

[ostrava  
journal of  
english  
philology ] vol. 5  
no. 2 ] 2013



# **Ostrava Journal of English Philology**

Volume 5 • Number 2 • 2013



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# **Literature and Culture**



# Not Only to Be Read: Aural and Visual Aspects of Samuel Beckett's *III Seen III Said*

Galina Kiryushina

Charles University, Prague

## Abstract

*This paper offers an examination of aural and visual features of Samuel Beckett's novel *III Seen III Said*. The main focus is on the methods by which these features appear within a prose text, and on their role as stimuli for a perception-driven approach to narrative construction. The motif of voice is established as crucial for Beckett's work, and oral expression is discussed in terms of its characteristic properties. The text's visual quality is approached from a cinematic perspective and investigated in parallel to Eisensteinian montage. The interaction between the two types of perception is considered in relation to Iser's reader-response criticism.*

*Keywords: voice, reader-response theory, montage, cinematography, perception*

This article is a result of a 2012 project supported by the Internal Grant Scheme of the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague.

Almost the whole body of Samuel Beckett's work possesses a rather curious and distinguishable feature: his dramatic pieces, prose writing and poetry all seem to share certain endlessly recycled and reshaped motifs and formal characteristics. It has been argued, chiefly in relation to poetry and music, that the works of Beckett frequently exceed the boundaries of their genre by readily adopting qualities of other means of expression. In Beckett, prose and dramatic dialogue become increasingly melodic and elliptical as they take on the characteristics of poetry; music is assigned a "speaking" role in radio drama; the stage in theatrical works is often left dim and bare, with nearly all action being evoked verbally by voices resonating on- and off-stage.

The remarkable audio-visual qualities of *Ill Seen Ill Said* (1981) in particular owe much not only to Beckett's familiarity with various media, but also to his experimentation with the limits of language and the possibilities of the human voice. On their progressive path towards minimalism, Beckett's late texts address common themes of expression and perception from a challenging new perspective. In this sense, *Ill Seen Ill Said* attempts to explore two essential, and most Beckettian, types of perception – the aural and the visual. However dissimilar and seemingly dissociated from one another the two types may appear, the novel shows them coexisting in a peculiar symbiosis; their incessant interaction creates an incredibly dynamic perceptual experience for the reader. To borrow a quotation from Beckett himself, however anachronistically, *Ill Seen Ill Said* indeed seems to be a text "[...] not to be read – or rather, [...] not only to be read. It is to be looked at and listened to" (Beckett, *Disjecta* 27). Although the novel itself is unquestionably different in its nature from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, which the young Beckett attempts to defend in his ambitious 1929 essay "Dante . . . Bruno . Vico . . . Joyce," this observation predicts a direction in which his own writerly aesthetics would develop almost half a century later.

The spare, minimalistic language of *Ill Seen Ill Said* is quite possibly that of a speaking voice/director/editor – in short an authorial authority whose condensed vocal evocation of a memory fragment transforms itself into the film-like visuality of the early twentieth century montage cinema. Linguistic economy and the careful arrangement of words in the text work directly with the reader's perceptive and cognitive processes, producing maximum audio-visual effect with minimum words utilized. In the inter-permeability of the aural and the visual, the creator and the created, the narrator's evocation and the reader's perception of this evocation, Beckett's novel aspires to reproduce the complexity of a multi-perceptual representation. The text urges its readers to mis-perceive with a new subjectivity the objects already once subjectively mis-perceived; to "see" the "ill seen" while trying to grasp the "ill said".

As a considerable number of Beckett's other works, *Ill Seen Ill Said* is literally called into existence by the highly melodious voice of a disembodied, self-reflective narrator. One of Beckett's fondest "obsessions",<sup>1</sup> the voice commonly finds itself caught in a wordy loop of the creator– created polarity, a reciprocal interplay between the narrators and their linguistically conjured inventions. Here, the voice encourages itself and its perceivers to visualize a series of moving images "in order to resume" (51). It needs to make itself perceived in order to exist, if only as a voice echoed in the reader's "madhouse of the skull and nowhere else" (53). Accordingly, the nameless woman inhabiting the landscape of *Ill Seen Ill Said* is an "object of narrator's creation, the narrator himself often a creation, 'devised' [...] to someone else's imaginings" (Gontarski ix). Both the narrator's and the woman's "being" becomes equated with their "being perceived": the voice conjures up visual imagery which is thus presented to the "gazing" other, the reader.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Beckett's narrator is aware of the total and deadly interdependence of the creator and the created, reporting that "[the woman] shows herself only to her own. But she has no own. Yes yes she has one. And who has her" (49). He insinuates his control over the woman as she is clearly nothing more than a product of his imagining mind. This cyclical interaction between the "seen", the "said", and the related "heard" is further affirmed by the voice's proclamation that "she needs nothing. Nothing utterable. Whereas the other" (51). The

woman only needs to materialize before the narrator's inner eye, whereas the narrator's own existence can only be secured by his voicing of these imaginings.

The voice, in S. E. Gontarski's words "Beckett's [first] major fictional innovation" (viii), is a dominant narrative principle which should not be entirely identified with written language as it is distinctly constructed "not *only* to be read". The author himself once affirmed that his writing had always been composed for a voice, and, as Ludovic Janvier also points out, Beckett's texts are based on the voice's vocal quality and a physical rhythm that he had found in it.<sup>3</sup> Reflecting Beckett's intention to bring the formal structure closer to the text's content, the voice's momentariness, dynamic nature, performativity and subjectivity are the qualities that most eminently contribute to such an approximation.

The transience of oral expression accounts especially for the text's dynamics, since its content is constantly changing and thus endlessly escaping characterization. Also in *Ill Seen Ill Said* the uttered word can be said to exist only temporarily at the moment of its articulation; once silenced by another word or a pause, its significance becomes lost and its meaning untraceable in time. Consequently, in order to exist, the voice needs to go on narrating; the performative quality of language enables the articulated objects to come to life, while it naturally serves as a means of justification of the narrator's own existence. The formal construction of the novel likewise reflects and emphasizes the oral quality of the narrative. The voice repeatedly comes back to its previous utterances, negating, readjusting, clarifying and reshaping them with added information or self-addressed semi-rhetorical questions that contribute to the overall impression of the narrative's being carried out *viva voce*: "Resume the – what is the word? What the wrong word?" (51). Not only does the narrator consistently omit words and phrases, but his subjective testimony also lacks punctuation which would indicate and determine the internal structure of the individual sentences. This allows for the desired ambiguity of interpretation and powerfully solicits engagement and active cognitive response from the reader/listener. The sense of ephemerality pertaining to spoken language is further associated with the fleetingness of the narrator's own existence, yet again relating the notion of content to its form and reinforcing the creator-created codependence.

Furthermore, the utilization of voice provides space for disembodied narrators freed from the specificities of name, time, and space, thus ensuring their ultimate subjectivity. On the one hand, it generates constant uncertainty on the part of the audience, and on the other an incessant need to overcome this uncertainty by attempting to arrive at a logical conclusion. In this way, the subjectivity of the narrative becomes analogous in its scope to the reader's own subjectivity; the voice's elliptical dictate becomes almost entirely dependent on his or her ability to reassemble, fill and refill the gaps produced by the narrating authority. Such an active, dialogic nature of the interaction between the reader and the text has been emphasized and further discussed in reader-response criticism. Notably, as Wolfgang Iser points out in *The Implied Reader*, the dynamic reciprocity between the constituent parts of a literary work and the reader's creative imagination triggered and "set in motion" by such a process becomes essential for the work's aesthetic effect (277). The reader is constantly urged to search for a total, comprehensible meaning within a literary text, particularly when encountered with the gaps of what remains "unwritten" among the fixed points of authorial guidance (275). The role of the voice as a narrator in Beckett's work is primarily to *activate*, and its subjectivity serves as an ironic point of departure

precisely because it constantly tests the reader's reliance on this guidance. On that account, Beckett presupposes the reader's familiarity with the characteristics of spoken language to ensure that the voice of his novel is indeed "perceived" as a voice. The narrator's existence-as-perception therefore accentuates the fact that both himself and his creations are in their entirety a product of the reader's own imagination. According to John Dewey, "to perceive, a beholder must *create* his own experience" (Iser 288), and so the novel's prescribed auditory effects have to be reproduced aurally at least inside the reader's head, for indeed "the text only takes on life when it is realized" (Iser 274).<sup>4</sup>

The counterpart of the spoken word in Beckett is the visuality of motion, and *Ill Seen Ill Said* in particular is composed of images that are moving, in both its literal and figurative sense. The narrative voice – or, rather, the voice narrating – often employs techniques and imagery reminiscent of monochrome silent films of the 1920s, Beckett's admiration of which is reflected in many of his works for media and, perhaps most notably, in *Film*. The narrator of *Ill Seen Ill Said* refers both directly and unobtrusively to cinematographic practices and utilizes various cinematic effects to project the fragmented story onto the screen of the reader's mind. His account exhibits similarities with a film in the process of its (re) making, and the voice itself adopts characteristics of a director/editor who both controls and is controlled by the peculiar "motion picture".

As in a number of other works, action and speech remain separated, an important notion that Beckett tended to emphasize throughout his artistic output regardless of the medium employed. Nonetheless, the two types of perception – vocality and filmic visuality – are also in synthesis here: the interaction of their common qualities is vital for the text's audio-visual appeal. Both the characteristics of voice as discussed above and the individual "shots" juxtaposed and superimposed in an imaginary "montage" correspond to Iser's theory of narrative gaps. In *Ill Seen Ill Said*, the narrator is heard reciting his lines into being and, consequently, leaves the reader to extract meaning from the endlessly readjusted and rearranged sequences of contrasting "film shots". The significance of employing "voice-over narrators" in Beckett's plays for television is accentuated in Jonathan Bignell's recent book *Beckett on Screen*: Bignell points out the narrators' authority as mediators between the spectators and the setting of the plays, which "reinforces the possibility that the represented environment is in some sense a creation or an illusion" (90). The fact that the voice-over naturally remains perceived separately from the images projected on screen adds profoundly to the overall sense of extreme subjectivity produced by the narrative. With every word ill-chosen, the images constituting "this still shadowy album" (Beckett, *Ill Seen* 50) become alternately clearer and obscured again as the narrator "flips" through its pages. Such a process is thus essentially dynamic and requires the reader's active and cautious involvement in every instance of the text's fragmented unfolding, which at the same time endorses and frustrates expectations.

As James Knowlson notes in his biography of Beckett, the author had always shown profuse interest in film and, during his formative years as an artist and critic, he studied in depth the theoretical writings of Soviet and German cinematographers including Vsevolod Pudovkin, Sergei Eisenstein and Rudolf Arnheim (226). Elsewhere, Knowlson points out Beckett's ardent interest in theories of film form and "especially in montage or 'constructive editing', that was to make an important contribution to his future career [...] as a playwright and director" (Knowlson and Haynes 119). Beckett would display great enthusiasm

especially for theories of editing and Pudovkin's "discussions of 'rhythmic composition'" (Knowlson and Haynes 119). However, he would not concur, Knowlson also notes, with Pudovkin's "emphasis on realism in both stage and film acting [...], as well as [with] its didactic, propagandist perspective" (119). It may be also assumed, from Beckett's unwillingness to submit to the idea of an uninterrupted and objectively "realistic" plot, that he would reject the filmmaker's insistence on the "essential" narrative continuity and "that unity, which conditions the value of any work of art" (Pudovkin 32). Rather, the philosophical and aesthetic affiliation with Sergein Eisenstein's films and theories of montage based chiefly on the notion of conflict and opposition become strongly felt in Beckett's work decades later: very much like the matters of poetry and voice, they find their way not only into his television scripts and his one short film, but also into his multifaceted prose.

Eisenstein's view on the poetics of montage is perhaps most adequately characterized by the juxtaposition of two contrastive images that would, in their dynamic clash, eventually give rise to a synthesized image of an unforeseen "third something", a concept shaped into its wholeness by the viewer's cognitive processes (*Film Sense* 10). In Eisensteinian terms, "[...] to achieve its result, a work of art directs all the refinement of its methods to the *process*. A work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging images in the feelings and minds of the spectator" (*Film Sense* 17; emphasis in the original). This accords with Iser's examination of Beckett's early trilogy of novels: in *The Implied Reader* he claims that the aesthetic dynamism of those texts lies precisely in the narrators' incessant articulation of contradictory statements that prevent the readers from achieving their cognitive goal of whole-formation (177). Eisenstein would argue, as his vision of the objective of all artistic creation may suggest, that "the desired image is *not fixed or ready-made, but arises – is born*" dynamically out of the combination of the author's creative input and the viewer's or the reader's perceptual and cognitive analysis of it (*Film Sense* 31; emphasis in the original). Consequently, Eisenstein's understanding of the gestalt process presupposes the eventual formation of a concrete whole, however unpredictable, which is based on the dynamics of the work and the individual viewer's subjective comprehension of it. By contrast, while Iser's analysis of Beckett's early trilogy does point out the texts' dynamism, it also accentuates the impossibility, on the reader's part, of achieving any solid and complete apprehension (177).

Rather than employing montage techniques for didactic goals, as it would frequently be the case with Soviet cinema, Beckett draws inspiration from it for aesthetic purposes. This method both mirrors the text's minimalism and allows Beckett to question the conceptions of reliability of knowledge, memory and "objective" reality. The images created by the voice in *Ill Seen Ill Said*, however punctilious their evocation may seem to be, can never be brought fully to life as the novel's overall imagery of "never having been" (73) tends to suggest.<sup>5</sup> The cyclical game that Beckett plays with his readers is based precisely on the interaction between the changeability of the text and the readers' cognitive urge to fill in the gaps produced by it. The voice's guidance through the darkness of the narrative constantly fails since its unreliability as a narrator merges with its performative power not only to create, but also to destroy and recreate differently. Indeed, everything in *Ill Seen Ill Said* emerges out of the darkness only in order to be consumed by this darkness again before it can ever be "properly born".<sup>6</sup>

The imagery of the novel is called forth in such a way as to reflect the unusual, almost monochromatic quality of the visual aspect, a feature typical of many of Beckett's later theatrical pieces and the majority of his works for television. The contrast between light and darkness serves, according to Eisenstein, to stress the work's intensity and dynamics by juxtaposition of two conflicting parts within a structure (*Film Form* 38–39).<sup>7</sup> The quasi-impressionistic arrangement of blacks and whites in the voice's account is reflected in its direct employment of the words themselves, and also indirectly by incorporation of specifically coloured objects in the narrative. For instance, while "all is black" (45) there are still "[c]halkstones of striking effect in the light of the moon" and the reader is called to imagine "[h]ow whiter and whiter as it climbs it whitens more and more the stones" (46). The "[...] chalky soil. Innumerable white scabs all shapes and sizes" is complemented "[a]fter long hesitation" by "ovines" because, as the voice assures itself, "they are white and make do with little" (47), and soon enough the narrator starts regretting not having created "[l]ambs for their whiteness [...] [w]hite splotches in the grass" (48). As the ghostly woman travels from her cabin to the tomb, "[o]n the snow her long shadow keeps her company" (50).

The antithesis of black and white, darkness and light, is present throughout the text and its metaphorical use becomes even more apparent in the passage where the voice first considers the idea of "[l]etting] her vanish. And the rest. For good" (60). Such a moment, in its gradual, step-by-step nature, recalls the inverse process of creation as depicted in the biblical Genesis narrative. After the voice has erased the woman and "the rest", it continues to rid itself of "[...] the sun. Last rays. And the moon. And Venus. Nothing left but black sky. White earth. Or inversely. No more sky or earth. [...] Nothing but black and white. Everywhere no matter where. But black. Void. Nothing else" (60). The ideas of overwhelming blackness and wordless void are yet again contrasted in Beckett and, in this case, tied closely with the creator-created polarity. In his endeavour to "breathe that void" (78) by ceasing to speak, the narrator has to free himself of the objects haunting his imagination and of his existential need to create. As long as the objects can still be perceived they exist – and this is precisely the reason why Beckett's narrator urges himself once again to "[c]ontemplate" them (60). The word "contemplate" here suggests both imagining total destruction as outlined by the narrator in a moment of panic, and re-considering the possible consequences before he resumes his narrative. Paradoxically enough, although the voice possesses the ultimate ability to create as well as to destroy, it can never achieve a complete undoing by means of language: as far as the apocalyptic narrative is recorded in words and thus perceived, it still has to go on existing – and so does the narrator himself.

On the whole, Beckett's employment of the internalized projection upon the reader's mind represents a curious cinematic experiment recorded in words, rather than a reflection of a more common literary tradition of narrative. In addition to the monochromatic visual aspect, the text also uses other specifically filmic notions. These include distinct ways of handling narrative time, textual dynamics arising from various "unexpected conflicts" between the "shots" (Eisenstein, *Film Form* 39) and also, more importantly, utilization of "cuts" and "montage" effects. All these techniques are employed as to fit the general theme of the novel: the narrator's effort to evoke and re-create in the present the subjective images of objects as they might have been once perceived.

The immanent time of the imagining mind constantly alters its pace and is adjusted to the narrator's artistic conduct in a manner that indeed implies a markedly filmic representation of the time passing. Straight from the beginning, the "voice-over" establishes the tense for its inventions: "[a]ll this in the present as had she the misfortune to be still of this world" (45). Such proclamation points to the voice's supremacy over the narrative it conjures up with both the use and the omission of words. The transience of speech mirrors the rapidly transmitted "film frames" that the voice sets into motion, thus making the fleetingness of form echo the elusive nature of the text's content. Particularly in its utilization of the present tense, the voice's account is brought even closer to cinematic representation: because the reader is lured straight into the fragmentary action and instructed to experience it immediately, the temporal aspect of the text calls for its imagined execution in film terms.

For instance, the voice's examination of the "[c]lose-up of a dial" confirms the unusual rendering of narrative time: "[the hand] [l]eaps from dot to dot with so lightening a leap that but for its new position it had not stirred. Whole nights may pass as may but a fraction of a second or any intermediate lapse of time soever before it flings itself from one degree to the next" (69). On other occasions, the narrator forces its own and the reader's imagination to shift "quick to the other window" (46), to "quick seize her" (50), to imagine the curtain "[s]uddenly open. A flash. The suddenness of all!" (52–53) and the woman "[s]uddenly still and as suddenly on her way again" (55), with the night reluctant to fall while she makes for her cabin because "[...] the time slows all this while. Suits its speed to hers" (56). The narrator in turns slows and hastens the time flow, which makes the reader acutely aware of the contrasts in speed between the individual fragments while all action remains tied to the immediate present. This accords with the previously discussed characteristics of spoken language, as well as with the instantaneous nature of action presented on screen: "the [...] tense in film and television is always present (because the image is present on the screen to the spectator) [...] [and] is based on the denotation that derives from the photographic basis of the film and television media" (Bignell 27–8).

The voice's effort to bring into life the image of the ghostly woman, to "reinvoke or resurrect a lost and beloved person," as is said to often be the case with Beckett's television plays (Bignell 28), acquires its powerful effect chiefly by virtue of the text's filmic qualities. It is not easily distinguishable from the voice's chaotic account whether the woman is a dream, a memory or a fantasy. All that is known about her is that she is far from being a "pure figment" (53) in the narrator's confusion of "[t]hings and imaginings" (53), "[t]hat old tandem" (65). However, his obsessive attempts to imagine the woman again and again result in the gradual disintegration of the image, which reveals, after all, her connection with the process of remembering and re-invoking: "Remembrance! When all worse there than when first ill seen [...] Worse than ever. Unchanged for the worse" (74). Consequently, if the individual narrated scenes are viewed as photographs or single film frames, they unquestionably act as a means of preservation of one particular moment when the time is always "that time". If the sequenced stills representing past actions are brought to motion, the result would inevitably be the impression of them coming alive and "being" in the present. Such a mechanism explains the narrator's obsessive need to gather all the images together in his memory: he strives to evoke each of the "frames" with the most detailed precision, re-assembles them in a seemingly correct order and sets them into

motion by way of the ostensible immediacy of representation pertaining to both voice and film. The effect of nostalgia and the woman's relation to former times is crucially supported by the novel's monochromatic aspect, as noted earlier. Beckett himself confirmed that the black and white rendering of the transmitted images "seemed to belong to a more distant fictional time than the implied present of the action seen in colour" – a statement based on the observation and comparison of *Quad I* and *II*, produced in both full colour and monochrome, respectively (Bignell 28).

The alteration in speed of the verbally evoked actions also contributes to the sense of conflict arising from the juxtaposition of individual "shots", and enhances the dynamics of the "film" thus created. If Eisenstein's method of analyzing poetry as singular consecutive camera shots is adopted and applied to the opening sentences of *Ill Seen Ill Said*, some curious observations can be made regarding the filmic quality of its visual aspect. The first three sentences are constructed as follows: "From where she lies she sees Venus rise. On. From where she lies when the skies are clear she sees Venus rise followed by the sun" (45). Avoiding the separation of this section into individual lines of poetry, and instead examining it as intended by the author as three consecutive sentences, the "shooting script" (Eisenstein, *Film Sense* 49) arises as follows:

1. From where she lies (P)
2. She sees Venus rise. (A)
3. On. (x)
4. From where she lies (P)
5. When the skies are clear (P)
6. She sees Venus rise (A)
7. Followed by the sun. (A)

It is observable how the two longer sentences may be divided into two and four images or, for our purposes, "camera shots", respectively.<sup>8</sup> The letters (P) and (A) have been added to mark the passive/active nature of each "shot": in the passive ones no motion is registered, while the active ones show objects in movement. The third "shot", "On" (x), does not transfer any particular image and functions purely as a divide or a pause, and may be apprehended as, for instance, a freeze frame: an effect achieved by a repeated duplication of a single film frame to give the illusion, when the sequence is projected on the screen, of an image frozen in time. Such "frozen tableaux" often reappear in Beckett's theatrical works and can ensure, on the one hand, a perceivable fragmentation of action, and lay additional dramatic emphasis on it on the other.<sup>9</sup> It would be possible to regard "On" merely as a signal for a "cut" between the two parts, but such an identification would deprive it of its temporal function expressing a pause that the voice requires before it can eventually proceed with its narrative. The alternation between active and passive takes, "[s]low systole diastole" (*Ill Seen* 60), as well as between long and short sentences, follows rather meticulously the concept of Eisenstein's conflicting montage: "Rhythm constructed with successive long phrases and phrases as short as a single word, introduces a dynamic characteristic to the image of the montage construction" (*Film Sense* 48).

The choice of words in the opening sentences of *Ill Seen Ill Said* elicits an effect comparable to that of time-lapse cinematography, a technique allowing the filmmaker to

capture processes occurring over prolonged periods of time so that, when projected upon the screen, the action seems to be considerably and unusually accelerated. As early as the mid-1920s, filmmakers and film theoreticians, such as Germaine Dulac and Jean Epstein, had been noticing the incredible possibilities of the time-lapse technique. In 1925, Dulac especially stresses the transformation of film into “a sort of microscope” that makes the “slow-motion study” of flowers perceivable to the human eye: with great excitement she talks about “[f]lowers [...] whose [...] birth, blooming, death, and whose infinitesimal development, whose movements equivalent to suffering and joy are unknown to us, appear before us in cinema in the fullness of their existence” (Dulac 60). Epstein likewise praises the “[a]stonishing abridgements in [the] temporal perspective [...] permitted by the cinema – notably in those amazing glimpses into the lives of plants and crystals” (Epstein, 54). *Ill Seen Ill Said* abounds in vivid examples of a similar cinematic enterprise, suggesting Beckett’s attempt at reviving and exploring this powerful visual experience on a textual level. For instance, while the verbs “lies” and “rise” in the opening passage evoke processes of lengthy temporal duration – the movement of celestial bodies in particular – their counterposition in a sentence with the verb “sees”, which on the contrary suggests an immediate and brief action, does indeed create an impression of a film being played in fast-forward. The excerpt is positioned between the sentences depicting the stillness and passivity on the woman’s part, while the “point-of-view shots” of the planet, the Sun and other natural processes display a great degree of activity, which further supports the effect of time lapse: “Rigid upright on her old chair she watches for the radiant one. [...] She sits on erect and rigid in the deepening gloom” (49). The action depicted in the following sentence, “[i]t emerges from out the last rays and sinking even brighter is engulfed in its turn” (49), would normally take a longer period of time and also appears to be notably accelerated and condensed.

For Eisenstein, montage is naturally “inherent in all art” and is essentially “the mightiest means for remoulding nature” (*Film Form* 5). His dialectic approach to film form quite deliberately works to disturb the continuity of a logical storyline: the viewer is presented with a series of discordant, colliding shots, whose “‘dramatic’ principle” (*Film Form* 49) is effected mainly through rhythmic intercutting between them. In this, Eisenstein would oppose Pudovkin’s “‘epic’ principle” of “unrolling” an idea within the narrative structure (*Film Form* 49), the continuity of which Pudovkin himself would perceive as “essential”: “[w]ith the loss of continuity, we lose the unity of the work – its style and, with that, its effect” (32). Nevertheless, Eisenstein’s films would rarely lose their effect and would instead profit immensely from the principles of diversity, collision, and the “dynamics of montage” that would “serve as impulses driving forward a total film” (*Film Form* 38). Not even in the case of Beckett’s novel does the disruption of continuity bring about the loss of its effectiveness as a work of art; Beckett’s idiosyncratic way of constructing his narrative in *Ill Seen Ill Said* is indeed montage-like and theoretically Eisensteinian. Borrowing terminology from film, the major, visible “cuts” in the novel can be said to divide the whole text formally into paragraphs of varying lengths, while the minor ones appear within the paragraphs themselves.

Initially, the effect produced by the text’s division into many individual sections is striking particularly due to the rapid shifts in their subject matter. However, the paragraphs are interconnected with both the preceding and the following chunks of narrative

by slightly varying, yet recurring imagery patterns. These define the voice's account as an endless attempt to grasp a fleeting memory which is always already a subjective fantasy. The cognitive "gaps" arising between the final lines of each of the paragraphs and the opening lines of the successive ones are indeed reminiscent of Eisenstein's approach to film editing. Any major change in the subject of these passages, as well their juxtaposition, elicits an intellectual response from the reader/viewer as he or she attempts to logically link the objects together: "All this in the present as had *she* the misfortune to be still of this world. [End of paragraph. Cut] The *cabin*. Its situation" (45); "Rigid with face and hands against the pane *she* stands and marvels long. [End of paragraph. Cut] *The two zones* form a roughly circular whole" (46, emphases added). The effect of abrupt, cinematic cuts is sometimes accentuated by the narrator's self-addressed commentaries and questions marking both the digressions of his wandering imagination and his enforced attempts at a flawless reconstruction of the narrative he pursues. These commentaries are frequently positioned at the boundaries of individual paragraphs and, similarly to the urging "On" discussed earlier, they cannot merely indicate a "cut". Rather, they precede these "cuts" by suggesting a specific kind of shot similar to a freeze frame, for instance: "Are they always the same? Do they see her? Enough. [End of paragraph. Cut] A moor would have better met the case" (47), "If only all could be pure figment. Neither be nor been nor by any shift to be. Gently gently. On. Careful. [End of paragraph. Cut] Here to the rescue two lights. Two small skylights" (53).

A more notable instance of the employment of "cuts" and the conflicts they induce can be perceived within the individual paragraphs themselves. Here again a close examination of the opening section will be illustrative. The voice constructs the initial sequence of five related scenes which are interlocked not only by the objects it evokes, but also by the employment of a technique similar to the cinematic "jump cut" or "stop motion". The former is an editorial device that utilizes an observable interruption to the action within the same shot by accelerating the time flow and abruptly cutting to a later action. The latter produces an effect similar to the earlier discussed time lapse: individual still images are photographed of manually manipulated objects, forging an impression of their independent movement when the frames are projected in a sequence. The effect of "jump cuts" in Beckett's text is thus mostly accomplished by "switching suddenly from one action to another," "cutting from one time to another or from one place to another with the same camera angle or lens," and by "cutting from a long or medium shot to a close-up of the same character or action" (Konigsberg 200). Thus, the major "cuts" occur most notably with each alteration of the woman's position, "an exercise in human origami" (Gontarski vii), as if the camera remained stationary while recording a long shot of the room:

From where she *lies* she sees Venus rise. [...] At evenings when the skies are clear she savours its star's revenge. [Cut] At the other window. *Rigid upright on her old chair* she watches for the radiant one. [...] She *sits* on erect and rigid in the deepening gloom. [Cut] Such helplessness *to move* she cannot help. *Heading on foot* for a particular point often she freezes on the way. [...] [Cut] *Down on her knees* especially she finds it hard not to remain so forever. Hand resting on hand on some convenient support. [...] And on them her head. [Cut] There then she *sits* as though turned to

stone face to the night. (45; Note that only the major “jump cuts” of the woman’s varying positions are indicated. Cuts to close-ups and point-of-view shots are not marked above. All emphases added.)

What must also be noted is the unfolding nature of the words that Beckett makes the voice utter, which increases the narrative’s resemblance to a cinematic project. With each word pronounced, the “camera shots” can also alter, although most unobtrusively to the reader/viewer: “Hand resting on hand” indicates a sudden “close-up” to the woman’s folded hands, which is instantly followed by a slightly broader one, “on some convenient support,” and zooming out further to “[a]nd on them her head.” By providing additional information about its subject, the voice simulates the movement of the imagined camera without explicitly stating the changes to its position and angle: “Seated on the stones she is seen from behind. From the waist up” (58).

Some other unquestionably technical descriptions are frequently featured in the text and speak of Beckett’s familiarity with cinematography. At times, the voice/director/editor employs specific techniques and uses certain terms rather unequivocally: “Close-up then. In which in defiance of reason the nail prevails. Long this image till suddenly it blurs. She is there. Again. Let the eye from its vigil be distracted a moment” (52). The voice often insists on the imagery of its narration being evoked through precisely delineated series of camera movements and angles: “Quick enlarge and devour before night falls” (55); “Just time to begin to glimpse a fringe of black veil. The face must wait” (50); “Wooed from below the face consents at last. [...] The lids occult the longed-for eyes. [...] Skipping the nose at the call of lips these no sooner broached are withdrawn” (56); “The hands. Seen from above” (60), “Quick the chair before she reappears. At length. Every angle” (73).

Associated with this is the narrator’s insistence on specific lighting, the sources of which are spatially defined by their connection to points of the compass and the position of objects in relation to those. Therefore, the woman seen from behind has her “[f]ace to the north” and is, in the “[e]ndless evening,” when the sun naturally sets on the west, “lit aslant by the last rays” (59). Similarly, the narrator uses the position of the sun to indicate cinematic effects of lighting elsewhere in the text, emphasizing its striking visuality and almost Eisensteinian conflict between “pieces of graphically varied directions, [...] pieces of darkness and pieces of lightness” (*Film Form* 39): “When from their source in the west-south-west the last rays rake its averse face” (68), “[I]t aslant by the latest rays they cast to the east-north-east their parallel shadows” (68).

As this paper has attempted to show, the symbiotic coexistence of voice and its visual counterpart in the text of *Ill Seen Ill Said* provides a fertile ground for Beckett’s exploration of mechanisms of expression and perception. The inherent qualities of both the aural and the visual aspects lure the readers into a cyclical process which merely equates their perception with mis-comprehension: the narrator’s “ill seen” becomes reproduced in such a way that the result is a disguised imitation of the actual processes of perception. The narrator is a purely vocal presence; his distinctly non-realistic and unspecified nature foreshadows the impossibility of logical closure which his account constantly denies. His attempts to evoke a “living” image of the woman are comparably ironic. The narrator is undoubtedly aware of the possibilities the film form offers in terms of its seeming closeness to perceptual experience, and of its miraculous ability to temporarily “create” objects

and “revive” people. Nevertheless, such an enterprise is doomed to failure from the very outset, simply because “[t]he memory evoked [...] can never reassume its original shape, for this would mean that memory and perception were identical, which is manifestly not so” (Iser 278). Not only does the narrator seem to desire the unattainable, he himself makes it altogether impossible: the infinite, meticulous reformulations of the individual memory fragments rupture and “cut” the action further, rather than create an uninterrupted and solid whole of realistic representation.

“So, montage is conflict,” Eisenstein famously proclaims in *Film Form* (38). Indeed, everything in Beckett’s text, including the text itself, is born from constant conflict, fragmentation and contradiction rather than from undisturbed harmony. To prove his point that our perception, memory, and ways of communication are essentially unreliable, Beckett makes his readers “see” for themselves. *Ill Seen Ill Said* works directly, and solely, with familiarity. Our awareness of the characteristics of spoken language and film are as crucial for the novel’s “being”, as is our habitual experience of reading and comprehending literary texts. All appears to be refuted in Beckett’s work as it ceaselessly tests our senses: “All five. All six. And the rest. All. All to blame. All” (61).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Lydie Parisse quoting Ludovic Janvier, Beckett’s friend and translator of his works: “Beckett était obsédé par la voix” (12).

<sup>2</sup> Explicitly stated in the original script of *Film*, George Berkeley’s “Esse est percipi” becomes a major theme for Beckett’s only cinematic project (Beckett, *Collected* 163). James Knowlson likewise notes that Beckett’s “preoccupation with the dynamics of looking [...] runs from Play and Film to *Ill Seen Ill Said*” (Knowlson 618).

<sup>3</sup> “J’ai toujours écrit pour une voix.” (Beckett qtd. in Parisse 12); (Ludovic Janvier qtd. in Parisse 12).

<sup>4</sup> John Dewey qtd. in Iser 288. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>5</sup> A rather common motif in Beckett, the theme is evoked throughout the whole text of *Ill Seen Ill Said*. For instance, the notion of “the odd crocus” (47) born right into a “[w]inter evening. [...] When not night. Winter night” (68), or of a lamb “reared for slaughter like the others” (63). Also, the voice wishing “[d]ead the whole brood no sooner hatched. Long before. In the egg” (64), and the “[d]ay no sooner risen fallen” (72) as it speaks about “[a]ll the fond trash. Destined before being to be no more than that” (76), “[o]f what was never” (77), right before the “pip for end beg[ins]. First last moment” (78).

<sup>6</sup> A Jungian notion that proves to be a recurrent motif running through many of Beckett’s works (Knowlson 616).

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Eisenstein discusses “conflicts” between close shots and long shots, “an object and its dimension,” and “an event and its duration” achieved by “stop-motion or slow-motion.” A great number of these conflicts is explored in Beckett’s novel.

<sup>8</sup> In *The Complete Film Dictionary*, Ira Konigsberg proposes to differentiate between the terms “take” and “shot”: “The term is sometimes defined as (1) the single uninterrupted operation of the

camera that results in a continual action we see on the screen and sometimes as (2) the continuous action on the screen resulting from what appears to be a single run of the camera. Since the film resulting from a single run of the camera, however, might itself be edited before appearing as a continuous action on screen or perhaps even broken up into two segments by means of an insert, it is best to refer to (1) as a “take” and only (2) as a “shot” to preserve the sense of continuity and completeness we associate with the term” (358). Because Beckett’s visual fragments indeed appear to be “edited” before they are “played”, this paper utilizes the term “shot” throughout.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Knowlson’s discussion of “frozen tableaux” and Rudolf Arnheim’s legacy in Beckett in Knowlson and Haynes 123–124.

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*Address:*

*Charles University in Prague*

*Faculty of Philosophy & Arts*

*Department of Anglophone Literatures & Cultures*

*nám. Jana Palacha 2,*

*116 38 Praha 1*

*Czech Republic*

*gkiryushina@gmail.com*

# The Parable of Nutrition in Margaret Atwood's *The Year of the Flood*

Giuseppina Botta

University of Salerno

## Abstract

*One of the most important effects of the “gene revolution” is the possibility of manipulating foodstuffs, in particular agricultural crops like soybeans, wheat and corn. While the development of agricultural technology accelerates the process of growth and provides solutions to age-old problems such as poverty and hunger, there are serious concerns about the risks of ecosystem changes. This article explores the environmental issues connected with Atwood’s claim for sustainable nutrition in *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and (more marginally) in *Oryx and Crake* (2003).*

*Keywords: gene revolution, foodstuffs, nutrition, Atwood, Oryx and Crake, The Year of the Flood, Ecosophy*

In April 2013 the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (UNFAO) published a programme of activities (*Resilient Livelihoods – Disaster Risk Reduction For Food and Nutrition Security Framework Programme*) to avoid food scarcity in risk areas such as Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Pacific. The plan highlights the major causes of the precariousness of food and nutrition security:

natural hazards (drought, floods, tsunamis, hurricanes/typhoons, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, landslides); food chain emergencies of transboundary threats (e.g. transboundary plant, forest, animal, aquatic and zoonotic pests and diseases, food safety events, industrial pollution); socio-economic crises (e.g. volatility in agricultural commodity markets and soaring food prices); wild fires; environmental conditions such as land degradation, desertification and water scarcity; climate change, particularly the expected increase in the frequency and intensity of weather-related

hazards; protracted emergencies (prolonged emergencies that combine two or more of the above-mentioned crises). (FAO 19)

Among the recommendations to reduce the risk of food shortages, UNFAO emphasizes “the application of technologies and approaches, such as crop diversification, genetically enhanced crop varieties able to withstand hazards, and conservation agriculture” (FAO 15).

One of the most important effects of the “gene revolution” is the possibility of manipulating foodstuffs, such as agricultural crops like soybeans, wheat, corn and so on. If, on the one hand, the development of agricultural technology makes it possible to accelerate the process of growth and to provide solutions to problems such as poverty and hunger, on the other hand there are serious concerns about the risks of ecosystem changes, the dependence on corporate control of the seed supply, and the spread of industrial agriculture.

In *Moving Targets: Writing with Intent, 1982–2004* (2004) Margaret Atwood states that “[t]he *what if* of *Oryx and Crake* is simply, *What if we continue down the road we’re already on? How slippery is the slope? What are our saving graces? Who’s got the will to stop us?*” (330). This lends a new impulse to an issue which has been one of the *leitmotifs* in some of Atwood’s novels, such as *Surfacing* (1972) and *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985): the environmental perspective. As Shannon Hengen notices, in her works environmentalism “becomes a concern with the urgent preservation of a human place in a natural world in which the term ‘human’ does not imply ‘superior,’ or ‘alone,’ and in which what is fabricated or artificial is less satisfying than what has originally occurred” (74).

Both *The Year of the Flood* (2009) and (marginally) *Oryx and Crake* (2003)<sup>1</sup> present this question with reference to the quality of new-generation food and to the particular food education instilled by God’s Gardeners, a religious sect. In this paper I will explore the environmental issues connected with Atwood’s claim for *sustainable* nutrition, and their development in the frame of Ecosophy.

Eating is an essential activity for all living creatures. In *The CanLit Food Book: From Pen to Palate, a Collection of Tasty Literary Fare* (1988), Atwood writes: “Eating is our earliest metaphor, preceding our consciousness of gender, race, nationality and language. We eat before we talk” (53). Such a statement locates food and eating on a metaphorical level: “[f]ood cooked, eaten, and thought about provides a metaphoric matrix, a language that allows us a way to get at the uncertainty, the ineffable qualities of life” (Schofield 1).

It would be difficult to analyze exhaustively the multiple representations of this “parable of nutrition” among Atwood’s novels, and so I will give just a few significant examples. The epigraph to *The Edible Woman* (1969) presents one of the main themes of the novel – the preparation of a product to be consumed: “The surface on which you work (preferably marble), the tools, the ingredients and your fingers should be chilled throughout the operation...” (Atwood, *The Edible Woman* vii). As Gina Wisker notes, this novel “critiques the contradictions or dualities where life is reduced to consumer artifice” (41). Marian McAlpin, the protagonist, moves through two different dimensions throughout the narrative: “to consume” or “to be consumed”. This battle is fought out over the body, which becomes both the symbol for the protagonist’s “rejection of her female identity and maternity” (Rigney 23) and for her “struggle [...] against that part of the self which is striving for self-determination” (Rao, *Strategies* 135).

Marian works for a market research firm, Canadian Facts Marketing, and her job consists of writing surveys and, occasionally, of sampling products. She shares a flat with a roommate Ainsley Tewce, a very independent woman, who shifts from one love affair to another, and whose final pursuit is to become pregnant and to rear her child as a single mum. Ainsley's counterpart is Clara Bates, Marian's friend, who has sacrificed her education in order to have children, and who depends on her husband for every aspect of her life. Motherhood is analyzed in the range of the social conventions in which Marian herself is entrapped during her engagement with Peter Wollander. He would like Marian to conform to the stereotype of the perfect wife (and mother), and this generates her sense of displacement; she is "torn between refusing and desiring to conform to society's representation of true womanhood" (Staels 23). One night, during a party, in order to cater to her fiancé, she wears a red dress and heavy make-up, thus presenting a fake and unusual version of herself, which becomes unbearable for her after her friend Duncan's remark: "You didn't tell me it was a masquerade. Who the hell are you supposed to be?" (Atwood, *Edible* 239). The next day, after spending the night with Duncan in a hotel, Marian shows the first symptoms of lack of appetite; she starts refusing anything with "bone or tendon or fiber" (Atwood, *Edible* 245). As the novel progresses, this refusal of food is extended also to vegetables and crops.

Some Atwoodian critics have ascribed Marian's self-starvation to pathological conditions, such as "nervous anorexia" (Staels 33), which "signals Marian's split or multiple condition and it silently communicates a repressed dimension of herself" (Staels 33), or to psychological discomfort, a "self-division", as Coral Ann Howells notes (*Margaret Atwood* 46–47). Recently in *Margaret Atwood and the Female Bildungsroman* (2009) Ellen McWilliams focuses mainly on the meaning of food in the novel, and states that it "functions as a vivid and complex metaphor [...], marking a new departure in the feminist impetus of Atwood's work, but also sowing the seeds of Atwood's preoccupation with the relationship between feminist and nationalist discourses of power" (81).

In my opinion, Marian's refusal of food is a protest against all social constraints, which annihilate her as an individual and orient her towards a homologated eternal nourishing figure. Her lack of appetite represents, ultimately, a revolt against the objectification of herself as a woman and as a human being. She reacts by performing a sort of totemic banquet<sup>2</sup>, whose main course is a scaled-down representation of herself. She bakes a woman-shaped cake which is "at once a therapy, a solution, self discovery, a potential symbol of freedom and a leading progressive step ahead" (Mouda 7). The cake represents also "the ultimate image of bodily dismemberment" (Royanian and Yazdani 237); Marian, indeed, bakes it for Peter with the intention of giving him a surrogate for herself: "'You've been trying to destroy me, haven't you?', she said. 'You've been trying to assimilate me. But I've made you a substitute, something you'll like much better. This is what you really wanted all along, isn't it? I'll get you a fork.'" (Atwood, *Edible* 352). Peter feels disoriented and leaves without joining the banquet. Paradoxically, Marian will eat her edible product with Duncan's help. Many forces interact and control the dynamics of power in this act of eating: anger, bewilderment, compensation, but also the refusal to submit to "male domination" (Mouda 7). The cake consumption symbolically inverts the power roles and releases Marian from the oppressive consuming and objectifying dimension, becoming herself a consumer and a ruler.

Food issues are present in two other novels by Atwood: *Lady Oracle* (1976) and *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). The protagonist of *Lady Oracle* is Joan Foster, a gothic novel writer who wanders through the world in order to escape from the cumbersome presence of her mother, whose ghost still haunts her from beyond the grave. During her existence, Joan fights against diverse “discarded selves” (Rosowsky 202), but the most powerful is “her former self as the Fat Lady” (Rosowsky 202), which fosters her sense of exclusion and separateness both from the love of her mother, who continually remarks on her fat condition, and from the world in general. According to Staels, in the novel the corporeal dimension “becomes the territory on which the war (of values) between mother and daughter is fought” (71). In this novel, as previously in *The Edible Woman*, the protagonist is affected by an eating disorder: in this case bulimia represents “the beginning of an unresolved battle, an ambivalent relationship characterized by proximity and domination on the one hand and evasion and absolute separation on the other” (Staels 71).

