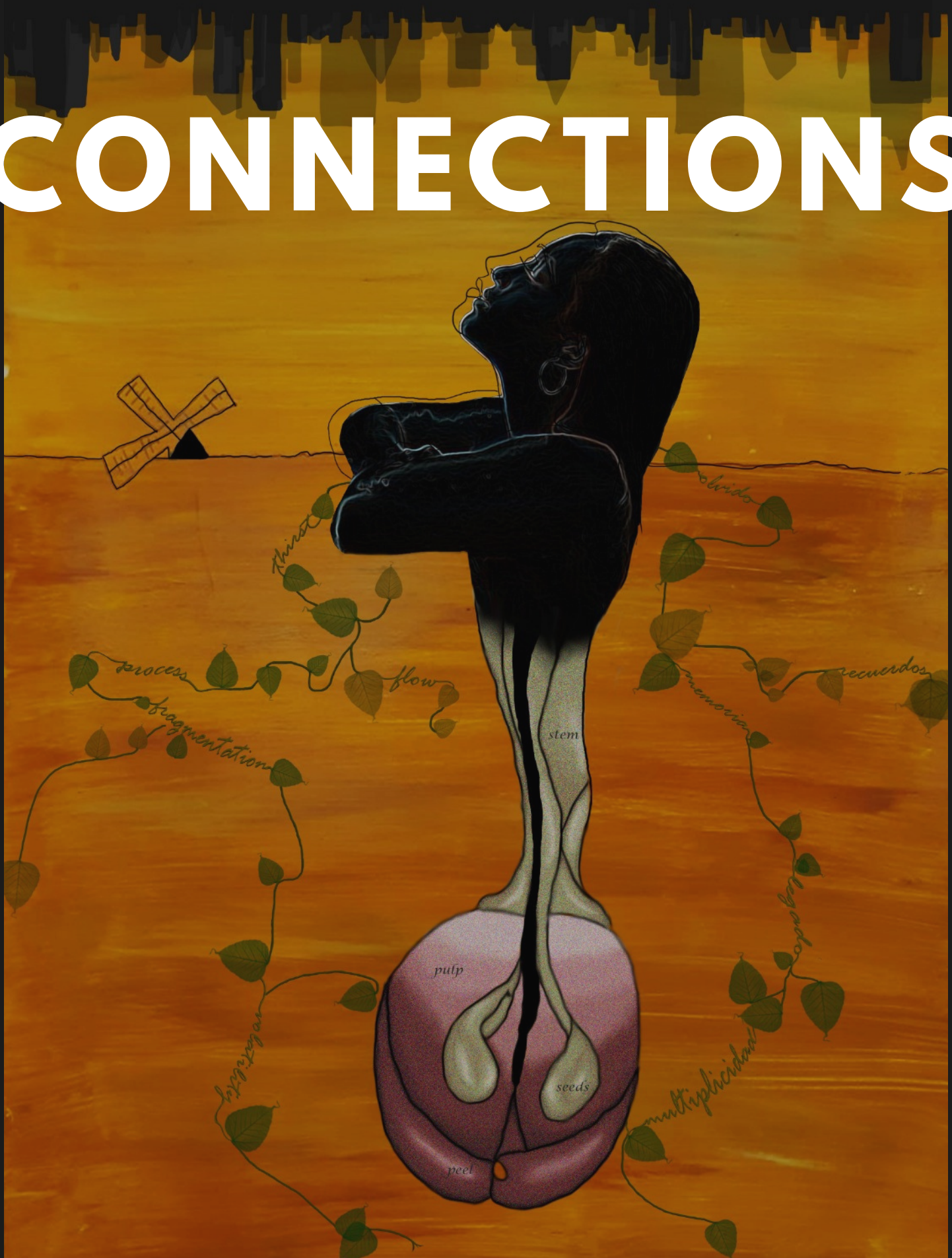
CONNECTIONS



November 2020 Volume 1, Issue 1

Cover Art By: María Jesús Monzón

CONNECTIONS

A JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE, MEDIA AND CULTURE

Connections is an annual academic publication led by the graduate students from the Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies at the University of Alberta. Established in 2019, this journal seeks to showcase innovative and interdisciplinary research that either challenges or reimagines normative approaches to applied linguistics, translation, comparative literature, media, and cross-cultural studies. Connections is committed to elevating the scholarly and creative voices of students engaged in research that crosses geographical, disciplinary, and political boundaries. Ultimately, this publication calls on authors to map the connections, wherever they may be.

Editorial Team

Please send all editorial correspondence to cnctjrnl@ualberta.ca

or to the following mailing address:

Connections Journal
Department of Modern Languages & Cultural Studies
University of Alberta
200 Arts Building
Edmonton, AB T6G 2E6
Canada

A Note from the Editor-in-Chief,

With the publication of our inaugural issue, *Connections* is indebted to the generous support offered by the graduate students from The Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies (MLCS). This journal is made by and for you.

Our MLCS graduate community is an academic medley. Not only are we home to brilliant and diverse students from all over the world, but our research specialities are the definition of interdisciplinary. From linguistic scholars studying third person pronouns in Chinese social media or the construction of identity for second language German learners, to comparative literature students examining Indigenous women's poetry in French and English, to research creationists writing biographies on the biohacking diabetes community, MLCS has it all.

I knew when I set out on this project of building a graduate student journal that I had to stay true to the heart of who we are: a diverse community. This is not an easy feat, though. I wondered how I would structure a thematic publication that could capture the multiple disciplines that made up our department. Soon, I had a team of hard-working visionaries on board as editors: Richard Feddersen, Kerry Sluchinski, Malou Brouwer, and Jonathan Garfinkel. We decided that our journal would be a little bit of everything and a little bit from all of us. This is where both connections and *Connections* starts.

As new academics ready to shake up the long-standing traditions of our respective disciplines, we envisioned a publication with a single objective: to challenge or reimagine normative approaches to applied linguistics, translation, comparative literature, media, and cross-cultural studies. We are committed to publishing research that showcases how our community of students are occupying creative, radical, and innovative spaces of scholarship. Summoning the very definition of "connections," we want to focus on research that relates spaces, places, and ideas that typically diverge from one another. This is why we made it a point to welcome research that crosses geographical, disciplinary, and political boundaries. Ultimately, this publication calls on authors to map the connections, wherever they may be.

In our inaugural publication, you will not only find a collection of interdisciplinary academic articles and creative works authored by the graduate students of MLCS, but also the works of students and young academics in Canada and abroad. The academic articles are categorized by meta-categories of **Translation and Linguistics**, **Transnational and Comparative Literature**, and **Media and Culture**. Further, our **Creative Section** includes a poetry collection and art work that focus on themes of illness, disease, and pandemic life.

We look forward to sharing our first publication and showcasing the amazing research of both MLCS graduate students and other new and emerging scholars. I would like to end this note by inviting you to consider submitting your own research to *Connections* in the coming new year.

Sincerely,

Megan Perram

Megan Perram, PhD Candidate, University of Alberta

IN THIS ISSUE

A Note from the Editor-in-Chief

Translation and Linguistics

Transnational and Comparative Literature

Media and Culture

Creative Works

Towards a Translator Criticism: (Mis)translating connections in Alice Munro's "Too Much Happiness"

Anna Antonova[1]

[1] Department of Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: aantonov@ualberta.ca

Abstract

In *Towards a Translation Criticism: John Donne*, Antoine Berman centres translation analysis on the translator's personality itself, suggesting the concepts of individual "position," "project," and "horizon" as the cornerstones of translation critique. This article will apply Berman's model to Alice Munro's short story "Too Much Happiness" and its Russian translation "Слишком много счастья" by Andrey Stepanov. The resulting comparative analysis framework will highlight how a translation project enforcing its inherent biases on the target text may produce a textual product misrepresenting the original and serving imperialist, rather than purely cultural, goals. Although Munro's story, based on the life of the Russian mathematician Sophia Kovalevsky, does invite connections between the source and target cultures, the translator's consistent self-positioning towards the heroine's gender and nationality leads to profound shifts in meaning. Stepanov's translation project focuses on asserting his country's cultural and literary superiority, while revealing his condescending attitude to the female protagonist. As a result, the Russian translation of "Too Much Happiness" plays up non-essential cultural connections and undermines the author's critical perspective on the Russian reality. At the same time, the translator's approach discredits the story's complex main character and effectively erases the feminist undertones of Munro's narrative. A careful examination of this case study building on Berman's critical model problematizes the widely-discussed concept of translator's agency and emphasizes the importance of comprehensive translator-centred analysis which combines textual and extratextual aspects.

Keywords: Alice Munro, translation, Russian, translators' agency, translating position

Introduction

Translators' agency, as a progressive and empowering concept, has long become the central aspect in most discussions of translation in general and literary translation in particular. Theorized by the feminist scholars of translation as a way to reject the normative requirement of fidelity and to reframe the role of translation from reproduction to production of meaning (see Simon, Flotow, Lotbinière-Harwood, and Tymoczko), agency of the translators is largely understood in relation to "various sites through which the translating subject defines itself" in the act of translation (Simon 29). From this standpoint, the translator is seen as the author's active and conscious collaborator who may be approaching the source text either in the mode of engagement or resistance, but whose interventionist practices always imply "extending and developing the intention of the original text, not deforming it" (Simon 16). As a theoretical construct, translator's agency has played an extremely positive role in asserting the creative authority of translators and reconceptualising translation as an activity grounded in difference, interdependence, and hybridization rather than imitation and equivalence. However, it is rarely mentioned that in certain institutional environments translators' agency itself may become the tool of misrepresentation. If a translator approaches their task from a position of bias supported by the dominant discourse, such biases are then enforced on the text producing a translation product that may significantly distort the original message. I will consider Andrey Stepanov's Russian translation of Alice Munro's short story "Too Much Happiness" (published in 2014 as "Слишком много счастья") from the translator's agency perspective to show how the target text reflects and

reinforces the translator's cultural biases, eventually serving imperialistic purposes rather than attempting a cultural transfer.

Antoine Berman's Translation Analysis Model

As the basis of my analysis, I will use Antoine Berman's translation criticism methodology first suggested in his book *Towards a Translation Criticism: John Donne.* This model is conceptualized as a form of positive criticism, which is meant to go beyond the simplistic judgment of errors and to overcome common perception of translation as inherently defective and secondary (29). Berman's goal is to consider the target text's purpose of attaining autonomy as a legitimate work of art in its own right and its potential of becoming a "new original" (30). Accordingly, his methodology is broken down into a series of non-conventional steps that are meant to present the process and product of literary translation from a new angle: 1) the study of the translation as an autonomous text, 2) the study of the original, 3) comparative analysis of both texts with a heavy emphasis on the translator's decision-making, and 4) overview of the translation's critical reception to evaluate the success of the relevant literary transfer.

Within the framework of this model, the analytical process starts with studying the translation itself, outside of its relationship with the original, with the goal of determining whether the translated text can "stand" on its own and whether it possesses integrity that Berman terms "immanent consistency" (50). This initial phase is to be followed by a careful study of the original as a form of "textual pre-analysis" (51) leading to the eventual confrontation between the two versions. Berman suggests that this pre-analytical stage should focus on selecting *"*those passages of the original that are, so to speak, the places where the work condenses, represents, signifies, or symbolizes itself. These passages are signifying zones where a literary work reaches its own purpose (not necessarily that of the author) and its own center of gravity" (54).

The third—and central—part of the translation analysis model focuses on the translators themselves as the key actors and empowered agents of the transfer process. Berman names the following key criteria used for determining the nature (and degree) of the translator's agency: 1) "the translating position" (58), 2) "the translation project" (60), and 3) "the horizon of the translator" (63). The translating position relates to the translator's theoretical approach and is understood as "the compromise between the way in which the translator … perceives that task of translation, and the way in which he has internalized the surrounding discourse on translation (the norms) … the self-positioning of the translator vis-à-vis translation, a self-positioning that, once chosen (for it is, in fact, a choice) binds the translator" (58). The concept of the translation project focuses more on the practical realization of this theoretical understanding and is broadly construed as the purpose of translation (whether consciously articulated or not). It "defines the way in which the translator is going to realize the literary transfer and to take charge of the translation itself, to choose a 'mode' of translation, a translation 'style'" (60). Finally, the translator's horizon considers multiple outside factors and is seen as "the set of linguistic, literary, cultural, and historical parameters that 'determine' the ways of feeling, acting, and thinking of the translator" (63).

The next stage, focusing on the translation analysis itself, signals a return to the comparative textual study and provides the space where the actual confrontation between the available textual iterations of the same literary work takes place. However, in Berman's view, the confrontation occurs not only between the textual versions and their particular "signifying zones," but also between the projects themselves, including possible tensions between various translations and retranslations (69). These tensions will further be reflected in the critical reception of the translated text after it is transplanted into the new linguistic and cultural context. Berman's integrated methodology considering these multiple factors provides an in-depth view of the translation process and its results while remaining essentially translator-centred.

Pre-Analysis: The Author's Project

Although the first stage of Berman's model is essential for determining if the translation can function as an autonomous literary work, the tensions between the source text and target text projects—which will be the main focus of this study—can only be discovered at the second, source text-oriented stage of the process. Therefore, my discussion of Stepanov's "Слишком много счастья" will be preceded by a brief pre-analysis of the author's project in "Too Much Happiness." In this respect, Munro's text does not pose a significant interpretation problem: most critics agree that its narrative centres on the typically feminist theme of female ambition that is denied its proper realization and eventually leads to the protagonist's isolation and disappointment (see Duffy, Zsizsmann, and Nillson). It can further be argued that, in this short story, Munro is attempting to (de)construct the myth of a feminist heroine by negotiating the fiction/history divide inhabited by her character. In "Too Much Happiness," the writer ventures into the territory of fictionalized biography recounting the last few days in the life of Sophia Kovalevsky, the nineteenth-century Russian mathematician and novelist who subsequently came to be known as the first female university professor in Northern Europe. The story, fluctuating between accurate historical facts and Sophia's

fictionalized personal experiences, simultaneously offers a "fully sourced and yet elliptical historical fiction" (Zsizsmann 201) and "an ambitiously imagined, intricately structured novella-length work, a tale of ambition and isolation, a narrative of displacement" (Zsizsmann 202).

Structurally, the text is both linear and fluid, moving continuously between the present time where Sophia is making her long and exhausting train journey from Paris to Stockholm, and the past in the form of multiple flashbacks. The main character's memories bring her back to her childhood spent with her sister Aniuta at the family estate of Palibino, her marriage to the geology scholar Vladimir Kovalevsky, her studies in Germany under the supervision of professor Karl Weierstrass, her time in Paris during the Commune, her life in St. Petersburg and the birth of her daughter, the dissolution of her family life and financial ruin followed by Vladimir's suicide, her move to Stockholm for a university teaching job, her prestigious Bordin Prize in mathematics, and her unhappy courtship with Russian professor of law Maxsim Kovalevsky. This last relationship comes to an abrupt end when Sophia suddenly dies of pneumonia soon after reaching Stockholm. The story's title "Too Much Happiness," which quotes Sophia's last words, becomes symbolic of the protagonist's inability to reconcile her professional ambition with the societal expectations imposed on a woman.

Based on these true facts from Sophia's biography, Munro's narrative offers a fictional, subjective interpretation of her heroine's perceptions and responses, bringing together real historical events, memories, dreams, character-authored letters, and author's speculations in an attempt to blur the boundary between history and fiction—or rather to reveal how the two grow into each other, essentially becoming the same thing. Sophia does not directly narrate her own story in "Too Much Happiness", although her fictionalized inner monologue pervades the text through the author's preferred structure of free indirect discourse that effectively blends the protagonist's thoughts with other textual presences, playing both on her need to be heard and her instinct of self-silencing. This intentional polyphony and the author's use of the real story behind Sophia's character arc serve as a convenient backdrop for exploring the central crux of the story—the conflict between creative work as the heroine's vocation and domesticity as the basic requirement in women's lives of her time.

Lizbeth Goodman describes this internal crisis as "the opposition between marriage as a fate or 'job' for women, and the need for women to improve themselves through education" (74) and classifies it as a typical feature of 20th century women-centred fiction. Sophia's life story can, therefore, be interpreted as a version of the female *Bildung* plot that embodies the clash between romance and personal quest. According to Rachel Blau Duplessis's narrative theory, such plots could traditionally end either in the female hero's marriage or death, the latter being seen as a punishment for her transgressions but also as a form of protest against restrictive normativity. From the very beginning, Sophia behaves as a female hero who manages to subvert both "the marriage plot, with its high status …, and the quest plot of punishment for female aspiration" (Duplessis 21). Although at her time women in Russia were not allowed to study at universities or to leave the country without their father's or husband's permission, Sophia, driven by her determination to study mathematics in Germany, finds a way to overcome this outrageous obstacle by entering into a fictitious "white marriage" with Vladimir Kovalevsky, a like-minded progressive student. By making this radical choice, Sophia gains freedom both from her family and her home country and avoids the requirement of female domesticity, at the same time maintaining proper appearances. This decision takes her beyond the conventional ending of the "marriage plot," in line with Duplessis's discussion of "writing beyond the ending, taking ending as a metaphor for conventional narrative, for a regimen of resolutions, and for the social, sexual, and ideological affirmations these make" (21). The heroine finds herself on the "quest plot" of studying mathematics, which leads her into the academic world where she is not only mentored and supported but can excel and shine, even surpassing the men around her. However, the "marriage plot" catches up with Sophia when her fictitious marriage with Vladimir becomes real, ultimately leading to a break between them as he starts to demand submission and domesticity of his wife and finally alienates her with his dismissive behaviour.

Having failed at this attempt to reconcile her need for love and family with her scientific aspirations, Sophia returns to her studies and eventually reaches professional success, becoming a professor of mathematics at Stockholm University and receiving an award for her outstanding research. Still, even then she is not accepted by the European scientific community, but rather seen as a dangerous, although curious, transgression. As she herself bitterly remarks, "[T]hey had closed their doors when it came to giving her a job. They would no more think of that than of employing a learned chimpanzee" ("Too Much Happiness" 266). Sophia's struggles with inequality and her commitment to her ambitious goals in the profoundly sexist society make her an important feminist heroine (both fictional and historical), as she becomes a trailblazer among the European female academics. As Dennis Duffy suggests, "Munro obviously has a particular story to tell about women savants and the obstacles they encounter, a pointed, even didactic, tale of the trials endured by women … the pointed exposition of an exemplary life whose ultimate meaning lies beyond

that of the particular moment in material history caught in the story" (203). Yet Sophia eventually turns out to be more complex and flawed than an exemplary feminist role model because in many respects she is constrained and stalled by her own weaknesses.

These weaknesses are epitomized by the protagonist's pervading feelings of displacement and loneliness. As she believes that Russia, with its legal discrimination of female academics, can never again be a safe home for her, Sophia comes to associate home and safety with the prospect of marriage—something that, as she thinks, can give her a respectable social status, protection, and financial independence. But when she falls in love with Maxsim Kovalevsky, the deep conflict between the two sides of her life becomes painfully clear: Sophia's longing for love and companionship—but above all, safety—is so strong that she readily submits to his male authority, temporarily trading her own goals for the comfort and reassurance of his company. Her perception of marriage as "a kind of ancient noble pact that they have made, a bond that has been signed, necessarily even if not enthusiastically, for your protection" ("Too Much Happiness" 294) reveals her deep-seated insecurity and her hope to find the solution in a clear and honest arrangement with a man who could both protect her and treat her as an equal.

However, after Sophia wins the Bordin prize, Maxsim's unsupportive response to her achievement shatters this hope. When he abandons her in the wake of her professional triumph, Sophia realizes that her needs for blissful domesticity and academic success cannot be successfully reconciled and that a truly equal partnership she has envisioned is impossible. So, in fear of losing her fiancé, she tries to accommodate his wounded ego by downplaying the importance of her work in comparison to his own: "He would be glad she had something to absorb her, though she suspected that he found mathematics not trivial, but somehow beside the point. How could a professor of law and sociology think otherwise?" ("Too Much Happiness" 253). This sudden willingness to restrain her ambition and to reduce her mathematical gift almost to a frivolous pastime indicates a downward shift in Sophia's perception of herself and her relationship with Maxsim. Now she feels the need to control her behaviour at all times to avoid his displeasure, even going as far as to repress her emotions in his presence: "She can barely answer, she feels such gratitude. Also a disastrous pressure of tears. Weeping in public is something he finds despicable … She manages to reabsorb her tears" ("Too Much Happiness" 253). Despite her progressive views and rebellious nature, Sophia starts to see this submissive behaviour and forced self-control as a reasonable compromise for the comfort and security of marriage—because she knows too well that, as a woman, she cannot earn acceptance and make a comfortable living on her own. But, to attain this desirable status, she must reconsider her notions of femininity and, to some extent, abandon her modern ideals of women's emancipation to diminish herself to a more conventional and acceptable role. According to Emma Nilsson, "[t]his self-reducing process may be seen as an attempt to live up to the ideal of the Angel in the House … Munro's short story could be interpreted as a critique of the ideal of the Angel in the House, suggesting that [it] still affects society's norms even in the 21st century" (2). From this perspective, "Too Much Happiness" may be read as a profoundly feminist message.

Nevertheless, Munro complicates things further by refusing to see feminism as the answer to all questions. Eventually, the feminist ideals of equality and justice that Sophia so passionately believes in turn out to be useless for herself and the women around her, as these elitist and idealistic notions have no bearing on their real everyday struggles. By the end of the story, Sophia feels that her rebellion has failed, partially because the men in her life, although initially supportive, prove unable to live by the progressive convictions they claim to share—but also because, to some extent, she herself remains in thrall to the promise of safety and home that she sees in a conventional marriage. Dennis Duffy points out this contradictory duality in his reading of "Too Much Happiness" as a story that "epitomizes the heroic image of a woman who was in some ways done to death by her culture's restrictions, and in other ways strengthened the chains of her bondage through her own recklessness" (204). Still, he insists that Munro's discovery of Sophia's story indicates "the major role that a writer like Munro has played in the cause of feminism" (Duffy 204), which fits in the author's overall project of dealing with "the exploitation and resistance of women through a generic continuum of narrative devices and hybridization ranging from the quotidian realistic to the historical to the exemplary" (Duffy 205). Sophia's (and Munro's) feminism in "Too Much Happiness" may be subtle and limited—up to the point of being critical of its own limitations—but it is ground-breaking in its sincerity, never shying away from the "uncomfortably honest treatment of the role played by victims in the cruelties visited upon them" (Duffy 205). Whether Sophia Kovalevsky is seen as a hero or a victim, the act of telling a story like hers becomes a signal of change in itself.

The Translator's Position

This essentially feminist reading of Munro's narrative is, however, not reflected in the Russian version of the text. In terms of the translation project, Andrey Stepanov, the Russian translator of "Too Much Happiness", approaches his task from a position that largely undermines both the

feminist potential of Sophia Kovalevsky's life story and the author's intention to present her protagonist as a complex and tragically lonely figure isolated by her own non-conformance. Stepanov, a professor of Russian Literary History at the Saint Petersburg State University who is known primarily as an Anton Chekhov scholar, mostly focuses on the Russian (and particularly Chekhov's) literary influences on Munro while showing very little interest in the female/feminist themes of her stories or her place in the tradition of Canadian women's writing. This limited perspective on the writer's work, which prioritizes non-essential cultural parallels over in-depth contextual study of her oeuvre, is by no means characteristic of Stepanov's personal approach alone. Rather, it reflects the entire history of Munro's literary transfer into the Russian-speaking linguistic and cultural context. The author's short stories and collections were conspicuously absent in Russian translation, and her name was virtually unknown to the Russian-speaking readers up until the 2013 Nobel Prize announcement. When *Too Much Happiness*, the first Munro collection that was translated into Russian (and the one containing the eponymous short story), was finally published in 2014, both the choice of the translator and the material suggested that the publisher intended to exploit Munro's "Russian connections" in presenting her to the Russian-language reading audiences.

The same connections consistently come to the centre stage in virtually all (not very numerous) Russian-language literary studies engaging with Munro's work (See Potanina and Butenina). In his own article "Chekhov's Themes in Alice Munro's Stories", Stepanov defines Munro as an author following Chekhov's literary tradition and talks extensively about the genre, style, and thematic parallels between both writers, such as their preference of the short story genre, masterful use of psychological details, thematic focus on the entrapments of everyday life, failures of human communication, invisible social hierarchies, and recurrent motifs of symbolic death and resurrection (86). Stepanov's attention, nevertheless, invariably concentrates on the "original" rather than the "copy": he uses this comparative analysis framework (as well as his own translations of Munro's stories) as a lens to refocus the readers' attention on Chekhov and to re-evaluate his literary legacy as an author who, unlike his Canadian counterpart, "always wrote about social injustice" (Stepanov 87, translation mine). What is important is that in the process Stepanov largely ignores the role of gender and social conflict in Munro's work, referring to the "absence of social barriers" for marriage and the "lack of impermeable barriers between the capital city and the country" (Stepanov 87, translation mine) in her stories. As a result, his claim that "typical Chekhovian plotlines based on such inequalities … are apparently impossible" in Munro's fictional representation of Canada (Stepanov 87, translation mine) reveals his limited understanding of the Canadian cultural and literary scene, as well as his selective blindness to some of the key themes in Munro's work. On the part of a literary translator, this lack of sensitivity to the source text and its original context can only be seen as problematic for the successful translation. At the same time, in Stepanov's case, it is symptomatic of the historical and cultural horizon the translator operates in.

The resulting translating position significantly determines the nature of Stepanov's translation project, particularly with regard to his self-positioning towards the story's protagonist, her gender, and her nationality. Situating Sophia Kovalevsky in the context of her "Russianness" and her femininity—metaphorically speaking, putting her back in her place—becomes a defining motif of Stepanov's translation, up to the point of ignoring the character's complexity and trivializing her struggles.

Confrontation: Diverging Images

From the opening paragraph where Sophia is first introduced to the readers, Munro's narrative subtly foregrounds her inner tensions, conflating her astounding intelligence with persistent self-doubt and picturing her simultaneously as an aging woman and a child:

> The woman has a childishly large head, with a thicket of dark curls, and her expression is eager, faintly pleading. Her face has begun to look worn. ("Too Much Happiness" 246)

Stepanov, however, misreads Sophia's tenseness as a sign of enthusiasm and explains her pleading expression by reorienting it towards her male companion (Maxsim):

> Выражение лица энергичное, но в то же время в разговоре с ним словно бы просящее. ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [Her facial expression is energetic, but at the same time, while talking to him, almost pleading].

This change of focus reveals the Russian translator's tendency to remain oblivious to his protagonist's inner conflicts and to align himself—whether intentionally or not—with the male characters of the story or, more generally, with the male perspective. Throughout the text, Stepanov demonstrates a condescending attitude towards Sophia as the main character, or an attempt to distance himself from her point of view, instead of fully embracing her own voice. When Sophia contemplates Maxsim's unexpected departure from Paris, attributing it to her sudden fame after winning the prestigious Bordin prize (which upstaged his own academic reputation), it is clear that she

has no illusions about his vanity or the transient nature of her own success. Thinking back to how the Parisian high society met her achievement with a mix of admiration and rejection, she refers to herself in ironic terms combining praising and disparaging language and conflating stereotypically masculine and feminine qualities to construct a contradictory self-perspective that reveals her inner conflict and familiar bitterness:

> A man of solid worth and negotiable reputation, with a certain bulk of frame and intellect, together with a lightness of wit, an adroit masculine charm. While she was an utter novelty, a delightful freak, the woman of mathematical gifts and female timidity, quite charming, yet with a mind most unconventionally furnished, under her curls. ("Too Much Happiness" 250)

In the Russian text, the tension is no longer obvious because Sophia's description consistently becomes more patronizing and less sympathetic towards the protagonist:

> Человек видный, с солидным состоянием, с серьезной репутацией, умный, светский, веселый, с несомненным мужским обаянием. А она была всего лишь любопытной чудачкой, новинкой сезона, дамой с математическими способностями, по-женски робкой, очаровательной, но с весьма странным устройством головного мозга — там, под кудряшками. ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [A distinguished man, with a solid fortune, a serious reputation, intelligent, worldly, jovial, with an undeniable masculine charm. While she was only a curious freak, a seasonal novelty, a fine lady with mathematical aptitudes, timid in a feminine way, charming, but with a very strange setup of her brain—there, under the curls].

In this passage, Stepanov not only downplays Sophia's positive characteristics by smoothing over the meaningful dissonance implied by "a delightful freak"—he adopts a decisively mocking tone with his use of sarcastically-sounding, and clearly gendered, descriptions "чудачка" [freak/odd woman] and "дама" [fine lady], while reducing Sophia's "gifts" to "aptitudes" [способности] and her fame to "a seasonal novelty" [новинка сезона]. But, most importantly, he distances himself from the protagonist, shifting the narrative point of view away from her own perspective. Although this episode focuses on Sophia trying to construct an unbiased picture of how Maxsim and she must be perceived by the people around them—and she does that with a certain detached irony—the translator's sarcastic tone and his use of deixis ("there" [там]) place the heroine away from the centre of narrative and reveal his unwillingness to side with her point of view.

When Sophia is weighing the prospects of her marriage to Maxsim, she implicitly acknowledges her deep dissatisfaction with their relationship, at the same time choosing to see her own expression of feelings as the problem:

> To be comfortable with his wealth was of course a joke. To be comfortable with a tepid, courteous offering of feeling, ruling out the disappointments and scenes which had mostly originated with her—that was another matter altogether. ("Too Much Happiness" 252)

The Russian version of the same passage differs from the original in some significant respects pertaining to how the characters' relationship is presented to the readers:

> [В]опрос, устроит ли ее его богатство, был, конечно, шуткой. Но был и другой вопрос: устроит ли ее холодноватое, учтивое выражение чувств, совершенно исключающее скандалы и сцены, которые она, случалось, устраивала? ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [The question whether she would be satisfied with his wealth was, of course, a joke. But there was another question: would she be satisfied with a coldish, courteous expression of feelings, completely ruling out scandals and scenes that she, as it sometimes happened, started?]

First of all, Stepanov's use of the active verb "устраивала" [started]—instead of the vague "originated with her"—clearly lays the blame on Sophia and her indiscretions, at the same time erasing any indication of Maxsim's fault, as if he had no part in the couple's disagreements. Moreover, the Russian translator replaces "disappointments" with "скандалы" [scandals], once again overlooking any signs of the protagonist's inner tension and instead portraying her as simply melodramatic and unreasonable.

Stepanov continues to insist on this unfavourable characterization even after Sophia suddenly opens up about Maxsim's selfishness and vanity—qualities that she has long been aware of but kept silent about, not daring to admit his imperfections:

> Spoiled and envious, actually. A while ago he wrote to her that certain writings of his own had begun to be attributed to her, because of the accident of the names. He had received a letter from a literary agent

> in Paris, starting off by addressing him as Dear Madam. Alas he had forgotten, he said, that she was a novelist as well as a mathematician. What a disappointment for the Parisian that he was neither. Merely a scholar, and a man. Indeed a great joke. ("Too Much Happiness" 254)

Here, Sophia's initially idealistic perception of Maxsim turns to negative, as she realizes that his revolt against his fiancée's fame, which he sees as taking away from his own privilege, borders on a personal accusation against her and is thinly disguised as a joke. She can easily see through his pretenses and responds with habitual quiet bitterness, acknowledging his attempt at witticism at the end of the passage. However, Stepanov, while starting the paragraph from Sophia's perspective, quickly reorients it towards the male character:

> Испорченный и завистливый. Некоторое время назад он написал ей, что какие-то его сочинения стали приписывать ей из-за совпадения фамилий в латинской транскрипции. Кроме того, он получил письмо от ее литературного агента в Париже, начинающееся с обращения «мадам». Ах да, — писал он, — я же совсем забыл, что Вы не только математик, но и нувеллистка. Как, наверное, был разочарован этот парижанин, узнав, что мсье Ковалевский не писатель. Всего лишь ученый, да к тому же мужчина. Очень смешно. ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [Spoiled and envious. Some time ago, he wrote to her that some of his writings started to be attributed to her because of the name coincidence in the Latin transcription. Besides, he received a letter from her literary agent in Paris that started with addressing him as "Madam." Ah yes,—he wrote,—I have completely forgotten that you are not only a mathematician, but also a novel authoress. How disappointed that Parisian must have been to find out that monsieur Kovalevsky is not a writer. Just a scholar, and a man on top of that. Very funny].

As the translator switches from free indirect discourse to direct speech (and from "he" [он] to "I" [я]), the narrative perspective shifts from Sophia to Maxsim, giving him the voice to speak and silencing her in the process. Moreover, Stepanov reintroduces the contested name as Maxsim's own by referring to him as "monsieur Kovalevsky" [мсье Ковалевский]. At the same time, his deliberate use of the word "нувеллистка"—which is not only an unusual, outdated spelling of "novel author" but also a feminine form (that translates more accurately to "authoress")—implies derision, both towards Sophia herself and her literary aspirations as an inferior form of activity. Taken together, these seemingly minor changes indicate the translator's (possibly unconscious) bias against the female protagonist and his tendency to merge his narrative voice with the male perspective in the story.

The translator's tendency to diminish and misrepresent his heroine finds its climax in the central episode on the train, when Sophia is contemplating the lives of women around her and thinking how (and whether) they could be changed by the burgeoning female liberation movement and the new opportunities she herself has been a part of:

> How terrible it is, Sophia thinks. How terrible is the lot of women. And what might this woman say if Sophia told her about the new struggles, women's battle for votes and places at the universities? She might say, But that is not as God wills. ("Too Much Happiness" 294)

Here, Stepanov transforms the heroine's resentment about the limitations of female fate into her contempt of women themselves, contradicting Munro's original text:

> Как все это ужасно, думает Софья. Как ужасно большинство женщин. Интересно, что ответила бы эта крестьянка, если бы Софья начала рассказывать ей про новые веяния, про борьбу женщин за право голоса, за работу в университетах? Наверное, сказала бы что-нибудь вроде "на все воля Божья, а это Ему не угодно." ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [How terrible all this is, Sophia thinks. How terrible are most women. She wonders what this peasant would say if Sophia started telling her about the new developments, about the women's fight for the right to vote, to work at universities? Probably, she would say something like 'Everything is God's will, and this is not what He wills'"].

The translator's decision to change the character's statement from the compassionate "How terrible is the lot of women" to the harsh and judgmental "How terrible are most women" distorts Sophia's perception of women, misrepresenting Munro's most feminist heroine as unsympathetic, backward-thinking, and snobbish; instead of sharing the unknown woman's pain, she shows only disgust. Stepanov's use of the word "крестьянка" [peasant] instead of "woman" also puts an unnecessary emphasis on the social class, which makes the story's protagonist sound condescending and completely unaware of her own privilege. These transformations, while revealing the translator's project and position, undermine both the author's

characterization of Sophia and the character's entire journey and thus can only be seen as problematic.

