) and the generative power of the female body serves mainly to secure men's power – in particular, the whole organisation of men's power – over the land (Restivo 119–120). This will be made clear by analysing the scene in which Lisa gives birth to her child.

Before the actual birth takes place, Steinbeck lets Mac enter the scene of childbirth. Although the man only pretends to have the knowledge of a doctor, he ultimately uses his interference in the delivery of Lisa's baby in order to proceed with organising the men. The male character is determined to use his interference as a way to be accepted by the whole group and to paint himself as a trustworthy person. During the childbirth,

Lisa's husband London comments on the midwife, the old woman who is supposed to deliver the baby, by questioning her mental stability. This could be understood as London's immediate favouring of Mac's supposed "ability" to help deliver the baby over the old woman's knowledge or experience, even though Mac has not demonstrated his knowledge yet. However, this is not the end of Steinbeck's denigration of the woman's involvement in the delivery; he continues by depicting why Mac would be a better choice for the role of a "doctor":

Mac turned to the old woman. "You a midwife?" She scratched the backs of her wrinkled hands and looked vacantly up at him, but she didn't answer. "I asked if you was a midwife?" he cried. "No - but I've took one or two babies in my life." Mac reached down and picked up one of her hands and held the lighted candle close to it. The nails were long and broken and dirty, and the hands were bluish-grey. "You've took some dead ones then," he said. (Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* 67-68)

In the excerpt above, Steinbeck describes the old woman's appearance as more than dubious, and through Mac's verdict, ultimately condemns the woman's ability to deliver the baby as non-existent. Restivo explains that while Steinbeck distinguishes female production as "dirty and backward", the male production in *In Dubious Battle* equals "scientific sterility" (119), no matter that Mac's level of knowledge when it comes to gynaecology is, without doubt, low. What is more, Steinbeck accomplishes what seems to be his goal even in various other novels - he pushes the pregnant female body to the margin, and brings the fate of the land to the centre. In *In Dubious Battle*, as has been mentioned above, the centre of the story is the phalanx narrative, of which the reader is reminded even when Lisa gives birth to her baby. Although Mac functions as the leader - the "director" of the whole process - he demands help from the rest of the men and therefore organises the men as a collective unit:

A change was in the air. The apathy was gone from the men. Sleepers were awakened and told, and added themselves to the group. A current of excitement filled the jungle, but a kind of joyful excitement. Fires were built up. Four big cans of water were put on to boil; and then cloth began to appear. Every man seemed to have something to add to the pile. One took off his undershirt and threw it into the water and then put on his shirt again. The men seemed suddenly happy. They laughed together as they broke dead cottonwood branches for the fire. (Steinbeck, *In Dubious Battle* 69-70)

What might have been the delivery of a baby as a process controlled by three people - one old woman (a midwife), Lisa, and possibly also her husband, i.e. the number of people typically present during the natural process of childbirth - suddenly becomes an event of relevance to the organisation of men, an event which is essential for the men and their struggle for the land. As Restivo hints, Lisa's body becomes "a medium for male formation and production", all for the future sake of the land (119). This alone could be considered an idealistic notion presented by Steinbeck - a childbirth connecting indi-

viduals, and above all revolutionaries, together. However, this is also a revolution at the expense of a woman whose body and childbirth are appropriated without her consent.

Considering Mac's main intervention, he poses as the leader and thus not only appropriates "the central figure of production" but also, through the child's birth, evolves into "a male mother" (Restivo 120). Moreover, it is essential to once again note Lisa's enforced passivity. While Mac gives instructions to the group of men and is able to register even the small boy fainting in the corner of the tent, Lisa is only able to experience contractions, though none of them are directly described, and she delivers the baby in silence, with practically no scream of her own: "The baby's head appeared. Mac supported it with his hands, and while Lisa squealed weakly, the birth was completed. Mac cut the cord with a sterilized pocket-knife" (71).

Again, Mac's male sterility is put to the forefront, and the reader cannot help noticing his faked expertise. When the old woman comes forward to at least collect and take care of the newborn baby while Lisa is recovering, Mac allows her to do so only after Jim properly washes her hands. What is more, all evidence of the birth, even donated cloths which were never used, gets burned on Mac's command, which the character later explains as follows: "Every man who gave part of his clothes felt that the work was his own. They all feel responsible for that baby. It's theirs, because something from them went to it. To give back the cloth would cut them out" (72–73).

To conclude, in a single scene, Steinbeck successfully enables the character of Mac to take over the delivery of the baby, and in the end to appropriate the female body as well as the whole process of production. In this story, Lisa represents the only female generative power, only to have that power taken away as a means of Mac's assimilation into the group of men. The moment is crucial in the story, as it introduces the phalanx narrative. Later in the novel, Mac adapts the same method in order to achieve the group's main goal – to appropriate the land. Consciously or not, Steinbeck constructs a link between the female body and the body of the land, and "gives birth" to male production, which becomes the central tool in the appropriation of the land as well as in the rebellion against the system (Restivo 118–120, Seelye 27–29).

## [4] To a God Unknown

Steinbeck's third novel explores reproduction through Elizabeth's labour as well as Joseph Wayne's relationship towards the land, once again linked with the female body. Hisako Osuga argues that Joseph, the main character, is "the fountainhead of fertility" (50). In the excerpt below, Joseph shows his powerful devotion to the land and the living beings dependent on it by making himself "the root of their fertility": "All things about him, the soil, the cattle and the people were fertile, and Joseph was the source, the root of their fertility; his was the motivating lust. He willed that all things about him must grow, grow quickly, conceive and multiply" (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 26–27).

Joseph puts himself in the position of the one who controls the fertility (and consequently also the production) of not only the land but also "the cattle and the people"

(Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 26–27). In Joseph's case, the process of appropriation covers not only female reproduction, but also animal reproduction. In the end, the main character marvels at every birth on his farm and controls the breeding of his animals with precision. As Restivo points out, the generative power in *To a God Unknown* is "heavily male-oriented" (120). This is especially prominent in the depiction of Joseph's involvement in Elizabeth's pregnancy. While Joseph worries about Elizabeth's well-being and tries to lecture her on the matter, she replies with confidence that "a whole plane of knowledge opens when a woman is carrying a child" (102–103). Although Joseph is not satisfied with Elizabeth's words and continues to control her pregnancy, his reasons for worrying are not related to his wife or to their child, but to the connection of Elizabeth's pregnancy with the earth, as demonstrated in his own explanation: "'Yes – the child is precious, but not so precious as the bearing of it. That is as real as a mountain. That is a tie to the earth.' He stopped, thinking of words for the feeling. 'it is a proof that we belong here, dear, my dear. The only proof that we are not strangers'" (102–103).

Through the explanation of his worries, Joseph constructs a direct connection between Elizabeth's body and the earth. Furtherly, Joseph's claim of this connection is "the proof of his ties to the land" (Restivo 120). Nevertheless, Joseph carries on connecting Elizabeth's pregnancy to the earth, saying that pregnant women "take up the nerve-ends of the earth in their hands" (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 113). In this case, Steinbeck could be also referring to the image of the human placenta, which, if delivered through labour, resembles the roots of trees – as do the nerve endings in human body.

Later in the novel, during Elizabeth's labour, Joseph takes control over female generative power and eventually appropriates it. Although he does not have knowledge or experience of assisting with childbirth, he forces himself between Elizabeth and Rama, arguing that "it's a thing for me to do" (117). As in *In Dubious Battle*, Joseph controls the childbirth and moves Elizabeth's body to the periphery, making it only "a passive site of male domination" (Restivo 121). Similar to Mac, he becomes the central figure of the delivery. Moreover, after the labour ends, Joseph steps outside and becomes aware of the consequences of his physical involvement in the labour, as if he was the one who had experienced the pain instead of Elizabeth. Steinbeck even writes that "his stomach still racked with the pains he had received from Elizabeth" (118–119).

"It's a boy," he said it up against his chest with a bandage." "Was it a hard birth?" Thomas asked. "I came out here to keep from going in to help." "Yes, it was hard, and Rama said it was easy. God, how the little things fight against life!" (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 119)

Finally, by appropriating Elizabeth's body, Joseph crowns himself as "the mother to both the land and the baby" (Restivo 121). Before the above-cited conversation occurs, Joseph constructs one more connection between the process of childbirth and the earth, specifically to his tree, uttering "you are the cycle" while he passes it on his way (Steinbeck, *To a God Unknown* 119). No matter if it was during Elizabeth's pregnancy, during her labour or after it, Joseph seems to complete the cycle that he has created for himself by conjoining

Elizabeth's body or her pregnancy, the land and himself, objects which are all fully within his control – objects which, he assumes, would not exist without him.