In *The Handmaid's Tale* the theme of food is very marginal, if compared with the two texts I previously analyzed. The novel's scenario is the Republic of Gilead, set from the territorial point of view within the borders of the former United States of America. It is a totalitarian regime, lead by a military dictatorship with a theocratic basis. In this context women are located at the very bottom of the social ladder and deprived of any social, economic and individual rights. The story is told by Offred, who “finds herself in the familiar dystopian predicament of being trapped inside a space and a narrative where she is denied any possibility of agency” (Howells, “Dystopian” 165). She is a concubine, or handmaid, of a troop commander called Fred, whence her name Of-Fred. The role of the handmaids is to copulate with the commanders in order to procreate. Indeed, because of pollution, sterility is one of the main problems in the community of Gilead. Despite their significant function, the handmaids live a very spartan life, almost cloistral: they are obliged to wear long nun-like garments, they are forbidden to read, to wear make-up, to circulate freely outside the Commander's house and to communicate with the outer world. From the nutritional aspect, they are given very essential and boring food, and the impossibility to satisfy the palate generates some improbable mental associations, as in the case of the Scrabble tiles which remind Offred of peppermint candies. This association of “bizarre senses to ordinary objects” (Macpherson 57) is due to the fact that in Gilead, as Roberta Rubinstein notices, “like sex [...] food serves only functional, not emotional, appetites” (109).

In Atwood's latest novels, foodstuffs not only give the coordinates of a lost future but they also define both the excessive manipulation of organic material and the urge for a more sustainable nutrition which would take into account respect for the environment. In *Oryx and Crake* (2003) we are in the presence of a world “where no alternative frame of reference is available, until the shock ending” (Howells, “Dystopian” 162). A sense of alienation emerges from the interrupted relationship between human beings and the Earth due to an environmental catastrophe; in this landscape of desolation, hunger represents a fundamental impulse: “There's something to be said for hunger: at least it lets you know you're still alive” (Atwood, *OC* 109). The story is set in a post-apocalyptic scenario in which Jimmy, the protagonist, is the last man left alive. Humankind has been decimated by a terrible plague-like disease after the consumption of a drug, the BlyssPluss Pill, which was supposed to “[...] protect the user against sexually transmitted diseases, [...] [to]

provide an unlimited supply of libido and sexual prowess, [...] [and to] prolong youth" (Atwood, *OC* 346).

Alone and desperate, Jimmy struggles with the harsh life conditions due to the progressive lack of food and the frequent attacks of genetically manipulated animals; at the same time he carries the heavy responsibility of the Crakers' lives. The latter are a transgenic species which, together with the BlyssPluss Pill, represent the result of the ambitious project of Crake, the protagonist's long-standing friend, who is killed by Jimmy at the outbreak of the epidemic. In order to survive, Jimmy, "stranded and displaced in an alien environment" (Rao, "Home and Nation" 109), feeds himself with "simulated foodstuffs" (Cooke 67), represented by "Svetlana No-Meat Cocktail Sausages" (Atwood, *OC* 4), dehydrated "chocolate-flavoured energy bars" (*OC* 4), "noodle soup with vegetables, chicken flavour" (*OC* 322), and "Chinese food in a tube" (*OC*, 322), which he alternates with the grilled "weekly fish" (*OC* 115) brought by the female Crakers. The focus of the novel, however, is mainly centred on the consequences of an indiscriminate use of biotechnologies, which has produced a new species at the cost of the decimation of mankind, rather than on the necessity of a more sustainable nutrition. This theme emerges forcefully in *The Year of the Flood* (2009), embodied in the God's Gardeners and their eco-thought, "dedicated to saving the planet and righting a natural balance" (Maxwell 5).

To discuss sustainable nutrition means to embrace a series of ethical questions concerning the responsibilities of agricultural producers, the assessment of technological changes affecting farm populations, the utilization of farmland and other resources, the deployment of intensive agriculture, the modification of ecosystems, animal welfare, the professional responsibilities of agronomists, veterinarians, or food scientists, the use of biotechnology, and the safety, availability, and affordability of food. Public interest in sustainability is increasing and consumers demand that foods are good for them, but also that they do not impact on the environment. A sustainable food system limits waste and optimizes land usage. The challenges to a sustainable world food system include limited land availability, soil health, water scarcity, an uncertain supply and dependence on energy, climate change and greenhouse gas emissions. More detailed evaluation would be required to determine the overall impact in the context of a sustainable food supply chain. A sustainable food system considers which foods are essential, which foods are luxuries, and how food is transported, processed and packaged. According to the study 'Food Security: The Challenge of Feeding 9 Billion People' (Godfray et al. 2010), in the future this will be a very important challenge, because feeding an estimated 9 billion people by the year 2050 will require a sustainable food system that makes the most of limited resources while protecting the world's fragile ecosystem.

Any sustainable activity, however, entails a good deal of social responsibility, requiring everybody to contribute for the good of the community. Atwood focuses her attention on the lifestyle of the God's Gardeners, which is in perfect harmony with this principle. The Gardeners are "canny environmental warriors" (Howells, "Atwoodian Mosaic" 55): they are vegetarians and grow their own food; they keep beehives to produce honey; they make their medicines from the mushroom beds they cultivate; in order to collect and compost human waste they use 'violet-biolets'. The education of the youngsters is based on classes teaching how to live green in the post-apocalyptic world: Fabric Recycling, Bees and Mycology, Holistic Healing with Plant, Wild and Garden Botanical Remedies, Animal

Camouflage, and Emergency Medical Training. Nothing is thrown away and recycling is a central activity in their community. They try to build a consumer free society with a healthful purpose. As Vandana Shiva remarks, the “aim of consumer liberation is to *improve the quality of life*” (254).

As emerges from this brief analysis, the God’s Gardeners’ lifestyle is much more than a mere form of environmentalism; it is a philosophy of sustainable life, an *ecosophy*. In *The Three Ecologies* (2000), Félix Guattari defines *ecosophy* as “an ethico-political articulation... between the three ecological registers (environment, social relations and human subjectivity)” (27). The term, however, was coined by the Norwegian philosopher Arnold Naess, the father of the so-called “deep ecology movement”: “By an *ecosophy* I mean a philosophy of ecological harmony or equilibrium. A philosophy as a kind of *sofia* (or) wisdom, is openly normative, it contains both norms, rules, postulates, value priority announcements and hypotheses concerning the state of affairs in our universe” (Naess, “The Shallow and the Deep” 8). Harmony and active human participation are the constant in both definitions. According to Guattari, the loss of balance is mainly due to the advent of what he calls Integrated World Capitalism, which, through a series of techno-scientific transformations, has led to ecological disaster, against which the French philosopher warns: “The Earth is undergoing a period of intense techno-scientific transformations. If no remedy is found, the ecological disequilibrium this has generated will ultimately threaten the continuation of life on the planet’s surface” (Guattari 27). However, the process of the Earth’s recovery passes through the interrelation between the subject and exteriority. In Guattarian terms, subjectivity eludes the individual-social distinction “as well as the givenness or preformedness of the subject either as a person or individual; subjectivity is both collective and auto-producing” (Genosko 146).

Such a concept of subjectivity is in line with the God’s Gardeners’ eschatology, transmitted through Adam One’s sermons which, while narrating the contributions of the saints to the environmental cause, “inspire the faithful to take actions” (Maxwell 8) for the sake of the collective good. On a more practical level, the Gardeners’ crusade is fought against the *SecretBurgers* chain. The slogan “*SecretBurgers! Because Everyone Loves a Secret*” (Atwood, *YF* 40) aptly represents the philosophy of the chain and the quality of the food it sells, translated into words by Toby’s disquieting testimony, as she was a former employee before becoming an Eve: “The meat grinders weren’t 100 per cent efficient; you might find a swatch of cat fur in your burger or a fragment of mouse tail. Was there a human fingernail, once?” (Atwood, *YF* 40). The Gardeners’ battle is in favour of animals’ rights, but against a certain anthropocentric attitude which sees the submission of all non-human creatures; this approach emerges in the words of Adam One, who tries to dissuade the masses from eating meat by talking about his own life before his green conversion: “I, too, was once a materialistic, atheistic meat-eater. Like you, I thought Man was the measure of all things” (Atwood, *YF* 48).

Lori Gruen identifies meat-eating and the consumption of protein foodstuffs as “the most prominent manifestation of a belief system in which woman and animals are reduced to objects to be consumed” (74). In *The Pornography of Meat* (2003), Carol Adams states that “viewing other beings as consumable is a central aspect of [Western] culture” (12), and through an analysis of food advertisements, she gives the dimension of a cultural dualism which divides the consumers and consumables into two distinct categories (50):

A	Not A
Man/male	Woman/female
Culture	Nature
Human	Nonhuman animal
'White'	People of colour
Mind	Body
Civilized	Primitive
Production	Reproduction
Capital	Labor
Clothed	Naked

While these categories undeniably recall the dichotomy of masculine/feminine, it is also possible to see the association of the feminine with corporeity, intuitive knowledge and nature. As Val Plumwood highlights, the equivalence between nature and women neglects the role of difference and entails the inferior social status of the feminine dimension:

Women's alignment with nature has been matched by the development of an elite masculine identity centring around distance from the feminine, from nature as necessity, from such 'natural' areas in human life as reproduction, and around control, domination and inferiorisation of the natural sphere. (34)

Ecofeminism deals with "ways to challenge the oppression of women and non-human nature effectively" (Otto 76) and harshly criticizes mainstream culture, which emerges as androcentric, dualistic, hierarchical, atomistic, and abstract. The association between women and non-human beings, i.e. animals, dates back to the dawn of civilization; as Gruen notices, it originates with the myth of Man the Hunter, predator of animals and food provider. In this frame of brutality and strength, "woman's body (being smaller, weaker, and reproductive) prevents her from participating in the hunt, and thus relegates her to the arena of non-culture" (Gruen 62). Weakness and vulnerability are qualities which belong to the animal realm as well: animals can be captured, killed, domesticated, used for agricultural work. Later on, with the advent of industrialization, women are confined to the domestic dimension, and their function is food preparation. In her analysis Gruen clarifies the parallel between the female and the animal element: "Certain animals have been domesticated and forced to provide food in a different sense. Women prepare and cook; animals are prepared and cooked. Both play subservient roles in the male-dominated institution of meat eating" (72). This connection is evident also in the commercial context; as Adams notices, the continual juxtaposition of women and animals is consolidated in the language of advertising by the portrayal of the "consumable" animals as feminine, sexual, available to men, just like female human beings.

Such an objectivization of the female body is represented in the narrative universe of *The Year of the Flood* by Toby and by Ren and the other girls who worked at *Scales and Tales*. Before joining the Gardeners, Toby passes through a series of dehumanizing experiences: from changing both her identity and distinctive features, to selling her hair and ova, and then to Blanco's sexual abuses. It is in particular during her job at *SecretBurgers* that

her humanity is completely denied and annihilated by Blanco's physical and communicative brutality: "Cross me up, I'll snap you like a twig" (Atwood, *YF* 45). *Scales and Tales* was a night club for adult entertainment, where women (basically young girls) performed in dancing and acrobatic shows disguised in bizarre costumes made of scales or feathers. The following quotation gives a precise idea of the place and of the objectified female body: "Scales had pictures on either side of the entrance [...]. The pictures were of beautiful girls covered completely with shining green scales, like lizards, except for the hair. One of them was standing on a single leg hooked around her neck. I thought that it must hurt to stand like that, but the girl in the picture was smiling" (Atwood, *YF* 90).

The God's Gardeners' diet is very spartan, essential and yet somehow "repetitious" as Toby herself says, due to the "limited materials available" (*YF* 56). Such a diet, however, does not only imply the liberation of human beings from all forms of oppression, as in the case of Toby; it is strongly linked to the necessity of a more sustainable lifestyle which will help to restore the lost Earth equilibrium claimed by Guattari in *The Three Ecologies*. In February 2010, a special issue of *Science*, the review of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, was dedicated to food security and the necessity of changing our diet in order to guarantee a more balanced distribution of resources: "Reducing the consumption of meat and increasing the proportion that is derived from the most efficient sources offer an opportunity to feed more people and also present other advantages" (Godfray 817), such as solving the problem of obesity or limiting the overexploitation of agricultural land. Godfray and the other authors of the article conclude that the Earth's salvation requires "a revolution in the social and natural sciences concerned with food production" (Godfray 817). This statement echoes Guattari's intuition of linking the spheres of ecology (environmental, social and mental) and emphasizes the central role of subjectivity in restoring the ecological balance. He does not provide the perfect recipe for being ecological, but insists on the necessity for generating a variety of solutions to enact ecosophical processes. The environmental attitudes of the God's Gardeners highlight the fact that each individual's changes contribute to a collective difference, which can produce positive changes on the local, nationwide and global level. As Howells remarks, "unlike everyone else, they have put in place survival mechanisms against disaster, which they have been predicting for a long time" ("Atwoodian Mosaic" 55).

Right from her early novels, Atwood has shown an interest in the environmental issue, which has sharpened in her latest texts. The excessive exploitation of natural resources has brought pollution and a modification both in the distribution of foodstuffs and in their structure (genetically modified crops, for example). In Atwood's novels the motif of food shows the problematic relationship between the characters and the surrounding world, both in the sense of the social world and of living space. In *Oryx and Crake* the consumption of surrogated food is a consequence of the decimation of mankind and of the subsequent suspension of productive activities. In *The Year of the Flood*, the food parable intersects with several eco-critical crucial points: the necessity for a sustainable lifestyle, the importance of a consumer-free standard of living, the promotion of a vegetarian diet, and the respect for all living species. In her latest production Atwood's green perspective encompasses every aspect of our daily life and existence, and becomes a concern with the environment which is "never merely an external place but always the very substance of our selves" (Alaimo 158).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the quotations *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood* are abbreviated as *OC* and *YF*.

<sup>2</sup> In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Sigmund Freud argued that God is the representation of the sublimated physical father; therefore, in the totemic sacrifice, those who eat gain power over God, who becomes the sacrificed victim.

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*Address:*  
*University of Salerno*  
*Faculty of Foreign Languages*  
*Department of Humanities*  
*Giovanni Paolo II, 132*  
*84084 Fisciano (SA)*  
*Italy*  
*gibotta@unisa.it*

# Food as a Metaphor for Love, Sex and Life in Woody Allen's Movies

Andrea Holešová

University of Ostrava

## Abstract

*In Woody Allen's works, the role of gastronomy is not only marginal, as food becomes a metaphor for love, sex, ethnicity, and the attitude of the protagonists towards life. This paper deals with Allen's moviemaking and finds links between food and relationships (including the purely physical ones), demonstrates how dysfunctional relationships are reflected in food, and points out that the desire for food corresponds to the desire for life shared by Allen's life-affirming characters. Food also reveals the ethnic identity of Allen's characters and contrasts them with Gentiles. The protagonists of Woody Allen's movies also use food to become assimilated into their environment, and the wrong choice of food often proves that they are outsiders.*

*Keywords: Woody Allen, food, (dysfunctional) relationships, love, sex, intimacy, ethnicity, Jewish identity, Alvy Singer, Annie Hall, Ike Davis, Allan Felix, Love and Death, Sleeper, Bananas, Play It Again, Sam*

Even though satisfying one's hunger represents one of the basic human physical needs and eating might be regarded as a rather mundane and routine activity, food and dining have played a distinct role in many literary works and movies, including those directed by Woody Allen.

Since the beginnings of the cinema, directors have employed food in their works, either making it their main focus or using food symbolically to create a particular meaning and to communicate emotions. Anne L. Bower comments on the role of food imagery, saying that “[f]ood draws us into a film's characters, action and setting. Food is part of the way that, for over a century now, movies have been telling us who we are, constructing our economic and political aspirations; our sense of sexual, national, and ethnic identity;

filling our minds with ideas about love and romance, innocence and depravity, adventure, bravery, cruelty, hope and despair” (3).

The choice of food and the way people behave when eating provide important information about their character. Alan Saunders believes that “we usually learn more about characters when they meet across the dinner table than when their bodies sweatily conjoin in intercourse ... what goes on over meals is in itself so revealing” (5). It is not only what is (or is not) eaten that is important, but also where, when and with whom it is eaten.

Food and drinks in movies can function as both comic and dramatic devices, as well as acting “as striking metaphors for the ‘big’ meaning-of-life questions” (Poole xi). Food refers to death, life and its meaning, or to one’s religion and beliefs. The characters’ attitude towards life is reflected in their stance toward food – by abnegating the pleasure of eating, characters reject life as such. Bower summarizes all functions of food in movies, claiming that

[f]ood as a stand-in for or accomplice to sex is also something we easily ‘read’ in films, as is a large meal as a sign of connection and communion, whether within a family, a religious community, a carnival, or a journey. Food, we also understand, can script traditional roles (the mother in the kitchen), or indicate dysfunction (food spoiled, badly cooked, poisoned, poorly chosen, vomited, or simply refused). Food can tell us about characters’ abject poverty or egregious consumption, about their health or dissipation. (7)

Even though Allen’s movies are not typical “food films”,<sup>1</sup> they feature food as an important communicative element. Allen largely uses food as a metaphor for love and sex. In his essay “*Love and Death* and Food: Woody Allen’s Comic Use of Gastronomy,” Ronald D. LeBlanc focuses on Allen’s 1975 comedy *Love and Death* and comments on the director’s use of food imagery, comparing him to the Russian writer Nikolai Vasilievich Gogol. Unlike realists, who frequently employed food to satirize contemporary bourgeois life and social values, Allen builds on the literary tradition of food symbolizing life and sensuality, and “one of the primary roles that food imagery plays ... is to remind us – amid all the lofty philosophical speculations engendered by abstractions such as ‘love’ and ‘death’, ‘war’ and ‘peace’, ‘crime’ and ‘punishment’ – of immediate physical sensations and instinctual urges” (LeBlanc 102). LeBlanc further perceives Allen’s cinematic persona as a sex-starved individual and stresses the link between sex and food in Allen’s movies (103).<sup>2</sup>

For Allen’s characters, food often serves as a prelude to intimacy or love-making, or accompanies it. Before kissing for the first time, Ike Davis from *Manhattan* (1979) and his new girlfriend Mary try to find something to eat. Although Ike fails to satisfy his physical hunger, he accomplishes emotional satisfaction. In Allen’s movie *Bananas* (1971), the main protagonist Fielding Mellish and a female rebel he hardly knows first watch each other eat and subsequently end up having animalistic sexual intercourse.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, when the protagonist of the above-mentioned movie *Love and Death* finally persuades his beloved Sonja to have sex with him, he promises to bring along the soy sauce.

Even though food often symbolizes sex and purely physical and primitive sensual pleasures, in Allen’s movies since the late 1970s it has been rather connected with affection and has also reflected the character of relationships; while spoiled dishes often symbolize

dysfunctional relationships, happy moments shared with loved ones are frequently accompanied by eating the food the characters enjoy. Allen's persona<sup>4</sup> no longer associates food only with the primary sexual urge, but perceives it as something that can create a bond between people and give emotional security and happiness.<sup>5</sup>

Allan Felix, the protagonist of Allen's comedy *Play It Again, Sam* (first produced as a play in 1969 and adapted for the screen in 1972), is just one of the many examples of the connection between food and love. Allan recalls his ex-wife, who could not live with him any longer, and remembers moments from their marriage. In one flashback, Allan takes his wife to a fancy restaurant and, trying to impress her, orders in French. As a result, the couple are served dishes they did not want. The spoiled dinner only corresponds to the unhappy marriage of Allan Felix and his wife Nancy – two people who could not communicate with each other and expected their lives to be different. Like the waiter who failed to understand Allan's imperfect French, also Nancy lacks understanding for her husband; she finds it difficult to find common ground, and their marriage does not satiate her hunger for excitement.

Allan's relationship with Nancy is not his only failure to experience love. In order to recover from the divorce and find a new partner, Allan again tries to impress a girl – this time by his own cooking skills. However, this relationship was not meant to last either and the protagonist's attempt to cook Beef Stroganoff in a pressure cooker also turns out to be a disaster.

In contrast to spoiled dinners representing implausible or dysfunctional relationships, when Allan Felix finally meets the perfect woman for him, everything seems to be great, including the food. Allan and his friend Linda have a wonderful time together over a dinner they prepared themselves. Moreover, when Allan wakes up in the morning, after a passionate night spent with Linda, he has a strong craving for breakfast. Even though the love affair with the married Linda is predestined to be only temporary, the two characters savored every moment of it and shared the intimacy they had longed for.

Allan Felix is not the only character whose problems with relationships are reflected in problems with food. Already at the beginning of his career, Woody Allen presented the central character of his first authorial movie *Take the Money and Run* (1969), Virgil Starkwell, as a loser who is lucky enough to find a woman to love, yet their love has to overcome many obstacles. In the course of the movie, Virgil's relationship with Louise develops, as does the food she serves to him. When the unsuccessful criminal Virgil is imprisoned and complains about the food in jail, his girlfriend does not hesitate and brings him home-cooked meals – although it is in fact just a hard-boiled egg she presses through the grid separating her from Virgil. However, when the couple get married, their life together is affected by financial problems, which is illustrated by the inedible dishes Louise prepares.<sup>6</sup>

Miles Monroe from *Sleeper* (1973) is another protagonist who associates intimacy with eating; he thinks that the object of his affection might fall in love with him or at least tolerate him if he manages to satisfy her primary needs and provide food for her. Unfortunately for him, the opposite is true and his potential partner, Luna, shows no sign of any feelings for Miles; even sexual intercourse seems to be highly improbable:

Luna: Couldn't you get anything else?  
Miles: You think it's easy to run when you're holding a banana the size of a canoe?  
Luna: You didn't get any dessert. There's no seasoning. There's no wine. (*Sleeper*)

The above-discussed Nancy from *Play It Again, Sam* and Luna from *Sleeper* are just two of the many women who do not love their partners or husbands and therefore are not able to share the intimate experience of eating and enjoying food with them. The beautiful Sonja from Allen's brilliant comedy *Love and Death* thinks about food when cheating on her first husband, a herring merchant who is too preoccupied with his passion for fish, even on his deathbed. Her reaction to his death makes it clear that she never loved him and is not going to mourn either:

Doctor: The dead pass on, and life is for the living.  
Sonja: I guess you're right. Where do you wanna eat?  
Second man: Let's go to Rykoff's.  
Doctor: No, no, no. Not Rykoff's.  
Second man: Why?  
Doctor: I feel like meat. What do you get at Rykoff's? You get a cheese sandwich.  
Second man: Meat is not good for your health. I can't believe it.  
Sonja: There's a tavern at the edge of the square. Makes a sausage that's wonderful. (*Love and Death*)

When Sonja gets married for the second time, her marriage is more of an obligation and she again fails to love her husband Boris. The dinners she prepares for him are thus rather abstract, cold and elusive like their relationship:

Boris: Soon Sonja got more used to me. Sometimes she actually had fun. Like the time she baked her first soufflé.<sup>7</sup> Money was scarce and Sonja learned to make wonderful dishes out of snow.  
Sweetheart, it looks a little rare to me.  
Sonja: I left it in the oven for hour and a half.  
Boris: Did you? 'Cos it looks...you know... it's all... What's the dessert?  
Sonja: A surprise, Boris.  
Boris: Yes? What?  
Sonja: A nice big bowl of sleet.  
Boris: Oh, sleet! My favorite! That's wonderful. (*Love and Death*)

Ironically, once Sonja falls in love with her husband (which is also reflected on the no longer abstract food she serves to him), Boris sinks into a deep depression and is even considering committing suicide.

Similarly to Boris, also the convict Virgil Starkwell from *Take the Money and Run* has to confront rather intangible dishes. As he said: "Food on a chain gang is scarce and not very nourishing. The men get one hot meal a day. A bowl of steam" (*Take the Money and Run*). Virgil is separated from his dear Louise, lacks love as well as satisfactory nutrition, and thus suffers from both emotional and physical deprivation.

The protagonist of Allen's 1985 period comedy *The Purple Rose of Cairo*, a clumsy daydreaming waitress named Cecilia, also experiences problems in her marriage to the brutish and unfaithful Monk, who does not even hesitate to use physical violence towards her. When Cecilia finally decides not to tolerate her husband's trespasses any more and leave him, Monk does not try to comfort his wife and repent for his previous behavior, but instead asks her for meatloaf. On another occasion, Monk complains about the sauce his wife has served to him and claims that it contains too much pepper. Problems with food again prove that their relationship lacks love and respect for each other; while Monk stresses physical nourishment, Cecilia also needs spiritual and emotional nourishment.

In contrast to the dismal reality of her marriage, Cecilia feels a close bond to the fictitious character from one of the movies she enjoys watching. Tom Baxter, a young and naïve explorer, even leaves the movie screen to experience real life and love with Cecilia. Tom takes her to fancy restaurants (the real ones as well as those on the silver screen) and they enjoy food (which was scarce during the period of the Great Depression, in which the movie is set), champagne and each other's company. Thus Tom not only satiates her physical hunger but also provides the care and intimacy she hungered for.

Apart from dysfunctional relationships and problems with love and intimacy accompanied by unpalatable food, the protagonists of Woody Allen's movies also share the pleasure of eating with those they love and are loved by. When Alvy Singer, the protagonist of Allen's iconic comedy *Annie Hall* (1977), recalls happy moments from the relationship with the love of his life Annie, memories of a weekend spent together in a summer house come back to him. In his head he plays back the scene when the two of them tried to cook lobsters for dinner. Even though they had difficulties catching the live shellfish, the couple are seen laughing, and the chemistry and feelings they have for each other cannot be denied. After their breakup, Alvy tries to recreate this particular moment with another girl. However, his attempt is a failure and it is obvious that no relationship between these two people could work and that his ex-girlfriend was too special to be replaced easily.

Another example of the relation between food and happiness can be found in Allen's movie *Manhattan* (1979). The central character Isaac "Ike" Davis feels happy when eating Chinese food in bed with his young girlfriend Tracy, while watching old movies on TV. Even though Ike leaves her and starts dating another woman, it is finally Tracy whose face suddenly appears to be one of the things that make his life worth living. Not surprisingly, Ike recalls Tracy's face right after one of his favorite dishes – the excellent crabs at Sam Wo's. The experience of eating and love are closely connected and can bring joy and satisfaction to Ike's life.

Similarly to Ike, who feels comfortable with the girl and food he likes, also the idealistic movie maker Cliff Stern from Allen's *Crimes and Misdemeanors* (1989) shares happy moments with a woman whose heart he would like to win. In this case, the food they eat is Indian takeaway and the movie is the old Hollywood classic *Singing in the Rain*.

The way Woody Allen makes use of food imagery is to a large extent influenced by his protagonists' identity; characters' ethnicity is represented by the food they consume, and food becomes a synecdoche for the Jewish and the Gentile worlds, marking the clash between them.

Particular foodstuffs symbolize the Jewish identity, while others are labeled as non-kosher and therefore forbidden. Allen contrasts foodstuffs like corned beef, pastrami, rye

bread, chicken or chicken soup – which comply with *kashrut* (a set of biblical dietary restrictions) and are traditionally associated with Jewishness<sup>8</sup> – with the typically non-Jewish pork, ham, Wonder Bread, mayonnaise, or shellfish.<sup>9</sup> Particularly pork and ham function as symbols of the non-Jewish world. By breaking dietary rules, Allen’s characters try to abandon traditions, assimilate and thus avoid being ostracized by the non-Jewish majority, or to climb the social ladder.

Allen also presents the typical dominant, manipulative and over-caring Jewish mother determined to feed her children with far more than they can possibly eat. As the Jewish culture stresses the importance of the family, family dinners are occasions for important matters to be discussed by as many relatives as possible, and Allen makes use of such family events and rituals to contrast Jews with Gentiles.

It is not uncommon for Allen to characterize relationships by means of food and simultaneously to use gastronomy to contrast people’s cultural identities. The 1989 project by three famous American directors (Scorsese, Coppola, and Allen) called *New York Stories* featured a middle-aged Jewish New York lawyer Sheldon Mills (who changed his name from the Jewish Millstein) who is constantly criticized and embarrassed by Sadie, his stereotypical Jewish mother. When Sadie mysteriously disappears during a magic show, Sheldon is at first relieved to have freed himself from her constant attention. However, when his mother appears as a huge head in the sky above Manhattan, he seeks the help of a female psychic called Treva, whom he gradually becomes close to. Contrary to previous dinners with his overcritical mother and his *shiksa* fiancée Lisa, the dinner Treva prepares for Sheldon is a pleasant and intimate experience and represents a turning point in his life.

Even though they represent different generations, both Sheldon’s mother and Treva are typical Jewish women for whom food means love, communion, and security. According to Marnie Winston-Macauley, the author of the book *Yiddishe Mamas: The Truth About the Jewish Mother*, the Jewish community uses food to express love for those who are close to them, and the Jewish woman is determined to feed at least somebody (19). During dinner with Sheldon and Lisa, Sadie repeatedly instructed her son to eat (“have bread and butter”, “eat your dessert”). When Treva sees Sheldon for the first time, she immediately offers him food, as he looks too thin to her.

As Sheldon seems to be confined to his apartment by the fact that his mother is ruining his life and telling embarrassing stories about him to strangers, Treva offers to make dinner for him. By choosing chicken, Treva demonstrates that she (unlike Sheldon) is true to her Jewish identity. Sheldon’s reaction to Treva’s offer again refers to the tense relationship he had with his mother, which is reflected on the quality of the food she served to him: “Great. My favorite. Boiled chicken. It’s my mother’s specialty. Of course, she manages to render the bird completely devoid of any flavor. It’s a culinary miracle” (*New York Stories*).

Like Sadie would do, also Treva tries to make Sheldon eat as much as he can:

Treva: Have some more. You only had a drumstick.

Sheldon: I’m full. I’ve eaten...

Treva: You didn’t have any potato pancakes at all.

Sheldon: I had two of those and I had two three pieces of chicken.

Treva: You still look thin to me.

Sheldon: No, I’m fine.

Treva: You know what, take some of this home with you. I'll wrap it up. That way you won't have to leave your apartment. I know how it embarrasses you. (*New York Stories*)

Even though Sheldon enjoyed both the food and Treva's company, it is only the chicken drumstick dripping with juices which he unwraps at home that makes him become fully aware of his love for this woman. Sheldon at last realizes that, no matter how hard he tried to deny his Jewishness, he cannot get rid of it. Unlike his unsupportive *shiksa* fiancée, Treva (who shares the same background as him) understands his needs and represents an ideal woman for him. Therefore, the home-cooked chicken not only becomes a symbol of caring and affection but also helps Sheldon reconcile himself with his ethnicity.

Another character, Ike Davis from *Manhattan*, goes through two relationships that are dissimilar to each other, and the food he eats with either of his partners differs too. When he takes out his girlfriend Mary, Ike prefers foodstuffs like seafood with a bottle of wine, while the teenage Tracy is invited to a pizza parlor or a soda fountain where she sips her milkshake, looking fragile and innocent.

Ike subconsciously knows that his affair with the intellectual but emotionally insecure and promiscuous Mary is inappropriate. The food they eat on their date seems to be "grown-up", gourmet, and definitely non-kosher. On the other hand, the affectionate and emotionally innocent Tracy orders a much simpler pizza topped with everything she likes. While Ike prefers his pizza pie to be plain, Tracy simply follows her taste and asks for anchovies, sausage, mushrooms and peppers. Ike's young lover enjoys life as much as she enjoys her food, and her spontaneity and disregard for what other people might think of her are something Ike is incapable of. As he remarks, the only thing missing on her rich pizza was coconut (*Manhattan*).

The forbidden shellfish Ike orders on his date with Mary also functions as a metaphor for a "non-kosher" relationship. Allen's Jewish male protagonists tend to be attracted to non-Jewish women, thus breaking the traditions of their ethnic group. Moreover, Allen's male characters often even adopt some of the eating habits of their partners and consume foodstuffs that are not compatible with *kashrut*. Similarly to Ike Davis, the already-discussed Alvy Singer from *Annie Hall* eats lobsters with his *shiksa* girlfriend Annie, and the amateur inventor Andrew Hobbs from *A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy* (1982) characterizes his extramarital relationship by saying that he "went out with her once ... and had a couple of lobsters... that's it!" (*A Midsummer Night's Sex Comedy*). According to Nathan Abrams, "Lobsters are the symbols of insatiable sexual attraction; they symbolize love affairs, as opposed to the more humdrum foods of marriage" (95). Seafood equals forbidden passion and denial of one's ethnic heritage.

Apart from shellfish, Allen also uses pork as a symbol of everything that is non-Jewish. Like lobsters, eating pork signals the characters' wish to change their identity and break away from the burden of traditions. In Allen's 1987 movie *Radio Days*, the Jewish father of the protagonist is seduced into eating pork (as well as seafood) by his communist neighbors. By accepting this food, the father also repudiates his religious beliefs and accepts his neighbors' ideology. Similarly to the Jewish man converted to communism, the hypochondriac TV producer Mickey Sachs from *Hannah and Her Sisters* resorts to Christianity when trying to find answers to his questions and give his life some meaning. Even though

he does not eat exactly pork, Mickey is determined to do everything correctly and even adapts his diet to the new lifestyle he is about to start – apart from Christian religious symbols he buys also Wonder bread and a jar of Hellmann’s mayonnaise.

When in the course of their relationship Alvy Singer from *Annie Hall* agrees to visit Annie’s traditional goy family in Chippewa Falls, he also tries to conform to the environment and not to stress his ethnicity. Therefore, despite being Jewish, Alvy not only eats ham but even praises its taste, calling it “dynamite”. Although he tries hard, Alvy still remains an outsider particularly for Annie’s anti-Semitic grandmother, who even pictures him as a Hasidic Jew, including the traditional clothes, headwear and peyes.

Allen frequently uses families to demonstrate the ethnic identity of his characters and Jewish family dinners serve as tropes for love and communion. In *Annie Hall*, the Easter dinner with the Halls is compared to dinners of the Singer family. The non-Jewish Halls abide by good table manners, practice small talk and their portions of food are much smaller, compared to the Singers. Alvy’s family are loud, all of them talk at once, discuss seemingly inappropriate topics like human diseases and they do not even hesitate to share the food that is on their plates. Despite being less sophisticated than their non-Jewish counterparts, the Singers are presented as loving people with strong family ties and enjoying life (*Annie Hall*).

The Singers and the Halls are not the only two families Woody Allen presents (and contrasts) in his movies. In *Hannah and Her Sisters* (1986), one of the female protagonists named Lee takes part in a Thanksgiving dinner full of warmth and care for each other where tasty home-made food is served. After coming back home, Lee is confronted with the reality of her love life represented by her pessimistic and bitter partner Frederick who refuses to take anything to eat. Even though Frederick loves her, he is unable to show his emotions and experience happiness. By refusing food, Frederick also rejects the pleasures life can offer. Allen contrasts the security Lee experiences with her relatives with the complicated and no longer satisfying relationship with Frederick.

Thanksgiving dinners create a framework for the whole story of *Hannah and Her Sisters*. The host of these dinners is Hannah, a successful actress as well as an exemplary mother and wife, whose cooking is admired by all the guests. Hannah is assisted by her younger sister Holly, an aspiring actress who keeps auditioning for parts without being cast. Meanwhile, Holly and her friend make their living running a catering company. For Holly, food seems to be a way out of her situation and an opportunity to make her life organized. Even though the individual family members have their problems and flaws and are sometimes difficult to deal with, the traditional turkey Hannah serves becomes a symbol of solidarity and tolerance towards each other. The lives of the protagonists are full of trials and tribulations and many things change in a year, but the annual dinners give them the opportunity to meet the people they enjoy being with.

In Allen’s 1989 movie *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, the occasion for a large Jewish family to meet is the Seder dinner. The feast gives the individual family members not only the opportunity to keep traditions but also to strengthen family ties by sharing opinions and discussing important and serious matters. Presided over by the deeply religious father, the whole party discusses morality and guilt, the existence of God, and tries to discover the reason for all the suffering Jews have been exposed to.

In Allen's first attempt at a non-comic movie, *Interiors* (1978), two variations of the same non-Jewish family are presented. The main characters of *Interiors* are three adult sisters, Renata, Joey and Flynn, whose parents separate and later on divorce. Soon after the official break-up, the father Arthur remarries, thus providing his daughters with a new stepmother, who is the opposite of his ex-wife. Scenes from the past reveal that when the original family met at the breakfast table, the atmosphere was rather sterile and was marked by the absence of any closeness between the family members. All the characters can be seen eating their breakfast in an orderly fashion. Under the influence of the sophisticated yet emotionally cold interior designer mother, the life of the whole family was well organized and there was no scope for warmth and emotions.

Unlike the meals with the mother Eve, the dinner with Arthur's new Jewish fiancée Pearl is louder and more emotional. Pearl is a very lively, pleasure-seeking person wearing a flamboyant red dress, whose appetite for food corresponds to her love of life. When subjected to the scornful eye of Arthur's daughters, Pearl expresses her fondness for steaks (she loves sirloin – charcoaled and blood-rare), heavy sauces and rich desserts, and does not hesitate to have a second helping of what is on the table. She is not ashamed to admit that she preferred Greek cuisine and particularly lamb to the country's grand architecture and ancient temples. The once quiet Arthur, who lived in the shadow of his dominating wife, seems to have come alive again and gets carried away by Pearl's unrestrained energy. Pearl disregards any objections and encourages him to eat anything he feels like having:

- Pearl: Would you like some more gravy?... What do you worry about? It's delicious. Try it...
- Arthur: I'd love another piece of cheesecake but...
- Pearl: Then have it. What do you worry about? You'll live to be a hundred if you give up all the things they make you want to. (*Interiors*)

The life-affirming new stepmother automatically adopts her partner's family and tries to come closer with them. For her, kissing and showing one's emotions are natural. Even though she was not given a warm welcome by female family members, Pearl tries to establish a friendly atmosphere and serves frankfurters and meat balls. As a typical Jewish woman and mother, she hopes that food will have the power to build rapport and might even unite the rather dysfunctional family.

Pearl is also just one of the many characters whose attitudes towards life and food correspond. Also in the already discussed movie *Love and Death*, gastronomy does not only serve as a metaphor for love and sex, but is also linked with death. As Allen told Robert Benayoun, he even considered calling his movie *Love, Food and Death* or *Love, Death and Food* (162). The protagonist of *Annie Hall* summarizes his attitude towards life by means of a joke: "There's an old joke – um... two elderly women are at a Catskill mountain resort, and one of 'em says, 'Boy, the food at this place is really terrible.' The other one says, 'Yeah, I know; and such small portions.' Well, that's essentially how I feel about life - full of loneliness, and misery, and suffering, and unhappiness, and it's all over much too quickly" (*Annie Hall*). By accepting food, Allen's characters demonstrate their denial of death and affirmation of life. In the face of death, food provides pleasure and enables the characters to go on living.

The central characters of Woody Allen's movies often share the intimate experience with food in the privacy of their own homes or surrounded by their family. However, when Allen lets his protagonists dine out, the restaurants they visit also frequently reflect not only their character but also their ethnicity. As has already been stated, Ike Davis from *Manhattan* takes his two girlfriends to different kinds of restaurants. The place which most corresponds to Isaac's character is probably the Russian tearoom he visits with his little son during an afternoon of male bonding. However, by choosing this place, Isaac seems to ignore the fact that his son is too young for it and would prefer a different sort of food:

Willie: Why can't we have frankfurters?

Ike: Because this is a Russian tearoom. I mean, you wanna have a blintz or something? Frankfurter gives you cancer. (*Manhattan*)

Even though Ike tries to be a good father and spend time with his son, he obviously has problems connecting with the boy and their relationship is limited to scheduled afternoon visits in compliance with the divorce settlement.

Another character, the anhedonic Alvy Singer from *Annie Hall*, has to suppress his contempt for Los Angeles and the social decay it represents for him, and meets his young and free-spirited ex-girlfriend in a healthy food restaurant she likes. In another movie, *Broadway Danny Rose* (1984), the traditional Carnegie Deli, where retired comedians recall their colleague, the unsuccessful Jewish booking agent Danny Rose, corresponds to the character of this man. Like the place itself, also Danny is consistent, old-fashioned and traditional, believing in values like honesty, loyalty and guilt which often make him look like a failure to people around him.

Apart from choosing an unsuitable place to dine, the protagonists of Woody Allen's movies also frequently order the wrong kind of food (either inappropriate or non-kosher) and thus prove to be outsiders in a particular environment. On his "mission" to bring his ex-partner Annie back to his home town New York, Alvy Singer from *Annie Hall* visits Los Angeles and a fashionable outdoor restaurant. The place itself is too trendy, airy and relaxed for Alvy to cope with. Moreover, when trying to assimilate, Alvy asks for alfalfa sprouts and mashed yeasts. His order makes it even clearer that Alvy does not fit into such an environment. On the other hand, Annie has fully adopted the new lifestyle represented by the city of Los Angeles, including its super-healthy cuisine. Nevertheless, before moving to L.A., Annie's choice of food for a change revealed her Midwestern origin; on their first date, Alvy ordered the typical New York-style Jewish corned beef<sup>10</sup> while, contrary to the usual way of serving pastrami, Annie asked for it to come on white bread with mayonnaise, tomato and lettuce.<sup>11</sup> Similarly to Alvy Singer, also Fielding Mellish, the central character of Allen's movie *Bananas*, finds himself in an environment not typical of him when he is captured by rebels trying to overthrow the dictator of San Marcos. In the rebel camp, Mellish asks for a grapefruit, poached eggs, toast and coffee and gets the same disgusting-looking mash all the other rebels eat. Fielding Mellish is a typical antihero who struggled to find his place in his own society and is suddenly confronted with the lifestyle of a rebel. Surprisingly, the new environment seems to be more suitable for him, as Mellish not only assimilates with the rebels but later also becomes the new leader of the country. The breakthrough comes when Mellish is given the task to go and get some food for the

starving rebels. In accord with Allen's type of humor, Mellish approaches his mission with responsibility and wins the respect and liking of his comrades in arms.<sup>12</sup>

While Alvy Singer seems to be an outsider in a different part of his own country and Fielding Mellish experiences his cultural shock in a fictitious "banana republic", Miles Monroe from *Sleeper* has to come to terms with the world of the future. Monroe, the owner of the Happy Carrot Health Food Restaurant, underwent minor surgery which did not turn out well, and he wakes up in the future. After being defrosted, he asks for breakfast consisting of wheat germ, organic honey and tiger's milk, all of these being substances that "some years ago were felt to contain life-preserving properties" (*Sleeper*). To Monroe's big surprise, the deep fat, steaks, cream pies, hot fudge or even cigarettes that his generation considered to be extremely dangerous and unhealthy have been proved to be exactly the opposite. Even though all his friends ate organic rice, they are dead now and Monroe has to deal with a world so different from what he knew in the old days. According to Miles Monroe, the future world is worse than the California of his time and he is shocked to come across oversized vegetables and chickens bigger than him.

Gastronomic metaphors are obviously very common in the works of Woody Allen who, like many authors before him, uses food particularly as a symbol of love and sensuality. The protagonists of Allen's movies try to satisfy their physical as well as emotional hunger, and associate food with intimacy. Problems with relationships are reflected in inedible dishes and dinners gone awry, while happy moments are invariably accompanied by the pleasures of the table. Allen's characters who incline to enjoying food also have a positive attitude to life and all the enjoyment it can offer to humans. In Allen's works food symbolizes the ethnicity of his characters and sets them apart from the non-Jewish society. By eating foodstuffs that are forbidden to their ethnic group, the Jewish protagonists try to assimilate and break free from the traditions they feel to be bound by. When the protagonists of Allen's movies find themselves in unfamiliar settings, their choice of food frequently exposes them as outsiders.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The term "food film" is hard to define and rather subjective. Nevertheless, in such films food is instrumental and their story is centered on the process of preparing or eating food.

<sup>2</sup> Another author who deals with the relation between food and sensuality in Woody Allen's work is for example Richard A. Blake, the author of the book *Woody Allen: Profane and Sacred* (1995).

<sup>3</sup> As LeBlanc claims, this scene was a tribute to the erotic dining scene from Tony Richardson's 1963 movie *Tom Jones* (103).

<sup>4</sup> The typical Allen persona (usually the central character of Allen's works) is a middle-aged Jewish male longing to find love and intimacy, terrified by his mortality, and trying to discover the meaning of life. Typical protagonists of Woody Allen's works struggle to come to terms with their personal and ethnic identity and try to find out the truth about the existence of God.