Similar choices can be traced in the episode where Sophia is thinking about her own acceptance by other women in her social circle and their response to her unusual status as a female professor:

> She must stop this litany of resentment. The wives of Stockholm invited her into their houses, to the most important parties and intimate dinners. They praised her and showed her off. They welcomed her child. She might have been an oddity there, but she was an oddity that they approved of. Something like a multilingual parrot … No, that was not fair. They had respect for what she did, and many of them believed that more women should do such things and someday they would. ("Too Much Happiness" 267)

In approaching this passage, Stepanov follows the same pattern of diminishing Sophia's struggles and trivializing her feelings:

> Впрочем, пора прекратить эту литанию обид. Жены ученых в Стокгольме приглашали ее к себе: и на лучшие званые вечера, и на ужины в узком кругу. Они хвалили ее и даже выставляли напоказ. Тепло приняли ее дочку. Может, Софья и для них была курьезом, но таким, который они приняли и одобрили? Что-то вроде попугая-полиглота … Нет, это несправедливо. Они с уважением относились к тому, чем занималась Софья, и многие из них считали, что женщинам надо последовать ее примеру и когда-нибудь так и будет. ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [Still, she must stop this litany of grievances. The wives of scientists in Stockholm invited her to their houses: both to the best soirees and private dinners. They praised her and even showed her off. They gave her daughter a warm welcome. Maybe Sophia was a curiosity for them, but the kind that they accepted and endorsed? Something like a polyglot parrot … No, this is unfair. They treated what Sophia did with respect and many of them thought that women should follow her example and that someday it would happen].

Here, Sophia's rightful indignation about the opportunities unavailable to her as a woman is reduced to an unsounded emotional complaint—Stepanov's use of the word "обиды" [grievances] is less strong and does not seem justified in comparison with "resentment," which could be more accurately translated as "возмущение" or "негодование". The translator's choice of "курьез" [curiosity/amusement/absurdity] to describe the character's unusual social standing implies a stronger degree of contempt and "othering" than the original "oddity," adding to the Russian text's rather negative and limited portrayal of the great mathematician. Finally, the grammatical transformation introduced in the translated version casts doubt on the very fact of the heroine's acceptance in her new home country, as Stepanov changes Sophia's statement into a question. Overall, his approach plays up the protagonist's uncertainties and self-negativity, at the same time undervaluing her achievements and her inner complexity and significantly weakening the feminist message of her story.

Confrontation: Cultural Biases

Another interesting aspect of the translation project is the translator's personal response to the representation of the heroine's cultural affiliations in the text. For Stepanov, any reference to the Russian language or culture becomes a matter of contention, and he goes to great lengths to state (and overstate) Sophia's Russianness, always framing it in the best possible light. In his version, the story's cultural connection to Russia is presented as an essential (and invariably positive) dimension of Munro's original text.

In this respect, Sophia's contradictory feelings about her country and mother tongue become an important point of departure in translation. Munro is consistently making it clear that her heroine, while resenting Russia's politics, is still nostalgic about her childhood memories and finds a safe shelter in her language. This becomes particularly obvious when she rediscovers a piece of her lost homeland in her relationship with Maxsim, a fellow exiled Russian intellectual:

> A torrent of jokes and questions followed, an immediate understanding, a rich gabble of Russian, as if the languages of Western Europe had been flimsy formal cages in which they had been too long confined, or paltry substitutes for true human speech. ("Too Much Happiness" 248)

Stepanov does not stop at conveying Munro's metaphor of a foreign language as a constricting cage but elaborates on it, equating the Russian language with freedom and happiness:

> *Бесконечный* поток шуток и вопросов, понимание с полуслова, *а главное — свобода и счастье болтать по-русски*. Им показалось, что *все остальные* европейские языки были клетками, в которых они просидели *целую вечность*, жалкой заменой подлинной человеческой речи. ("Слишком много счастья")

> [The *endless* torrent of jokes and questions, finishing each other's sentences, *but most importantly—the freedom and joy of chatting in Russian*. It seemed to them that *the rest* of European languages were cages where they had been kept *for eternity*, a pitiful substitute for real human speech].

The additions introduced by the translator in this paragraph (italicized in the above quote and back translation) do not only stress the special meaning of the Russian language for the story's characters, but also reflect Stepanov's personal perception of his language and culture as superior. However, unlike the translation, the original text makes a point of highlighting critical intonations in Sophia's inner monologue about her long-lost home. Thus, in the scene where the heroine thinks back to the memoir and the novel she had written, she does acknowledge her mixed feelings about the past, referring to her despair and frustration along with happy memories:

> She had written the recollections of her life at Palibino in a glow of love for everything lost, things once despaired of as well as things once treasured. She had written it far from home when that home and her sister were gone. And *Nihilist Girl* came out of pain for her country, a burst of patriotism and perhaps a feeling that she had not been paying enough attention, with her mathematics and the tumults of her life. ("Too Much Happiness" 281)

Here the protagonist reveals a painful mix of love, resentment, and nostalgia that comes from not being able to reconcile her powerful sense of belonging and her profound disappointment with her country's flaws. It is significant then that Stepanov chooses to ignore this negative side of Sophia's memories—in his version, there is no mention of her despair, and her pain is only attributed to being away from home:

> Она написала воспоминания о жизни в Палибино, поддавшись порыву ностальгии по всему бесконечно дорогому и безнадежно утраченному. Написала вдали от дома, когда и дом, и сестра навеки остались в прошлом. А «Нигилистка» родилась от боли за свою страну, от вспышки патриотизма и, наверное, еще от чувства вины за все, на что она не обращала внимания, вечно занятая математикой и перипетиями своей личной жизни. ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [She wrote her memories about life in Palibino, succumbing to an outburst of nostalgia for everything endlessly precious and hopelessly lost. Wrote away from home, when both her home and sister were already gone for good. And *Nihilist Girl* was born out of her pain for her country, the spark of patriotism and, probably, the feeling of guilt for everything she had not paid attention to, always busy with mathematics and the entanglements of her personal life].

In the Russian translation, the attention is redirected instead towards the heroine's feeling of guilt for losing connection with her homeland. Moreover, the distractions that prevented her from staying in touch are described in a way that downplays the difficulties Sophia had to overcome: the use of a slightly ironic and deliberately theatrical word "перипетии" [entanglements/adventures] combined with the addition of "personal life" [личной жизни], erases the negative connotations of "tumults" and reduces her political, academic, and financial troubles to romantic affairs. As a result, it seems that the translator does not only underestimate the depth of the protagonist's feeling of displacement in his attempt to embellish Sophia's (and the reader's) perception of Russianness—he also sounds almost accusing of his character's insufficient patriotism.

At one point, Sophia herself acknowledges that her own view of what it means to be Russian may not be reliable: she understands that her privileged class status makes her ignorant of how the other half lives. Still, the qualities she identifies as "typically Russian" mostly come across as negative in her account. As she watches Swedish peasant families on the train, she fails to recognize the same manners and behaviours she used to see in Russia as a child—and then she has to admit that both Swedish reserve and Russian excessiveness would be equally strange to her now:

> But these are not Russian peasants. None of them are drunk, or garrulous, or laughing. They are stiff as boards … She knows nothing about them. But what does she really know about Russian peasants, the peasants at Palibino, when it comes to that? They were always putting on a show for their betters. ("Too Much Happiness" 291)

This passage reveals Sophia's own class prejudice, as well as her ability to recognize her privilege. It also questions the reality of her nostalgic memories and shows the extent of her alienation from her homeland and its people. The Russian translator softens the picture by making Sophia's description less critical and generally portraying the Russians in a more positive light:

> Правда, эти люди совсем не походили на русских крестьян. Не пьют, не болтают, не

> смеются. Не люди, а какие-то деревяшки … Впрочем, что она о них знает? Хотя если так рассуждать, то что она знает о русских крестьянах, тех же палибинских, например? Перед господами они всегда разыгрывали спектакли. ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [To be honest, these people were not like Russian peasants at all. They don't drink, don't chat, don't laugh. Not people, but wooden planks … Yet, what does she know about them? Though if you think about it, what does she know about the Russian peasants, the ones from Palibino, for instance? For the masters, they always put on shows].

Here, Stepanov's shift towards more neutral expressions ("chat" [болтают] instead of being "garrulous" and "drink" [пьют] instead of being "drunk") serves to normalize behaviours that Sophia finds off-putting, making the reasons for her detachment less visible and less understandable. Hence, the translator's intention to minimize any criticisms of his culture in the translated text results in taking away from the characterization of the protagonist and her emotional state at this point in the narrative.

The translator's cultural bias becomes particularly pronounced in his treatment of Russia's discrimination of women, as described by Sophia when she tries to explain to professor Weierstrass and his sisters that the only way she could leave her country to study in Germany was through a fictitious marriage:

> Young people—young women—who wanted to study abroad were compelled to go through with this deception because no Russian woman who was unmarried could leave the country without their parents' consent … What a barbarous law. Yes. Russian. ("Too Much Happiness" 275)

Although this passage utilizes free indirect discourse to relay the conversation between the characters, it clearly combines two voices—Sophia's careful and somewhat hesitant explanation and her audience's incredulous response. When the listener calls the idea "barbarous," the protagonist unequivocally agrees, and her emphasis on the repeated word "Russian" sounds as a quiet accusation and a meaningful comment on the social injustice she herself has been subjected to. However, Stepanov, in his translation, complicates things by refusing to convey Sophia's quiet but decisive judgement:

> В России молодым людям, точнее, молодым женщинам, желающим учиться за границей, приходится прибегать к подобному обману, потому что незамужняя девица не имеет права покидать страну без согласия родителей … Какой варварский закон! Да-да. Русский закон. ("Слишком много счастья")
>
> [In Russia, young people, or to be more precise, young women, who wish to study abroad have to resort to this deception, because an unmarried maiden has no right to leave the country without her parents' consent … What a barbarous law! Yes, yes. A Russian law].

Elimination of the pauses marked by the dashes here undermines the impression that Sophia is speaking emotionally, obviously torn between her national loyalty and her profound convictions but eager to explain her position. The use of the condescendingly-sounding word "девица" [maiden] finds itself in stark contrast to the original's consistent repetition of "woman"/"women" and somewhat distorts the character's individual manner of speech, making her sound less respectful of women and more accepting of the societal norms she is rebelling against. The double repetition "yes, yes" [да-да] introduced by the translator sounds hasty and less confident than Sophia's unambiguous agreement in the original, and the addition of "закон" [law] redirects attention from "Russian" to "law," to some extent normalizing the injustice faced by the protagonist. Overall, the translator's interventions in rendering this dialogue—as well as other culturally-marked signifying zones of the text—serve to shift the narrative tone towards weakening Sophia's resentment and minimizing her non-conformance.

Conclusion: Implications of the Translator's Agency

As can be seen from the above, Stepanov's treatment of the story's heroine, the feminist significance of her narrative, and her complex negotiation of her Russianness are profoundly determined by his own cultural self-identification and his personal views on the nature and function of literary translation. Instead of accentuating the feminist potential of Munro's text, the Russian translator consistently downplays the main character's complexity and shifts away from her female perspective, occasionally veering into male-oriented narration up to the point of demonstrating open condescension towards women. From the cultural perspective, he is actively trying to construct a nostalgic image of Russia through Sophia's memories, thus enforcing an idealistically positive cultural connection on Munro's story and obscuring any sociopolitical criticism expressed or implied by the narrator/protagonist.

In Stepanov's case, these choices are supported (if not pre-conditioned) by the dominant discourse on the superiority of the Russian culture and the continuing prevalence of patriarchal values in the Russian society. The

fact that the translator's chosen position is aligned with the common discursive perspective on Munro's work and the function of literary translation can be evidenced by the overwhelmingly positive evaluation of Stepanov's translation in a review published by the literary scholar Olga Fedosyuk, where the reviewer herself focuses primarily on the Russian connections and influences in the author's short stories and disregards the importance of women-centred themes and motifs (see Fedosyuk). Accordingly, both the Russian translation of "Too Much Happiness" and its Russian-language critical reception unquestioningly reflect and reinforce the same (albeit one-sided) reading of the original, paring it down to what the translator and the critic consider acceptable rather than attempting to engage with the narrative's inherent difference.

As a result, it can be argued that the translated text does attain relative autonomy in Berman's understanding of the term and that the agency of the translator is exercised completely in line with the expectations of the respective cultural horizon—although both transformations occur at the expense of the character's truth and the story's integrity. Therefore, as this case study shows, even in the presence of a consistent translator's project and a clearly defined translating position, the true purpose of the translator's agency, as envisioned by contemporary translation theories, cannot be realized unless the translator is ready to work against the grain of one's own cultural conventions and personal biases.

References

Berman, Antoine. *Towards a Translation Criticism: John Donne*, translated and edited by Francoise Massardier-Kenney, Kent State UP, 2009.

Butenina, Evgenia. (Бутенина, Евгения). "Чеховское начало в прозе Элис Манро." ["The Chekhovian Heritage in Alice Munro's Fiction"]. *Новый филологический вестник*, № 1(40) [*Novyi Filologicheskiy Vestnik (New Philological Journal)*, no. 1(40)], 2017, pp. 182-189, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/chehovskoe-nachalo-v-proze-elis-manro.

Duffy, Dennis. "Alice Munro's Narrative Historicism: 'Too Much Happiness.'" *American Review of Canadian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2015, pp. 196-207, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02722011.2015.1043565.

DuPlessis, Rachel Blau. *Writing beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers.* Indiana UP, 1985.

Fedosyuk, Olga. (Федосюк, Ольга). "Манро Элис. Слишком много счастья. Новеллы. Пер. А.Д. Степанов. СПб.: Азбука, Азбука Аттикус, 2014. – 352 с.; Манро Элис. Беглянка. Пер. Е. Петровой. СПб.: Азбука, Азбука Аттикус, 2014. – 352 с.; Манро Элис. Дороже самой жизни. Пер. Т. Боровиковой. СПб.: Азбука, Азбука Аттикус, 2014. – 320 с. (обзор книг)." ["Munro Alice. Too Much Happiness. Translated into Russian by A.D. Stepanov. Spb: Azbuka, Azbuka Attikus, 2014. – 352 p. Munro Alice. Runaway. Translated into Russian by E. Petrova. Spb: Azbuka, Azbuka Attikus, 2014. – 352 p. Munro Alice. Dear Life. Translated into Russian by T. Borovikova. Spb: Azbuka, Azbuka Attikus, 2014. – 320 p. (book survey)"]. *Канадский ежегодник*, № 18 [*Kanadskiy Yezhegodnik (Canadian Annual Journal)*, no. 18], 2014, pp. 138-144, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/manro-elis-slishkom-mnogo-schastya-novelly-per-a-d-stepanov-spb-azbuka-azbuka-attikus-2014-352-s-manro-elis-beglyanka-per-e-petrovoy-spb-azbuka/viewer.

Flotow, Luise von. *Translation and Gender: Translating in the 'Era of Feminism'.* U of Ottawa P, 1997.

Goodman, Lizbeth. *Literature and Gender (Approaching Literature)*. Routledge, 1996.

Lotbinière-Harwood, Susanne de. "The Body Bilingual." *Re-belle et infidèle: la traduction comme pratique de réécriture au féminin / The Body Bilingual: Translation as a Re-writing in the Feminine*. Éditions du Remue-ménage / Women's Press, 1991, pp. 89-168.

Munro, Alice. "Too Much Happiness." *Too Much Happiness.* Penguin Canada, 2010, pp. 246-303.

---. "Слишком много счастья." *Слишком много счастья*. Переводчик: Андрей Степанов. Kindle ed., Азбука-Аттикус, 2014. / "Too Much Happiness." *Too Much Happiness.* Translated by Andrey Stepanov, Kindle Ed., Azbuka-Attikus, 2014.

Potanina, Natalia. (Потанина, Наталия). "Русская тема в художественной прозе Э. Манро." ["Russian Theme in Artistic Prose of A. Munro"]. *Вестник Тамбовского университета*, № 8(136) [*Vestnik Tambovskogo Universiteta (Tambov University Journal)*, no. 8(136)], 2014, pp. 122-127, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/russkaya-tema-v-hudozhestvennoy-proze-e-manro.

Simon, Sherry. *Gender in Translation: Cultural Identity and the Politics of Transmission*. Routledge, 1996.

Stepanov, Andrey. (Степанов, Андрей). "Чеховские мотивы в рассказах Элис Манро." ["Chekhov's Themes in Alice Munro's Stories"]. *Мир русского слова*, № 2 [*Mir Russkogo Slova (World of Russian Word)*, no. 2], 2014, pp. 85-90, https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/chehovskie-motivy-v-rasskazah-elis-manro/viewer.

Tymoczko, Maria. *Enlarging Translation, Empowering Translators*. St. Jerome, 2007.

Zsizsmann, Éva. "Escaping Flimsy Formal Cages: Alice Munro's *Too Much Happiness* as Fictionalised Biography." *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2011, pp. 201-210, https://digilib.phil.muni.cz/bitstream/handle/11222.digilib/118150/1_BrnoStudiesEnglish_37-2011-2_17.pdf?sequence=1.

The Role of Kiswahili in Furthering an Afrocentric Ethos

John Mũkonzi Mũsyoki[1]

[1] Department of Drama, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: musyoki@ualberta.ca

Abstract

This paper examines how Kiswahili as a major African language promotes African agency. The theoretical framework of the inquiry situates language at the centre of the attempt to promote an Afrocentric ethos within the context of decolonization while speaking to the dominant national identity in Africa. The arguments that shape and propel this paper invite us to consider how linguistic reclamation can help us subvert the dominant perception of the position of the African within the growing discourse of globality.

Keywords: Afrocentric Philosophy, African Agency, Postcolonial Identity, Decolonization

Introduction

This paper examines the role the Kiswahili language plays in the formation and propagation of African agency. The theoretical framework of the inquiry situates language at the centre of the attempt to promote an Afrocentric ethos within the context of decolonization while speaking to the dominant national identity in Africa. Using Molefi Kete Asante's notion of Afrocentric philosophy featured in *An Afrocentric Manifesto*, Ngugi wa Thiong'o's campaign for linguistic decolonization in *Decolonizing the Mind* and Ali Mazrui's probe into socio-political significance of Kiswahili language in *Swahili State*, we will delve into the possibilities Kiswahili offers as an organic African language in nurturing African agency.

The aspiration for an Afrocentric ethos aligns with the need to liberate African agency from Eurocentric linguistic modalities dominant sociologically, economically and politically. I argue that since Kiswahili developed as an African language, it reaches contextually as both a national language (in Kenya and Tanzania) and a regional language (East and Central Africa) while offering a strong possibility to counter colonial linguistic hegemony. The integrational character of Kiswahili offers a possibility of promoting an identity bigger and more relevant than the dominant national identity. However, this is not an endorsement of Kiswahili as the most important African language but an exemplification of how a language that is 'African' can foster a strong sense of African agency.

The main focus here is the idea of an African language. It is important above all to acknowledge that language nurtures an appreciative sensibility in which we see, accept, validate and appraise ourselves as key participants in our own reality. It is through language that we communicate within our communities, with our inner self and with others outside our communities and geographies. We rely on language to articulate ourselves through naming and description of things, ideas and our environs. Therefore, the crux of this paper invites us to consider how linguistic reclamation can help us subvert the dominant perception of the position of the African. We ought to ponder the quintessential role of African languages in furthering interventions which possess (promote) an Afrocentric ethos. This inquiry aims to challenge the current African identity and reality in light of the geo-political factors within the expanding discourse of globality.

Excavating African Agency

Asante advocates for a paradigm shift in how we think, perceive and talk about the African identity. Core to his proposition is the question of African agency. He posits that "Afrocentricity is a paradigmatic intellectual perspective that privileges African agency within the context of African history and culture transcontinentally and trans-

generationally" (*Manifesto* 2). Asante broaches the broad spectrum upon which African agency falls. He instantiates that agency should mean the conception of

> a human being who is capable of acting independently in his or her own best interest. [Thus] *agency* itself is the ability to provide the psychological and cultural resources necessary for the advancement of human freedom. In situations of 'un-freedom,' oppression, racial repression, the active idea within the concept of agent assumes the primary position. (*Notes* 2)

Asante insists that it is crucial to make African agency "our object of inquiry [in order] to recognize the fragility of African agency in systems of social, economic, political and cultural hegemony" (*Liberating* 646). The underpinning argument here is, the impact of European colonialism should be acknowledged as an integral facet in the dialogue about the African experience. We have to question the locus and the basis of the ideas that have shaped the African experience. This attempt will help distinguish propagation of 're-colonization' of Africa from 'reclamation' of cultures that occupy the region that has come to be regarded as Africa.

Colonialism continues to shape the African experience and language occupies a central position in the questions that emerge. We cannot ignore the fact that national identity is the dominant form of identity in Africa today. The phenomenon of Africans being affiliated with a particular national identity prods us to investigate the ramifications that undermine the progression of indigenous cultures in the region that has come to be regarded as Africa in furtherance of an 'authentic' identity. Modernity plays a key role in the impediments that arise while trying to maintain a notion of African agency that is not shaped by European hegemony. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point out that modernity is

> fundamentally about conquest [and as] a discourse, [it] enabled the large-scale regulation of human identity both within Europe and its colonies. The emergence of modernity is conterminous with the emergence of Eurocentrism, and the European dominance of the world effected through imperial expansion. (161)

As Africans, we ought to be cognizant of the history and ideology that has impacted the modern-day conception of African identity. Prudence in the questions we raise ensures we are working towards a proper identification and definition of African agency; within the socio-cultural matrixes that continue to shape, produce, propel and propagate discussions on what we now regard as 'being an African subject.'

We somewhat have to excavate African agency from the unprivileged position in which it is situated. William Brown and Sophie Harman probe into the quintessential questions and considerations one should pose when examining the constrained nature of African agency. They ask:

> [w]hat does African agency look like and how can we understand it? It is not an effort to deny the very obviously tight corners which constrain Africa's choices within the international system. These constraints, whether in the form of great powers, structures of economic disadvantage or disabling discourses, are real and persistent. (2)

It is then essential to acknowledge that understanding African agency entails a probe into the conditions that have shaped the conception of the African position as disadvantaged, unprivileged and subordinate.

The Conception of Africa: Language, Ideology and History

History

Asante reminds us that "[w]hen Europe colonized Africa, it also colonized the language used to speak about Africa" (*Manifesto* 28). If we are to establish a legitimate understanding of African agency, we thus have to liberate it from the colonial ideological entanglement. Ideological thought played a crucial part in the colonial domination of Africa. Ideology orients a person or a group of people and shapes the frame of thinking, action and perception. Some ideologies are imposed while others are adopted. Within the context of colonialism, most of the ideologies that shaped (and continue to shape) Africa were imposed. Imperialism, as a colonial ideology, played a big part in the inception and on-going conception of the African identity. Mazrui historically elucidates that "Europe's greatest service to the people of Africa was not Western civilization which is under siege, or even Christianity, which is on the defensive. Europe's supreme gift was the gift of African identity" (*Thought* 284). Mazrui instantiates that the scramble and partition of Africa led to the "invention of Africa" (*Thought* 284). For a more precise analysis of the African identity, we should examine the political and cultural effect of the contact (or contract) between the African people and the other cultures through history. The questions emanating from the examination of the history of culture, politics, ideology and identity within the context of inter/intra-communal contact will bring us closer to understanding the conception of the African consciousness.

African Consciousness

Before the coming of Europeans, Arabs had already established a relationship with Africans mostly through trade and the spread of Islam. Mazrui identifies that in comparison, "Islam and the Arabs awakened Africa's Black consciousness, but a continental identity was still dormant" (*Thought* 284). It is the European colonialism that led to the ideation of the Africanization. The European conceptualization of the African status was based on pigmentation as a connotation of inferiority. Mazrui emphasizes that "[t]he primary differentiation between Arab and non-Arab was not skin colour, but language and culture. It was Europeans who raised the barrier of pigmentation higher in Africa" (*Thought* 285). The differentiation introduced by Europeans promoted the idea of subjugating Africans. Mazrui reiterates that

> it took European conceptualization and cartography to turn Africa into a continent. To Europeans, 'black' was not merely descriptive; it was also judgmental. Arabs alerted the people of Sub-Saharan Africa that they were black. Europe tried to convince Black people that they were inferior. (*Thought* 278)

European occupation was disruptive both to the relations between people and the pre-existing fluid geographical interactions. The Europeans interrupted the pre-existing relations and mobilities in order to advocate for their definition of African identity. Mazrui highlights that European imperialists "decided where one continent ended, and another began. For Africa, Europeans decided that our continent ended at the Red Sea rather than on the Persian/Arabian Gulf" (*Thought* 284). The colonial disruption then reshaped the relations Africans had amongst themselves because geographical boundaries marked spheres of influence apportioned to different European powers. Territorial boundaries immensely diminished the primacy of Indigenous linguistic cultural modality as the defining aspect in the emergence of the 'African subject' since the geographic restrictions proffered stringent linguistic impositions. By so doing, Europeans designated the parameters of what it means to be African; a crucial aspect of African consciousness.

Language and Ideology

Ngugi wa Thiong'o identifies the linguistic detriment in the African continent as a result of the European conquest. He reminds us that, "The contention started a hundred years ago when in 1884 the capitalist powers of Europe sat in Berlin and carved an entire continent with a multiplicity of peoples, cultures, and languages into different colonies" (4). The underpinning statement presented by partition and scramble for Africa is the assumption that Africa was 'somehow' a 'clean slate'. Ngugi highlights the commensurate linguistic impact of European domination when he says, "Berlin in 1884 saw the division of Africa into the different languages of the European powers. African countries, as colonies and even today as neo-colonies, came to define themselves in terms of the languages of Europe" (5). Today we have linguistic categorizations of Africa like Francophone Africa, Portuguese-speaking Africa or Anglophone Africa. European linguistic modes dominate the formal cultural and economic regional infrastructure in the Sub-Saharan African states. The African national states are an invention of colonialism. National identities are outcomes of colonial territories. Colonies promoted a colonial agenda, and thus there is something problematic and irreversible about modern African statehood. That is why many African states have European languages as the national languages designated in the areas of education, trade and technology. Therefore, to eliminate the problem, we have to deracinate the basis of using colonial languages to fashion and propagate an African identity.

Ngugi substantiates that "The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized" (16). Linguistic colonialism thus inhibits the extent to which Indigenous Africans were enmeshed in their indigenous culture. The Eurocentrism acculturated the African colonial and postcolonial subjects using European linguistic modalities to promote the agenda of 'modernizing' Africa. Modernity (through colonialism and neo-colonialism) continues to have an abrasive impact on the true African identity. This abrasion leads to what Asante calls "the fragility of African Agency" (*Liberating* 646). We need to extricate African agency from the oppressive linguistic apparatus. Asante insists that, "[t]he key method is by distinguishing between the language of centeredness and the less precise language of decenteredness in relation to culture" (*Liberating* 648). Language from a socio-cultural perspective determines what (who) is at the center and what (who) is at the periphery. Ngugi remains unwavering on the issue of colonial decentralization through linguistic imposition. He corroborates that "[t]o control a people's culture is to control their tools of self-definition in relationship to others" (16). Colonialism in this regard promotes cultural disruption through the "the deliberate undervaluing of [the] people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the colonizer" (16). We cannot establish an influential and instrumental bearing on African agency without interrogating the essence of language in the realization of African agency.

We have to begin by asking, from a linguistic perspective, how can we centre African agency? This question brings us closer to an understanding of the

connection between language and agency within the African context. Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin point out that in colonial discourse, agency "refers to the ability to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power" (10). The current linguistic phenomenon (multilingual nation states) depicts the tussle between the 'colonially purported African identity' and the 'actual African identity'. We then go on to ask: which languages are African, what makes them African and how do these languages foster an African sensibility? Ngugi mentions that the link between language and its culture is organic. Peremptorily, African culture can best exist and grow through its rightful conduit; an African language. Ngugi propounds that language contains "the collective memory bank of a people's experience in history. Culture is almost indistinguishable from the language that makes possible its genesis, growth, banking, articulation and its transmission" (15). An African language is thus the best 'aqueduct' for African agency. It both appraises the culture and ensures the transmission of knowledge. Asante invites us to challenge and thus dislodge cultural modalities that undermine African Agency. Hence, maintaining an Afrocentric lens ensures that "the manner in which the acquisition of knowledge is legitimized and then disseminated will affect an agency analysis that strips from oppressors the right to establish norms of human relations" (*Liberating* 650). Language is thus resourceful in debunking the colonial undertones contained in European languages in the transmission to the African context.

The reason we need to pose the question of African languages is identified by Ngugi in his examination of the impact of a colonial language. He poses the vital question of how a given language perpetuates individual reflection. He avers: "Since culture is a product of the history of a people which it in turn reflects, the child [in the colony] was now being exposed exclusively to a culture that was a product of a world external to himself. He was made to stand outside himself to look at himself" (17). The linguistic colonialism described by Ngugi reminds us that, when we do not clothe our cultures with our language, we inevitably displace ourselves. So, how can African languages bring us closer to ourselves as African agents? In his probe of centre and periphery on linguistic terms, wa Thiong'o proposes the need to dismantle the metaphysical empire that exists through the perpetuation of an image of Africa fashioned by Eurocentrism. Kiswahili thus offers a possibility to counter the dominant linguistic domination of European languages in the modern African identity. In 2019, Rwanda officially accepted Kiswahili as an official language thus expanding the use of the language in the East African region. Kiswahili is now spoken as an official language in Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda. Additionally, the language was also adopted as an official language by African Union (AU) East African Community (EAC) and Southern African Development Community (SADC) thus raising its status as the most widely spoken African language. Within the context of globality Kiswahili has been acknowledged as a Pan-African medium thus functioning as a reliable linguistic modality in furthering an Afrocentric ethos. The big contest to consider now is the ways Kiswahili can help counter the metaphysical empire in liberating the African mind from a European definition and propagation of Africanness.

The Case of Kiswahili in Fostering an Afrocentric Agenda: Kiswahili versus the Metaphysical Empire

John Mugane states that the history of Kiswahili is embedded in a geo-political stretch called the Swahili coast. He accounts that "[i]t is impossible to say when the mixture that became a Swahili language began to form, but we know something about the setting in which the language developed" (17). Trade and contact with the outside world greatly influenced the later development and spread of the language. Mugane instantiates that

> [t]he word for the language, *Kiswahili,* is derived from the Arabic *sahil,* meaning 'coast,' 'edge,' or 'border'—a place—and *sawahil,* meaning 'Swahili country.' Swahili is thus the language of the prime Indian Ocean coastal strip stretching from Mogadishu in Somalia to Sofala in Mozambique and reaching out to all the adjoining islands (Pemba, Zanzibar, Lamu near the coast, and the Seychelles and Comoros farther offshore) as far as northern Madagascar—a distance of about 2,000 miles from the mainland. (17)

Heterogeneity is a defining factor of the language's origin. This foundational feature of bringing different cultures together poses the possibility to have a strong appeal (in the featured regions of Africa and beyond) in the aspiration for a broader Pan-African sensibility. Historically, Kiswahili culture presents itself as a welcoming culture. Mugane asserts that the language "has been the language of everybody [for instance] slaves from the nyika, the locally born, traders, porters, laborers, soldiers, and rulers, as well as diplomats, colonizers, and missionaries from far away" (20). And even as times changed and mobilities livened, "[b]y speaking Swahili, everyone who went to the East African littoral could choose to become Swahili, and many decided to do just that" (20). As a language that melds well with different cultures while nested in a culture (Swahili culture) that is welcoming and accommodating, it is a plausible channel to pursue an Afrocentric agenda. However, the attempt to centre African agency from a linguistic

perspective ought to consider the influence of colonialism within the context of global coloniality.

Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni notes that in the perspective of 'global coloniality' the metaphysical empire dominates. He claims that the metaphysical "is better understood in terms of how it worked on the minds of the colonized in the process adversely affecting the entire mental universe of the colonized through such technologies as epistemicides, linguicides, alienation, and cultural imperialism" (100). Ndlovu-Gatsheni thus raises a poignant philosophical question on how language among other cultural modalities promote colonialism. He notes that "The consequence has been the re-making of the African people in the image of the colonial conqueror. Metaphysical empire even invented new political identities such as 'native'" (100). Achille Mbembe points out that the colonial empire in forging the various definitions such as 'a native' is primarily seeking "to establish [the] radical otherness of the colonized individual" (236). Colonial terminologies enforce the peripherality of the colonized. In these situations, when an entity or individual is defined, a commensurate meaning/placement/connotation is put in effect. It shapes how the defined entity or individual relates to and is perceived by the definer. This relationship then (re)iterates a relational hegemony. Therefore, we need to interrogate the language used to philosophize, describe, legitimate, identify and address the African experience.

Mazrui probes into the philosophical basis of language in the African context, propounding that "more important than the philosophy of language in Africa is the language of philosophy. Colonial and post-colonial ideologies are disproportionately in European languages" (*Thought* 17). The crux in Mazrui's proposition is the need to realize that "cultural philosophy is, in the first instance, conceived in indigenous languages [while] ideological philosophy in Black Africa is disproportionately in European languages" (*Thought* 16). Kiswahili offers a possibility to triumph over the problem of language in the formation and propagation of the African thought. Mazrui gives an example of Julius Nyerere, explaining that

> Julius Nyerere is the most enterprising of African philosophers. He has philosophized extensively in both English and Kiswahili. He has tried to tear down the language barrier between ancestral cultural philosophy and the new ideological tendency of the post-colonial era. (*Thought* 22)

Mazrui contextualizes that in African societies, the relationship between European languages and African languages should entail the languages speaking to each other as equals. It should be a co-cultural transaction. Within the context of globalization, it is hard to avoid cross-cultural transactions. However, there should be fair terms upon which the various 'conduits' (such as language) of transaction are founded.

Kiswahili remains embedded in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa due to the basis of its origin along the region regarded as the Swahili Coast. The spread into the inland is rapid but still encounters challenges. Alamin Mazrui and Ali Mazrui probe into the relevance and reaches of Kiswahili language in Eastern and Central Africa. They mention that within an international context, Kiswahili is limited by popularity and not the embeddedness within the people of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. They postulate that:

> Much of the recent debate as to whether it is wise to make Kiswahili the official language of a country like Kenya or Uganda has rightly pointed out that Kiswahili is less of an international language than English. What has been overlooked is the simple fact that when all is said and done, Kiswahili is still the most international of all the indigenous languages of the African continent or of the Black people as a whole. Should Kiswahili be underestimated because it is less international than English? Or does it deserve to be developed further because it is the most internationally promising of all the native-born languages of Africa? (*Swahili* 100)

The formal refutation on the status of Kiswahili has always been a question of 'modernization'. Academics and policymakers grapple with the reaches of the language within a global spectrum. Alamin and Ali foreground that "Kiswahili is still the most international of all the indigenous languages of the African continent" (*Swahili* 100), exposing that the determiner of Kiswahili's globality is not the Afrocentric (net)workings but rather the reference to the West. Ali and Alamin illuminate that the disadvantage Kiswahili faces comes from the fact that "In reality, African countries have been aiming at two related processes, one that has sometimes been called 'modernization' and the other 'development'" (*Swahili* 105). The two phenomena pit Africa with the West since "'Modernization' has been seen as a process of change in the direction of narrowing the technical, scientific, and normative 'gap' between industrialized western countries and the Third World. Partly because the industrial revolution first took place in the West, Western civilization as a whole became the criteria for assessing and measuring 'modernity'" (*Swahili* 105). Alamin and Ali thus expound that if the point of reference is the West, then it means that "Kiswahili cannot be examined in isolation but has to be related to the impact of its European rivals" (*Swahili* 107). In other words, juxtaposing the position and essence of Kiswahili with English or French constraints the relevance of the language. This mentality

reduces the language merely to a rival rather than attributing it with the propagation of African agency.