## [5] East of Eden

Mark Seltzer, the author of *Bodies and Machines* (1992), argues that at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the stream of naturalism evident in novels of the time tried to “replace female generative power with an alternative practice, at once technological and male” (28). Nowadays, there are many other novels or short stories which contain similar scenes, such as Ernest Hemingway's “Indian's Camp” (1924). Of course, Steinbeck belongs to this category, as has already been pointed out in the previous two analyses; however, in *East of Eden*, the impact of male-dominated technology on the generative power of the female character Cathy is much more prominent.

Before demonstrating this, it would be appropriate to insert a brief introduction to the powerful character Cathy Trask. To one group of critics, Cathy is Steinbeck's strongest and most prominent female character, but she does not play the role of a hero, unlike her male counterparts. She is an antagonist; often used by critics as a proof of Steinbeck's misogynist views of women. Nikki Garcia, however, argues that Cathy is the one female character who breaks free from the typical writing scheme which Steinbeck used for most of his female characters (24–34). Cathy refuses to be passive, to be moved aside by her husband, the doctor or the land. The best demonstration of her refusal of passivity is during yet another scene of childbirth:

Her head jerked up and her sharp teeth fastened on his hand across the back and up into the palm near the little finger. He cried out in pain and tried to pull his hand away, but her jaw was set and her head twisted and turned, mangling his hand the way a terrier worries a sack. A shrill snarling came from her set teeth. (Steinbeck, *East of Eden* 145)

The key point of the scene which concerns this analysis is the bite that Samuel receives from Cathy. As a male with knowledge of medicine, Samuel represents modern technology, and he is also the one who attends Cathy's labour as a doctor, thus appropriating the female body as well as the power of production. However, Cathy tries to stop the male control over her body even sooner in the story by her attempt to abort her children. This move – expressing her independent choice in regards to her own body – is criticised by a man, her doctor, and Cathy is forced into motherhood, regardless of the fact that she is mentally (and later also physically) unable to do so. In the story, Cathy refuses to nurture her children and therefore rejects what is natural for her body – she rejects her ancient connection to nature. This is an important aspect to highlight, as the whole story, dominated by a strong female character and her refusal to be controlled or have her generative power appropriated, involves a land which does not flourish in production. Unfortunately for Cathy, she does not undergo the difficulties related to pregnancy because of her free will, but she becomes a tool, a machine for the men around her who want to hold control

over the land as well as over female reproduction. Restivo explains that Steinbeck's characters once again favour the "male-mother model" and men's control of the means of production (123).

In the end, Cathy's impassiveness does not bring the man, her husband, any benefit; she is presented as the female power of destruction. Steinbeck describes the Wise Woman of the following text "The Forgotten Village" in a similar way; however, in the case of *East of Eden*, Cathy does not hold power over the land, yet her choice to leave her children and her husband causes the future of Adam's land to remain unchanged, and the soil continues to be in its untouched form, unploughed and unfarmed.

As has been mentioned above, *East of Eden* is also a novel which explores the clash between technology (attributed to men) and non-industrial agriculture, or in different words, "the old way of living" (mostly attributed to women). Samuel Hamilton, "the male mother" of this story as Restivo calls him, demonstrates this even before the birth takes place. The first indication of this clash is when Samuel speaks of his ability to attend the birth of different farm animals, in which category he includes even women (Restivo 122–124). The important moment, however, comes when Cathy's labour starts and Samuel is called in to help. After that, he says "first we find a buried star and now we go to dig up a mint-new human"; this may indicate his male control over modern technologies such as mining, or as Samuel calls it "digging up" (Steinbeck, *East of Eden* 145). Through Samuel's commentary about the day's events, Steinbeck once again connects female generative power to the land.

## [6] The Forgotten Village

"The Forgotten Village" offers an insight into the ancient life of the Mexican people. This short story, which Steinbeck wrote for a movie of the same name released in 1941, aimed at examining the differences between new technology and old beliefs, between Western medicine and ancient magic, between modern and pagan ways of living. Though considered to be one of the shortest works written by Steinbeck, it includes an important discussion about the clash between old and new, a theme that is present in more than one of his novels – and also a theme that is almost omnipresent in both old and modern society. Steinbeck refers to this subject in the preface of the story as follows: "What we found was dramatic – the clash of a medicine and magic that was old when the Aztecs invaded the plateau with a modern medicine that is as young as a living man" (Steinbeck, "The Forgotten Village" 9–10).

Nonetheless, like the previously analysed novels, "The Forgotten Village" contains a scene of childbirth. The difference comes in the presence and meaning of the central character, the Wise Woman called Trini, who is "the doctor", the magician and the Mother of the whole village. In contrast to *In Dubious Battle* or *To a God Unknown*, Trini holds the power which the men in the aforementioned novels want – and, in the end, successfully appropriate. While making the movie, Steinbeck writes in the preface of the short story, "our curandera<sup>3</sup> was a real 'wise woman,' one who practiced herbology and magic

in the village; our teacher was a real teacher in the government school; our doctors real doctors; our mother a real mother who had lost a number of children” (Steinbeck, “The Forgotten Village” 9–10); this already creates an image of realness and moreover draws attention to the contrast between the curandera of the village and the newly arrived foreign doctors.

Having said that, while Trini represents the old and pagan way of living, Juan Diego, a young boy who turns against the traditional life in the village, represents modern technology. Similarly as in *In Dubious Battle*, the female, curing the villagers through herbs, eggs, snake skin or other natural remedies (things which, as Restivo points out, represent “Mother Earth”), is almost automatically associated with devastation (124). Trini’s destructive power is best demonstrated when she destroys the real medicine which the men bring, which is intended to save the boy Paco: “‘You will kill the people with your new foolishness. This for your nonsense!’ And she threw his medicines to the ground” (Steinbeck, “The Forgotten Village” 35–36).

The Wise Woman disapproves of the world of modern technology represented in the men. She openly, though falsely, debunks the men’s medicines as a tool for killing – they do not come from nature or the land, things controlled by the female, the Mother Earth. In the end, she is the force that drives the villagers to annihilation. Therefore, Steinbeck creates the image of the female who is supposed to represent a force that destroys modern technology (Restivo 124–125).

If the death of the pregnant mother’s child was not demonstrative enough, Steinbeck gives the reader yet another scene of childbirth, this time “directed” by the female Mother of the village – it is like a mirror of the scenes of female-led production in the previous novels, specifically reflecting the men’s role in the whole process.

The Wise Woman worked her magic, and chanted the old words: “Now he is forming, Now he is ready. Now he has hands. Now he has eyes. Now he is forming.” When the birth was near, they awakened the father to give strength and comfort to the mother. Between his knees he held her and braced her against her pain, and took some of the pain to himself. And Trini worked with the last labor. She chanted, “Now he is formed, now he is ready.” The father whispered in Esperanza’s ear, “Be of good courage, I am with you. Be of good courage, I am with you.” And Trini cried in triumph, “He is formed – he is born! He is here!” (42–44)

This time, the man is moved to the periphery. In fact, the father of the baby and the rest of the family are in tune with the Wise Woman’s scheme. Although the mother is again passive, apart from the mention of pain there is no word about her physical or mental experience of the labour; the important thing which happens during the production is Trini’s chanting at the infant. Representing magic and most of all nature, the Wise Woman is the Mother Earth’s voice forming the infant’s body little by little; the voice gifting the infant with his life. In other words, she is the Mother Earth standing above the creation happening in front of her eyes and led by her hands – i.e. the position which the men in previous novels appropriated and took away from the control of females.