<sup>5</sup> In his 1943 paper called “A Theory of Human Motivation” the American psychologist Abraham Harold Maslow defined his hierarchy of five basic human needs which form an imaginary pyramid. According to Maslow, an individual primarily strives to satisfy his or her physical needs including breathing, eating, drinking or sex. Once physical needs have been at least to some extent satisfied, people instinctively desire for emotional satisfaction and want to be loved, respected and finally struggle to achieve self-actualization. Satisfying physical needs was the ultimate goal for many protagonists of Woody Allen’s early comedies, while since the late 1970s the Allen persona has not only desired sexual gratification but also struggled to experience love.

<sup>6</sup> Louise serves her husband burned toast and fries meat without even taking it out of the original packaging.

<sup>7</sup> The soufflé was actually so hard and heavy that it had to be carried by two people and subsequently broke the table it had been placed on.

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the two most traditional and authentic Jewish dishes, gefilte fish and matzo, do not appear in Allen’s movies at all.

<sup>9</sup> According to the *Torah*, Jews are allowed to eat only those aquatic animals that have fins and scales. Therefore, all shellfish is regarded as non-kosher.

<sup>10</sup> In New York, the traditionally Jewish corned beef is usually served on rye bread with mustard or some dressing and garnished with a pickle, sauerkraut or Swiss cheese.

<sup>11</sup> Pastrami is similar to corned beef and is also typical of New York. It is also typically served on rye bread and may be accompanied by pickles, coleslaw or sauerkraut and seasoned with mustard or Russian dressing. The west coast (Los Angeles) variation of this dish comes with a French roll.

<sup>12</sup> Fielding Mellish returns to the camp with 1,000 grilled cheese sandwiches, 300 tuna fish sandwiches and 200 sandwiches with bacon. His order of food was even more specific, as he asked for 490 of the sandwiches to come on rye, 110 on whole wheat bread, 300 on white bread, and 1 on a roll. He even ordered coleslaw for 900 men and mayonnaise on the side. Apart from food, Mellish brought to the camp 700 regular coffees, 500 Cokes and 1,000 Seven-Ups.

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*Address:  
University of Ostrava  
Faculty of Arts  
Department of English and American Studies  
Reální 5  
701 03 Ostrava  
Czech Republic  
andrea.holesova@osu.cz*

# The Puzzle Novel and Richard Powers' *Prisoner's Dilemma*

Richard Stock

University of South Bohemia, České Budějovice

## Abstract

*This study seeks to establish a new type of novel: the "puzzle novel". It relies on the groundbreaking, and still valid, theories of the novel from Gyorg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin. The puzzle novel construct tries to provide a new direction for novel criticism: it should follow certain broad characteristics, but is open to more specific definition for certain analytical purposes. Just such a specific definition is provided to guide a particular reading of an excellent example of a puzzle novel, Richard Powers' *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988). The general conclusion of the reading is that the novel highlights the question "who is the author?" on many different levels.*

*Keywords: theory of the novel, novel, Richard Powers, *Prisoner's Dilemma*, Gyorg Lukács, Mikhail Bakhtin, postmodern literature, 20<sup>th</sup> century literature, American literature*

## 1. Introduction

Early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Gyorg Lukács and Mikhail Bakhtin established a definition of the novel that is realistic and also impossible. The novel is connected to lived life in a way other genres are not, which means it is much more open to natural change and innovation than other literary genres. The novel in fact has to innovate to be called a novel. As the only originally written literary genre, it is unique in not being defined by the kinds of characteristics we usually use to designate literary genres.

It is almost a century since Lukács and Bakhtin's groundbreaking work and today we unfortunately still do not understand how to analyze novels in a way consistent with these ideas. Even in his time, Bakhtin made it clear that the modes of criticism available were

not sufficient for studying the novel. Unfortunately, this situation has not changed substantially since then. New ways to study the novel have mostly gone in a horizontal direction, considering the contributions of different social and psychological categories. The vertical direction – developing the theory of the novel – has remained largely dormant.

This situation is one of the motivations of this study, although directly establishing a theory of the novel seems to be a project doomed from the start. Instead, I try to establish a flexible genre of the novel as an example of the kind of study one might undertake having in mind these earlier ideas about the character of the novel. That genre is called the “puzzle novel”, which is meant to be a construct that can be used in different ways for different purposes. Indeed, much of this study is devoted to using the puzzle novel construct to produce a useful reading of *Prisoner’s Dilemma* (1988) by Richard Powers, an excellent example of a puzzle novel, although one excellent example among many.

## 2. The Puzzle Novel

A puzzle novel is structured in such a way that the reader must piece together the basic story in order to understand the plot of the novel because neither are given to the reader in a clear way. The novel presents itself as unfinished, and requires a reader’s input. A traditional novel does not require this construction: the story and plot are clearly explained (even if the story and plot are complicated).

The puzzle metaphor refers to a jigsaw puzzle. When you construct a jigsaw puzzle, you assume that the pieces provided can create a coherent picture. You assume that there are the right number of pieces: not too many and not too few. You assume there are boundaries to the puzzle, and moreover border pieces, corner pieces, and interior pieces that clarify those boundaries. You assume that the pieces are the correct pieces, that they do not belong to some other puzzle.

The most familiar type of jigsaw puzzle is the mass-produced commercial puzzle. The metaphor is more exact if you consider an original puzzle painted and cut by an artist, a puzzle that has no duplicate. In this case there is less certainty about the prospect of finishing the puzzle. You may not have a representation of the finished image; you may not be certain that you have all the pieces; the pieces will not follow established types like a mass-produced puzzle; fitting the pieces together is difficult but not impossible, so the puzzling is never so hard as to appear random; the pieces already fitted may change character and cease to fit or fit better elsewhere upon finding other pieces; the pieces fitted together add to the confidence that success is possible and/or the process is worthwhile; the initial interest in puzzling gives way to the satisfaction of the already fitted pieces, etc. With an original puzzle, one has more of a feeling of struggling with another consciousness, a consciousness that may or may not be trustworthy in upholding the “contract” between the puzzle maker (author) and the puzzler (reader). However, the basic metaphor works with either a mass-produced or original jigsaw puzzle.

We could think of the reading process of a traditional novel under the puzzle metaphor. As you read a traditional novel, the pieces of the story are given to you one by one, along with directions as to where in the puzzle you should fit the pieces. The novel itself presents to you a system to complete the puzzle. There is a process of puzzling, but the reader is not active in solving the puzzle. We would probably not call it a puzzle at all. Even a traditional

popular novel is a long text and contains many pieces of data. Probably most important in the traditional novel is neither the amount nor the type of material that is included in the story, but rather the cues the novel provides to the reader to put the right pieces in the right places in the right order. These cues are traditionally expected of narrative; in fact, some have a hard time describing something as narrative if these cues, which can come in a variety of forms, are partially absent or inconsistent. These cues are analogous to a guide to the jigsaw puzzle that tells you piece by piece how to construct the puzzle.

This “puzzling” of a traditional novel does not make it a puzzle novel in the way that I would like to define the term. The puzzle novel asks the reader to pick up the pieces of the narrative after reading the book and construct the story. In this way, the puzzle novel sees reading as necessarily a process of re-reading. The first read-through of a novel is just data-gathering; it is not yet reading the story. It is like opening the box and spilling out the pieces. The process of re-reading opens up the reading experience to endless repetition, with each iteration different than the others. Once the reader must re-read the novel – once this concept is established as a normal and expected reading strategy – the typical concept we have of reading a book from first page to last page is undermined. “Reading” is something completely different than usually assumed, and can be said to be not only a recursive or repetitive process, but an endless process. One is never done reading a puzzle novel because reading is re-reading.

In addition, the novel provides all the material to understand the story, but requires creative work from the reader. The puzzle novel is not only complicated or hard to understand. The puzzle novel is not only a long novel or a novel with a lot of characters or detail. A puzzle novel is not just a novel that makes the reader think hard or a confusing novel. The puzzle novel has to encourage the reader to use the pieces given to him or her to construct a story, not just comprehend a story.

Many theorists of the novel find themselves having to specify that what is commonly called a “novel” is not necessarily their object of study. Gyorg Lukács contrasts the “novel” that he assumes in theorizing the form with the “entertainment novel”, which in many ways looks like a novel but ignores many of the innovative narrative possibilities that the novel form offers, and therefore is not a real novel (cf. *Theory of the Novel*). Bakhtin delineates a “First Line” and a “Second Line” in the production of the modern novel, emphasizing that it is the Second Line that interests him, because the First Line only mimics the style of the novel, but does not truly invest itself in the heteroglossia on which the novel capitalizes (“Discourse” 415–416). The puzzle novel refers only to Bakhtinian “Second Line” novels or whatever is not an “entertainment novel” according to Lukács.

While it is necessary to define the “genre” of the puzzle novel more specifically, at the same time it is clear that there are other possible useful definitions that follow from the basic structure outlined above. Also, as mentioned above, the traditional ways we define a genre do not work well for the novel, so the same will apply for the subset puzzle novel. Still, one cannot escape the attempt to define. The defining characteristics of the puzzle novel for this study are as follows.

First, a puzzle novel does not ask the reader to fill in pieces with special outside knowledge or sources. In puzzling out the story, the reader has only the information that the novel gives to him or her. Leo Bersani proposes a “naïve” reader of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* with a similar motivation as I take for granted in this study (155).

Second, a puzzle novel encourages engagement in the puzzle. It gives the reader reason to believe that the puzzle can be completed. In many ways the novel simply appeals to our human need to put forth an effort to understand a somewhat unclear text. But the novel cannot appear completely chaotic, or fragmented in a careless way.

Third, if the reading experience of a text reasonably meets the reader's expectations of that experience, then the reader is compelled to work out the meaning of the text. Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) was uncomfortable for many readers in the 1970s, but if the same text appeared in the 1870s, it would not have reasonably met readers' expectations. It would have been seen as nonsense, chaotic. We do not search for meaning in every confusion we encounter; we look for meaning where it seems beneficial to do so within the limits of time and effort. But, in principle, readers must search for meaning given a reasonable text. In fact, we could say that this is a basic human need, that all other things being equal, one will put forth an effort to understand a text when an understanding does not come automatically.

Fourth, the reader is the one to decide if the puzzle is complete. The novel does not do this for us. In this the puzzle novel is much more like an original jigsaw puzzle than a mass-produced jigsaw puzzle. We do not know if there are too many or too few pieces, we do not know what the picture is, etc. If the puzzle is not complete, the reader needs to decide if it will ever be completed, and if not, what meaning that has in itself. Ultimately, this is an individual decision, and reflects that cooperative nature of the making of meaning in the reading process of a puzzle novel.

Because of all of these qualities, the puzzle novel breaks boundaries, but at the same time it does not disregard or destroy boundaries. The puzzle novel uses and abuses boundaries, definitions, innovations, and assumptions. The puzzle novel invites us to create a new kind of criticism. For example, the puzzle novel does not "kill the author" à la Roland Barthes (cf. *Image Music Text*), but it does not doggedly follow authorial intention. Authorial intention is one possible tool to use to better understand the novel, but theoretically it does not have more "authority" than other methods to gain insight. Each tool or method is unique and has its own different effect on understanding, but no one tool is absolutely better or worse than another. In addition, novels themselves will often make it clear that such authority does not exist. Novels do not have to be consistent. A puzzle novel will often propose structures within itself or refer to structures outside the text as macro-level organizing principles, only to undermine those structures while using them or even paradoxically flatly denying that structure after using it. Perhaps the best example is that the assumption we often have about reading a novel from first page to last page is both exploited and undermined in the puzzle novel.

A puzzle novel is not reader-centered. It does not transfer all of the making of meaning onto the reader. Just because it does not follow the traditional production-consumption pattern of novels, that does not mean that the text itself has no say in making meaning. In fact the puzzle novel is suspicious of following any one concept absolutely. In the same way the puzzle novel is not author-centered, either. It is not even character-centered or narrator-centered, or centered on any particular narrative or textual phenomenon. If we have to say that the puzzle novel is centered on anything, we would have to say it is *reading*-centered.

The puzzle novel allows readers to leave the novel without solving or completing the puzzle, but the reader in this case still leaves with some sense of story and plot. This

reader refuses the encouragement to engage further, but does not leave empty-handed. This power of refusal is not a rejection of the novel and is not uncommon. This refusal, of course, may be temporary or permanent. In either case, the reader is not left with chaos or incoherence. There is a sense of plot and story, an understanding of what the reader has participated in making, but has not been able to complete.

The strategy of the puzzle novel is not that the reader needs to find the “key” to the novel. At the same time, the puzzle novel usually holds out the prospect of such a key. But the endgame of reading a puzzle novel is not to be satisfied, in the sense of learning the “real” meaning. Because the making of meaning is a cooperative and inclusive process, the feeling of a plot comes even during the process of reading and looking for such a key, balancing the need for an absolute coherent completion and the need to continue reading.

The puzzle novel described here is, necessarily, a novel. As all novel theorists recognize, there may be novelistic aspects to texts that we call different literary forms, such as poetry or drama. Bakhtin in particular claims that in the modern era all literary genres have become “novelized”. But this does not make them novels, nor does it deny the special place the novel holds as a genre. In different ways, novel theorists clearly describe the modern novel as the most potent instantiation of these “novelistic” qualities, not denying that other genres, especially in the modern era, may have become “novelized” to a certain extent. In fact, while other genres have become novelized, as mentioned above, some novels are not considered novels in the sense that prominent theorists describe the genre. In the end, it is impossible for a poem to be like a novel and remain a poem. However, a novel may be like a poem, and still be a novel.

In many puzzle novels, there seems to be a narrative scheme that sets up a “core story” in the novel, but the novel also includes a large amount of “extra material” that seems indirectly related or unrelated to the core story. Usually even the core story is something that needs to be puzzled out.

It seems that this core-story-plus-extra-material scheme is the major structure through which puzzle novels have tried to accomplish the paradoxical experience of reading described above. The core story in a puzzle novel follows a traditional plot line: a protagonist who goes through some kind of significant change over time and the experience of that change is narrated. These events are narrated in chronological order, and the events do not have large time gaps; the reader is “with” the main character during the process of the change. The core story could be narrated in a much shorter text excerpted from the novel. Although, to make this cut properly, one would have to be at an advanced stage of puzzling. Even this determination of the core story is a particular construction of a particular reader, but it seems justified to say that most readers, in puzzling the novel, would realize these core stories in these ways. One of the assumptions I make here is that readers often try to find the thread of a story by following what seem to be main characters, and keeping track of the cause and effect of what happens to them. Generally, I find that at this level the puzzle novel does not frustrate the expectations of the readers.

The material in the novel that is not part of the core story can serve a variety of purposes, but all of these ultimately relate to the core story. In the limit case, this material serves as a diversion from the puzzle, connected by not being connected through the puzzle. Because of the puzzle structure, including the anchor of the core story, the extra material has a wide

breadth of area of operation while still being in a coherent work. But still, the extra material should not be random or unconnected to the core story.

The approach to the reading of *Prisoner's Dilemma* shown below could be used for other puzzle novels. It takes a two-part structure. First, a description of a particular puzzling of the core story is given. While all acts of the puzzling of these novels can be different for different readers, this part of each novel seems to allow the author or narrator to dominate and to a large extent determine the meaning-making of the narrative. Second, a consideration of the extra material in the novel is given. This is where the results of the reading usually diverge for different readers and purposes and indeed for different puzzle novels.

### **3. *Prisoner's Dilemma***

Richard Powers' *Prisoner's Dilemma* (1988) provides a puzzle that only resists solution at the very end of the puzzling process. It leaves out important pieces of the puzzle (like a jigsaw puzzle, the reader does not know these pieces are missing until the very end), which leaves the reader with both a sense of order and an opportunity to be creative. In this way *Prisoner's Dilemma* allows the reader to change and define the puzzle, but only to a limited extent. However, the changes that the novel allows in this limited area allow the reader to define the basic purpose of the whole novel. In this way the amount of creativity the reader has is truly huge, for the reader helps determine the most basic foundational concepts on which the novel rests, as well as being able to create large systems of meaning that all are mostly coherent, but not completely coherent. The question that *Prisoner's Dilemma* ultimately leaves the reader with is "who is the author?", a question that is asked on a variety of levels, providing a unifying uncertainty.

The typesetting and titling of the chapters in *Prisoner's Dilemma* indicate that there are three kinds of chapter in the book (one could also determine four kinds; see below). One kind of chapter appears quite normal: the chapters are consecutively numbered and printed in normal text, with no title other than the chapter number. It turns out that this narrative is also chronological. The second kind of chapter has titles that consist of dates chronologically arranged from 1939 to 1945, and is set in italicized text. The third kind of chapter has descriptive titles such as "Riddles" or "Breaking the Matrix" (so they are "undated") and is also set in italicized text. While two of these groups of chapters follow a linear chronological order in the book, the third does not, and all three types of chapter are integrated in the book. The result is that from chapter to chapter time shifts greatly, although the general progression is forward in time. Even with this first impression, *Prisoner's Dilemma* presents itself as containing multiple narrative threads, and the implicit challenge to the reader is to figure out if and how the threads relate to each other.

The first kind of chapter in *Prisoner's Dilemma*, the normal-text narrative, can stand on its own as a traditional story. We could pick out these chapters as a short novel on its own. This part of the novel is chronological, there is a rather conventional story line, and many of the typical narrative cues to connections between events are present. Eddie Hobson, Sr. is the protagonist in the normal-text narrative, and this part of the novel has a consistent and apparently reliable authorial narrator. Eddie is the patriarch of his Midwestern American, two-boy, two-girl family. Eddie is a retired high-school history teacher, and

he constantly asks challenging intellectual questions of his children, who always have the answers. Eddie's hobby is Hobstown, the creation of another world that involves Eddie speaking for long hours into an old Dictaphone. Eddie has a mysterious sickness, a sickness that causes him to have seizures which knock him unconscious and that keeps getting worse. However, Eddie Sr. refuses to seek treatment for his illness, or even to go see a doctor. It is the worsening of this illness that provides the main narrative tension in the normal-text sections.

In the normal-text narrative, after years of denying the seriousness of his affliction, Eddie finally agrees to check into a veteran's hospital for treatment. Eddie soon runs away from the hospital and disappears, but his son Artie figures out where to look for him by listening to the Dictaphone recordings: Alamogordo, where Eddie happened to be when the first A-bomb was tested. The family does not truly realize that this is the cause of his sickness until he disappears from the hospital. Eddie Sr. has radiation poisoning, for which there is no treatment, hence his refusal to go to a doctor. Eddie Jr., the youngest child, drives west to find his dad, and realizes that Eddie Sr. came to Alamogordo to finish what was started there: his death. Eddie Sr. presumably kills himself in Alamogordo. In the closing chapter, the other three children listen to what is left of Hobstown and start to record their own story over the tape.

The normal text narrative has a clear story structure, with a problem that mounts as the description of the interesting family situation continues through most of the bulk of the narrative. The climax is when Eddie Sr. checks into and disappears from the hospital, and the family have to figure out where he has gone and why. The story ends with Eddie Sr. tragically, but necessarily, dying or killing himself, leaving traces of himself both at the Alamogordo visitor's center and on the Dictaphone tape. From these traces his children have to take up the challenge and create their own lives, figuratively spreading Eddie Sr.'s ashes and recording over his Hobstown.

The narrative in the other types of chapter is quite different. Both kinds of italicized chapter are parts of a narrative set farther in the past, during World War Two. The first kind is marked by having chapters with dates from 1939 to 1945 and authorial narration. The character of the dated italicized chapters is determined through a puzzling process, specifically by comparing repeated text in different chapters in the book. The dated italicized chapters are a transcript of Hobstown: what Eddie's children listen to and record over at the end of the normal-text story, the remnant or supreme creation of Eddie Sr.'s twenty-year-long obsession.

In the normal text narrative, after Eddie Sr. has run away, Artie listens to the tape that Eddie Sr. has left. Eddie Sr. leaves many erased tapes, and only one with any sound. The first two sentences Artie hears are given in one of the last normal-text chapters, chapter 18 of a total of 21 normal-text chapters: "Everything we are at that moment goes into the capsule: a camera, a wall switch, a safety pin. The task, a tough one, is to fit inside a ten-foot, streamlined missile a complete picture of us Americans, circa 1939" (316). In this chapter, Artie proceeds to listen to most of Hobstown, but not the whole thing.

These sentences in the normal-text narrative are therefore identified as the very beginning of Hobstown (at least the Hobstown that Eddie Sr. left when he went to the hospital), and they are the same two sentences that begin the first dated, italicized chapter on page 41. The ensuing dated italicized chapters are therefore the continuation of Hobstown that

Artie and his two sisters listen to in full in chapter 19, one of the last normal-text chapters. Since these chapters are a transcript of Hobstown, the narrator of these chapters is meant to be Eddie Sr. His method of narration is rather authorial, not personal, so before this puzzling takes place the reader has no reason to think the narrator of these chapters is Eddie Sr., or any other character. Hobstown even includes Eddie Sr. as a character, but the character is not narrated in the first person. The Eddie Sr. in the normal-text narrative is narrating a fictionalized version of himself in the dated italicized chapters, in Hobstown. It is clear that the puzzle reading of *Prisoner's Dilemma* is indeed a re-reading. Without taking the novel as a whole, none of these narrative conclusions can be made. Further, the impact of identifying the different qualities of the chapter simply cannot be represented in a study such as this one. One must read and live with the novel in order to make these simple connections, and when explicating the connections in this way, they appear rather simplistic than artistically simple.

The undated italicized chapters, on the other hand, have a first-person and more subjective narrator, but before puzzling out the qualities of these chapters, the reader has a hard time identifying just who constitutes the voice of these chapters. Through puzzling, we find these chapters are a transcript of what the children record on the Dictaphone after listening to Hobstown. Again, we come to this conclusion by recognizing repeated text in the novel. In chapter 21, Artie records over his father's voice, saying: "Somewhere, my father is teaching us the names of the constellations" (344). This sentence is repeated as the first line of the "Riddles" chapter on page 13, the first undated, italicized chapter, and the first chapter of the book. The three children take turns recording episodes from their childhood and stories that they heard their parents tell, and this is the content of the other undated, italicized chapters in the book.

This narrative structure is in no way explicitly indicated anywhere in the novel. Without puzzling out these connections, the reader cannot know that these chapters are narrated by the Hobson children. Each of these chapters, then, has a different first person narrator, but since they are all Hobson children, and they are all narrating things about the Hobson family, they are all very similar. Without puzzling out the narrator identity in this way, the narrator in these chapters seems consistent enough to be one narrator, but just different enough to make it difficult to be confident with this conclusion.

The piecing together of this puzzle has to do with authorship. The clues are textual – that is, parts of the text of the book direct us to other parts of the text of the book – and indicate to us which parts are narrated by whom. To this point, the questions left have to do with the effect of the story as a whole, but we seem to have a mastery over who wrote what. So far *Prisoner's Dilemma* requires the reader to engage in a puzzling game to make sense of the text, although at the same time without playing this game the narrative provides a readily-understandable thread of a story through the book. In this way the normal-text narrative is a "core story" for this novel. There is material that clearly links the other chapters to this core story, as well. For example, the dated italicized Hobstown uses Eddie Hobson as a character, supposedly narrating parts of his life that pre-date the normal-text narrative. The connections between the children's undated italicized chapters are more difficult to know, but most of these chapters seem to deal with the same characters as the normal text narrative does, albeit without naming them. Knowing the authorship and narrator identity through these puzzles, the reader seemingly can now proceed to a straightforward

interpretation of the story of the book. The two kinds of italicized chapters are to be taken as more or less a commentary on the lives of the characters described in the more traditional normal text narrative. We can use the italicized chapters to bring more life and insight into the neat normal text story.

However, in the analysis above we have ignored three chapters in the book that will continue our questioning of authorship and complicate the puzzle in *Prisoner's Dilemma*. This will also lead us to create a fourth kind of chapter, or to problematize the chapter designations we have made so far, despite the sound conclusions we have made above, clearly indicated by the text. That is, considering the vast majority of the text of the book, only ignoring three short chapters, we can make sound, logical, normal game conclusions about the novel.

In the chapter "V-J", between chapters 19 and 20 of the normal text narrative, we realize that the names we have been using for the different kinds of chapters are perhaps inappropriate. We should be designating the italicized chapters according only to the narrator, either first-person or authorial, not according to the obvious appearance of the title. "V-J" is an undated, italicized chapter, but it describes events in Eddie's life before his children were born with authorial narration. In fact, it shows Eddie listening to a Dictaphone tape left by Walt Disney, and after listening to it, re-threading the tape and recording over Disney's recording. As an undated italicized chapter, this chapter should be a part of what the children record over Hobstown, but in two ways this is impossible. It uses authorial narration, whereas all the other undated italicized chapters use first person narration, and it authoritatively describes a time before the children were born, while the other chapters subjectively describe events within the children's lives.

This chapter forces the reader to consider that the chapters in first-person narration compose the children's recording, while third-person chapters are Hobstown, created by Eddie Sr., regardless of the appearance of the titles. While this is a basic difference in understanding the chapters, it actually causes little change in the identification of the chapters in the book. All of the chapters so far considered remain as before, but defined by narrative voice rather than by title, "V-J" fits into Eddie's Hobstown. This is not completely comfortable, for there is no clear reason why the chapters would then be titled and typeset as they are. But it does seem to produce a more coherent narrative chapter system.

"V-J" closes with a sentence spoken by Eddie Sr.: "It's one of those unrepeatable days in mid-May, and all those who are still at home sit down to dinner" (333). It is not exactly clear in the narrative, but this is probably the beginning sentence of Hobstown, since it seems that at the end of "V-J" Eddie is beginning his project by recording over Disney's voice. This conclusion, though, also requires another leap of interpretive faith in that we must not define the first thing Artie hears on the tapes on page 316 as the beginning of Hobstown. Perhaps Artie did not start the tape from the beginning.

Complicating things further, the "unrepeatable days in mid-May" sentence begins the last chapter of the book, "1979", a dated italicized chapter with an authorial narrator, and therefore, in either understanding, a part of Eddie Sr.'s Hobstown. This chapter should then be the beginning of Eddie's Hobstown. But the chapter shows Eddie coming home, unexpectedly alive, in 1979. This is not a likely beginning to Eddie's project, especially given the description of how and why he begins the project in "V-J". The identification of

the chapter according to narrative voice and repeated text confirm that this is the start of Hobstown. But the content of the chapter does not allow for this.

There is no way to interpret “1979” so that it follows the puzzling rules established so far, but there is also no way to interpret the chapter to exempt it completely from these rules. It has to only partially fit the puzzle. With “V-J”, we can create a system that allows this chapter to fit, but it performs a certain violence on the obvious appearance of the book, and the puzzling the reader has done to that point. The puzzle exists only for the novel to willfully refuse to complete the puzzle, to purposefully leave out a piece of the puzzle so that it cannot be completed, but the novel does so in a way that the reader cannot deny the puzzle that is already constructed. All the same, even the incomplete puzzle is important for understanding the story.

The question that Powers leaves us with is “who is the author?” By “1979”, the novel calls into question the existence of all the narratives in the book while simultaneously asserting the power of those narratives. For every step of the puzzle in this novel before “1979”, there is strong textual evidence to support the logic of the step. But ultimately the text fails us, we cannot make a conclusion about “1979” that has the support of the rest of the text, as the other connections have. In a strange way the reader is seemingly alone/autonomous in her or his understanding of the book, yet at the same time is surrounded by the novel itself and the system that has led the reader to this place. Further, “1979” is not just a gimmick, a surprise ending. “1979” shows us that separate logical constructs can work with the same material. It causes us to truly reconsider the rest of the book, rather than “problematize” the rest of the book.

One can imagine different possible readings that seek to reconcile these conflicts, but each of these possibilities must honor parts of the logic of the game and defy other parts. That is, none of these possibilities are completely correct or clearly incorrect. I have started to give an idea of some of these interpretive connections that the reader can start to make above, and I will not continue to give exhaustive examples of such possibilities. They all lead to the same contextualized and logically frustrated end. The reader is not confronted with a myriad of details and narratives, from which she or he needs to take a heavy hand in making sense of the story. This is a strategy employed by many postmodern novels such as Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Rather, the finishing is the reader’s own, while the story as a whole remains a communal creation. This is also why it is not a gimmick ending, since it is not a hidden alternative key to the story that makes all the pieces fit into place. Rather it breaks the whole puzzle, but only at this very late stage in the puzzling.

However, we still have one more chapter in *Prisoner’s Dilemma* to discuss that will further our questioning of authorship. “Calamine” is a very short chapter, less than a page, and it is the second-to-last chapter in the book, just before “1979”. “Calamine” is also another chapter that does not follow the original chapter scheme, for it appears in normal text, but has an undated title, not a number. The narrator is first person. By these qualities, this chapter does not fit any of the possible categories established above.

“Calamine” starts with the same sentence as “1979” (the “unrepeatable days in mid-May” sentence, page 347, which is repeated twice), and proceeds to roughly follow the scene of “1979” as well. “Calamine” describes a day in mid-May with a different family than the Hobson family in “1979”. In this family, there are five children, and the middle son is narrating in first-person while in the Hobson family there are four children with

an authorial narrator. The “Calamine” family’s narrator’s brother is home from medical school; “1979”’s Artie is home from law school. The “Calamine” family’s narrator’s father died of cancer the previous winter; in “1979” Eddie walks in the front door when the family has given him up for dead. “Calamine” ends with this (remember it is the middle son narrating): “I have had an idea for how I might begin to make some sense of the loss. The plans for a place to hide out in long enough to learn how to come back. Call it Powers World” (345). In “Calamine”, we are to see that the Hobsons are a fictive version of the author’s family.

In one way, “Calamine” can be seen as a rather unsophisticated move by the author, where he shows his hand and cannot resist explaining to the reader that his fiction is indeed grounded in his own lived reality. It risks being simple, cute metafiction; it again risks being a gimmick.

But “Calamine” lifts the whole story to another level, employing the concept of the book itself to show how we try to puzzle out our own lives. This is a basic theme of this book, with multiple people creating their own Hobstowns to sort out their own lives. The author of the book is not clearly an outsider; he is another point on the plane of consistency. Through its successive phases of puzzling out the story, this novel plays into the reader’s traditional sense of a hierarchy in the reading experience, the most basic of which is the author as the creator, and the reader as the consumer. Even to this last step, the novel relies on this hierarchy, brings the reader up successive steps of the story to the pinnacle, where the author simultaneously shows his face and hides his presence, indicates his reality and asserts his fictiveness. Again the puzzle novel uses and abuses our conventional expectations for reading strategies and innovates with those strategies. In the end, a character with the author’s name can never be the author, it can only be a representation. However, using representations of known people has a different narrative effect than characters that have no such common reference.

In fact, with “Calamine” we are encouraged yet again to look at our chapter system, even though it is now both broken and working, to see if the inclusion of “Calamine” affects our consideration of the other chapters. The first chapter of the book, the undated italicized “Riddles”, narrates in first person children lying on the ground with their father looking at the constellations. In this chapter, it is “we children” who are lying with the father, typically answering questions about the constellations. “We are all already expert at second-guessing. The five of us are fluent, native speakers of the condensed sign language, the secret code of family” (13). Later in the chapter, the narrator says the father has gone, leaving among other things, “And the five of us, of course. The sum total of his lessons” (16). Five? It is technically possible in these passages that the narrator is including Ailene, Eddie Sr.’s wife and mother of all the children, but the character of the narrative does not suggest this. “Calamine” has five children, of course, the Powers children. Is “Riddles” also about the Powers family, rather than the Hobsons?

With this in mind, we can find other questionable places in the book, such as the undated italicized chapter, “The Dominant Tense”. This chapter is narrated like the other Hobson children’s recordings, but part of the chapter speaking about the “father” includes “[d]ad probably should have been an engineer, the only line of work that fit his temperament. . . . He would have become one, too, if it hadn’t been for the detour that history arranged for him. He wanted me to take up the work he never did, but on that hope I could not deliver.

My product has to be another” (83–84). In what we know about Artie, Rachel, Lily, and Eddie Jr. (the four Hobson children), none of them do anything that deals with producing a “product”, while obviously a novelist does, and there is a novelist in the Powers family while there is not one in the Hobson family. These questionable parts probably all occur in what we have been considering the Hobson children’s recordings, and this makes sense since the narrative identity in these chapters is more diffuse, and the content that the middle child in “Calamine” would want to address would reside best in these chapters. No clear conclusion can be made about these chapters, how much they are fictionalized versions of the author’s life and how much they are more purely fictionalized Hobson children’s narration. Perhaps this distinction starts to be more and more useless the more we think about it.

This is another way that the novel leaves us with the question of “who is the author?” *Prisoner’s Dilemma* seems to leave only a small area of the story untold, just a few small questions, but through these questions it causes us to doubt all the bases we stand on in reading, and in this way this unwritten area is much larger. The metafictional part would seem to give us more information for how to deal with the piece missing from the puzzle, but in fact all it does is show us how important it is to take that creation, that decision, with care. It simply increases the stakes of the game; it does not help us complete the game.

In this novel, until “Calamine”, we are merely asked as readers to imagine what the story might be. Even though other forces are inevitably at work, until this chapter the story maintains the separation between the world and the book on the one hand, and the author on the other, even though it integrates the reader as a maker of meaning. With “Calamine”, this separation disappears; we are confronted with the reality of fiction and the fiction of reality, and the reader must suddenly recognize her or his place beside this book, this story, and this author in the plane of consistency. This is the place that *Prisoner’s Dilemma* takes us to, ultimately. It is a place that asks incredible things of the reader, yet also teaches the reader how to belong in that place. This is a very different thing from a puzzle novel like James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, which is a puzzle that is also a guide to its own puzzle. *Prisoner’s Dilemma* takes on the task of helping the reader live in the world, rather than helping the reader read the book. This is obviously an unwritable part of a story, and it is the crucial piece of the puzzle that must be left out of the narrative proper. By the time the reader has any idea of what the missing pieces are, he or she is deeply involved with figuring out the puzzle, and deeply invested in the novel. Only after the reader truly becomes surrounded with the words in *Prisoner’s Dilemma* does he or she start to get an idea of what the novel really focuses on, even if, at that point, the focus is actually less clear.

*Prisoner’s Dilemma* ends with the concept of freedom. In the end, perhaps the most crucial lesson the puzzle novel teaches us is that like paranoia (see Bersani’s chapter on Pynchon in *The Culture of Redemption*), but in an inverse way, freedom is not always positive. We can be too free, left to make our own individual, solipsistic meanings from texts that do not confront us with the ethical choices of those meaning-makings. *Prisoner’s Dilemma* shows us the need to negotiate things such as freedom and paranoia in conjunction with other thinking humans, other readers, and other writers.

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### *Address:*

*University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice  
Faculty of Philosophy  
Department of English  
Branišovská 31a  
370 05 České Budějovice  
Czech Republic  
rstock@ff.jcu.edu*



# Does blackness still matter? Black Feminist Literary Criticism Revisited

Karla Kovalová

University of Ostrava

## Abstract

*In the last few years, scholars within the field of Black studies have sought to assess the current state of the field, addressing its objectives, shifting paradigms as well as the political stakes of their own theorizing. On both sides of the Atlantic, debates have taken place giving rise to new observations of blackness, new trajectories in research, and new perspectives on knowledge production. This essay seeks to contribute to this debate by examining, retrospectively, the ways in which black feminist literary critics, ever conscious of the political stakes of their theorizing, have engaged in and grappled with the issue of race and/or “blackness.”*

*Keywords: black feminist criticism, blackness, Christian, ideology, Joyce, McDowell, poststructuralism, practice, race, Smith, Spillers, theory*

*This article is part of the Czech Science Foundation (GAČR) project no. 13-26975S, University of Ostrava, “Black Feminist Literary Criticism.”*

## Introduction

[I]n the world of avant-garde literary studies, today, it is possible to think that black women, above all others, perhaps, should be in the vanguard of one of the most exciting areas of literary criticism and theory in the United States.

(Baker)

What is the future of Black studies? Can we do away with race as an organizing category, as Kenneth Warren's *What Was African American Literature* (2011) seems to suggest? In the last few years, scholars within the field of Black studies have sought to assess the current state of the field, addressing its objectives, shifting paradigms as well as the political stakes of their own theorizing.<sup>1</sup> On both sides of the Atlantic, debates have taken place giving rise to new observations of blackness, new trajectories in research, and new perspectives on knowledge production. One of the most interesting debates has centered on the oppositional theories of post-racialism and Afro-pessimism, both of which highlight the issue of race. While for post-racialists this category seems no longer needed or is dated at best, for Afro-pessimists it is essential for understanding the structural dehumanization of the Black.<sup>2</sup> This essay seeks to contribute to this debate by examining, retrospectively, the ways in which black feminist (literary) critics, ever conscious of the political stakes of their theorizing, have engaged in and grappled with the issue of race and/or blackness. Divided into three parts, the essay examines the origins and early development of black feminist criticism, analyzes its internal conflict concerning the use of theoretical language threatening to depoliticize and/or undermine blackness, and assesses ways of engaging race and/or blackness in the current trends in black feminist criticism.

## Part I: Origins and Development of Black Feminist Criticism

The Black feminist critic would be constantly aware of the political implications of her work.

(B. Smith)

Born in the 1970s, largely as a response to white/male criticism rendering black women's literary work invisible and/or marginal, black feminist literary criticism, at its inception, had three major goals: to challenge stereotypical literary representations of black women; to propose new ways of reading black women's texts; and to excavate forgotten and out-of-print literary works by black women.<sup>3</sup> Highlighting the need to make black women's existence and experience in America recognized, its overall project was to develop a body of theory whose insights could be used in the study of black women's art. Pioneering in this endeavor was the essay "Toward a Black Feminist Criticism" (1977) by Barbara Smith, one of the founding members of the black feminist political organization Combahee River Collective (1974)<sup>4</sup>

Smith saw a direct connection between "the politics of black women's lives" and black women's "situation as artists" whose creativity had, historically, been stunted by "the political, economic, and social restrictions of slavery and racism."<sup>5</sup> In her formulation,

black feminist criticism was both a cultural and political enterprise; it emerged directly from the politics of black women's lives and black women's struggle for justice. Therefore, for Smith, the emergent black feminist criticism would naturally "owe its existence to a Black feminist movement while at the same time contributing ideas that women in the movement could use" (11). This envisioned reciprocity or mutually beneficial relationship between literary criticism and political activism underlines both the roots and political dimensions of black feminist criticism: black women's efforts to eradicate racism (i.e., white supremacy) and sexism (i.e., patriarchy) in America.

Emphasizing that the black feminist critic must be "constantly aware of the political implications of her work" (11), Smith called for a new critical perspective sensitive to black women's literature, attentive to interlocking factors of race, class, and gender in black women's lives. Arguing that black women writers "constitute an identifiable tradition" and that "thematically, stylistically, aesthetically, and conceptually [they] manifest common approaches to the act of creating literature as a direct result of the specific political, social, and economic experience they have been obliged to share" (10), she urged black feminist critics to explore these "commonalities." To Smith, it was unquestionable that the black feminist critic remains true to *her* identity and does "not try to graft the ideas or methodology of white/male literary thought to [...] Black women's art" (11, emphasis mine).<sup>6</sup>

Echoing one of the tenets of the Black Art Movement proposing that black literature should be judged by the standards derived from black, not mainstream, culture, Smith outlined several areas key to defining black feminist criticism's boundaries: the question of authority (who has the right to produce black feminist criticism), textual terrain (what is the subject of black feminist criticism), and methodology (what methods/approaches are appropriate for black feminist critics). Her claims for black women's exclusive authority over the production of black feminist criticism, their exclusive interest in the literary tradition of black women writers, and, finally, their rejection of white/male critical theories became the heart of ensuing debates among black feminist critics.

In "New Directions for Black Feminist Criticism" (1980), Deborah McDowell criticized Smith's rendition of black feminist literary criticism as ahistorical and essentialist, "lack[ing in] definitional precision and supportive detail" (7). Questioning Smith's claim that black women share a common language and that the incorporation of certain activities, such as rootworking or midwifery, is a unique feature of black women's writing, she urged black critics to move away from the focus on "common approaches" to a more fruitful and, in her words, necessary exploration of contexts of textual production and reception. This contextual approach to black women's literature, however, she insisted, "must not ignore the importance of rigorous textual analysis" (12), which could unravel the artistic sophistication of black women's literature and help create a more substantial theoretical body of black feminist criticism.

McDowell's critique marked a time in which black literature as well as black feminist criticism became institutionalized, i.e., established as part of academic enquiry. This victorious move into the academy "began to yield a body of academically sophisticated work [...] no longer directly grounded in overt political struggle," in some ways shifting the focus on the social/political to the more linguistic/literary (Griffin 491). Yet, as Farah Jasmine Griffin points out, black feminist critics "never lost sight of the political implications

of their work” (491); they recognized that even “the creation of the fiction of tradition is a matter of power, not justice, and that that power has always been in the hands of men – mostly white but some black” (Washington qtd. in Griffin 491). In other words, for black feminist critics, “[t]he academy became yet another location, another site in the centuries-long battle against white supremacy and patriarchy” (Griffin 491). Within this context, the conscious (re)construction of a black women’s literary tradition on the part of black feminist critics was, essentially, part of the struggle for power, just as were their efforts to develop a larger body of black feminist criticism that could not be dismissed as a mere “identity politics-based criticism” – a frequent accusation leveled at black critics. This context also explains McDowell’s anxiety about Smith’s reciprocal link between black feminist theory and political action, yoking political ideology with aesthetic judgment.

While not entirely dismissing the possibility of the *political* use of feminist criticism, McDowell disagreed with what she saw as the overly restrictive boundaries of black feminist criticism in Smith’s work. Arguing for more inclusive parameters, McDowell challenged all areas that Smith articulated as key to black feminist criticism. First, she rejected race and gender as the sole defining criteria for the black feminist critic, suggesting that black feminist criticism could be practiced by men and women alike, both white and black. Second, she challenged the idea of an exclusive textual terrain of black feminist criticism, calling for an exploration of “parallels between black male and female writers” instead of the critics’ stubborn focus on black women’s literature and/or the treatment of black women by black males in black men’s literature (15). Last but not least, she maintained that black feminist critics must abandon their distrust of Western theories and “determine the extent to which their criticism intersects with that of white feminist critics” (11), and, possibly, “embrace other modes of critical inquiry” (15).

Interestingly, more than a decade later, McDowell admitted having gone too far in her “attempt to formulate a definition [of black feminist criticism] so inclusive in its scope that it nearly gutted black feminist thinking of any distinctiveness and explanatory power as a critical category” (17) and acknowledged her error of having faulted Smith “for allowing ideology to inform critical analysis” (23). Her acknowledgment was largely influenced by her academic experience of racial “fetishization” and the disapproving views of other black feminist critics, namely that of Hazel V. Carby, who was quick to point out in “The Woman’s Era: Rethinking Black Feminist Theory” (1987) that “black feminist theory is emptied of its feminist content if the perspective of the critic doesn’t matter” (13). In line with her argument, McDowell went on to explain in “*The Changing Same*”: *Black Women’s Literature, Criticism, and Theory* (1995) that to “detach ‘blackness’ from feminism [...] is to lend tacit support to a standard of ‘neutrality,’ [...] to become an invisible black” in a race-neutral world (McDowell 21). Given the circumstances of a continuing existence of racial hierarchies in America, such a move would be foolish; in other words, she concluded, there was no place for black criticism without ideology as yet (23). Her remarks, further elaborated in “Transferences: Black Feminist Discourse: The ‘Practice’ of ‘Theory’” (1995), an essay published in the same year as her reassessment of Smith,<sup>7</sup> can be read as an insightful coda to an internal conflict within black literary criticism, which has become to be known as “male theory versus female practice” or the “‘race’ debate.”

## Part II: The “‘Race’ Debate” or “Male Theory versus Female Practice”

Inevitably a hierarchy has now developed between what is called theoretical criticism and practical criticism. (Christian)

In 1987, the winter issue of the literary journal *New Literary History* brought to the light a heated debate among black critics over the use of poststructuralist theory. The debate was triggered by Joyce A. Joyce’s essay “The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism,” in which Joyce, highlighting the inappropriateness of the use of Western male/white European critical theories in analyses of black literature, accused two leading black intellectuals and critics, Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Houston A. Baker, Jr., of denying “blackness or race as an important element of literary analysis of Black literature” (292). Arguing that the black critic “takes his or her cues from the literary work itself as well as from the historical context of which that work is a part” and thus his or her consciousness is “predetermined by culture and color” (293), she charged that “it is insidious for the Black literary critic to adopt any kind of strategy that diminishes or [...] negates his blackness” (294).