Kiswahili has the potential to be the language of trade, education and technology. It can accommodate and further an Afrocentric sensibility because of its indigeneity in Africa, where it has spread and established strong links among the Eastern, Central and Southern African communities. Historical evidence dates the use of the language along the East African coast around the tenth century. Kiswahili has had a long history in East and Central Africa. The existence of the language subsumes the historical and cultural experiences that have defined the region. For instance, during the colonial period, it was a language of resistance. Alamin and Ali historicize that "three wars were particularly important in the history of Kiswahili in East Africa. One war was the Maji Maji Resistance in German Tanganyika, which broke out in 1905. The second important war for the evolution of Kiswahili was World War I, and the third was World War II" (*Swahili* 36). From a historical point of view in East and Central Africa, Kiswahili has promoted "inter-ethnic African unity" (*Swahili* 39) against colonial powers. It is unifying. Kiswahili fosters an Afrocentric consciousness and, on this accord, Alamin and Ali encourage that "Africans therefore must continue to strive to set their own terms of definition and discourse on the global arena" (*Swahili* 161).

On the science and technological front, Ali and Alamin assert that "[n]o language is inherently incapable of handling modern science and technology" (*Swahili* 25). They instantiate that Professor Mohammed Hyder, who was a Zoology lecturer at the University College in Nairobi, was able to write a scientific paper in Swahili "on the subject of 'The Effect of Thyroid Stimulating Hormone on the Radio-Active Iodine Uptake in Beef Thyroid Tissue In Vitro'" (*Swahili* 25). Ali and Alamin use this example to illustrate that Kiswahili can function in scientific discourse. They quote Hyder, who postulates that

> [t]here is no good reason why this development of a 'technical limb' of Swahili through the Swahilization of [technical] terms should weigh heavily on our consciences. Examination of any technical or scientific journal in English, French, German, Russian, or Chinese shows clearly that such technical terms are really international in usage. (*Swahili* 25)

The point emphasized is that Kiswahili or any other language has the potential to transmit scientific language because it has the potential. Alamin and Ali insist that "Kiswahili has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adopt linguistic items from other languages […] in the process of nominalizing potential. In short, Kiswahili has been flexible enough to respond creatively to new linguistic challenge of the scientific age" (*Swahili* 27). Consequently, the arguments presented above remind us that with investment to align Kiswahili with vital contemporary discourses like science and technology, Kiswahili scholarship enables the language to fit within the broader regional and international platforms.

Kimani Njogu encourages that "Kiswahili can be foregrounded as the language of social and economic activity and [thus] contribute in inter-ethnic understanding" (21). It is integrative and thus centers an African sensibility. Kiswahili may not be indigenous to many Eastern, Central and Southern African communities, but it has the potential to foster cultural, economic and political growth. Mugane points out that Kiswahili's contact with Bantu language groups manifests in the fact that "[m]any Swahili words have cognates in Proto-Bantu, the hypothesized language of the original groups who left what is now southeastern Nigeria some five thousand years ago" (45). This phenomenon depicts that Kiswahili has a long history with the Bantu language group which predominantly occupies Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. Thus, it maintains a favourable multilingual environment. In the broader scheme of things, Njogu instantiates that

> the African Union passed a resolution making Kiswahili one of the organic official languages in July 2002 and it was implemented at the General Assembly in Addis Ababa in July 2004. The working languages of the African Union are now Arabic, English, French, Kiswahili, Portuguese and Spanish and a few other African languages. (24)

John M. Mugane emphasizes that "The African Union (AU)" seen as a key unifying fabric of African states "nurtured the same sentiment of continental unity in July 2004" (3) when they made the decision to adopt the language. He reminds us that "[t]oday, Swahili is the African language most widely recognized outside the continent. The global presence of Swahili in radio broadcasting and on the Internet has no equal among sub-Saharan African languages" (6). Mugane identifies that up to date "Swahili is broadcast regularly in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Kenya, Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Swaziland, and Tanzania" (7). The expanding scope of the language continues to show the potential of the language in crafting a broader African identity. Mugane substantiates that "Africa's Swahili-speaking zone now extends across a full third of the continent from south to north and touches on the opposite coast, encompassing the heart of Africa" (1).

Njogu and Mugane pose a more significant question insisting that Kiswahili not only offers a possibility to foster

an Afrocentric sensibility but also presents a solution over the ethnic tension brought by divisive vernacularism. In the Kenyan context, Pius Kakai Wanyonyi posits that ethnic consciousness was a doing of colonialism. He reminds us that the territorial boundaries were introduced by colonial masters as a divisive strategy. The colonial strategy

> weakened the pre-colonial intermingling [thus] helped to intensify and fossilize ethnic consciousness amongst different communities and ended up promoting the feeling of exclusiveness and eventually planted the seeds of ethnocentrism and the urge for ethnocracy. (37)

Kiswahili has actively countered this material sociological dysfunction in its role as a regional and national language. Alamin and Ali regard the role of Kiswahili in the face of negative ethnicity as "detribalization" urging that "Kiswahili is also linked to the of process of urbanization. Kiswahili has been a facilitating factor behind such urbanization and has served as a lingua franca among the different ethnic communities" (*Swahili* 3). Kiswahili fosters a more integrated society. Due its closer indigeneity to the East African community, it centres an Afrocentric ethos by posing a positive evolution of the African linguistic situation. Ali and Alamin persist on the embeddedness of Kiswahili in Africa specifying that

> Kiswahili and its achievements [is] presented as the product of the collective genius of the African people themselves who, at the maximum, just borrowed items from Arabic—as English borrowed from French, for example—to meet certain functional needs. (*Babel* 161)

We also ought to consider the legality aspect of languages in Africa. Justice is a crucial tenet in the advancement of society. Ali and Alamin point out that

> Anglophone Africa has inherited from the colonial experience, many litigants who are bound to the oral-indigenous linguistic tradition are precluded from making any real contribution to the (re)construction of the legal process. (*Babel* 121)

The legality of language is a postcolonial reality built on the decentralization of Africanity. They go on to caution that

> Africa's legal ideology continues to be overwhelmingly Eurocentric partially because linguistically, it continues to marginalize the less Europeanized members of society, and those who are best placed to contribute towards its Africanization. (*Babel* 121)

Recent developments in Kenya require the use of Kiswahili in some parliamentary proceedings. The insertion of Kiswahili on a parliamentary level is a stride towards the use of Kiswahili in law. In Kenya and Tanzania, experts have drafted the constitutions in Kiswahili. The use of Kiswahili in these national levels promises a lot on the future of the language.

In East and Central Africa, literacy continues to be the leading avenue for the spread of Kiswahili. Since the Nairobi revolution of 1968, literacy has promoted an Afrocentric conscious in a strife Apollo Obonyo Amoko regards as a strive to "promote appropriate forms of citizenship" (6). Kiswahili scholars like Said A. Mohammed, Ken Walibora, Julius Nyerere and Wallah bin Wallah among many others have immensely contributed to the literary imagination of East African society through Kiswahili. Most of their writings have pushed the discussion forward in primary, secondary and tertiary education. The Kiswahili dictionary *kamusi* has seen constant updates in alignment with technology, science, law and cultural advancement. For instance; a word like 'computer' has undergone Swahilization into 'kompyuta', another example is 'television' which became 'televisheni' and also 'email' became 'baruapepe'. Kiswahili's adaptive nature can be seen in a word like 'baruapepe': 'barua' means 'letter' in Kiswahili and 'pepe' is a Kiswahili adverb which denotes 'happening in an unconventional manner'. Kiswahili can be more than we think. Its adaptability and transnational reaches paint a clear picture of its importance. Given that the pace of the world on the technological, economic and cultural front is not slowing down, we then should consider adopting a more reliable socio-cultural approach that guarantees that we remain key participants in our reality as well as appearing as key in situations that are cross-cultural and cross-national within a global reality.

Moving Beyond the Nation

Patrick Chabal points out that we should start thinking of "supra-national solutions" in light of how "recent and artificial African nation-states are" (40). In contemplating about the future of Africa we ought to "set in train new forms of association which would in time make the present national divisions of Africa redundant" (40). Kiswahili has already started showing the potentiality of creating a broader identity. Ali and Alamin conceptualize this as the transnational Swahili state. A socio-cultural identity that appreciates the centrality of African agency in discussions about and for Africa. This ought to be the future. Chabal cautions us that "there are more voices expressing both the limitations of the existing system of nation-states and the need for new forms of co-operation" (40). Chabal problematizes the legitimacy of the nation-state in Africa in light of "the present economic crisis and the apparent non-viability of a number of smaller or resource-less African countries have led many to […] propose radical supra-

national solutions" (41). Chabal is advocating for a more pan-African aspiration which aligns with the transnational Kiswahili identity Ali and Alamin identify.

It is however clear that the Afrocentric basis of the language proffers the propitiation of interruptions of colonialism through an integrative agenda. Kiswahili has furthered the conversation on the future of Africa. The relevance of Kiswahili within the context of decolonization and Afrocentrism encourages the conception of a bright future for the continent. Ali and Alamin point out that to cater for a more progressive ethos in deliberations about the future of Africa, we have to think of decolonization. They instantiate that from a linguistic perspective, decolonization involves "indigenization, domestication, diversification, horizontal interpenetration, and vertical counter-penetration" (*Swahili* 128). Through indigenization Ali and Alamin emphasize that this particular process entails "the utilization of indigenous resources, ranging from native personnel to aspects of traditional local technology" (*Swahili* 128). Specifically, this particular aspect ensures preservation rather than discarding the essential undertones of indigeneity. Kiswahili as we have seen maintains a healthy relationship with the indigenous cultures. The kind of Kiswahili spoken depends on the region. There is Kiswahili with regional inflections. This particular attribute aligns with what Ali and Alamin regard as domestication. They assert that domestication "involves making imported resources more relevant to the local society. [Thus] To domesticate is to make [something] respond to local imagery, figures of speech, sound patterns, and to the general cultural milieu of the region" (*Swahili* 129). As we have seen, the capability of Kiswahili to adapt scientific vocabulary to a Kiswahili perspective marks the capability to domesticate things into a Kiswahili perspective.

Ali and Alamin use the term diversification to connote to "the ways of perception, sources of expertise, techniques of analysis, types of goods produced, markets for the products, general trading partners, aid-donors, and other benefactors" (*Swahili* 130). They outline these factors in order to heighten the importance of Kiswahili language in the interactions that raise the economic, social and political stakes in Africa. Language is essential on the level of establishing the infrastructural basis of the interactions that are bound to occur. The choice to put Kiswahili in this conversation then means that we don't allow the socio-economic realities regulate the terms. If we grow the reaches of the language, it means that we go into these interactions with the intend to have a co-cultural interaction. If we don't pay attention to the linguistic aspect, it means that we will still feel like we need European languages to interact among ourselves.

On the point of horizontal inter-personal-penetration, Ali and Alamin emphasize on the need to promote "a greater exchange among, say, African countries themselves" (130) in a quest to build a cohesiveness among African nations. Kiswahili can be a conduit in which this network is built for the purpose of eliminating the economic dependency of African nations on the West. Such a relationship will ensure we foster an Afrocentric ethos and thus move forward. It encourages an aspiration for a pan-African sensibility and thus presents a possibility to forge a unified front in light of global transactions.

Conclusion

We have to pose questions on the future of Afrocentrism within the African setting. We can begin with the potential Kiswahili offers the integration of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. In all areas of the African reality, traces of Eurocentrism persist, thus posing a threat to the attainment of African agency. Homi Bhabha reminds us that through "the process of reinscription and negotiation […] emerges the process of agency both as a historical development and as the narrative agency of historical discourse" (191). From a postcolonial linguistic perspective, it is thus vital to engage with the question of an African language in the process of 're-inscribing' African identity. Such an intervention will facilitate an incisive evaluation of the socio-cultural realities that are key to the African experience. Asante reminds us the Afrocentric

> objective has always been to create space for conscious human beings who are, by virtue of their centeredness, committed to sanity. This is the key to re-orientation and re-centering so that the person acts as an agent rather than as a victim or dependant. (*Manifesto* 34)

Kiswahili, as a powerful linguistic modality, offers the possibility of promoting African agency culturally, politically and economically. Its mainstay is the promotion of a wider network of alliance (among African communities) and allegiance (to a broader Afrocentric ethos). Kiswahili's socio-cultural basis is embedded in the proliferation of an African ethos due to its adaptability to other ethnic languages and also the capability to represent an African sensibility within an international level. The growing entrenchment of the language can help us combat the epistemological and systemic problem of recolonization of the continent. The strong philosophical and cultural roots Kiswahili possess promise that as an Afrocentric language, Kiswahili can help liberate and centre African agency.

References

Chabal, Patrick. "The African crisis: context and interpretation." *Postcolonial Identities in Africa.* Edited by Werbner, Richard

P., and T. O. Ranger. Zed Books, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1996.

Wanyonyi, K. Pius. "Historicizing Negative Ethnicity in Kenya." *(Re)Membering Kenya.* Edited by Gona, G. M., Wa Mungai, Mbugua. Twaweza Communications, Nairobi, 2010.

Amoko, Apollo Obonyo. *Postcolonialism In the Wake of the Nairobi Revolution: Ngugi Wa Thiong'o and the Idea of African Literature.* Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

Asante, Molefi K. *An Afrocentric Manifesto: Toward an African Renaissance.* Polity, Cambridge, 2007.

Asante, Molefi Kete. "Afrocentricity: Notes on a Disciplinary Position." *Handbook of Black Studies.*Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2006. 152-164. *http://sk.sagepub.com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/reference/hdbk_blackstudies/n11.xml*

Asante, Molefi Kete. "A Discourse on Black Studies: Liberating the Study of African People in the Western Academy." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 36, no. 5, 2006, pp. 646–662. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/40026678.

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin. *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts.* Routledge, 2013, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/concordiaabebooks/detail.action?docID=1244807

Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture.* Routledge, 1994.

Brown, William, and Sophie Harman. *African Agency in International Politics.* vol. 2, Routledge, 2013, https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/concordiaab-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1157754

Gona, G. M., et al. *(Re)Membering Kenya.* Twaweza Communications, Nairobi, 2010, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=e000xna&AN=411027

Gurr, Andrew, and Pio Zirimu. *Black Aesthetics: Papers from a Colloquium Held at the University of Nairobi, June, 1971.* East African Literature Bureau, Nairobi, 1973.

Mazrui, Ali A. *African Thought in Comparative Perspective.* Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle Upon Tyne, 2014, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=e000xna&AN=748503

Mazrui, Ali A., and Alamin Mazrui. *Swahili State and Society: The Political Economy of an African Language.* East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, 1995.

Mazrui, Ali A., and Alamin Mazrui. *The Power of Babel: Language & Governance in the African Experience.* J. Currey; Chicago, Oxford, England, 1998.

Mbembe, Achille. *On the Postcolony.* vol. 41, University of California Press, Berkeley, USA, 2001.

Mudimbe, V. Y. *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge.* Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1988, http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.02645.0001.001 http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.02645.0001.001

Mugane, John M. *The Story of Swahili.* Ohio University Press, Athens, Ohio, 2015.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J. "Metaphysical Empire, Linguicides and Cultural Imperialism." *English Academy Review.* Vol 35, no. 2, 2018, pp. 96-115, https://doi.org/10.1080/10131752.2018.1530178.

Wa Thiong'o, Ngũgĩ. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature.* J. Currey; Portsmouth, N.H., Woodbridge, Suffolk, UK, 1986.

Njogu, Kimani, and Seifudein Adem. *Critical Perspectives on Culture and Globalisation: The Intellectual Legacy of Ali Mazrui.* Twaweza Communications Ltd., Nairobi, Kenya, 2017.

Reviere, Ruth. "Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology." *Journal of Black Studies*, vol. 31, no. 6, 2001, pp. 709–728. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/2668042

Spivak, Gayatri C. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present.* Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1999.

Werbner, Richard P., and T. O. Ranger. *Postcolonial Identities in Africa.* Zed Books, Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1996.

Scrambling Sex and Gender with Rachilde: Towards a reading of *Monsieur Vénus* as 'proto-queer'

Alexandra Pugh[1]

[1] Department of French, King's College London, United Kingdom

E-mail: alexandra.pugh@kcl.ac.uk

Abstract

Taking *Monsieur Vénus* (1884) as its focus, this article expands upon the limited critical discourse connecting the work of Rachilde (1860-1953) to queer theory. *Monsieur Vénus* and queer theory are mutually illuminative: Butler's theory of performativity allows us to interpret the unstable bodies in Rachilde's text, while *Monsieur Vénus* in turn elucidates, or at least exemplifies, some of the questions at the heart of queer studies. For example: can sex exceed the human body? Can a transgender person live a heteronormative life? What is the relationship between queerness and reproduction? In asking such questions, this article grounds a piece of Decadent, *fin-de-siècle* French literature in the context of queer, feminist and trans studies, and thereby maps the connections between Rachilde's work and these contemporary cultural conversations. As the author of *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* (1928), Rachilde rejected progressive social movements. I therefore borrow Lisa Downing's notion of the 'proto-queer' (Downing, 'Notes on Rachilde' 16) to guard against the complete recuperation of Rachilde into the queer canon. Regardless of its author's positionality, however, I am seeking to frame *Monsieur Vénus* as part of our queer literary heritage. *Monsieur Vénus* is more playful and provocative than it is political, but Rachilde succeeds in 'scrambling' sex and gender in that the two categories become muddled, unfixed and denaturalized.

Keywords: queer theory, feminism, French literature, gender, Rachilde

List of Abbreviations

LJ Rachilde. *La Jongleuse*. 1900. Des Femmes, 1982.

MS Rachilde. *La Marquise de Sade*. 1887. Mercure de France, 1981.

MV(a) Rachilde. *Monsieur Vénus: Roman Matérialiste*. 1884. Edited by Melanie Hawthorne and Liz Constable, Modern Language Association of America, 2004.

MV(b) Rachilde. *Monsieur Vénus*. 1889. Hard Press, 2016.[1]

PF Rachilde. *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe.* Les Éditions de France, 1928.

SI Rachilde. *La Sanglante ironie*. 1891. Mercure de France, 1902.

[1] *Monsieur Vénus* was reprinted in 1889 with certain passages from the original 1884 edition, including the provocative ending, abridged or omitted. The 1889 edition includes a preface by Maurice Barrès. For a breakdown of the differences between the 1884 and 1889 editions, see *MV(a)* xxvi-xxx.

Introduction

'[A]doptons *il* ou *elle*, afin que je ne perde pas le peu de bon sens qui me reste' (*MV(a)* 77). So begs the Baron de Raittolbe when his friend Raoule de Vénérande, the protagonist of *Monsieur Vénus* (1884), declares herself in love with a young, feminine artist named Jacques Silvert: 'Je veux qu'*elle* soit heureuse', Raoule exclaims, 'comme *le filleul* d'un roi !' (*MV(a)* 75). The reader might have some sympathy for Raittolbe; throughout *Monsieur Vénus*, gendered pronouns, attributes and roles are assumed, swapped and dropped by different characters at a bewildering pace. This is characteristic of the gleefully deviant work of Rachilde (1860-1953, *née* Marguerite Eymery), the only woman recognized among the Decadent authors of *fin-de-siècle* France. Characterized by perversity, transgression and linguistic subversion, *Monsieur Vénus* was a *succès de scandale*, and led to Rachilde's prosecution in Belgium for obscenity (Holmes 42). The novel tells the story of Raoule, a cross-dressing aristocrat, and Jacques, the impoverished object of her dangerous obsession. Raoule sets Jacques up as her 'mistress' in a luxurious apartment and, as she plies him with disorientating hashish, he becomes increasingly womanly. Raoule marries Jacques, scandalising Parisian high society, but becomes violently jealous of his relationship with Raittolbe as it develops in a series of eroticized encounters. Raoule engineers a duel in which Raittolbe kills Jacques, before commissioning a waxwork model of Jacques' corpse, complete with his hair, teeth and nails.

Critics such as Janet Beizer (1994), Rita Felski (1995) and Diana Holmes (2001) have read *Monsieur Vénus* as a denaturalisation of gender and play with identity categories. Yet *Monsieur Vénus* can also be understood as a deeply conservative text: Rachilde upholds the class hierarchy, characterising Jacques' sister Marie by her 'lit de prostituée' (*MV(a)* 31) and 'expression faubourienne' (*MV(a)* 45). Rachilde's fascination with perversion can also be seen as nothing more than a Decadent literary trope. Moreover, if Raoule assumes the male position in her destructive relationship with the feminized Jacques, perhaps this only inverts the gender binary, reinforcing 'the correlation between masculinity and dominance in the symbolic code' (Hawthorne 174). All of these interpretations, however, are useful and reconcilable to a reading of *Monsieur Vénus* as proto-queer. Presentations of perversity in the text constitute both a Decadent trope *and* a proto-queer exploration of the flexibility of sex properties and the porosity of the boundaries between human and object. And as Katherine Gantz argues, gender roles are not only inverted in Rachilde's work, but rather subverted, since—as we will see—the instances of gender inversion are neither systematic nor straightforward (Gantz 124).

Rachilde's presentations of gender subversion were not intended as politically radical. As the author of *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe* (1928), she was ardently individualistic and anti-feminist. She writes of having no desire 'de m'emparer de droits qui n'étaient pas les miens', and states: 'J'ai toujours agi en *individu* ne songeant pas à fonder une société ou à bouleverser celle qui existait' (*PF* 6).[2] Rachilde thus framed her transgressive work as non-threatening and detached from extratextual feminist politics. In light of this, a queer reading of *Monsieur Vénus* might be more appropriate than a strictly feminist one; regardless of its author's positionality, the text can be read today as a Butlerian exposition of the performativity of sex and gender. Instances of drag throughout *Monsieur Vénus* testify to gender's imitative structure, while Rachilde's ambiguous linguistic play and scattering of gendered signifiers cast doubt upon the fixity of sex and render Raoule and Jacques' bodies highly unstable. Reading *Monsieur Vénus* as proto-queer thus grounds the text in the context of queer studies, and connects Rachilde's Decadent work to contemporary cultural conversations.

I borrow the term 'proto-queer' from Lisa Downing, who, focusing on *La Marquise de Sade* (1887), locates Rachilde 'in a genealogy of (proto-)queer writing' (Downing, 'Notes on Rachilde' 25). The prefix here is an important caveat, which punctures the superiority of the modern reader by establishing a queer literary heritage while signalling that Rachilde's work is not straightforwardly emancipatory. As Downing explains, 'a text can be proto-queer while its author may have led a heteronormative lifestyle… certain forms of political radicality that we would expect from a 20th or 21st-century queer writer may be wholly absent' (Downing, 'Notes on Rachilde' 18). Regardless of Rachilde's historical and political position, therefore, *Monsieur Vénus* proves fertile ground for the modern reader versed in queer theory. What is more, Rachilde's work can elucidate, or at least exemplify, some of the questions at the heart of queer studies. What is sex, and how does it relate to gender? Can sex exceed the human body? What is the relationship

[2] In her own life, Rachilde wore men's clothing and self-identified as an 'homme de lettres' (Holmes 74). In *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe*, she cites economic reasons for doing so, as well as describing the impact of her father's regret that she had not been born a man. Although they lie beyond the scope of this article, Rachilde's identity and authorial posture are thus worthy of study in their own right (on these topics, see Holmes and Mesch).

between queerness and reproduction? Can a transgender person live a heteronormative life? A good place to begin this article might be the question with which Judith Butler ends *Gender Trouble* (1990): what 'strategies for engaging the "unnatural" might lead to the denaturalization of gender as such?' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 190). I will argue that Rachilde's decadent embrace of the 'unnatural' scrambles sex and gender, in that they become confused, muddled and entirely unfixed. This notion of scrambling is more playful than it is political: Rachilde reveals sex and gender to be constructions, without positing any kind of utopian alternative in which sexes, genders and desiring positions might proliferate freely.

Gender as Performance and Sex as Gender

A cornerstone of queer theory, Butler's *Gender Trouble* argues that gender congeals over time as a result of repeated acts. We come to believe that gender is natural, but it is not. Gender is therefore a 'doing' as opposed to a 'being', or rather it is done, since the subject is constructed in this doing: there is no doer behind the deed. In this sense, then, gender is performative. Butler takes this further, arguing that the performance and construction of gender is also the process by which sexed beings come to exist. She states:

> If the immutable character of sex is contested, perhaps this construct called 'sex' is as culturally constructed as gender; indeed, perhaps it was always already gender, with the consequence that the distinction between sex and gender turns out to be no distinction at all (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 9-10).

For Butler, distinguishing between sex and gender is impossible: sex is a social construction and it is gender. Sexed bodies have 'no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute reality' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 185). The classic example of such an act is the doctor's performative utterance of 'it's a boy!' or 'it's a girl!' when a baby is born; such normative discourse *constructs* sex as a natural fact. While the 'heterosexual matrix' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 47) holds that sex is the binary biological basis upon which gender is constructed, sex is, in fact, itself constructed as such.

Monsieur Vénus and Butler's conception of sex and gender are mutually illuminative; the subversion of gender roles throughout the text functions as an illustration of the iterative nature of gender and the mutability of sex. For example, Raoule's bedroom is decorated with a 'panoplie d'armes', 'mises à la portée par un poignet féminin' (*MV(a)* 22). The dissonance between the masculine imagery of weapons and the delicacy of 'un poignet féminin' is grotesque and disconcerting and destabilizes gendered signifiers. This is encapsulated on a linguistic level where, by virtue of an idiosyncrasy of the French language, the adjective 'feminine' takes the masculine form. Elsewhere, Raoule is reported to exclaim: 'Je suis *jaloux* ! rugit-elle affolée…' (*MV(a)* 84). Here, Raoule is depicted in both masculine and feminine terms, rejecting in her speech the feminine gender to which the omniscient narrator conforms. This dual perspective evokes the two guises, male and female, in which Raoule appears throughout the text. It also points to the artificiality of both language and gender, and thus their ripeness for manipulation. This is emphasized by Rachilde's use of italics, which 'call into question the linguistic code or convention that assigns gender' (Beizer 223).

The assignment of sexed bodies is similarly destabilized in *Monsieur Vénus*. When Jacques envelops himself in Raoule's bedsheets revealing only 'la rondeur de son épaule', it resembles 'l'épaule large d'une femme' (*MV(a)* 182). The sex of Jacques' body is highly unstable, and he becomes increasingly feminine/female: 'Plus [Jacques] oubliait son sexe, plus [Raoule] multipliait autour de lui les occasions de se féminiser' (*MV(a)* 95). Jacques' body is a shifting surface upon which any sex or gender might be inscribed. As Jay Prosser puts it, repurposing Simone de Beauvoir: 'One is not born a woman, but *nevertheless* may become one' (Prosser 33).

Before reading Jacques' becoming as a trans narrative, however, we might take a moment to examine the theme of artificiality throughout *Monsieur Vénus*. There is an emphasis on surface from the moment Jacques appears:

> Autour de son torse, sur sa blouse flottante, courait en spirale une guirlande de roses ; des roses fort larges de satin chair velouté de grenat, qui lui passaient entre les jambes, filaient jusqu'aux épaules et venaient d'enrouler au col (*MV(a)* 8).

This Baudelairean imagery is deeply synesthetic, and immediately presents Jacques as steeped in materiality. He is feminine and hyper-sexualized, flowers trailing in between his legs and around his neck. Importantly, these flowers are artificial ornaments, their flesh not organic but rather velvety satin. Later in the novel, Jacques decorates his apartment with real flowers, but this time explicitly plays at being a woman for the sake of performance, 'se jouant la comédie vis-à-vis de lui-même, se prenant à être une femme pour le plaisir de l'art' (*MV(a)* 96). In this example of drag, it is not just femininity, but 'being a woman' (*être une femme*) that can be adopted for purely aesthetic purposes, as art for art's sake. This suggests that there is little to distinguish being a

woman from being feminine, and hints at the artifice inherent in any performance of femininity. As Butler puts it, using drag to exemplify her theory of performativity: '*In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself*' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 187).

This is not to suggest that gender is a choice, something artificial and thus trivial that we perform at will 'pour le plaisir de l'art'. Indeed, Butler clarifies: 'If drag is performative, that does not mean that all performativity is to be understood as drag' (Butler, *Bodies* 175-6). Rather, drag—including when Jacques plays at womanhood for the pleasure of it—demonstrates that all gender is performative, even in more 'natural'-seeming forms. This is the implication of the instances of drag that run throughout *Monsieur Vénus*. For example, the narrator reports that when Raoule dresses as a man, she is 'l'image d'un homme beau comme tous les héros de roman que rêvent les jeunes filles' (*MV(a)* 176). This is a parody of norms of masculinity, laughably trite and so easily adopted by a 'woman'. The image generates a 'pastiche-effect' through which the 'real' is constituted as an effect; Raoule's 'hyperbolic exhibition' of the supposedly natural category of 'man' reveals its 'fundamentally phantasmatic status' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 186-7). There is a similar effect in chapter 16, when both Jacques and Raoule visit Raittolbe in drag, disappear for a moment and swap their clothes back, emerging as a straight couple. This topsy-turvy episode stupefies Raittolbe's valet, to whom it seems that 'Mme Silvert' has changed her hair colour from Jacques' red to Raoule's brunette. Dorothy Kelly provides an apt summary of the effect of this incident, in which no gendered characteristic ends up attributable to any one character alone:

> The decadent, upside-down world turns itself around so many times that one loses one's bearings and after a while notices only the artificial machine of reversal, the artificial nature of gender identity itself. (Kelly 152)

As Butler notes, the revelation of the artificiality of gender is not *necessarily* subversive, yet in any repetition of a gendered norm, interstices open up for resisting and reshaping it (see Butler, *Bodies* 169-70). As such, *Monsieur Vénus* is not necessarily subversive or queer; it could be argued that Raoule merely perpetuates masculine violence in her abuse of Jacques. Nonetheless, there is every reason for the modern reader to recognize the ways in which Rachilde undermines the naturalisation of both sex and gender, in instances of cross-dressing and beyond. Among all the sexual perversity and violence of *Monsieur Vénus*, it is only when Raoule asks Jacques to marry her that she feels as if she is doing something 'contre nature' (*MV(a)* 113). On a surface level, it might be seen as 'contre nature' for a woman to ask a man to marry her, not least for a noblewoman to propose to a poor artist. Yet we might also read this comment as an indictment of the unnaturalness of hegemonic heterosexuality, represented by the institution of marriage. Raoule and Jacques rehearse yet elude this heterosexual norm, and thereby highlight the plasticity of sex, gender and sexuality.

Towards New Sex and Gender Identities: Reconceptualising the Desiring Subject in *Monsieur Vénus*

This emphasis on plasticity is reminiscent of Prosser's observation that 'One is not born a woman, but *nevertheless* may become one'. Transgender theory such as that of Prosser sheds new light on *Monsieur Vénus*, and it is possible to read the character of Jacques as a trans woman *avant la lettre*.[3] Indeed, without imposing ahistorical categories on this *fin-de-siècle* novel, Gantz has speculated whether 'the best postmodern assessment of Raoule and Jacques's relationship might be that of "stone butch" and "proto-pre-op"' (Gantz 129). If so, Rachilde's work points towards alternative sex and gender identities. Her subversion of gendered language, 'rather than simply being yet more Decadent inversion for the sake of celebrating the "unnatural", effectively generates previously unimagined identities and desiring positions' (Downing, 'Notes on Rachilde' 25).

This is not an unduly optimistic queer recuperation of Rachilde, for there is much in *Monsieur Vénus* to substantiate Gantz's framing of Raoule as stone butch and Jacques as pre-op trans woman. The narrator reports that if Raoule was more beautiful than Marie, Jacques' prostitute sister, she did not receive more pleasure: 'elle en donnait, mais n'en recevait pas' (*MV(a)* 109). The term stone butch was popularized by Leslie Feinberg's *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) and refers to butch lesbians who—sometimes due to sexual trauma—do not want to be genitally touched, although they touch their partners. In *Monsieur Vénus*, Jacques tries to embrace Raoule, but she remains stone cold: 'il lui sembla qu'un corps de marbre glissait entre les draps' (*MV(a)* 90). Raoule reflects on this coldness: she is, in her own words, 'Raoule de Vénérande, qu'une orgie laisse

[3] I follow Goulimari (2020) in using 'trans' as 'an umbrella term for those who do not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth'.

froide' (*MV(a)* 41). Jacques, meanwhile, is 'pas même un hermaphrodite, pas même un impuissant, c'est un beau mâle de vingt et un ans, dont l'âme aux instincts féminins s'est trompée d'enveloppe' (*MV(a)* 75). Gantz uses this image of a mistaken envelope to argue that Jacques is in fact already a (trans) woman: 'it is his sex, and not his gender, that is out of place' (Gantz 126).

In *Second Skins* (1998), which Gantz draws upon in her argument, Prosser critiques Butler's *Gender Trouble*. He condemns what he sees as the erasure of trans subjectivities and embodied realities, and challenges 'the assumption that transgender is queer is subversive' (Prosser 29). Prosser points out that 'transgendered subjectivity is not inevitably queer… by no means are all transgendered subjects homosexual' (Prosser 31). Jacques is at first horrified by Raoule's suggestion that Raittolbe felt homosexual desire for him (*MV(a)* 130-131), but as he becomes increasingly female, Jacques turns to Raittolbe, visiting him dressed as a woman and seeking to seduce him. This turn to Raittolbe comes after Jacques is faced with Raoule's breasts on their wedding night. He cries out: 'Raoule tu n'es donc pas un homme ! Tu ne peux donc pas être un homme ! Et le sanglot des illusions détruites, pour toujours mortes, monta de ses flancs à sa gorge' (*MV(a)* 184). It could be said, then, that as a trans woman, Jacques seeks a heterosexual relationship: first with the butch Raoule and then, when the 'illusion' of Raoule's manhood is destroyed, with the hyper-masculine Raittolbe—whose desire Jacques rejected as homosexual before his identity was so feminized.[4]

These complicated dynamics are reflected in some of the key questions raised in the work of Prosser and Butler. Does the inclusion and instrumentalization of trans identity in queer theory neglect heterosexual trans people? Is trans identity necessarily subversive, or can trans people live heteronormative lives? What is the link between gender and sexuality, if any? The identities of Jacques and Raoule are so unfixed that their sexualities remain ambiguous. Sometimes, they repeat but invert heterosexuality, as when Raoule calls herself Jacques' husband and Jacques her wife (*MV(a)* 158). If we see Jacques as a trans woman then her/his eroticized encounters with Raittolbe likewise rehearse heterosexuality, but his relationship with Raoule as stone butch becomes queer. Ultimately, Raoule and Jacques' coupling is both a testament and a challenge to doxa: their love 'pour vivre avait besoin de regarder la vérité en face, tout en la combattant par sa propre force' (*MV(a)* 185). Butler acknowledges this paradox in her response to Jennie Livingston's film *Paris is Burning* (1990. See Butler, *Bodies* 81-97). She focuses on the aptly named trans woman Venus Xtravaganza,[5] whose desire for a nice suburban home and husband exemplifies Prosser's point that 'transgendered subjectivity is not inevitably queer' (Prosser 31). As Butler writes:

> Venus, and *Paris is Burning* more generally, calls into question whether parodying the dominant norms is enough to displace them; indeed, whether the denaturalization of gender cannot be the very vehicle for a reconsolidation of hegemonic norms (Butler, *Bodies* 85).

This analysis could apply word for word to *Monsieur Vénus*. The ambiguous subversion of desiring positions in the text exposes and undermines norms of gender and sexuality, but also has the potential to reinstate them.