However, the story's goal is not to praise the pagan way of living; with the children and the baby dying, Steinbeck's aim to discredit beliefs in old magic and nature – and with that also beliefs in female generative powers – comes to a successful fulfilment. Although disturbing, the story ends, similarly as in the following text *The Grapes of Wrath*, with a hopeful scene. Juan Diego occupies a laboratory, possibly involved in modern technology. One might hope that in consequence he will be able to change the future of the village by taking control over it – and with that, as Restivo points out, also over the land and the production power (125):

“And the change will come, is coming; the long climb out of darkness. Already the people are learning, changing their lives, learning, working, living in new ways. “The change will come, is coming, as surely as there are thousands of Juan Diegos in the villages of Mexico.” And the boy said, “I am Juan Diego.” (Steinbeck, “The Forgotten Village” 78–80)

## [7] The Grapes of Wrath

The “Okies” in *The Grapes of Wrath*, specifically the Joads family, move through their industrialised and machine-filled transformation against the laws and rhythms of nature, even though Steinbeck takes many opportunities to remind both the family and the reader of the existence of the cycle of nature (Railton 102–103). This novel, often considered to be Steinbeck's masterpiece, is a social manifesto highlighting and commenting on various issues – such as immigration and its consequences or causes, which are favourite topics of discussion in different parts of the world even nowadays. In the case of *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck also chooses to demonstrate his view on these issues through the journey of the Joads family; however, what seems to be even more important than the members of the migrating family is, of course, their land.

As has been mentioned in the introduction to this analysis, *The Grapes of Wrath* explores the connection of men to the land through the body of a female, in this case the pregnant body of one of the female characters, Rose of Sharon. Restivo claims that “the female body is instrumental of Steinbeck's critique” (125). In fact, *The Grapes of Wrath* portrays the disaster which unfolds if men lose control over their land, or if the land is controlled by people who do not sustain life on the land, but rather destroy it.

Nevertheless, with the destruction of the land comes not only the destruction of the men's power to control. *The Grapes of Wrath* depicts the same connection of the female body and the land, but as opposed to *In Dubious Battle* or *To a God Unknown*, the connection is apparent in the destructive results – both the female body and the land are infertile, and they both suffer from the absence of male control over their production (Restivo 125–128).

This is obviously best displayed during the scene of Rose of Sharon's childbirth. Even before the labour fully unfolds, Rose of Sharon's body is already connected to agriculture and the land:

Down by the mattress, in the bright light of the lamp, Ma and Mrs. Wainwright held conference. Their voices were raised a little over the hollow beating of the rain. Mrs. Wainwright took a paring knife from her apron pocket and slipped it under the mattress. "Maybe it don't do no good," she said apologetically. "Our folks always done it. Don't do no harm, anyways." Ma nodded. "We used a plow point. I guess anything sharp'll work, long as it can cut birth pains. I hope it ain't gonna be a long one." (Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* 302)

This "plow point" and its replacement by a "paring knife" symbolise the absence of non-industrial agriculture and the loss of their own land. Due to this loss, Rose of Sharon is cut off from "the life-giving properties of the land and agriculture", resulting in the unfortunate death of her child (Restivo 126).

As men in *The Grapes of Wrath* lose the control over production, they are also placed at the periphery during Rose of Sharon's labour. Moreover, according to Restivo, production seems to be controlled by the forces of nature rather than by the men (126–127). Rose of Sharon's pregnant body seems to mirror the behaviour of the environment, especially in the last part of the novel. While flood waters hit the valley of the Joads' temporary home, Rose of Sharon's body prepares for the upcoming labour. Both flooding and Rose of Sharon's labour are, in the end, completely outside the control of men.

What is more, while women help Rose of Sharon through the delivery of her unfortunately stillborn child, the men instead take a chance to grasp control over at least one of the events, this time tied to the seemingly "uncontrollable" nature, by building a barrier to stop the upcoming flooding. The male characters are then implicitly contrasted with the women assisting the delivery of Rose of Sharon's child. Steinbeck describes that "they worked jerkily, like machines" (303), creating a "technological" or possibly "artificial" opposition to nature and its forces. Earlier in the story, Rose of Sharon's mother draws a similar comparison; however, in this case, she also explicitly includes women in it. While men are compared to machines – "lives in jerks" (291) – women are, on the other hand, compared to the river, which signals that men are "excluded from the means of production" and "face nature differently than women" (Restivo 126).

"An' that's one more thing a woman knows. I noticed that. Man, he lives in jerks – baby born an' a man dies, an' that's a jerk – gets a farm an' loses his farm, an' that's a jerk. Woman, it's all one flow, like a stream, little eddies, little waterfalls, but the river, it goes right on. Woman looks at it like that. We ain't gonna die out. People is goin' on – changin' a little, maybe, but goin' right on." (Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* 291)

Richard E. Hart argues that Steinbeck's views about nature were at times contradictory. Hart comments that Steinbeck understood nature "as both friend and enemy" (49). In the novel, the two events – the men's struggle against nature's forces and the childbirth – seem to unfold at the same time, and both – although natural and unstoppable – represent a danger to the characters. Therefore, the falling of the tree and the flood waters

entering the earth's "canal" epitomise Rose of Sharon's labour, which, similarly to the tree or the building of the barrier, proceed to end in disaster. The fallen tree, specifically, might be viewed as the embodiment of Rose of Sharon's body deprived of the ability to bring a healthy child to life (Restivo 125–127, Hart 49–50):

Then, from up the stream there came a ripping crash. The beam of the flashlight showed a great cottonwood toppling. The men stopped to watch. The branches of the tree sank into the water and edged around with the current while the stream dug out the little roots. Slowly the tree was freed, and slowly it edged down the stream. The weary men watched, their mouths hanging open. The tree moved slowly down. Then a branch caught on a stump, snagged and held. And very slowly the roots swung around and hooked themselves on the new embankment. The water piled up behind. The tree moved and tore the bank. A little stream slipped through. (Steinbeck, *The Grapes of Wrath* 304)

Finally, the work of the men is destroyed by the "enemy" which nature has become, and Rose of Sharon's child is killed by the "enemy" that has appropriated the land of the family.

## [8] Conclusion

The main aim of this article has been to analyse the woman/nature relationship (with the emphasis on ecofeminist aspects) in selected works by the American writer John Steinbeck. For this purpose, an introduction to Steinbeck's use of the woman metaphor is given, and the established notion of Steinbeck's misogyny (regarding his female characters) is presented. Critical approaches which seem to either support or oppose this viewpoint are pointed out.

The analysis then specifically focuses on Steinbeck's use of the theme of production and reproduction in his writings about nature and the Californian land. From the very beginning of the analysis, it is made apparent that for Steinbeck's characters – and male characters in particular – childbirth is not a process dominated by women and their bodies. In fact, the majority of childbirths (or even entire pregnancies) are fully dominated by male characters. What is more, childbirth as well as pregnancy are both strongly related to the production of the land – and most importantly, it is an activity which Steinbeck's male characters take away from the female body in order to allow the men to appropriate the whole process of creation in the story.

Nevertheless, the excerpts dealing with production and reproduction show not only the depiction of the connection between the land and the female body, but also the writer's attempts to allow his male characters to "give birth" – or, as the analysis shows, to appropriate female generative power and become the "Male Mothers" of both the land and the newborn children.

Clearly, through his novels and the topics that he dealt with, Steinbeck managed to give voice to many voiceless communities across the world, including the "Mother Earth". However, as has been shown in this article, in the novels discussed here he fails

to give voice to women, although he repeatedly borrows their bodies in the form of an absent referent of sexist-naturist descriptions of the land or female characters.

## [Notes]

<sup>1</sup> A narrative which includes and centres around the organisation of men for the purpose of a battle or, in the case of Steinbeck's *In Dubious Battle*, for the purpose of a revolution.

<sup>2</sup> A term which originated in Latin America and represents a traditional healer who uses natural and folk remedies, including magic.