Essentially, Joyce was concerned with black critics’ use of poststructuralist theory, in particular their “adopt[ion of] a linguistic system and an accompanying worldview that communicate to a small, isolated audience” (294). In Joyce’s words, the poststructuralist language was “distant and sterile,” estranging the critics not only from “the realities of the sensual, communicative function of language” (294) but also from the job of the black critic who must be responsible to his or her readership. In her view, not dissimilar from that of Barbara Smith, the black critic should “serve [...] as an intermediary [...] between Black people and those forces that attempt to subdue them” (293). Hence race and blackness can never be for the black critic (both male and female) just an arbitrary function of language that poststructuralist theory sees as a mere “system of codes or as mere play” (295).

Predictably, Joyce’s views on the inappropriateness of the use of Western critical theories in analyses of black literature met with strong reactions from both Gates and Baker who defended this “inter-racial” critical engagement as one that enriches the understanding of black texts. In particular, in “What’s Love Got to Do With It?: Critical Theory, Integrity, and the Black Idiom,” Gates noted that despite what he perceived as a resistance to theory on the part of Joyce, “the challenge of the critic of black literature in the 1980s” was “not to shy away from [Western] literary theory; rather, to translate it into the black idiom” (11). In “In Dubious Battle,” Baker seconded that poststructuralist critics “ha[d] seized initiative by formulating suggestive theories of Afro-American expressive culture that bring their work into harmony not with a mainstream, nor with an academic majority [...] but with an avant garde in contemporary world literary study” (20). Moreover, he maintained that black poststructuralist critics were bringing “a desirable expansiveness, diversity, originality, and [...] complexity [to] the Afro-American critical and theoretical arsenal” (18) *in contrast to black women critics* who tended to espouse “a new black conservatism” (21). Baker’s overtly gendered response, combined with Joyce’s accusation of two *male* intellectuals (although her essay was not otherwise gender-specific) and Gates’s

reference to Joyce's resistance to theory, helped to create a false schism among black literary critics referred to as "male theory versus female practice." The schism – suggesting that only male critics employ and/or develop theory while female critics merely engage in practical criticism – was further solidified with the publication of Barbara Christian's essay "The Race for Theory," which occurred in the same year as the Joyce-Gates-Baker debate.

Essentially, Christian argued that literary criticism, in general, had become marred by a perturbing "movement to exalt [poststructuralist] theory" (17). According to Christian, in the academic world, "a hierarchy has now developed between what is called theoretical criticism and practical criticism" (17), resulting in critics' rush to embrace theory. This "race for theory," however, had a detrimental effect on black criticism and black critics for whom, she argued, literature was not "an occasion for discourse" but "necessary nourishment":

The race for theory, with its linguistic jargon, its emphasis on quoting its prophets, its tendency toward "Biblical" exegesis, its refusal to mention specific works of creative writers, far less contemporary ones, its preoccupation with mechanical analyses of language, graphs, algebraic equations, its gross generalizations about culture, has silenced many of us to the extent that some of us feel we can no longer discuss our own literature, while others have developed intense writing blocks and are puzzled by the incomprehensibility of the language set adrift in literary circles. (13)

Christian found it alarming that black women critics who had not been silenced were often "influenced, even coopted into speaking a language [...] in terms alien to and opposed to [black people's] needs and orientation" (12), displacing the organic ways of reading black literary texts, i.e., ways derived from and conscious of black culture, history, literature, and politics.<sup>8</sup> Like Joyce, she saw a danger in the proliferation of a largely European male poststructuralist critical theory, which threatened to de-politicize and/or undermine black authenticity. In her view, black critics had no need to use what she saw as an essentializing, ideological category in service of the white male hegemony, trying to reinvent the wheel:<sup>9</sup>

[P]eople of color have always theorized – but in forms quite different from the Western form of abstract logic. And I am inclined to say that our theorizing (and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, in riddles and proverbs, in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking. ... My folk, in other words, have always been a *race* for theory – though more in the form of the hieroglyph, a written figure that is both sensual and abstract, both beautiful and communicative. In my own work I try to illuminate and explain these hieroglyphs, which is, I think, an activity quite different from the creating of the hieroglyphs themselves." (12, emphasis mine)

An eloquent statement about the distinct ways of black theorizing in which race is inextricably bound to people ("my folk") of which the critic is part and whose words the critic tries to illuminate – this aspect of Christian's critique of the use of poststructuralist theory has often been neglected. Yet Christian reiterates the point in "The Highs and the Lows of Black Feminist Criticism" (1990), making it explicitly gendered: "It is often in the poem,

the story, the play, rather than in Western philosophical theorizing that *feminist* thought/feeling evolves, challenges and renews itself” (54). In doing so, she not only challenges the charge that women are incapable of theorizing, implicit in the myth of “male theory versus female practice,” but also, and perhaps most importantly, explains why Western theorizing is inappropriate for black women. To Christian, Western theory serves to “homogenize the world”; it fixes black women “in boxes and categories through jargon, theory, abstraction” (54), preventing them from seeing “connections between emotion/known language of women’s literature, the many-voiced sounds of [their] own language and the re-visioning [the black women] seek” (55). In other words, Western critical theory contributes to the “multiple jeopardy” of black women by undermining that which is inextricably bound with them (black female authenticity), to the point that their voices “no longer sound like women’s voices to anyone” (56).

### Part III: Transformation(s) of Black Feminist Literary Criticism

Indeed, by the mid-1990s black feminist literary studies was one of the most intellectually exciting and fruitful developments in American literary criticism. (Griffin)

While the debate over the use of poststructuralist theory has never been quite resolved among black critics, it has contributed to a rich diversification within the field of black feminist criticism.<sup>10</sup> If Christian and Joyce felt concerned about the negative consequences of the black critics’ use of Western theory, taking to heart Audre Lorde’s cautionary argument that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,”<sup>11</sup> the majority of black feminist critics have exploited the possibilities of using “the master’s tools” to produce sophisticated readings of and/or theories about black women’s literature while maintaining race and/or blackness as their key element. In “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition” (1989), for example, Gwendolyn Mae Henderson combined Mikhail Bakhtin’s and Hans-Georg Gadamer’s theories of dialogics and dialectics with black idiom to propose a new theory of interpretation of black women’s literature based on the black woman’s “simultaneity of discourse.”<sup>12</sup> While not quite “dismantling the master’s house,” her reading of black women writers as “the modern day apostles, empowered by experience” recuperated the black vernacular to highlight the specificity of black women’s experience.<sup>13</sup>

Perhaps the best example of attacking “the master’s house” could be seen in Hortense J. Spillers’ essay “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” (1987), which uses and simultaneously subverts Western psychoanalysis to explore black subjectivity. Articulating a theory of black female gender construction, Spillers argued that “in the historic outline of dominance, the respective [Lacanian] subject-positions of ‘female’ and ‘male’ adhere to no symbolic integrity” (58); they lose differentiation and validity within captivity through “a theft of the body,” becoming “sensuality,” “the object,” “the other” and “powerlessness” (58). Exposing the ways in which slavery marked black women’s bodies, she demonstrated that this institution ruptured the black family both physically and psychically; and that “the traumatic marks on the body of the slave constitute

‘an American grammar’ that is transferred across generations within African American culture” (Keizer 159).

Spillers’ exploration of the diacritical relation of psychoanalysis to race has proved to be a fruitful direction for black feminism.<sup>14</sup> With her emphasis on the black “interior,” Spillers “rescued the psychoanalytic [approach] from the depoliticized, ahistorical realm,” transforming it into a tool for accessing a more complex black subjectivity (Griffin 496). In doing so, she rebutted Joyce’s and Christian’s fears, reversing the role of the agent: instead of allowing a Western theory to de-politicize blackness, she used blackness to politicize the Western theory. In addition, her formulation of the American grammar of suffering, with its delineation of the structural dehumanization of blacks and their denied agency has provided a theoretical framework useful not only for literary studies but also for other fields, such as history and cultural studies.<sup>15</sup>

As black feminist criticism was gaining momentum in academia, there were several attempts to redefine the field. Hazel Carby was the first to recognize “contradictory impulses” in the growing scholarship of black feminist criticism, arguing that black feminist criticism “be regarded critically as a problem, not a solution, as a sign that should be interrogated, a locus of contradictions” (15). The contradictions within the field of black feminist criticism involved primarily the three areas outlined by Barbara Smith back in 1977 – the question of the identity of the black feminist critic, the question of the textual terrain of black feminist criticism (especially with regard to the literary tradition of black women), and the question of methodology (already discussed above). Most if not all of the contradictions were caused by the import of poststructuralist theory, namely deconstruction.

Deconstruction questioned the concept of fixed, coherent identity, hence also the concept of literary tradition – the very concept that black women critics were asserting to confirm the black women writers’ (and their own) existence. While the critics recognized that the creation of “an identifiable literary tradition” of black women, as Smith had defined it, was a construct, they disagreed on the issue of whether or not to abandon it. Some, like Carby, argued against it and encouraged a move away from the “reliance on shared experience” (16); others were less dismissive, insisting that black women must first reclaim their collective identity before they can critique it. In “‘The Darkened Eye Restored:’ Notes Toward a Literary History of Black Women,” for example, heeding Spillers’s idea of “cross-currents” and “discontinuities,” Mary Helen Washington suggested that we learn to read the black women’s literary tradition “in new ways” (xxv). Carole Boyle Davies saw a possible solution in “cross-cultural, transnational, translocal, diasporic perspectives” that would help “redefine identity away from exclusion and marginality” (4). Arguing for a geographically broad conception of black feminist criticism that would avoid the limitation of being “almost wholly located in African-American women’s experiences,” she proposed in *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994) that “Black women’s writing [...] should be read as a series of boundary crossings and not as a fixed, geographical, ethnically or nationally bound category of writing” (4).

While Davies remained locked in the pursuit of *black* women’s writing (her new category basically meant including *black* women from Diaspora), Toni Morrison was attempting to expand American literary scholarship by shifting its attention to the study of literature written by whites. Suggesting that literature written by white American canonical

authors may prove a fruitful territory for exploration of what she called “the Africanist presence,” in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (1992), she began to examine inscriptions of race in white literary production. Her investigation, implicitly challenging black critics to give up their exclusive textual terrain and to explore *(the) other(s)* texts, provided a brand new impetus for black feminist criticism. It shifted its focus on “what can black feminist theory claim as its own” to pondering a different set of questions: “[W]hat can black feminist theory give to its ‘other’? What does black feminist theory have to offer to that which is not its own?” (DuCille 33).

Last but not least, informed by both the poststructuralist critique of essentialism and Kimberlé Crenshaw’s term of intersectionality,<sup>16</sup> Valerie Smith challenged not only the textual terrain of black feminist criticism but also the very assumption of a biologically grounded positionality of the black feminist critic. In *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* (1998) she argued that “Black feminism is not a biologically grounded positionality” but one that “provides strategies to reading simultaneity,” i.e., intersecting constructions of race, gender, class, and sexuality in cultural expression (xv). Her words, reminiscent of her earlier definition of black feminist criticism as “a way of reading inscriptions of race (particularly but not exclusively blackness), gender (particularly but not exclusively womanhood) and class in modes of cultural expression” (“Black Feminist Theory” 39), have opened up the way for a broader, more inclusive, concept of black feminist criticism while laying foundations for more expansive black feminist approaches.<sup>17</sup> Yet they have also left a nagging question hanging in the air: if black feminist criticism is not a biologically grounded positionality, i.e., the black feminist critic does not have to be a black person, if the cultural expression under critical consideration does not have to be authored by a black person and if the methodology used by the black feminist critic can be a white Western theory, does blackness still matter for the black feminist critic?

### **Coda: Does Blackness Still Matter?**

[T]he most recent generation of scholarship, while seemingly opening up black concerns [...], has, like its post-1960s counterpart, “frequently limited [its analyses] to one oversimplified explanation – racism.” (Warren)

There is no doubt that since its inception, black feminist criticism has undergone profound transformations. Inspired by Barbara Smith’s call for a politically responsible criticism attentive to interlocking factors of race, class, and gender in black women’s lives, it entered the academy in the late 1970s to challenge its existing hegemony. Over the course of the years, it has succeeded in moving black women’s literature from the margins to the literary canon, academic curricula, and publishing houses, making it more visible and recognized. Black women’s fiction, in turn, provided the ground for the critics’ theoretical analyses of and approaches to black women’s multiple oppression, which not only constitute, to use Robert J. Patterson’s words, “the ur-defining analytical framework” of the field

of black feminist criticism (90) but have also come to inform and influence the scholarship of fields outside of literary study.

Despite the fact that many of Barbara Smith's premises have been challenged, the core tenet of black feminist criticism has remained intact: black feminist criticism has never severed its link to politics. As has been demonstrated throughout this essay, race (and blackness as an essential part of it) has always been important to black feminist analyses, which have constantly highlighted its intersection with class, gender, and other factors affecting black women's lives. It is precisely this reading "with an eye toward equality and justice" (Griffin 502) that is still of value in today's world where race continues to matter. As Griffin poignantly summarizes it: "Given the misogyny of some of today's contemporary black popular culture as well as the impact of U.S. imperialism on the lives of women of color and poor women globally, the insights of black feminist criticism offer a mode of analysis worth heeding, for black feminist criticism provides a strategy of reading but it also informs a politics that measures a society and its culture by the place that the poorest women and girls occupy within it" (502).

Thus despite the recent trend to embrace diasporic, transatlantic or global frames that tend to erode the distinctiveness of American blackness (and seem to dilute the critical enterprise originally meant to promote it), as long as the idea of a post-racial, color-blind American society in which racism no longer exists continues to circulate in American society,<sup>18</sup> there will be a need for black feminist criticism. The new challenge that lies ahead of black feminist literary critics, however, is to learn to navigate through the conflicting narratives surrounding the ever-problematic issue of authentic blackness. So perhaps the real question we should be asking is not "Does blackness still matter for the black feminist critic?" but "What makes black feminist literary criticism black?" As this essay has, hopefully, demonstrated, the answer to this question is: "aplenty."

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Among the most recent and important venues bringing together large numbers of scholars interested in the future of Black studies are, for example, the Collegium for African American Research (CAAR) conference (Atlanta, March 2013), the WISE conference on The African American Experience Since 1992 (Hull, September 2013) and the forthcoming conference on The Futures of Black Studies – Historicity, Objectives and Methodologies (Bremen, April 2014). My list of issues pertaining to the future of Black studies reflects both the Atlanta and Hull conference sessions and keynote lectures, and the Bremen conference call for papers.

<sup>2</sup> On post-racialism see, for example, Lawrence Bobo's "Somewhere between Jim Crow and Post-Racialism: Reflections on the Racial Divide in America Today" (*Daedalus*, vol. 140, no. 2, Spring 2011, 11–31), Ytasha L. Womack's *Post Black: How a New Generation is Redefining African American Identity* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2010) or Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* (Lanham: Rowman, 2010). On Afro-pessimism see, for example, Jared Sexton's "The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism" (*InTensions*, no. 5, Fall/Winter 2011, online, 47 pages), Frank B. Wilderson's *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid* (Cambridge:

South End Press, 2008) or Saidiya V. Hartman's *Scenes of Subjugation: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).

<sup>3</sup> Instrumental in this process, which continued throughout the 1980s, were, for example, Barbara Christian's *Black Women Novelists: The Development of a Tradition, 1892–1976* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980), Mari Evans' *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation* (New York: Doubleday, 1984), Marjorie Pryse's and Hortense Spillers' *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), Hazel Carby's *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Mary Helen Washington's *Invented Lives: Narratives of Black Women, 1860–1960* (New York: Doubleday, 1988) as well as her earlier volume *Black Eyed Susans/Midnight Birds: Classic Stories by and about Black Women* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), and Joanne M. Braxton's *Women Writing Autobiography: A Tradition Within a Tradition* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989). Two milestones in this endeavor were also the founding of *The Black Women Writers* series (Beacon Press) by Deborah McDowell and the publication of *The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers series*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

<sup>4</sup> In this paper I use the terms black feminist theory and black feminist criticism interchangeably, both of them referring to the critical theorizing essays by black feminists.

<sup>5</sup> Smith here paraphrases the words of Alice Walker from her landmark essay "In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens" (1974), which can be considered the first critical attempt to reconstruct a literary tradition of black women. The essay can be found in her collection of essays titled *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt, 1984), 231–243.

<sup>6</sup> Smith also urged black women to pay more attention to black lesbian texts. In the second part of her essay, she tried to define lesbian literature and offered a lesbian reading of Toni Morrison's *Sula*.

<sup>7</sup> The essay is included under the title of "Black Feminist Thinking: The 'Practice' of 'Theory'" in *African American Literary Theory: A Reader* ed. by Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 557–579.

<sup>8</sup> Arlene R. Keizer reads the controversy over practice versus theory as "the fight to determine how African American literary studies would be institutionalized in historically white colleges and universities" (161). In her essay "Black Feminist Criticism", included in *A History of Feminist Literary Criticism*, ed. by Gill Plain and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 154–168, she argues that "[t]he establishment of African American Studies programmes [sic] was influenced heavily by the cultural force of the Black Power and the Black Arts movements, but as these movements waned and were critiqued from within, many new questions about the field had to be answered," among them "[w]hat critical models would (or should) be used to discuss African American literary texts?" (161).

<sup>9</sup> Christian speaks of a new academic *hegemony* in which only a few select individuals versed in a particular language *control* the destiny of others "since theory has become a commodity which helps determine whether we are hired or promoted in academic institutions – worse, whether we are heard at all" (11). These comments, explicitly framing the debate about male theory versus female practice in the context of the institutionalization of African American literary studies and the hiring of black faculty members, attest to the above-mentioned argument that for black feminist critics, "[t]he academy became yet another location, another site in the centuries-long battle against white supremacy and patriarchy" (Griffin 491).

<sup>10</sup> It has also generated further discussion on the topic of theory versus practice. See, for example, Michael Awkward's "Appropriative Gestures: Theory and Afro-American Literary Criticism,"

Joyce A. Joyce's "'Who the Cap Fit': Unconsciousness and Unconscionableness in the Criticism of Houston A. Baker, Jr., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr." and Sandra Adell's "The Crisis in Black American Literary Criticism and the Postmodern Cures of Houston A. Baker, Jr., and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.," all of which can be found in Winston Napier's *African American Literary Theory: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), pages 331–338, 319–330, 523–539, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> The expression comes from Audre Lorde's seminal essay "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House," in which Lorde criticized racism within white feminism. It can be found, for example, in *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color*. Eds. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (New York: Kitchen Table, Women of Color Press, 1983), 98–101.

<sup>12</sup> Likening black women to the disciples of Pentecost, she argued that black women, as gendered and racial subjects having to interact on different levels with black men, white men and white women, speak in tongues, addressing both "the notion of commonality and universalism" as well as "the sense of difference and diversity" (36).

<sup>13</sup> In some ways, Henderson followed in the footsteps of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and Houston A. Baker, Jr., who had combined black idiom with Western theory in their seminal works *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro-American Literary Criticism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) and *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), respectively.

<sup>14</sup> Among the black feminist scholars who took up the challenge of applying psychoanalysis to black literature were, for example, Claudia Tate with her *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) and *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels: Desire and the Protocols of Race* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Ann DuCille with her *The Coupling Convention: Sex, Text, and Tradition in Black Women's Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); and Mae G. Henderson with her essay "Toni Morrison's *Beloved*: Re-Membering the Body as Historical Text," published in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*, ed. by Hortense J. Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991), 62–86. Spillers's interdisciplinary approach also influenced black feminist critics to combine literary studies with other areas of interest. Some of the key interdisciplinary black feminist texts are Karla Holloway's *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991), offering valuable insights into the field of cultural studies; Valerie Smith's *Not Just Race, Not Just Gender: Black Feminist Readings* (New York: Routledge, 1998), making contributions to cultural and queer studies; and bell hooks' *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), offering illuminating essays on film and culture.

<sup>15</sup> For works combining psychoanalysis and black cultural studies or history, see, for example, Saidiya Hartman's *Scenes of Subjugation: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), Sharon Holland's *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), and Elizabeth Alexander's *The Black Interior* (Saint Paul, MN: Graywolf Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> See Kimberlé Crenshaw's essay "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Politics, and Violence against Women of Color," *Stanford Law Review* 43.6 (July 1995), 1241–99.

<sup>17</sup> These new feminist approaches are found, for example, in the writing of the black male feminists David Ikard and Michael Awkward, who offer insightful readings of intraracial gender conflicts. See, for example, David Ikard's *Breaking the Silence Toward a Black Male Feminist Criticism* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007) and Michael Awkward's *Negotiating Difference: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Positionality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

1995), which contains his seminal essay “A Black Man’s Place(s) in Black Feminist Criticism.” On the question of positionality, see also Cheryl Wall’s insightful essay “Taking Positions and Changing Words” in her *Changing Our Own Words: Essays on Criticism, Theory, and Writing by Black Women* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1989, 1–15).

<sup>18</sup> For excellent examples of such claims and of some writers’ fictional fantasies of a post-racial American future see, for example, Coleman Hutchinson’s insightful lecture “Three Poems and a Critique of Postracialism” given at Emory University, Atlanta, GA, on November 1, 2012, its full text to be found at <http://southernspaces.org/2012/three-poems-and-critique-postracialism>.

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*Address:*

*University of Ostrava*  
*Faculty of Arts*  
*Department of English and American Studies*  
*Reální 5*  
*701 03 Ostrava*  
*Czech Republic*  
*karla.kovalova@osu.cz*

# Sexuality Today: Contemporary African American Women Writers' Chick Lit Novels

Veronika Portešová

Silesian University, Opava

## Abstract

*Firstly the paper explains how sexism and racism have been intertwined for African Americans, as well as taking into consideration the resulting importance of gender and class-specific approaches even today. Secondly, the paper deals with how hidden power relations operate in the third millennium from the viewpoint of sexuality, as depicted in the case of the major characters in two selected books, namely *What a Sista Should Do* (2005) by Tiffany L. Warren and *The Other Side of the Game* (2005) by Anita Doreen Diggs, which represent two distinct subgenres of chick lit.*

*Keywords: Black, sexual politics, gender, sexuality, contemporary African American women writers, chick lit, Sista lit, Christian lit, sisterhood, romance*

It would be naïve to think that power relations that elevate some groups over others do not exist. For African Americans of both genders much has changed and much has been achieved since the civil rights movement, but still – as for instance Patricia Hill Collins notes – “the power relations that administer the theatre of America are now far more hidden” in the post-civil rights era (4). To accept that racism still exists in some form means an important challenge both for white Americans and (mainly) for African Americans.<sup>1</sup> In particular, despite the social mobility of many African Americans and the better visibility of African Americans in higher social positions, some violations against black men and women still continue to occur (Collins 5).<sup>2</sup> What is more, African Americans often still seem to be alienated and disconnected from other black people – especially in their attempts and aspirations to live in middle-class white neighbourhoods – and also from themselves (cf. Collins 5–6).

Throughout this paper, the theoretical framework of intersectionality is used (as explained by Collins). Intersectional paradigms understand race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, and sexuality as a mutually constructing system of power which penetrates all social relations (Collins 11).<sup>3</sup> As Collins observes, “[i]n the post-civil right era, gender has emerged as a prominent feature of what some call a ‘new’ racism” (5). Simultaneously, and ironically, many African Americans deny the existence of sexism, as the more obvious and pressing problem of racism has been solved. But it is vital to realize that – due to the fact that sexism and racism are intertwined – racism simply “cannot be solved without seeing and challenging sexism,” as Collins suggests. There is no doubt that African American people are still affected by racism, but in gender-specific ways (Collins 5).<sup>4</sup>

Before this paper proceeds further, it is necessary to explain its basic standpoints. Assuming that the chick lit novel<sup>5</sup> is one of the most successful (but usually also underestimated) genres<sup>6</sup>, one which tends to some extent to romanticize sex and sexuality,<sup>7</sup> it is intriguing to ask how contemporary popular African American women writers deal with sexuality as well as racial tensions, as suggested by Collins and other black feminist critics.<sup>8</sup> In addition, it becomes vital to consider whether contemporary African American women writers feel an urge to cope with racial issues and tensions related to female sexuality,<sup>9</sup> and if so, what shape the tensions take. As Andersen suggests, “rather than just adding sexuality” into the analysis, it is necessary to “develop an understanding of how sexuality intersects with race, class, and gender and in ways that go beyond argument by analogy or addition” (447). Two different novels representing various subgenres of chick lit<sup>10</sup> were chosen: Tiffany L. Warren’s *What a Sista Should Do* (which can be classified as Christian chick lit or “church lit”) and Anita Doreen Diggs’ *The Other Side of the Game* (an example of black chick or “Sistah lit”); these terms were suggested by Ferriss and Young (6).

Regardless of race, social status, sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc. all people face social norms about gender. These norms influence their sense of themselves, the way they perceive femininity and masculinity. In the case of African Americans, the relation between race and gender is even more intensified, and therefore it produces “ideology that shapes ideas about Black masculinity and femininity” (Collins 6). Consequently, black gender ideology justifies certain behavioural patterns of discrimination and lack of opportunity for both African American men and women, which becomes visible especially in schools, jobs, many social institutions, and/or authorities (Collins 6, 17). In addition, images often presented by contemporary black popular culture and the globalized mass media take the form of representations of black masculinity and femininity, which increasingly influence public life. It becomes rather intriguing to ask whether the presented ideology represents reality or whether it actually shapes it, moulding African American people’s aspirations and the way they perceive themselves within the everyday context. As Collins explains, the tight bond between sexism and racism must be approached as a result of the remaining cultural beliefs concerning the nature of African American sexuality as well as African American sexual practices. As a result, it is obvious that a view of sexuality can hardly be limited to a biological function. From what was outlined above, it is clear that sexuality is also a set of ideas that are deeply rooted in shaping social inequality in America as far as various ethnic groups are concerned (Collins 6). In any event, as Andersen explains, sexuality and gender “exist in a dialectical relationship, just as race and class and gender

are mutually constituted, overlapping, intersecting, and dialectically interrelated to social relations” (447).

Several important observations should be made before proceeding to the analyses. First, as contemporary research proves and Andersen explains, sexuality, “like gender, is a socially constructed identity, not one fixed by nature” (449). Second, in Collins’ opinion, sexuality can be seen as an “entity that is manipulated within each distinctive system of race, class, and gender oppression”. Third, sexuality is a “specific constellation of social practices that demonstrate how oppressions converge”. Finally, in general terms, sexuality tends to be perceived as heterosexism, a limiting rigid binary system of oppression similar to racism, sexism, and class oppression (Collins 11–12).<sup>11</sup>

The repressive nature of sexuality in American society becomes even more obvious when we take into account how extensively visible sexuality has become – Collins terms it hypervisibility (36) – in combination with the fact that even nowadays a wide range of sexual practices are censored or at least frowned upon. These include for instance gay and lesbian “closeting” accompanied by sexuality discussed only within the margins of heterosexual marriage as well as interracial sexual activities, procreation stressed as a fundamental purpose of sexuality, or silence when it comes to information concerning other forms of birth control before marriage but abstinence (Collins 37–38). On the one hand, sex and the notion of lust sell, and therefore sexual spectacles are highly visible in American (as well as other countries’) media;<sup>12</sup> on the other hand, sexuality fails to be understood as a natural but complex part of human life. A real understanding of sexuality as an essential experience in people’s lives has hardly been reached. As a result, as is pointed out by Collins, it is rather difficult to have frank, open, and public debates about sexuality which would be somehow constructive and would reflect reality. Sexuality itself then becomes perceived as a taboo or some sort of problem, and can even be demonized. Not to mention that studying sexual practices which do not fit into the prevailing heterosexist norms becomes rather problematic, for such activities stigmatize individuals as well as groups who engage in alternative sexual practices (Collins 37–38). What is more, this normative system leads to a certain reluctance to talk about human sexuality as far as education is concerned. Young people may lack information about birth control, HIV, and other sexually transmitted diseases, and are therefore at risk (cf. Collins 38–39).

For centuries, as Collins points out, both African American men and women were associated with an imagined animalistic, “wild” and therefore dangerous sexuality based on their racial difference and the concept of the Other by Western society.<sup>13</sup> In particular, black men were labelled as dangerous and violent sexual beings, while black women were perceived as frivolous. Such associations reinforced racial differences and further fuelled the imagery of untamed and, above all, hypersexualized men and women of African descent. According to Collins, invoked sexual meanings gradually gave shape to racism, sexism, class exploitation, and heterosexism (27).

In addition, today the historical context of presupposed African American untamed sexuality is not taken into consideration. Although present-day sexual images of African Americans are more sophisticated, they remain limiting and tend to view African Americans as hypersexualized by their very nature. The funky and dirty sexual practices associated with this ethnic group make their sexuality even more intriguing, and may continue to result in myths around black sexual practices (cf. Collins 42).

In order to prevent American society from returning to such simplifying tendencies and reinforcing the new sexism and racism, there is an essential need for a continuous black sexual politics. Sexual politics has to do with the placement of particular groups at the particular intersection of race, gender, and sexuality. It can be defined as “a set of ideas and social practices shaped by gender, race, and sexuality that frame all men and women’s treatment of one another, as well as how individual men and women are perceived and treated by others” (Collins 6).

It is vital to point out that African Americans consider sex and gender relations to be a private concern. Trying not to “air the dirty Black linen” in public (Guy-Sheftall 301)<sup>14</sup> leads people to observe the normativity of heterosexism, and problems remain hidden. The church, similarly to major African American social and other organizations such as the NAACP, the Urban League, and so on, bases its teachings around the patriarchal black nuclear family, which does not contribute to undermining a sexually repressive culture either (Collins 45).

To sum up, heterosexism mostly remains as a system of labelling what is considered to be normal and therefore acceptable; it operates as a set of ideas or assumptions which form a normative “taken-for-granted ideology” (Collins 37). There has always existed a need for a progressive black sexual politics; however, today, the need to take a gender-specific approach is even more obvious in order to explain African American men and women’s realities. Sex education and open discussion of human sexuality must not be suppressed in the sex-saturated society (Collins 38).

The first novel analyzed in the paper is *What a Sista<sup>15</sup> Should Do* by Tiffany L. Warren. The book centres on three African American women belonging to the same church, narrated by each of them in the first person in alternating chapters.<sup>16</sup> Unlike in other chick lit books – and especially “Sistah lit” genres – their real friendship remains undeveloped throughout the book. The women struggle to live good and meaningful lives in balance with their faith and relationships.

A brief outline of the plot and description of the three major protagonists should shed some light on the way sexuality is dealt with in the book. Pam Lyons is an African American professional woman who – out of necessity, though – has carried the financial burden of the whole household due to her husband’s inability to fulfil his dreams. Simultaneously, she takes care of their two small daughters. She compensates for her dissatisfaction with her family and personal life by centring her life on God and the New Faith Church, which further frustrates her husband Troy. Their growing apart is only solved by her becoming pregnant again and his ultimate acceptance of her faith. Wondering where their future lies, Pam learns to love both her partner and God, which is her greatest achievement. The second major character is Taylor Johnson, the single mother of Joshua, who is the result of an affair she had with Luke Hastings – who also happens to be the minister of the Church and is married to Yvonne, the last major character. Yvonne Hastings thinks she has a perfect (but childless) life, not being aware of the fact that her husband has been unfaithful for years (not only with Taylor) and has also been leading a parallel life with another woman with whom he has an adult daughter. When she learns about Taylor’s child and who the father is, Yvonne aims her hatred at Taylor and initially believes her husband’s lies about his affair. Only after Luke attacks his wife so violently that he nearly kills her does she find the strength to face the truth and leave him.

The novel is to be read as an example of a Christian chick lit (or “church lit” as suggested by Ferriss and Young) novel in which the depiction of sexuality plays a seemingly minor part in comparison with its strongly accentuated religious message. The opposite, however, is the case: as a matter of fact, sex is not totally suppressed or even ignored, but it becomes a taboo subject. While Taylor is silenced by his threats, Luke, the respected and respectable minister of the Church, is unable to take responsibility for the consequences of his affair. The seeming absence of sexuality as far as the everyday protagonists’ lives are concerned precisely shows the restrictive and hypocritical attitude of the African American church to the sexuality of its members.

To sum up the initial discussion of this particular novel, sexuality in the novel *What a Sista Should Do* is limited to basically four views. First, sexuality is viewed an essential part of marital duties within a Christian marriage. There is a question, however, whether to view sexuality as a source of carnal pleasure or simply as a part of procreation (as stated in the Bible). If the latter view is taken, then Yvonne – who apparently cannot bear children – and Luke’s sexual practices definitely become more than just a fulfilment of their marital duties. Yvonne’s blind obedience to her husband as well as her negation of her own sexuality become obvious from the following words: “And in the bedroom – well, let’s just say that I ain’t never had a headache. ... I know my husband gets everything he needs at home. I’m not bragging either. It just what I know” (20).

Second, sexuality might take a form of indulging oneself but it is never referred to in an explicit way or in terms of carnal pleasure in the book. Taylor and Luke see each other regularly for this purpose before her attention is drawn to her pregnancy, and her attachment to him is immediately destroyed by his urgent request to undergo an abortion. The only allusion to sex as a pleasurable part of a woman’s life is when Taylor’s mother, “being her carnal self, had the nerve to ask [her] if [she is] gay or something” (235) when she expresses her concern about her daughter’s sexual passivity. The mother is simply worried about her daughter’s wellbeing – which, in her opinion, is related to finding herself a man. Taylor’s prudish reaction reveals how fanatical and narrow-minded one of the protagonists has become: “... that one little comment got me longing for a warm body in my bed. That’s how easy the devil can steal my focus. I need to hurry up and figure out what God has for me to do” (235). At the same time, if sex does not go hand-in-hand with love, as is the case with several men Taylor has dated, it becomes a source of frustration and hopelessness. Taylor contemplates her life: ““One day we’re going to have our own family,’ I believed him. He had to be telling the truth, or else I was an idiot and this man was just using me for sex. Well, it turns out that I was an idiot” (11).

Third, sexuality is perceived as a source of sin. Only after the woman sinner is judged and punished (often by the members of the “Sister to Sister” community operating within the context of the Church) can she be forgiven and redeemed. Taylor compares herself with Hester Prynne from *The Scarlet Letter*. Her son Joshua is stigmatized and frowned upon because he was born out of wedlock, which means “that he carries some spirit of lust” (29).

Fourth, in the novel enjoying sex and sexuality as lust is depicted as effectively preventing African American women from finding a partner with serious commitment. Having been hurt by Luke, Taylor is strongly convinced that the only reason why her potential boyfriend Spencer would like to meet and date her is that he wants to have sex with her.

In comparison with other black chick lit novels, Warren's book is not as rich in motifs of racial tensions related to sexual politics. There are essentially three moments in the novel which have a sexual-racial context. The first one is a passage in which Taylor, a single mother, contemplates two notorious themes of African American literature. These are i) her options when, after losing her job, she is advised by a clerk at the Ohio Job and Family Services to apply for emergency benefits, and ii) the high number of imprisoned black men in the American jails. She comments,

Now, I'm not a racist or anything, but it seems real odd that Mrs. Eckhart immediately threw welfare out there as an option. I wonder, if she was looking at a white girl that could have been her daughter or niece, would she be so quick to recommend the poisonous crutch of government money? I'm not too proud to get help, but how about giving me a list of jobs to apply for, or something like that? I think that black women are sometimes steered toward welfare just the way our fathers, husbands and sons often become permanent fixtures in the justice system. (49)

As is the case in other sister-girl novels, in *What a Sista Should Do* Warren attempts to debunk the stereotypes of the welfare queen and the criminal black man.

Next, having been accused of fathering Joshua and having been confronted by Yvonne, Luke leaves threatening messages on Taylor's answering machine. One day he even pays her a visit and expresses his fury: "Oh, you done put the white man in our business," referring to the American courts, which from his point of view represents a sort of betrayal (77). Finally, Taylor addresses another infamous and frequently discussed issue – the competitive nature of the relationship between black and white women. Watching her superior Glenda at work interact with a man she herself might be interested in, she utters, "I can't stand the way some white women get around fine black men. It's sickening." Her following words show how critical of men she is in general. She continues, "[b]ut the brothers love that ego-building attention. I think that's the real reason why some of them are crossing over" (91).

The second analyzed book is *The Other Side of the Game* by Anita Doreen Diggs. In comparison with the previous novel, this book pays much more attention to issues of love of various kinds, and sex is often explicitly displayed or discussed as a strong motif with considerable variety; this can generally be said about numerous "Sistah lit" novels.<sup>17</sup> Similarly to *What a Sista Should Do* as well as other books of the chick lit genre, the individual chapters take their names from the corresponding first person narrators who follow each another in a largely regular pattern. What is more interesting, despite the fact that the novel is a women-centred text, Diggs provides her readers with a completely different perspective, using a male voice as one of those telling the story. Subsequently, the novel becomes not simply more complex, but also more multi-layered and therefore also more convincing.

Saundra Patterson and Asha Mitchell are half-sisters who live very different lives. Saundra is a yoga-practicing vegan who cannot imagine her life without her father Phillip (or Phil, the male narrator mentioned above), as she has lived with him since her mother Lola's death. Together with her sister, she is preparing happily for Saundra's upcoming nuptials. By contrast, materialistic Asha, an accessories buyer at Macy's, simultaneously

engages in various relationships in order to be able to afford designer clothes and her fancy apartment. She believes that men can only be a part of her life sexually and financially, having “no intention of settling down or ever being faithful to any one man” (14), whereas Sandra and her high school sweetheart Yero live a holistic lifestyle and support each other’s dreams. Phil is a police detective who has lived with a terrible secret since he was in the first grade. He has been dating Evelyn, his colleague from the same precinct who helped him to raise Sandra for six years, but always has an excuse for postponing their engagement. When Sandra discovers her father’s secret (he is gay), it affects the relationship she has with the two most important men in her life, Phil and her fiancé. Sandra flees to the only safe place she has at the moment, Asha’s apartment, which reveals how different the sisters are. At the end of the novel, there is a happy reunion at Sandra and Yero’s wedding in which all the characters except Evelyn participate.

*The Other Side of the Game* offers a much more varied and complex way of depicting sexuality. Sexuality and sexual practices are never referred to as duties but mostly as sources of pleasure and even spiritual growth, as in the case of Sandra and her gentle but passionate husband-to-be. Fundamentally, the novel focuses on the sensual aspect of love-making. Simultaneously, unfulfilled longing for sex turns into a source of frustration; Evelyn comments about her boyfriend at her birthday party: “Sometimes, he takes the abstaining from sex thing too far. Tonight is an example. There are certain days of the year that no woman should have to ask for what she needs” (56).

As discussed previously, unapproved sexual activity by a child can become a reason for turning him/her into an outcast of a family. Joanne, Yero’s brother’s girlfriend, is thrown out by her strict Haitian family even though she miscarries. Phil’s secret of being sexually attracted to other boys results in his father’s threat not to “ever set a foot on his property again” (227) and his mother’s constant rejection of any attempt Phil makes to contact his parents.

The female body is also depicted as a trap and source of trickery, anxiety, and humiliation. Asha’s teenage adventure with the most attractive but ruthless peer she could choose ends up in her pregnancy and subsequent painful abortion at the age of sixteen. To make things worse, Asha becomes “the subject of a major scandal and the ridicule [is] tearing [her] apart” (13). It is this experience that later turns the protagonist of the “Sistah lit” novel into a promiscuous man-hunter. Yero describes her as follows: “I don’t dislike her. But if Asha liked herself, she wouldn’t be hitting the sheets with every man that crosses her path” (203). Asha uses her body as a strategic weapon, effectively creating a feeling of power and control over men. This attitude is rooted in her inability to become emotionally attached to any man, an emotional issue she herself calls “a commitment phobia”. Having overcome her fear of being Nick’s woman, “something owned. Someone who [is] going to be betrayed” (300), she is the character who experiences the largest emotional and psychological growth, metamorphosing herself into a much more balanced person.

Evelyn joins the other numerous African American women characters who are forced to face the lack of eligible men of the same colour. She explains her complicated relationship with Phil, “[b]ut what would have been the point of leaving him? It’s not like there’s a surplus of African-American men who don’t mind being in a relationship with a woman who carries a pistol and studies Eastern philosophy” (156).

As a matter of fact, Asha is not the only character afraid of commitment. Nick brings a very frank insight into the difference between a wife and a “wifey”, who is “just a girlfriend you like a lot and you don’t want her to go out there fuckin’ around, so you give her a title and she sticks around forever and ever. . . . It’s an insurance policy for a brother who has no intention of actually making any real commitment to his girlfriend but has decided he doesn’t want her messing around with other people while he does whatever he wants.” Asha is astounded: “What kind of sorry-ass woman would agree to an arrangement like that?” Nick’s answer is “The kind that’s in love” (216–217). When Asha discovers Brent has never loved his white wife, because he “just liked how she looked on [his] arm,” but never “stopped loving the sisters,” Asha respects him even less than before, correcting him immediately, “No, you mean you never stopped *fucking* the sisters” (278).

Phil and Evelyn’s relationship has lasted nearly for six years. Except for her frustration resulting from the lack of intimacy and sex with her boyfriend, as well as his reluctance to propose to her, paradoxically enough Evelyn finds herself happy with Phil. She states that she does not “have to beg him to take [her] out or buy [her] a thoughtful gift”. All in all, in her opinion, he “is a wonderful boyfriend” (35), despite the fact that “sometimes, he takes the abstaining from sex thing too far” (156). The two make a deal that as soon as Sandra moves out of the house, “it would be [her] time.” Evelyn agrees “to wait for him to handle his business with his daughter,” being “happy with the way things are” (37). However, her statement “that’s that. Or it should be” plants a seed of doubt for an observant reader. What keeps her motivated to be patient is her feeling that “Phil is one of the last good men left,” and she does not intend to lose him by listening to those who doubt their relationship (37). In addition, Evelyn has been married before when she was very young, and the marriage turned out not to function at all. Gradually – despite her trying not to push him just because she has already been waiting for so long – more characters than just Evelyn speculate about the reasons why Phil has not proposed to her yet. Evelyn is constantly reminded of the fact that she still has not been bought an engagement ring by her mother<sup>18</sup> but mainly by her best friend Josephine.<sup>19</sup> However, it crosses no-one’s mind that Phil might be gay. Even when Evelyn confronts him, announcing her wish to have an engagement ring, he lulls her with the same excuse of “march[ing] his daughter down the aisle first” (74).

Finally, in connection with sexuality, Diggs does not avoid the rather sensitive topic of racism within the black American community. Joanne is automatically expected by her Haitian family to “be a lawyer, marry a Haitian man from a good family and live happily ever after.” When she announces she is in love with Yero, an African American man of Jamaican origin, the parents say they “want nothing to do with her”. This incident brings back Sandra’s high school memories of the “stupid ‘Island Wars’” and what Phil taught her about narrow-mindedness within the black community: “we are all black people who may have come on different ships but are still in the same boat” (181–182).

I have examined several African American women characters of chick lit novels from the third millennium who were born after the struggles of civil rights and black power; the analysis has focused on the characters’ sexuality. Despite the fact that chick lit and its varieties have tended to be frowned upon, their importance is indisputable for several reasons. First of all, chick lit novels represent publishing’s most lucrative categories, and therefore belong among the best-selling books enjoyed by contemporary women readers. Considering the African American women readers, who make conscious choices of what

books they want to read as well as do not want to read, an important phenomenon should be referred to. As was mentioned above, it was Terry McMillan who started a new wave of popularity for the genre with the release of her novel *Waiting to Exhale* and the subsequent movie in the early 1990s, which further encouraged millions of women to read, even across racial boundaries. In addition, McMillan's legacy is cultivated by the so-called "Terry's children", that is younger writers "deliberately extending the urban contemporary mode she developed" (Richards 19).<sup>20</sup> It is thanks to McMillan that authors such as Warren or Diggs can engage in an open, frank, and somewhat political discussion with primarily African American readers.