In fact, if we consider Jacques to be the titular 'Monsieur Vénus',[6] it is remarkable and disquieting that Venus Xtravaganza becomes his namesake, and in some ways his double. Raittolbe's violent reaction to his sexual attraction to Jacques is an affecting representation of homo/transphobic hatred, inspired by fear and fragility. After feeling inexorably drawn to Jacques' body, Raittolbe beats him, howling: 'tu sauras ce que c'est qu'un vrai mâle, canaille !' (*MV(a)* 121). Later, when Jacques appears in drag, Raittolbe tries to strangle him; Raoule then finds Raittolbe about to shoot himself in the head. She asks him, quite simply, 'Vous en avez peur ?' (*MV(a)* 143). Jacques' unstable sex and gender, and his beauty, make him unintelligible. This is both arousing and threatening, and the violent reaction that it provokes in Raittolbe foreshadows the fatal duel between the two characters. When this duel occurs, the moments before Jacques' death are focalized through Jacques, which tenderly highlights his naivety and the perverse tragedy of the situation ('A quoi souriait-il ? Mon Dieu, il l'ignorait', *MV(a)* 203). Rich in pathos, this generates a similar poignancy to the scene in *Paris is Burning* in which footage of Venus Xtravaganza socialising

[4] I continue to use masculine pronouns for Jacques for the sake of consistency and clarity. In *Monsieur Vénus*, the omniscient narrator uses masculine pronouns for Jacques and feminine pronouns for Raoule, although these are pointedly interchangeable in the characters' speech.

[5] It seems unlikely that Venus Xtravaganza's name is a deliberate reference to *Monsieur Vénus*; beyond academia, the text has not been popular in modern times. Nonetheless, both Rachilde and Venus Xtravaganza exploit the connotations of 'Venus' as feminine and seductive.

[6] Both Jacques and Raoule can be seen as 'Monsieur Vénus'; the very title of the text presents a scrambling of gendered signifiers and evokes the shifting gender identities of its two protagonists.

and innocently announcing 'I'm hungry!' is overlaid with Angie Xtravaganza's description of her murder (1:8:13-1:9:29). *Monsieur Vénus* thus offers a remarkably timeless (and perhaps inadvertent) staging of the tragedy engendered by what we might now conceive of as transphobic rage.

If *Monsieur Vénus* leaves the possibility of heterosexuality intact, it also therefore points to new, potentially threatening forms of identity and desire. The web of relations between all characters, not least Raittolbe and Jacques, disrupts the hegemony of heteronormativity. Raittolbe, a cavalry officer, appears to function as a paragon of masculinity. Yet his eroticized interactions with Jacques render Raittolbe's gender unstable, too, exposing even normative masculinity as performance. Raittolbe's masculinity is most emphasized when he feels attracted to Jacques: he is 'L'ex-officier de hussards… qui tenait en égale estime une jolie fille et une balle de l'ennemi' (*MV(a)* 116). This ironic description exposes these tenets of upper-class manhood as a sham, as does a scene in which Jacques excites a group of gentlemen at a ball at the Vénérande mansion—when his hip brushes past them, their palms become moist (*MV(a)* 159). There is similar (homo)eroticism as Raittolbe teaches Jacques how to fence: 'de Raittolbe faisait grincer son fer sur celui de Jacques' (*MV(a)* 160), and Raoule derives sadistic, voyeuristic pleasure from orchestrating the duel between them, asserting: 'Je veux vous voir tous les deux, face à face' (*MV(a)* 143). The erotic charge of such dynamics and interactions pluralizes potential sites of desire and unsettles the identity and relationality of all characters in the text.

Ultimately, though, in the final duel, Raittolbe is protected by both his masculinity and his class. Jacques has no hope of winning a duel against a hyper-masculine baron with experience of combat (Hawthorne 168), and it could be argued that Jacques' class and femininity seal his fate. We have seen, however, that Raittolbe's characterisation is not quite so straightforward. Class and gender interact in multiple ways throughout *Monsieur Vénus*, to the extent that the characters inhabit a plurality of sex and gender identities across a nonetheless recognisable class hierarchy. Jacques' sister Marie and Raoule's pious aunt Ermengarde, for example, appear to map on to a classed virgin/whore dichotomy: Marie is a 'démon', Ermengarde an 'ange', and they flee Raoule and Jacques' union 'en même temps, l'un vers Paradis, l'autre vers l'abîme' (*MV(a)* 170; Ermengarde enters a convent and Marie founds a brothel). Yet the narrator's cynical remark about Parisian gossips disrupts this neat reading, pointing out that Ermengarde's dearest wish had always been to take the veil: 'personne n'avait plaint la chanoinesse, alors qu'elle ne menait pas l'existence de ses rêves, [mais] on la plaignit énormément lorsqu'elle eut réalisé son vœu le plus cher' (*MV(a)* 186). Meanwhile, Marie's brothel is reported to thrive (*MV(a)* 186, 191). Ermengarde and Marie are therefore granted agency, and are not categorically condemned as virgin and whore. Rather, their contrasting but parallel fates are both generated by and revelatory of the dynamics of class and gender that intersect to shape their identities, reputations and lives.

Class, Vulnerability and the Medical Establishment

Class and gender also intersect in depictions of vulnerability in *Monsieur Vénus*. Debarati Sanyal argues that Rachilde 'resists a purely performative reading of gender and desire by reminding us of the vulnerability of the human body to the violence of another' (Sanyal 154). Jacques' skin is marked first by the violence of Raittolbe, then by Raoule, who reopens Jacques' wounds to reinscribe her possession of his body, scratching at his cuts and chewing his skin (*MV(a)* 132-3). Jacques' feminine, 'male', working-class—and thus unintelligible—body is exceptionally vulnerable to this violence. In comparison, Raoule does not face violent repercussions for her gender transgression by virtue of her class and wealth. *Monsieur Vénus* might thus be read as an exemplum of Butler's writing on vulnerability, and the violence and dehumanisation that attends those with unintelligible bodies. Butler develops the notion of 'precarity', which is unequivocally harmful (unlike precariousness) and is unevenly distributed along political, social and economic lines. Precarity is produced by normalising frames through which we recognize (or are unable to recognize) certain people's lives as fully liveable and grievable (Butler, *Frames of War*). In this sense, Jacques' humanity is unrecognisable, making him ripe for manipulation by Raoule. He hints at this himself: 'je n'ai pas de nom, moi !' (*MV(a)* 158). The implication here is that Raoule, and indeed Raittolbe, can abuse Jacques since he has no recourse to a reputable family name; in Butler's terms, his life is neither fully liveable nor grievable.

Another normalising frame through which only certain bodies are legitimized is medical discourse. It is unclear whether or not Rachilde intended to expose the precarity of Jacques' non-normative, working-class body—it could be argued that she weaponizes class hierarchies to drive the narrative—but it seems that she did deliberately engage with the medical establishment. In his biography of Rachilde, Claude Dauphiné suggests that her works, particularly *Monsieur Vénus* and *La Marquise de Sade*, were literary transpositions of medical manuals detailing sexual psychopathology (Dauphiné 53). Downing, however, critiques this view, arguing that Rachilde does not so much illustrate sexual psychopathology as critically and strategically respond to it (Downing, 'Notes on Rachilde' 18). The *fin-de-siècle* was an era of increasing medicalization when Jean-Martin Charcot was performing hypnosis on

'hysterical' women patients at the Salpêtrière hospital (Holmes 163). Rachilde, however, pokes fun at medicalization: Raoule's aunt summons multiple doctors to diagnose her niece's hysterical behaviour, but Raoule simply invites the most witty and elegant of them into her bedroom (*MV(a)* 26). This ineffectual intervention implies that medical discourse around hysteria is just that, an 'arbitrary but ideologically interested' discourse (Downing, 'Notes on Rachilde' 21).

The final image in *Monsieur Vénus* is of the waxwork Raoule commissions from Jacques' corpse, and this too subverts the medicalization of the body. Wax 'Venuses' were used to study anatomy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and like the doll in the text, these models incorporated human hair, teeth and nails. While their purpose was educational, the models outwardly resembled conventionally beautiful and sexualized women (Bailar 31-32). Rachilde subverts this grotesque, normative practice in an equally grotesque way, by creating a male Venus—hinting, perhaps, at the perversity of the real medical Venuses. Suppressed in subsequent editions, *Monsieur Vénus*' original ending describes a spring buried in the flanks of Raoule's waxwork, which 'correspond à la bouche et l'anime en même temps qu'il fait s'écarter les cuisses' (*MV(a)* 211). Here, Raoule's list of perversions expands to include the necrophilic and the non-human. Importantly, the spring spreads the model's thighs, suggesting that Raoule's role is penetrative and casting doubt again on the fixity and meaning of sex categories.

There are echoes here of Raoule as a stone butch. The spring that 'correspond à la bouche et l'anime' mirrors Jacques' earlier attempt 'd'animer par des baisers furieux la bouche [de Raoule]' (*MV(a)* 90). In this reversal of Ovid's Pygmalion myth, Raoule has truly fashioned a creature in her own image. She keeps the model in a hidden room in her mansion, and it is reported that both 'une femme vêtue de deuil, quelquefois un jeune homme' visit it (*MV(a)* 210). The narrator refers to these personas as 'ils', although they are clearly both Raoule, pointing to the plurality of her sex and gender identities and the inadequacy of binary language to express this. For Gantz, this scene is 'the lovers' final parody of heterosex' (Gantz 128). Not only does the ending of *Monsieur Vénus* denaturalize 'biological' sex, then; it denaturalizes heterosexual sex (that is, as an activity), hinting perhaps that all heterosexual sex acts are unnatural, overdetermined and medicalized, and that sexuality itself is a construct.

Beyond the Human: The Extension and Dispersal of Erotic Charge

Raoule's fetishized waxwork, with hair, teeth and nails 'arrachés à un cadavre' (*MV(a)* 209) begs the question of 'where and how the human and the inorganic intersect' (Bailar 32). Reading *Monsieur Vénus* as proto-queer, one might build on this to ask whether we can conceive of sex as extending beyond the human and into the realms of the inorganic. Ayala and Vasilyeva have developed the notion of 'extended sex', arguing 'that properties relevant for sex categorization are neither exclusively internal to the individual skin, nor fixed' (Ayala and Vasilyeva 725). They use a cognitive metaphor, suggesting that since our minds are not purely internal, nor is our sex: just as notepads can extend the capacity of our mind beyond our brain, tools such as dildos can extend our sex beyond our body (Ayala and Vasilyeva 731, 734). There is no explicit mention of such 'tools' in *Monsieur Vénus*, but the implication of Raoule's penetrative role, and Rachilde's incorporation of the semi-human waxwork into the realms of sexuality, suggest that sex is flexible and that the boundary between the internal and the external is unfixed. Moreover, in his preface to the abridged 1889 edition of *Monsieur Vénus*, Maurice Barrès writes: 'Je prie qu'on regarde cet ouvrage comme une anatomie' (*MV(b)* 6). He sees the text as a biological body, and as an extension of its author (see *MV(b)* 6-8 and Hawthorne 164-5). Metatextually, this attests once again to the porous boundaries between human and object.

The idea that 'the boundaries of skin are not the boundaries of sex' and the extension of 'what counts as a sex-relevant property' (Ayala and Vasilyeva 734, 737), are also consistent with the pluralisation of sites of eroticism in Rachilde's work. Early in their liaison, Jacques assures Raoule that he has golden hair all over his body (*MV(a)* 40). As Beizer argues, there is, in the 'attention paid to every form and site of male hair, an apparent defetishizing of the phallus and a reinvestment in a more general erotics of the body' (Beizer 258). This 'general erotics' is also reflected in the ability of Rachilde's women characters to orgasm from thought alone. Moderated in later editions, the original 1884 version of *Monsieur Vénus* describes Raoule travelling home from her first meeting with Jacques:

> Toute cette organisation délicatement nerveuse se tendit dans un spasme inouï, une vibration terrible, puis, avec l'instantanéité d'un accident cérébral, la réaction vint, elle se sentit mieux… on [l']aurait dit une créature délicieusement lasse d'ardentes caresses (*MV(a)* 19).

Raoule (like a stone butch) has no need of 'ardentes caresses'; her pleasure is 'cérébral'. Similarly, in *La Jongleuse* (1900), the protagonist Eliante achieves orgasm while grasping a large Tunisian amphora (*LJ* 50-1). Gantz analyzes the queerness of these situations, which remove the

female orgasm from the realms of reproduction, male pleasure and marriage (Gantz 119). These presentations of female sexuality, then, are not so much an inversion of norms of gender as a subversion of norms of heterosexuality and decency, and a dispersal of pleasurable stimuli.

We might therefore read *Monsieur Vénus* as moving towards a fluid form of hedonism that transcends the boundaries of sex, gender and the human. Although Melissa Bailar sees Raoule as adeptly performing both genders (Bailar 39), Micheline Besnard-Coursodon argues that Raoule refuses any sex or gender at all: 'l'entreprise de Raoule… se fonde sur le refus du sexe, qu'il soit masculin ou féminin' (Besnard-Coursodon 123). Similarly, Jacques' thighs possess 'une rondeur solide qui effaçait leur sexe' (*MV(a)* 40), and when he is high on the hashish Raoule feeds him, he hears 'chants d'amour étrange *n'ayant pas de sexe*' (*MV(a)* 62, my emphasis). Increasingly, Jacques and Raoule are united 'dans une pensée commune : la destruction de leur sexe' (*MV(a)* 98). Together, they are destroying sex itself, for the sake of corporeal pleasure. A frenzied Raoule asks, 'qu'importe à notre passion délirante le sexe de ces caresses'? (*MV(a)* 183).

This hedonistic refusal of sex and gender categories invites a new materialist interpretation. Jacques is in a near-constant state of transition, or becoming, while Raoule describes herself as '*jaloux*', 'folle', and 'le plus homme' all in one single conversation (*MV(a)* 84-85). This evokes Dorothea Olkowski's description of the sea creature the brittlestar, which draws on Deleuze and Guattari, and Barad. The brittlestar is 'constantly breaking off and regenerating its bodily boundaries… nature makes and unmakes itself experimentally; nature's differentiations of its own material were never binary' (Olkowski 55). This reveals the gender binary as entirely unnatural, suggesting not that there are many genders, but rather that 'there are innumerable, mutating genders that cannot be counted, in continuous variation' (Goulimari). This surely applies to the multiplicity of gender identities that we find shifting and intersecting in the characters of Raoule, Jacques, Raittolbe, and even Marie and Ermengarde, in *Monsieur Vénus*. We might plot the sex and gender of these characters on some kind of scatter graph, yet the crosses representing each one would move from scene to scene as they adopt, swap and shed gendered positions within the rhizomatic network of the text. This is no simple gender inversion: it is an infinite scrambling of sex and gender fuelled by Decadent ideals of beauty, pleasure and perversion.

The Queer Death Drive in Rachilde's Corpus

Nonetheless, Rachilde does not construct a utopian world in which her characters' sexes and genders might proliferate freely. The narrative of *Monsieur Vénus* is infused with violence, destruction and death, and is compatible with Lee Edelman's thesis in *No Future* (2004). Edelman presents a queer critique of 'reproductive futurism', that is: the privileging of 'the Child' as 'the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention', the perpetuation of heteronormativity, and the marginalisation of non-normative subjects who resist such futurism (Edelman 2-3). For Edelman, the queer refuses to partake of 'narrative movement toward a viable political future' or to subscribe to 'the fantasy of meaning's eventual realization' (Edelman 4). In this sense, *Monsieur Vénus* is surely a proto-queer, if not queer, narrative. Rachilde divorces sexuality from procreation, and Raoule gives death, not birth. Jacques becomes increasingly childlike throughout the text, and at one point, Raoule holds him, 'le berçant entre ses bras, le calmant comme on calme les enfants' (*MV(a)* 114). The soothing alliteration of this sentence belies the dissonant, grotesque image of Raoule as maternal. Perhaps we should see Raoule as anti-maternal since she indirectly kills Jacques and builds (births?) a waxwork from his corpse. Their coupling has no future and ultimately means nothing: Raoule freezes Jacques in time as a kind of proto-cyborg that she will visit over and over again. The narrative movement towards Raoule and Jacques' future as a married couple is violently and deliberately curtailed.

Therefore, in the narrative arc of *Monsieur Vénus*, death is positioned as the proto-queer equivalent to birth; the drive towards the future is replaced by a drive towards Jacques' death. This equivalence between birth and death is hinted at throughout the text. Jacques juxtaposes childbearing to murder, speaking of himself in the feminine third person in an unsettling and childlike manner: 'Il faut bien qu'elle demande à tuer quelqu'un puisque le moyen de mettre quelqu'un au monde lui est absolument refusé' (*MV(a)* 181). This positions Jacques as a woman who 'lacks', but not in the Freudian sense for he is, after all, in possession of a penis. As Maryline Lukacher argues, Rachilde thus equates 'woman's "penis envy" and man's inability to become pregnant' (Lukacher 124). Furthermore, after he has dealt the fatal blow in his duel with Jacques, Raittolbe sucks Jacques' wound, trying to extract the blood that 'ne coulait toujours pas' (*MV(a)* 207, 208). Why does he not bleed? Perhaps this is a reference to Jacques' inability to menstruate or give birth—a tragic symbol of a kind of trans melancholia, perversely eroticized by Raittolbe's lips in a final allusion to non-procreative sex.

The thwarting of reproductive futurism is present throughout Rachilde's corpus. In *La Marquise de Sade*, Mary Barbe (the eponymous marquise) threatens to poison her husband if he tries to impregnate her: 'je ne veux pas être mère, d'abord parce que je ne veux pas souffrir' (*MS* 215). In

her study of *La Marquise de Sade*, Downing analyzes this figure of the 'murderous female pervert' as an example of the *sinthom*osexual of Edelman's *No Future*. As she explains:

> "*Sinthom*osexual" is a Lacanian pun. The "sinthome" is, homophonically, both a "symptom" and a "holy man" (*saint homme*). The homosexual is the symptom of a homophobic culture. Edelman asks that the queer accede to the death-driven position that culture imagines for him/her—the place of "*Sinthom*osexuality" (Downing, 'Notes on Rachilde' 26 n7).

In Rachilde's corpus, women embrace unproductiveness and are fixated on death, abandoning the society that seeks to assimilate them into its heteronormative narrative of progress. Downing also examines the death drive of the murderous, incarcerated (male) protagonist of *La Sanglante ironie* (1891; Downing, 'Beyond Reasonable Doubt' 196). This murderer personifies death as a lover to be seduced: 'Je rêve la *Mort* comme un homme bien élevé rêverait la véritable femme du monde' (*SI* 8). In *Monsieur Vénus*, this plays out on a literal level: Jacques comes to embody death, and in this deathly form is literally idolized by the gleefully anti-maternal, proto-*sinthom*osexual Raoule.

It is of course possible to produce a non-queer reading of 'murderous female perverts' such as Raoule and Mary Barbe. The final scene of *La Marquise de Sade* is of Mary drinking wine mixed with blood near an abattoir, which aligns her with the men who had horrified her as a child: 'l'homme qui tue les bœufs… l'homme, le roi du monde !' (*MS* 30; see Holmes 131). In other words: men still rule the world, but Mary, in her perversity, moves among them. Does this leave the gender hierarchy intact, much like the class hierarchy that plays out in *Monsieur Vénus*? If Raoule can be seen as victorious in her manipulation of both Jacques and Raittolbe, and in the relative impunity with which she adopts a masculine persona, then it might be said that *Monsieur Vénus* upholds the correlation between power, class and masculinity. It could also be said that the morbid consequences of Rachilde's characters' gender inversions only serve to underline their abnormality, rather than to exemplify any queer, death-driven anti-futurism.

Yet we can and should mount an alternative, queer reading of Rachilde. However anti-feminist she may have been, her work resonates with a reader versed in queer theory. In fact, Rachilde's anti-feminism is a productive lens through which to read her texts, one that raises questions about the nature and power of the literary subversion of gender norms. What role does authorial intention play in the reception of transgressive texts, over a century after they were written? Can subversion be an individualist endeavour, or does it only accrue power through the feminist or queer collective? I would argue that Rachilde, even as an anti-feminist individual, has the power within her texts to destabilize, pluralize and muddle the very concepts of sex and gender; literary texts can transcend the meanings that their authors intend.

In Conclusion: The Implications of Reading *Monsieur Vénus* as 'Proto-Queer'

This article has expanded upon the limited existing critical discourse connecting Rachilde's work to queer theory. An explicitly queer reading of Rachilde, the gender-bending author of *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe*, is in many ways more appropriate than a straight feminist one. I continue to use the term '*proto*-queer' to guard against the ahistorical, complete recuperation of a conservative author so firmly situated within the Decadent tradition. I would nonetheless suggest that even the dystopic ending of *Monsieur Vénus* is a death-driven, queer rejection of a heteronormative future, while the depiction of Jacques' class-based precarity is 'Butlerian *avant la lettre*' (Holmes 3). Indeed, the linguistic subversion, emphasis upon artifice, and ambiguously sexed bodies in *Monsieur Vénus* are a striking exemplification of Butler's thesis that gender is performative and sex is 'always already' gender. Paradoxically, the instability of sex/gender identities in *Monsieur Vénus* also makes possible the restoration of heterosexuality (such as between Raittolbe as a man and Jacques as a woman), demonstrating Butler's point that not all drag is subversive—rather, all gender is performative.

In *Monsieur Vénus*, Rachilde thus makes space for new forms of sex, gender and desire. Raoule may well be a stone butch and Jacques a trans woman, although this is in some ways a moot point. What Rachilde does depict, perhaps unknowingly, is the violence of homo/transphobic rage, which stems from fear of new identities and desiring subjectivities that appear to threaten the heteronormative order of society. Class and gender interact to produce vulnerable, unintelligible bodies in the text, although Rachilde's response to the contemporary medical discourse that would seek to 'treat' such bodies verges on the satirical. In its ending, *Monsieur Vénus* explores the porous boundaries between the human and the inorganic, and plots sites of eroticism across and beyond the human body. Raoule and Jacques seek to destroy or transcend sex in their quest for pleasure, and the innumerable identities inhabited by Rachilde's full cast of characters point to a view of sex and gender as constant states of becoming.

A proto-queer reading of *Monsieur Vénus* therefore begs the question of what sex and gender are. Following Butler, I have used the two terms fairly interchangeably, in

the sense that they are both mutable, cultural constructions—pointedly so, in Rachilde's writing. The artificiality of sex and gender is reflected in the confusing proliferation of gendered pronouns in *Monsieur Vénus*, and perhaps every use of a gendered pronoun in this article should be read as enclosed within invisible inverted commas. This is a fitting indictment of the inadequacy of language, both French and English, to express sex and gender as they are presented and played with in *Monsieur Vénus*. This play with sex and gender is implied in the term 'scrambling': Rachilde renders the two categories indistinguishable, unfixed and unpredictable. Within the death-driven confines of the text, then, *Monsieur Vénus* might be seen to answer Butler's call for the articulation of a proliferation of cultural 'configurations of sex and gender', which confound 'the very binarism of sex, and [expose] its fundamental unnaturalness' (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 190). The extent of the connections between Rachilde's work and contemporary queer, feminist and trans studies is quite remarkable.

Rachilde will undoubtedly remain a controversial figure, something she would have relished far more than any recuperation into the queer canon. As Gantz brilliantly puts it, Rachilde has a 'disruptive writerly fashion of making a scene without necessarily making a point' (Gantz 122). Yet the scrambling of norms in Rachilde's making of a scene invites queer interpretation by the reader. In turn, reading *Monsieur Vénus* as proto-queer attests to the limitless potential of literature to offer new perspectives on sex, gender and sexuality, across cultures, periods and intellectual traditions.

Acknowledgements

With thanks to my peers and supervisors on the MSt in Women's Studies at the University of Oxford; this article is an extension of research carried out for that degree.

References

Ayala, Saray and Nadya Vasilyeva. 'Extended Sex: An Account of Sex for a More Just Society.' *Hypatia*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2015, pp. 725-742. *Wiley Online Library*, DOI: 10.1111/hypa.12180. Accessed 17 Oct. 2019.

Bailar, Melissa. 'Uncanny Anatomies/Figures of Wax.' *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2016, pp. 29-53. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44164804. Accessed 26 Mar. 2020.

Beizer, Janet. *Ventriloquized Bodies: Narratives of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century France*. Cornell University Press, 1994.

Besnard-Coursodon, Micheline. '*Monsieur Vénus* et *Madame Adonis* : sexe et discours.' *Littérature*, vol. 54, 1984, pp. 121-127. *Persée*, DOI: 10.3406/litt.1984.2227. Accessed 26 Mar. 2020.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 1990. Routledge, 1999.

---. *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. 1993. Routledge, 2011.

---. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* Verso, 2009.

Dauphiné, Claude. *Rachilde*. Mercure de France, 1991.

Downing, Lisa. 'Beyond Reasonable Doubt: Aesthetic Violence and Motiveless Murder in French Decadent Fiction.' *French Studies*, vol. 58, no. 2, 2004, pp. 189-203. *Oxford University Press*, https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk:2095/10.1093/fs/58.2.189. Accessed 26 Mar. 2020.

---. 'Notes on a proto-queer Rachilde: Decadence, Deviance and (Reverse) Discourse in *La Marquise de Sade*.' *Sexualities*, vol. 15, no. 1, 2012, pp. 16–27. *Sage*, DOI: 10.1177/13634607. Accessed 5 Dec. 2019.

Edelman, Lee. *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. Duke University Press, 2004.

Felski, Rita. *The Gender of Modernity*. Harvard University Press, 1995.

Gantz, Katherine. 'The Difficult Guest: French Queer Theory Makes Room for Rachilde.' *South Central Review*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2005, pp. 113-132. *Project Muse*, DOI: https://doi.org/10.1353/scr.2005.0051. Accessed 7 Dec. 2019.

Goulimari, Pelagia. 'Genders.' *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, 2020. DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.1123. Accessed 25 Jun. 2020.

Hawthorne, Melanie. '*Monsieur Vénus*: A Critique of Gender Roles.' *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1/2, 1987, pp. 162-179. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/23532091. Accessed 26 Mar. 2020.

Holmes, Diana. *Rachilde: Decadence, Gender, and the Woman Writer*. Berg, 2001.

Kelly, Dorothy. *Fictional Genders: Role and Representation in Nineteenth-Century French Narrative.* University of Nebraska Press, 1989.

Livingston, Jennie. *Paris is Burning*. Academy Entertainment and Off White Productions, 1990. *Netflix*, https://www.netflix.com/title/60036691. Accessed 26 Mar. 2020.

Lukacher, Maryline. *Maternal Fictions: Stendhal, Sand, Rachilde, and Bataille*. Duke University Press, 1994.

Mesch, Rachel. *Before Trans: Three Gender Stories from Nineteenth-Century France*. Stanford University Press, 2020.

Olkowski, Dorothea. 'Every "One"—a Crowd, Making Room for the Excluded Middle.' *Deleuze and Queer Theory*, edited by Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr, Edinburgh University Press, 2009, pp. 54-71.

Prosser, Jay. *Second Skins: The Body Narratives of Transsexuality*. Columbia University Press, 1998.

Rachilde. *Monsieur Vénus: Roman Matérialiste*. 1884. Edited by Melanie Hawthorne and Liz Constable, Modern Language Association of America, 2004.

---. *La Marquise de Sade*. 1887. Mercure de France, 1981.

---. *Monsieur Vénus*. 1889. Hard Press, 2016.

---. *La Sanglante ironie*. 1891. Mercure de France, 1902.

---. *La Jongleuse*. 1900. Des Femmes, 1982.

---. *Pourquoi je ne suis pas féministe.* Les Éditions de France, 1928.

Sanyal, Debarati. *The Violence of Modernity: Baudelaire, Irony, and the Politics of Form*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005.

Understanding Conflict in Shakespeare's Plays and Chinese Daoist Texts: Comparing cultures by Geert Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory

Qian Ye[1]

[1] Department of Secondary Education, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: qye3@ualberta.ca

Abstract

This paper discusses how conflict is dramatized in some of Shakespeare's plays and is implied in the Chinese Daoist texts. Within the framework of Geert Hofstede's (2001) five independent dimensions of cultural theory, the paper specifically addresses the teachers of Shakespeare to adopt cross-cultural approaches to Shakespeare. My purpose is that teachers of Shakespeare's plays might consider adding the introduction of Chinese Daoism into their class and unfold the understanding of conflict as more productive than disruptive. By bringing Shakespeare's plays into an intercultural dialogue with the Chinese Daoist works, I hope that the study will open up new possibilities of understanding and interpreting conflict in the literary curriculum.

Keywords: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory; conflict; Shakespeare; Chinese Daoism; education

Introduction

In this paper, I focus on reading and understanding conflict in Shakespeare's plays and Chinese Daoism in the framework of Geert Hofstede's cultural dimension theory. Shakespeare (1564-1616) is acknowledged as representing the English culture of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. His achievements in drama create "the common bond of humankind" (Greenblatt 1). Chinese Daoist culture and philosophy are based on the *Dao De Jing* (《道德经》) and the *Zhuangzi* (《庄子》). The text of *Dao De Jing*, supposedly written by Laozi (老子), originated in the Warring States period of China, approximately 475-221 BC. The text of *Zhuangzi* was supposedly written in the 4th century BC by Zhuang Zhou (庄周) and those who followed Zhuang Zhou's ideas. Shakespeare's production of drama and Chinese Daoist philosophy transcend time-bound beliefs and national boundaries. Shakespeare and Lao-Zhuang become signs that belong not only to a particular culture but to "culture" as a whole.

The word "culture" undergoes a significant change from "the cultivation of land" to "the cultivation or development of the mind, faculties, [and] manners" (OED). There is an intimate analogy between tilling the soil and cultivating the mind. Just as tilling the soil needs sunshine and water to breed plants, cultivating the mind also calls for traditional wisdom to slow down the fast pace of life in the modern society and contemplate problems that destroy our harmonious relationships with nature. As humans, we are a species and are confronted with internal and external conflicts. Conflict is ubiquitous and disruptive in nature. Shakespeare's art dramatizes conflict as one of the salient themes. Although conflict is treated differently in different plays, the general keynote that Shakespeare conveys is to embrace conflict as part of life. The Daoist texts also admonish people to treat conflict less harshly to keep body and mind in good health.

This article specifically addresses the teachers of Shakespeare to adopt cross-cultural approaches to Shakespeare. My purpose is that teachers of Shakespeare's plays might consider adding the introduction of Chinese Daoism into their class, to enrich students' knowledge about the ancient wisdom of the other culture. My research questions are: What do Shakespeare and Daoist texts tell us about conflict? How is conflict addressed, treated, and internalized in some of Shakespeare's plays and Daoist texts? I hope that the article will help teachers to interpret the theme of conflict in Shakespeare's plays from a new lens. In an intercultural dialogue between Shakespeare and Chinese Daoist philosophy, teachers might help students understand the diversities and complexities of conflict and treat conflict with more respect. It is also my wish that students in the West who study Shakespeare might acquaint themselves with Chinese Daoist culture and develop a cross-cultural consciousness when they read Shakespeare's writing in a literature class.

Theoretical Framework

Geert Hofstede (Oct.2nd, 1928-Feb 12th, 2020) was a Dutch scholar in cross-cultural studies. His in-depth research delineates diversities of thinking modes and social behaviors that connect people in different cultures as well as separate them. In *Culture's Consequences*, he analyzes the elements of national cultural differences and categorizes them into five dimensions: power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and collectivism, masculinity and femininity, long-term orientation and short-term orientation. They constitute the core of Hofstede's cultural dimensional theory.

The first dimension of Hofstede's cultural dimension theory is power distance. Although different cultures handle it in different ways, power distance is essentially concerned with human inequality. As early as in Homer's *Odyssey* and Plato's declaration of the status consistency, Hofstede points out, inequality has become "one of the oldest concerns of human thinking" (Hofstede 80). Despite Jean-Jacques Rousseau's belief in "all equal by agreement and by law" (81), one universal phenomenon in almost every society is that there are undernourished people and people deprived of basic education. It seems that there would be no society without the "integrated systems" (82) of one class presupposing other classes. Due to this paradoxical phenomenon, power is distributed unequally. Hofstede defines power distance as follows:

> The power distance between a boss B and a subordinate S in a hierarchy is the difference between the extent to which B can determine the behavior of S and the extent to which S can determine the behavior of B. (83)

Hofstede cites Mauk Mulder's field experiments (1976, 1977) and Kipnis's laboratory experiment (1972) as evidence to show that "inequality confirms and perpetuates itself" (83). The above definition presumes that there is a considerable difference in different cultures but an equilibrium is eventually established between B and S by mutual satisfaction. Before equilibrium levels off, conflict occurs incessantly due to the social hierarchies that separate people into classes, castes, and estates. Hofstede employs the power distance norm as a criterion to characterize one dimension of different national cultures.

The second dimension in Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is uncertainty avoidance. Uncertainty about the future is a basic fact of human life. Due to this consciousness, human beings tend to resort to technology, laws, and religions to cope with anxiety towards the future. Though each of these institutions has its unique power in coping with the inherent uncertainties of living in the uncertain future, Hofstede proves that coping with uncertainties "belong[s] to the cultural heritages of societies" (146). He points out that uncertainty avoidance is not the same as taking risks and risk avoidance (148). Risk has a specific case in mind and arouses our fear toward it. However, uncertainty is a "diffuse feeling" (148) because we do not have a clear idea of what would happen in the future. Uncertainty is the "source of anxiety" (148), hence escaping from ambiguity is a feature of uncertainty avoidance. People living in an uncertainty-avoiding culture look for orders and institutions to make the future predictable and interpretable. A typical example is a Confucian society where people's view of the world and their behavior are manipulated by a set of strict moral norms.

The third dimension of Hofstede's cultural theory is individualism as opposed to collectivism. Hofstede defines this dimension as "the relationship between the individual and the collectivity that prevails in a given society" (209). The relationship affects not only the way of people living together in a family or a working place but also considerably affects how well human institutions function in the entire society. Hofstede's data research shows that the Chinese culture scores significantly lower on individualism than most Western cultures do. In a sense, Chinese people's emotional, cognitive, and motivational constructs differ much from those of Western culture because Chinese culture provides its people with an interdependent "self-construal" (210). In an individualist culture, the antithesis between "I" and "you" carries its distinct "inner-directed" (210) moral overtones. For example, people do not go by traditions but are guided in their behaviors by an inner "psychological gyroscope" (210) that is developed in their early education. In a collective culture, much respect is shown for the traditional wisdom. Collectivism does not mean a negation of the individual's

stance in pursuing well-being. It is implicitly assumed that a collective identity makes personal interest possible. Hence, when a conflict arises, a pro-collective ethos cherishes the values of peer groups, while an individualist ethos attaches much importance to "personality". A convincing example is a lexico-semantic difference between the Chinese character "人" (*ren*, meaning "man") and the English word "personality": the former carries both social and cultural connotations, while the latter refers to a separate entity that is isolated from social and cultural environment.

Hofstede's fourth dimension is concerned with the difference between the two sexes. Sexual differences between the male and female in the biological sense have significant implications for the different social roles that two genders undertake in society. Masculinity and femininity reference the social and cultural differences between the two genders. Anthropologist Margaret Mead (1950/1962) argues that women attain "a sense of irreversible achievement" (qtd. in Hofstede 280) in childbearing, and men attain this sense of achievement in more physique-related activities, such as raising cattle, building gardens, killing game or enemies, etc. In short, women take tender work while men take tough work. The pattern of "the male assertiveness versus female nurturance" (Hofstede 280) establishes the male's dominant role in the family and in society. Hofstede also quotes Deborah Tannen's work (1992) to reveal that different ways of thinking and exchanging feelings are also manifest in two genders. "Machismo" is a term associated with masculinity and manliness. In feminine cultures, Hofstede argues, people look down upon macho behaviors (309), and the female is seen as combining qualities of "saintliness, submissiveness, and frigidity" (309).