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**[ linguistics  
and translation  
studies ]**



# [ Variability of Proper- -Noun Idioms in Different Varieties of English ]

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**[Abstract]** *The paper sets out to investigate the grammatical and semantic variability of selected idioms across different varieties of English, employing the cognitive linguistic and cultural linguistic perspectives. The analysis revealed that lexemes in idioms are prone to considerable variability in different English varieties. It was also revealed that the topic of the text, as well as the intention of its producer, played an important role in the process of modification. Examples of this kind of modification might be variants of the idiom Bob's your uncle, such as Jah's your uncle or Mao's your uncle, as found in the NOW corpus.*

**[Keywords]** *idioms; variability; cognitive linguistics; cultural linguistics; corpus*

## [1] Introduction

The present paper sets out to investigate the grammatical and semantic variability of selected idiomatic expressions across different varieties of English, employing the cognitive linguistic and cultural linguistic perspectives. Contrary to the traditional/orthodox view, which considers the meaning of idioms to be non-compositional, fully opaque and hence unpredictable (e.g. Fraser, 1970; Katz 1973; Crystal, 2003; Cruse, 2011), the cognitive linguistic perspective maintains that the meaning of most idioms can be understood with the help of the conceptual systems which are deeply embedded in human brains and function independently of language (e.g. Nunberg, 1978; Nunberg et al. 1994; Kövecses, 2010). This suggests that it may be possible to rely on our knowledge of these conceptual systems in order to understand the meanings of unfamiliar idiomatic expressions. The concepts in people's minds consist very often of prototypical elements that are generally used to describe a particular event or situation. In this way, idioms function similarly to metaphors (Cacciari & Glucksberg, 1994, p. 463). In addition to this, Cultural Linguistics considers the meaning of idiomatic expressions to be culturally motivated (Sharifian, 2017). Different approaches have been applied with respect to the ability of both native and non-native speakers of English to understand the meaning of idioms (see e.g. Langlotz, 2006 for a summary of different approaches to idiom comprehension and Kvetko, 2009 for different types of idioms). Also, the question has also been raised whether the form of an idiom is unconditionally fixed or allows for a certain variability, and to what extent the possible variability is admissible (e.g. Moon, 1998; Langlotz 2006, Callies; 2017). Moreover, once the semantic and grammatical variability of idioms has been established, the actual instances of idiom variability can be investigated in order to determine the reasons and influences that lie behind this process. It is the aim of the present paper to take this route, and to carry out a small-scale case study showing the relationship between the variability of idiomatic expressions in a language and the cultural settings in which they occur. For this purpose, several name idioms, i.e. idioms containing a proper noun, have been chosen. The advantages of this choice are twofold. First, name idioms represent a rather restricted group in terms of the number of expressions which belong to it, and are therefore suitable for initial research in this field of study. Second, proper nouns can be viewed as bearing a direct relationship to the particular text or the particular culture in which they appear. Additionally, the meaning of name idioms is generally regarded as non-compositional (Moon, 1998), which means that individual elements of the idioms do not contribute to its overall meaning. These idioms constitute a less researched area of linguistic study. From the psycholinguistic point of view, it has been concluded that "syntactic behavior of idioms is determined, to a large extent, but speakers' assumptions about the way in which parts of idioms contribute to their figurative interpretations as a whole" (Gibbs, 1989). Non-compositional idioms are therefore regarded as more rigid.

## [2] Theoretical background

The theoretical background to this study, on which the analysis rests, comprises two areas of investigation. First, I will discuss the approach to idioms presented in various textbooks aimed at ESL learners. Second, I will summarize different linguistic approaches to idiom comprehension. Knowledge of these theoretical issues is necessary in order to adopt an up-to-date approach to the problem under investigation.

### [2.1] Idiom variability

The following section will examine idiom variability from several different perspectives. First, I will address the question of whether idiom variability is mentioned in various ESL textbooks, and second, I will examine the linguistic approach to this issue. The overview will address the question of whether and to which degree these two approaches differ.

#### [2.1.1] Idiom variability in ESL textbooks

A number of ESL textbooks are concerned solely with idioms, as these are considered to be an important part of the intermediate and advanced language competence of any learner of English as a foreign language. Their role in both formal and informal discourse is strongly accented in order to prepare learners of English to be able to deal with idioms in everyday encounters with native speakers, as well as with the more varied role idioms play in the media. To achieve this aim, variability of idioms is mentioned, but only marginally: “Some idiomatic expressions are fixed and cannot change – very often you can change the tense and the pronoun” (Wright, 2002, p. 8), “Sometimes additional words can be used within an idiom, especially to change the emphasis” (Gairns & Redman, 2011, p. 8), or “Most idioms are fixed in their form and cannot be changed or varied. Sometimes, however, the grammar or the vocabulary can be varied slightly” (O’Dell & McCarthy, 2009, p. 6). The previously mentioned ESL textbooks are aimed at intermediate learners of English, which might be the reason why the possible range of use of idioms and their variability is mentioned only to a limited extent. The textbook *English Idioms in Use – Advanced* (O’Dell & McCarthy, 2010) elaborates more on the subject of the range of use of idioms, mentioning e.g. that they can be used to add an emphasis to an utterance, to make an utterance more interesting, to catch a reader’s eye, or to indicate membership of a particular group (p. 8). However, the variability of idioms is likewise mentioned only marginally: “Idioms are a type of formulaic language. Formulaic language consists of fixed expressions which you learn and understand as units rather than as individual words. [...] The words and word order of idioms are usually fixed, and we cannot change them in any way” (O’Dell & McCarthy, 2010, p. 6).

As a conclusion of this micro-analysis of several ESL textbooks, it can be mentioned that the ability of English idioms to change both lexically and grammatically without losing their idiomatic meaning is not commonly known among learners of the language.

### [2.1.2] Idiom variability in linguistics

A number of recent linguistic studies have aimed to show the relationship between the idiomatic expressions of a language and the cultural setting in which they occur. Two of these studies, “‘Idioms in the making’ as evidence for variation in conceptual metaphor across varieties of English” (Callies, 2017) and “Fixed expressions and culture” (Fiedler, 2017), published very recently in the academic journals *Cognitive Linguistic Studies* and *International Journal of Language and Culture*, have provided inspiration for the present paper. The shared conclusion of these two articles is that idiomatic expressions do vary when compared across different varieties of English; the question, which remains to be answered, is how and why. Both articles also observe greater variability in African Englishes than in other varieties of English. Although the link between idiomatic expressions of a language and its culture is proved beyond doubt, the actual research on the extent and the nature of the variability has only begun, as Callies (2017) states in one of his articles: “Generally speaking, when compared to the field of lexico-grammar, there is relatively little research on idiomatic phraseology and figurative language use in varieties of English” (p. 63). The following sections outline a brief history of approaches to idiom variability.

### [2.1.3] The traditional approach

The traditional approach to idioms is marked by allowing no lexical and/or grammatical variability, or only a very limited amount. For example, Crystal (2003) describes idioms as follows: “Two central features identify an idiom. The meaning of the idiomatic expression cannot be deduced by examining the meanings of the constituent lexemes, and the expressions are fixed, both grammatically and lexically. Thus, *Put a sock in it!* means ‘stop talking’, and it is not possible to replace any of the lexemes and retain the idiomatic meaning” (p. 163). Similarly, Cruse (2011) states that: “All the items of a sentence except those which form part of the idiom can be changed without destroying the idiomatic meaning in the sentence. Items inside the idiom cannot be changed. The meaning is attached to the phrase, and not to the individual constituents” (p. 86), while Griffiths (2006) maintains that “An expression is an idiom if its meaning is non-compositional, that is to say it cannot be worked out from knowledge of the meanings of its parts and the way they have been put together” (p. 19). Just as the lexical variability of idioms is excluded from traditional approaches, only little more allowance is given to their grammatical variability. Cruse (2011) notes that some aspects of grammar may be part of the meaning of the idiom and some aspects of grammar may not. For example, the passive voice may function differently in different idioms. In the sentence *His leg was being pulled continually by the other boys*, the passive voice, according to Cruse (2011, p. 87), does not destroy the idiomatic meaning of the sentence, while in the sentence *The bucket was kicked by him* it does (Cruse, 2011, p. 87).

### [2.1.4] The cognitive approach

In comparison to the traditional approach outlined above, cognitive linguistics admits greater variability in idioms: “Idioms and many formulaic expressions are not simple

fixed or frozen phrases. In many cases, idioms are analysable to varying degrees” (Cuyckens & Geeraerts, 2010, p. 698). Cognitive linguists consider idioms to be “an integral part of the language that eases social interaction, enhances textual coherence, and, quite importantly, reflect fundamental patterns of human thought” (Cuyckens & Geeraerts, 2010, p. 698). Similarly, “many, or perhaps most, idioms are products of our conceptual system and not simply a matter of language” (Kövecses, 2010, 232). By this assertion, Kövecses implies that it may be possible to understand, at least partially, the meaning of idiomatic expressions with the help of our general knowledge of the world. In other words, as Evans & Green (2006) state: “Language serves to encode and externalize our thoughts” (p. 7). Our knowledge of the world is reflected in the conceptual systems stored in our minds. These assumptions suggest that it is possible to modify an idiomatic expression, both lexically and grammatically, as long as the canonical meaning of the idiom remains transparent. Furthermore, the decomposability of idioms, i.e. the way in which the individual words of an idiom contribute to its overall meaning, plays an important role in determining the figurative meaning of the idiom (Cuyckens & Geeraerts, 2010, p. 709). Decomposability is a matter of degree (Cuyckens & Geeraerts, 2010); some lexical components of an idiom contribute to the overall meaning of the idiom more than others. However, recent research has shown that non-decomposability does not necessarily imply fixedness in terms of lexis and grammar (Geeraert et al., 2017). Proper name idioms, which are the subject of the present article, might be regarded as semantically decomposable, as the proper name – the key word – has a very specific reference, very often related to the culture in which the idiom appears.