Sexuality is among the most intriguing themes of contemporary chick and "Sistah lit" books. There is no struggling within and against heterosexuality – no "traditionally defined heterosexual women as either mothers or whores" (Willis 233) inhabit the space of the selected novels. Representations of sexuality in them are predominantly heterosexual, with the exception of Phil, one of the protagonists of *The Other Side of the Game*. Still, Diggs' tolerant attitude toward homosexuality prevents her from suggesting that he as well as other male characters could have made husbands for the protagonists if it were not for their sexual orientation.<sup>21</sup>

Yet, there is also a critical perspective: the need for more sharing and consideration when it comes to sex is advocated in both of the selected novels. Treating either gender as sexual objects is not a solution. Naomi Wolf suggests in *The Beauty Myth* that "[w]omen could probably be trained quite easily to see men first as sexual" (154). Nothing could be further from the truth in the case of most of the African American protagonists of the analyzed novels. Neither is the inversion of gendered sexual practice (not objectifying men) of any use, as especially the second novel is based on a value system that feminism originally intended to reject as dehumanizing. On the one hand, the characters of Diggs' novel actively seek pleasure in sex; on the other hand, hand-in-hand with this attitude goes vulnerability: these explorers of the sexual landscape end up emotionally attached to their lovers despite their initial notion that they could avoid such attachment. And it is equally demanding not to succumb fully to what starts as a non-binding flirt, as well as to retain the image of a liberated sex-goddess. All women characters of the analyzed novels are aware of the fact that it is up to them and nobody else to suffer the consequences. Single characters are portrayed as being intrigued by the "normal" life; simultaneously, they often have to try hard to sustain it, or they simply cannot fully relate to it. Kiernan precisely understands this dilemma: "Attempting to invert existent sexual norms in favor of the feminine here seems to risk annihilation. But the possibility of adopting the stereotypically masculine approach to sex ... doesn't signify liberation, rather it seems to suggest a resigned view toward revising feminist sexual politics" (215). The paradoxical fake rhetoric of empowerment, where the sexual subordination of a woman is eroticized, is encountered only occasionally in Asha's behaviour.<sup>22</sup>

In general, sex scenes in chick lit are not very extensive or graphic, and "they are narrated matter-of-factly rather than in purple prose, factors that distinguish the genre from pornography, erotica, and romance novels" (Wells 50). In comparison with the selected representative of church lit *What a Sista Should Do*, the second novel analyzed here pays much more attention to issues of love of various kinds, and sex is often explicitly displayed

or discussed as a strong motif with a great variety, which can be generally said about numerous “Sistah lit” novels.

Kiernan sums up the situation effectively, stating that chick lit can be seen as “a relatively new form of romance” and claiming that it “offers a more sophisticated insight into the lives, loves, and aspirations of the women it speaks for and to: ‘anticipating pleasure’ has largely been superseded by actively seeking and experiencing pleasure. And sex... has heralded a new phase of women’s fiction – one that raises questions about how feminine desire is constructed, articulated, and received beyond fiction” (208). It is tempting to expect that in such an atmosphere a feminist triumph is signalled; still, however, the protagonists cannot have it all, as their thirst for independence is often at odds with their occasional wanting of a “knight in a shining armour”. By giving her female protagonist a number of sexual partners and experiences, Diggs lets the story of the women’s growth and experiences “stand on [their] own, rather than simply making it part of a larger romantic narrative” (Mabry 202). Moreover, these more experienced heroines “are also easier for their intended readers to relate to, as it is not only accepted but also accepted in contemporary culture that young women will have had at least some sexual experience before settling into a serious long-term relationship or marriage” (Mabry 202).

Suppressed sexuality, as presented in *What a Sista Should Do* and demonstrated in the analysis, has rather serious consequences; by contrast, most of the characters in *The Other Side of the Game* – similarly to many other real women of their generation – consider the search for sexual fulfilment to be what Richards terms as a “valid human endeavour” (Richards 118). Obviously, Terry McMillan’s heritage in subsequent black popular novels for women lies not only in the formal (mainly narrative) innovations, but also in the fact that in *Waiting to Exhale* she “struck a chord similar to that of other forms of popular women’s fiction, such as romance novels, which also invite women readers into a dialogue about new roles women can play in intimate relationships,” which women readers consider to be vitally important, the reason being the changing mores that have “radically altered the way men and women try to relate to each other in romantic partnership” (Richards 118).

All in all, criticism directed at the genre of chick lit is often harsh and tends to make conclusions based on a few of its representatives. That is also why this paper took into account two very different examples of what chick lit fiction can offer. *What a Sista Should Do* is a chick lit novel with clear Christian aspirations. Unlike various novels by McMillan or Diggs, in this book African American (and other) women protagonists are often depicted as passive victims, trapped by their bodies within the patriarchal structures; at the same time, African American men become a source of evil, having sexuality at their disposal as a means of controlling and subjugating women. In order to find relief and sanctuary, these women let themselves be “filled with the Spirit of the Lord” (Warren 93). They suppress sexuality and focus their attention on worshipping, wanting “to spend all day every day just basking in His presence” (Warren 93). The impression of seemingly content families in the novel is underlined by its happy ending – Troy’s acceptance of faith and Pam’s giving a birth to a son as well as Yvonne’s newly gained independence from Luke. Only after the women make a decision to act against their partners’ destructive behaviour does something begin to change in the males’ attitude – however, this change comes at a high cost. Warren’s novel reinforces the traditional model of heterosexual marriage and its importance (in the case of Pam and Troy) at first sight; nevertheless, it subversively

shows the absurdity of remaining in a relationship based on lies, obedience, and blind loyalty. Yvonne's divorce provides her with a chance for a new beginning. Neither is Taylor forced to become a part of the happy ending in marriage.

*The Other Side of the Game*, the second novel analyzed here, represents a more easily recognizable pattern of the happy ending in marriage (Saundra and Yero) as well as in betrothal, a promise of marriage (Asha and Nick).<sup>23</sup> This "Sistah lit" novel does not reinforce heteronormativity, since Phil, a closet homosexual<sup>24</sup> and one of the narrators, comes out even though this step is more than likely to undermine his position as an African American police detective. Most of Diggs' protagonists find out how to appreciate themselves, enjoy their bodies, and learn not to expect or hope for a partner – whether male or female – who would answer all their questions.

To conclude, the novels analyzed above challenge both the repressive nature of black female sexuality (historically related to its construction) and the popular (and often demeaning) myths about why women's fiction captivates millions of women readers to various extents. None of the heroines "can achieve happiness only by undergoing a complex process of self-subversion, during which she sacrifices her aggressive instincts ... and – nearly – her life" (Modleski 37). The books, especially *The Other Side of the Game*, rather offer dynamic positive characters who make changes only if they suppose that these changes are somehow beneficial for them and also for their loved ones. In *What a Sista Should Do* the usual chick lit critical-subversive stance is suppressed; as a result, it stresses the traditional articulation of morality as inherent in monogamy and motherhood, which are also basic features not only of church lit but also romance novels. Fortunately Warren does so with no reinforcement of the traditional role of women or uncritical insistence on heterosexist family ideology. Friendship and female bonding is something for which the protagonists pay a high price in both books. At the same time, however, – especially in *The Other Side of the Game* – the plotline is fuelled by "wrestling" with "urban material temptations" (Harzewski 4) and values rather than relationships among characters which seem to be reduced to portraying contemporary courtship and social motives – including the position of the protagonist on the marriage market.

The umbrella term of "chick lit" has provoked much controversy in the mainstream press and in the literary world, for the genre's varieties serve not only as commentaries on changing social and demographic phenomena but also as a product of the singles market which expanded in the second half of the 1990s. Whether chick lit is approached as a more realistic parody of the (Harlequin) romance novel,<sup>25</sup> as a specific sort of female Bildungsroman, as an evidence of backlash of feminism,<sup>26</sup> or as a postfeminist subversive manifesto offering self-reflexive meditations about (and what Harzewski terms as "meta-commentaries" on) the role of the respective communities and commodities (13), it is virtually impossible to ignore the genre's popularity, which goes hand-in-hand with consumer culture. The fact that such novels themselves are written should not elicit anxiety; however, what *is* dangerous is that their readers tend to take to this sentimentalized prose and things presented in it as ideals to aspire to. Also – despite offering a more realistic portrait of single life, several formal innovations, and original use of language, which results in their infectious quality and massive commercial appeal to the audiences – when these novels become perceived as facts representing definitive statements about women's prose

craftsmanship, they perpetuate negative gender stereotypes inflicted both upon African American males and females, and may lead to readers' unrealistic expectations.

Most of the contemporary chick lit novels written by African American women writers only partly compensate for the deficiencies in the real lives of their readers. They are not directed towards female passivity or powerlessness;<sup>27</sup> on the contrary, they serve as sources of empowerment, encouraging women readers to realize the potential they have when shaping their lives. By doing so, these novels offer vibrant discussions of the complex topic of sexuality that the prevailing American discourse has been raising in relation to African Americans in the post-civil rights era. In addition, the racial tensions suggested above do occur in contemporary African American romance novels; however, the white element does not stand for any direct threat to the self-supportive African American community, which is capable of functioning and standing by its members of both genders. To be precise, the white presence is limited to those women who represent potential competitors to the African American ones in their quest for finding eligible men.

In other words, the quest for African American progressive sexual politics forms a part of a broader and more global struggle for human rights. Considering the number of people of African descent within US society, they should have their own voice, and their concerns should be discussed on their own terms (Collins 13–14). The first basic prerequisite is to understand that racial and sexual oppression draw strength from each other, and that there still is a tendency to foster black subordination. Gender and sexuality must not be seen from the viewpoint of binary oppositions but rather in terms of variety, individuality, and heterogeneity. Heterosexism and/or any other normative system (sexism, racism, etc.) lead to the classification and marginalization of those who differ from the majority. It is essential to realize that African American people come in all shapes, sizes, political, and religious persuasions, sexual orientations, and so on. It is, therefore, necessary to stop presenting African Americans as a homogenous group regardless of age, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, etc. but to learn to value and appreciate their value as individuals. Finally, as Collins suggests, the politics and infrapolitics as well as the everyday lives of African Americans should respond to challenges of inequalities of race, gender, sexuality, and class (49). Having been given the opportunity to be heard and seen in the media, African Americans themselves are responsible for their reactions to the way they are treated, which – in Collins' opinion – are often rather contradictory (50). There is no urge to submit to “routinized violence” and hypervisible or seemingly empowering sexuality, or to accept labels of untamed wild sexuality. Neither is the solution to embrace the conservative politics of respectability or the repression of sexuality, as was advocated in the past. Instead, as Collins suggests, drawing her ideas from Audre Lorde, the antidote to a gender-specific racial oppression that previously advanced controlling images of deviant black sexuality is for today's African Americans, in the context of new racism, to “rescue and redefine sexuality as a source of power rooted in spirituality, expressiveness, and love” in order to “craft new understandings of black masculinity and black femininity needed for progressive Black sexual politics” (51).

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It would also be possible to apply the terms “black American”, “African-American” or “Afro-American” to people of African ancestry, as the only difference between these expressions seems to lie in their inconsistent use by various critics and scholars around the world. The words “black” nor “white” are not capitalized in this paper; this is not because of lack of respect, but due to the fact that both words merely designate race; in addition, most African American people themselves do not do so either.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret L. Andersen agrees with Collins, adding that “the emphasis on agency in contemporary feminist scholarship underestimates the role of power in shaping social relations.” In Andersen’s opinion, this error “discounts the significance of class and race (along with other social structural forms of inequality) in shaping the experiences of different groups of women” (443). Andersen too insists on “thinking relationally”, which enables one to “see the social structures that generate both unique group histories and the processes that link them, as well as the processes specific to the social experiences of different groups” (446).

<sup>3</sup> The interlocking (often mutually reinforcing) connections among race, class, and gender, as well as how these are manifested in women’s sexuality, is also dealt with by Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill in “Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism”, or Zinn et al. in *Gender through the Prisms of Difference*.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics* 119–148 and 149–180.

<sup>5</sup> The term “chick lit” was first used in print by the novelist Cris Mazza, a co-editor of *Chick-Lit: Postfeminist Fiction* (1995) and *Chick-Lit 2: No Chick Vic* (1996). It is generally agreed that the cornerstones of the genre were laid in 1996 by the publication of the newspaper columns *Sex and the City* by Candace Bushnell in book form as well as *Bridget Jones’s Diary* by Helen Fielding. It might be of some interest that it is Terry McMillan’s *Waiting to Exhale* from 1992 that foreshadows this new trend in women’s prose. Chick lit is often discussed as a sociocultural phenomenon in which playfulness often slips into superficiality; it makes use of not only popular forms (hence the heritage of the romance and Bildungsroman) but also media discourse. For more information about how chick lit draws from romances, see Ferriss and Young 3–5.

<sup>6</sup> Apparently the genre emerged almost twenty years ago; nevertheless, chick lit has begun to receive academic attention (whether in a positive or negative sense) only in the past ten years, with Imelda Whelehan, Suzanne Ferriss and Mallory Young, or Caroline J. Smith as pioneering scholars. As Ferriss and Young point out, acclaimed novelists such as Beryl Bainbridge and Doris Lessing gave its authors the shameful label of “chickerati” (Ferris and Young, ed. 1).

<sup>7</sup> As a matter of fact, there are other reasons why it is not easy to approach this kind of literature. These include its ambiguous relation to feminism, its fetishization of commodity culture and consumerism, as well as its protagonists’ complicated identities as independent human beings or objects of (mostly hetero-) sexual exchange (Harzewski xvi–xvii).

<sup>8</sup> Among the black feminist lesbian scholars it is possible to mention, for instance, Gabriele Griffin’s or Evelyn M. Hammond’s work (especially the essay “Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality: The Problematic of Silence”).

<sup>9</sup> Chick lit, as a genre which largely embraces the postfeminist doctrine, romanticizes, yet simultaneously ironizes, and therefore also subversively simplifies, not only sexuality but also other depicted phenomena such as single life, social mobility, etc.

<sup>10</sup> For more information about varieties of chick lit, see Ferriss and Young 5–7.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed account of how heterosexism creates rather harmful binary categories and dichotomizes social groups, see Rosenblum and Travis, *The Meaning of Difference: American*

*Constructions of Race, Sex and Gender, Social Class and Sexual Orientation* (2000). West analyzes sexuality as an instrument of supporting racial fears and subordination in *Race Matters* (1993).

<sup>12</sup> Seidman offers a discussion of sexuality as commodity in *The Social Construction of Sexuality* (2003).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Collins, *Black Sexual Politics* 27–35.

<sup>14</sup> A very specific but rather frequently cited expression similar to what Terry McMillan terms as “the right to ‘air our dirty laundry’” in her Introduction to the anthology titled *Breaking Ice* from 1990 (xx).

<sup>15</sup> It is vital to refer to various meanings associated with the word *sister* (and *sista* in the case of African American vernacular language) in this respect. The word denotes a female who has the same parents as another person, but also – more important for this reading – a woman who is a member of the same race, church, religious group, or organization as others. The term may also be used as a form of address to a woman, referring to a woman to whom one has strong feelings of loyalty and friendship (*Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners* 1335).

<sup>16</sup> It might be of some interest that this particular way of storytelling was used by Terry McMillan in her breakthrough novel *Waiting to Exhale* (1992) as well as its sequel *Getting to Happy* (2005). A large number of subsequent chick lit novels by many African American women writers have adhered to this pattern, including the second novel analyzed in this paper. In Ferriss and Young’s opinion, although McMillan remains “the original progenitor of popular black women’s fiction”, most African American chick lit authors owe more to books such as *Sex and the City* and others by non-black authors than *Waiting to Exhale* (8).

<sup>17</sup> As explained above, “Sistah lit” refers to chick lit written by African American authors and is therefore considered as its subgenre.

<sup>18</sup> Evelyn is sceptical of her mother’s advice due to the fact that both “Josephine and Mama need to handle the procrastinators in their own lives” first. In particular she means that Mama and the local butcher have been not only been “flirting with each other for the past ten years”, but also talking about their personal problems, and sharing their dreams. Still, she “can’t get [him] to commit to simply being her boyfriend” (40). Sandra, the first character to learn that her father is not going to ever marry Evelyn, is bewildered by this. Cf. 40, 65–66.

<sup>19</sup> Evelyn makes herself clear in one of the tiresome conversations she and Josephine have on this topic: “Why should I rush this man down the aisle, Josephine? I’ve never been interested in having children. I’m not feeling insecure because I always know where he is, and we’re only going to City Hall when we do tie the knot. We can just jump up and do it anytime.” Josephine, on the other hand, senses “something just isn’t right. . . . he must be one of those commitment-phobic men” who she reads about “in this book called *Men Who Can’t Love*” (37).

<sup>20</sup> Another term, namely “members of a ‘New Black Aesthetic’”, which was coined by Trey Ellis in his essay from 1989 (qtd. in Richards 19, or McMillan, *Breaking Ice* xx–xxi), could be referred to in this respect.

<sup>21</sup> Juliette Wells explains: “these plots are exclusively heterosexual, although a very distant whiff of lesbianism occasionally provides titillation” (59).

<sup>22</sup> A more sensitive reader, however, immediately recognizes how naïve her account of the situation is (cf. Diggs 54).

<sup>23</sup> Marriage as a formal feature of every romantic novel (Regis 7) is, by contrast, not typical of chick lit novels in which the unknotting of the plot often takes the form of a mere reunion with the partner, which leaves the novel open for a potential sequel.

<sup>24</sup> For more information on the topic of heteronormativity as well as gay and lesbian closeting see Collins, *Black Sexual Politics* 87–98.

<sup>25</sup> The terms romance and romance novel overlap in their meanings and are consistently used by most critics in such a way, e.g. by Tania Modleski in her book *Loving With a Vengeance: Mass Produced Fantasies for Women* or Barbara Fuchs in *Romance*. “Harlequin romance” refers to probably best-known published novels of romantic fiction.

<sup>26</sup> In chick lit feminism is ultimately depicted as an outdated style. It is even “misread as a bilious monolith, its strident tendencies embarrassing and not fully compatible with chick lit’s ties to the values of romance fiction and its embrace of commodities, especially beauty and fashion culture” (Harzewski xxii).

<sup>27</sup> These, among others, are viewed as potential reasons for criticism aimed at romance novels (chick lit novels’ predecessors) as suggested and listed by Regis (5).

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*Address:*

*Silesian University in Opava  
Faculty of Philosophy and Science  
Institute of Foreign Languages  
Masarykova třída 37  
746 01 Opava  
Czech Republic  
veronika.portesova@fpf.slu.cz*

# **Linguistics and Translation Studies**



# On the Categorical Properties of English and German Modal Verbs

Dagmar Machová

Tomas Bata University in Zlín

## Abstract

*Considering the prototypical properties of English and German verbs, this paper analyzes the categorial status, i.e. the part of speech, of core modal verbs in both languages. Illustrating the morphological and syntactic properties of modal elements in both languages, the paper demonstrates that English modals do not exhibit verbal properties and therefore cannot be considered to be verbs, despite the frequently held view. Furthermore, the paper illustrates that German modal verbs possess the majority of prototypical verbal properties, and therefore are to be considered legitimate members of this part of speech.*

*Keywords: modal verb, lexical verb, part of speech, subcategorization, agreement, English, German*

## 1. Introduction

Modal verbs in any language provide fertile ground for linguistic research, and not many areas of the language have enjoyed such careful scholarly attention. Therefore, it is all the more interesting that neither in English nor in German is there yet any general agreement on the most basic question connected with modals – namely if **modal verbs** are actually **verbs**. The aim of this paper is to compare and contrast the properties of modal verbs with the properties of lexical verbs in two languages – English and German. Based on this analysis, the study ascertains to what extent modal verbs in both languages demonstrate verbal properties, and thus if they are to be recognized as verbs or form a separate part of speech.

## 2. The Notion of Parts of Speech

In order to analyze modal verbs in terms of the **part of speech** to which they belong, it is necessary to define the diagnostics used in the division of words into different parts of speech, i.e. the criteria for establishing them. Categories in various scientific disciplines such as chemistry or biology are based on the similarity of features shared by members of that category, and all classifications in linguistic research – in this case the division into parts of speech – should be treated on the same grounds. Parts of speech, sometimes referred to as *word categories* or *syntactic categories*, encompass words with the same morphological and syntactic properties.<sup>1</sup> Biber et al. (62) define the notion of parts of speech similarly – viewing them as groups of words “characterized by a combination of morphological, syntactic, and semantic features.”

As a diagnostic illustration based on a **morphological criterion**, English nouns can appear as plural whereas this property is not shared by English adjectives, as shown in example (1).

- (1) NOUN:           *boy* → *boys*, *child* → *children*  
ADJECTIVE:       *interesting* → \**interestings*, *happy* → \**happies*

Similarly, adjectives in German can be graded, which is not the case of German verbs, as shown in example (2). Therefore, it can be concluded that *schön* and *gut* are adjectives, whereas *machen* and *studieren* are not.

- (2) ADJECTIVE:   *schön* → *schöner*, *gut* → *besser*  
VERB:            *machen* → \**machener*, *studieren* → \**studierener*

In terms of **syntactic properties**, words can be divided into word categories based on their distribution, i.e. their position in a sentence and their syntactic environments. In English, nouns can be pre-modified by determiners, which does not hold for adjectives or verbs, as shown in example (3).

- (3) NOUN:           ***The*** *cat is under the table.*  
ADJECTIVE:       \**This book is **the** interesting.*  
VERB:             \**I **the** work in Prague.*

Members of the same part of speech generally share more properties – e.g. English adjectives can be graded (4a), can modify a noun (4b), can be pre-modified by *so* or *very* (4c), or can function as predicates after copula verbs like *seem* or *look* (4d).

- (4) a. *He is **happier** now.*  
b. *He is a **happy child**.*  
c. *He is **so/very** happy.*  
d. *He **seems** happy.*

Every part of speech has, however, its central as well as peripheral members, which do not exhibit all prototypical properties – such as the adjective *infinite*, which can neither be graded nor modified by *so* or *very* – see the examples below.

- (5) a. \*This lecture is **more** infinite than the previous one.  
 b. He has got **infinite** patience.  
 c. \*This is **so/very** infinite.  
 d. This **seems** infinite.

Still, the word *infinite* is considered to be an adjective, and, indeed, it would not be effective to invent a new part of speech for such restricted members. Every science, linguistics included, applies economy of description; i.e. one should not invent more categories than are absolutely necessary. This principle will also be applied in this paper.

In traditional approaches to grammar, parts of speech are defined on **semantic grounds** – nouns denote a person, thing, animal or idea, adjectives denote properties, qualities or states, etc. However, it must be stressed that considering this criterion may be, in contrast to the morphological and syntactic criteria, misleading. Verbs are frequently defined as denoting actions and activities. Following the semantic definition, the Czech word *psaní* would then be analyzed (incorrectly) as a verb. However, it is a noun, since it has morphological and syntactic properties of nouns – i.e. it does exist in various cases, or it can be combined with a demonstrative pronoun. Furthermore, as Warner (10) exemplifies, pairs such as *love* (verb/noun) vs. *fond* (adjective) or *courage* (noun) vs. *brave* (adjective) refer to the same entities; still, they belong to different parts of speech. Since semantic criteria are unreliable, and moreover there are no formal categories of meaning which could be compared, they will not be considered in this paper when analyzing parts of speech.

### 3. Modal Verbs vs. Lexical Verbs in English

The aim of this section is to compare and contrast the properties of English modal and lexical verbs from the perspective of their morphology and syntax. This paper focuses on central modals, which include *can*, *could*, *may*, *might*, *should*, *will*, *would* and *must*. The most striking property of this group is definitely the absence of the **morpheme –s** in the third person singular – examples (6).

- (6) a. *He works at weekends.*  
 b. *He must/\*musts work at weekends.*

Despite the fact that this distinctive property is mentioned most often in connection with modals, it does not have much relevance for a **synchronic** analysis of Modern English, since this peculiarity dates back to Proto-Indo-European and Proto-Indo-Germanic – 3,000 B.C. and 500 B.C. respectively. The lack of the agreement suffix is a result of the fact that modals developed from “preterite-present” verbs, i.e. the present forms are descendants of originally past forms; compare the examples in (7a) and (7b).

- (7) a. *He broke/\*brokes his leg.*  
 b. *He can/\*cans sing very well.*

Simply put, the reason why *can* does not have -s in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person is the same reason why *broke* is not compatible with the -s morpheme.

As far as **morphology** is concerned, modals do not possess any verbal form. Whereas verbs exist in infinitive, past, past participle and present participle forms, a prototypical modal does not possess any of these – see the comparison in (8):

- (8) LEXICAL VERBS: *to speak – spoke – spoken – speaking*  
 MODAL VERBS: *\*to must – \*musted – \*musten – \*musting*  
*\*to can – could – \*cannen – \*canning*

As illustrated, the verb *must* does not appear in any of those forms. The verb *can* or *will*, on the other hand, has a past form. Interestingly, in the earliest stages of the development of the English language – more precisely in the Old and Middle English periods, some modals exhibited these forms, such as *cunnen* (past participle), or *willende* (present participle). According to Lightfoot (101) or Hopper and Closs Traugott (55), modal verbs ceased to have verbal properties in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

In terms of **subcategorization**, modals do not demonstrate verbal properties either. Whereas lexical verbs have quite a varied subcategorization, i.e. they can be combined with NPs, VPs, PPs, APs or whole clauses, modals in English invariably combine only with VPs, as shown in parts (9) and (10):

- (9) LEXICAL VERBS: a. NP: *I want<sub>NP</sub>[a chocolate].*  
 b. VP: *I want<sub>VP</sub>[to be at home].*  
 c. PP: *He went<sub>PP</sub>[to the church].*  
 d. AP: *He looks<sub>AP</sub>[tired].*  
 e. Clause: *I think<sub>CL</sub>[that he will like it].*
- (10) MODAL VERBS: a. NP: *\*I can<sub>NP</sub>[the song] by heart.*  
 b. VP: *I must<sub>VP</sub>[be at home].*  
 c. PP: *\*He must<sub>PP</sub>[to the church].*  
 d. AP: *\*He might<sub>AP</sub>[tired].*  
 e. Clause: *\*It may<sub>CL</sub>[that he will like it].*

As illustrated by the examples above, Modern English modals do not systematically tolerate any type of phrase apart from the VP. This, however, was not the case in previous stages of the development of English. In Old and Middle English, some modal verbs could be combined with nominal objects – such as in sentences (11) and (12), taken from Warner (98) and Lightfoot (99):

- (11) *He symble wyle<sub>NP</sub>[god] and næfre nan yfel.*  
 He always desires good and never no evil.
- (12) *She koude<sub>NP</sub>[muche of wandrynge] by the weye.*  
 She knew much of wandering by the way.

In terms of **their syntactic behaviour**, the distribution of modals is complementary with that of verbs. There is **no** syntactic environment where a modal could be systematically replaced by a full verb or vice versa. Lexical verbs do not invert in questions, are not

followed by the clausal negative particle *not/n't*, and do not appear in question tags, as illustrated in (13a), (13b) and (13c) respectively.

- (13) a. QUESTIONS  
*Will he want it?*  
 \**Wants he it?*
- b. NEGATION  
*He will **not** want it.*  
 \**He wants **not** it.*
- c. QUESTION TAGS  
*He will do it, **will** he not?*  
 \**He wants to do it, **wants** he not?*

Similarly to the previously mentioned properties, in earlier stages of the development of English, modals had the same distribution as lexical verbs – examples (14a) and (14b) provided by Millward and Hayes (115) show interrogative clauses containing a preterite-present and a full verb respectively.

- (14) a. *Canst ou temman hafocas?*  
 Know how tame hawks?
- b. *Hwæt secge we be þæm coce?*  
 What say we about the cook?

As stated in section 2, the division of words into parts of speech should be based on the morphological and syntactic properties shared by the elements of that group. The previous section showed that English modals do not have the properties of lexical verbs in **contemporary** English, either in terms of their morphology or syntax. Therefore, modals in English **are not verbs at all** but form a separate part of speech.

To sum up the properties of this part of speech, the members appear solely in finite forms (present or past) and lack any agreement morphology. As far as their syntactic properties are concerned, the group of modals are combined solely with the bare VP and invert in questions, are followed by clausal *n't*, and appear in question tags.

Concerning the status of modals with respect to **auxiliary verbs**, these two groups **partially** share sentence distribution, i.e. similarly to modals, the auxiliary verbs *do*, *be* and *have* invert in questions, appear in question tags, and are followed by the clausal negative particle *not/n't*. However, it must be pointed out that unlike modals, the auxiliary verbs *be* and *have* also have other (full verb) distribution. When they are preceded by a modal verb, they do not demonstrate the syntactic properties of modals, i.e. they do not invert in questions, are not followed by *not/n't*, and do not appear in question tags – as shown in examples (15).

- (15) a. QUESTION  
*He will **have** done it.*  
 \****Have** he will done it?*

## b. NEGATION

*He will **have** done it.*

*\*He will **haven't** done it.*

## c. QUESTION TAGS

*He will **have** done it, **won't** he?*

*\*He will **have** done it, **hasn't** he?*

Concerning their morphology, in contrast to modals, auxiliaries do have agreement morphology. Furthermore, *have* and *be* appear in infinitives and participles, unlike *do*, which is invariably finite – see examples in (16).

(16) a. *I like **being** talked about.*

b. *He claimed **to have** seen him then.*

As for subcategorization, only *do* has the same subcategorization as modals, i.e. a bare VP – auxiliaries *be* and *have* show a great variety of subcategorization including NP, *to* infinitive, *-ing* participle and *-en* participle, as illustrated in examples (17). None of these combinations are to be found with modals.

(17) a. *I had<sub>NPL</sub> [them] VP [do it].*

b. *I have<sub>VP</sub> [to study hard].*

c. *I am<sub>VP</sub> [studying hard].*

d. *I have<sub>VP</sub> [stolen the car].*

As has been shown above, auxiliaries may demonstrate the same distribution as modals. On the other hand, there is a series of differences in morphology as well as in syntax, and therefore it would not be appropriate to regard modals and auxiliaries as an identical group.

As far as well-established grammar manuals are concerned, Quirk et al. (73) distinguish three **separate** parts of speech – modal verbs, primary verbs (= auxiliary verbs) and full verbs, stating that this division is “well motivated for Modern English”. A similar view is held by e.g. Denham and Lobeck, who also recognize three separate parts of speech – namely auxiliary verbs, modals and (lexical) verbs (145). The non-verbal status of modals was also recognized by Emonds, and others. However, the division presented in this paper is not shared by all scholars. For example, Huddleston and Pullum do not list modal verbs as a separate category, but include them into a group of verbs in the introductory chapter (22). In the chapter focusing on verbs, they do, however, distinguish two basic “subtypes” of verbs – lexical verbs and auxiliary verbs acknowledging their different morphological and syntactic properties (74).<sup>2</sup>

A frequently mentioned argument of linguists opposing the division of modals vs. verbs is the fact that modal verbs can express some verbal categories – such as tense. However, this view is not sustainable. First, modals in English are not productive in expressing the tense (see *must*, which cannot express past tense). Second, the past tense with English modals (*would* or *could*) does not frequently refer to the past at all, but has other functions – such as politeness. Third, the fact that some modals in English share this property with lexical verbs does not prevent them from forming a separate part of speech. Different

parts of speech can share some qualities – for example nouns and adjectives can express gender in Czech, nouns and pronouns can both express number in English, etc. It is also often claimed that modals combine with the VP complement to form a predicate, and therefore they must be verbs; this, however, is erroneous. Determiners also combine with nouns to form subjects and objects, but are not considered to belong among nouns. Another frequently mentioned argument against the independent status of English modal verbs is the fact that modals belong to a category of verb in some other languages (e.g. in Czech, where modals exhibit verbal properties). Any argument based on the analysis of modals in other languages is not valid either, since the division of words into parts of speech can vary from language to language – for example, Czech does not categorize determiners as a separate part of speech, whereas English does.

#### 4. Modals vs. Lexical Verbs in German

The same diagnostics as in section 3 will be applied to the analysis of German modal verbs *mögen*, *müssen*, *sollen*, *wollen*, *wissen*, *dürfen* and *können*. Since English and German evolved from the same proto-language, modals in both languages developed from the same group of verbs – namely from preterite-presents. This also explains, in the same way as in English, the two most salient **morphological peculiarities** German modals demonstrate, namely the lack of agreement in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular and the ablaut in the whole singular paradigm. Similarly to English, the present forms of modals developed from the past forms. Compare the present paradigm of German modals and strong verbs as shown in (18), which shows that the present paradigm of modals copies the past paradigm of strong verbs.

(18) MODAL VERBS

Present paradigm

*ich darfø*

*du darfst*

*er darfø*

LEXICAL VERBS

Present paradigm

*ich breche*

*du brichst*

*er bricht*

Preterite

*ich brachø*

*du brachst*

*er brachø*

Since these changes originated centuries ago and do not have any impact on the system as a whole, they are irrelevant from the perspective of the synchronic analysis of present-day German.

Contrary to the English modal verbs, modals in German appear in all **forms** typical for verbs, namely in the infinitive, in the past form, and in the past participle (Particip I) as well as in the present participle (Particip II), although the last form is not productive and is probably reserved for idiosyncratic uses – see examples in (19).

- (19) INFINITIVE: *müssen, sollen, wollen*  
PAST: *musste, sollte, wollte*  
PAST PARTICIPLE: *gemusst, gesollt, gewollt*  
PRESENT PARTICIPLE: *?wollende*  
as in *nicht enden wollender Regen*  
\*a not willing to end rain

In terms of their **subcategorization**, German modal verbs as a group can subcategorize for a variety of phrases. Needless to say, however, not all modals subcategorize for all types of phrases. This is similar to lexical verbs, each of which tolerates a different subcategorization set. Contrary to English, however, German modals can subcategorize for a NP, VP, PP, or a clause – see examples (20).<sup>3</sup>

- (20) a. NP: *Ich kann<sub>NP</sub> [das Lied] auswendig.*  
\*I can the song by heart.  
b. VP: *Ich muss<sub>VP</sub> [gehen].*  
I must go.  
c. PP: *Ich muss<sub>PP</sub> [ins Stadtzentrum].*  
\*I must in the city centre.  
d. Clause: *Ich möchte<sub>C</sub> [dass wir Freunde sind].*  
\*I want that we are friends.

In terms of **the distribution** of German modal verbs, contrary to English modals, they do appear in the same positions as lexical verbs – compare the examples below demonstrating the behaviour of modal verbs, auxiliary verbs and lexical verbs in statements (21), in the topicalization of a sentence member other than a subject (an adverbial in this case) exemplified in (22), in a negative sentence (23), in a question (24) and in a subordinate clause (25).

- (21) a. *Er **will** heute arbeiten.*  
He will today work.  
b. *Er **hat** heute gearbeitet.*  
He has today worked.  
c. *Er **arbeitet** heute.*  
He works today.
- (22) TOPICALIZATION  
a. *Heute **will** er arbeiten.*  
b. *Heute **hat** er gearbeitet.*  
c. *Heute **arbeitet** er.*
- (23) NEGATIVE SENTENCE  
a. *Er **will** nicht arbeiten.*  
b. *Er **hat** nicht gearbeitet.*  
c. *Er **arbeitet** nicht.*

## (24) QUESTION

- a. Was **willst** du heute machen?
- b. Was **hast** du heute gemacht?
- c. Was **machst** du heute?

## (25) SUBORDINATE CLAUSE

- a. Ich weiß nicht, ob er heute arbeiten **will**.
- b. Ich weiß nicht, ob er heute gearbeitet **hat**.
- c. Ich weiß nicht, ob er heute **arbeitet**.

As examples (21)–(25) above demonstrate, modal verbs, auxiliaries and lexical verbs in German occupy identical positions in various syntactic contexts. Furthermore, as mentioned, they exhibit other verbal properties such as verbal subcategorization and verbal forms, and therefore they should be classified as verbs. As far as the conception of modal verbs in German grammar books is concerned, similarly to the division here, Helbig and Buscha do not recognize modal verbs as a separate part of speech, but consider them as a “subclass” of verbs.

Diewald (51) maintains that based on the syntactic criteria, modal verbs do not constitute a separate category from verbs, adding that there is no syntactic property that would be shared by all modal verbs and which would not be simultaneously demonstrated by lexical verbs. Frequently mentioned properties such as the absence of the imperative form or the passive voice are ascribed to the semantics of the modal verbs; i.e. modal verbs are stative verbs, and similar defects are found with other (stative) lexical verbs as well. Moreover, Diewald provides an example showing that even modals in German do sometimes form imperatives – see for example (26).

- (26) *Wollt es, dann könnt ihr es!*  
Want it, then you can (do) that.

Interestingly, modal verbs form the so-called *Ersatzinfinitiv*, i.e. when they are used in preterite with an infinitive of a lexical verb, they appear in the infinitive instead of the past participle form as exemplified in (27a), in comparison with (27b) where a modal verb is used without a verb complementation. However, similarly to the previous point, this is not an exclusive property of modal verbs but also occurs with other verbs such as *brauchen*, *lassen*, and *sehen*; see example (27c).

- (27) a. *Sie hat es machen können.*  
She could do it.  
b. *Sie hat es gekönnt.*  
c. *Sie hat ihn kommen sehen.*

The often mentioned inability of the modal verbs to subcategorize for a *zu*- infinitive (a counterpart of the English *to*- infinitive), is again not a property characteristic of only modals. Some other lexical verbs behave in the same way – compare examples (28a) and (28b), showing a modal and a lexical *gehen*.

- (28) a. *Ich muss einkaufen/\*einzukaufen.*  
b. *Ich gehe einkaufen/\*einzukaufen.*  
I must/go shopping.

In this respect, Diewald claims that modals behave like lexical verbs. However, she adds that the verbal properties of German modals are reserved for their deontic use only (55). According to her and others,<sup>4</sup> epistemic modals are auxiliaries since they exhibit certain gaps in the system – i.e. they cannot form predicates themselves or cannot appear in non-finite forms.

However, Reis disagrees, claiming that modal verbs in German are pure verbs (and not auxiliaries), regardless of their use. According to her, the reasons why epistemic modals appear predominantly in a restricted number of tenses (namely present or subjunctive) are purely semantic, i.e. epistemic modals reflect the time of utterance. Furthermore, she adds that epistemic modals can appear in non-finite forms especially in periphrastic structures of conditional clauses, though she admits that they are rather rare – see example (29) provided by her.

- (29) *Nach allem, was ich weiß, hätte er dann zu Hause sein müssen.*  
As far as I know, he must have been at home then.

In German linguistic literature, there seems to be a general agreement on the status of the deontic modals, which, as has been shown, demonstrates the properties of lexical verbs. It is the epistemic use of modal verbs in German that causes some scholars to categorize them as auxiliaries. Yet, despite the fact that epistemic uses of modal verbs in German may demonstrate some deficiencies in the paradigm in comparison to their deontic counterparts, they still exhibit an overwhelming majority of verbal properties, and therefore should be considered as verbs (although as more peripheral). The defects connected with some functions of modal verbs in German cannot be at all compared to the behaviour of modal verbs in English, which show a full range of morphological and syntactic properties that are different from lexical verbs.

## 5. Concluding comments

Using morphological and syntactic criteria, this paper aimed to show that central English modal elements such as *must*, *can*, and *will* are not verbs but form a separate part of speech. As far as German modal verbs are concerned, their epistemic uses may demonstrate some gaps in the system. Despite this, they are to be classified as verbs in line with the general principle of economy of description.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> English grammar manuals frequently list a third type of distinguishing property – namely the phonological level (more precisely stress placement), for example in the pair *'increase* vs.

*in'crease*. However, since this type of distinction is not productive in English, this criterion will not be considered in this paper.

<sup>2</sup> Another interesting paradox can be found with structures such as *have to*. This expression is often called a semi-auxiliary, as in Quirk et al. (137). When considering its syntactic properties, it behaves like **a verb** (such as *try to*); therefore there is no reason to call it an auxiliary. On the other hand, central modals (*can, must*, etc.) should not be called modal **verbs** (the term *modal auxiliaries* may be more appropriate) – this paper uses the neutral term *modals*. On the other hand, it is well-justified to call the perfective *have* an auxiliary, since it does exhibit auxiliary properties; namely it inverts in a question or appears in question tags – unlike *have* in the *have to* structure.

<sup>3</sup> Durbin and Sprouse argue that the variety of subcategorization is reserved only for German deontic modal verbs – epistemic modals, on the other hand, exhibit only verbal complements.

<sup>4</sup> Durbin and Sprouse claim that German modals are not full verbs (for both their deontic and epistemic uses). However, they are not prepared to analyze them as auxiliaries, and at the same time they are reluctant to introduce a new category for them.

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*Address:*

*Tomas Bata University in Zlín*

*Faculty of Humanities*

*Department of English and American Studies*

*Mostní 5139,*

*760 01 Zlín*

*Czech Republic*

*[machova@fhs.utb.cz](mailto:machova@fhs.utb.cz)*

# Representation of Social Actors in the Genre of the Institutional Press Release: a Study of Headlines

Danica Maleková

Catholic University, Ružomberok

## Abstract

*The paper aims to investigate the relationship of self-reference to other-reference in the discourse of institutional press releases focusing on headlines. For the purposes of the study, two key political actors were selected – the European Commission and the British government, namely their environmental departments. Corpora of more than 70 press releases from each organization have been compiled to compare the degree of self-centredness as demonstrated by foregrounding and backgrounding linguistic techniques, with particular focus on how syntactic-semantic structures are allocated to social actors. The analysis shows that while there is a significant level of similarity as far as allocation of agency and prominent linguistic structures related to self-reference is concerned, there are stark differences in terms of the space and prominence of linguistic structures allocated to the other social actors, personality and directness of reference, and the intensity of self-promotion by frequent repetition.*

*Keywords: Institutional press release, self-reference, social actors, linguistic actors*

## 1. Background and methodology

The genre of the institutional press release is an instance of a more general category of the genre of press release, where besides the obvious informative function, i.e. to communicate news about an organization relating to a specific event or development, the promotional function comes to the foreground, which is aimed at serving the public relations needs of an organization and generating a positive image of it. In other words, information

is given in such a way as to promote the organization. From the point of view of communicative purpose, it is thus adequate to postulate an axis of *informative – promotional* as the most general variable relevant to the study of inner differentiation in the genre, which is the aim of the present paper.

In his classic work on the genre of the press release *Preformulating the News*, Jacobs designates three prominent ‘standard features of press releases’: *self-reference*, *self-quotation* and *semi-performatives*. It is the first one that will be my focus, as it is most directly related to the representation of social actors – one of the persistent themes in the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which accentuates power relations. By applying the approach of CDA, I wish to shed additional light on the nature of self-representation as a typical generic feature, and study the dynamics at work by comparing two analogous corpora of institutional press releases. Self-referencing will be considered within the structural elements of headline<sup>1</sup>, and it will be evaluated both in proportion to ‘other-referencing’ as well as in relation to the position in syntactic-semantic structure.