The fifth dimension of Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is long-term versus short-term orientation. In a society that cherishes the long-term orientation, "children learn thrift, … tenacity in the pursuit of whatever goals, [and] humility" (Hofstede 361). Children who grow up in a short-term orientation culture tend to chase "immediate need gratification" more than they respect traditions, hence an intense tension between need gratification and respecting 'musts'" (361). To put it simply, traditions are honored in a long-term orientation culture, while respect for traditions brings about feelings of guilt in a short-term orientation culture if self-gratification runs contrary to traditions that "must" be observed, such as tolerance for others and reciprocity of favors (361). Hofstede sees the Confucian culture as a long-term orientation culture because virtues, "such as education, frugality, and persistence" are taught "directed at the future" (363). Western religions, such as Christianity and Judaism, are based on the belief of a Truth, which leads to the "dissociation between spirit and matter" and "explains the opposing forces in short-term orientation cultures" (363).

Power Distance: *As You Like It* and the Daoist Outlook on Nature

In the "Teacher notes" of designing *As You Like It* (2010), the Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency offers a detailed description of learning objectives and processes of teaching Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. In the introduction part, teachers require students to prepare a design proposal for a production of *As You Like It*. The proposal should show that students understand "the two contrasting environments in the play: the court and the forest" (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency 2). From the line "I trust thee not" (*As You Like It* 1.3.49), students do a close study of life in the court and interpret the characters and atmosphere of the court. In contrast, teachers ask students to read closely life in the forest when they read "… [m]ore free from peril than the envious court" (*AYL* 2.1.4). Students work in groups and discuss which words or phrases stood out in terms of describing the forest and what effect have these words or phrases created (Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency 19).

In the pedagogy of *As You Like It*, teachers cannot ignore the issue of hierarchical social order in the family and in the dukedom. There are two plotlines in the play: Orlando is dispossessed of his father's property by his elder brother Oliver, and Duke Senior was banished by his younger brother Frederick. The conflict between two pairs of brothers is produced by the inheritance laws and social hierarchies. Shakespeare, in alignment with Spenser, Marlowe, Raleigh, and his contemporary playwrights in the Elizabethan period, resorts to the pastoral to criticize the social and political practice in the dramatic text. The pastoral is not only an idyllic form of poetry singing about the shepherds' lives but also a satirical critique of a hierarchical society. In the play, the desire to flee the corrupt urban court life is enacted by the men and women who possess innate goodness and gentility. Gilbert (qtd. in Garber 439) references Spenser's explanation of the word "savage" as etymologically associated with "wood". The play is brimming with images that carry the connotations of the woods and the rustics. For example, Orlando is kept at home "rustically" (*AYL* 1.1.6); Duke Senior removes to *Arden* with his followers where "they live like the old Robin Hood of England" (*AYL* 1.1.100); Rosalind and Celia utter a simple line when they flee the urban court: "Let's away, / And get our jewels and our wealth together" (*AYL* 1.3.127-128); the faithful old man Adam demonstrates what Orlando calls "the constant service of the antique world" (*AYL* 2.3.58); and finally in the isolated forest of *Arden*, every character writes verses that provide us

not only with pleasure but also carry a comic irony of the selfish life in the court.

In the pastoral conventions, "savage" men living in the woods are nurtured in a way that nature is represented: natural, kind, civil, and genteel. As a contrast to the pastoral decorum that emphasizes the gentility and gentleness, the courtly decorum is featured by the Latinate speech and pompous actions to distinguish itself as a symbol of hierarchy and high values. With regard to the conflict between the two kinds of decorum, there are no heroic or chivalric actions in the play to rebel against the rank inequalities. Instead, music, dance, verse-writing, deer-hunting, and sheep-tending are profusely used to emphasize the human's attachment to nature. The forest of *Arden* itself carries the connotations of simplicity, wildness, and recklessness in this socialized nature or naturalized society. Elizabeth Marie Weixel believes that the forest is "charged with myriad complementary and conflicting cultural connotations" (2). Garber argues that the forest "is a repository, and indeed a palimpsest, of earthly paradises from literature, myth, and personal history" (440). Consistent with their arguments, I contend that the forest of *Arden*, freighted with cultural and historical weight, functions as a way to deconstruct the power distance generated by primogeniture and estate inheritance, two integrated systems generated by civilized society as well as the source of familial strife and social unrest.

In the civilized world, the insurmountable power distance leads to the courtly treachery and fraternal enmity, taking on a more ferocious visage than the harsh wind and coldness, the green snake, and the udder-dried lioness in the forest. The underprivileged men of worth – Orlando and Duke Senior – are forced to retreat to the marginalized world of the forest after they are banished from the mansion and their dukedom. The privileged men of evil – Oliver and Duke Frederick – have their souls magically and mysteriously elevated in the green atmosphere of *Arden*. While the high power distance in the court emphasizes the prevailing authority and demands deference from the people in the lower rungs of the social ladder, the forest of *Arden* manifests a lower power distance culture where power equality is bestowed upon dwellers. Forest dwellers are not concerned with which social status they are in. This world is "a golden world, an Eden, [and] an Arcady" (Garber 443). In the high power distance world of the court, Rosalind regards the court as a working place. She laments, "O how full of briers is this working-day world!" (*AYL* 1.3.9). In the low power world of the forest, she is in a happy mood, and says, "I am in a holiday humour, and like enough to consent" (*AYL* 4.1.59-60). The opposition of these two emotional states insinuates the heroine's eagerness for liberation. The play draws upon pastoral conventions to express people's fundamental needs for justice and equality. The conflict generated by power distance is addressed in the pastoral dreams and fantasies that the play enacts.

Chinese Daoist culture also attaches much importance to the significance of nature in healing people's thirst for power and authority. Nature is spontaneous and non-contentious. The *Dao De Jing* claims that seeking prominence, wealth, and social status as the means to achieve success brings catastrophe to the individuals and society as well. The wisdom of being artless, simple, and genuine as nature assumes prevails in Daoist culture. According to the *Dao De Jing*, to maintain a state of natural simplicity, one should be like an infant, a piece of ice, or a block of uncarved wood. Consider the following line from Chapter 8 of the *Dao De Jing*:

> The highest good is like water. The goodness of water lies in benefiting the myriad things without contention, while locating itself in places that common people scorn. (Lynn 63)

Lin points out that water manifests the characters of humility, gentility, and seeking the lowly position (77). In the *Zhuang Zi*, water is described as "serv[ing] as our model, for its power is preserved and is not dispersed through agitation" (Lin 77). Water represents the sacred value in the way that it flows to lowly areas, does not compete against any others, and nurtures all that hinders its flowing as well as fauna and flora alongside the banks.

The image of the valley also evokes in us humility and tranquility. The *Dao De Jing* has terse verses on modeling ourselves to be valley or ravine in Chapter 28. "He who is a river valley for all under Heaven never separates himself constant virtue and always reverts to the infant" (Lynn 103). Wang Bi interprets these verses as follows: "The river valley does not solicit anything, yet things come to it as a matter of course. The infant does not use any knowledge of its own, yet it communes with the knowledge of nature" (Lynn 103). Much of Daoist wisdom comes from the ancient Chinese sages' observation of nature. The Chinese character "谷" (*gu*, meaning valley or ravine) occupies an important ontological status in our knowledge of the world. It is a place where all sorts of creatures start flowing and breeding. It is vast and formless. It generates life and movement without persuading others to grow and to follow. Thus chapter 28 of the *Dao De Jing* goes on to indicate that power does not assert one's honor and glory. It is obscurity, humility, or disgrace that has an eternal power that sustains our life. This is particularly a piece of advice to modern people who are constantly contriving for superiority, fame, and wealth:

> He who knows glory yet sustains disgrace will be a valley for all under Heaven. He who is a valley for all under Heaven is filled completely by constant virtue, for he always reverts to the uncarved block. (Lynn 103)

The "uncarved wood" is used to refer to such a state as being simple, spontaneous and uncontentious. It is a state of *ziran* (自然, which means spontaneity). There is nothing more authentic or genuine than a piece of wood. We can change it into whatever we want it to be – we can cut it into a piece of a log; we can carve it into a delicate piece of furniture; yet the best state is its natural original state when it grows in the living tree.

The *Yi Jing*'s interpretations of the Earth (坤, *Kun*) also carries the message of modeling ourselves after Mother Earth. The *Yi Jing* (《易经》), also translated as *I Ching: The Classic Book of Changes*, is a Daoist wisdom book in ancient China written over 2000 years ago. In this book, *Kun* is the name of the second Hexagram of the total 64 Hexagrams. It means Earth, opposite to and correlated with *Qian* (乾), the Heaven. The combination of *Qian* and *Kun* designates the Universe. *Kun* illustrates the nature of earth: dark, corporeal, receptive, and dependent. As Minford comments, "*Kun* has utmost Softness, greatest Capacity; there is nothing it cannot contain, nothing it cannot sustain … Earth is broad, its Potential Energy soft and pliant" (35). Mother Earth accepts whatever is poured down into the soil and completes the birth and growth of the seed, without hesitation, complaints, and contentions. In the human world, power produces arrogance and conflict, and eventually, misery and disaster befall to the parties concerned. In the natural world, *Kun* cooperates with *Qian* to make the process of life possible. Namely, Mother Earth compliances or accords with Heaven and willingly puts down herself into a state of docility. Like water and valley, Mother Earth receives whatever comes to itself and nourishes them in a subtle way. The second Hexagram of the *Yi Jing* describes *Kun* as "Mother of the Myriad things" (Minford 32). It goes on to say that "*Kun*'s capacity is vast" (33); "*Kun* is soft, yielding, is steadfast" (34); "*Kun*, potential Energy of Earth. / The True Gentleman sustains matter through ample inner strength" (35).

Comparing Shakespeare's pastoral strategy and the Daoist wisdom of modeling us after water, valley, uncarved wood and Mother Earth, I find that it is interesting that both cultures are concerned with the role of nature in dealing with the conflict produced by power or hierarchies. Shakespeare's nature reconciles the distance between the authority of courtly life and the pristine nature of human existence. Daoist culture teaches people to imitate the fine qualities of natural beings, to see nature as holy, and restore our sense of reverence. In a swiftly changing age, we are inclined to prioritize the impact of science and technology and are convinced that humans, especially the greatest historical figures, are turning the wheel of history, pushing human civilization upwards and outwards. In this human-centered anthropocentric view, we obliterate in the experience of art something far more important to us. Through an inter-culturally informed pedagogy, teachers invite the student to think deeply about the conflict between the civilized world and the forest world in *As You Like It* and cultivate the sense of humility, gentility, and submission in students' consciousness, informed by the Daoist thoughts on the anti-anthropocentric view of the world.

Uncertainty Avoidance: *Hamlet* and the Daoist Outlook on Mindfulness

In this part, I compare Hamlet's interior monologues with the Daoist wisdom of practicing mindfulness in tranquility, with the intent to examine how uncertainty is viewed differently in *Hamlet* and in Daoist culture and what measures they take to cope with the inner conflict which is the outcome of anxiety. Revenge and forgiveness are highly focused in the teaching of *Hamlet* (Styslinger 26). Wolfsdorf, a high school teacher, asks his students in the *Hamlet* class: "What happens if the Danish prince does not contemplate his own mortality?" (39). Hamlet's interior monologues are the starting point and the key to understanding and interpreting his inner conflict.

In the play *Hamlet*, Hamlet's interior monologues, or soliloquies, along with his melancholy, exemplify his preoccupation with anxiety. Entangled in a web of uncertainties and ambiguities, Hamlet wants to either take revenge against his uncle or to commit suicide, yet he finds himself more engaged in "desir[ing] to throw off the burden of his inner conflict" (Paris 155-184). Recognizing that the world he dwells in abounds with evils with which he feels disgusted – "the oppressor's wrong," "the proud man's contumely," "the pangs of dispriz'd love," and "the law's delay, the insolence of office" (*Hamlet*, 3.1.73-75), Hamlet wishes for moral justice and laws to guarantee a secure life for Danish people. When a possible murder twists his heart and cannot fulfill his revenge, Hamlet retreats to his inner world: he contemplates the relationship between dreaming, sleeping and dying; he meditates on the full sense of "being" while having to live with "a sea of troubles" (*Ham.* 3.1.61). He eulogizes the divine workmanship in "What a piece of work is man!" (*Ham.* 2.2.294). He also expresses the equally weighty lamentation of "this quintessence of dust" (*Ham.* 2.2.298). Man's spiritual highness and corporeal lowness are constantly brooded over in his philosophy of life and death, being and not-being. Through his soliloquies which focus

more on philosophical meditations than on his security, Hamlet ponders over the essence of being. Compared with Gertrude's remarks that death is "common" because "all that lives must die, / Passing through nature to eternity" (*Ham.* 1.2.71-72), and gravediggers' corporeal view of death as a vulgar descent into decay, Hamlet's insight into death is closer to Heidegger's concept of authentic Being. Authentic Being means that one's awareness of death focuses attention on the self and goes deep into the individual *Dasein*. Hence the attitude to death is not the fear of death but the anxiety about death. The anxiety about death reveals a sense of Nothingness. In his lecture *What is Metaphysics*, Heidegger asserts that Nothing is the very home of ours (qtd. in Zhu, Yong 235). Hamlet utters a strong sense of Nothingness in his soliloquies. In the face of the pestilence-ridden world of Denmark, this feeling of Nothingness becomes manifest. Heidegger's philosophy tells us that the more one experiences the anxiety, the more one perceives the essence of the Nothingness, and the more one maintains his truthfulness and naturalness (qtd. in Zhu, Guan 235-236). Hamlet has no fear of death. It is his insight into the essence of Being that he appears to be sickly meditative.

Different from Hamlet's uncertainty about the future and anxiety about death, Daoist culture embraces a peculiar paradigm on how to ensure a person's well-being and a state's stability. As far as an individual is concerned, the Daoist teachings focus on practicing mindful meditations by closing one's eyes and taking a deep breath. The more one inspects the inner world in mindfulness, the more worldly burdens will be unloaded, and closer and closer one walks toward a true self. Sun Buer (c. 1119-1182) was a famous female master in the history of Chinese Daoism. She outlined fourteen steps to concentrate on one's heart/mind as consistent with the Daoist concept of quietude and vastness. These steps, such as collecting Heart/Mind, Cultivating *Qi* (气), Moving Energy, Embryonic Breathing, and Facing the Wall, emphasize the transformation of three basic elements in the human body: *Jing* (精, literally translated as essence), *Qi* (气, literally translated as energy), and *Shen* (神, literally translated as spirit) (Wang 286). Both the *Dao De Jing*'s emphasis on quietude of the mind and the *Zhuangzi*'s focus on the fasting mind indicate the interconnectedness between the body and the mind. If we are trapped in anxiety, the body, which engages in a reflective mind, would be severely harmed. *Qi* circulates in our body, and the meditation in tranquility enables the mind and the body to work together synchronically and dynamically.

Daoist culture extends the individual's well-being to the state's longevity. The *Dao De Jing* calls prohibitions, laws, regulations, and statutes "sharp weapons" because they increase men's cunning and hypocrisy. The more they are used in a state, the poorer the people will be, and the more benighted the land will grow:

> The more all under Heaven are beset with taboos and prohibitions, the poorer the common folk grow. The more common folk are beset with sharp instruments, the more muddled the state becomes. The more people have skill and cleverness, the more often perverse things will happen. The more laws and ordinances are displayed, the more thieves and robbers there will be. (Lynn 159)

It is too much calculative expediency in the knowledge of laws and statutes that harm a state's stability. Too much expediency would increase the ruler's anxieties, and even more merciless and unrelenting statutes would be enforced to prohibit crimes. Due to these anxieties, the *Dao De Jing* reads:

> I engage in no conscious effort, and the common folk undergo moral transformation spontaneously. I love quietude, and the common folk govern themselves. I tend to matters without conscious purpose, and the common folk enrich themselves. I am utterly free of desire, and the common folk achieve pristine simplicity by themselves. (Lynn 159)

These four points – engaging in no conscious effort, loving quietude, tending to matters without conscious purpose, and being desireless (Lynn 159) – encompasses the wisdom of enhancing the growth at the branch tip. If the ruler could adopt this wisdom in the governance of the state, bloody combats and antagonism would be avoided, and he would not be trapped in the unknown anxieties.

By comparison, Hamlet's meditative soliloquies resemble the Daoist mindfulness in the way that they focus on their inner world without disturbance. A physical, tranquil setting is what they need, because at this moment Hamlet and the Daoist practitioners enter their mind and heart in a spontaneous way, having a conversation with their souls. Hamlet is pondering over the essence of being and not-being when he is pushed to the brink of uncertainties by the kinds of "statues" he encounters. One of the "statues" is the religious prohibition on suicide. He laments that God has "fixed his canon 'gainst self-slaughter" (*Ham.* 1.2.131). Religion is central to his anxiety because suicide is prohibited as a sin. His anxiety also comes from the prevalence of evil in the world of Denmark. Hamlet is called the "fair expectation of the state," (*Ham.* 3.1.151) or a potentially good king in his later years. His counterpart Fortinbras may bring stability to the state infected by his uncle's crime. However, his persistent reaction against evil

"contradictorily and mysteriously destroys much that is good as well" (McEachern 3). Hence a strong but tragic sense of waste evokes spontaneously in our heart. It seems that evils are able to be "overcome only by self-torture and self-waste" (Cunningham 11). Beset by the heavy anxiety, Hamlet wishes for a high uncertainty avoidance society where justice and laws rule his state. Daoist culture, however, does not resort to laws and statutes to confront anxiety and uncertainty. Instead, it emphasizes the intimate relationship between the body and the mind, and by practicing mindful meditation, we introspect behaviors in tranquility. Eventually, it outlines a Utopia society where people live from day to day with less fear for tomorrow and less fear of the unknown (Hofstede 176), which is the characteristic of the lower uncertainty avoidance countries.

Individualism versus Collectivism: *Romeo and Juliet* and the Daoist Outlook on *Pu* and *Jie*

Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is a good example that enacts the devastating power of we-group fighting against the invasion of the they-group. Both families, the Montagues and the Capulets, two names that are symmetrical even in dactylic rhythms (MON-ta-gue and CAP-u-let) (Garber 199), are alter-ego households within which patriarchism expects respect, obedience, and filial piety. Their stubborn and recalcitrant feuds are parallel and hierarchical in structure. Their feuds are hierarchical in the sense that fights are ranked from servant to master. In Act 1, scene 1, Gregory and Sampson, two servants of Capulet, display their obedience to their master by fighting for their family names. In Act 3, scene 1, Romeo kills Tybalt, right after he doffs his name in the famous balcony scene, to resume his identity as a scion of Montague. In Act 5, scene 3, the swordfight between Romeo and Paris in front of Capulet's monument puts an end to the feuds by each of them defending any kind of invasion from the outside. These three fights, with male characters wielding their sword which "is seen as a sign of manliness" (Garber 191), tellingly illustrate the devastating power of protecting family honor within the restrictive we-group or in-group concept. That Romeo dies in the Capulet's family monument and Juliet uses Romeo's dagger to kill herself becomes an ironic dislocation.

The passionate love between Romeo and Juliet sets them against the honorable values of their families. The complex intertwining of honor, property, dignity, and filial piety that family name demands make the young lovers' marriage incompatible within the family order of things. A familiar scene that manifests this incompatibility is the father of Juliet's blind rage when Juliet thwarts his authority in the matter of marriage arrangement. Romeo finally abandons the code of his family identity to enter the graveyard of Juliet's ancestors, and Juliet asserts her identity as Romeo's wife unequivocally. The individualist ethos in a family attempts to impose its will and power on their children, only to be thwarted by the ever more extremes in clandestine marriage and final suicides. Friar Laurence's homily on herbs seems to function as a reasonable summary: an individualist family, just like the herbs' double-ness that have both poisonous and meditative effects, endorses the family honor and property, yet meanwhile buries the passionate love and life, very much like the misapplied herb "stumbling on abuse" (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.20).

The "ancient grudge" in the play's beginning sonnet predicts the constant combats between the two individualist households, and Friar Laurence intends to use Romeo and Juliet's love to resolve the conflict between them. By contrast, Daoist culture adopts the wisdom of *Pu* (朴, which means sincerity and genuineness) and *Jie* (节, which means both separateness and connectivity) to designate the necessity of living in a world of collectivity. As noted above, the Chinese word "人" (*ren*, which means "man") carries both social and cultural meanings in its reference to an individual self. This non-differentiated state of man is not much influenced by any sort of pretensions.

A man of *Pu* is not an absolute entity of an individual that alienates himself or herself from society. Identity is ascertained by one's engagement with the sentient and non-sentient creatures. The *Zhuang Zi* describes a man of *Pu* as below:

> … lov[ing] one another without knowing that to do so was benevolent. They were sincere without knowing that this was loyalty. They kept their promises without knowing that to do so was to be in good faith. They helped one another without thought of giving or receiving things. Thus, their actions left no trace, and we have no records of their affairs. (Chang 105)

From this passage, it can be understood that virtues such as benevolence, generosity, truthfulness are moral codes that a man of *Pu* would not put on his behaviors deliberately. Like the uncarved block that the Chinese word 朴 (*pu*) indicates, the person is totally muddled together with all others and lacks his own existence. He is nameless, tiny, but reflects the constant movement of *Dao*. As Wang Bi explains the lines of Chapter 32 of the *Dao De Jing*, the analogy of the nameless uncarved wood consists in its profound meaning that it "is similar to the way streams and tributaries respond to the river and the sea" (Lynn 109). According to Wang Bi's interpretation, "The relationship between streams and tributaries and the river and the sea is such that it is not

because the river and the sea summon them but because streams and tributaries gravitate to them without being summoned or sought" (Lynn 109). Every single one of us is a stream or a tributary that will wind our way into the collectivity of the sea, in the course of which our own identity seems to have been lost, yet it is within the collectivity that we assert our existence. This might be what the man of *Pu* prognosticates to us.

The *Yi Jing* offers a similar analogy in Hexagram 60 about "节" (*jie*, literally translated as "Notch"). The Chinese character "节" (*jie*) means bamboo notches which not only separates sections of bamboo but also connects them into a whole. It denotes the idea of one's individuality and social connections to other beings. Interestingly, it also refers to one's regulation and moderation, much like the meaning that Friar Lawrence's herbs implicitly convey to Romeo. This hexagram is a combination of two symbols putting together in a vertical way: abyss above lake, which means that the lake will overflow if the water flows into it exceeds its capacity (Minford 461). The idea of this hexagram is that whatever we do should be in tune with the equilibrium of society. Just as notches are joints of bamboo, we should also connect ourselves to nature and to society. Likewise, just as notches have limits, our conduct should also be moderate, which means restraint of individual selfishness.

The play *Romeo and Juliet* displays the conflict between two households who assert their honorable existence above the other. They are a miniature of the individualist culture. Daoist culture is a portrayal of the collectivist culture. A person whose conduct is guided by the wisdom of sincerity (*pu*) and moderation (*jie*) will be expected to sustain his/her life in kinship with others. In the teaching of *Romeo and Juliet*, teachers could invite students to think deeply about how Dao sheds fresh light on reading the conflict between two families. For example, the Daoist doctrines of sincerity and genuineness, connection, and moderation might reduce the loss of love, family discord, and crimes that youths experience in their coming-of-age.

Masculinity versus Femininity: *Antony and Cleopatra* and the Daoist Cosmology of *Yin-Yang*

It is interesting to compare Shakespeare's views about gender differences and the Daoist concept of *Yin-Yang*. In Shakespeare's time, masculine culture and feminine culture were in a hierarchical relationship. Men were considered as higher in a gender hierarchy based partly on readings of the Bible. But Shakespeare liberates his heroes and heroines from whatever restricts them from the boundary of gender labeling. Othello is subdued by uncontrollable emotions, and his eyes overflow "a woman's tears" (*Othello* 4.1.240); Juliet wishes she had the prerogative of being a man to articulate her love. These and many other dramatic characters attempt to break out of culturally circumscribed gender stereotypes of their societies. The Rome-Egypt conflict, as well as the correspondence between masculinity and femininity, is a salient fact in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Roman values are concerned with virility, rivalry, and war, and Antony is "the firm Roman" (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.5.43) and the "man of steel" (*Ant.* 4.4.32). Although Antony is also perceived as falling into luxury in Egypt and seen as abandoning his manliness to make love to Cleopatra, images of swords and horses are found in the play to associate Antony's manhood with conquest and the chronicle of heroic history in Sir Thomas North's English translation of *Plutarch's Lives*, which has an account of Antony and Shakespeare draws his source from. Antony's sword "quartered the world" (*Ant.* 4.15.58), and he envisages his name and his sword earning a place in history, "I and my sword will earn our chronicle" (*Ant.* 3.13.177). The horse that bears Antony in Cleopatra's imagination (*Ant.* 1.5.19-33) stands for uncurbed passion and male virility. Antony's masculinity and his Roman identity are also asserted through his emulous bond with Caesar. According to Coppélia Kahn (Kahn), homosocial rivalry defines masculinity as a heroic presence, and Antony's rivalry from Caesar also differentiates himself from the female Other (116).

As a counterpart of the moral and martial qualities of Roman *virtus*, Egyptian values are concerned with more feminine principles, which are represented by the Nile river's procreating power. When the Nile river floods, serpents, and weeds are produced. "Serpent" is the symbol of an absolute Evil in Christianity, and a symbol of wisdom as well, as shown in the Bible's line, "be ye therefore as wise as serpent's" (Matthew 10:15). In this play, the serpent is a symbol of fertility, which is identified as the Mother of all creatures inhabited on the Egyptian soil. It is a very queer creature having no arms and legs and inhabiting the dark soil and the muddy water. The Nile itself resembles the serpent in the way that it nourishes Egypt for fertility and the proliferation of the nation. Alongside its self-breeding attribute, the serpent is destructive and devouring, as displayed in the final scene of Cleopatra's death. Demonic and chaotic, it destroys whoever is enticed to its magic power and whoever is curious about its knowledge. Its self-renewing power is inevitably bound up with its fatal power.

On the play's dynamic map of shifting power between Roman masculinity and Egyptian femininity, Antony's martial *virtus* fittingly corresponds to Cleopatra's nurturing power. A horse would be to Rome what a serpent would be to Egypt. They evoke a feeling of awe more than a feeling of fear. There is no antagonistic conflict between them. In more than one place, we see how Antony is reduced

to an infant version of "the serpent of old Nile" (*Ant.* 1.5.25). Cleopatra is metamorphosized into a maternal existence feeding her baby and Antony is like a son to be loved and nourished. We also read lines about Cleopatra's "marble constant" (*Ant.* 5.2.236), the most telling example shown in her untying the "knot intrinsicate of life" (*Ant*. 5.2.295) in death with steady will power. The tragedy presents masculinity and femininity not in uncompromisable antithesis but in an interacting and interplaying relationship, as represented in the Daoist "*Yin-Yang* Fish" gyre. As Daoist culture indicate, each contains the other and each being dependent on the other. They are in a state of flux to achieve reconciliation. This sort of Daoist fluidity and reversal is, in one way or another, enacted by *Antony and Cleopatra*.

The *Yin-Yang* cosmology occupies an important position in the Chinese Daoist culture. As two cosmic forces, *Yin* and *Yang* are in constant interaction and complementation. OED defines *Yin* as "the feminine or negative principle characterized by dark, wetness, cold, and disintegration", and *Yang* as "the masculine or positive principle characterized by light, warmth, dryness, and activity". Although they are in constant conflict, they produce the phenomenal world as we perceive it. *Yin* holds the elements of *Yang* and vice versa. They are mutually included and each has a vital need for the other. In chapter 42 of the *Dao De Jing*, we read: "The myriad things, bearing yin and embracing yang, form a unified harmony through the fusing of these vital forces" (Lynn 135). It can be seen that the union of *yin* and *yang* creates harmony. *Yin* is at the back while *Yang* is in front. It does not necessarily refer to the gender difference that the male stands before the female. It includes the myriads of things under heaven. In his commentary on the Hexagram Six of the *Yi Jing*, Wang Bi writes, "It is always yang [male] that starts singing and yin [the female] that joins in. Yin is never the one to take the lead" (qtd. in Lynn 68). In his commentary on the Hexagram 49, Wang Bi maintains, "The character of yin is such that it is incapable of taking the lead and instead should be an obedient follower" (qtd. in Lynn 68). A very important idea in the *Yi Jing* is that "[t]he reciprocal process of yin and yang is called the Dao" (Lynn 59).

The male virility in the sense of potency is not shown in toughness or stiffness. A man's virtue (德, *de*) harbors within himself, manifesting the virtue of softness and pliability. The *Dao De Jing* uses the metaphor of the infant to describe the man of perfect virtue: "One who has profoundly internalized virtue is comparable to the infant… His bones are soft and sinews pliant, but his grip is firm" (Lynn 155) The male infant is free of desire and contention, yet he is fully energetic. Wang Bi interprets it as "the man of perfect virtue does not contend with others and employ hard, aggressive behavior and policies (yang and male), thus he never 'gets broken' and so preserves his wholeness intact" (qtd. in Lynn 157). Be soft and pliable is the virtue of the femininity. The male who models after the female's character always puts himself in the rear, takes on the lower positions, and maintains quietude and tolerance. He will give birth to and nourishes myriad things under heaven. This functions as the opening and shutting of the gateway of Heaven, as the *Dao De Jing* states in the chapters 6 and 10 respectively: "[G]ate of the Mysterious Female is referred to as the 'root of Heaven and Earth'" (Lynn 62); "The gateway of Heaven, whether it is to be open or shut: can you play the female?" (Lynn 66); "The female always responds but not acts" (Lynn 66). The Daoist epistemology of the feminine draws a picture of the interaction of *Yin*/female and *Yang*/male in complementation and cooperation.

Virginia Woolf (1882-1941) describes a great mind as "woman-manly or man-womanly" and maintains that "a mind that is purely masculine cannot create, any more than a mind that is purely feminine" (qtd. in Zhu, Gang 248). Both *Antony and Cleopatra* and the Daoist epistemology of the feminine demonstrate the interrelationship between two genders. The male creates, and the female produces. The order of nature brings everything into existence by the interfusion of *Yin* (male, Heaven) and *Yang* (female, Earth). The mutual interdependence of *Yin* and *Yang* could be incorporated into the pedagogy of *Antony and Cleopatra*. To help students understand that Rome and Egypt in the play do not stand in opposition or in absolute dichotomy, teachers might draw upon the Daoist Yin-Yang cosmology to elaborate harmony, fluidity, and correspondence in the two independent entities.

Long-term Orientation versus Short-term Orientation: *The Tempest* and the Daoist Outlook on *De*

In the dimension of long-term orientation versus short-term orientation, both Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Daoist culture highlight the importance of virtues and show respect for education, though in different ways. *The Tempest* does not encourage rivalry and strife to solve the immediate human conflict. Prospero, with the terrible wrong wrought on him by his brother, holds virtue as nobler than vengeance. Forgiveness is a virtue in a Christian sense. When seeing that the courtiers are undergoing a moral regeneration because they are "pinched" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.74) with "remorse and nature" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.76), Prospero goes through a process to reach forgiveness. Forgiveness prevails over his vindictive motives. In Act 5, scene 1, Ariel describes the sufferings and remorse of the "court party" and touches Prospero's deepest chords of being a man:

ARIEL: … Your charm so strongly works 'em

> That if you now beheld them your affections
> Would become tender.
> PROSPERO: Dost thou think so, spirit?
> ARIELl: Mine would, sir, were I human. (*Tmp*. 5.1.17-19)

Ariel's "Mine would, sir, were I human" has a magic effect on Prospero. He breaks his magic stick, burns his magic books, and finally achieves the highest moral virtue of forgiveness.

The play displays another virtue of compassion in Miranda. Growing up in an island of enchantment and bred by her father, she exhibits "the very virtue of compassion" (*Tmp*. 1.2.27). Prospero holds onto his conviction that human creatures, due to their moral consciousness, could be cultivated to a virtuous man with proper husbandry and learning. Just as proper husbandry prevents the ferociously growing weed-like buds, learning is believed to whet the raw human nature better. Miranda is full of compassion when the roaring sea is threatening to overflow the boundary and engulf the feeble creatures. Prospero also teaches Miranda the virtue of restraining desire through his "art". He warns Ferdinand twice of the necessity of tempering the lust. If desires unheeded, calamities will befall. His teaching lies in his belief that human beings are creatures with noble reason and that knowledge of temperance and continence could make self-discipline possible. The relationship between raw nature and nurture, as suggested by the play, is that man's nature needs nurturing through learning and husbandry. The three virtues that distinguish humans from Caliban are oriented toward the future, which is the characteristic of a long-term orientation culture.

The *Dao De Jing* also gives important implications for 德 (*de*, which means inner virtue). A sage's virtues are as deep as the ravine of the universe. Laozi encourages the men to withdraw, to be low, and to maintain a heart of timidity in whatever situations they find themselves in. The difference between *Dao* and *De*, maintains Lin Yutang, is that *Dao* "is the unembodied principle", while De "is the principle embodied" (Lin 173). "[D]ao is unknowable, while [De] is knowable" (Lin 173). The *Dao De Jing* distinguishes "superior virtue" from "inferior virtue":

> A person of superior virtue is not virtuous, and this is why he has virtue. A person of inferior virtue never loses virtue, and this is why he lacks virtue. A person of superior virtue takes no conscious effort and so acts out of something. When a person of superior benevolence takes action, he acts out of nothing. When a person of superior righteousness takes action, he acts out of something. When a person of superior propriety takes action and no one responses, he pushes up his sleeves and leads them to it. Therefore one resorts to virtue only after losing the Dao, resorts to benevolence only after losing virtue, resorts to righteousness only after losing benevolence, and resorts to propriety only after losing righteousness. Propriety consists of the superficial aspects of loyalty and trust and is thus the beginning of disorder. (Lynn 119)

It can be seen from this passage that the Daoist view of cultivating virtue does not specify what virtues to nurture in human beings but emphasizes where one attains virtue. One obtains virtue from *Dao*. Confucius teaches us the virtues of humanity, benevolence, justice, and propriety. However, these Confucian virtues are means of affectations and lead to chaos, according to the Daoist view on them. As far as virtue is concerned, Daoism lays much emphasis on our inner goodness, goodness that is spontaneous in us without motives and pretensions. When inner goodness is rigidly motivated, then it means a deviation from *Dao*.

The Daoist wisdom of superior virtue is intimately associated with the worldview of 无为 (*wuwei*, which means not taking deliberate action). A ruler of inferior virtue seeks a good reputation and keeps his people in order by taking conscious action but acts out of nothing in the end. With conscious action, one values applications of benevolence, righteousness or propriety. He appears to be loyal and trustful, but he lacks sincerity. This is what is meant by saying "[one] resorts to benevolence only after losing virtue, resorts to righteousness only after losing benevolence, and resorts to propriety only after losing righteousness" (Lynn 122). If one does not take pretentious efforts, the Confucian virtues of benevolence, righteousness, and propriety will have no esteem and are more manifest. By holding fast to Dao, one does not necessarily take conscious and deliberate actions, yet is spontaneously encircled by beauty and power.

Confucian virtues are described by Hofstede as "directed at the future" (363). It is a long-term orientation culture. Confucian virtues also bring modern people a sense of guilt when these virtues crash their immediate self-gratification. The Daoist superior virtue is concerned with the inner goodness and enhancing the root so the branch flourishes. Insofar as Daoist culture imbues us with the teachings of thriftiness and humanity, it is also a long-term orientation culture.