### **[2.1.5] The cultural approach**

Just as general knowledge of the world varies from individual to individual and from culture to culture, underlying concepts vary as well. Wierzbicka (2001) maintains that figurative language may serve as a reflection of the culture in which it is in current use. Additionally, Cultural Linguistics considers idiomatic expressions to be culturally motivated (Sharifian, 2017). These two assertions therefore seem to suggest that a certain amount of variability in idioms may be possible. Several recent linguistic studies on idioms have focused on the relationship between idiomatic expressions in a language and the cultural setting in which they occur. Two of these studies, “‘Idioms in the making’ as evidence for variation in conceptual metaphor across varieties of English” (Callies, 2017) and “Fixed expressions and culture” (Fiedler, 2017), published recently in the academic journals *Cognitive Linguistic Studies* and *International Journal of Language and Culture*, have provided inspiration for the present paper. Both articles provide evidence of the important role played by culturally conditioned conceptualisations “as a further dimension of variation in the study of World Englishes” (Fiedler, 2017, p. 189). Fiedler (2017) also notes that “there are few realms in which the intimate link between language and culture is more obvious than proverbs and idioms” (p. 190). Additionally, both articles show considerable convergence in observing greater variability in African Englishes than in other varieties of English. English might be considered a fruitful source for similar investigations,

as it has spread all over the world and become accommodated by many different cultures (Kachru, 1983; Fiedler, 2017).

### [3] Research Questions

Although the link between the variability of idiomatic expressions of a language and its culture has already been proved, actual research on the size and the nature of this variability has only just begun (Callies, 2017). The present article explores the lexical and grammatical variability of a selected group of idioms with regard to different varieties of English. The research presented is by no means suitable for consequent generalizations; it is a small-scale case study whose aim is to test out hypotheses which will be addressed in a future research project. Such a research project will have to be based on a considerably larger number of idiomatic expressions. The main research problems/questions the present article addresses are:

- I. Is there a variability of proper name idioms in different varieties of English? Is the proper name component of the idiom susceptible to greater variability than other components of the idiom?
- II. What are the possible reasons/explanations for the lexico-grammatical variability of proper name idioms across different varieties of English?
- III. In the following paragraphs, the methodology of the research will be briefly explained; afterwards, the results of the case study itself will be presented.

### [4] Methodology

The research drew on the *News on the Web* (NOW) corpus. The corpus contains approximately 7.1 billion words from various web-based newspapers, magazines and websites, dating from 2010 to the present time. The NOW corpus is a monitor corpus, which means that the amount of the data contained in the corpus, grows “by about 140–160 million words of data each month” (News on the Web, online). The scope of the corpus is around 20 English-speaking countries from all around the world, and the corpus can therefore undoubtedly serve as an appropriate tool for analysing lexical units across different varieties of English. Additionally, in contrast to the GloWbE corpus, which can also be used for comparisons between English varieties across the world, the NOW corpus allows a researcher to see what is happening with the language over a selected period of time as well as tracing the emergence of new words and phrases during the last couple of years. However, a few drawbacks of the analysis should be mentioned, as these might influence the value of the conclusions drawn from the analysis. First, to obtain results suitable for generalizations, a multi-billion-word corpus should be employed to conduct the analysis. The idioms under scrutiny, i.e. idioms with a proper-noun component, are rather rare in texts (Moon, 1998). The choice of the NOW corpus is by all means suitable for the small-scale research presented here, but the designed method of data extraction will have

to be tested on more extensive language material in order to reach generalizable conclusions. Second, the size of the sub-corpora of the different English varieties in the NOW corpus should be taken into account, and the frequencies of the investigated expressions should be normalized in order to better compare the results across different English varieties. The choice of the corpus was also influenced by the fact that, according to Langlotz (2006), similar research has only been conducted so far with the help of the BNC, which might not reflect the possible idiom variants exhaustively (p. 290).

First, each of the selected idiomatic expressions was investigated in the NOW corpus in terms of its distribution across different varieties of English. Second, the possible variability of each idiom was addressed and quantitatively assessed. Consequently, individual idiom variants were examined and generalized conclusions were drawn regarding the reasons for the variability or the functions these varieties perform in the discourse in which they appear.

## [5] Discussion

The case study examines the variability of eight name idioms, i.e. idioms containing a proper noun which can be regarded as a key word. These idioms are: *Bob's your uncle*; *before you can say Jack Robinson*; *every Tom, Dick, and Harry*; *rob Peter to pay Paul*; *(not) know someone from Adam*; *Johnny-come-lately*; *doubting Thomas*; and *as patient as Job*. Contrary to the original assumption which presupposed a considerable variability of their proper noun component as well as the cultural specificity of such modifications, the corpus analysis revealed that the proper name idioms form a heterogeneous group in terms of their lexical variability. In accordance with this proposition, the idioms under consideration can be divided into three groups according to the type/degree of variability they are subject to. The first group contains idioms with key word variability, i.e. idioms whose proper noun component is subject to substitution by other proper nouns. The idioms which belong to this group are: *Bob's your uncle*; *before you can say Jack Robinson* and *every Tom, Dick, and Harry*. The second group of idioms is characterized by a certain amount of variability of other components of the idiom, while the proper noun component of the idiom remains unchanged. The idioms belonging to this group are: *before you can say Jack Robinson*, *every Tom, Dick, and Harry* and *rob Peter to pay Paul*. The contents of the first two groups partially overlap, as some of the idioms display both variability of their proper noun component as well as variability of other parts. The last group comprises expressions which are not subject to any variability at all. They appear in the NOW corpus in their canonical form, no matter which variety of English is involved. These idioms are: *not know someone from Adam*; *Johnny-come-lately*; *doubting Thomas*; and *as patient as Job*. The idioms, roughly divided into these three groups, will now be investigated individually in order to pinpoint their individual characteristics.

## [5.1] Lexical variability of the idiom *Bob's your uncle*

The meaning of the idiom *Bob's your uncle*, as defined by the *Cambridge Dictionary*, is “something will happen very quickly and simply” (online). Additionally, as the Cambridge Online Dictionary states, the use of the idiom is old-fashioned and informal. The following table summarizes the findings from the NOW corpus. The query which was used to trace the variability of the idiom *Bob's your uncle* was \*’s your uncle. Table 1 lists variants of the idiom for each of the 20 varieties of English listed in the corpus. The abbreviations used in the first column of the table are explained in the endnote<sup>4</sup>. The numbers in the table reflect the number of hits for each variant of the idiom. The minimum frequency during the analysis was set to 1.

	Bob's your uncle	other
US	20	Jah's your uncle (1)
CA	24	Bob Ryan's your uncle (1); Mao's your uncle (1)
GB	41	Bob Killey's your uncle (1); Ben's your uncle (1)
IE	22	Job's your uncle (1)
AU	15	Bjorn's your uncle (1)
NZ	20	Saint Nic's your uncle (1)
PK	1	before you could say Bojo's your uncle (1)
ZA	14	Miyagi's your uncle (1)

Table 1

As the table shows, variability in the wording of the selected idiom can be ascertained, even though the original version is still much preferred. However, given the source of the data (which are solely journalistic texts), it can be concluded that the idiom allows a certain amount of freedom in order to tailor it to the journalistic purposes of the text in which it appears. In the following paragraphs, attention is paid to some of the idiom variants listed in the right column of the table. In each case, the context of the expression was investigated, using the function of the corpus enabling access to the webpage on which the original article appeared.