The corpora consist of 83 press releases (PR) issued by the European Commission (EC) and 71 PRs issued by the UK’s Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA). The compatibility of the material compared is guaranteed by the fact that the institutions are analogous in function, as well as by restricting the topic coverage to the (highly controversial) issue of climate change. The following criteria were applied in compiling the corpora: PRs were issued under the heading “environment”; each PR had to contain at least one of the keywords *climate change* and *carbon* (the corpora were manually sifted to remove press releases that, although containing one of the keywords, address a topic that is not directly related to climate change, e.g. a release on smoking). In the case of the EC, the PRs were published between 21 October 2005 (the start of the second European climate change programme, a turning point in the EU policy making in the area of climate change) and 28 March 2008 (the start of the corpus compilation). In the case of DEFRA, relevant press releases were collected by working backwards from 28 March 2008 to compile a corpus matching the size of the EC corpus (i.e. 66 000 words).<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Proportion of ‘self’ and ‘other’ reference

In the EC corpus of 83 headlines, we find a total of 93 references to social actors. The situation is basically mirrored in the DEFRA PRs, where 71 headlines include 80 references to social actors. It can thus be asserted that the element falling under the journalistic ‘who’ is a vital constitutive part of PR headlines, which makes it a relevant point of investigation. However, while the focus on ‘who’ is relatively stable between the corpora, the EC and DEFRA show a marked difference in terms of the proportion of self and other reference, as shown in figure 1 below:

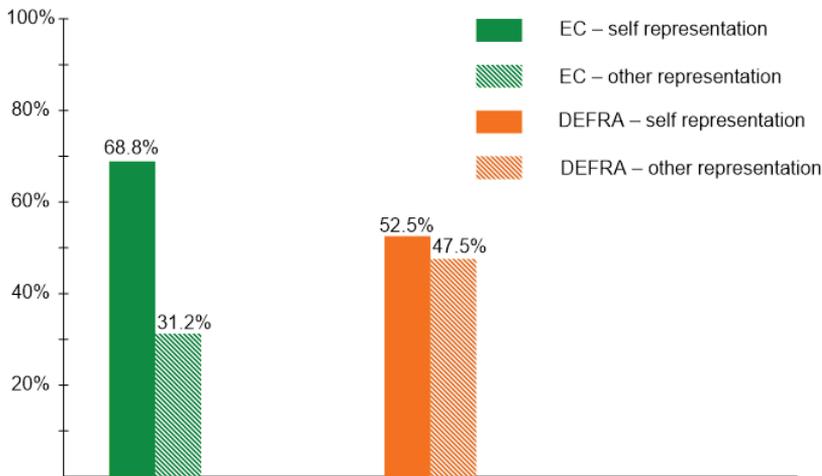


Figure 1. The proportion of ‘self’ and ‘other’ reference in the EC and DEFRA headlines

Here we can see that while DEFRA headlines are marked by almost equal distribution of reference between ‘self’ and ‘other’ in respect of social actors, there is a clear self-centering tendency prevalent in the corpus of Commission headlines. The latter can thus be placed closer to the promotional end of the *informative – promotional* axis, where the variable of ‘self’ and ‘other’ proportion can be described as unstable across the genre of institutional press releases.

### 3. Type of designation

In the EC corpus, the most common designation in terms of self-reference is *Commission* followed by *EU* and *Commissioner Dimas*. There are only two instances where the designator *Europe* is used at least partly referring to the institution: one instance with the full name of the institution, i.e. *European Commission*, and one instance of reference by the possessive pronoun *our*, which is also ambiguous. Figure 2 shows the types and distribution of social actors related to the issuing organization:

Linguistic representation	Number of instances	Percentage
Commission	40	62.5 %
EU	14	21.9 %
Commissioner Dimas	6	9.4 %
Europe	2	3.1 %
European Commission	1	1.6 %
Our	1	1.6 %

Figure 2. EC headlines: linguistic representations and distribution of social actors in self-reference

The overwhelming prevalence of the shortened form *Commission* over the full name *European Commission*, together with the omission of the definite article, are a clear sign of what Quirk et al. classify as ‘block language’, characteristic of newspaper headlines due to limitations on space. The main feature of block language is “omitting closed-class items of low information value, such as the finite forms of the verb BE and the articles, and other words that may be understood from the context” (Quirk et al. 845). Similarly, where *EU* is used in the position of a foregrounded clause element, the definite article is omitted. It is also significant that there is not a single occurrence of the full form *European Union*. The form *Commissioner Dimas* is again a shortened version of *European Environment Commissioner Stavros Dimas* that is frequently used in the leads, even though the function is always explicitly referred to, with no occurrence of just the name *Dimas*. Nevertheless, in terms of structural features of designation, the Commission press release headlines share the characteristics of newspaper headlines.

In the DEFRA corpus, the most frequent designation in terms of self-reference is *UK* followed by *Government* and the surname of the environment secretary *Benn*. In contrast to the Commission headlines, where the name of the issuing organization was by far the most common type of self-reference, the name *Defra* is only used 4 times in the corpus of DEFRA headlines. Note, however, that the hierarchical equivalent to Defra would be the Commission’s DG ENV (Directorate General – Environment), which does not occur in the respective corpus at all. Figure 3 below shows the types and distribution of linguistic forms related to the issuing organization:

Linguistic representation	Number of instances	Percentage
UK	15	35.7 %
Government	6	14.3 %
Benn	6	14.3 %
Defra	4	9.5 %
Pearson	4	9.5 %
Woolas	3	7.1 %
Miliband	1	2.4 %
Gardiner	1	2.4 %
Hilary Benn	1	2.4 %
Prime Minister	1	2.4 %

Figure 3. DEFRA headlines: linguistic representations and distribution of social actors in self-reference

Similarly to Commission headlines, DEFRA headlines exhibit features of ‘headlines’ or block language characteristic of newspaper headlines. This is proved by the omission of articles (*UK*, *Government*), use of short, univalarized forms (*Government*, *Defra*) or abbreviated structures (*UK*, *Defra*), omission of social actors’ functions, and indeed their first names (*Benn*, *Pearson*, *Woolas*, *Miliband*, *Gardiner*). A major difference in comparison to EC headlines is the frequency of reference to politicians without designating their function. While in the EC headlines corpus the designation *Commissioner Dimas* as the only type of reference to a politician occurring 6 times is outnumbered by 58 instances of

impersonal reference, the ratio personal/impersonal reference is 17 to 24 in DEFRA headlines corpus, as illustrated in figure 4 below:

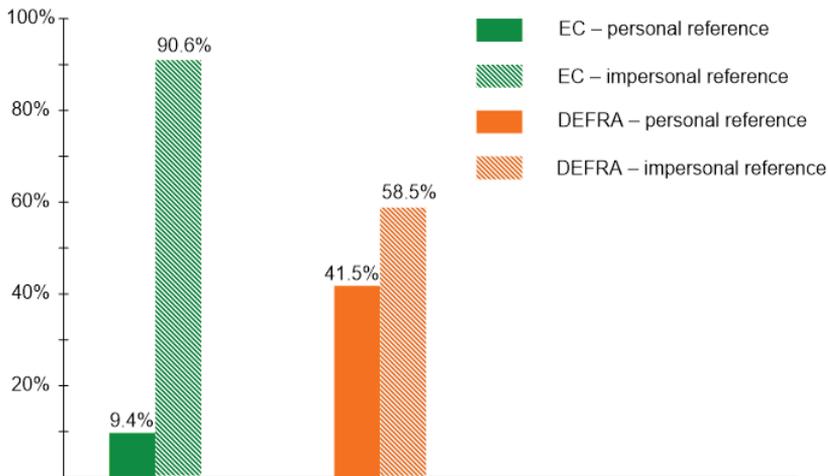


Figure 4. The proportion of personal and impersonal reference in EC and DEFRA headlines

We can thus point to the more personalized character of self-reference in DEFRA headlines as opposed to the Commission headlines, which is even underlined by the omission of the politicians' functions. Arguably, such personalization is characteristic of the journalistic style (cf. Bell) and can thus be classified as an instance of pre-formulation as defined by Jacobs. In comparison with the more impersonal character of the EC lexical units, the level of personality can be identified as another variable influencing the inner differentiation of the analyzed genre.

#### 4. Type of identification – directness of reference

While in the majority of the cases in EC headlines reference to the issuing organization is made directly, reference by identification with the EU and Europe is used as well. The distribution of direct reference and identification with a larger space that the institution represents is shown in figure 5 below:

	Number of instances	Percentage
Commission; Commissioner Dimas; European Commission	47	73.4 %
EU; Europe; our	17	26.6 %

Figure 5. EC headlines: the distribution of direct and indirect reference

However, self-referencing by the designators *EU*, *Europe* and *our* is ambiguous. In this context, it is important to bear in mind that the European Commission is the body that represents the European point of view, as opposed to the Parliament and the Council which

embody the perspectives of the member states. The Commission's projection where it refers to itself by the more general designator *EU* can be seen in the comparison of the headlines:

*Climate change: **Commission** looks for progress from UN ministerial conference in Nairobi*

*EU welcomes solid results of Nairobi world climate conference*

where the forms *Commission* and *EU* are used interchangeably. The designation by *Europe* is more problematic, although similar logic is applied. For illustration, we can consider the headline

*Climate change: **Europe** must take adaptation measures to lessen impacts of current and future warming*

together with the following lead, which is more explicative:

*Climate change poses a double challenge: **Europe** must not only make deep cuts in its greenhouse gas emissions but also take measures to adapt to current and future climate change in order to lessen the adverse impacts of global warming on people, the economy and the environment. This is the key message of a Green Paper published by **the European Commission** today which sets out options for **EU** action to help the process of adaptation to climate change across Europe. Adaptation means taking action to cope with changing climatic conditions, for example by using scarce water resources more efficiently or ensuring the frail and elderly are properly cared for during heatwaves. The Green Paper aims to stimulate a broad public debate on adaptation in Europe, starting with a major **stakeholder** conference hosted by **the Commission** on 3 July in Brussels.*

The social actors (marked by bold print in the excerpt) involved actively in the activity described are, in successive order,

*Europe*  
*the European Commission*  
*EU*  
*stakeholders*  
*the Commission*

The prominent position of the European Commission is underlined by the lexico-grammatical structures into which it enters, which is most evident in the last sentence where *stakeholders* appear in a backgrounded position as a pre-modifier, while the Commission is in a more foregrounded position assuming the syntactic-semantic role of ACTOR. A similar comparison can be drawn between the nominal phrases *the key message of a Green Paper published by the European Commission* and *options for EU action*, where *EU* is syntactically an ATTRIBUTE while *the European Commission* again takes the syntactic-semantic role of ACTOR. While this intricately portrays the Commission as having the

key to the activity, the reference of the form *Europe* both in the headline and in the lead is more complicated, notably by the use of the modal *must* in reference to the activity. The modal verb here is used in the sense of ‘obligation’ or ‘compulsion’. In this context, Quirk et al. speak of

the implication, to a greater or lesser extent, that the speaker is advocating a certain form of behaviour. Thus *must* [...] typically suggests that the speaker is exercising his authority. An apparent exception to this occurs where the subject is in the first person [...] the meaning is one of self-admonishment, appealing to his own sense of duty, expediency, etc. (225)

Because the reference to *Europe* here includes the European Commission as the representative of the ‘European’ perspective as well as other stakeholders, it can be stated that the issuing institution both appeals to its own sense of duty and exercises its authority. In this way, the reference is ambiguous. In fact, corpus studies of policy discourse carried out by Mulderrig indicate that such ambiguity of reference might be a characteristic feature of the discourse: “deontic modals that express an imperative such as *must*, *need to*, *have to* occur most frequently with ambivalent instances of *we*, where the referent of the pronoun is unclear” (“Textual Strategies,” 144).

It should be noted, however, that most instances of self-reference that is not direct are not realized by foregrounded clause elements, usually appearing in attributive or possessive position; with the ratio being 7 foregrounded clause elements to 10 instances of modification, either attributive or possessive use. This is in stark contrast to direct self-reference, where of all 47 instances, only two are not foregrounded syntactically. It can thus be concluded that direct self-reference receives a much more prominent place in the EC headlines than reference through identification with a higher political unit. From the point of view of genre, the tendency to promote the organization by repeating its name in the prominent lexico-grammatical structures again shifts the specimen towards the promotional end of the axis mentioned above.

As in the Commission headlines, DEFRA headlines involve cases where the issuing organization is identified with a higher political unit, namely the whole governed country. In such cases, the designation *UK* is used invariably. The distribution of direct reference to the issuing organization or its representatives and reference by identification with a larger political unit is shown in figure 6 below:

	Number of instances	Percentage
Government, Defra, Benn, Pearson, Woolas, Miliband, Gardiner, Hilary Benn, Prime Minister	27	64.3 %
UK	15	35.7 %

Figure 6. DEFRA headlines: the distribution of direct and indirect reference

Compared to the Commission headlines, self-referencing by identification with a higher political unit is slightly more frequent, with 35.7 % as opposed to 26.6 % for the Commission corpus. An important factor in this comparison, however, is the syntactic-semantic

role assumed by the linguistic forms, with *UK* much more frequently occupying the position of a foregrounded syntactic element than is the case with its *EU* counterpart. These are also the instances where reference is less ambiguous, e.g.

*UK Delays Issuing EU Carbon Allowances*

where *UK* clearly refers to the political representatives of the country, or, in other words, its decision-making authority, as shown by the verb in the following lead:

*The UK has decided to delay issuing 2008 EU Carbon Allowances because the European Commission is still discussing a date of the carbon trading registry system, connected to the UNFCCC's International Transaction Log (ITL), to go live.*

The exact nature of reference is more obfuscated if *UK* is used in an attributive syntactic position, e.g.

*UK-China clean coal initiative launched*

While *UK* is one of the social actors involved, the identification of the designator in terms of self-reference is based on our knowledge of socio-political context rather than on the immediate linguistic context. There is, however, a degree of ambiguity, as in syntactic-semantic terms, agency is not made explicit either in the headline or in the lead. Agency is coded in the implicit subject of the verb *launched*. Still, based on the socio-political context, *UK* can be identified as an instance of self-reference assuming the role of modifier in the phrase structure. This is, however, a more indirect type of self-reference than direct quotes of the issuing organization or its representatives. For an overview of the directness of self-reference, see figure 7 below:

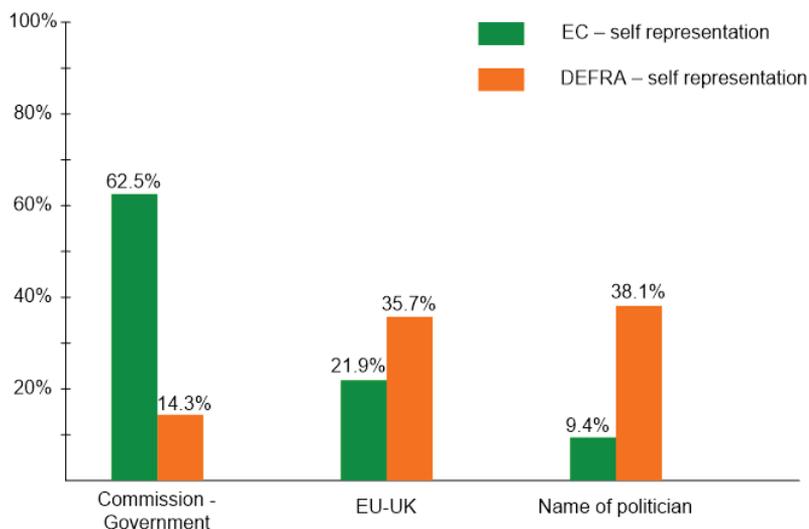


Figure 7. Type of identification in EC and DEFRA headlines

It can be summed up that the stronger tendency on the part of EC to ‘sell’ its ‘brand’ is compensated by the tendency towards personalization in the DERFA headlines, presumably for reasons of pre-formulation, and the two tendencies highlight clear inner differentiation in the genre of institutional press release.

### 5. Foregrounding/backgrounding patterns in the syntactic-semantic structure

CDA studies tend to presume that social actors can be grammatically foregrounded or backgrounded<sup>3</sup>, and that such stylistic treatment is socially/ideologically significant. Fowler points out that

[t]ransitivity [in Hallidayan sense] has the facility to analyze the same event in different ways [...] we must represent [the phenomenon] as one particular structure of meaning. Since transitivity makes options available, we are always suppressing some possibilities, so the choice we make – better the choice made by the discourse – indicates our point of view, is ideologically significant. (71)

Moreover, it is argued that this has implications for the definition of genre from the more interdisciplinary perspective assumed by CDA. In the analysis, three main foregrounding/backgrounding strategies are considered.

*Clause/phrase elements* The categories ‘foregrounded’ as opposed to ‘backgrounded’ are a matter of degree rather than an ‘either-or’ choice. This means that on the syntactic level, discourse referents might occupy the most prominent position of a clause element in the syntactic structure of the main clause, or they might be part of a pre-modifying or post-modifying phrase, which is the least prominent linguistic treatment when the discourse referent is made explicit. The cases in between include clause elements in subordinate or embedded clauses. The term ‘embedded’ is used to refer to elements in clauses other than the main clause.

As for verbal processes, Halliday notes that

[i]n formal grammar what is said is treated as ‘noun clause object of the verb say’, meaning a down-ranked or ‘embedded’ clause [...]. But functionally the verbalized clause is not down-ranked; it functions as the secondary clause in a ‘clause complex’ being either a) directly quoted or b) indirectly quoted. This means that such sequences consist of two clauses. (129)

Such functional perspective, being closer to the point of view of CDA, will be adopted in my analysis as well, where any social actor referred to within a verbalized clause (formally within a direct object) will be treated as being syntactically foregrounded occupying a position of a clause element on the level of main clause:

***Gas and electricity companies of the future could be as much about helping customers cut their energy use and CO2 footprint as selling units of energy, Environment and Climate Change Minister Ian Pearson said today.***

where *gas and electricity companies* will be treated as an element of the main clause, similarly to *Environment and Climate Change Minister Ian Pearson*. This will concern all other quotation structures.

The quantitative study of the two corpora shows that there are no significant differences as far as the foregrounding and backgrounding of the self is concerned (see figure 8 below), where approximately 80 % of self-representation receives the treatment of the main clause element with ACTOR as the most frequent participant role. It can thus be hypothesized that such a strategy represents a generic constant, although it would require further verification on a more (especially thematically) varied corpus.

Unlike self-representation, the treatment of other-representation shows significant differences, with almost 70 % of other social actors relegated into a modifying structure in the EC headlines, while DEFRA headlines are marked by slight preference towards a main clause element. Again, this feature needs to be postulated as a variable from the point of view of genre.

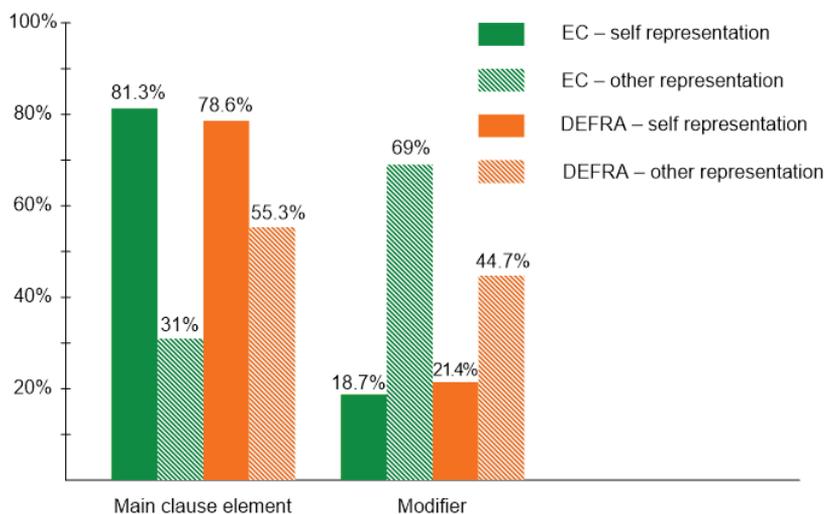


Figure 8. Syntactic foregrounding/backgrounding of social actors in EC and DEFRA headlines

*Clause participant role* Apart from foregrounding/backgrounding on the level of clause/phrase structure, the participant<sup>4</sup> structure is taken into account (cf. Quirk et al., Huddleston and Pullum). Van Leeuwen points out that “[a]gency [...] as a sociological concept is of major and classic importance in CDA [...] but sociological agency is not always realized by linguistic agency, by the grammatical role ‘Agent’” (32).

My focus will be on the role of ACTOR in order to determine the degree to which it is conflated with the discourse referent of social actor (‘who’), while bearing in mind that “the function of Actor [...] is defined only by its relation to other representational functions such as Process and Goal” (Halliday 37). The analysis of the corpora shows that most

verbs refer to either abstract material processes (*launch, decide, publish, propose, confirm, release, approve, agree*) or verbal processes (*announce, say*). This is in line with Jacob’s findings that semi-performatives in PR serve pre-formulation, and as such they are a defining feature of the genre.

As in the context of the present analysis, the agents of both the material and verbal processes can be conceptualized as processes of ‘doing’ something (cf. Halliday 103), the term ACTOR will be used in a wider sense to refer to the initiator – the person or entity responsible for any process including verbal or mental processes (cf. Mulderrig “Consuming education, 13”).<sup>5</sup> The simplification serves well the objective of the analysis, which deals with agency as such. The person or entity to which something is done, on the other hand, will be referred to as AFFECTED OR RECIPIENT (cf. Quirk et al.), depending on whether it concerns a direct or indirect object in the syntactic clause structure. For relational processes (cf. Halliday 115) the label TOKEN-VALUE will be used (cf. Fairclough 141). Clause participants semantically referring to circumstance will be referred to as OTHER<sup>6</sup>, as these are not significant from the point of view of our analysis and are only counted in order not to proportionally distort the statistics. While it is appreciated that the above classification is a simplification<sup>7</sup>, it is assumed that the level of generality of the roles involved matches the needs of the analyzed phenomenon.

The quantitative analysis from the point of view of agency reveals a fairly consistent pattern across the two corpora with only a slight strengthening of agency in other-representation in the DEFRA headlines (see figure 9 below). It is clear that if other social agents receive a favourable treatment as the main clause element, they tend to be assigned the participant role of AFFECTED OR RECIPIENT rather than that of ACTOR. This is in stark contrast with self-representation, where the role of AFFECTED OR RECIPIENT is insignificant in comparison with the role of ACTOR.

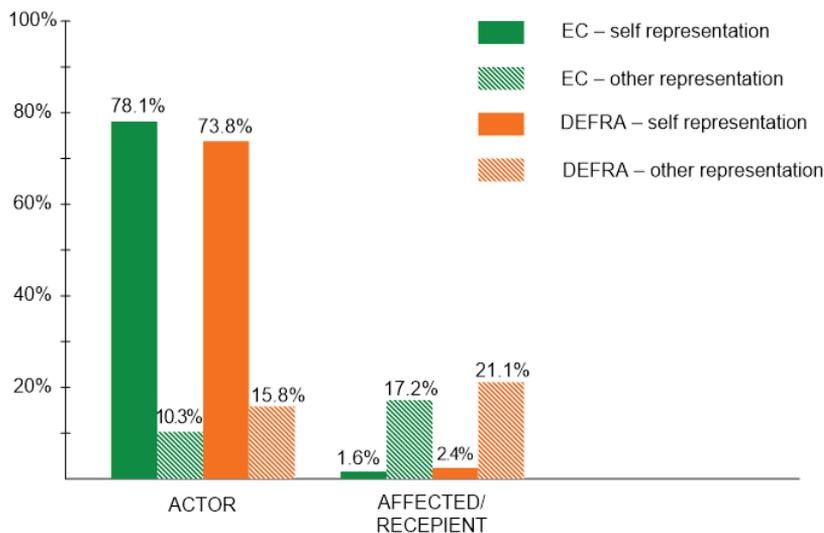


Figure 9. The proportion of the role ACTOR versus AFFECTED / RECIPIENT in EC and DEFRA headlines

The results obtained from the comparison point to a possibly stable generic feature, which is, moreover, tied to the form of governance. Such link can be further substantiated by comparing the findings to Mulderrig's ("Consuming education," 8) study on the representation of social actors in educational policy discourse, where the proportion of linguistic agents (ACTOR in the present study) assigned to other-representation totals approximately 20 %. This is comparable to the 10.3 % and 15.8 % for the EC and DEFRA headlines respectively, bearing in mind that the latter two do not represent a full text.<sup>8</sup> Such tendencies in fact suggest a paternalistic character of the relationship between the governing and the governed, and undermine the participatory framework which is called upon in discussions on legitimacy.<sup>9</sup>

*Passivization* The third means of foregrounding and backgrounding on the level of syntax is through *passivization*. In connection with headlines, Fowler notes that "[p]assive is a common structure in headlines – it saves space as well as immediately establishing the topic [...] [it is] possible that the agentless passive is chosen not only for brevity but also because of the official or bureaucratic nature of the events referred to" (78).

In the analyzed corpora, passive constructions in headlines are rare, and they are outnumbered by non-finite or verbless ones:

*National search for England's 'Climate Change Champions' is launched today.*

In several cases the auxiliary verb is ellipted:

*Climate change initiative welcomed*

*Climate change: More effort needed to reverse EU's greenhouse gases emission trends*

The passive in both EC and DEFRA headlines is used to avoid naming the agent for reasons outlined in the quotation above.

## 6. Conclusion

The perspective of CDA on the nature of self-reference as one of the three standard features of the genre of the press release has revealed not only tendencies that might be constant across the genre of institutional PR, but also those that highlight its inner differentiation.

The comparison of two analogous corpora shows that there is a significant level of similarity as far as allocation of agency and prominent linguistic structures to social actors is concerned, with both institutions largely favouring self-reference. Here a link to the mode of governance can be made, where lexico-grammatical instantiations of the social actors enforce a paternalistic rather than participatory framework.

On the other hand, the analysis reveals significant differences regarding the following dimensions: (i) degree of self-centredness marked by the space and prominence of linguistic structures allocated to the other social actors; (ii) personality and directness of reference; and (iii) the intensity of self-promotion by frequent repetition. In this context, the axis informative – promotional (journalistic – advertising) is seen as adequate to ground

the inner differentiation within the analyzed genre, where DEFRA displays characteristics closer to the informative end, while EC gravitates towards the promotional one. The more journalistic character of DEFRA headlines indicates greater emphasis on pre-formulation on the part of the British ministry.

Further analysis, including corpora of PRs issued by other institutions and/or activating other discourses (e.g. the war on terrorism), could be undertaken to verify the tendencies outlined in the study.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Headlines are selected based on the top-down strategy of decreasing importance, and their role in the orientation of the story (cf. Bell).

<sup>2</sup> The present paper is part of a more extensive study, so the design of the corpora serves to accommodate other related avenues of research.

<sup>3</sup> Note that in this context, Halliday speaks of down-ranking (63).

<sup>4</sup> By ‘participants’ I understand ‘entities realized by noun phrases, whether such entities are concrete or abstract’ (Quirk et al. 740).

<sup>5</sup> Chilton refers to ‘prototypical agent’ and ‘prototypical patient’ (53–54).

<sup>6</sup> In this context, see Van Leeuwen’s claim that “one cannot [...] have it both ways with language. Either theory and method are formally neat and semantically messy [...] or they are semantically neat but formally messy” (33).

<sup>7</sup> Huddleston and Pullum question the possibility of establishing a small number of general roles “such that all arguments can be assigned to one or other of these roles, with no two arguments in the same clause having the same role” (228).

<sup>8</sup> In fact, the study of the leads following the analyzed headlines gives the figure of 24.5 % for both EC and DEFRA for allocation of agency to the ‘other’ social actor.

<sup>9</sup> See for example the 2001 White Paper on European Governance, which redefines the role of the Union in policy-making: “[EU] legitimacy today depends on involvement and participation. This means that the linear model of dispensing policies from above must be replaced by a virtuous circle, based on feedback, networks and involvement from policy creation to implementation at all levels.” (European Commission 2001, 11).

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*Address:*  
*Catholic University*  
*Faculty of Arts*  
*Department of English Language and Literature*  
*Hrabovská cesta 1*  
*034 01 Ružomberok*  
*Slovakia*  
*danica.malekova@ku.sk*

# English Canonical Antonyms in Non-Native Speakers

Lenka Janovcová

Pavol Jozef Šafárik University, Košice

## Abstract

*This paper deals with non-native speakers' perception of the structure of antonymy in English. It concentrates on the notion of canonical antonyms – conventionalized pairs of words with contrastive meaning. To compare the perception of native and non-native speakers, the elicitation experiment designed by Paradis, Willners, and Jones is used. The results suggest that the nature of antonymy in English is perceived in the same way by both native and non-native speakers. Moreover, the set of adjectival canonical antonyms is very similar for both studied groups, while certain differences can be observed in the group of less strongly related antonyms.*

*Keywords: antonymy, canonical antonyms, adjective, native speakers, non-native speakers*

## 1. Introduction

Antonymy belongs among the basic lexical-semantic relations, together with homonymy, polysemy, synonymy or hyponymy/hyperonymy. The basic principle of this relation is that the meaning of the antonyms are opposite in some way – they represent a contrastive value (e.g. *dead – alive, pretty – ugly, arrive – leave*). Some authors distinguish between the terms ‘antonyms’ and ‘opposites’, but others use them synonymously. In the former case, antonymy is usually understood as oppositeness in a narrow sense, which means that it refers only to gradable opposites (*slow – fast, small – big*). Cruse belongs among those linguists who work with the term antonymy in its narrow sense (*Lexical Semantics* 204). According to his definition, opposites are two words which share a semantic dimension

and stay on the opposite poles of the dimension (197), e.g. the dimension of TEMPERATURE is shared by the words *hot* and *cold* (210–211).

Antonymy has a special position in language use. In Cruse's view, oppositeness is the only sense relation to receive direct lexical recognition in everyday language (*Introduction* 162). Jones estimates that one in fifty sentences might include an antonymic pair (119). Within sentences, antonyms co-occur more often than a chance would allow (*Ibid.*) and more often than any other pairings – e.g. synonyms (Paradis, Willners, and Jones). In addition, binary opposition is natural for children from the very early stages of language use. Murphy shows that children in the language acquisition stage use antonyms independently from adults and more often than their parents.

On the one hand, antonymy has a special position among lexical relationships. On the other hand, there is a group of antonymic pairs with a special position among antonyms. Members of the Comparative Lexical Relations Group<sup>1</sup> define canonical antonyms (in the sense of any kind of oppositeness) as “pairs of words in binary semantic opposition associated by convention as well as by semantic relatedness (e.g. *wide – narrow*)” (Paradis, Willners, Löhendorf, and Murphy). These linguists distinguish canonical antonymy from semantic opposition, in which pairing is not based on convention, but on semantic contrast only, e.g. *glad – unhappy*, *cold – scorching*, *pale – dark*, *speedy – slow*, *beautiful – practical* (*Ibid.*). “Canonical antonym pairings have been learned as pairings of lexical units (i.e. pairings of form-sense combinations), not just derived by semantic rules (i.e. sense-sense pairings)” (Jones et al. 131). Language users perceive canonical antonyms as ‘belonging together’. Murphy notes that “language users can intuitively sort ‘good’ (or prototypical) antonyms from not-so-good ones and downright bad ones” (11).

The notion of canonical antonyms is relatively recent. The term was introduced at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it has been studied mainly in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Paradis, Murphy, Willners, Jones, etc.). It is closely connected with a psycholinguistic approach to linguistics which is aimed at language users' perception of the relations in the language. However, even before the term canonical antonymy was introduced, Cruse pointed out that central, prototypical cases of antonymy “judged by informants to be good examples of antonymy” (*Lexical Semantics* 198) like *good – bad*, *true – false*, *large – small*, *top – bottom* can be distinguished. These ‘prototypical’ pairs are usually gradable adjectives in binary opposition – antonyms in a narrow sense (*Ibid.* 262). In general, psycholinguistic approaches to antonymy build on the fact that some antonymic pairs are perceived as ‘better’ antonyms (more prototypical) than other pairs. Individual approaches differ in terminology and properties attributed to the ‘best’ (prototypical) antonymic couplings.

A special model of antonymy called the WordNet<sup>2</sup> model is proposed by Gross, Fischer, and Miller from Princeton Cognitive Science Laboratory. In one of their reports (*Antonymy*) they introduce direct antonyms – cases that represent clear examples of antonyms (e.g. *wet – dry*, *young – old*). The rest of the antonyms participate in antonymy indirectly (by being synonyms of some direct antonyms) and therefore they are called indirect antonyms (e.g. *wet – dried-up*, *wet – unhydrous*, or *humid – dry*, *watery – dry*). The notions of this model are based on free association tests. Gross, Fischer, and Miller claim that direct antonyms are easily to be recognized as antonymic couplings because they are directly linked in the mind. They are perceived as more prototypical than indirect

antonyms because they are heard together, learnt together and usually they can substitute each other in the same context.

On the other hand, Muehleisen refers to the existence of antonymic pairs related more closely than other pairings as to the ‘clang phenomenon’, which she describes as native speakers’ “strong intuitions about which pairs of words are good examples of antonyms, for example, probably all English speakers would agree that *cold* is the opposite of *hot*, that *happy* is the opposite of *sad*, and that *down* is the opposite of *up*.” (4). Using Deese’s ideas (*The Structure*), Muehleisen states that adjectives are usually associated with their opposites and that less frequent adjectives are associated with the common ones (Ibid. 26). These claims are based on the results of the free association tests.

Despite varied terminology, all the above-mentioned models describe the same phenomenon. As it is highlighted by Paradis, Willners, Löhndorf, and Murphy, canonical antonyms correspond to direct antonyms in the WordNet model and non-canonical antonyms to indirect ones. In Muehleisen’s terminology canonical antonyms correspond to antonymic pairs affected by the clang phenomenon. However, some authors (Gross, Fischer, and Miller, *Organization*; Charles, Reed, and Derryberry) claim that antonymic pairs are either canonical (direct) or non-canonical (indirect) while others (Herrmann et al.; Murphy; Paradis, Willners, and Jones) argue that antonymic pairs cannot be strictly classified and a continuum exists between the mentioned categories. The next section describes several pieces of research carried out with native speakers of English. Their results are in favour of the continuum model of antonymy in English.

### 1.1 Research into Canonical Antonyms

The nature of antonymy can be examined from two basic points of view – linguistic (based on corpus data reflecting language use) and metalinguistic – judgement tests and elicitation experiments which “assess not how language is used, but how informants reflect on the meaning(s) of given words and the relations that hold between them” (Jones et al. 132). Recently (in the 21<sup>st</sup> century) the phenomenon of canonical antonyms has been studied most deeply and complexly by the members of the Comparative Lexical Relations Group. The researchers studied the nature of antonymy in English (Paradis, Willners, and Jones; Jones et al.) as well as in Swedish (Paradis, Willners, Löhndorf, and Murphy; Willners and Paradis) with native speakers of the corresponding languages. To reveal the structure of antonymy in Swedish, Willners and Paradis use the same methods as described below for English.

To examine antonym canonicity in English, Paradis, Willners, and Jones use three different methods: corpus-based data, the judgement test and the elicitation experiment. The corpus research was carried out mainly to determine the words to be tested in the psycholinguistic experiments. However, it showed some interesting results in itself. The researchers chose the set of seven dimensions of human communication with the central meaning. Each dimension was represented by the pair of the ‘best opposites’ – canonical antonyms. All of these pairs were marked as direct antonyms in Princeton WordNet. Then all the synonyms of the chosen canonical pairs were collected from WordNet and all possible pairs with opposite meaning within the dimensions were tested for sentence co-occurrence using a programme called Coco, developed by Willners (*Antonyms in Context*).

The results show that there are antonymic pairs (canonical antonyms) that co-occur more frequently than others (see also Justeson and Katz; Willners). In addition, not only do canonical antonyms co-occur significantly more often than chance would allow, but they co-occur much more often than all other generated combinations of words with opposite meaning. Moreover, a majority of the members of pairings with high scores are frequent individually as well.

The judgment experiment showed that some of the proposed pairs are considered to be better examples of antonyms than others. Pairs tested in the judgment experiment were chosen on the basis of the co-occurrence test and Herrmann et al.'s test. As Paradis, Willners, and Jones wanted to make the list of the tested words as homogenous as possible, they chose only adjectives that can be modified in the sense of scalar degree by adverbs such as *very*. Gradable adjectives are used, as adjectives are usually considered to be the best examples of antonyms.

Together 55 antonymic pairs were used in the judgement test. Native speakers of English were asked to decide how good an example of antonymy a given pair of words is on the scale from 'very bad' to 'excellent' using special software. The word pairs were classed into four categories – canonical antonyms, antonyms, synonyms and unrelated pairs. The results suggest that antonymy has a special status among lexical-semantic relations, that there is a limited set of canonical antonyms showing a high level of 'goodness', and that sequential ordering does not have an effect on the judgement.

The elicitation experiment involved the same 85 individual words (randomly ordered) as the judgement test. Native speakers of English who participated were asked to write down the best possible opposite for the stimulus word – e.g.: "The opposite of thin is \_\_\_\_". The results of the elicitation experiment show that there is a scale of canonicity from very good matches (small number of antonyms suggested) to words with no preferred antonym (many suggested antonyms). Some of the participants were not able to give any opposite of certain stimulus words. These adjectives with omitted answers belong among the words with many elicited antonyms. Thus conventionalized pairs (canonical antonyms) are probably easier to retrieve from the memory. It is also interesting that responses are not distributed symmetrically (e.g. *bad* elicited only *good*, while for *good*, both *bad* and *evil* were suggested). However, there are strongly connected antonymic pairs that tend to display strong correspondence in both directions – they are reciprocal (on the level of a one-to-one, one-to-two or one-to-three match). The researchers claim that in many cases this asymmetry may be caused by the fact that one of the pair members is more general than the other one.

In summary, the elicitation experiment reflects the associative strength and contextual versatility of the most frequently suggested pairings. Words constituting non-canonical antonymic pairs elicited many various antonyms and some of the participants were not able to give any opposite for them. It is supposed that they are not stored together in the mental lexicon<sup>3</sup> and therefore it is more demanding to identify them as pairings. When having freedom of choice in an elicitation experiment, participants may employ various possible contexts where the tested items can occur, which leads to many proposed antonyms for adjectives that do not belong to canonical pairings. Paradis claims that "the elicitation experiment very clearly highlights the fact that speakers make up their own contexts when they suggest the best partner" (387).

To conclude, in the study by Paradis, Willners and Jones, all most frequently co-occurring pairs retrieved from the corpus-driven data were considered to be good opposites both in the judgement experiment and the elicitation experiment. They show significantly different behaviour in comparison to other antonyms, synonyms and unrelated pairings. When the participants were given freedom of choice in the elicitation test, slightly different pairs of antonyms were identified as canonical than in the corpus-based research and judgment experiment. However, Paradis, Willners and Jones claim that the elicitation experiment results are not in conflict with the previous results. The differences might be caused by the nature and design of the experiments as well as by statistical calculation. These differences suggest that the studied phenomenon is not clear-cut. However, all the experiments suggest that there are several couplings perceived as good (strongly related), while the list of them may differ due to the nature of experiments and individual preferences of the test participants.

Paradis proposes a theoretical model that explains the nature of antonymy (see Paradis; Paradis and Willners), called Lexical meaning as ontologies and construals (LOC). According to this model, conceptual space is divided into two kinds of structures: contentful (CONCRETE and ABSTRACT PHENOMENA, EVENTS, PROCESSES, STATES) and configurational (PART/WHOLE, BOUNDEDNESS, SCALE etc.). On the other hand, cognitive space is occupied by construals, such as comparison, salience, perspective or Gestalt. Human communication proceeds through construal operations imposed on concepts and a contextual meaning construal is established. In the LOC model, antonymy (opposition) is understood as a binary construal of comparison in which the contentful dimension (e.g. LENGTH, GENDER) is divided by the configuration of BOUNDEDNESS. “This way, a dichotomy can be set up, and the two opposites are located on either side of the boundary and they are contrasted through comparison in the context where they occur” (Paradis 36). This categorization of antonymy by contentful meaning structures explains a continuum from prototypical antonyms to worse examples of antonymic pairs.

Muehleisen (*Antonymy and Semantic Range in English*), on the other hand, tries to answer the question why some pairs are so closely related while the others are not via the method of semantic range. This method studies meanings and contexts where the members of antonymic pairs can occur. According to Muehleisen, conventional relatedness of certain antonyms is caused by the great extent of semantic range shared by the antonymic pair members. Thus the more semantic range two words share in which to contrast, the better examples of antonymy they are. This means that adjectives are good opposites only when they describe the same kind of thing.

The results of research (Paradis, Willners, and Jones; Willners and Paradis) show that the structure of antonymy as a lexical-semantic relation has the same pattern in both English and Swedish – it is a scale from prototypical examples to loosely connected antonyms. To my knowledge, non-native speakers have not yet been tested for their perception of antonymy. However, it is probable that non-native speakers are aware of the pattern of antonymy perceived by native speakers. This paper concentrates on the perception of adjectival antonyms in English by non-native speakers. Although there is not a corpus of English specializing in the texts produced by non-native speakers, metalinguistic experiments can also be applied to non-native speakers. The results of metalinguistic experiments reflect the functioning of the mental lexicon of participants. Some authors (e.g. Gross,

Fischer, and Miller, *Antonymy*) suppose that canonical antonyms are directly linked in the mind, and some (e.g. Paradis, Willners, and Jones) that they are stored together in the mental lexicon. Therefore, the explanation of possible reasons for the differences between the results of the experiments with native and non-native speakers requires understanding of the L1 (native speakers') and L2 (non-native speakers') mental lexicon.

## **1.2 Comparison of the L1 and L2 mental lexicon**

It has been assumed by several authors that processing of the L1 and L2 mental lexicon is very similar in its nature, however the mental lexicon of non-native speakers may be quantitatively limited (Zareva; Singleton; Wolter). As shown by Zareva, the vocabulary size of intermediate learners of English is significantly limited in comparison with native speakers, while advanced learners' vocabulary is similar in size to native speakers' vocabulary. Nevertheless, the vocabulary of non-native speakers is to some extent limited in comparison with native speakers' vocabulary. The smaller size of the vocabulary is associated with fewer links between the words, and consequently a relatively loosely connected lexicon. Zareva assumes that the larger the lexicon, the better it is connected with regard to the number and variety of connections. This conclusion is in accordance with Meara's opinion. He claims that "association network of L1-group is 'denser' than that of L2-group" (Meara 3). Furthermore, the L1 mental lexicon is meaning-oriented, which is true also for the L2 advanced learners' mental lexicon, while acquisition of lexical units in earlier stages of dealing with a language may be based on the phonological form to some extent (Singleton).

## **2. Experiment**

### **2.1 Aims and hypotheses**

The main aim of this paper is to compare the perception of the nature of antonymy in English by native and non-native advanced speakers. It is expected that non-native speakers perceive the structure of antonymy in the same way as native speakers – on a scale from the best examples of antonymy to hardly related pairs. Considering the fact that there is a group of antonyms perceived by native speakers of English as being related by convention, I expect that there is an analogical group of canonical antonyms among non-native speakers. These antonyms are learnt together as they are used quite frequently (including written texts) and stored together in the mental lexicon. Jones et al. talk about canonical antonyms as "learnt as pairings of lexical units" (Jones et al. 131). Therefore, non-native speakers – when acquiring the language through English course books, reading in English or speaking with native speakers – get in touch with antonymy as it is perceived by language users from an English-speaking background. Thus non-native speakers may intuitively acquire the same canonical antonyms as native speakers.

On the other hand, I expect certain differences in the group of non-canonical antonyms. Possible differences in preferences for particular words as the best antonyms of the given items may emerge due to non-native speakers' limited vocabulary, fewer links between the

items in the non-native speakers' mental lexicon (see e.g. Zareva; Meara), or non-native speaker's restricted awareness of all possible contexts where the proposed items can be used.

## 2.2 Method and Participants

The elicitation experiment was chosen as a tool for the comparison of native and non-native speakers regarding their perception of English antonyms. On the one hand, the elicitation experiment reveals the nature of antonymy; on the other hand, it enables the comparison of concrete word couplings, the frequency of their co-occurrence or their directionality. The advantage of the elicitation experiment over the judgement experiment is that it provides a more precise scale of the relation between antonymic pairings. In the judgement experiment the pairs are already given, while in the elicitation experiment participants are free to choose the word they prefer as the best antonym of a given item.

To make the data clearly comparable, the elicitation experiment (Paradis, Willners, and Jones) was replicated with non-native speakers. The experiment with non-native speakers preserves the same set of words, number of participants and conditions for completing the elicitation experiment of the original study. The procedure was the same as in the original experiment, using the original instructions. Informants were to write down the best opposites for the 85 listed adjectives. The time for the task was not limited; however, participants were to give the first antonym they could think of and not check or correct their answers. For the list of the responses elicited by native and non-native speakers see Appendix A and Appendix B.

Fifty non-native speakers of English whose mother tongue is Slovak were asked to fill in the questionnaire. All of them were students of British and American Studies at Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice, Slovakia, where the test was also carried out. The informants were 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students of a BA degree programme, aged between 20 and 25, all of them advanced learners of English. Advanced learners of English were asked to participate because research by Zareva suggests that the mental lexicons of native speakers and advanced non-native speakers are similar both in nature and size. On the other hand, the vocabulary size of intermediate learners of English is significantly limited compared with native speakers. Using intermediate learners as participants might have caused differences related to their limited knowledge of English vocabulary.