To help students understand and interpret "virtue" in the play, such as Prospero's forgiveness and humanity and Miranda's compassion, teachers might explain what virtue is regarded in the Daoist epistemology. The *Dao De Jing* advocates that by holding on to *Dao*, *De* will prevail under heaven without artfulness, with which human kindness,

morality, ritual, loyalty, and other virtues will ensue successively and naturally. Moral transformation, in this sense, does not require too many artful actions but to follow the laws of nature to realize self-cultivation. Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* applies the tempest metaphor to echo the moral change that is taking place in the courtiers' heart. Moral transformation is more like "a dreamlike dissolution of tempest clouds" (Palmer 172). Both resort to the power of inner goodness in nature. *The Tempest* dramatizes the important role of nurturing and husbandry in cultivating virtue. Daoist culture makes it clear that Confucian virtues of benevolence, righteousness, and propriety are embellished. Superior virtue is a great thing accessible to *Dao*. Both of them are attributes of long-term orientation cultures.

Conclusion

My discussion of some of Shakespeare's plays and Chinese Daoist culture in this paper is an inter-cultural dialogue within the framework of Hofstede's cultural dimensional theory. Hofstede's research, conducted in the late 1960s, includes his years of observations and quantitative data collected in IBM companies. Drawn from the outcome of his research, my article focuses on the interpretation of conflict in Shakespeare's plays and the Daoist texts, and hence is qualitative in nature.

Hofstede's cultural studies inform me that the dialogue between cultures, either literally or statistically, sheds fresh light on the different ways of thinking, behaving, and modes of feeling that different cultures have. This interesting enterprise inspires me to go back to classical works, eager to find out what lies in the cultural root that separates us as different nations and meanwhile connects us as humanity.

Conflict is a perplexing issue and we are prone to regard it as disruptive and negative. The most direct response to it is how it originates, how we encounter it, and what measures we can take to make a compromise with it or to overcome it. This intuitive response to conflict makes sense insofar as there are numerous cases of bullies in schools, enmities among peers, the inner conflict of teenagers, broken-up relationships when a misunderstanding arises, and different forms of combats, competitions, and rivalries at all levels of educative institutions. I take up this issue not to strengthen its destructive power. As Apple asserts, conflict is not "disruptive factor", but is "productive of vitality" (Apple 110). Shakespeare's plays and the classical Daoist works address the positive and the negative aspects of conflict in different ways.

Hofstede's cultural dimensional theory encompasses five dimensions that exhibit similarities and differences in the value system. In the first dimension of power distance that is basically human inequality, I find that nature plays an important role in both cultures to address the conflict. Shakespeare adopts pastoral strategy in *As You Like it* and Daoism invites us to the model after water, valley, uncarved wood, and Mother Earth. The second dimension, uncertainty avoidance, urges a desire for laws. Hamlet's meditative thinking forms a contrast to the Daoist meditation in tranquility. Hamlet is more entangled in inner conflict, and uncertainties about being and non-being intertwine in him to such a degree that the conflict looms as roaring sea or stormy rain in his heart. Daoist culture, by contrast, teaches us to practice mindfulness to relieve ourselves from inner burdens. The third dimension is individualism versus collectivism. *Romeo and Juliet* reveals an individualist culture due to the antagonism between two households, the we-group in opposition to the they-group. The Chinese Daoist culture emphasizes the kinship of individuals with others through the images of uncarved wood (朴, *pu*) and bamboo notches (节, *jie*). Hence it is more of a collectivist culture, where people seek solutions and agreements when conflict arises. In the fourth dimension of masculinity versus femininity, I discuss *Antony and Cleopatra*'s distinctive features in dramatizing Antony's martial manhood and Cleopatra's nurturing power. The conflict between Rome and Egypt is metamorphosized into mutual need and interdependence. The *Yin* and *Yang* modes in Daoist culture also negate the absolute conflict between the two genders. The Daoist epistemology of the feminine metaphorically illustrates the complementation and cooperation between the *Yin*/female and *Yang*/male. The fifth dimension, long-term versus short-term orientation, is directed about the future when people consider the weight of traditions. Since a long-term orientation culture lays more emphasis on education, I find it interesting that both *The Tempest* and Daoist culture values virtues. In the play, nurturing and husbandry plays an important role in cultivating such virtues as forgiveness, compassion, and continence. In the *Dao De Jing*, superior virtue differs from Confucian virtues of benevolence, righteousness, and propriety. Cultivating superior virtue requires a mind that takes non-deliberate action. Inner goodness cannot be tainted with the pretentious efforts that Confucian virtues accompany. Because both cultures are attributed with long-term orientation features, conflict is viewed with a generous heart and reduced to the minimum.

To conclude, culture is an interesting and complex phenomenon. Eurocentrism and alterity of Eastern culture have entailed many dangerous outcomes. It might be helpful to the development of the English Language Arts curriculum if the pedagogy of Shakespeare's plays could be laden with other cultural coding and ethical values. My reading experiences inform me that both Shakespeare's plays and

Daoist culture inquire about our lived life and critique the human-centered anthropocentric view that western philosophies have upheld for centuries. The Daoist epistemology of the feminine, interrelated images and concepts, as well as "virtue" education, among diverse understandings, hold views against the anthropocentric landscape. Shakespeare's plays also depict a panorama of gender identity, cultivation, and husbandry, human images as related to nature, among other root issues in human development. Their similarities and differences make the intercultural dialogue between the East and the West possible in the Shakespeare class.

References

Apple, Michael W. "The Hidden Curriculum and the Nature of Conflict". *Curriculum Theorizing*, edited by William Pinar, McCutchan Pub. Corp, 1975, pp. 89-119.

Chang, Chung-yuan. *Tao, a New Way of Thinking; a Translation of the Tao Te Ching*. Harper & Row, 1975.

Cooper, Jean C. *An Illustrated Introduction to Taoism: The Wisdom of the Sages*. World Wisdom, Inc, 2010.

Cunningham, James. *Shakespeare's Tragedies and Modern Critical Theory*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Presses, Inc., 1997.

Garber, Marjorie. *Shakespeare After All.* Anchor Books, 2005.

Gelven, Michael. *A Commentary on Heidegger's Being and Time*. North Illinois University Press, 1989.

Greenblatt, Stephen, et al. *The Norton Shakespeare*. 2nd edition, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2008.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson, Harper, 1962.

Hofstede, Geert. *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*. 2nd edition, Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, Inc, 2001.

Kahn, Coppélia. *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*. Routledge, 1997.

___. *Shakespearean Education: Power, Citizenship, and Performance*. University of Delaware Press, 2011.

Kermode, Frank. *Shakespeare: The Tempest*. 5th edition, Harvard University Press, 1954.

Knight, George Wilson. *The Wheel of Fire: Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*. Methuen, 1978.

Lau, Dim Cheuk, translator. *Tao Te Ching*. Chinese University Press, 2001.

Lin, Yutang. *The Wisdom of Laotse*. Modern Library, 1948.

Lynn, Richard John, translator. *A New Translation of the Tao-Te Ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi*. Columbia University Press, 1999.

McEachern, Claire. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Minford, John. *I Ching/Yijing: The Book of Change.* Viking, 2014.

Mou, Zhongjian. *Taoism*. Brill, 2012.

Palmer, David John. *Shakespeare: The Tempest*. Macmillan, 1968.

Parris, J. Bernard. *Psychological Perspectives on Literature*. The Shoestring Press, 1984.

Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency. *Active Shakespeare: Designing As You Like It (Teacher notes)*. 2010, https://dera.ioe.ac.uk//2614.

Styslinger, Mary E. "Just Listen: Reading Conversations with Incarcerated Youth." *English Journal*, vol. 109, no. 2, 2019, pp. 23-31.

Wang, Robin R. "'Kundao': A Lived Body in Female Daoism." *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2009, pp. 277-292.

Weixel, Elizabeth Marie. *The Forest and Social Change in Early Modern English Literature, 1590-1700*. 2009. University of Minnesota, PhD dissertation. *ProQuest Dissertation Publishing*.

Wolfsdorf, Adam. "When It Comes to High School English, Let's Put Away the Triggers." *English Journal*, vol.108, no. 1, 2018, pp. 39-44.

Zhu, Gang. *Twentieth Century Western Critical Theories*. Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press, 2001.

Zhu, Yong. *Rereading Masters: A Sincere Statement of Lies*. People's Literature Publishing House, 2001.

Laughing About Caste

An analysis of how caste considerations find representation in the genre of English stand-up comedy on the internet in India

Shreyashi Ganguly[1]

[1] Department of Sociology, University of Victoria, British Columbia, Canada

E-mail: shreyashig@uvic.ca

Abstract

The literature on humour in India has largely evaded the question of how humour intersects with caste stratification. Not much has been written about humour's potential to discriminate against certain caste groups of the lower social order. Similarly, the traditional media in India has been silent about the issue of caste following which, social media has emerged as the 'counter publics' where caste identity can be collectively and freely expressed. Taking the now flourishing brand of English stand-up comedy on the Internet in India as an entry point, this study investigates if the symbolic articulation of caste identities is at all made possible in this genre. Using a combination of discourse analysis and social media analysis, to examine the jokes produced in stand-up shows, in this paper I try to gauge how frequently, and in what ways, caste finds mention in these performances on the Internet. I find that caste identity, and the associated discrimination, are hardly evoked in the comedians' discourse. And when spoken about, they are often done so in a disparaging light. I conclude this paper by illuminating the ways in which this disparaging humour bolsters caste discrimination, sustains stereotypes and, in the process, conditions the normalized exclusion of lower-caste groupings from the public sphere.

Keywords: Caste, stand-up comedy, Dalit, Internet, counter-public, post-caste, disparagement humour

Introduction: A Brief History of Humour Studies in India

India has a historically rich comic tradition, the earliest instances of which have been recorded in Bharata's *Natyashastra*, the ancient treatise on the theory of drama (Kumar 82). Bharata classifies humour as one of the eight mood effects that can be created through drama. This classification of humour as a theatrical trope has provided it a foundation on which to flourish in public and political spaces in contemporary times (Kumar 82). C.M. Naim writes about the 16th century Mughal emperor, Akbar, and the verbal duels replete with wit and satire that ensued between him and his court advisor, Birbal, which have lingered on in the popular public imagination (1456). Satire as a form of political humour, in fact, has had a robust legacy in the subcontinent since at least the days of the consolidation of the British empire. The *raja*, the *nawab*, the *daroga*, the *jotedar*, have often been the target of sharp jokes and caricatures (Joshi). The newspapers that emerged during this time were directed at resisting colonial rule and would often carry political satire pieces aimed at destabilizing the Empire (Kumar 83). They often published political cartoons that have been an important tool for resistance movements (Khanduri 463). In the genre of entertainment, too, comedy has been an important motif. The Hindi film industry, more popularly known as Bollywood, has immortalized actors such as Mehmood, Johnnie Walker and Johhny Lever, known for their impeccable comic timing (Nüske 14). In contemporary times, considerable attention has been devoted to the tradition of stand-up comedy in India and its newly burgeoning English variant that has gained popularity with the advent of the Internet and the various social media platforms (Nüske 14, Sahoo 241, Paul 121, Kay 4).

Religion, particularly, has been an important theme where literature on humour in India is concerned. Lee Seigel

in his book, *Laughing Matters: Comic tradition in India*, chronicles the way humour has been described and understood in the ancient Indian religious texts (xv). Koenraad Elst has shown that in the history of Hinduism — the predominant religion in the country with the majority of the population practising it — humour is not a counter current against the orthodoxy but is quite common and open (35). Edwin Gerow has explicated how humour manifests in religious rituals, familial relationships throughout the ages in the country (146). *Humour, Wit, and Satire from Indian Classics* presented numerous satiric and parodic anecdotes from ancient texts within Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism (Thomas 2). But these studies rarely acknowledge how the use of humour has negatively impacted religious or, for that matter, any other minority groups in the country (Weaver 487). Thus, whereas studies from across the world have devoted considerable attention to how visible minorities — Jews, People of Colour, women, and alternate sexualities — are often at the receiving end of jokes (Davies 4), the studies on humour in India mainly limit themselves to chronicling the historical trajectory through which humour has progressed. There, therefore, exists a considerable knowledge gap as to how humour aligns with the different axes of social stratification to discriminate against groups perched at disadvantageous positions. Take for instance, the question of caste stratification. Elst, in his essay on humour in Hinduism does talk about jokes on the stereotype of the Brahmin: the caste of the highest social order. But he also mentions that these jokes were possible only because they were written by Brahmins themselves and thus served the function of self-deprecating humour (39). Very few works have actually looked into the way caste hierarchy, discrimination can be themes in the discourse on humour (Waghmore 160, Sahoo 241). Given how important caste is to an understanding of Indian society, the sparse literature on the topic is surprising, to say the least. Waghmore argues that this can be understood as a manifestation of the unwillingness to broach the issue of caste altogether, an unwillingness that pervades much of the public discourse in the country (155).

This paper is thus an attempt to unpack the ways in which humour facilitates caste discrimination in the contemporary Indian public discourse. By examining representations of caste inequality in comedy, the study throws open an avenue through which humour in contemporary India can be analysed. But more important, it intends to start a new discussion on caste.

Caste in Contemporary Indian Public Discourse

Caste continues to be a pervasive feature of the Indian public discourse. But despite being the subject of extensive scholarship and scrutiny, it remains difficult to arrive at a comprehensive theoretical formulation of what exactly this mode of stratification entails due to its varying nature and composition across the country. Simply understood, an individual's caste ascription determines their life chances, starting from their food habits, chances of obtaining an education, employment opportunities, their choice of partners and even the treatment they receive at death. It has the rare status of being an identity, a social system and the basis of discrimination, all at once (Mosse 4). It is so ingrained in society that it is difficult — if not impossible — to imagine a life without it. Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, is the social reformer and political jurist who was one of the first to have led the movement against social discrimination against the lower castes and the practice of untouchability, and is considered the founding father of the modern anti-caste movement. Ambedkar argues that the problem of caste is

> a vast one both theoretically and practically. Practically, it is an institution that portends tremendous consequences. It is a local problem, but one capable of much wider mischief, for as long as caste in India does exist, Hindus will hardly intermarry or have any social intercourse with outsiders; and if Hindus migrate to other regions on earth, Indian caste would become a world problem. (132)

Surely enough, a recent study has shown that the Indian diaspora is, in fact, an ardent propagator of caste discrimination (Ray).

The caste system may be defined as a hierarchy of endogamous divisions in which membership is hereditary and permanent (Berreman 120). In other words, an individual born into a caste has no way of escaping the identity that their ascription awards, unless, very rarely, in the case of women, by marriage. Ambedkar argues that endogamy is a defining feature of the caste hierarchy and that the strict observance of this custom and social superiority by the Brahmins sufficiently proves that it was this group that founded and contributes to the maintenance of the institution of caste (Ambedkar 133). Across the northern belt of the country, the caste system follows the *varna* (colour) pattern closely that serves to classify the castes as Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, Shudras and the untouchables (Jaffrelot 757), thus establishing that caste divisions also imbue a racial connotation. Another distinct feature of the caste system are the notions of purity and pollution (Gupta 410). Louis Dumont, the most influential proponent of this theory described the caste hierarchy as one that essentially serves to separate the pure from the impure. On one end of the spectrum stand the Brahmins — the twice borns: the caste that is most pure, while on the other end, and in direct

opposition to them, stand the untouchables or the caste of the lowest order. All other castes lie in between (Gupta 411). The untouchables are now known as the Dalits, a term popularized by Ambedkar, the literal translation of which means the broken or the downtrodden (Sharma 843). In the scheme of purity *versus* pollution, commingling among the castes is strictly prohibited (Gupta 411), so much so that even today, Dalit encampments are usually located at the fringes of the village in order to minimize their contact with castes higher than them (Desai and Kulkarni). Not too long ago, Dalits had to announce their arrival in a village by beating drums so that the other castes would not have to encounter even their shadows (Jaffrelot 758). An excluded section of the society, Dalits are often subject to enforced landlessness and servitude and relegated with the most menial tasks such as manual scavenging and disposing of the dead (Mosse 9).

Historically speaking, the caste system underwent significant changes during colonial times. With the introduction of the Census, the caste divisions were recorded in great details that gave the lower castes a basis on which to organize their agenda and political demands. The British policy of compensatory discrimination based on the reservation of seats in the bureaucracy and in the assemblies contributed to the crystallization of new social categories that resented their non-representation (Jaffrelot 757). Anti-Brahmin sentiments started being conveyed vocally during these times, and the British also enacted laws that served to bring down the burden of untouchability (Gupta 413). The process of challenging the established hierarchies was, thus, well underway. With the independence of India in 1947, the politics of caste assumed a different character. The Constitution of India, pioneered by Ambedkar, not only abolished untouchability but also reserved jobs and seats in government jobs and educational institutions for the lower castes and the indigenous tribes (Gupta 412). Reservation schemes have since then been attacked by privileged groups everywhere as the denial of the merit of 'deserving' — another word for 'upper-caste' — candidates (Akbar). In the 1980s, the Mandal Commission took the agenda of caste-based reservations a step further by also reserving seats for the Other Backward Classes, a group of castes identified as suffering from social, economic and political backwardness (Gupta 414). The implementation of the suggestions of the Mandal Commission created a nationwide furore, resulting in innumerable incidents of violence led mainly by members of the higher castes. The recommendations were criticized for not being a means to eliminate caste and its associated discrimination but instead a way to make this ascriptive marker a source from which to derive political clout (Gupta 414).

The caste system is constantly undergoing modifications. Harold Gould is of the opinion that in the rural areas, caste has come to be recognized as occupationally and hierarchically specialized endogamous social strata whereas in the urban context, it has arranged itself as interest groups sustained through endogamy and legitimized by religion (427). The question of class is inextricably tied to the notion of caste in ways that give rise to divisions and hierarchy within each of the caste divisions and make it difficult to understand them as homogenous entities. Better life chances mean that the upper castes have been able to acquire social and cultural capital that has placed them at a position of advantage, something that continues to elude the lower castes, who, by default, have been relegated to the margins of the society. But even then, it is fallacious to consider the Dalit category as a neatly packaged category where everyone that belongs to it has had a uniform experience. Even within this category, class connotations have ensured the prevalence of hierarchical divisions. But even though there is a considerable collusion between class and caste status, it can safely be said that the boundaries between the castes exist and the rituals and customs that serve to separate one caste from another are strictly maintained.

Caste, today, is decried as a social evil but it cannot be denied that it is an intrinsic feature of Indian social life; and so is caste-based discrimination. While Dalits have always been at the receiving end of violence from the upper castes, it is with the advent of the Narendra Modi-led Bharatiya Janata Party government in 2014, that incidents of caste-based violence have increased manifold all over the country. Reports suggest that violence against Dalits in the western state of Gujarat alone has seen a 35 per cent surge since 2014 (Smitha). Not to mention the many incidents that are forced to remain unreported. In 2018, a Dalit man was killed by the upper castes in his village in Gujarat because he grew a moustache: an indicator of upper caste status (Das). In Tamil Nadu, a Dalit man was assaulted by three caste Hindus and forced to eat human excreta (Vasudevan). A 14-year-old Dalit girl was beheaded by an upper-caste man whose wife said he hated the girl specifically because of her caste (Gettleman and Raj). Even in urban areas, the predominance of caste remains undeterred. A recent web series on Netflix, *Indian Matchmaking*, lays bare the importance of caste in upper-class millennial matrimonial alliances. The practice of keeping separate utensils for the domestic help — most of whom usually hail from the lower castes — is widespread, implying that untouchability, in some form or the other, still continues to be an important motif of modern Indian social life.

However, the rising cases of caste-based discriminatory practices is complemented by a belief that

caste is no longer an important social determinant in public discourse. Endorsed by the public institutions and mainstream media, the assumption is that caste identity no longer matters in the urban context. Outside academia, it is considered regressive to use caste as a lens to examine India (Akbar). Most incidents of violence involving lower castes are met with silence from higher authorities, and given the short-lived nature of public memory, the cases and the uproar are promptly forgotten. Numerous terms have been invented to refer to caste without explicitly mentioning it. Some of them include 'community' and 'family background' (Akbar). These terms, however, carry the full range of meaning that caste categories do. What this post-caste assumption essentially does is debilitate the fight for social justice and rights of the Dalit identity. The upper castes with their array of privilege compete for the same resources as the lower castes all the while criticizing the affirmative action policies.

The Post-Caste Assumption in Indian Media: The Space for a Counter-Public Sphere

Media organizations make news of even the most trivial matters but concerns such as manual scavenging, people refusing to cook for Dalit children in schools, or Dalits being displaced owing to urbanization, hardly hit the headlines (Rani). This makes apparent the aversion the traditional media harbours towards the discussion — any discussion — on caste. A reason behind this could be that a significant portion of the Indian broadcast media is owned by business houses, members of which hail from the upper castes. There is not a single *adivasi* or Dalit journalist among some 300 identified 'decision-makers' in the media (Nagarajan). For the elite sections of society, caste is not a part of their everyday lived reality and therefore, by extension, is not a reality at all. Adding to this is the fact that Dalits are often portrayed negatively in the media. Often highlighted as 'nuisance value', their demands, positive qualities and backgrounds are neglected to sustain their stereotypical images (Kumar).

It is this post-caste attitude of the traditional media that has pushed more and more Dalits to pursue social media as a space where open discussions on caste are made possible. Today, a plethora of forums that focus on the concerns of the Dalit community are available on the Internet. While some such as Round Table India conduct online, anti-caste debate, others such as Dalit Camera film debate, interview and upload them to YouTube (Dhillon). This has been facilitated by the rapid dissemination of the Internet in even remote areas (Chadha and Harlow 685). Now, people anywhere with access to Internet can exchange political messages with each other. Even in the face of political crackdowns on free speech and attempts to censor, cyberspace allows for political communication. Scholars have stressed social media's potential to open up space for marginalized communities and to award them social and political accountability (Kumar and Subramani 126, Thakur 361). Social media in India, therefore, has emerged as what is called the 'counter-publics' where instead of one exclusive sphere, there exists multiple counter public spheres where subaltern identities can be articulated effectively (Chadha and Harlow 673). By expressing outrage online, collectives can influence even the mainstream media (Chadha and Harlow 675). Online networking has brought social and cultural capital for the Dalit community, enabling millennial Dalits to employ social media for political purposes. Common online users in the Dalit community are becoming primary interpreters and agenda builders for the political claims on social networking sites, no longer depending heavily on non-Dalit leaders and the intelligentsia to represent claims to justice and equality (Thakur 361).

In 2016, Rohith Vemula, a Dalit PhD research scholar at the University of Hyderabad in the southern state of Telangana, committed suicide due to caste-based prejudices and practices at the institutional level (Farooq). Following his death, there was a massive furore on various social media platforms with the hashtag #Dalitlivesmatter trending on Twitter (Thakur 365). Online activism and digital rage were successfully able to bring the issue into mainstream political debate and Vemula's suicide and the successive debate on discrimination in liberal institutions marked a watershed moment in the history of Dalit activism.

However, it remains a fact that most people belonging to the lowest rungs of the caste order do not have access to the basics of survival. For them, access to Internet and forums for public discussion remain a gilded dream. In most cases, therefore, it is the middle-class, educated Dalit voice that is most loudly heard on these counter-public spheres. But even then, the online media platforms are providing spaces for articulating alternative opinions, becoming a means for the subaltern identity to express lived experiences of systemic injustice and thereby, contributing to effective meaning-making practices (Thakur 371).

Stand-Up Comedy in India: A Brief Introduction

The power of the Internet to make a clip go viral is a modern-day cultural phenomenon (Kay 2). While this has changed the way activism is conceived, it has also significantly altered patterns of media consumption in India. With the social media boom, the comedy entertainment industry has also seen a simultaneous upsurge. Comedy shows in the form of situation comedies (*Taarak Mehta ka Ooltah Chasmah*), sketch comedies (*The Great Indian Laughter show*), political satire on news channels (*The Week That Wasn't*, *Gustaakhi Maaf*) and stand-up comedy

competitions (*The Great Indian Laughter Challenge*) have always been popular on Indian television. But the widespread dissemination of the Internet, coupled with trends of globalization, has facilitated the emergence and steady growth of a brand of English stand-up comedy. This new variant is different from its already existing counterparts in the sense that it is mostly performed in front of a live audience and the clips are later circulated on the various social media platforms. Even though it is largely called English stand-up comedy, most of the performers juxtapose English with regional languages, but mainly Hindi, a technical apparatus known as 'linguistic code switching' to maximize laughter and stay relatable (Paul 124).

Stand-up comedy, in general, can be defined as "the oldest, basic, and deeply significant form of humorous expression" (Mintz 71). Oliver Double defined stand-up as an act which "usually involves a solo performer speaking directly to an audience, with the intention of provoking laughter, within the context of formalised entertainment, but it is an entity in itself, and is not contained within a larger narrative structure" (MacDonald 15). Stand-up comedy involves interaction between the audience and the performer (Sohail and Hasan). But in the case of the new brand of stand-up comedy in India, the clips are also circulated on the different social media platforms. The comments section underneath the videos, over and above the live audience, facilitates interaction and enables people to engage with the cultural texts in their own way.

The origins of English stand-up comedy in India as it is popular today can be traced back to the Internet boom in the early 2000s which made Western comedic content available to the Indian audience. The social media savvy population were slowly getting acquainted with comedians such as Vir Das and Russell Peters, who performed mostly in English (Paul 122). Gradually, in metropolitan cities such as Mumbai and Delhi which had an established pub culture, the American style stand-up comedy became a routine form of entertainment to provide the patrons novelty. And since most of them had returned home following the recession in the United States, a hint of nostalgia (Paul 122). Soon after, comedy clubs began opening up in different cities dedicated solely to showcasing comedic talent. Meanwhile, on *YouTube*, groups such as *All India Bakchod* (AIB), *East India Comedy* (EIC), *The Viral Fever* (TVF) came together to incorporate sketches and stand-up routines in their content (Paul 123). English stand-up comedy today is an entire industry complete with corporate collaborations, brand endorsements and huge annual turnovers. Many of the over-the-top (OTT) platforms such as Amazon Prime and Netflix have capitalized on the comedy boom and have programmed hour-long specials featuring some of the top comedians. Rohan Joshi, a comedian, and a member of the now dissolved comedy collective AIB, is of the opinion that the current comedy scene would not have worked a decade ago when social media was not there (Gopalakrishnan). In its formative years, Twitter was instrumental in publicizing live shows. Comic Zakir Khan also believes that the Internet has made it possible for stand-up to come to the same level as Bollywood or cricket in India (Gopalakrishnan). English stand-up comedy in India is still at a nascent stage which contributes to the fact that it largely remains undertheorized. But the publicity it has already garnered makes it an important lens through which to examine Indian social life.

Historically, stand-up comedy has been an important means of resistance, a tool for affecting change. The space it creates aims to challenge the dominant norms and upset the formal public discourse (Sahoo 241). Perez argues that stand-up comedy often breaches the norms of etiquette and repeatedly points out the significance of confronting touchy subjects and issues that do not always find expression in politically repressed societies. Stand-up comedy can be used to articulate alternate opinions and bring in the required consciousness to contest the dominant ideology (Sahoo 241).

English stand-up comedy in India, true to its form, is being heralded as a harbinger of change. It has made possible the articulation of opinions and topics that could not be explored on television with its strict laws of censorship. This content disguises itself as jokes and challenges the hegemonic narrative by unravelling the mask of authority (Paul 125). Furthermore, the fact that the content very often goes viral signals the popularity of YouTube and other similar social media platforms as counter public spheres capable of producing rational discourse on pertinent issues. This genre of comedy has brought sarcasm, vulgarity, dark humour into public consciousness and normalized them in the public comedic vocabulary. The comedians are being lauded for going off the beaten track, for speaking the unspeakable. Comedian Daniel Fernandes, who performs mostly in English, has a powerful set on YouTube titled "*Marital Rape*" (2015), in which he picks apart the societal negligence and the regressive attitude towards marital rape. He says, "I think marital rape is worse [than non-marital rape], because not only are you sexually violated but you have to wake up next morning and make your rapist a sandwich" (Fernandes). Such a discussion is practically unheard of in mainstream media and the laughter that ensues, possibly unimagined. In November 2016, the Narendra Modi government discontinued the five-hundred and thousand-rupee notes, a move that threw the entire country in a mayhem. Weeks after the change, the ATMs still had long queues of people waiting to withdraw money. Comedian Varun Grover says in Hindi, "I met an uncle who was carrying a chair, I asked him why and he said he'll use the

chair to sit outside the ATM" (Grover). Kunal Kamra, known best for his sharp critique of the BJP-led government and his many trysts with the police, does not shy away from ridiculing the jingoistic fervour of the government. Female comedians, specifically, have been commended for hitting out at the patriarchal nature of the society with their gigs on menstruation, body shaming and societal expectations — topics otherwise considered taboo in public discussion. Aditi Mittal in a video on YouTube titled, "*Sanitary Napkins | Things they wouldn't let me say*" (2016), jokes "I have realized that saying the words sanitary napkin in public is like standing in a Hogwarts common room and saying the word 'Voldemort'" (Mittal). Through their content, these comedians have been, to some extent, able to capture and confront the attitudinal changes India is going through.

But comedy is not without consequences. Ever since it gained traction in India, English stand-up comedy has been subject to much criticism and negative publicity. Comedians have received death threats, police complaints have been launched against them — the complaint against AIB after the roast routine they organized in 2015 continues to be an important event in the history of English stand-up comedy in India — and some such as Kamra have even been evicted because of the topics they evoke on stage (Singh). Religion and the government are particularly taboo topics when it comes to stand-up comedy, even though comedians continue to incorporate them in their content in some way. The documentary "*I am Offended*" (2015), aptly captures the nation's obsession with getting hurt over comedy content, but especially anything related to religion. In its most recent manifestation, the culture of offence-taking was in the headlines when a female comedian, Agrima Joshua, allegedly poked fun at Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, a warrior venerated in the western state of Maharashtra. She was given rape threats in graphic details and even after she deleted the video and published a public apology, the trolling did not cease (Yadav).

In the last few years, the debate around political correctness (PC) has gained traction in India and in many ways, is said to be stifling comedy. But then comedy is, almost always, inextricably tied to the issue of PC. Kapil Sharma, one of the most popular comedians on television says, "My shows are watched by little children and grandmothers. They have faith that I will not say anything offensive… We have so many religions, languages, and caste groups in India that we grow up with a self-censorship device inside us" (Lakshmi). The Indian populace is still warming up to the idea of a person talking about a particular topic on stage, hence, the possibility of getting offended is quite high. Kenny Sebastian, in his video on YouTube, "*Why I Don't Do Jokes About Politics in India*" (2018), explains why he shies away from political topics. He is afraid that Internet trolls will burn his family. "I do not want them to be crispy," he jokes (Sebastian). In fact, the culture of offence-taking in India has taken off almost immediately with the growth of the Internet. Incidentally, the same comments section that allows individuals to engage with the comedy becomes a hotbed of expletives and disparagement. Facilitating this is the garb of anonymity. In spite of these complexities, English stand-up in the country is constantly pushing the limits of free speech, testing the limits of what is acceptable. Comedians are constantly negotiating boundaries, failing multiple times at it but nevertheless setting new grounds for public dissemination of ideas. Given how pertinent this mode of comedy is in the public discourse, it is appropriate that it serves as a lens to examine how caste and comedy impinge upon each other in India today.

This study thus aims to understand if the silence around caste, that is a feature of mainstream media, also extends to the domain of English stand-up comedy on the Internet; if comedians talk about caste in the form of ascriptions, prejudice, and if the innumerable incidents of caste-based violence taking place all over the country ever find their way into any of the content. But most importantly, this paper looks at the identities of the comedians in order to gauge if this comedy space allows for the Dalit voice to be heard.

Methodology

Some claim that language simply reflects existing attitudes. Others maintain that language is a powerful weapon that can help to form or change attitudes. Examining language can then help explain why people laugh (Ross 2). The precise manner in which comedians employ language to evoke laughter is pivotal to my research and thus it was a conscious decision to use discourse analysis methodology for the purposes of the study. Starks and Trinidad are of the opinion that discourse analysis is concerned with how individuals use language to accomplish personal, social, and political aims and position themselves in relation to others. It is through mutual exchange that meaning is attributed to language and identities are negotiated and discourse analysis deals in the study of this (1374). However, this paper uses discourse analysis methodology in conjunction with a qualitative content analysis approach. The motive was to unpack the meanings that comedians attach to their jokes and arrange the findings into themes, and since a qualitative content analysis approach proposes to do just that, it was the best way to go about this study.

It is evident that this study deals largely with a social media analysis. The social media platforms have been treated as complex formations that shape ideas and worldviews of those consuming them (Caliandro 554).

Borrowing from Christine Hine, these sites are understood to be both culture as well as cultural artefacts (Caliandro 554). This means that the social media platforms present a space where the comedians reproduce existing cultures, inequalities through their gigs.

Methods of data collection and analysis

A multi-sited, mobile online ethnography of mainstream comedy videos was conducted. In other words, the comedians were followed across YouTube, Facebook, Twitter and any paid streaming websites where they might have put up content. By mainstream, I intend to convey that comedians who perform in only Hindi and English, the two most used languages in the comedy circuit, have been included in the study. Mainstream also means comedians whose content is available easily on YouTube thus ensuring that they are able to reach a wider gamut of audience. Even though there is a vibrant regional stand-up comedy scene in many parts of the country, most of these performances do not make it to social media platforms. Adding to it is the fact that regional comedy predominantly makes use of languages other than the two most widely used, making it inaccessible to audiences from other regions of the country. With the stand-up industry in India slowly finding its feet, there are many performers on the comedy circuit. But in order to limit the scope of the study, only those with the most number of subscribers on their YouTube channel were selected. The subscriber count illustrates how many have found the content relatable enough to follow the comedian. Keeping these considerations in mind, a sample of 15 comedians was drawn up. The website indianstandups.com which has a comprehensive list of all the comedians performing in India at a given point in time, was instrumental in this process. The number of subscribers was cross-checked from the comedians' individual YouTube channels. Some of these comedians tour internationally but this study includes only those performances which have been performed in front of a live audience in India. And even though the Internet awards a relative degree of permanency in terms of shelf life of the video clips, only the clips produced in or since 2017 have been examined. The list of comedians and their subscriber base on YouTube (as of April 30, 2019) are as follows:

- Zakir Khan (3.8 million)
- Kenny Sebastian (1.6 million)
- Abhishek Upmanyu (1.4 million)
- Abish Mathew (873K)
- Kanan Gill (699K)
- Kunal Kamra (929K)
- Biswa Kalyan Rath (553K)
- Sundeep Sharma (439K)
- Karunesh Talwar (426K)
- Sorabh Pant (294K)
- Aditi Mittal (241K)
- Varun Grover (233K)
- Daniel Fernandes (179K)
- Vaibhav Sethia (166K)
- Anirban Dasgupta (135K)

Each video of these comedians, available across different social media platforms — namely Facebook and YouTube — and OTT platforms such as Amazon Prime Video and Netflix were studied in detail to see how caste is spoken about in them. This was done following a process of open coding. Some of the direct codes studied include mentions of caste as a category and incidents of caste-based violence. But caste does not always find mention in a direct fashion and hence the literature review informed me of certain indirect ways that caste could be spoken about. These include — family profession, surnames, and skin tone. These codes were included in the coding frame as implicit references to caste. The codes were then analysed for frequency (how many times they come up in one particular set). The codes were recorded manually along with the joke they were a part of as to not decontextualize the utterances. Each code was accompanied by a definition from the beginning which helped prevent confusion of what it meant in the later stages of the study. Additionally, I focused on the response from the audience in terms of the laughter that a particular joke received. These have been indicated wherever applicable.