### » Jah's your uncle

This version of the idiom appears in an article on New Orleans' drinking culture, offering not only descriptions of different kinds of – mostly – alcoholic drinks that are typical of the area, but also stories related to them. One of the mentioned drinks is called the Holy Trinity. The simplicity of the way it can be prepared is crowned by the expression under investigation – the short description of the procedure is ended by the modified idiom *Jah's your uncle*. The choice of the proper noun, Jah, seems to be directly related to the name of the beverage itself, the Holy Trinity, Jah being a shortened version of Yahweh,

the proper name for God in the Hebrew Bible (“Yahweh”, n.d.). The religious connotations, however unusual in relation to the topic of the article, are therefore even more strengthened by the modification of the idiom.

» Mao’s your uncle

The article describes a deal between China and the USA: “China is discussing construction of a super-underwater railway tunnel that would have high-speed trains barrelling from China to the U.S., [...] faster than you can say ‘Mao’s your uncle’” (McParland, 2014). Again, the link between the topic of the article and the choice of the proper noun in the idiom is clear, Mao being considered the founder of the modern People’s Republic of China (Schram, 2019). Additionally, in this case, the meaning of the idiom has been slightly changed as the alluded quality in question is not only simplicity but also speed. The idiom modification therefore suggests the powerful position of China in enforcing its international business aims.

» Bjorn’s your uncle

Even though this expression appeared on an Australian website, the actual article is in fact a description of, or an invitation to, a cruise in Northern Norway, which also explains the choice of the proper noun Bjorn, instead of Bob, in the idiom. The article gives the reader advice on how to prepare for encounters with the “tough and individualistic people” (Callender, 2017) who live in the area. After reading this advice, the article suggests, the actual encounter will be easy.

» Saint Nic’s your uncle

The article in which this expression appeared deals with various recipes suitable for various occasions of the year. Even though the recipe after which the phrase appears is designed for the Christmas season – hence the abbreviated reference to Saint Nicolas – the actual recipe, as well as its ingredients, are typically New Zealand. The modification in this case serves the purpose of enhancing the fact that the recipe is to be used during the festive season.

» before you could say Bojo’s your uncle

In this case, the phrase was not only modified to stay in line with the title of the article, “Could BoJo really be the keeper of Britain’s moral compass?” (Husain, 2017), but it changed its meaning as well. This was achieved by combining two idiomatic expressions into one, namely the idioms *Bob’s your uncle* and *before you can say Jack Robinson*, which is generally “used to say that something happens very quickly” (Cambridge Dictionary, online). The newly coined idiom therefore refers to events or processes which are not only simple but also quick. The proper noun *BoJo* itself is an abbreviation of Boris Johnson, the former Foreign Secretary and the current Prime Minister of the UK.

## » Miyagi's your uncle

This expression appeared in a review article on a brand-new Nissan car. The description uses both Japanese and South African features to deliver the feelings of the uniqueness and power to the potential buyer. The car is nicknamed a “Japanese beast” (Bhagaloo, 2011) and a “warrior landed with a Samurai sword in the form of a 3.8-litre twin-turbo'd V6” (Bhagaloo, 2011), thus alluding to its country of origin. It is also stressed that it is particularly easy to control the car – there are just a few steps which must be taken and “Miyagi's your uncle” (Bhagaloo, 2011). Here again, the reference is taken from Japanese culture, referring to Mr. Miyagi, a Japanese fictional karate master (“Mr. Miyagi”, n. d.). It seems that the two kinds of references employed in the article serve two different purposes to promote the car in South Africa. The Japanese references serve the purpose of stressing the “unadulterated power” (Bhagaloo, 2011) of the product, while the African references highlight the suitability of the car for the African environment.

## [5.2] Lexical variability of *before you could say Jack Robinson and every Tom, Dick, and Harry*

The procedure was the same as in the previous case; the results will therefore be presented in a more concise way. The following two tables, Table 2 and Table 3, summarize the results extracted from the NOW corpus.

	before you can say Jack Robinson	other
US	0	before you can say Twerk (1)
CA	0	before you can say Thelma and Louise (1)
GB	2	before you can say Inspector Clouseau (1); before you could say Jack Robinson (1)
IE	0	before you can say Kill Bill (1); before you can say George Orwell (1)
AU	0	before you could say Jack Robinson (3)
NZ	0	before you can say vinaka (1); before you can say knife (1)
IN	1	before you can say Amar-Akbar-Anthony (1)
ZA	0	0
NG	2	before you could say Jack Robinson (10); before you can say Juliet (1)
JM	0	before you can say Amen (1)

Table 2

The idiom *before you can say Jack Robinson* is used to “refer to something being done or happening very quickly” (Cambridge Dictionary, online). Just like the idiom discussed in the previous section, *before you can say Jack Robinson* is regarded as old-fashioned by the Cambridge Dictionary (online). However, compared to *Bob’s your uncle*, the idiom *before you can say Jack Robinson* is rather infrequent. In fact, according to Table 2, which summarizes the results from the NOW corpus, there are two canonical variants of the idiom, namely *before you can say Jack Robinson* (5 hits) and *before you could say Jack Robinson* (15 hits). Even though the Cambridge Dictionary (online) lists both variants, other dictionaries, including the Oxford Dictionary (online) and Macmillan Dictionary (online), list only the variant *before you can say Jack Robinson*. The general impression, therefore, is that the variant with *can* is preferred by dictionaries while the variant with *could* is in current use, as evidenced by the corpus. Second, while the use of the canonical form of the idiom seems to be rather rare, the number of possible context modifications/substitutions is more numerous.

Table 3 lists the occurrence of the canonical form as well as the variants of the idiom *every Tom, Dick, and Harry*. The meaning of the idiom is “everyone, without discrimination, ordinary people” (Spears, 2000, p. 106). Moreover, as the *NTS’s American Idioms Dictionary* states, the idiom, though containing solely male proper nouns, can apparently be used to refer to females as well – and without any modification in terms of lexis (Spears, 2000, p. 106).

	every Tom, Dick, and Harry	other
US	5	every Tom, Dick, and Harriet (2); every Tom, Dick, and Kardashian (1); every Tom, Dick, and Ari
CA	1	every John, Dick, and Harry (1); every Tom, Dick, and Pumpkin (1)
GB	2	0
IE	2	every Tom, Dick, and Harriet (1)
AU	0	0
NZ	0	0
MY	0	every Tom, Dick, and Sonny (1)
ZA	0	0

Table 3

The research in the corpus has revealed that a certain amount of variability concerning the idiom *every Tom, Dick, and Harry* is admissible. The applicability of the idiom to both male and female participants is enhanced by the use of the proper name *Harriet* as a counterpart to the proper name *Harry*. The occurrence of this modified form of the idiom, *every Tom, Dick, and Harriet*, is not unique, as it appears more than once and in two distinct varieties of English. The second type of modification, the substitution of other

components of the idiom, has also been observed in course of the research. The most common substitutes of the word *every* are: *any*, *even*, *average*, *ignorant* and *all*. The context of these modifications reveals that the substitution not only supports the original meaning of the idiom, but it also enhances it: “Economic infiltration is not something the average Tom, Dick or Harry will detect at first sight” (NOW).

### [5.3] Lexical variability of *rob Peter to pay Paul*

The meaning of the idiom *rob Peter to pay Paul*, as defined by the NTC’s American Idioms Dictionary, is “to take from one in order to give to another” (Spears, 2000, p. 342). This general description is expressed in a more precise way in the Cambridge Dictionary (online): “to borrow money from one person to pay back money you borrowed from someone else”. The following table, Table 4, summarizes the results extracted from the NOW corpus.

	rob Peter to pay Paul	other
US	29	0
CA	29	tax Peter to pay Paul (2)
GB	18	0
IE	9	0
AU	17	0
NZ	9	0
IN	6	steal Peter to pay Paul (1)
ZA	17	0
NG	33	rub Peter to pay Paul (1); rubbing Peter to pay Paul (1); cheating Peter to pay Paul (1); rob Peter to pay N-Power (1)
KE	0	borrowing Peter to pay Paul (1)

Table 4

The idiom *rob Peter to pay Paul* is an example of an idiom whose proper noun component invariably stays the same. By contrast, the first word of the idiom, the verb *rob*, is, at least in certain varieties of English, subject to substitution, while the second verb of the idiom, *pay*, is not. Two observations may be of interest concerning this idiom. First, the repeated use of the verb *rub* instead of *rob* in Nigerian English; second, the almost synonymous nature of the *rob* substitutes: *tax*, *steal*, *cheat* and *borrow*. Another notable feature is the frequent use of the idiom in Nigerian English as well as the greatest number of possible modifications in this variety of English.