## 2.3 Results

For practical reasons I mark the elicitation experiment with native speakers (Paradis, Willners, and Jones) as ENS and the elicitation experiment with non-native speakers as ENNS. In addition, the arithmetic mean of the number of suggested antonyms is labelled AM.

### 2.3.1 Canonical antonyms

Paradis, Willners, and Jones claim that “for the test items that most speakers of English intuitively deem to be good pairs of antonyms, the strong agreement held true in both directions, not always at the level of a one-to-one match, but a one-to-two or one-to-three”

(406). For example, the only antonym suggested for *good* was *bad*, while *bad* elicited two antonyms (*good* and *evil*), and yet the antonymic pair *good* – *bad* is prototypical. Therefore, adjectives meeting the condition of bidirectionality in the described sense are very strongly related. The pattern of bidirectionality of strongly related antonyms is very similar for both native and non-native speakers (see Figure 1 and Figure 2). Adjectives that elicited only one antonym in ENS are the following: *bad* (*good*), *hot* (*cold*), *young* (*old*), *weak* (*strong*), *clean* (*dirty*), *beautiful* (*ugly*), *heavy* (*light*), *poor* (*rich*). In ENNS, seven items elicited only one antonym, namely *bad* (*good*), *hot* (*cold*), *young* (*old*), *strong* (*weak*), *big* (*small*), *white* (*black*), and *black* (*white*<sup>4</sup>). Four of these canonical pairs are the same as in ENS, although the pair *strong* – *weak* appears with a reversed order of its members. However, the judgment experiment (Paradis, Willners, and Jones) shows that ordering of the antonyms within a pair does not influence its ‘goodness’. Therefore *strong* – *weak* in the elicitation experiment corresponds to the pair *weak* – *strong*, and the pair *white* – *black* (*black* – *white*) was elicited in both directions in ENNS. In addition, the low number of proposed antonyms suggests a strong relation of the couplings *white* – *black* and *big* – *small* in ENS (despite the fact that the number of participants who suggested each of these antonyms is not mentioned by Paradis, Willners, and Jones). For *big*, native speakers suggested only *small* and *little*, for *white* only *black* and *dark*, for *black* only *white* and *colour*. In the opposite direction, most of the adjectives that were assigned only one antonym in ENS are strongly related in ENNS. These are the couplings *beautiful* – *ugly*, *poor* – *rich* and *clean* – *dirty*. *Ugly* was chosen as the best antonym of *beautiful* by 46 non-native participants, 45 participants suggested *rich* as the best antonym of *poor*, and 49 participants gave *dirty* as the best antonym of *clean*. However, the pair *heavy* – *light* represents an exception because it is not as strongly related in ENNS as in ENS. While in ENS *heavy* elicited only *light*, and *light* elicited *heavy* and *dark*, in ENNS only 37 participants gave *light* as the best antonym of *heavy*. Nine of them suggested *easy*, three of them *soft*, and one participant preferred *weak*. Moreover, the most common antonym of *light*

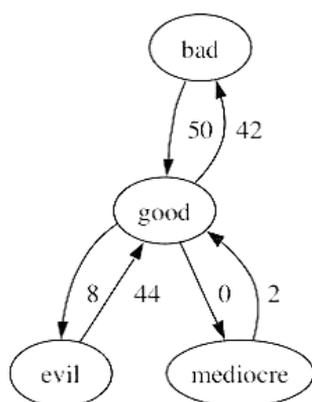


Figure 1. Scheme of bidirectionality of *bad* – *good* in ENS

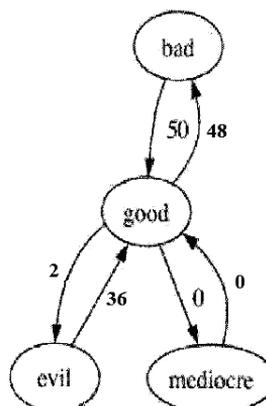


Figure 2. Scheme of bidirectionality of *good* – *bad* in ENNS

was not *heavy* but *dark* (suggested by 34 participants), with *heavy* in the second place with 14 occurrences. *Fat* and *tough* were both suggested once.

The position of canonical antonyms among other antonymic pairs is special. The results of the corpus-based analysis and the judgment experiment carried out by Paradis, Willners, and Jones point to the existence of a rather significant difference in the relation between canonical and non-canonical antonymic couplings. In the case of ENNS, there is a special group of antonyms that can be distinguished. These pairs of words elicit each other in both directions in at least 90 % of the responses and not more than two other items are suggested for the words creating the pair. There is not a coupling which meets one of the proposed conditions without meeting another one. This observation indicates a significant difference in the relationship between the antonyms belonging to this group of couplings and the rest of the antonymic pairs. The above-mentioned conditions guarantee a very high degree of relatedness between antonyms constituting such a pair. Therefore, these conditions might be considered as an option of classifying antonyms as canonical on the basis of the elicitation experiment.

According to the given criteria, the following pairings in ENNS are canonical: *strong – weak*, *bad – good*, *white – black*, *fast – slow*. Except the mentioned pairs, there are other pairs that might qualify for antonym canonicity in ENNS: *hot – cold*, *young – old* and *clean – dirty*. *Hot* and *young* elicited the only antonym in ENNS, *clean* elicited *dirty* in 49 cases and *messy* in one case. All three words (*hot*, *young*, *clean*) elicited the only antonym in ENS. Despite this fact, the criterion of bidirectionality cannot be verified for these words as the words they elicited (*cold*, *old*, *dirty*) do not occur among the tested items. Nevertheless, the preference of the informants suggests that these three pairs are related strongly.

An interesting situation arises in the case of *dark – light* and *big – small*, where the principle of bidirectionality is deviated from. Ambiguity is caused by the synonymous nature of the items in question. In ENNS, *dark* elicited *light* in 47 cases (it also elicited *bright* – 3 responses) while *light* elicited *dark* only in 34 cases. Moreover, *light* elicited three other responses – *heavy*, *fat*, *tough*. In the case of the latter coupling, a strong interconnection occurs between the words *big*, *small* and *large*. The situation here is complicated by the possible synonymy of *big* and *large* in some contexts. In ENS, the relations between these words are very similar – *big* elicited *small* and *little*, *small* elicited *big*, *large* and *tall*, *large* elicited *small*, *little* and *slim* (see Appendix A). Thus, on the basis of the elicitation experiment, the relations between the words *dark – light* and *big – small – large* cannot be treated as canonical, as there is a lack of clear preference between the items. However, the conclusions of the research based on different methodology (Muehleisen; Gries and Otani) show that despite the ambiguity, antonymic pairs *large – small* and *big – little* should be considered canonical.

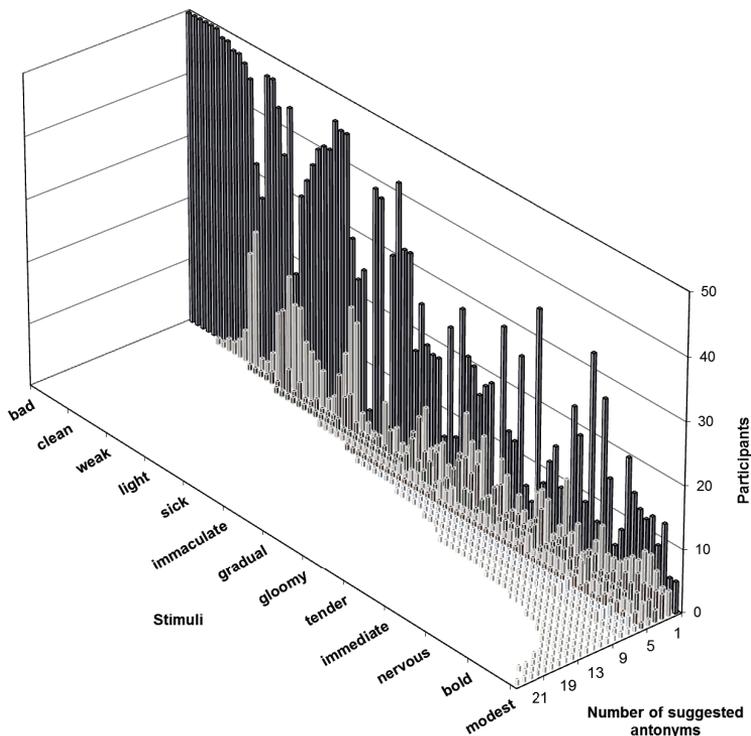
To conclude, Paradis, Willners, and Jones identified eight canonical antonyms in the judgement experiment. All of them appear among the strongly related antonymic pairs given by the participants in elicitation experiments. The pairs *bad – good*, *young – old*, *strong – weak* can be considered canonical both in ENS and ENNS; *hot – cold* and *clean – dirty* appear in ENS and *big – small*, *white – black* and *fast – slow* appear in ENNS. This observation supports the conclusion of Paradis et al. that all the experimental methods

point to the same limited set of canonical antonyms. At the same time, it suggests that the differences between these sets of canonical antonymic pairings in the mental lexicon of native and non-native speakers are very minor.

### 2.3.2 Distribution of responses

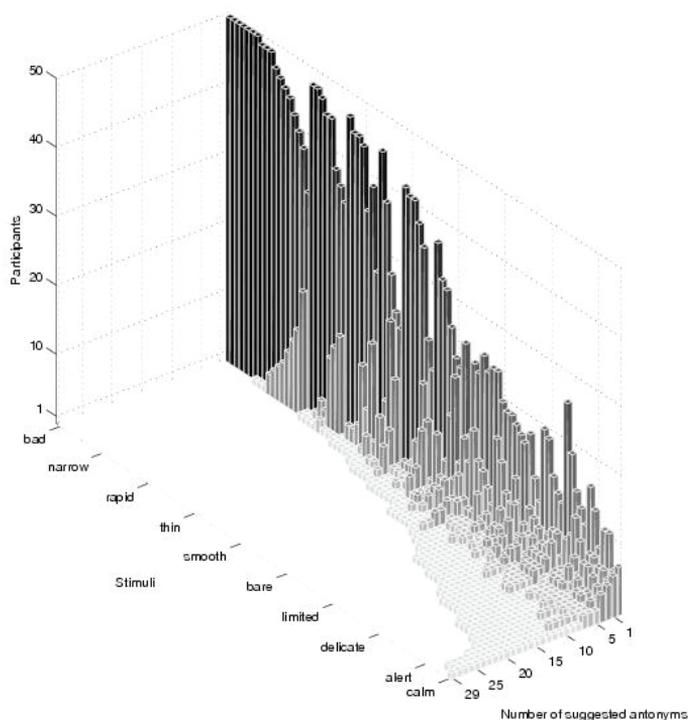
The overall distribution of responses in ENNS is comparable to the distribution in ENS (compare Figure 3 and Figure 4). In ENS as well as in ENNS, 7 words elicited the only antonym. The maximum number of suggested antonyms was 29 in ENS and 24 in ENNS. Moreover, none of the antonyms strongly related in ENNS appears among the weakly related ones in ENS. Nevertheless, the numbers of suggested antonyms for individual items vary in the two experiments.

According to the relation between the number of responses elicited in ENS and ENNS, all test words can be divided into three groups. The first group consists of 40 test words (47 % of all test words) that elicited fewer antonyms in ENNS than in ENS. This is in compliance with the expectation that non-native speakers are not aware of all possible contexts where a word can occur with its antonym. Responses to these words are in accordance with Meara's conclusion that non-native speakers identify smaller numbers of associated



**Figure 3.** Distribution of the antonyms in the ENNS elicitation experiment. The X-axis gives the **number of suggested antonyms**, the Y-axis (**Stimuli**) gives the test items (every seventh is written in full length), the Z-axis (**Participants**) gives the number of participants suggesting antonyms given on the X-axis.

words than native speakers. The arithmetic mean of the number of responses (AM) elicited by these words is 9. The second group of 16 test items elicited the same number of words in ENS and ENNS. In the case of 4 canonical antonyms not only the number of words but also the words themselves are the same. The remaining 12 words belong mostly to the words constituting rather strongly related pairs as the AM of these items is only 5.6. The third group contains the test items that elicited more antonyms in ENNS than in ENS. It was not expected that a relatively large proportion of the items (29 words, which represents 34.12 % of all tested words) would belong to this third group. This observation may be caused by a higher degree of conventionalization of certain pairings in the mental lexicon of native speakers, while non-native speakers do not have such preferences. The AM of these items is 7.9 which means it is slightly lower than the AM of words belonging to the first group.



**Figure 4.** Distribution of the responses in ENS. The X-axis gives the **number of suggested antonyms**, the Y-axis (**Stimuli**) gives the test items (every tenth is written in full length), the Z-axis (**Participants**) gives the number of participants suggesting antonyms given on the X-axis. Adapted from Paradis et al. (2009, p. 403).

### 2.3.3 Omitted answers

The participants of ENS did not give any answer to the test items in 94 cases; that represents 2.14 % out of the total number of responses (85 test items x 50 participants = 4,250 responses in total). A majority of the test items with omitted answers were the ones with

the highest numbers of suggested antonyms. 41 test words in ENS elicited all 50 responses (the AM of these items is 5.3), while 44 items were not provided with any antonym by at least one informant (the AM of these items is 12.5) (Paradis, Willners, and Jones 404–406). The situation with omitted responses in ENNS is slightly different. The number of omitted responses is 6,617 times higher than in ENS. Slovak informants were not able to give any antonym in 622 cases, which represents 14.635 % of all responses. Only 30 test items elicited all responses and at least one of the participants failed to provide an antonym for 55 words. The AM of the test words with 50 responses is 3, while it is 10.62 for the test items with omitted responses.

It is logical that the number of the words with 50 responses is higher and the total number of omitted responses is lower in the experiment with native speakers. Non-native speakers are not familiar with the meaning of some of the tested adjectives and lexical-semantic relations in the non-native speakers' mental lexicon may be weaker than in the mental lexicon of native speakers (this depends, of course, on individual language users). Zareva and Meara assume that the number of links between the words in the L2 mental lexicon is limited compared to the L1 mental lexicon. The low AM of the test items with 50 responses in ENNS suggests that non-native speakers have no problems with assigning antonyms to the words constituting relatively strongly related antonymic pairs, while the recognition of the less strongly related antonymic couplings is more problematic for some of them.

Generally, words that elicit relatively many antonyms are the ones with several omitted answers. An interesting fact is that there are words with a very high number of omitted answers in ENNS among the test items. For 11 items, less than one half of the Slovak informants suggested an antonym. In the case of these words it is difficult to judge the strength of the pairings they constitute. However, they cannot form very strongly related pairs as their antonyms were not identified by a majority of the informants and they elicited from 5 to 14 different opposites.

## **2.4 Discussion**

To summarize, the nature of antonymy in English is the same for both native speakers and non-native advanced learners with the Slovak language as their L1. There is a continuum from strongly (conventionally) related pairs to weakly related ones. All pairs of canonical antonyms retrieved from the elicitation experiment with non-native speakers are related very strongly in the eyes of native speakers. At least one of the words constituting any of the 'non-native speakers' canonical pairs' was elicited by all 50 native speakers in ENS. Moreover, all strongly related antonyms can be found among the pairings with no omitted responses. These observations indicate that canonical antonyms are easily recognisable by both native and non-native speakers. Jones et al. hypothesize that canonical antonyms are learnt together and thus recognized as conventionally paired. It is probable that non-native speakers acquire canonical antonyms as belonging together already in the process of learning English as their L2. Nevertheless, it is possible that there is an analogical set of canonical antonyms in the mother tongue of non-native speakers that makes recognition of canonical antonyms in English natural for them. If the concepts of certain adjectives are encoded as opposed in the mental lexicon of language users, they should be able to

recognise corresponding forms representing them as canonical antonyms in any language they speak. Regardless of the cause, canonical antonyms seem to be well-established in the word-stock of all English speakers. If this hypothesis were true, English canonical antonyms would be universal not only for native speakers but also for all learners of English. However, a deeper survey of perception of canonical antonyms by the speakers with L1 belonging to different languages (and different language families) would be necessary.

Concerning less strongly related pairs, a majority of the test items (47 % of the test words) elicited more antonyms in ENS than in ENNS. In these cases, native speakers are aware of a wider range of contexts where the given antonymic pairs can occur. However, there is a group of the items (more than 34 % of all tested items) that elicited more antonyms in ENNS than in ENS. This observation may reflect the fact that in some cases convention plays a more important role in the native speakers' perception of antonymy than in the non-native speakers' perception of this lexical-semantic relation. Nevertheless, the advanced English learners are able to recognize antonyms of the given words without difficulties (when they know the meaning of the given items). This fact supports Singleton's, Zareva's and Wolter's view on the mental lexicon of non-native speakers. Singleton claims that the operation of the L2 mental lexicon is similar to the operation of the L1 mental lexicon (both of them are meaning-oriented) (151); Zareva and Wolter assume that the L1 and advanced L2 mental lexicon differ only quantitatively, not qualitatively. In accordance with this assumption, the number of omitted responses (when at least one participant was not able to give any antonym of the test item) in ENNS is 6.617 times higher than in ENS. This number is 44 in ENS and 55 in ENNS. However, Zareva claims, that the size of native speakers' and advanced non-native speakers' vocabulary is comparable. Thus, if learners with a lower level of English were asked to participate in the elicitation experiment, a serious lack of L2 vocabulary knowledge or significant differences in the mental lexicon processing might influence the test results. Therefore, comparing the perception of antonym canonicity of native speakers and learners with a lower level of English would be an interesting topic for further study.

Furthermore, the nature of antonymy in the described experiments is tested on gradable adjectives. Although adjectives are often considered the best examples of antonyms, the lists of canonical antonyms mentioned in the studies cannot be considered definite or complete. It is probable that there are other pairs in language that meet criteria to be canonical but they do not belong among gradable adjectives. Antonymic pairs can be found, for example, among non-gradable adjectives (*single – married*), nouns (*love – hatred*), verbs (*allow – prohibit*), or prepositions (*above – below*). On the other hand, it is a topic for further research to specify the exact criteria that would classify a pair of antonyms as canonical on the basis of metalinguistic experiments. To establish the status of certain antonymic pairs (such as *hot – cold*, *young – old* and *clean – dirty*), an elicitation experiment containing the second member of the pairs (*cold*, *old*, *dirty*) would be needed to test these couplings for the criterion of bidirectionality. That said, the topic of antonym canonicity and the perception of antonymy by native and non-native speakers provide several directions of further research.

### 3. Conclusion

This paper discusses the nature of antonymy in English, concentrating on its perception by native and non-native speakers. For both native and non-native speakers, there is a scale running from prototypical examples of antonyms (canonical antonyms) to loosely related antonymic pairs. Canonical antonyms are defined as pairs of words with opposite meaning related by convention as well as by semantics (Paradis, Willners, Löhndorf, and Murphy). These pairings of general meaning co-occur frequently in English texts and they are supposed to be learnt together (Paradis, Willners, and Jones).

Comparison of antonym canonicity perception by native and non-native speakers is based on the data acquired from elicitation experiments with 50 native speakers of English and 50 advanced learners with Slovak as their mother tongue. The advanced learners were asked to participate because it had previously been shown that their mental lexicon is very similar to the mental lexicon of native speakers (Singleton; Zareva; Wolter). The participants were asked to give the best antonyms of the proposed adjectives. To make the data as accurately comparable as possible, the same set of words and the same conditions for filling the questionnaire were used for the non-native speakers as in the elicitation experiment with native speakers designed by Paradis, Willners, and Jones.

In compliance with the hypothesis, the results of the elicitation experiment with non-native speakers indicate that the nature of antonymy in English is the same whether the speakers are native or non-native. There is a continuum from very strongly related antonymic pairs eliciting only one antonym to weakly related words of opposable meaning both in ENS and ENNS. Differences between native and non-native speakers in preferences for particular words as the best antonyms of the given items may emerge due to non-native speakers' limited vocabulary, fewer links between the items in the non-native speakers' mental lexicon, or non-native speakers' restricted awareness of all possible contexts where the proposed items can be used. The above-mentioned differences are apparent in the group of less strongly related antonyms. The set of all antonyms proposed for the individual items differs partially in the vast majority of cases. All the tested items can be divided into three categories: the words that elicited more antonyms in ENS than in ENNS (47 %), the words that elicited more antonyms in ENNS than in ENS (over 34 %), and the test words that elicited the same number of antonyms in ENS and ENNS (less than 29 %). However, the lists of antonyms suggested for the individual test items from the latter group are not fully identical, regardless of the cases of canonical antonyms. These observations may indicate that although native speakers are aware of a wider range of contexts where the given antonymic pairs can occur, convention plays a more important role in their perception of antonymy than in non-native speakers'.

Furthermore, the number of omitted responses in ENNS is 6.617 times higher than in ENS. The difference between the proportions of omitted responses in ENS and ENNS is natural, as the mental lexicon of learners is usually limited in comparison to that of native speakers. However, the behaviour of antonyms is the same in ENS and ENNS – the test words with omitted responses constitute less strongly related antonymic couplings than the words with all 50 responses. None of the strongly related pairs include a word with omitted responses. Therefore it seems that canonical antonym members are well-established words from the core vocabulary of English with general meaning.

All in all, the research presented in this paper indicates that canonical antonyms do exist in the mental lexicon of non-native speakers. Moreover, the set of canonical antonyms is very similar for both native and non-native speakers with an advanced level of English. This conclusion makes room for further investigation of the indicators of antonym canonicity in English and of the nature of the lexical-semantic relation of antonymy in general.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> The Comparative Lexical Relations Group is a group of researchers involved in a Complexica Project. Members of the group (Steven Jones, Lynne Murphy, Carita Paradis, Caroline Willners, Victoria Muehleisen) deal with various aspects of antonyms – “their innate characteristics and the way these manifest in speech and writing, of children, adults, and language learners” (<http://www.f.waseda.jp/vicky/complexica/>).

<sup>2</sup> “WordNet<sup>®</sup> is a large lexical database of English, developed under the direction of George A. Miller. Nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs are grouped into sets of cognitive synonyms (synsets), each expressing a distinct concept. Synsets are interlinked by means of conceptual-semantic and lexical relations”. The resulting network consists of meaningfully related words and concepts (<<http://wordnet.princeton.edu/>>).

<sup>3</sup> Aitchison talks about the mental lexicon as a ‘human word store’ which is arranged systematically, although in a different manner than a book dictionary. The mental lexicon contains all kinds of information about the stored words, including their relations to other words. Dictionaries present words in isolation and provide only limited amounts of information about them (3–17). Murphy defines the mental lexicon as “the mental representation of information about words” (12).

<sup>4</sup> 49 participants suggested *white* and one suggested *which*. This word is not semantically related to the tested item in any way (definitely it cannot be an antonym of *black*), so it could be expected the suggestion of this word was just a mistake made by one of the informants. From the shape of the given word it can be assumed that the mistake was of spelling character, and therefore an antonym *white* was suggested by all informants.

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*Address:*

*Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice*

*Faculty of Arts*

*Dpt. of British and American Studies*

*Petzvalova 4,*

*040 11 Košice*

*Slovakia*

*lenka.janovcova@student.upjs.sk*

## **Appendix A**

### **Stimuli and their responses in ENS**

Adapted from Paradis, Willners, and Jones 426–429.

Stimuli in bold are followed by the responses for each stimulus ordered according to their decreasing frequency. The stimuli are ordered according to the number of responses from the lowest to the greatest. Omitted responses are not included.

**bad** good

**beautiful** ugly

**clean** dirty

**heavy** light

**hot** cold

**poor** rich

**weak** strong

**young** old

**black** white colour

**fast** slow fast

**narrow** wide broad

**slow** fast quick

**soft** hard rough

**good** bad evil

**hard** soft easy

**open** closed shut

**big** small little

**easy** hard difficult  
**white** black dark  
**light** dark heavy  
**dark** light pale  
**large** small little slim  
**rapid** slow sluggish fast  
**small** big large tall  
**ugly** beautiful pretty attractive  
**exciting** boring dull unexciting  
**thick** thin clever fine  
**strong** weak feeble mild slight  
**wide** narrow thin skinny slim  
**evil** good kind angelic pure  
**thin** fat thick overweight wide  
**sober** drunk frivolous inebriated intoxicated pissed  
**filthy** clean spotless immaculate pristine sparkling  
**huge** tiny small little minute petite  
**sick** well healthy fine ill yum  
**enormous** tiny miniscule small little minute slight  
**dull** bright exciting interesting shiny lively sharp  
**bright** dark dull dim gloomy stupid obscure  
**fat** thin slim lean skinny thick wrong  
**rare** common commonplace ubiquitous frequent plentiful well-known  
**feeble** strong robust hard impressive powerful steadfast  
**broad** narrow thin slim small lean slight  
**smooth** rough bumpy hard jagged hairy resistant  
**healthy** unhealthy sick ill lame diseased poorly sickly  
**tiny** huge large big enormous massive giant gigantic  
**lean** fat fatty flabby large plump support stocky wide  
**heroic** cowardly unheroic scared wimpish villainous disappointing reticent weak  
**glad** sad unhappy sorry upset disappointed regretful cross worried  
**bare** covered clothed dressed abundant cluttered full loaded patterned  
**slim** fat broad big chubby wide large obese plump round  
**tough** weak tender easy soft flimsy gentle sensitive weedy wimpy  
**gradual** immediate sudden rapid fast quickly instant abrupt incremental swift  
**tired** awake energetic alert lively fresh wakeful energized peppy perky rested  
**sudden** gradual slow prolonged expected incremental immediate delayed foreseen infrequent predictable  
**idle** busy active energetic hard-working working awake conscious diligent industrious proactive workaholic  
**gloomy** bright happy cheerful cheery light sunny clear illumined nice merry pleasant  
**tender** tough rough hard well-done cold robust chewy harsh mean nash strong uncaring  
**pale** dark bright tanned bold brown coloured red ruddy colourful healthy rosey swarthy vivid nervous calm confident bold brave relaxed alert assured excited fine innervous ready steady uncaring

**limited** unlimited extensive abundant comprehensive endless plenty available broad capacious common fat infinite widespread

**robust** weak fragile feeble flimsy shoddy thin brittle frail lethargic natural skinny slim vulnerable

**fine** thick coarse bad bold dull wide blunt clumsy cloudy mad ok rough wet unwell

**abundant** scarce rare sparse little lacking disciplined few limited needed none meagre plentiful sparing threadbare

**pure** impure tainted contaminated corrupt dirty tarnished evil adulterated bad foul mixture sinful unclean unpure

**immaculate** untidy dirty messy filthy scruffy dishevelled boring faulty ramshacky spotted stained tarnished terrible tawdry

**civil** uncivil rude anarchic barbaric belligerent childish corperate couth horrible impolite mean nasty military savage unfair

**extensive** limited small intensive narrow restricted brief minimal constrained inextensive insufficient scanty short superficial sparse unextensive vague

**grim** nice happy bright cheerful pleasant positive hopeful good pleasant carefree clear cosy fun jolly reassuring welcoming

**slender** fat broad plump wide bulky chubby thick well-built big chunky curvy lean massive obese podgy portly rotund

**delicate** robust strong tough sturdy hardy rough coarse unbreakable bold bulky crude course gross hard hard-wearing harsh heavy

**immediate** later delayed slow gradual distant deferred extended anon eventually far forever longterm pending postponed prolonged soon whenever

**modest** boastful immodest arrogant bigheaded brash conceited extravagant vain outgoing blase confident forward ignorant modest proud quiet shy

**great** small rubbish terrible bad average awful crap dreadful insignificant lowlyI mediocre microscopic obscure ok shit tiny poor unremarkable

**firm** soft weak floppy lenient wobbly flexible flimsy gentle groundless relenting lax limp loose saggy shaky undecided unsolid unstable

**confused** clear understood knowing sure lucid organised certain alert clued-up clear-headed coherent comprehending confident enlightened fine focused notconfused scatty together

**bold** timid shy cowardly faint fine italic thin nervous cautious faded feint frightened hairy meek quiet scared timorous weak yellow

**daring** cowardly timid nervous scared boring carefully cautious shy afraid careful fat faltering fearful reticient safe staid undaring wimpish

**mediocre** outstanding excellent exceptional brilliant amazing good great challenging charge clever extreme fair interesting mediocre rare special superb unusual wicked

**yielding** unyielding firm resisting dormant hard stubborn agressive dying fighting fixed lose losing obdurate rigid steadfast steamrolling strong stuck tough unproductive

**irritated** calm content relaxed amused fine placid serene soothed comfortable easy even goodhumoured happy laid-back normal ok patient pleased tranquil unperturbed unruffled

**alert** sleepy tired asleep dozy oblivious distracted dull drowsy groggy lazy slow apathetic awake complacent dim dozey lethargic spacey torpid unaware unconscious unresponsive

**disturbed** calm undisturbed sane peaceful settled stable untouched alone balanced content fine ignored normal quiet relaxed together tranquil unaffected uninterrupted untroubled welcome well-adjusted well-balanced

**slight** large great strong big heavy considerable enormous huge major substantial very alot extensive heavyset lots marked massive plenty pronounced robust rough severe thick unslight well-built wide

**delightful** horrible awful unpleasant boring disgusting repulsive tedious abhorrent annoying crap difficult distasteful dreadful dull grim hateful horrendous horrid irritating miserable nasty repellent revolting rubbish terrible uninteresting yuk

**calm** stressed stormy rough agitated excited hyper panicked angry annoyed anxious choppy crazy flustered frantic frenzied hectic hubbub hysterical irrate irrational jumpy lively loud nervous neurotic rage reckless tense trouble

## Appendix B

### Stimuli and their responses in ENNS

The data in Appendix B are ordered in the same way as the data in Appendix A. In addition, for all antonyms there are the exact numbers of participants who suggested them. Omitted answers with corresponding numbers of participants are not included.

<b>bad</b>	good	50						
<b>big</b>	small	50						
<b>hot</b>	cold	50						
<b>strong</b>	weak	50						
<b>white</b>	black	50						
<b>young</b>	old	50						
<b>black</b>	white	49	which	1				
<b>clean</b>	dirty	49	messy	1				
<b>fast</b>	slow	48	slowly	2				
<b>good</b>	bad	48	evil	2				
<b>dark</b>	light	47	bright	3				
<b>slow</b>	fast	45	quick	5				
<b>open</b>	close	32	closed	18				
<b>large</b>	small	47	little	2	tiny	1		
<b>weak</b>	strong	47	heavy	2	high	1		
<b>exciting</b>	boring	44	bored	1	tiring	1		
<b>slim</b>	fat	43	thick	4	wide	1		
<b>evil</b>	good	36	angel	11	God	2		
<b>thin</b>	thick	27	fat	22	wide	1		
<b>beautiful</b>	ugly	46	awful	2	hideous	1	disgusting	1
<b>poor</b>	rich	45	wealthy	3	expensive	1	healthy	1
<b>narrow</b>	wide	41	broad	6	straight	2	spread	1
<b>small</b>	big	41	large	7	tall	1	huge	1
<b>hard</b>	easy	40	soft	8	simple	1	light	1
<b>heavy</b>	light	37	easy	9	soft	3	weak	1
<b>light</b>	dark	34	heavy	14	fat	1	tough	1
<b>healthy</b>	sick	31	ill	14	unhealthy	4	junk	1

<b>ugly</b>	nice 18	beautiful 18	pretty 13	handsome 1
<b>sick</b>	healthy 45	wealthy 2	health 1	fit 1
<b>broad</b>	narrow 39	small 2	lone 1	thick 1
<b>huge</b>	small 29	little 11	tiny 8	pitty 1
<b>easy</b>	difficult 25	hard 17	heavy 6	hardly 1
<b>fat</b>	thin 23	slim 19	skinny 5	light 2
<b>feeble</b>	strong 3	thick 3	free 2	complicated 1
<b>sober</b>	drunk 38	high 1	dirty 1	abstinent 1
<b>rapid</b>	slow 30	gradual 7	small 2	slowed 1
<b>immaculate</b>	filthy 2	slouchy 1	faulty 1	flawed 1
<b>wide</b>	narrow 42	thin 3	tight 1	broad 1
	slim 1			spread 1
				closed 1
<b>bright</b>	dark 32	dull 4	gloomy 4	indefinite 1
	stupid 1			shady 1
<b>thick</b>	thin 32	broad 2	feeble 1	easy 1
	tiny 1			pure 1
<b>filthy</b>	clean 25	tidy 2	good 2	empty 2
	dry 1			self-behaving 1
<b>gradual</b>	sudden 19	rapid 7	immediate 6	continuous 3
	basic 1			fast 2
<b>heroic</b>	coward 18	cowardly 4	frightened 4	tragic 3
	bold 1			ordinary 2
<b>rare</b>	common 18	often 10	usual 9	ordinary 6
	obvious 1			general 1
<b>idle</b>	active 17	hard working 2	real 1	working 1
	industrious 1			difficult 1
<b>smooth</b>	rough 28	rash 3	load 1	stupid 1
				sharp 1
				hard 1

<b>sudden</b>	crunchy 1	steep 1	gradual 24	expected 6	late 5	slow 4	continuous 1	rapid 1
	graduate 1	stable 1	bright 21	nice 4	light 4	happy 3	shiny 3	sunny 2
<b>gloomy</b>	optimistic 1	casual 1	hard 20	rough 13	heavy 7	rude 2	harsh 2	tough 1
<b>soft</b>	wet 1	taft 1	fat 7	big 3	compliment 1	robust 1	thick 1	gentle 1
<b>slender</b>	sympathetic 1	free 1	dressed 6	covered 5	clothed 2	full 2	difficult 2	extended 1
<b>bare</b>	hairy 1	shoed 1	little 19	small 11	tiny 7	minimal 3	normal 1	very small 1
<b>enormous</b>	very little 1	rare 1	easy 18	soft 8	smooth 5	weak 3	fragile 1	easy-going 1
<b>tough</b>	thin 1	tender 1	huge 16	big 9	fat 7	large 7	enormous 3	wide 1
<b>tiny</b>	overweight 1	fatty 1	unlimited 29	infinite 4	free 3	neverending 3	infinite 1	common 1
<b>limited</b>	broad 1	broadminded 1	independent 1	independent 1	live 2	smily 1	frown 1	cheerful 1
<b>grim</b>	happy 3	alive 2	calm 1	smiling 1	smile 1	pleasant 1		
<b>calm</b>	nervous 35	stressed 2	irritated 2	irritated 2	crazy 2	angry 2	upset 1	
<b>fine</b>	noisy 1	yielding 1	loud 1	loud 1	disturbed 1	confused 1		
	bad 26	nervous 2	coarse 2	coarse 2	rough 2	irritated 1	ill 1	
	wrong 1	robust 1	cheap 1	cheap 1	uncomfortable 1	ordinary 1		
<b>robust</b>	tiny 15	small 7	little 6	little 6	slim 4	thin 3	weak 2	
	gentle 1	fragile 1	abundant 1	abundant 1	feeble 1	petite 1		

<b>tender</b>	rough 13	tough 9	hard 5	rude 4	harsh 2	sour 1
	bad 1	calm 1	brutal 1	unpleasant 1	cheeky 1	
<b>delicate</b>	disgusting 12	awful 7	rough 6	tough 3	strong 2	supple 1
	bad 1	dull 1	undelicious 1	untasty 1	average 1	
<b>immediate</b>	gradual 12	late 8	later 4	slow 2	past 2	extra 1
	unmediate 1	postponed 1	lasting 1	lately 1	advanced 1	
<b>slight</b>	big 8	huge 7	hard 2	thick 2	tough 1	dramatic 1
	much 1	vast 1	enormous 1	spread 1	great 1	
<b>alert</b>	calm 6	tired 5	sleepy 3	passive 2	safety 2	asleep 1
	clueless 1	safety 1	disalert 1	peace 1	careless 1	
<b>yielding</b>	quiet 4	rude 3	calm 3	controlling 2	manipulating 1	silent 1
	unyielding 1	talking 1	quite 1	barren 1	brave 1	
<b>pale</b>	dark 19	red 4	colourful 4	tan 3	healthy 2	old 1
	black 1	pink 1	tanned 1	flexible 1	vivid 1	brave 1
<b>extensive</b>	small 9	intensive 6	limited 3	short 3	narrow 2	little 1
	poor 1	narrowing 1	lacking 1	rare 1	shrinking 1	unextensive 1
<b>lean</b>	fat 9	straight 2	subtle 1	rough 1	rich 1	energetic 1
	independent 1	energetic 1	skinny 1	clever 1	industrious 1	flat 1
<b>daring</b>	coward 5	shy 4	scared 2	good 2	modest 1	fearful 1
	reserved 1	realising 1	coward 1	unpleased 1	afraid 1	worried 1
<b>glad</b>	sad 23	unhappy 12	nervous 3	unpleasant 2	sorrow 2	disappointed 1
	unsatisfied 1	frustrated 1	unwilling 1	hate 1	upset 1	not glad 1
<b>nervous</b>	calm 33	glad 2	fine 2	easy-going 2	easy 2	cheerful 1
	stable 1	self-confident 1	happy 1	peaceful 1	confident 1	patient 1
	ok 1					
<b>pure</b>	dirty 27	filthy 5	mixed 4	impure 2	complicated 1	unpure 1
	unclean 1	evil 1	irritated 1	thick 1	rich 1	gloomy 1



<b>confused</b>	untired 1	awake 1	excited 1	well 1	powerful 1	
	sure 9	clear 8	calm 4	decided 3	normal 2	understanding 1
	clear-minded 1	decisive 1	determined 1	certain 1	logical 1	informed 1
	clearly 1	firm 1	thoughtful 1	self-confident 1	unconfused 1	stable 1
	small 1					
<b>civil</b>	private 13	state 6	criminal 4	rude 2	army 1	casual 1
	political 1	anarchic 1	governmental 1	brutal 1	public 1	aristocratic 1
	formal 1	incivil 1	uncourageous 1	dramatic 1	unheroic 1	common 1
	terrified 1	afraid 1	lazy 1	normal 1		
<b>delightful</b>	unpleasant 5	unsatisfied 4	irritated 4	horrible 3	disgusting 3	delightless 2
	disappointed 2	angry 1	embarrassing 1	gloomy 1	revolting 1	sad 1
	disturbing 1	tired 1	bored 1	depressed 1	stressful 1	unhappy 1
	upset 1	ugly 1	boring 1	bad 1		
<b>modest</b>	selfish 5	mean 4	generous 4	egocentric 2	greedy 1	excessive 1
	needy 1	boastful 1	rich 1	pure 1	gorgeous 1	brave 1
	dishonest 1	pushy 1	nervous 1	alcoholic 1	bold 1	big-headed 1
	liberal 1	proud 1	immodest 1	spoilt 1	filthy 1	excentric 1

# **Book Reviews**



**Hildegard Hoeller**

*From Gift to Commodity. Capitalism and Sacrifice  
in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction*

Durham, New Hampshire: University of New Hampshire Press, 2012

*From Gift to Commodity* is an interdisciplinary study of the tension between gift and market exchange in nineteenth-century American culture. It raises some of the most fundamental questions about human existence: What are we given – life, talent, love, friendship, objects or faith? Who gives these gifts and why? What, if any, are the obligations that come with these gifts? In what way can gifts be blessings, curses, or mixed blessings? Can we tell stories without gifts? How can we offer and accept sacrifices in an increasingly capitalist culture? Hoeller demonstrates that nineteenth-century American writers were engaged in brilliant and complex explorations of the role of the gift in a culture based on self-interest, market transactions and economic reason. With sacrifice at the centre of her discussion, Hoeller taps into the discourse of modes of exchange, revealing central tensions of American fiction and culture.

Divided into three parts – “Sacrifices of a Nation”, “Panic Fictions”, “Fading Gifts and Rising Profits” – Hoeller discusses the works of Hannah Foster, Lydia Maria Child, Susan Warner, William Wells Brown, Herman Melville, William Dean Howells and Frank Norris. Two chapters are of particular interest: “Self-Sacrifice or Preservation: Lydia Maria Child’s Reflections on the Gift in *Hobomok* and *The American Frugal Housewife*” (chapter three), and “Panic, Gifts and Faith in Susan Warner’s *Wide, Wide World*” (chapter four). In her discussion of *Hobomok*, Hoeller points to Child’s conviction that women and Indians respectively are to some extent excluded from an economic system that is governed by self-interest and exploitation of resources; they have tended to sacrifice themselves to the interests of white men. *Hobomok* asks us to recognize the Indians’ and many women’s noble sacrifices – sacrifices that have made it possible for the white man to settle and prosper in the new world. *Hobomok*’s sacrifice, however, is all too easily forgotten. Hoeller concludes that the novel unfolds “outside of conscious reason and within the logic or spirit of the gift” (55); sacrifice is an important but much underestimated part of this logic.

In her later work *The Frugal Housewife*, Child thought more clearly about the deathly dangers of the gift. Hoeller argues that in this novel, Child’s writing disintegrates into open chaos: she formally refuses any vision beyond economic accumulation. The reader is invited to read the text only with his own self-interest and survival at heart. The gift cannot defend itself against the exploitation that dominates American’s growing capitalist order.

The discussion of Susan Warner’s *Wide, Wide World* in chapter four focuses on how the novel explores exchanges and communities that might rescue the characters, especially the female ones, not only from poverty but also from what Hoeller describes as “the meaningless volatility of the market” (84). Unlike other critics, Hoeller does not focus on the endorsement of female submission but explores the role of the gift in America’s economic and spiritual life, concluding that “[t]he meaning of the novel and its central struggle lie in its focus on the motion of the gift” (85). Different gift rituals are examined as alternative

economic spaces to market capitalism. Hoeller demonstrates that far from being a novel about submission, *The Wide, Wide World* is about flux and motion, between inside and outside, life and death, private and public. There are two kinds of gift: secular and sacred. While the secular gifts are devoid of transformative power, the sacred ones are transformative and powerful but also frightening.

*From Gift to Commodity* is a scholarly work of the highest order. As the first book to examine in detail the gift in nineteenth-century American fiction, it fills an important gap in American literary scholarship. Meticulously annotated and with a comprehensive bibliography and index, *From Gift to Commodity* is an invaluable aid to students and researchers of American literature and culture on both sides of the Atlantic and an important addition to the “Becoming Modern: New Nineteenth-Century Studies” series published by the University of New Hampshire Press.

Jane Mattisson Ekstam  
Kristianstad University, Sweden

### **Maurice Ratcliffe**

*Leonard Cohen: The Music and the Mystique*

London: Omnibus, 2012

“Hi Jiri, Maurice is a devoted fan of LC. Like a lot of us!” was the reply I obtained from the publisher after inquiring about the author’s identity. Any time a text dealing with Leonard Cohen is published, the information concerning the author initiates a considerable discussion – in this case, even a heated debate, triggered by the fact that this work, intended to be a “complete guide” to Cohen’s music, is merely a pathetic attempt to expand on the lyrics’ complexity.

Not merely academics, but any enthusiastic fans of Cohen’s work will notice the book’s shortcomings. The songs are taken too straightforwardly and are interpreted in relation to Cohen the man, rather than Cohen the singer. On the other hand, this well-compiled compendium – enriched, possibly, by personal interviews and research into the singer’s literary output – brings into focus material which might serve as a starting point for critical thinking.

The question regarding the author was meant to prove that such information is irrelevant as this work is the product of the sum of “intelligence” that has been *accumulated* about Cohen the man so far and condensed into this easy-to-use, ninety-six-page-long guide.

As with any guide of this type, we soon realize that this slim volume was not written for knowledgeable followers of Cohen’s work. It provides an album-by-album and song-by-song analysis of the whole of Cohen’s musical output without trying to properly identify

the common motifs and influences that permeate Cohen's oeuvre. What is more, it neglects the songs' spiritual dimension. For this reason, Cohen is mainly portrayed as a seducer exploiting the possibilities of carnal love. One might object that every now and then the author mentions Cohen's use of religious symbols and vocabulary; however, he does not engage in deeper meditations on their meaning. Moreover, many of these facts have simply been taken from previously written books by Nadel and Devlin.