Code-switching presents the problem of translation. And since most performers switch between English and Hindi frequently while delivering the punch line, the transcribing process also included a fair bit of translation. The precise use of language and choice of words is important to this study and thus the coding process also accommodated the variances in language, especially the use and frequency of abusive language and expletives. But this introduces a complexity: not every Hindi word has an English equivalent and therefore not all words can be directly translated into English. Therefore, the motive was to get to the closest possible meaning to the word.

The codes and the information derived were then arranged into successive themes. Braun and Clarke argue that when conducting thematic analysis for latent codes, the development of themes is interpretative work and not just mere description (13). I followed a process of theoretical thematic analysis with an emphasis on how the codes relate to the theoretical understanding of the issue at hand (Braun and Clarke 13). By finding repeated themes across various performances, I attempted to arrive at a broader understanding of the larger problem at play.

English Stand-Up Comedy in India and the Absence of Caste-Related Discussions

As it so happens, only four comedians out of the selected 15 have mentioned or hinted at the question of caste in all of their performances. This goes on to prove that on the Internet too, despite its relative creative freedom, caste is treated as a topic best left untouched. Two of the comedians, Zakir Khan and Kenny Sebastian, make a passing reference to caste and caste-based reservations and promptly move on to other topics. Zakir Khan, in his hour-long special, "*Haq se Single*" (2017) on Amazon Prime Video elucidates how people after a break-up question themselves and says:

> *Jab tum poochte ho ki mere saath aisa kyun huwa, tab jawab mein woh baat kehte ho jo tum nahin chahte koi bhi duniya mein tumko kahein — woh tumko isliye chhor ke chali gayi kyunki tum kaale ho… woh tumko isliye chhor ke chali gayi kyunki tumhari* caste *chhoti hain… par main yeh kehna chahta hoon ki har rishtey ki ek umar hoti hain, jab woh umar khatam hoti hain, woh* relationship *bhi khatam ho jaata hain…*
>
> [When you ask yourself, why did this happen to me? Then your answers are those that you would not want anyone else to tell you — she left you because you are dark… she left you because you belong to a low caste… but I want to say that every relationship has an age, when you mature, that relationship ends].

Kenny Sebastian in in his Amazon special, "*Don't be That Guy*" (2017), sings a song towards the end. In between, he asks the audience if they would like it to be more indie and finally says, "[L]et's put in some *alaap* [in Indian classical singing, the prologue to a formal expression], because there is reservation here also".

The absence of any discussion on caste is problematic, to say the least. With comedy videos gaining popularity across media platforms, and potentially changing how people in the country think, a lack of discussion on caste jeopardizes efforts to build a more caste-cognizant public sphere. A lack of discussion on caste consolidates the urban, liberal notion: 'caste is dead'.

Stand-Up Comedy and the Assumption of Post-Caste

The post-caste assumption also finds expression in the way comedians choose to talk about the issue of discrimination. Abhishek Upmanyu's gig elucidates that amply. In his video on YouTube, titled, "*Breakup, Respecting Elders & Discrimination*" (2017), the comedian talks about discrimination in the following manner:

> *Main ek* football match *dekh raha tha, aur usme ek* announcement *huwa, bauhat ajeeb type ka, banda kehta hain, '*Today is the Anti-Discrimination Day, any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, colour or sex would not be appreciated'*… matlab tum kar lo, tareefein nahin kar rahe hum, thik hain?* Compliments *toh mat hi expect karna.* [Laughter] And I think India *ek jagah hain jahaan* discrimination *ko* lightly *lete hain,* right? 'cause we have much bigger problems than discrimination. Consider Mumbai Police, every day they are getting cases of murder, kids getting stabbed, and somebody getting robbed, *aur tab koi bhaisaab aa rahe hain*, discrimination *ki complaint leke, 'Sir, meri* complaint *likhna, usne mujhe kaala bol diya*'[The audience bursts out in laughter and Upmanyu makes a funny face] Police *wale ko gussa aa jayega. 'Dekh bhai, usne tujhe kaala bola kyunki tu kaala hain. Kaale, kaluye, bhaag yahan se. Abbey andhera hoga, kuch dikhega nahin, gaadi maar jayega tujhe.'*
>
> [I was watching a football match and there was an announcement, of a very weird kind — a man says, 'Today is Anti-Discrimination Day, any discrimination on the basis of caste, creed, colour or sex would not be appreciated'. This means you can do it, but do not expect any compliments. [Laughter] India is one place where discrimination is taken lightly. This is because, there are much bigger problems. Consider Mumbai Police, every day, they get cases of murder, kids getting stabbed and somebody getting robbed and then there comes a man with a complaint of discrimination, 'Sir, write my complaint — that person called me dark'. [The audience burst out in laughter and Upmanyu makes a funny face] Even the police get angry and says that 'he has called you dark because you are. Now, you dark person, run. Very soon it will be dark and then no one will be able to see you, you might come under a car'].

Upmanyu conveys the idea that there are several issues more important than discrimination in the country. This monologue is an example of the way in which mainstream media has treated the issue of caste-based discrimination — by normalizing and trivializing it. This video demonstrates that the domain of English stand-up comedy is no different.

Equally problematic is the scourge of wrong information. Sundeep Sharma in a 6-minute video titled "*Bombay ka Brahman Bro*" (2017), analyses the famous controversy of Salman Khan (a popular Bollywood actor) killing a Blackbuck — an endangered, protected species. Seeing how Khan's lawyer managed to get him acquitted in the case [This video was produced in 2017. In 2018, Khan was convicted and then granted bail], he concludes that Khan must have had a Brahmin as a lawyer:

> *Yeh* convincing powers *sirf Brahmins ki hi ho sakti hain.* Brahmins in the house give me a cheer [the audience makes noise and claps]. *Sabse zyada* convincing powers *humari hoti hain* [pointing to himself]. *Kyunki humne saare samaj ko samjhaya, tumhare ghar main koi paida ho, toh hume khilao, koi mar jaaye, toh bhi hume khilao… aur humne jaati byavastha banai. Aur jab yeh banai humne, toh sabse upar kaun rahega? Hum. Humne kya kahaan?* [Uses the mic stand to explain the divisions] *Dekho, yeh sabse upar Brahmin, uske neeche Vaishya, Baniya, uske neeche Kshatriya, uske neeche Shudra… hum* [Brahmin] *kya karenge? Hum tumhe batayenge ki tum kya karoge. Uske baad aayi Mayawati* [inverts the stand]. *Agli baar unhone sarkar banai toh usme sab Brahmin bhar rahe the, purpose fail… But humare paas zyada paise nahin hota hain.* Cinema *mein* hero *ka naam hota hain Raj Singhania, Vicky Malhotra, tum kabhi nahin sunoge ke* Ferrari *mein se koi* hero *nikle aur kahein '*Hi! I am Santosh Pandey'. *Never happens.* Bank-*o mein* zero balance account*, humare liye khula tha… But hum log achchhe hote hain, duniya hum e samajh leti hain galat.*
>
> [This kind of convincing power can belong only to Brahmins. Brahmins in the house give me a cheer [the audience makes noise and claps]. We have the most convincing power [pointing to himself]. This is because we have convinced the society that if anybody is born in your community, feed us, if anyone dies, feed us... We have made the caste system. And who will remain at the very top? Us. And what will we do? [Uses the mic stand to explain the divisions] At the top will be Brahmins, right below them will be the Vaishyas or Baniyas, below them will be the Kshatriyas, below them the Shudras. We, Brahmins, will tell everyone what to do. After this came Mayawati [inverts the mic to indicate that this political leader has changed the way caste is seen in politics]… We, Brahmins, do not have much money power. You will see that heroes in Hindi films usually have names like Raj Singhania, Vicky Malhotra. You will never hear a hero, getting out of a Ferrari, and introducing himself as 'Hi! I am Santosh Pandey' [Pandey being Brahmin surname]. This will never happen [pause for laughter]… We are good people, it is just that the world misunderstands us.]

Even though Sharma manages to depict the four strata in which castes are mostly grouped, it is factually incorrect. This is indicative of the lack of awareness where caste identities are concerned. This signals a deeper problem of the caste strata not being recognized enough in the modern public discourse. This post-caste attitude thus aids in circulation of the wrong ideas and contributes to the misinformation around caste. Sohail and Hasan conjecture that so common is the lack of information surrounding caste that sometimes caste identities are interchanged with regional stereotypes. Jokes do not spend time in etching out the differences between Haryanvis (people living in the northern state of Haryana) and Jaats (a caste group found in Haryana) (Sohail and Hasan).

The Use of Disparaging Humour

Comedy comes armed with power. The role of the comedians then becomes ever more critical in their function of power, resistance, and voicing truth to power (Kay 38). Standing on the stage, the comedian is in a superior position, a position to influence perceptions. However, not always positively. Humour and comedy can easily descend into ridicule and mockery and can be used to reinforce ideas of superiority. John Morreall understands this as the Superiority theory of humour. He describes it as deriving the essence of laughter from feeling superior to someone (121). Upmanyu's video on discrimination makes this clear. His use of disparaging words such as "*kaale, kaluye*" (literally translated as 'dark', abrasive words used to refer to people with dark skin tone), encourage their usage. In a country obsessed with a fair skin tone, calling a person dark is considered derisive for it fails to take into cognizance the association skin tone has with caste prejudice. If the raucous laughter that is heard in the background is any indication, Upmanyu is quite successful at reinforcing this prejudice. The comments section below this video on YouTube did not have a single negative feedback, rather people lauding him for his wit and 'keen observations'. This disparagement humour silences the marginalized, but more important, creates an acceptability of these prejudicial attitudes.

Upmanyu, in his position of power, gives out the message that in this context, one need not consider discrimination seriously or critically thereby encouraging his viewers to suspend all notions about it too.

The Absence of the Dalit Voice

Stand-up comedy employs autobiographical performance directed towards dissemination of a broader message. It allows the artiste to perform both self and culture and it is the juxtaposition of the two that becomes important in the acceptance of the joke. The very fact that Sharma constantly pointed at himself whenever he spoke of Brahmins as a group, reveals that society is yet not comfortable joking about caste identity objectively. The teller can only hope to evoke a (positive) response if he belongs to that group. His jokes were funny because he was self-deprecating.

Sanjay Rajoura, a political satirist, criticizes the Indian stand-up scene by saying that it does not touch upon the soul of the country — caste politics. This, he says, is largely because the comedians belong to elite classes (Sahoo 245). A cursory glance at the caste identities of Indian comedians (an exhaustive list is available on indianstandups.com) reveals that an overwhelming majority are upper caste males. The rest are upper-caste females. This demonstrates that Indian comedy, in spite of its democratizing potential, is still in the grips of the upper-caste elites. Unsurprisingly then, issues pertaining to lower castes are hardly discussed. It should be safe to assume that jokes about Dalits and the oppression they face will be possible only once a Dalit comedian is empowered enough to take the stage by breaking through the ranks that is so closely guarded by upper caste men. This absence of Dalit comedians from the comedy scene, however, has to be located amidst the broader socio-historical structure. Inaccessibility to English education and lack of exposure to the Internet are some of the many reasons why the comedy space still eludes the Dalit comedian. Former comedian Gursimran Khamba is of the opinion "I do see stand up continuing to be a force of resistance but I also see it only being that simply because the government is not going to give it that much importance. If we were Dalit stand-up comics going from village to village talking against the Brahmins, we would have been shot or killed or been under arrest… Let's be honest, we are upper middle-class people with cultural capital" (Khamba).

The concern of punching up/down cannot be left behind when discussing caste in comedy. Making a joke at the expense of a group less powerful is constantly a problem in a sphere that is completely dominated by upper-caste males. Self-deprecating humour can only be possible if the comedy space is made accessible to the Dalit voice. But a larger question of acceptability is at play here — how much will the English educated middle-class, most of whom belong to the upper-castes, with its post-caste assumption be comfortable with hearing a Dalit person on stage making fun of the historical oppression they have had to face, fully aware that they too are complicit in their suffering?

Conclusion

A topic becomes funny only after enough time has passed. The taboo of caste still lurks too close to the skin, comes loaded with years of guilt and recrimination. The comedy scene in India has been successful at bringing up uncomfortable topics for discussion, but as this study demonstrates, it has still not been able to break the silence around caste. Here it treads the path adopted by the traditional media, one replete with absence, misinformation and disparagement of caste considerations and adopts the attitude that 'caste is not important'. It continues to pander to the middle-class demand for clean, elite comedy. This cannot be expected to change very soon. There is time till Dalit comedians make their presence felt on mainstream comedy, perform their marginality, and challenge the power structure in the process. The comedy space needs to be liberated from the clutches of the upper-caste, upper-class men if the question of caste is to be discussed. For this, the potential of the Internet stand-up comedy to alter the public sphere needs to be realized more fully. Then only can a cultural turn based on humour be achieved (Sahoo 246).

This study is by no means intended to be an exhaustive account of the current state of comedy in the country. Neither does it claim to give a complete picture of the multiple facets of caste discrimination. Instead, it argues that even though comedy studies have not relegated much importance to the study of caste, humour's historical association with discrimination and empowerment can be successfully appropriated in the Indian context. In so doing, it lays the groundwork for more analysis on this subject.

References

Akbar, Prayag. "Caste lives on, and on: Indian society deludes itself that caste discrimination is a thing of the past, yet it suffuses the nation, top to bottom." *Aeon*, 20 April 2017, https://aeon.co/essays/how-india-deludes-itself-that-caste-discrimination-is-dead. Accessed 23 April 2019.

Ambedkar, Bhimrao Ramji. "Castes in India: Their mechanism, genesis and development." *Readings in Indian Government and Politics Class, Caste, Gender*, 2004, pp. 131-53.

Berreman, Gerald. D. "Caste in India and the United States." *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 66, no. 2, 1960, pp. 120-127.

Braun, Virginia, and Victoria Clarke. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2006, pp. 77-101.

Caliandro, Alessandro. "Digital methods for ethnography: Analytical concepts for ethnographers exploring social media environments." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, vol. 47, no. 5, 2018, pp. 551-578.

Chadha, Monica, and Summer Harlow. "The writing is on the wall, or is it? Exploring Indian activists' beliefs about online social media's potential for social change." *International Journal of Communication*, vol. 9, no. 5, 2015, pp. 672-693.

Das, Preeti. "Dalit boy stabbed for sporting moustache; third attack in a week in Gujarat village". *The Indian Express*, 04 Oct. 2017. https://indianexpress.com/article/india/dalit-teen-stabbed-for-sporting-moustache-third-attack-in-a-week-in-gujarat-village-4873228/ Accessed 22 April 2020.

Davies, Christie. *Jokes and targets*. Indiana University Press, 2011.

Desai, Sonalde, and Veena Kulkarni. "Changing educational inequalities in India in the context of affirmative action." *Demography*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2008, pp. 245-270.

Dhillon, Amrit. "How social media is empowering India's Dalits." *The Globe and Mail*, 25 July 2016, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/how-social-media-is-empowering-indias-dalits/article31091710/. Accessed 22 April 2020.

Don't Be That Guy. Kenny Sebastian, Stage 42 Productions, OML, Amazon Prime Video, 2017. https://www.primevideo.com/region/eu/detail/0R1B9NL93I9TH1XCT9W9YZQ06V/ref=atv_sr_def_c_unkc__1_1_1?sr=1-1&pageTypeIdSource=ASIN&pageTypeId=B071CZ2C21&qid=1599771993

Elst, Koenraad. "Humour in Hinduism". *Humour and Religion: Challenges and Ambiguities*, edited by Hans Geybels, Walter Van Herck, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011, 35-53.

Farooq, Omer. "Rohith Vemula: The student who died for Dalit rights." *BBC News*, 19 Jan. 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-35349790. Accessed 30 April 2019.

Fernandes, Daniel. "Marital Rape." *YouTube*, 25 May 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n9Cql4qMrQ8&t=308s. Accessed 23 July 2020

Gerow, Edwin. "Why the Fish Laughed, and Other Matters Relating to (the Indian Sense of)" Humor." *Studia Orientalia Electronica* 94, 2001, pp. 167-180.

Gettleman, Jeffrey and Raj, Suhasini. "Tell Everyone We Scalped You!' How Caste Still Rules in India." *The New York Times*, 17 Nov., 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/17/world/asia/tell-everyone-we-scalped-you-how-caste-still-rules-in-india.html. Accessed 22 April 2020.

Geybels, Hans, and Walter Van Herck, eds. *Humour and religion: Challenges and ambiguities*. Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011.

Gopalakrishnan, R. "For a few laughs more."*Fountainink*, 2 April 2015, https://fountainink.in/reportage/for-a-few-laughs-more. Accessed 30 March 2020?

Gould, Harold A. "The adaptive functions of caste in contemporary Indian society." *Asian Survey*, vol. 3, no. 9, 1963, pp. 427-438.

Gupta, Dipankar. "Caste and politics: Identity over system." *Annu. Rev. Anthropol*, vol. 34, no.21, 2005, pp. 409-427.

Grover, Varun. "Notebandi par Varun Grover ki stand-up comedy."*YouTube*, uploaded by The Lallantop, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gsejj9BCsSE&t=212s. Accessed 23 July 2020?

Haq se Single. Zakir Khan, Stage 42 Productions, OML, Amazon Prime Video, 2017. https://www.primevideo.com/region/eu/detail/0J7ZN4B9J2AGBRNET2R5GOVFAI/ref=atv_sr_def_c_unkc__1_1_1?sr=1-1&pageTypeIdSource=ASIN&pageTypeId=B073QDFN34&qid=1599772922

Jaffrelot, Christophe. "Sanskritization vs. ethnicization in India: Changing identities and caste politics before Mandal." *Asian Survey*, vol. 40, no. 5, 2000, pp. 756-766.

Joshi, Ruchir. "No humour please, we are Indian." *The Hindu*, 16 July 2017, https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/columns/no-humour-please-we-are-indian/article19286300.ece. Accessed 30 April 2019.

Kay, Kavyta. *New Indian Nuttahs*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, 2018.

Khanduri, Ritu G. "Vernacular punches: Cartoons and politics in colonial India." *History and Anthropology*, vol. 20, no. 4, 2009, pp. 459-486.

Kumar, Sangeet. "Transgressing boundaries as the hybrid global: Parody and postcoloniality on Indian television." *Popular Communication*, vol. 10, no. 1-2, 2012, pp. 80-93.

Kumar, Suresh C. "Indian Mass media's approach towards Dalits in India." *Indian Journal of Research*, vol. 5, no. 7, 2016, pp. 66-67.

Kumar, Suresh C. and Subramani, R. "Internet as an alternative media for Dalits in India: Prospects and challenges." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2014, pp. 125-129.

Lakshmi, R. "India's booming stand-up comedy scene tests boundaries with cutting-edge jokes." *The Washington Post*, 21 Aug. 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/indias-booming-stand-up-comedy-scene-tests-boundaries-with-cutting-edge-jokes/2014/08/20/a4e6a4db-90b5-4700-aa11-f371cb40c9d1_story.html?utm_term=.44783ffc712d. Accessed 17 June 2020 ?

MacDonald, James Lorien. "Comic trans: presenting and representing the other in stand-up comedy", Live art and Performance studies, Uniarts Helsinki, 2018.

Mintz, Lawrence E. "Standup comedy as social and cultural mediation." *American Quarterly*, vol. 37, no.1, 1985, pp. 71-80.

Mittal, Aditi. "Sanitary Napkins| Things they wouldn't let me say." *YouTube*, 4 March 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bIapVfDTgBY. Accessed 23 July 2020?

Morreall, John. "Humor, philosophy and education." *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, vol. 46, no. 2, 2014, pp. 120-131.

Mosse, David. "Outside Caste? The Enclosure of Caste and Claims to Castelessness in India and the United Kingdom." *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, vol. 62, no.1, 2020, pp. 4-34.

Nagarajan, K. "A largely Upper-caste Media is Not Good for India's Democracy." *The Wire*, 9 Sept. 2015, https://thewire.in/media/a-largely-upper-caste-media-is-not-good-for-indias-democracy. Accessed 23 April 2020?

Naim, C. M. "Popular Jokes and Political History: The Case of Akbar, Birbal and Mulla Do-Piyaza." *Economic and Political Weekly*, 1995, pp. 1456-1464.

Nüske, Lea Sophie. *Comedy as Resistance: Indian Stand-Up Comedians and Their Fight Against India's Anti-Democratic Tendencies*. 2018. Universität Potsdam, Master's Thesis. https://www.uni-potsdam.de/fileadmin/projects/wci/Masterarbeit_Indian_Stand-UpComedy_4485_.pdf.

Paul, Subin. "A new public sphere? English-language stand-up comedy in India." *Contemporary South Asia*, vol. 25, no. 2, 2017, pp. 121-135.

R, Smitha. "Violence against Dalits see a 35% surge since 2014 in Gujarat." *DNA*, 16 May 2019, https://www.dnaindia.com/ahmedabad/report-violence-against-dalits-see-a-35-surge-since-2014-in-gujarat-2749689. Accessed 22 Feb. 2020.

Rani, Jeya. "The Dalit Voice is Simply Not Heard in the Mainstream Indian Media." *The Wire*, 15 Nov. 2016, https://thewire.in/media/caste-bias-mainstream-media. Accessed 19 Feb. 2019?.

Ray, Tinku. "The US isn't safe from the trauma of caste bias." *WGBH News*, 08 March 2019, https://www.pri.org/stories/2019-03-08/us-isn-t-safe-trauma-caste-bias. Accessed 20 April 2019.

Ross, Alison. *The language of humour*. Routledge, 2005.

Sahoo, Sonali, and Rolla Das. "Is English Stand-Up Comedy in India Intersectional?" *Language in India*, vol. 18, no. 9, 2018, pp.240-249.

Sebastian, Kenny. "Why I Don't Do Jokes About Politics in India." *Youtube*, 22 April 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=azFe8b6yfb0&t=344s. Accessed 23 Feb. 2019?

Sharma, Arvind. "Dr. BR Ambedkar on the Aryan invasion and the emergence of the caste system in India." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, vol. 73, no. 3, 2005, pp. 843-870.

Sharma, Sundeep. "Bombay ka Brahman, Bro." *YouTube*, 5 May 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2K7tw3IWi6s&t=2s. Accessed 18 Feb. 2019?

Siegel, Lee. *Laughing matters: Comic tradition in India*. The University of Chicago Press, 1989.

Singh, Harsha. "Comedian Kunal Kamra asked to move out of his house due to 'political issues.'" *The Times of India*, 25 Jan. 2018, https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/viral-news/comedian-kunal-kamra-asked-to-move-out-of-his-house-due-to-political-issues/articleshow/62647201.cms. Accessed 22 Feb. 2020.

Sohail, Jagat and Nomaan Hasan. Humourous Worlds: A Study of Stand-Up Comedy in the Delhi-NCR Region, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics.

Starks, Helene, and Susan Brown Trinidad. "Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory." *Qualitative Health Research*, vol. 17 no. 10, 2007, pp. 1372-1380.

"Tanmay Bhat || Varun Grover || Vir Das - I AM OFFENDED". BeingIndian, *YouTube*, 4 Feb. 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=swozBbWMzNQ&t=1070s

Thakur, Arvind Kumar. "New Media and the Dalit Counter-Public Sphere." *Television & New Media*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2020, pp. 360-375.

Thomas, Paul. *Humour, Wit, and Satire from Indian Classics*. Ernakulam: Joseph Thomasons, 1969.

Upmanyu, Abhishek. "Breakup, Respecting elders & discrimination." *YouTube*, 13 March 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8q4xY8NO7yQ&t=2s. Accessed 6 Feb. 2019.

Vasudevan, Lokpria. "2 arrested for forcing Dalit man to eat human faeces in Tamil Nadu." *India Today*, 08 May 2019, https://www.indiatoday.in/crime/story/dalit-attacked-1520154-2019-05-08. Accessed 22 April 2020.

Weaver, Simon. "A rhetorical discourse analysis of online anti-Muslim and anti-Semitic jokes." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 3, 2013, pp. 483-499.

Yadav, Vijay Kumar. "Mumbai Police arrests Nalasopara resident for giving rape threat to comedian Joshua." *Hindustan Times*, 13 July 2020, https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/mumbai-police-arrests-nalasopara-resident-for-giving-rape-threat-to-comedian-joshua/story-JL17orwJqKhNf3WTFlu0wK.html. Accessed 20 July 2020.

Waghmore, Suryakant. "Challenging Normalised Exclusion: Humour and Hopeful Rationality in Dalit Politics." *From the Margins to the Mainstream: Institutionalising Minorities in South Asia*, edited by Hugo Gorringe, Roger Jeffery, Suryakant Waghmore , Sage, 2016, 153-177.

Diffraction Patterns of Homoeroticism and Mimesis between *Twelfth Night* and *She's the Man*

Xavia Publius[1]

[1] Department of Drama, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: xapublius@gmail.com

Abstract

Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* is well-known for its homoeroticism, whereas the critical consensus concerning *She's the Man* (dir. Andy Fickman), a 2006 film based on *Twelfth Night*, seems to be that it dampens the play's homoerotic strategies and meanings in the translation to film. This paper argues that while specific elements are indeed dampened, homoeroticism is still firmly present in the movie, and the perceived curtailing of much of the play's subversive energy does not explain the film's queer legacy. Because of the different codes surrounding homoeroticism for Elizabethan drama and Hollywood cinema, the different contours of homosocial space within the two societies, and the Western invention of the homosexual as a distinct category in the time between the two eras, the queer potential of *She's the Man* resides in different moments of the story, and is filtered through capitalist strategies of queerbaiting. Therefore, I aim to show the diffraction patterns of queer and trans desire between the two works. Specifically, the different approaches to mimesis shape this intra-action, including the place of women in mimetics; the specters of realism and psychoanalysis; shifting notions of gender and sexuality; and changes in audience tastes regarding bodily spectacle in cross-dressing stories.

Keywords: homoeroticism, *Twelfth Night*, *She's the Man*, mimesis, adaptation

Introduction

Much has been written about Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, including ample discussion of the homoerotics of both its text and its staging. Regarding *She's the Man* (dir. Andy Fickman), a 2006 film based on *Twelfth Night*, a considerable amount of conversation around its approach to the play's homoerotics has also taken place. While accepting the general consensus that the homoerotic strategies of *Twelfth Night* are dampened in the translation to film, this paper argues that homoeroticism is still firmly present in the movie. Because of the different codes surrounding homoeroticism for Elizabethan drama and Hollywood cinema, the different contours of homosocial space within the two societies, and the Western invention of the homosexual as a distinct category in the time between the two eras, the queer potential of *She's the Man* resides in different moments of the story, and is filtered through capitalist strategies of queerbaiting. Therefore, I aim to show the diffraction patterns of queer and trans desire between the two works. Specifically, the different approaches to mimesis shape this intra-action, including the place of women in mimetics; the specters of realism and psychoanalysis; shifting notions of gender and sexuality; and changes in audience tastes regarding bodily spectacle in cross-dressing stories.

Twelfth Night is by no means the only Shakespeare play where a cross-dressing female character is a vehicle for homoerotic desire; in fact, the scene in *She's the Man* where Viola-as-Sebastian impersonates herself for Duke to practice talking to girls is a borrowing from *As You Like It* (Klett 76; Osborne, "Cinematic" 18). And yet, "[o]f all Shakespeare's comedies it is perhaps *Twelfth Night* which takes the most remarkable risks with the identity of its central figure. […] [I]t is only in *Twelfth Night* that the protagonist specifically says, 'I am not what I am' (3.1.139) where 'seem' would

have scanned just as well and preserved the unity of the subject" (Belsey, "Disrupting" 185). Indeed, much of the scholarship on queer possibility in the play notes how Cesario[1] is a destabilizing figure who, depending on the theory, represents carnivalesque reversal of norms (Coddon 74), apocalyptic transitory identity (Martin), narcissistic doubling (Bate 61; Dodd 95), cisgender heterosexual identity formation (Bate 62; Balizet 129; Kahn 207-11), the homonormativity of Renaissance marriage (Osborne, "Marriage"; Shannon), the fluidity of gender (Massai 10-11), female mobility (Hutson 99; Schiffer, "Long View" 27), and bisexuality of both the characters and the actors (Dodd 94; Dorwick). While the symbolic value of Cesario's identity (or lack thereof) seems the most obvious locus of queer energy in the play, the contours of the discussion surrounding *Twelfth Night*'s homoerotic elements encompass several other key points, namely Antonio and Sebastian's relationship (e.g. Atkin 93-98; Kostihová), the Elizabethan practice of employing boy actors to play women (e.g. Case; Orgel), Cesario's relationship with Orsino (e.g. Dorwick; Osborne, "Marriage"), Cesario's relationship with Olivia (e.g. Belsey, "Modern"; Carroll 75-76), and the parallel class boundary violations by Sir Toby, Maria, and Malvolio (e.g. Schiffer, "Long View" 27).

There is considerable disagreement about whether *Twelfth Night*'s ending neatly and miraculously returns Illyria to Lenten order, or whether the disruption caused by Cesario and Sebastian's arrival extends beyond the curtain (Traub 119-20). Even if the carnivalesque is successfully contained by the ending, the complex tone of the play, especially Feste's notoriously somber ending song, brings into question whether such closure is indeed a happy ending, or instead a bittersweet necessity (Bate 63; Klett 82-83). At any rate, there are significant questions left unanswered by the closing of the curtain, many of which are of interest to the queer spectator: What do Sir Andrew and Antonio do after going home empty handed? Can Olivia's feelings for Cesario be successfully transferred to her new husband? Given Orsino's sexist ideas about women, will his relationship with Viola be acceptably similar to his relationship with Cesario? What if the sea captain cannot be found?

Most of these questions are left just as open in *She's the Man*, although some are given interesting solutions. The plot of *Twelfth Night* is well-known, but a summary of *She's the Man* may prove instructive in the ways it adapts the story. Viola is a prominent member of the Cornwall women's soccer team; we see her athletic prowess before learning her name. When the women's team is cut and the men's coach refuses to let the girls try out, Viola decides to impersonate her brother Sebastian, who is disappearing to London for two weeks. Both an attempt to prevent him from getting expelled and a chance to face off against the Cornwall boys, her decision to attend Illyria in his place is met with confusion and begrudging assistance from her gay[2] best friend, Paul Antonio. After a lengthy makeover montage, she arrives at school and attempts to fit in using hypermasculine bravado and rampant cultural appropriation, all of which is met with considerable distaste by Toby, Andrew, and her roommate Duke. Their annoyance eventually dissipates, however, when Paul orchestrates a parade of women—i.e. Viola's friends Kia and Yvonne—to flirt with 'Sebastian', only for Sebastian's actual ex Monique to show up. It also helps that Olivia has already taken a liking to her lab partner Viola, a position Duke exploits to try and score himself a date with Olivia in exchange for helping Viola with her soccer. There is also a subplot where Viola is roped into participating in a debutante ball, which adds tension to her ruse, as does the prying of Principal Gold, Malcolm Festes, and Monique. Eventually, the love triangle comes crashing down when Sebastian returns a day early and is immediately kissed by Olivia, and at the soccer match between Illyria and Cornwall, both Sebastian and Viola end up exposing parts of their bodies to 'prove' that Sebastian is a boy (his penis) and Viola is a girl (her breasts). Duke, initially upset, comes around and escorts her to the debutante ball, where we find all the lovers united: Duke and Viola, Sebastian and Olivia, Toby and Eunice, Monique and Viola's ex Justin, and Paul and Andrew.

[1] I will refer to the *Twelfth Night* character as Cesario instead of Viola and use he/him pronouns for two reasons: first, from a practical perspective it is useful to distinguish Cesario, the main character of *Twelfth Night*, and Viola, the main character of *She's The Man*, unless explicitly collapsing them as *the Violas*; secondly, the name Viola famously only appears in the dialogue at the very end (5.1.238-50) and in the script, whereas the only name the audience has access to until this point is Cesario. Indeed, even when the name Viola is revealed, he is only ever addressed as Cesario, "for," as Orsino mischievously remarks, "so you shall be while you are a man; /but when in other habits you are seen, /Orsino's mistress and his fancy's queen." Since we never see him in these "other habits" except at the very beginning—when the character has no name as yet—I feel no qualms about continuing to call him Cesario. Another convention I have adopted is to use Orsino to refer to the play, Duke the film, and Duke Orsino both.

[2] While the word gay/queer is never used for him, he is very strongly coded gay (Klett 84 n. 5; Mathijs 95 n. 23).

Most reviews of the movie were fairly lukewarm-to-negative[3]. Setting aside the somewhat farfetched scenario and perceived dilution of *Twelfth Night* into a simplified popular text[4], the criticism most interesting for my purposes is the seeming consensus that the homoerotic elements of *Twelfth Night* are downplayed—if not removed entirely (Klett 75-76)—in the film: "with Viola's friend, Paul Antonio, who is strongly coded as gay and fully accepted (though not partnered [*sic*]) throughout the movie, the filmmakers have relocated Antonio and in effect eliminated the passionate male friendship between Antonio and Viola's brother. Instead, Sebastian is pursued by his girlfriend Monique. Similarly, Olivia's attraction to Viola in disguise is markedly less homoerotic than in Shakespeare's comedy […]" (Osborne, "Cinematic" 17-18). Even the homoerotics that are still present are necessarily constrained by the hegemonic narrative; Elizabeth J. Meyer writes that films like *She's the Man*

> are not violently homophobic, but they demonstrate how heterosexism and homophobia operate. [The] love interests provide comic moments for the audience who are "in the know" about [Viola's] female sex […], but also illuminate how same-gender desire is marked as scary, gross, or threatening and is to be avoided at all costs. These situations are acceptable and presented as comedic to the audience because […] Viola's feminine "het cred"[5] was established in the first frames […] and was never in question; therefore, there is never a real "threat" of queer desire or behaviors. (236)

I do not necessarily disagree with any of these assessments; it is certainly the case that *She's the Man*, however much it plays with gender and sexuality, reinforces hegemonic values of heteropatriarchy (Aranjuez 39). But I worry these critiques undervalue the homoerotic elements that are still present, albeit relocated (Dorwick 78), especially since Valerie Traub's argument that *Twelfth Night's* "transvestism […] has a more generalized erotic effect, dispersed throughout the entire fabric of the text, rather than located and fixed within one character's desire" is equally applicable to *She's the Man* (118-19). Instead, if we agree that many of the elements of the homoeroticism of *Twelfth Night* have disappeared in the adaptation process, then I think it important to trace where they went, why they shifted, and what if anything took their place.

Adaptational Diffraction

In literary criticism, what constitutes homoerotic energy in a piece has a specific history braided using three strands—psychoanalysis, the lesbian continuum, and queer coding—all of which analyze the suppression of queer content as (respectively) taboo, his-torically unimportant, and subversively immoral. Because of this suppression, queer possibilities were relegated to the subtext, and in order to locate these queer subtexts, audiences had to know what to look for (Tyson 326). Even though these strictures are (mostly) no longer in place, they shaped the language of cinematography and character development so fundamentally that 21st century offerings still utilize these codes and tropes to encode queerness. Moreover, content producers know that the audience knows these codes, and deploy them to cash in on the queer market share without alienating conservative consumers with explicit queer representation, a strategy known as queerbaiting (Nordin; Remple).