#### [5.4] Lexical variability of *not know someone from Adam, Johnny-come-lately, doubting Thomas* and *as patient as Job*

The last group, consisting of four idioms (*not know someone from Adam, Johnny-come-lately, doubting Thomas* and *as patient as Job*), can be regarded as a relatively homogeneous group, as almost no variability occurs in the NOW corpus. The only exception is the idiom *not know someone from Adam*, whose variability is inevitable, as the idiom contains the word *someone*, which must be replaced according to the actual needs of the sentence in which the idiom appears. The remaining three idioms do not seem to be subject to any type of variability, as the results of the research in the NOW corpus suggest. The idioms *Johnny-come-lately* and *doubting Thomas* seems to be in current use (264 and 445 hits, respectively), while the idiom *as patient as Job* is rather rare (1 hit in the NOW corpus).

### [6] Conclusion

The present paper analysed a group of idioms with regard to their variability in different varieties of English. The topic was inspired mainly by the article “Idioms in the making’ as evidence for variation in conceptual metaphor across varieties of English” (Callies, 2017), which argued for a more thorough investigation of the variability of idioms, subscribing to the cognitive linguistic and cultural linguistic view of idiomatic expressions.

The selected idioms, namely the idioms *Bob’s your uncle, before you could say Jack Robinson, every Tom, Dick, and Harry, rob Peter to pay Paul, (not) know someone from Adam, Johnny-come-lately, doubting Thomas* and *as patient as Job*, were investigated by means of the NOW corpus, which was assessed to be particularly suitable for comparisons across different English varieties. It was concluded that even though the canonical form of the selected idioms under investigation is still the most preferred form across different varieties of English, substitution of their individual components cannot be overlooked. However, the degree of variability differs when individual idioms are investigated in greater detail. The selected idioms were therefore divided into three groups, each displaying a different degree/type of variability.

The first group contains the idioms *Bob’s your uncle, before you can say Jack Robinson* and *every Tom, Dick, and Harry*. These idioms displayed a considerable variability of their proper noun component. The case study explored the context of these modifications of the idiom *Bob’s your uncle*. It was concluded that the part of the idiom which contains the proper name, *Bob*, is particularly susceptible to variation. *Bob* is replaced by other proper nouns/names, such as *Jah, Mao, Saint Nic, BoJo* and *Miyagi*. The findings therefore seem to support the cognitive linguistic view of idioms, which stresses the role of cognitive processes in understanding the meaning of the idiomatic expressions. Second, the role of context has proved to be an important factor in idiom modification. Contextual influence was determined in the other two idioms of this group as well.

The second group consists of the idioms *before you can say Jack Robinson, every Tom, Dick, and Harry* and *rob Peter to pay Paul*. These idioms display variability of other components than the proper noun component. For example, even though *before you can say Jack Robinson* can be considered the standard, the variety with *could* seems to be far more common among users of the language. A similar tendency can be traced in the substitution of *rob* for *rub* in the idiom *rob Peter to pay Paul* in Nigerian English. A certain tendency for almost synonymous substitutions can also be observed: *average, ignorant* and *all* for *every* in *every Tom, Dick, and Harry* or *tax, cheat, borrow* for *rob* in *rob Peter to pay Paul*.

The last group is formed by idioms displaying no variability in the NOW corpus – or, as in the case of *know someone from Adam*, in which the variability is inherent in the idiom, *someone* being substituted according to the grammatical and lexical needs of the particular sentence e.g. *know Peter/him from Adam*.

However, what remains to be investigated in greater detail is the extent of the influence of the cultural setting on the actual modifications of idioms. The presented analysis did not convincingly reveal a direct link between the English variety and the actual wording of the idiom. However, the extent of the presented case study is too limited to draw any definite conclusions regarding this hypothesis. On the other hand, it was revealed that the topic of the text in which the modified idiom is used, as well as the intention of the text producer, plays an important role in the process under investigation. Further research in this area, concerning a greater number of name-based idioms, can be conducted in two directions. On the one hand, the idioms can be further investigated to prove the links between different variations of the same idiom and the cultural setting in which it is dominant. It is advisable that a far larger corpus of idioms should be investigated in the future to be able to draw generalized conclusions regarding the lexico-grammatical variability of idioms. On the other hand, the question concerning the relationship between idiom variability and the pragmatic or stylistic reasons for the variability can also be addressed.

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## [List of abbreviations]

US – USA, CA – Canada, GB – Great Britain, IE – Ireland, AU – Australia, NZ – New Zealand, IN – India, LK – Sri Lanka, PK – Pakistan, BG – Bangladesh, MY – Malaysia, SG – Singapore, Ph – Philippines, HK – Hong Kong, ZA – South Africa, NG – Nigeria, GH – Ghana, KE – Kenya, TN – Tanzania, JM – Jamaica

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**[ book  
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**[*Understanding Intercultural Communication. Negotiating a Grammar of Culture*]**  
**Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, Second Edition, 2019.**

Friend or foe? Issues of intercultural communication appear to be heavily in demand in academia and/or education (i.e. college courses), and of course the field itself reflects on a variety of societal changes (globalization, migration, changing business practices, to name just a few).

In order to successfully navigate the demands and needs of changing interpersonal communication and organizational communication, and to successfully apply the findings of intercultural communication research in everyday use, one is always in search of new approaches, theories and outlooks that might be helpful and profitable in the intercultural communication classroom and beyond.

Teachers and academics in the field of intercultural communication are always on the hunt for new, refreshing, and up-to-date sources and information (including texts) to be incorporated into the classroom curriculum. Therefore, a new book on the topic is always welcome.

The author, Adrian Holliday, is a professor of applied linguistics and intercultural education at Canterbury Christ Church University, UK. He is an experienced academic and an author on topics that intersect at the crossroads of linguistics (English as a second/international language), cultural studies (intercultural communication) and research methodology.

The book contains nine chapters covering a total 181 pages. A slightly unusual and nontraditional concept involves establishing and presenting the list of figures, references, and acknowledgments at the beginning of the book. Then, the text follows with the presentation of the grammar of culture, cultural practices, investigating and constructing culture, the dialogue with structure, narratives of nation and history, discourses of culture, prejudice, cultural travel, and innovation, and the often-controversial notion of multiculturalism.

The length of the text is on the shorter side and the book's scope is relatively narrow; however, this is not something that should cause us to be dismissive of the whole work. The structure and the internal organization of the writing is very methodical, coherent and cohesive, which makes it ideal for quick reference and/or short assignments within a class.

The clear (and clearly structured) text is certainly a benefit for purposes of individual reading and preparation, accompanied with a plethora of examples (i.e. dialogues, interviews and their possible interpretations from different angles and contexts). The texts are firmly embedded in dichotomies and dualities (i.e. contradictory interpretations of situations and events). A larger part is devoted to stereotypes, self-stereotypes, and prejudice. Information is frequently presented in the form of charts and tables. One might even read this text as a guide on how to navigate a different culture (and how to explain that to students).

The potential weakness of the text does not lie predominantly in the content, but in its structure. It is a relatively short

text (more of a reference book, a supplementary text, rather than an actual textbook itself). It takes one prevailing and significant approach to culture and intercultural studies, and that is through the linguistic lens only (i.e. does linguistics dominate in an intercultural communication classroom?). Also, the list of references clearly suggests taking only the linguistic approach to issues of intercultural communication; there is no reference to cultural values, cultural dimensions, and cultural competencies related to cultural values (such as time, distance, power – as known from theories of G. Hofstede and F. Trompenaars, for example).

The ideal target audience might consist of various individuals and groups, such as academics and/or university/college teachers seeking a reference book for courses in intercultural communication. Also, it might be helpful for teaching foreign languages (i.e. Czech as a second/foreign language) to appropriately relate to the issues a student might be dealing with – for example, it might be helpful when seeking answers to questions such as how polite is polite (sociolinguistic issues within cultures).

It is also suitable as a supplementary text for assigning course readings (the classes might fluctuate from intercultural communication to research methods – how to conduct ethnographic research, qualitative and quantitative methods).