Despite all this, Ratcliffe deserves some praise on account of his commentaries, which might broaden the reader's perspective. Overly personal opinions, for instance in the part concerning the song "Queen Victoria", are not to be taken at face value. By his subjective and provocative comments, he in fact enrages Cohen devotees to such an extent that an enhanced and new reading might arise:

Cohen's Victoria is his alter ego, mirroring and sharing his own solitary sadness, not the portrait of a nineteenth-century monarch. As a song, however, the piece does not really work. The tune is mournful and barely melodic, and the lyrics seem mannered and over-literary compared to most of Cohen's songs. (69)

Those acquainted with Cohen's output will recognize a lot of the tricks played by the author – for instance, the commentary to the song "Always": "Growling this introduction over background chatter, and fortified by a drink of his own invention known as Red Needle, Cohen launches..." (52). Many will recognize that Red Needle comes from the short story "My Life in Art", but as an unquoted reference it makes the writing slightly bewildering. However, the comments that do make one smile are not intended to be amusing. For example, when the author "analyzes" the song "The Smokey Life," after some interesting pieces of information he falls into the mire by concluding: "The thrust of the song is that, when this happens (as it does, 'everywhere'), one must not panic. One must continue; one must survive" (39). Thus he comments on the dissolution of the ground, the fading scenery and walking on air as if not realizing that "The Smokey Life" might express the kind of love that Cohen often describes in other songs, such as in "True Love Leaves No Traces:"

As the mist leaves no scar / On the dark green hill / So my body leaves no scar / On you and never will.

These lines say almost clearly that this love is in no way carnal – although, in view of Cohen's work, carnality constitutes an indelible part of it. Here, the mention of panic, continuation and survival simply ceases to exist as it is the abandonment of those feelings which Cohen is searching for.

Though ignoring the spiritual aspects, the author points out Cohen's bitter sense of irony, and, more beneficially, partly touches upon Cohen's dualism with regard to the love triangle. For instance, when analyzing "Famous Blue Raincoat," he draws our attention to two aspects of Cohen, one the "guardian" and the other the "hermit". Ratcliffe interprets this as a "contemporary self" self and a "past self", but again omits the song's religious connotations. The Protector, symbolized by an older and more experienced man, is put into contrast with the hermit/Jesus fasting in the desert. The teamwork of those two characters might be understood as a relationship between G-d and his Son functioning as a mediator.

A similar kinship is hinted at in songs such as “The Captain,” “The Hunter’s Lullaby,” “Winter Lady,” “Master’s Song,” “Going Home” and possibly “Queen Victoria.” Ratcliffe, instead of trying to find parallels, assigns the protector/teacher’s role to Cohen’s Zen Buddhist master Roshi. Again, in the commentary to the song “You Know Who I Am,” he forgets that Cohen seems to appeal to G-d as his lover, and says that “the song is clearly addressed to a woman” (23). Of course it is addressed to a woman, but at the same time it is a dialogue between G-d and Cohen. There is a widespread apotheosis in Cohen’s work to which no-one has paid much attention so far. And is this not a clear reference to Exodus 3:14, where it is said that G-d’s name is, eternally, “I AM WHO I AM”? This account might be skating on thin ice, but it makes Cohen’s analysis far more profound.

But there are also moments when I find the book clarifying. The author understands Cohen’s notion of regularity, of coming and going. He mentions it in the song “Dance Me to the End of Love,” but portrays Cohen’s love again only as carnal. Forgetting that the singer reaches the Divine and also “empties” himself through the woman, Ratcliffe does not realize that Cohen desecrates once-sacred love in order to restore its original pristine qualities. When he begs his “crazy” to quit him in the song “Crazy to Love You,” it is exactly for this reason. The weak man ends up praying for the woman’s refusal in order to suffer and be close to the Lord. The critic comments on this by saying that “this song is simply unclear and imperfectly realized” (62). Moreover, he does not pay attention to the fact that the abandonment is the consequence of desecration. Cohen’s lyrics taken from “So Long Marianne” illustrate this better: Cohen wants to leave the woman in the song in order to repent for his neglect of the spiritual: “I forget to pray for the angels/ and then the angels forget to pray for us.” It is a pity Ratcliffe ignores those details. They would contribute much more to his interpretation.

But now it is time to praise the book a little. The critic is very close to saying that Cohen’s song is a prayer directed to the Lord, or to the woman. “Our Lady of Solitude” supports this claim (38). It is a plea for the return, which is so significant for Cohen. The analysis of “Show Me the Place” (61) also supports this supposition. The paragraph dealing with “Love Itself” (54) again states that an interaction between “the Nameless and the Name” is going on. It is not a matter of a religious affiliation, but rather the desire for the return, which is a part of religious strivings.

In the part concerning Cohen’s live albums, the author compares individual versions and their lyrics. The readers are surprised to read about several renderings of “Hallelujah” or “Bird on the Wire” with verses that are, especially in the first case, dramatically different. He is very acute when observing the mistakes in Cohen’s sleeve notes, such as the information accompanying the song “The Lost Canadian” (37), or the portrayal of “Queen Victoria” (69). In this respect the book succeeds and deserves to be regarded as valuable.

We can notice that the writers dealing with Leonard Cohen are very often cautious about the interpretation and vary widely in their judgements. This is on account of Cohen’s syncretism, which creates vast possibilities for different readings. We are always led to search for the facts to gain at least some insight into his work; however, as far as artistic creation is concerned, one’s insight is shaped by one’s experience. Guided tours might open up the horizons, but it is an individual’s task to trace the path.

Despite all of my criticisms, I would award this book five stars out of five because it is well meant and has a place in the world. Moreover, I have a feeling that it was written by a woman.

Jiří Měšic  
undergraduate student  
University of Ostrava

The review is the outcome of the Student Grant Competition: SGS2/FF/2012 – Song in Cultural Contexts / Píseň v kulturních kontextech.

### **Jenni Adams**

***Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real*  
New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2011**

The incorporation of the supernatural into the work of contemporary writers describing real historical events has become an increasingly common practice and logically attracts the attention of scholars. The most recent examination of this phenomenon (considered by many to be the first major study of it) is the monograph *Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature: Troping the Traumatic Real* (2011) written by Jenni Adams, a lecturer in contemporary literature at the University of Sheffield, UK. Adams primarily concentrates her research on the representation of the Holocaust in fiction and the problems of ethics and aesthetics accompanying this literary representation. The study has emerged from her doctoral project analyzing representative novels written by various international writers who have applied magical elements to Shoah narratives. It consists of five chapters, each divided into smaller sections relating to particular aspects of magic realism represented in the texts.

The introduction to the book attempts to offer the most suitable definition of the complex term “magic realism” by presenting the developmental trajectory of the concept from its initial formulation in 1925, oriented exclusively towards visual arts, and by characterizing the conflicting views of critics worldwide. Adams also stresses the presence of magic realism in non-Holocaust discourses, turning to texts such as Salman Rushdie’s *Midnight’s Children*, Patrick Süskind’s novel *Perfume*, Gabriel García Márquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude* or Franz Kafka’s “Metamorphosis”. The reader is rightly reminded that magic realist texts do not restrict themselves to particular nations or events, and the source of inspiration does not necessarily have to be linked to a specific indigenous world but has the potential to reach beyond cultural, religious and ethnic boundaries. Adams also clarifies the difference between magic realism and other related genres such as science fiction or fantasy. In numerous passages she points out the significant properties of magic realism – such as its natural acceptance of the improbable, its escapist tendencies and its closeness

to the grotesque. Although the introduction approaches the subject universally, the book itself purposefully focuses on the representation of the Holocaust, mainly (but not exclusively) in contemporary literature. Adams for the most part discusses the following novels: *Everything Is Illuminated* by Jonathan Safran Foer, *See Under: Love* by David Grossman, *The White Hotel* by D. M. Thomas, *The Last of the Just* by Andre Schwarz-Bart and *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak. Adams also offers an insightful view of Joseph Skibell's *Blessing on the Moon*, which she incorporates into the very conclusion of the study but which would undoubtedly have deserved an entire chapter. The study relies substantially on significant works focusing on the problems of Holocaust representation, namely the research of Hirsch, Caruth, LaCapra, Zamora, Wiesel, Vickroy and Spindler.

Adams chooses texts challenging conventional Western-empirical rationalism by offering a new perspective on the Shoah, which has been predominantly represented through the lenses of historical realism. Selected works often consist of a multi-layered story where the probable stands side by side by the inexplicable and wonders are presented as a part of reality in a matter-of-fact way, often without any comment or notion of surprise. Adams connects with Hegerfeldt and McHale, who claim that the Holocaust's extremity – reaching far beyond human understanding – becomes an open field for the inversion of the magic and the real. The unreal mode and the deviation from the traditional Western discourse enable the writer, who does not have immediate experience of the historical event in question, to articulate reality in the new post-testimonial era, in which it is vital to look for *other* means to expand our historical understanding. Adams' in-depth study is unequivocally inspiring in its focus on new questions and perspectives. The diversity of the texts being explored gives the subject an international character and is well suited for students of literature and academics alike.

Michaela Staňová  
University of Ostrava

This review is the outcome of the Student Grant Competition, project GGS4/FF/2012, University of Ostrava, "Intergenerational and Transgenerational Transmission of Trauma in Contemporary Jewish American Fiction".

**Alena Smiešková**

***Mýtus. Realita. Rozprávanie. Prípád Philip Roth***

**Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre, 2011**

Monografie Aleny Smieškové se zabývá dílem významného amerického židovského spisovatele Philipa Rotha. Tohoto laureáta Nobelovy ceny není třeba příliš představovat, jako jeden z mála zahraničních autorů aktivně podporoval český samizdat a Československo několikrát navštívil. Své zkušenosti pak popsal v novele *Pražské orgie* (1985). Většina

jeho románové tvorby je navíc průběžně překládána a těší se značnému čtenářskému i kritickému zájmu. Přestože se jedná o díla z formálního hlediska značně různorodá, tematicky se neustále vrací k otázkám hledání americké (židovské) identity, vztahu reality a fikce a postavení spisovatele v americké kultuře. Vzhledem ke skutečnosti, že Roth začal publikovat již v padesátých letech minulého století a jeho prozatím poslední román *Nemesis* vyšel v roce 2010, je možné jeho dílo zkoumat i jako výpověď o vývoji poválečné americké společnosti a kultury, což je ostatně i jedním z cílů předkládané monografie. Smiešková se zaměřuje převážně na Rothův posun od modernismu k postmodernismu, dále analyzuje jeho pojetí mýtu, vyprávění a reality, a to zejména (přestože ne výhradně) na povídce „Fanatik Eli“ (1957) a románech *Sbohem, město C.* (1959), *Elév* (1979), *Druhý život* (1986), *Operace Shylock* (1993), *Sabbathovo divadlo* (1995) a *Americká idyla* (1997).

První kapitolu věnuje změnám v americkém kánonu po druhé světové válce, zejména vzestupu vlivu etnických literatur, které se od šedesátých let stále více dostávají do popředí čtenářského i kritického zájmu. Nejvíce pozornosti je však logicky věnováno americké židovské literatuře. Autorka zde Rothovo dílo konfrontuje s podobně významnými spisovateli, zejména Isaacem Bashevisem Singerem, Saulem Bellowem a Bernardem Malamudem. U tohoto překonaného, byť tradičního srovnání však bohužel zůstává. Vzhledem ke skutečnosti, že o rozdílném přístupu těchto autorů k umění i americké židovské identitě toho již bylo hodně napsáno, dochází autorka k očekávaným závěrům, v nichž poukazuje na jejich tematickou i stylistickou odlišnost i na nejednoznačnost samotného pojmu americká židovská literatura.

Co však ve studii zcela chybí je vymezení modernistické estetiky, a to i přesto, že posun Rothovy tvorby od modernismu k postmodernismu je jedním z hlavních cílů této monografie. Vymezení tohoto konceptu se autorka bohužel vyhýbá i ve spojení s americkou židovskou literaturou, přestože etnický modernismus je stále v popředí kritického zájmu. Vzhledem k tomuto nedostatku pak není zcela jasné, z jakých východisek celá práce vychází.

Druhá teoretická kapitola představuje základní pojmy postmoderní kritiky, jež osvětluje změny poválečné estetiky a senzibility. Opírá se o díla Frederica Jamesona, Jeana Françoise Lyotarda, Jeana Baudrillarda, Winfrieda Flucka a Waltera Benjamin. Přehledně a srozumitelně čtenářům představuje základní znaky postmodernismu, mezi něž zahrnuje ztrátu hloubky, přehodnocení vztahu k dějinám a novou senzibilitu. Na tuto část pak navazuje analýza vlivů postmoderního myšlení na současnou literární teorii. Smiešková názorně vysvětluje mechanismus tzv. „rekurzivních struktur“, které mohou výrazně zasahovat do ontologického pojetí literárního díla.

Přestože jsou obě kapitoly psány přehledně a prezentují základy postmoderního vnímání, jsou příliš odloučené od rozborů konkrétních textů. Tato poměrně rozsáhlá teoretická část tak není koherentně propojena s částí analytickou. K té se autorka obrací až v následující kapitole, v níž se však nezabývá postmodernismem, ale zkoumá Rothovu koncepci americké i židovské identity v souvislosti s mýtem. Roth podle autorky „dekanonizuje stereotypnou postavu Žida, ale demýtizuje percepcii Žida v rámci vlastnej komunity“ (s. 60). Na druhou stranu by však bylo možno říci, že Roth ve svých románech prezentuje alternativní pojetí americké židovské identity a klade hlavní důraz na nedostatečnost a omezenou platnost veškerých definic. Tím, že odmítá jednostranné a fixní pojetí identity,

však nemusí nutně narušovat percepci Židů v rámci jejich komunit, jež jsou různorodé jako židovství samo.

Poslední kapitola se zabývá analýzou rekurzivních struktur a vlivu postmodernismu na Rothovo dílo. Autorka přesvědčivě dokazuje subverzivní charakter jeho próz, nepřehlídí však ani jeho vypravěčské nadání, které ho oprávněně řadí mezi přední představitele současné americké literární scény. Na jedné straně tvrdí, že Roth vyčerpал možnosti formálních experimentů, zároveň však na podrobných analýzách dokládá, že právě tyto romány patří k autorovým vrcholným dílům, která vzhledem k aktuálnosti témat a imaginativní hloubce konkurují i vizuálním médiím.

*Mýtus. Realita. Rozprávania. Prípád Philip Roth* si neklade nárok na konečnou nebo úplnou interpretaci Rothovy tvorby, nabízí ale další způsob, jak přistupovat k jeho formálně propracovaným románům. Přínos této monografie spočívá především v propojení Rothova díla se současnými kritickými směry a zároveň v jeho zařazení do literárně-kritického, společenského, biografického i filozofického kontextu. Práce je psána přístupným stylem; případnou nevýhodou pro odbornou veřejnost může být prolínání slovenského textu s citacemi v českém a anglickém jazyce, což výrazně snižuje čtivost a koherenci práce. Výše uvedené nedostatky jsou však kompenzovány strážlivým a citlivým přístupem nejen k postmodernistické teorii, ale i k Rothovým románům.

Michaela Weiss  
Slezská univerzita, Opava

### **Martin Luther King, Jr.**

***Odkaz naděje: vybrané články a projevy***

**Praha: SLON, 2012**

*Odkaz naděje: vybrané články a projevy* Martina Luthera Kinga je dlouho očekávanou publikací. Je vůbec prvním knižním výběrem z díla této osobnosti v češtině, protože doposud vyšly v překladu jen některé stěžejní texty na stranách literárních časopisů (např. slavná řeč „Mám sen“ (I Have a Dream) v překladu Jana Patočky v *Literárních novinách* 16/2009 nebo Kingův projev „Je čas prolomit ticho“ (A Time to Break Silence) v překladu Robina Ujfalusiho v kulturním týdeníku časopisu *A2* 15/2008). Na druhou stranu však *Odkaz naděje* není zcela ojedinělým počinem. V roce 2010 se na českém trhu objevila nenápadná kniha *Martin Luther King proti nespravedlnosti* (M. Hrubec a kol., Praha: Filosofia, 2010, recenzována např. v *Listech* 6/2010), která vzešla z konference uspořádané u příležitosti čtyřicátého výročí Kingova zavraždění v roce 1968. Tento mezioborový sborník se vůbec jako první pokoušel přiblížit osobnost Martina Luthera Kinga nejen jako významného černošského kazatele a bojovníka za práva Afroameričanů, ale také jako člověka zasazujícího

se o sociální spravedlnost. A v tomto duchu na něj navazuje i *Odkaz naděje*, za jehož zrodem stojí dva autoři příspěvků ve sborníku, Erazim Kohák a Robin Ujfalúši.

*Odkaz naděje* obsahuje překlady dvaceti formou i délkou různorodých textů – vybraných článků, projevů, přednášek, kázání i interview, které Martin Luther King za svůj život napsal, pronesl či poskytnul médiím. Výběr textů, který zahrnuje Kingovo známé i méně známé dílo z 50. a 60. let 20. století, vychází z reprezentativního výboru Kingova díla *A Testament of Hope, The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* (ed. James M. Washington, New York: HarperCollins, 1991) a svým záběrem se snaží postihnout jak šíři tak i hloubku Kingova odkazu. S výjimkou prvního textu, eseje s názvem „Odkaz naděje“ (*A Testament of Hope*), která byla vydána až po Kingově smrti, jsou všechny texty řazeny chronologicky – jako první je uveden článek z roku 1956 „Náš zápas“ (*Our Struggle*) popisující význam černošské kampaně v Montgomery, poslední místo zaujímá Kingovo kázání „Vidím zaslíbenou zemi“ (*I See the Promised Land*), které pronesl 3. dubna 1968, den před svou smrtí. Překladům předchází předmluva profesora Erazima Koháka „Občané království božího“, která se snaží osvětlit myšlenky člověka vedeného na seznamu americké FBI jako nebezpečného agitátora.

Kdo byl vlastně Martin Luther King? Baptistický kazatel, odpůrce rasismu, jeden z hlavních představitelů hnutí za občanská práva amerických černochů. Stál v čele bojkotu autobusové dopravy v Montgomery, byl tváří mnoha protestních akcí a pochodů. V roce 1964 byl oceněn Nobelovou cenou za mír za uplatňování politiky nenásilného odporu v boji za rasovou rovnoprávnost. V roce 1968 se stal obětí atentátu. Dnes je považován za jednu z nejvýznamnějších postav 20. století, za symbol lidské důstojnosti a sociální spravedlnosti. Ve Spojených státech amerických se stal národním hrdinou – den výročí jeho narození je oslavován jako státní svátek a ve Washingtonu nedaleko Lincolnova památníku, odkud pronesl v roce 1963 svou slavnou řeč „Mám sen“, mu byl v roce 2011 postaven národní památník. Znamená to, že se odkaz Martina Luthera Kinga naplnil? Že se jeho sen o zemi, ve které si všichni budou rovni, stal realitou?

V předmluvě k *Odkazu naděje* vykresluje profesor Kohák M.L.Kinga jako proroka, občana království božího, kterého dnešní ateisticky založený člověk není schopen pochopit, a proto z něj musí udělat „ikonu kultu osobnosti“ (s. 21). Jedině tak totiž mohou jeho slova přestat „ohrožovat naše pohodlné samozřejmosti“ (s. 12), které Kingovy postoje obnažují a nahlodávají. Podle Koháka byl Martin Luther King nebezpečný, protože „usiloval o změnu nejradikálnější. [...] Usiloval o změnu hluboce zakořeněných lidských postojů“ (s. 12–13). Překlady vybraných textů v *Odkazu naděje*, které mapují vývoj Kingovy osobnosti a dokumentují jeho protestní aktivity, tuto skutečnost dokládají. Odhalují myšlenky člověka, který věřil v lásku, spravedlnost a bratrství tak, jak je hlásal Ježíš, a který se nebál kritizovat církevní funkcionáře, umírněné bělochy ani příliš radikální černochy. Jeho slova – ať už obsažena v slavnostním proslovu „Americký sen“ (*The American Dream*), proneseném na Lincolnově univerzitě v Pensylvánii v roce 1961, v otevřeném „Dopise z birminghamského vězení“ (*Letter from Birmingham City Jail*) z roku 1963, určeném bílým liberálním duchovním, nebo v proslovu „Je čas prolomit ticho“ z roku 1967, ve kterém ostře kritizuje válku ve Vietnamu – vyjadřují hluboké přesvědčení, že násilí nikdy nepovede ke svobodě a že nutné změny nemohou jednoduše přinést jen nové zákony, protože právo člověka nepřiměje k lásce – lásku k bližnímu mohou člověka naučit jen náboženství a vzdělání.

Svým reprezentativním výběrem textů dává *Odkaz naděje* prostor vyniknout myšlenkové bohatosti Martina Luthera Kinga, který k nám promlouvá jako teolog, kazatel, filozof, aktivista, vůdce hnutí i otec rodiny nádhernou prózou plnou metafor, přirovnání a odkazů na moudrost jiných (vše do značné míry zachováno i v češtině díky výborným překladům Víta Bezdíčka, Petra Černovského a Robina Ujfalúsiho). Protože však výbor předkládá nezkrácené verze textů, čtenář je zaskočen skutečností, že některé textové pasáže se zde několikrát opakují. Tato, místy až rušivá, opakovanost má však své opodstatnění, jak vysvětluje redaktorka *Odkazu*: „King měl svá ústřední témata, argumenty a dokonce celé řečové pasáže, které různě používal a akcentoval před různým publikem“ (s. 301), což se kniha snaží zachytit.

Je třeba říci, že *Odkaz naděje* není kritickým vydáním, které by tvorbu Martina Luthera Kinga jakkoli analyzovalo, v tomto směru spíše doplňuje knihu *Martin Luther King proti nespravedlnosti*. Přínos výboru spočívá především v jeho výběru textů, které se snaží, jak již bylo zmíněno dříve, postihnout šíři i hloubku Kingova odkazu a podtrhnout jeho smysl pro sociální spravedlnost a lidskou důstojnost (není bez zajímavosti, že kniha vychází v sociologickém nakladatelství v ediční řadě moderní sociologické teorie). Nesporným kladem výboru je skutečnost, že překlady přinášejí českému čtenáři první ucelený obraz Kingovy osobnosti a jsou doplněny jmenným a věcným rejstříkem, které poskytují podrobnější informace nejen o amerických a dobových reáliích, ale i o lidech, které King ve svém díle zmiňuje či cituje, čímž umožňují čtenáři lepší orientaci v problematice. Výbor je tak vhodný nejen pro vědeckou komunitu, ale i pro širší veřejnost. Přestože uplynulo přesně půl století od doby, kdy ve Washingtonu Martin Luther King pronášel svou slavnou řeč „Mám sen“, český čtenář neměl doposud mnoho příležitostí se s touto postavou blíže seznámit. *Odkaz naděje* k tomu vybízí. Ba co víc, i když se jedná o překlad výboru z díla, není tato více než třisetstránková kniha jen pouhým dokumentem o minulosti, který, pro větší působivost, doplňují dobové fotografie (v tomto případě ze soukromé sbírky Jerryho Harrise). Je i zcela aktuálním odkazem pro naši generaci. Vytyčuje směr, kterým se můžeme vydat. Jak píše Kohák v předmluvě k *Odkazu*: „[M]ůžeme také riskovat a nechat se oslovit velikostí lidí, kteří žijí podle jiného zákona. Můžeme se nechat oslovit jejich slovy, přijmout výzvu jejich činů. Není to pohodlné ani snadné, ale může nám to změnit život“ (s. 21). Věřím, že v dnešní době bude *Odkaz naděje* výzvou nejen k zamyšlení nad problémy současného globálního světa, ale i k dalším kritickým dílům v českém jazyce.

Karla Kovalová  
Ostravská univerzita

**Michal Peprník**

***Rané romány Jamese Fenimora Coopera: Topologie počátků amerického románu*  
Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2012**

Podľa známej historiky sa James Fenimore Cooper dostal k písaniu náhodou, keď čítajúc anglický román znechutene vyhlásil, že dokáže napísať lepší. Jeho prvý román *Prezieravosť* čitateľov príliš nezaujal, ale autor si overil, že román napísať dokáže a počas nasledujúcich rokov sa stal najznámejším americkým spisovateľom, prekladaným do mnohých svetových jazykov, reprezentujúcim mladú americkú demokraciu a kultúru. Týmto faktom začína svoju útlú knižku nazvanú *Rané romány Jamese Fenimora Coopera: Topologie počátků amerického románu* český amerikanista a popredný odborník na americkú literatúru 19. storočia a najmä na Jamesa Fenimora Coopera Michal Peprník.

Bez Fenimora Coopera by boli diela americkej literatúry v prvej polovici 19. storočia len napodobeninami britských románov. Cooper bol prvým, kto zasadil svoje diela do amerického prostredia a zaľudnil ich skutočne americkými postavami. Svojimi ranými románmi sa zaradil medzi priekopníkov na poli špionážneho románu (*Vyzvedač*, 1821), románu z pohraničia (*Priekopníci*, 1824) a námorného románu (*Lodivod*, 1825). V týchto románoch (všetky tri vyšli aj v českom preklade) sa objavujú prví americkí hrdinovia, „nositelia novej americkej mytológie“ (s. 8) ako vyzvedač Harvey Birch, lodivod Tom Coffin, ale predovšetkým Natty Bumppo, neskôr známy ako Kožená pančucha, vďaka ktorému sa stal Cooper známym po celom svete. Práve týmito tromi románmi sa Peprník zaoberá vo svojej monografii.

Monografia *Rané romány Jamese Fenimora Coopera* nie je prvou, v ktorej sa profesor Peprník venuje svojmu obľúbenému autorovi. Nadväzuje na jeho predchádzajúcu monografiu nazvanú *Topos lesa v americkej literatúre* (Host, 2005), kde sa Peprník zaoberá funkciami tohto toposu nielen v raných Cooperových románoch, ale aj v neskorších a v stredoeurópskom priestore známejších dielach ako *Posledný Mohykán* alebo *Lovec jeleňov* a v románoch ďalších amerických autorov. Ako nasvedčuje názov, topologický prístup zvolil autor aj v recenzovanej publikácii, a to najmä z toho dôvodu, že práve v období, keď Cooper svoje rané romány napísal „sa projekt topologizácie americkej krajiny, alebo vytvárania poetických (romantických) asociácií, stal jedným z ústredných bodov programu americkej národnej literatúry“ (s. 9).

V úvodnej časti monografie sa Peprník zaoberá Cooperovými literárnymi počiatkami a poukazuje na fakt, že Cooper svoj prvý román vydal anonymne, aby vyvrátil názory kritikov na to, že americký autor nedokáže napísať román, ktorý by bol nerozoznatelný od diel britských spisovateľov. Po *Prezieravosti* nasledovalo niekoľko úspešných románov, ktoré Coopera zachránili pred bankrotom a príjmy mu umožnili dostať sa do Európy, kde strávil sedem rokov. Tento pobyt mu však viac uškodil ako prospel, pretože na základe svojich verejných vystúpení v Londýne a Paríži bol vo svojej domovine obvinený z politikárčenia.

Ďalšia kapitola v monografii je venovaná dobovej recepcii raných románov Jamesa Fenimora Coopera. Autor tu rozoberá dôvody, prečo Cooper nepatrí medzi zabudnutých, ale ani medzi všeobecne rešpektovaných spisovateľov a prečo sa ocitol v žánrovej kategórii dobrodružnej literatúry spolu s Alexandrom Dumasom alebo R. L. Stevensonom. Stručne sa venuje aj českým prekladom Cooperových diel a nezabúda pripomenúť, že v mnohých románoch je Cooperov text viac dielom silnej vôle ako umeleckej inšpirácie. V ďalšej časti

Peprník oboznamuje čitateľa najmä s rozsiahlou recenziou románu *Vyzvedač* z pera W. H. Gardinera. Gardiner v tejto recenzii nabáda amerických spisovateľov na to, aby vo svojich dielach vytvárali imaginatívne histórie miest a vidí literárny potenciál vo využití Indiánov ako postáv. Škoda, že táto kapitola je viac-menej obmedzená len na dobovú recepciu románu *Vyzvedač*, recepcia ďalších dvoch diel, *Priekopníkov* a *Lodivoda* v tejto kapitole a rovnako aj v celej monografii chýba.

Román *Vyzvedač*, ktorý je obsahom nasledujúcej kapitoly, definitívne etabloval Coopera ako amerického spisovateľa. Pri jeho písaní sa síce inšpiroval historickými románami Sira Waltera Scotta, ale zasadil ho do obdobia americkej revolúcie. Román sa odohráva na neutrálnom území okresu Westchester, v priestore, ktorý nemá pod kontrolou ani jedna z bojujúcich strán. Toto prostredie so svojou bohatou históriou ponúklo americkým čitateľom romantický nádych a k úspešnosti románu určite prispeli aj postavy, ktoré sa v románe objavujú, pretože ako Peprník správne podotýka, Cooper zapája ľudové postavy do deja v oveľa väčšej miere ako Scott. Najlepším príkladom takejto ľudovej postavy je dvojité agent Harvey Birch, prvý zo série ľudových typov, ktorí sa objavia aj v nasledujúcich románoch.

Peprník sa v kapitole najskôr venuje žánru historickej romancy a až potom sa dostáva k samotnej topológii románu, teda k miestam s asociáciami. Venuje sa aj Cooperovmu pohľadu na americkú revolúciu a všíma si, že na rozdiel od Scotta Cooper využíva historické udalosti len ako pozadie a historickým postavám pridáva len menšie úlohy. Cooperov prístup k americkej revolúcii v románe môže vyznieť ako nie príliš vlastenecký – Britov nedémonizuje, americký súd urobí chybu pri odsúdení mladého Henryho Whartona, ktorú musí napraviť sám George Washington, americkí partizáni sú zodpovední za skazu Whartonovského domu. Okrem topológie sa Peprník v tejto kapitole zaoberá aj postavami v románe a čo je pozoruhodné, pomerne veľký priestor venuje úlohe, ktorú v románe zohrávajú ženy. Na záver kapitoly autor konštatuje, že románom *Vyzvedač* vytvoril Cooper „model amerického republikánskeho románu, založeného na demokratickom princípe pluralizmu.“ (s. 73).

*Priekopníci* sa od predchádzajúceho Cooperovho diela líšia vo viacerých aspektoch. Ako prostredie pre toto dielo si Cooper vybral pohraničie štátu New York a zobrazuje v ňom zmeny, ktoré do tejto oblasti priniesla civilizácia v podobe bielych osadníkov. Román *Priekopníci* môže byť považovaný za prvý americký environmentálny román, pretože téma plytvania prírodnými zdrojmi patrí medzi prominentné témy a scény masového výlovu rýb alebo masakru tisícok holubov osadníkmi patria medzi najpamätnejšie v Cooperových dielach. Keďže sa jedná o prvý román z pohraničia a prvý, kde sa objavujú postavy Nattyho Bumppa a delawarského náčelníka Čingačgúka, nie je prekvapivé, že v monografii mu Peprník venuje najväčší priestor.

Autor nezabúda ani na svoje obľúbené asociácie s českou literatúrou, ktorými sa prezentoval už v knihe *Topos lesa v americkej literatúre – Priekopníci* mu pripomínajú román Boženy Němcovej *Babička* (dokonca so zmyslom pre humor sebe vlastným podotýka, že by sa dal premenovať na amerického *Dědečka*) – oba romány totiž majú cyklickú kompozíciu, sledujú život v osade na pozadí rytmu striedajúcich sa ročných období, v oboch vystupuje postava prostého ale skúseného človeka.

V tejto kapitole sa autor venuje topológii románového priestoru v oveľa väčšej miere ako v tej predošlej, rozčleňuje ho na osadu a okolitú lesnú krajinu a podrobnejšie sa

zaoberá prírodnými toposmi, ako sú hora (dejisko niekoľkých dramatických udalostí), jaskyňa (miesto s tajomstvom a posledné útočisko) alebo jazero (dejisko vyššie uvedeníých scén plytvania prírodných zdrojov), ale aj toposmi v osade ako napríklad dom sudcu Templu alebo krčma. Dôvodom je, že Cooper vo svojich dielach postupne zdokonaľoval topologickú metódu a v každom ďalšom románe sa objavuje väčšia rozmanitosť toposov. Pokiaľ ide o postavy v románe, veľká časť kapitoly je venovaná Cooperovmu obrazu indiána. Podľa Peprníka je náčelník Čingačgúk svojim smutným osudom poetickým prvkom románu, „žijúcou malebnou ruinou heroického veku“ (s. 103) a stelesnením pojmu ušľachtilý divoch.

V poslednej kapitole monografie sa autor zaoberá románom *Lodivod*, ktorý považuje za prvý skutočne námorný román, pretože v predošlých románoch sa len malá časť deja odohrávala na mori. Cooper bol pre napísanie takéhoto románu skutočne kvalifikovaný, počas svojej mladosti slúžil na obchodnej lodi a neskôr aj v americkom námorníctve. Peprník poukazuje aj na to, ako Cooper na rozdiel od svojich predchodcov dokázal využiť možnosti, ktoré poskytuje more ako topos – motívy ako napríklad prenasledovanie, únik či námorné bitky. *Lodivod* sa stal prvým z celkového počtu jedenástich námorných románov, ktoré Cooper napísal.

Kapitola má podobnú štruktúru ako predošlé dve – autor sa venuje najskôr naratívnej technike, potom rôznym toposom (sú medzi nimi samozrejme topos mora a lodi) a postavám, medzi ktorými je ďalší zo známych Cooperových charaktarov, kormidelník Tom Coffin. Peprník ho porovnáva s ľudovými postavami z predošlých románov a prichádza k záveru, že Tom Coffin svojou obrovitou postavou stelesňuje (na rozdiel od Harveyho Bircha alebo Nattyho) mýtus Ameriky ako krajiny hojnosti. Autor v kapitole opäť nezabúda na analýzu role ženy v románe.

Netreba pripomínať, že monografia *Rané romány Jamese Fenimora Coopera: Topologie počátků amerického románu* je prvou ucelenou monografiou venovanou tomuto americkému autorovi v českom jazyku. Je veľmi prínosným počínom v oblasti amerických štúdií, autor v nej využil svoje rozsiahle poznatky o diele a živote jedného z prvých uznávaných amerických spisovateľov a ponúka čitateľovi vyčerpávajúce informácie o jeho raných dielach. Nevenuje sa iba topológii, ako by nasvedčoval názov monografie, ale podáva komplexnú analýzu historického pozadia, tém a postáv v prvých troch Cooperových úspešných románoch.

Jozef Pecina  
Univerzita sv. Cyrila a Metoda, Trnava

**Renata Povolná**  
***Interactive Discourse Markers in Spoken English***  
**Brno: Masaryk University, 2010**

Renata Povolná's book *Interactive Discourse Markers in Spoken English* is an interdisciplinary study examining the interactive dimension of spoken discourse, an area of research which is currently the subject of intense debate by numerous discourse analysts. The study, which is undertaken primarily from the viewpoints of pragmatics, discourse analysis and conversation analysis, explores the contribution of discourse markers to the smooth flow of interaction, politeness and the establishment and maintenance of coherence in spoken discourse. The careful context-informed comparative analysis of the pragmatic functions of discourse markers in three genres of spoken discourse is one of the important strengths of Povolná's study. The book promises to be of considerable interest to linguists and students of the English language, as it takes into account various context-dependent aspects of spoken interaction which are crucial for an adequate discourse interpretation.

Adopting a functional approach to the analysis of authentic language data, Povolná's research applies both quantitative and qualitative methods to the analysis of the pragmatic functions of clausal discourse markers such as *you know*, *you see*, *I mean*, *I think*, *I'm sure* in the genres of face-to-face conversations, private telephone conversations, and public radio discussions. The main contribution of the study on the theoretical plane is the author's proposed revised taxonomy of pragmatic functions of clausal interactive discourse markers, which serves as a basis for the discussion of their distribution and functional specialization in the three genres of spoken discourse under investigation. The corpus of authentic texts used in the investigation is taken from the *London-Lund Corpus*, which provides the author with the obvious advantage of analyzing surreptitiously recorded conversational data.

The research is logically organized into seven chapters which present the author's argumentation in a reader-friendly way. In the first two chapters Povolná explains her understanding of the basic terms used in the study, introduces the genres under investigation and describes her corpus (the key terms are included in the *Glossary of Terms*). Chapter Three provides a highly useful comprehensive review of different definitions of discourse markers known also as fumbles (Edmondson 1981), discourse signals (Stenström 1989, 1990), discourse particles (Schourup 1985, Aijmer 2002), pragmatic markers (Fraser 1990), inserts (Biber et al. 1999), and metalinguistic monitors (Erman 2001). The critical discussion of an impressive array of different approaches to the analysis of this complex language phenomenon evidences the author's thorough knowledge of the field and enables Povolná to outline her own understanding of the nature of discourse markers and lay the foundations for the subsequent analytical part of the book.

Povolná's classification of the pragmatic functions of discourse markers as described in the next chapter takes into consideration a complex set of factors affecting discourse interpretation. The taxonomy is based on five basic criteria, namely syntactic type, *I-/you-*orientation, turn position, prosodic features, and situational context. It comprises three hearer-oriented pragmatic functions of interactive discourse markers (appealer, inform marker, empathizer) and four speaker-oriented pragmatic functions of interactive discourse markers (monitor, opine marker, marker of certainty and marker of emotion).

The findings of the research show that the most frequent realizations of hearer-oriented discourse markers are *you know* and *you see*, while speaker-oriented discourse markers are typically realized by a wider spectrum of clausal forms comprising *I think*, *I suppose*, *I mean*, *I'm sure* and *I'm afraid*. An important contribution of Povolná's research is her identification of the distinctive features of interactive discourse markers. As she points out, interactive discourse markers tend to be phonologically reduced or unstressed; they are optional and loosely integrated into the syntactic structure, and they tend to have little or no propositional meaning.

Chapters Five and Six explore the use and distribution of the different categories of discourse markers in private face-to-face and telephone conversations and public radio discussions. Among the important strengths of the analytical part of the study are the detailed description of the pragmatic functions of interactive discourse markers in the three genres under investigation and the careful analysis of numerous examples. The findings of Povolná's research bring new evidence of the multifunctionality of clausal discourse markers. The results of the research show that clausal discourse markers may operate simultaneously on different linguistic levels and due to their contextual dependency may serve a different function in a different position or a different function in the same position. Despite the presence of some cross-generic variation in the use of the individual markers in the genres under investigation, all interactive discourse markers were found to contribute to politeness strategies at the discourse level of communication by creating a cooperative and friendly atmosphere, thus enhancing the smooth flow of interaction between discourse participants. As Povolná points out, the contribution of hearer- and speaker-oriented discourse markers to the perception of coherence resides in their potential to operate on both the discourse and text levels of communication by organizing discourse and integrating utterances in the flow of communication, thus helping the current hearer to realize how discourse interpretation is affected by the context. The results of the research also reveal some significant differences in the use and distribution of interactive discourse markers across the three genres under investigation. The most prominent difference concerns the occurrence of response elicitors – verbal reactions, which are considerably more frequent in the highly interactive genres of private face-to-face and telephone conversation than in public radio discussions, where the low level of cooperation between the participants motivates a very low rate of verbal reactions.

In the last part of her study, Povolná summarizes her theoretical insights and the results of the analysis of the pragmatic functions and distribution of interactive discourse markers in the three genres under investigation. She stresses in particular the decisive role of clausal discourse markers in ensuring coherent discourse interpretation and the smooth flow of interaction in spontaneous spoken communication.

By its detailed analysis of the various pragmatic functions of clausal discourse markers in different genres of spoken discourse, the book *Interactive Discourse Markers in Spoken English* brings valuable insights into the complex nature of spoken interaction and sheds light on the role of discourse markers in politeness strategies and the establishment and maintenance of discourse coherence. Povolná's publication is undoubtedly a useful contribution to the field of pragmatics and spoken discourse analysis, as on the one hand it suggests a revised categorization of discourse markers based on a combination of formal and functional criteria, and on the other hand it provides a detailed context-informed

cross-generic analysis of the functions of clausal discourse markers in spoken English discourse. This will certainly make this volume an inspiring resource for researchers, teachers and students of the English language.

Olga Dontcheva-Navratilova  
Masaryk University, Brno

# **News, Announcements**



## Conference Report

Contexts, References and Style  
5th Nitra Conference on Discourse Studies  
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia  
21–22 March 2013

This conference was the fifth in a series of conferences dedicated to contemporary issues connected with pragmatics and discourse studies held by the Department of English and American Studies at the Faculty of Arts in Nitra. This time the focus was on structural, sociolinguistic, functional and contextual aspects of English within the fields of text linguistics, (critical) discourse analysis, style and stylistics, pragmatics of discourse and semantics. The range of topics covered at the conference was a strong impetus for members of our research group organized as part of the University of Ostrava's Student Grant Competition (SGS) to share their current research results with the wider scholarly community. No less motivational for our conference trip to Nitra was the presence of four distinguished guests, including Jonathan Culpeper, renowned for his research in literary stylistics and pragmatics.

The first plenary lecture was given by Anita Fetzer (University of Würzburg, Germany), entitled "The Pragmatics of Discourse", in which she examined a range of questions: whether the nature of discourse is more pragmatic, more semantic, or something unique to itself; how speech acts are connected to discourse; and consequently, whether it is really possible to talk about speech acts in discourse. Her preliminary conclusion was that speech act theory and discourse can indeed be (re)united, though there is no straightforward match between speech acts in discourse or its discursive parts. The second plenary lecture was given by Professor Culpeper (Lancaster University, UK) on "The Language of Plays in a Historical Perspective". He elaborated on his recent research of dramatic texts (cf. "Stylistics and Shakespeare's Language: Transdisciplinary Approaches", London, Continuum, 2011, co-edited with M. Ravassat). This research involved a genre analysis of play texts with respect to their changing characteristics over the last 400 years (two sets of data were compared: present-day plays and Early Modern plays from Shakespeare's time); the lecture focused on the linguistic forms and functions of the dialogue, the theatrical context of the play, and the manner in which play texts were produced. Professor Culpeper examined three different aspects of the contexts of both types of play texts – the performance, the

stage and the participants – and commented on related changes in turn taking, repetitive elements and pragmatic noise.

The remaining two plenaries included speakers from Middlesex University (UK): Alan Durant focused on “Appeals to Linguistic ‘Register’ in Construing the Language of Legal Statutes” and Billy Clark on “Relevance and Style: More than Reading”. Professor Durant tested the concept of linguistic ‘register’ in the field of professional, legal discourse and claimed that it is necessary to distinguish between specialized legal ‘constructions’ (such as contracts or statutes) and a wider notion of everyday ‘interpretation’. Legal language was examined from both the linguistic and the legal perspectives, as a mix of various kinds of professional discourse which are both strongly anchored in their cultural context and socially authoritative. Billy Clark’s plenary attempted to show how a relevance-theoretical approach can help us not only interpret inferences made by individual readers, but also understand inferences made by writers, speakers and editors, and various processes involved in criticism and evaluation.

The programme was organized into two parallel (roughly thematic) sessions including 32 presentations. Three members of our research team focusing on media discourse gave their presentations on the first day: Renáta Tomášková – “Writing the Prospective Student in the Text: On the Interplay of Monoglossic and Heteroglossic Elements in University Websites”; Chris Hopkinson – “Keyboard Warriors: Antagonistic Facework in Online Discussions”; and Barbora Blažková – “Uncovering Ideology by Naming: Discourse Analysis of Newspaper Headlines”. The remaining three members of our team, who specialize in academic and computer discourse, gave their talks on the second day: Tereza Malčíková – “The Negotiation of Scientific Knowledge: Metadiscourse in Research Articles and Undergraduate Textbooks”; Gabriela Zapletalová – “Argumentation and Narration in Academic Talks”; and Daniel Bizoň – “Language Behaviour of the Protagonist in a Computer Role-playing game *Fallout*”.

Due to the busy conference programme (and partly also due to the bad weather) there was almost no time to enjoy the conference setting, the marvellous historic city of Nitra, situated in the heart of western Slovakia. Apart from its academic side, the conference also included several enjoyable social events: the evening reception took place on the university premises, where participants and colleagues were able to exchange and discuss their ideas in an informal setting. The Nitra conference was an excellent experience for our young colleagues in the SGS grant project (who are also our PhD students): they became acquainted with the wider academic community, presented their research results in front of the four prominent keynote speakers and other established scholars, and had the chance to discuss their results and future plans.

Gabriela Zapletalová  
University of Ostrava

The keynote speakers – from the left: Anita Fetzer, Billy Clark and Jonathan Culpeper  
Our junior research team members – Barbora Blažková, Tereza Malčíková and Daniel Bizoň – listening to Jonathan Culpeper.