It is not a “traditional” textbook in the sense of explanatory theoretical frameworks and chapters, examples, exercises or discussions. However, it is suitable for additional discussions.

The book is a relatively subtle text that might be easily overlooked in the sea

of more “attention-seeking” (i.e. more aggressively marketed) texts; however, this should not stop one from reading it.

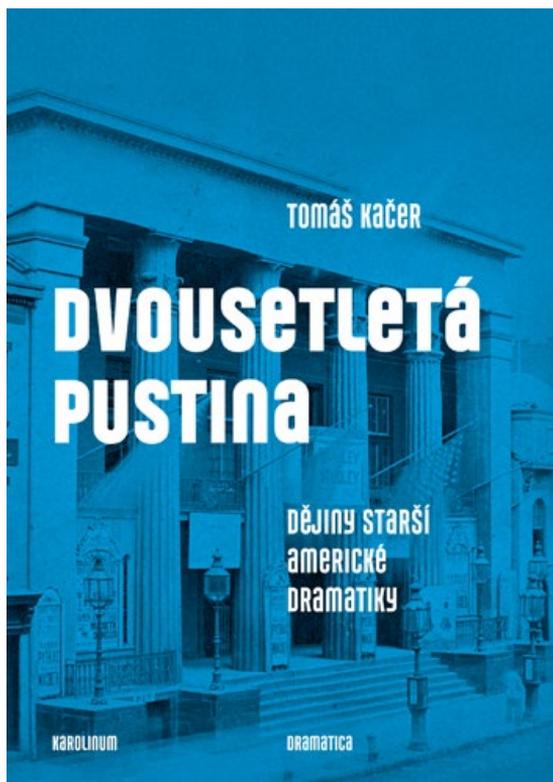
**Veronika Zavřelová**

University of New York in Prague

**[ news,  
announcements ]**



## [New Books]



*Dvousetletá pustina—Dějiny starší americké dramatiky*

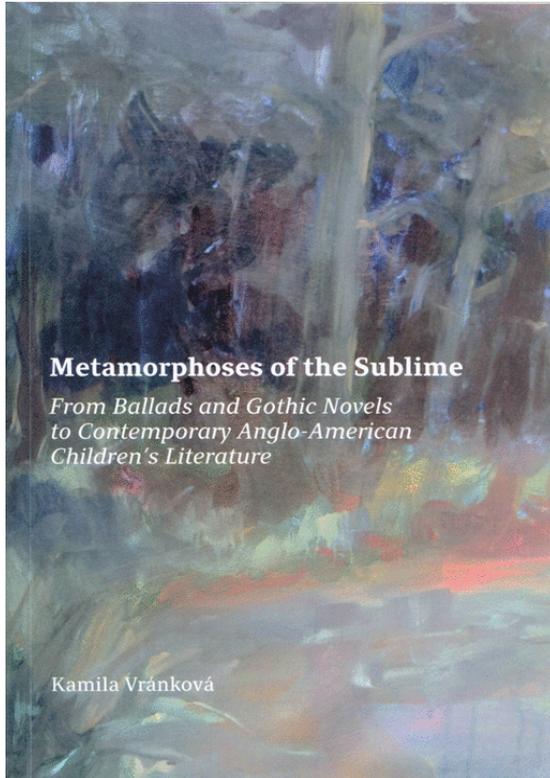
**Tomáš Kačer**

paperback, 380 pp., 1. edition

**Published:** Karolinum, December 2019

This book represents the first Czech history of drama in the United States of America, from its beginnings in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century through 1916. The most prominent movements and works are placed in the context of artistic, theatre, social and political changes, which directly influenced them.

The book is divided into two sections. The first part contains an exposition, subdivided into the stages of the development of older American drama, while the second part consists of translated examples of representative works from the period. It serves as a history of the development of this rather neglected genre as well as an anthology of texts which illustrate this development.



***Metamorphoses of the Sublime: From Ballads and Gothic Novels  
to Contemporary Anglo-American Children's Literature***

**Kamila Vránková**

paperback, 167 pp., 1. edition

**Published:** České Budějovice: University of South Bohemia, 2019

The monograph traces the metamorphoses of the concept of the sublime in Anglo-American literature on a number of canonical and less well-known works from medieval ballads and the Gothic novels to contemporary literature for young readers. The deep analysis of the selected texts shows and confirms the lasting popularity and relevance of the sublime over the centuries.

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# [Call for Papers]

## Doing Southern Studies Today

International Conference Humboldt University in Berlin  
14–15 January 2021

In the field of Southern Studies, the first twenty years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century were defined by attempts to formulate and visualize the future of Southern Studies, as evidenced by publications such as Suzanne W. Jones and Sharon Monteith's *South to a New Place: Region, Literature, Culture* (2002), Jon Smith's *Finding Purple America: The South and the Future of American Cultural Studies* (2013), or Zackary Vernon's *Ecocriticism and the Future of Southern Studies* (2019) – to name only a few. The “future”, most publications propose, lies beyond traditional narratives of Southern exceptionalism and sectionalism that promote a specific “sense of place” that cannot be found outside the South. A more dynamic and global understanding of the South needs to be implemented if Southern Studies wants to contribute to a critical engagement with current and past cultural and social developments, in and outside the U. S. Despite the expansion of the scope of Southern Studies though, the ‘old’ questions remain: What and where is “the South”? What is “southern”? While “sense-of-place” regionalism, a rather essentialist and nativist approach to being “southern,” is outdated, the concern with the “place of ‘place’” in Southern Studies remains. This conference aims to bring together scholars who want to share their work on “the South” and “doing Southern Studies” in an uncommon place: Berlin – a place outside “the South”. We don't expect definite answers to the ‘old’ questions (although we welcome them). We rather want to explore the trajectories of Southern Studies in and outside the U.S. We owe our title to Scott Romine and Jennifer Rae Greeson who claim that “[d]oing Southern Studies is unmasking and refusing the binary thinking – ‘North’/‘South,’ nation/South, First World/Third World, self/other,” it is “thinking geographically, thinking historically, thinking relationally, thinking about power, thinking about justice, thinking back” (2016: 4). We take their definitions as this conference's objective and seek an exchange of these thoughts. We are particularly interested in papers that tackle the South as a “multiplicity of communities” (Gray 2002: xxiii), factoring in race, gender, sexuality and ethnicity; the role (or rather the problematic exclusivity) of whiteness in Southern Studies; imaginations of “the South” in popular media; the Global South and the possible transnational routes of Southern Studies.

The first confirmed keynote speaker is Martyn Richard Bone (University of Copenhagen), author of *The Postsouthern Sense of Place in Contemporary Fiction* (2005).

Please send abstracts of no more than 300 words and a short biographical info to conference organizers Evangelia Kindinger (Humboldt University in Berlin) and Greta Kaisen (Humboldt University in Berlin) at [doingsouthernstudies@gmail.com](mailto:doingsouthernstudies@gmail.com). The deadline for paper proposals is 1 August 2020.



## Odešel Josef Grmela

3. května letošního roku zemřel ve věku 77 let přední anglista a amerikanista doc. PhDr. Josef Grmela, CSc., vysokoškolský pedagog a odborník na anglickou a americkou literaturu. V letech 1970–1993 působil na univerzitě v Prešově a od roku 1993 na Katedře anglického jazyka a literatury Pedagogické fakulty Univerzity Karlovy v Praze. Jeho odborný zájem se soustředil především na americkou literaturu a historii, ale rovněž na českou recepci amerických a irských spisovatelů. Je autorem nebo spoluautorem celé řady publikací a učebnic, které vyšly v České republice a na Slovensku. Několik generací studentů ho mohou znát jako autora dvou kapitol knihy *Dějiny anglické literatury* (Praha: SPN 1988), již publikoval společně s Martinem Hilským, Jiřím Markem a Evou Oliveriusovou. Týkaly se kritického realismu a viktoriánské literatury a anglické literatury první poloviny 20. století. Se stejnými autory se podílel i na vydání *Antologie anglické literatury* (Praha: SPN 1984). Jeho publikační činnost doplňují i literárněkritické studie, publikované časopisecky a ve sbornících u nás a v zahraničí. V Josefu Grmelovi ztrácejí jeho kolegové laskavého člověka, který nikdy nešetřil vlídným slovem a kterého si pro jeho odborné znalosti hluboce vážili. Čest jeho památce.

s.k.