There are three levels of reception in play that need to be identified in order to understand how homoeroticism is perceived in these works: early modern reception of *Twelfth Night*, contemporary reception of *Twelfth Night*, and contemporary reception of *She's the Man*. While most of the literature on *She's the Man* explores the differences between what *Twelfth Night* would have meant for early modern audiences and what *She's the Man* means for contemporary audiences, the implication is that *She's the Man*, as an adaptation of the play, also by proxy communicates what *Twelfth Night* means for contemporary audiences, hence the dilution narrative (Balizet *passim*; Hutcheon 121-22). That is, by adapting *Twelfth Night* in such a way that the homoerotic aspects readily accessible to an audience familiar with Elizabethan codes are removed or displaced, *She's the Man* changes the meaning of *Twelfth Night* for a contemporary audience for whom it might be their only knowledge of the play (Hutcheon 120). *She's the Man* does not just reflect contemporary views of *Twelfth Night*, it provides avenues for interrogating and "re-cognizing"

[3] The film has 43% critical approval on Rotten Tomatoes, but 79% audience approval ("She's the Man (2006)").

[4] See Friedman, "To Think" as well as Hutcheon for a complication of this dilution narrative.

[5] *Cred* is borrowed from African American Vernacular English (AAVE), simultaneously denoting 'credibility' and 'credentials,' with the contextual meaning of believability as a member of a group or as legit/authentic. Meyer's critical deployment of the term occurs after a discussion of the ways that Viola "appropriat[es a] Black urban masculinity," thus she's emphasizing the ways that racialized gender is used in straight circles in her formulation "het cred" (235). I have adopted this critical usage of *cred* as a framework for understanding appeals to authenticity both by characters and by the film's creators.

Twelfth Night and what it means to today's audiences (Balizet 123). Because of this, the change in homoerotic strategies is seen as making the movie more conformist than *Twelfth Night* was/is (Klett 70). I argue that *She's the Man* is no more beholden to the foreclosure of the carnivalesque than *Twelfth Night* is, and that while the movie's foreclosure is tighter than the play's, it retains and reshapes some of the same unanswered questions mentioned above that are left offstage by Shakespeare. The simultaneous presentation of "both hegemonic and counter-hegemonic elements" allows "the latter […] to disseminate viewpoints that interrogate the status quo" (Aranjuez 41) as well as the same type of fancy of alternative ways of being that fixation of the body in one authoritative form cannot fully erase (Smith 78).

Attention to *She's the Man* as an adaptation requires us to chart the similarities and differences between the two texts, because part of the pleasure of encountering an adaptation lies in "the interplay between works" (Hutcheon 117). The translation from Elizabethan theater to contemporary film retains some strategies of representation and transforms, adds, or eliminates others, such that adapting the story to its new context provides occasion to observe and appreciate both thematic and structural strategies of reinterpreting *Twelfth Night*. To this end I utilize diffraction as a metaphor in reference to Harlan Weaver's work on the subject, who explains that texts "in close proximity to each other act as slits for the […] intense feelings that move, wave-like, through both of them, [… creating] points of constructive interference that demarcate the emergence of differences between them" (3236-38). That is, instead of the differences and similarities being concrete aspects of two separate texts, the interactions and intra-actions between the texts open up points of sameness, difference, amplification, and interference. As Weaver presents Karen Barad's usage of the term, *intra-action* means that "self and other do not encounter one another, boundaries intact, and then separate with the same boundaries; rather, self and other become separate through the process of encountering" (3445-46). In other words, how do *Twelfth Night* and *She's the Man* shape each other, as opposed to a unidirectional influence on the supposedly derivative text?

While I am focusing on homoerotics instead of affect proper, the diffraction strategy seems to be an effective trans methodology of tracing movements and intra-actions between texts. It is clear that both texts are involved in homoerotic projects, yet sometimes those projects reinforce each other and sometimes they interfere given the shift in context between them. The methods of encoding eroticism have changed; nevertheless, in both cases mimesis is the vehicle through which the text carries its homoerotic content. Thus, the diffraction patterns between homoerotic codes in Elizabethan dramatic theory and in contemporary film theory emerge through the lens of differing conceptions of mimesis and verisimilitude[6]. Aristotle describes the difference between history and art such that, respectively, "the one describes the thing that has been, and the other a kind of thing that might be" (52). Mimesis is thus not necessarily about truth 'itself' but a representation of that truth (Nuttall 55). Throughout the history of theater, theorists have debated the proper relationship between the stage and reality, and in fact the nature of this relationship can be seen as one of the characteristic features of a region or time period's theatrical practice (Nuttall 59-61). Whether or not a piece has verisimilitude depends on one's perception of reality, on which aspects of reality are salient in one's conception of what is 'realistic' (Nuttall 55-56). The diffractive nodes between our two texts regarding these salient aspects of reality center around shifting notions of female representation, psychology and interiority, sexuality, and spectacle.

Node #1: Women and the Stage

In *Feminism and Theatre*, Sue-Ellen Case argues that the entire mimetic project is a masculinist one, and that the practice of men playing all the roles, including women, means that in the case of the feminist spectator, "mimesis is not possible for her. Perhaps the feminist reader will decide that the female roles have nothing to do with women […]" (15). Thus, the stage is not truly a mirror of reality, but a male projection of what women are/should be (Case 11). This rigidly homosocial stage opens up homoerotic potential between characters, between actors, and between the actors and the audience (Case 22-23). When combined with crossdressing plots, such as Cesario being seen as a boy playing a woman playing a man, juicy layers of homoeroticism emerge: are Olivia and Cesario's scenes a woman flirting with a man? A woman flirting with a woman? A boy flirting with a boy? All of the above?

My curiosity joins that of Stephen Orgel's students in how "increasingly [they] want to confront the question of what Renaissance audiences saw when they went to the theater: the female character or the boy beneath the costume," and I too am partial to his notion that "the indeterminacy of the transvestite stage, the persistent sense

[6] I recognize that the distinctions between mimesis, verisimilitude, and realism are muddy, but as I use them in this paper, mimesis is the process of imitating reality, verisimilitude is the degree to which a work approximates reality within a given artistic framework, and realism is one such historical framework (i.e. psychological realism).

of either and both" is precisely the point (109). The very polyvalence of positionalities is the occasion for the heat of Cesario's interactions with Olivia and Orsino. It is also important to acknowledge that this polyvalence was often specifically about male sexuality and eroticism (*pace* Traub): Keith Dorwick's central argument is that the male romantic leads in Shakespeare's plays (and their theatrical descendants) are bisexual due to the simultaneity of the female character and the boy's body, which dramatizes the tension at the heart of heteropatriarchy (75). Heteropatriarchy is structured around a careful balance of promoting homosociality and homoeroticism, to maintain bonds between men over those with women, while eschewing homosexuality, so as to continue female subjugation through reproduction of more men (McConachie 193; Traub 139). Thus, while women are ostensibly represented onstage, their presence is occasion for men to flirt with each other and explore male sexuality without the threat of not reproducing heteropatriarchy.

That Viola, Olivia, and all other women's roles in *She's the Man* are played by women removes one of these homoerotic layers by enforcing a congruity between actor and character gender (*pace* Dorwick). Fortunately, what the film loses in male homoeroticism, it gains in female homoeroticism. While Laurie Osborne argues quite successfully that such Sapphic energy is dampened ("Cinematic" 17-18), the situation is more complex than at first glance. Firstly, even if *She's the Man* does diffuse the Viola-Olivia interactions, *Twelfth Night* did the same thing in relation to *Gl'Ingannati*, the play on which it is based, which could indicate, as Lorna Hutson argues in analyzing the two plays, a shift in focus from eroticism to rhetorical engagements with female advancement, soccer in the film's case (98). I do not wish to imply that female homoeroticism is not already central to *Twelfth Night*; several theorists have examined this aspect (Carroll 75-76). However, the presence of female actors certainly foregrounds female homoeroticism more than it had been.

Secondly, unlike in traditional performances of *Twelfth Night*, in the movie Viola and Olivia interact with each other *as women*. Even when stage productions cast women in the roles of Cesario and Olivia, he is traditionally dressed as Cesario when they are onstage together. *She's the Man* has several scenes where Viola is wearing a dress (something we are assured is a rarity) and talking to Olivia. Analyzing the scene leading up to the bathroom fight, Elizabeth Klett observes that when Olivia is unwittingly gushing about 'Sebastian' to the very object of affection, Viola's reaction to the praise is ambiguous (69). While her daydream-y gaze in the mirror is played for laughs, that Viola is so moved by Olivia's affections calls into question the one-sidedness of their relationship. Indeed, the roles seem to have reversed in relation to the play: instead of Viola's words stirring unexpected passion in Olivia, Olivia's words stir unexpected passion in Viola (1.5.271-79), although the wooing speeches Cesario composes are transposed into Sebastian's, not Viola's, written lyrics (Osborne, "Cinematic" 18), another reversal of the situation in *Twelfth Night,* where the inauthentic written word gives way to extemporaneous speech (Massai 14).

Olivia is not the only woman pursuing Cesario, an even more radical departure from *Twelfth Night*. Whereas *Twelfth Night* has been described as the story of Olivia and her many (male) love interests (Draper 215), *She's the Man* could cheekily be described as the story of Viola and her many girlfriends. Eunice is creepily clingy to 'Sebastian', including watching her sleep in a sequence that reads like a send-up of lesbian boarding school films[7]. Kia and Yvonne hang all over her, albeit for show, and the other girls at school flirt with her after she ostentatiously breaks up with Monique in Cesario's (the pizza joint in the film). While collecting women in this manner is designed to establish her diegetic het cred, this time as a guy, it also trades in butch/femme dynamics. Viola, the most butch woman in the film, throws into relief the femininity of her potential partners through her camp masculinity. This is deliberately toyed with in the sequence where Kia and Yvonne pretend to flirt with 'Sebastian', with the beat of the accompanying song suggesting Kia's strut in heels towards her to be a well-choreographed dance that may appear heterosexual to the untrained eye but is a playful caricature by women who know each other to be women (Nestle 141). This charade has a second layer of homoerotic content: Paul, who's orchestrating this scene, mouths Kia and Yvonne's lines as they say them, thus implying this is Paul talking to some dream straight boy (Sebastian perhaps?). The playfulness of this exchange is interrupted by the arrival of Monique, a representative of cis heterosexual femininity who would be able to blow the whole scheme with her knowledge of its artifice.

Other choices about adapting the characters, while less drastic than the move to female actors, diffuse the homoerotic energy differently, avoiding queer implications in some places and creating them in others. Viola, Duke, Olivia, and Sebastian are fairly straightforward transplants from the original. Toby Belch, Andrew Aguecheek, and

[7] Additionally, the debt of *She's the Man* to the horror genre, which has several queer implications, has yet to be explored.

(Paul) Antonio also get to retain their names, however their characterizations are dramatically different and they have switched their allegiances, with Paul being Viola's friend instead of Sebastian's and Toby and Andrew being part of Duke's retinue instead of Olivia's. As Osborne notes above, Paul becoming Viola's friend removes the intensely homoerotic bond between him and Sebastian, however his affection is instead bestowed upon Andrew in a blink-and-you-miss-it moment at the debutante ball (1:39:45). These shufflings accomplish several things. Most directly, they emphasize the rigidly homosocial atmosphere of Illyria Prep; despite being co-ed, the school is strongly associated with chaotic hypermasculinity starting with the sequence where Viola first arrives at the dorms (14:14-15:00). This underscores the overarching theme of the film, which is the battle of the sexes epitomized by Viola's soccer career. Whereas class has been argued to be the more important boundary in *Twelfth Night* (Massai 42), in *She's the Man*, gender firmly takes center stage as the overdetermining barrier to be turned upside-down[8]. Because of the stronger thematic emphasis on gender and the attendant shift to more female roles played by women, strategies of homoeroticism move to other moments and characters to accommodate the change.

Node #2: The Specters of Realism and Psychoanalysis

Despite his romantic life being all but expunged from the text, Paul Antonio does not end the story empty-handed; by pairing him off with Andrew, *She's the Man* solves one of the many issues with staging *Twelfth Night*, namely what to do with these characters once their lines are done. In fact, replacing Andrew for Sebastian could be said to avoid two problematic tropes that would not be palatable in contemporary media: the predatory gay and the gay guy with unrequited feelings for his straight(?) best friend. Since Paul's love life has nothing to do with Sebastian, his happiness is not dependent on the whims of a character who ends up in an impromptu heterosexual union at the end. Furthermore, Graham Atkin has described an inequality in the affection between Antonio and Sebastian in *Twelfth Night* that today comes off as controlling and creepy[9] (93-96). While there are certainly other ways to interpret Antonio and Sebastian's lines to each other, Paul not being even remotely associated with Sebastian removes any specter of the predatory gay, an extremely harmful and homophobic trope that dominated queer representation in the U.S. throughout the 20th century (Tyson 320). Because Paul's presence is homosexual instead of homoerotic, there is a different responsibility towards his representation to which Hollywood is marginally more attuned than it is towards the problems with queerbaiting[10]. At any rate, Andrew's pairing with Paul queers the original Sir Andrew and adds another potential homoerotic ghost for the contemporary player (see Quick), in addition to de-heteronormalizing the three-weddings ending in *Twelfth Night*.

And yet, Monique's presence encourages us to interpret Sebastian as explicitly straight, whereas in the play his relationship with Antonio provides little context for his sudden desire to marry Olivia ("it's a guy thing," the movie's Sebastian claims, echoed by Duke). A parallel straightening occurs with Viola through the addition of Justin—who in part serves as the catalyst for Viola going to Illyria—and even with Olivia, who is mourning a bad break-up with a college guy instead of her dead father and brother. This is probably the most damning evidence that queer possibilities are being evaded. That said, a large part of this evasion has to do with the comparatively panoptical regulatory apparatus in 21st century U.S. high schools, particularly as presented in the film (Mathijs 93-94; Meyer 237). The coaches, parents, debutante coordinator, and especially Gold provide visible social constraint not immediately present in *Twelfth Night*'s Illyria (Klett 73). For Shakespeare, Illyria serves as a sort of fantasy realm wherein the characters have more license to be excessive and play with identity, the site of the carnival as it were (Carroll 80-81; Martin). Whereas Cesario could theoretically have played his part indefinitely, Viola's disguise had a predetermined timeframe (two weeks), the identity of an already existing person (her brother), and the complication of social obligations as a daughter (the debutante ball) to parents who are not dead. This reduced social location of the cast also means that in the play Orsino and Olivia as nobility have tangible legal and social power

[8] This is not to say that issues of class are not germane to an analysis of *She's the Man*; Osborne notes how the immense class privilege of all the characters in the film shapes their access to social clout and transgression ("Cinematic" 23). Furthermore, the racialized class politics of Viola's mimicry of Black urban masculinities, especially her egregiously unidiomatic deployment of AAVE, have a lot to do with both her ambiguous success as a man (e.g. Duke's reaction in the first boys' bathroom scene) and the film's success as a comedy invested in critiquing gender at the expense of racialized realities (Meyer 235). I also recognize that Orsino and Olivia's courts are themselves gendered spaces (Stanivuković 122).

[9] Dorwick's observation that Monique takes the structural role of Antonio bolsters this reading (80).

[10] That is, as the Antonio character, "any interpretation of" Paul and Sebastian "is in a contemporary production political" because of the ambiguity in the play and the current climate for LGBTQ2PIA folk (Kostihová 138).

they do not have as students (Duke's performative acceptance of post-reveal Viola on the team notwithstanding). Furthermore, it should be pointed out that being minors, all three of the leads have even more limited access to full self-expression, which along with the other social constraints could explain why *She's the Man* feels less overtly homoerotic—too many people are watching.

While the film itself presents soccer as Viola's main reason for pretending to be Sebastian, the theatrical trailer argues something different. According to the voiceover, "Viola was facing a fate worse than death, until her twin brother Sebastian showed her a way out" ("Trailer"). This is intercut with scenes from the rehearsal luncheon (emphasizing her masculinity) and the scene in Sebastian's bedroom. Not only is soccer not mentioned, but Viola's disguise is presented as a "way out" of an enforced femininity. The agency of the decision switches to Sebastian, who now tells her to "pretend to be [him]," but his absence and the invited opportunity to take his place induct Viola into a world where "everyone's got a secret" ("Trailer"). In this way, the central conflict is implied to be Viola exploring her gender identity, not soccer. "What," Stephen Greenblatt provocatively asks, "if Olivia had succeeded in marrying Orsino's page Cesario" (66)? Quoting Michel de Montaigne's report of an actual case from the period, he presents a bleak potential answer: "the matter was brought to justice, and she [the cross-dresser; *sic* throughout] was condemned to be hanged, which she said she would rather undergo than return to a girl's status; and she was hanged for using illicit devices to supply her defect in sex" (qtd. in Greenblatt 66). Let us extend the parallel: what if Sebastian never came home and Viola quietly transferred to Illyria as him; or even more subversively, what if Viola had transferred to Illyria under a completely different identity? The real-life counterpart in this analogy would undoubtedly be *Boys Don't Cry* (1999, dir. Kimberly Peirce), which documents the rape and murder of Brandon Teena. When trans or gender-non-conforming people are presented seriously in film, we are often subjected to violence and death; when presented comically, we are the butt of the joke, and *She's the Man* is no exception.

Because of psychoanalysis, much of recent literary criticism focuses on interiority and on the character as an actual person instead of a structural element (Hutson 97). By the same token, the larger theatrical move to neoclassicism and then Stanislavskian psychological realism after the writing of *Twelfth Night* and their attendant expectations prevent some of the more fanciful elements of *Twelfth Night* being carried over in-tact (Massai 39). While rom-coms certainly have their own fanciful conventions, Hollywood film in general keeps to realist conventions and thus believability becomes paramount—especially in a film set in the present and especially concerning gender as a presumed marker of sex. This is why *She's the Man* requires much more context for why Viola is dressing as a boy.

The first 14 minutes of the film are dedicated to rationalizing why she must cross-dress and how, whereas in *Twelfth Night* the decision takes a couple lines and the transition happens off-stage. The passages wherein these decisions are made reward close study:

> VIOLA. O, that I served that lady, [Olivia]
> And might not be delivered to the world
> Till I had made mine own occasion mellow,
> What my estate is.
>
> CAPTAIN. That were hard to compass
> Because she will admit no kind of suit,
> No, not the Duke's.
>
> VIOLA. ……
> I prithee—and I'll pay thee bounteously—
> Conceal me what I am, and be my aid
> For such disguise as haply shall become
> The form of my intent. I'll serve this Duke.
> Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him. (1.2.43-59)
>
> DAPHNE. Picture this: we're at the country club, they call your name, and you emerge in this— [*She dramatically unveils a debutante gown.*] Ta da!
>
> VIOLA. [*Gagging noise*.] No. Sorry, mom, I have a strict no-ruffles policy.
>
> DAPHNE. Sometimes I just think you just [*sic*] might as well be your brother.
>
> [*Exit DAPHNE. Dramatic music. VIOLA looks at a picture of SEBASTIAN, wearing the same hat he's wearing in the photograph.*]
>
> VIOLA. Hmm. You know what? If you can't join 'em, beat 'em. (9:19-49, author's transcription)

Despite the shift in length of time devoted to this choice, in both *Twelfth Night* and *She's the Man*, the obvious solution is denied the Violas, and instead of applying pressure to the barrier, they view crossdressing in the image of their brother to be easier than, say, begging Olivia anyway for admittance

to her court—she obviously is not as closed off as thought if Cesario could be granted audience[11]—or filing a Title IX complaint against the school which the girls could easily win given the coach's virulent misogyny[12]. Clearly there would be no story if the characters simply avoided the perceived need to cross-dress, but the relative speed with which they acquiesce to these limitations and reach their decision to cross-dress is curious. Diegetic interpretations of this decision also vary significantly. Whereas Cesario legally being a woman is seen as a miraculously convenient solution to the characters' problems, the students and principal at Illyria Prep view Viola as at best odd and at worst mentally ill: during her outing, Gold says of Sebastian over the megaphone: "In fact, yes he is, he's a big girl. He's actually specifically his own sister, Viola, who's been impersonating him for reasons which will become very clear after extensive psychoanalysis" (1:19:43-53).

The history of conversion therapy and the pathologization of transgender identity makes this statement jarringly dark. As with Aristotle's stage, the idea that performing arts hold up a mirror to reality serves to erase the actual beings who inhabit the positionalities represented (Case 15). In *She's the Man* and other cross-dressing films, the possibility of transgender people is rarely considered. In the film's reality, there are no trans people, only boys, girls, and girls pretending to be boys; Viola is the exception that proves the rule that boys are one way and girls are another way, and never the two shall meet.

Node #3: Gender and Sexuality

As previously mentioned, the world in which Viola finds herself is portrayed as an extremely patriarchal, homosocial space that she has to navigate as a tomboy; indeed, the metaphysics of the tomboy is a central concern with transerotic implications. The techniques employed by the film of "downplaying *Twelfth Night*'s homoeroticism […] embrace the strategies of adolescent female athletes who distance themselves from peer assumptions about their homosexual orientation" (Osborne, "Cinematic" 19); this allegorical presentation of the plight of the female athlete establishes a border identity from which Viola can call the gender system into question (Meyer 241), but it also requires significant energy to justify and maintain. Because tomboys as a trope are masculine without being male/men, they allow men an indirect form of homosocial bonding without the risk of homosexuality. That is, the tidiness of Viola and Duke ending up together, and hence its erotic appeal, is that they can both play men's soccer and still be straight. In the opening sequence, it appears Viola can have it all: she can flirt with her boyfriend in a bikini *and* kick ass in soccer (Meyer 233; Osborne, "Cinematic" 22). However, this moment of freedom and honesty occurs without tangible markers of social regulation, a peace broken by the next scene at the school where the gutting of the women's soccer team ends both her soccer aspirations and her relationship. Viola must now make a familiar choice: her career, or her femininity? By sacrificing her femininity, she quickly demonstrates how little she fits into either the hypermasculine world of Illyria's soccer team or the hyperfeminine world of the debutante ball. In either scenario, her actions are incongruous, and wearing a suit and tie is presented as just as much a costume as her in a dress.

Both texts employ dramatic irony for laughs at/with the gender play by emphasizing the incongruity between the Violas' 'real' gender and their disguises[13] (Belsey, "Disrupting" 180). *She's the Man* has an added layer of dramatic irony through queer coding, such as during Gold's wig speech where he encourages 'Sebastian' to come out… as a baldy, or in the rehearsal luncheon when Cheryl asks the debutantes, "who's ready to come out[14]?" (39:09-45, 1:03:28). One benefit of this campy in-between space is that the Violas can bridge the gaps between Duke Orsino and Olivia, who represent opposite sides of the "two-culture approach" of gendered communication (DeFrancisco et al. 64). In the popular imagination, "communication problems between women and men are similar to problems that arise when persons from different language groups attempt to communicate" because men and women are thought to have completely different cultures despite ample evidence to the contrary (DeFrancisco et al. 64). Cesario is able to secure audience with Olivia when no one else in Orsino's court can,

[11] To be fair, this is in no small part due to Olivia's intrigue about the cute new guy at her gate, which might not have obtained were Viola not Cesario (1.5.145-63).

[12] It is implied that Cornwall Academy is a private school, and therefore likely—but not necessarily—exempt from Title IX, but going over his head or taking legal action is never even considered.

[13] In *She's the Man*, these moments tend to be one-liners, such as when Paul sends her off with a "be a good boy!" or when Daphne says "my little girl, you're finally gonna be a lady!" right before we see the 'Sebastian' costume in full (13:39; 12:08).

[14] Historically, "gay people in the prewar years […] did not speak of *coming out of* what we call the 'gay closet' but rather of *coming out into* what they called 'homosexual society' or the 'gay world' […]," in reference to the debutante tradition (Chauncey 7, emphasis in original).

and furthermore improves upon Orsino's outmoded and ineffective speech to woo her (1.5). Viola, as a representative of both men and women, is the only thing Duke and Olivia have in common, and *both* of them are desperate for 'Sebastian' to arrive and rescue them from their disastrous date. The dialogue between Duke Orsino and Olivia can only begin when someone fluent in both styles can translate, but also because each of them has a stronger connection with the Violas than with each other. This preference for sameness echoes Laurie Shannon's insights into the homoeroticism of marriage: "the ideological work of much comedy, then, is less to celebrate or to critique [heterosexual] marriage and its approach than to find a means to make it plausible or even thinkable in parity terms" (187).

Nonetheless, the Violas' intermediate positions are found to be unstable as both of them come up against traditional markers of hypermasculinity. Cesario is called upon to duel with Sir Andrew, although neither of them could be considered fighters. Cesario's reticence to fight serves as foil to 'real' men Antonio and Sebastian, who are competent swordsmen. The fight scenes in *She's the Man* reverse this characterization; Viola—as Viola—is squarely in the middle of both three-way fights, one where Justin and Duke are competing for Viola, and one where Olivia and Monique are competing for 'Sebastian'. Her willingness to jump headfirst into a scrape is in stark contrast to Cesario's reluctance. In both of the movie's scenes, the fight is over ownership of Viola/'Sebastian', and in regards to the film's quasi-feminist gender politics, it is illuminating that it allows Viola to fight as a woman for ownership of herself. Sir Andrew's greenness in dueling points to just how ill-fitting masculinity can be for men as well, a theme that emerges in *She's the Man* (Massai 46). In both texts, Duke Orsino's sensitivity is coded feminine, and a large part of the Violas' project is helping channel his sensitivity to their benefit (Aranjuez 37; Stanivuković 127). Parallel to Viola's soccer dream is Sebastian's music career, currently a feminine-coded pursuit.[15] Both Sebastian and Viola take advantage of the confusion of their parents' divorce to flee the social constraints that inhibit pursuit of their careers. The closing scene emphasizes this parallel to show the double standards of perceptions of gendered labor, as well as Sebastian's privilege in being able to maintain his gender presentation at the same time. This parental double standard of dis/approval appears earlier, though inverted, during the twins' flashings; in both scenarios, markers of masculinity are approved while markers of femininity are put under closer scrutiny.

This reflects a larger femmephobia issue in the film. Monique and Daphne, as ultra-feminine upper-class women, are consistently portrayed as frivolous, excessive obstacles to be overcome. During the rehearsal luncheon, "jump cuts contrast traditionally feminine Olivia gracefully consuming morsels (accompanied by a non-diegetic flute melody) and 'butchy' Viola gorging on chicken drumsticks (with dopey bassoon music)" while she glares at Olivia (1:03:32-1:04:11; Aranjuez 38). This sequence occurs at a moment when Viola thinks she and Olivia are competing for Duke, thus Olivia's emphasized poise draws a link between femininity and antagonism. The pizza scene, where 'Sebastian' dumps Monique by calling her crazy and ugly, is met with peculiarly enthusiastic applause from the other diners and immediately cements both her ladies-man reputation and her place in Duke's social circle. Gold's comments about high heels and Justin's propensity for crying also feminize them and encourage us to laugh at gender transgressions of (presumably) cis men antagonists.

Oddly, whereas in *Twelfth Night*, Orsino holds sexist views that Cesario has to correct, it is *Viola's* rampant misogyny that *Duke* challenges throughout the film (e.g. "why do you always talk about girls in such graphic terms?" [53:53]). While masculinity is just as fragile for the film's men as it is for 'Sebastian', Viola feels more pressure to present a hypermasculinity to (over)compensate for not being a man. This contrasts sharply with Cesario's strategy, wherein he occupies the relatively settled position of an attending boy, an already feminized position for youth that helps justify his androgyny[16]. Importantly, Viola's exaggerated masculinity unnerves the guys just as much as her moments of femininity, because both point to a lack of internalized masculine maleness. Whereas the guys' moments of femininity and compensation are in a larger context of settled masculinity, the rapid oscillation between extremes in a person they are just meeting constructs her as a "freak" (16:54). Just as Viola fails to inhabit a convincing male masculinity, she also has an unconvincing female femininity for most of the film. The entire rehearsal luncheon scene is based around Viola's resistant deployment of masculinity, which is equal parts deliberate (Klett 77), natural, and residual from her disguise. Interestingly, her masculinity is almost corruptively effusive. Monique and Olivia, until this point constructed as exemplary debutantes, have a rare failure in (white upper-class) femininity during the bathroom fight; as Cheryl admonishes, "when debutantes disagree, they say it with their *eyes*" (1:08:23). Sebastian's femmephobia, subtly suggesting femininity as a source of violence.

[15] The shirt he wears when first introduced, which advertises punk band Violent Femmes, seems a visual pun on the gendered complexity of musicianship as well as the gender play of the film. It also connects in with the film's

[16] Klett points out that perceived age also helps Viola pass because "Duke assumes she is a freshman" (75).

penis has a similar corrupting power: during his reveal scene, an extra can be heard saying, "Kevin, close your eyes!" (1:20:11). Masculinity is so contagious and powerful that it can turn anyone queer.

Why doesn't Viola simply say 'Sebastian' is not straight? This would probably be easier for her to maintain and provide a convincing 'secret' justification for her antics, although since her brother has to attend school there after she leaves, giving him a reputation as queer is not helpful, considering here he is firmly straight-coded. Moreover, when she does express what appears to be same-sex attraction, "her profession elicits aghast looks and gasps from both teams […]" (Aranjuez 39). While Shakespeare is indeed deployed as a marker of so-called high culture, in the particular case of *Twelfth Night*, his queer cred is also called on to lend legitimacy to its sexual politics even as it edits those politics. Queerbaiting elements such as this are littered throughout the film. The tarantula (named Malvolio) scene is probably the best example (Klett 76): to teach Duke how to talk to girls, Viola pretends to be herself, and while they "flow" as she calls it, Malvolio crawls on Duke's foot causing the two to panic. They jump on the bed and hold each other screaming, then turn to face each other and scream again. Malvolio leaves the room and Duke shuts the door, the evil contained, but then the phone rings, scaring them again. Wherefore Duke's line: "you, you don't ever, *ever* do that girl voice again" (43:38). Every time Duke and 'Sebastian' start to enter homoerotic territory, its indulgence is laughed off as Viola being creepy, and because we queer-decoding audiences are trained to see these characters as individuals with motivations for these actions that could indicate queerness as opposed to pieces of a comedic whole[17], we are expected to tolerate or filter out these bait-and-switches as the price for seeing gender and sexual ambiguity.

Node #4: Body, Cross-Dressing, and Spectacle

Not only do these moments approach queerness before "swerving towards nature's bias" (Greenblatt 68), but the overall carnivalesque nature of both texts frames these moments of destabilized heteropatriarchy as a temporary aberration that inevitably results in proper induction into the social order (White 43). In both the play and the film, Duke Orsino shares erotic energy with someone whom he perceives to be a man, but ultimately the disguise is removed and he resumes heterosexual courtship. Besides these carnivalesque elements, the presence of a literal carnival in the middle of the movie plays up the farcical elements of the scenario and occasions a spectacle of cross-dressing that is much more in keeping with Hollywood conventions. The spectacle of cross-dressing in *Twelfth Night*, besides the boy actors playing women, is the "double-vision" of Cesario and Sebastian, culminating in the final scene (Elam 110-11); for *She's the Man*, the spectacle lies in exposing the methods of production for the illusion. The transition from Viola to her masculine persona is moved from off-stage to on-screen in an extended make-over/"field research montage" (10:28-11:23; Aranjuez 39). At the carnival, Viola has no less than three on-screen costume changes, many with very thin justification. The locations of these changes, and of her fight with Paul when they arrive at Illyria, are fascinating because they hold the illusion of privacy within public view. When first we see 'Sebastian' fully outfitted, she immediately assumes she has been clocked by a random guy and gets back into the car to leave, only to have a shouting match with Paul in the open vehicle. Somehow no one around them has heard this exchange. It is equally implausible that no one would notice or comment on her tilt-a-whirl or moon bounce costume changes given there are witnesses to the transformation[18].

These moments of fantasy privacy allow for a different scopophilic pleasure than does Cesario in tights[19]; not only do we see various states of exhibitionist undressing, but we also see the costume-like aspect of gender inscribed on the body dynamically instead of statically. We are never permitted to forget that Viola is leading a double life—she now has two images for one body instead of two bodies for one image. It would seem *prima facie* that this emphasizes the arbitrariness of gender and Judith Butler's conception of gender parody, but on the contrary Viola's gender is presented as much less performative than Cesario's. The more Cesario presents as a man, the more he is accepted as a man, to the point that even after revealing his legal gender and birth name, the other characters (or at least Orsino) still treat him as a man. His performances of gender congeal to

[17] Although, Mathijs discusses how the acting and directing choices make deliberate use of an ensemble cast to provide the queer cred of a cult film by emphasizing referential humor instead of psychological realism.

[18] Many of these witnesses are children, which could explain how she gets away with it but also carries unfortunate implications given the predatory gay stereotype. At any rate, George Chauncey reminds us that the search for "privacy in public," to use Laud Humphreys' formulation, has a long queer history due to reduced privacy in the home and a lack of public institutions in which queer people could gather (197).

[19] When women were allowed on the English stage and took over the role of Cesario, part of the scopophilic pleasure was to see the actress's legs (Schiffer, "Long View" 11); this also connects in with the homoerotics of breech roles (Reynolds).

stabilize his perception such that returning him to the social role of a woman is a difficult project that exceeds the bounds of the play (Butler *passim*). For Viola, her deployment of gender is increasingly fractured until finally her body is called in as the final say on her gender. Before confessing, she says "I can't do this anymore," the stress of being two people finally rupturing the world she has created (1:27:12). To restore order, "*both* Viola and […] Sebastian must prove their gender, […]" as defined by their genitalia/sex characteristics (Osborne, "Cinematic" 31, emphasis in original). While we are denied visual confirmation, the conventions of PG-13 movies imply that the diegetic audience has more than enough proof to decree Sebastian a man and Viola a woman (Pittman 131). Especially since shirtlessness has been a metonymic stand-in for masculinity throughout the film, she is required to demonstrate her difference through presentation of the chest.

This scene is disturbing on several levels. Besides the "psychoanalysis" comment discussed earlier, that two minors need to expose themselves publicly to satisfy everyone's curiosity is problematic. Moreover, the circumstances of this outing cast serious doubt on Gold's judgment. Instead of privately discussing the issue with 'Sebastian', he makes an extremely public announcement in the middle of gameplay, as if this is a school emergency. In a deleted scene, he explains to Malcolm and Monique that he believes 'Sebastian' requires an intervention, not realizing that interventions should ideally be done in a context where the person feels safe. It is never appropriate to out someone, especially in so public and ostentatious a way and especially surrounded by so many people who can do her physical harm. Thankfully, Viola is granted slightly more agency in coming out than Sebastian is, but her confession is still in a larger context of coercion and public humiliation.

There is some slight resistance to the association of genitalia with truth; when Sebastian exposes himself, Kia takes out her binoculars and says "nice work, Paul!" approvingly (1:20:07). For Kia, Sebastian's penis is just one more part of the disguise, a recognition of the expectation that men have penises of a certain shape and size without necessarily assuming the fixedness of the body. Granted, Kia is portrayed as a ditz and the moment is played for laughs, but she comes closest to referencing the body as constructed instead of deterministically essential. More subversively, because the people in the bleachers aren't given a full explanation of the situation for Viola's reveal, they receive the illusion of a body with both a penis and breasts, until both iterations of Sebastian are seen side-by-side. By proving her worth on the soccer field, Viola has obtained the elusive female phallus.

One final note on the carnivalesque: as mentioned, the tone of *Twelfth Night* is notoriously complex. Even as *She's the Man* eliminates much of the melancholic elements (Klett 70), it retains the ambiguous and destabilizing tonal power of Feste's final song—in this case "Move Along" by the All-American Rejects—perhaps even more enigmatically given that so much of the other serious material is purged. Though Viola's femininity is supposedly embraced through her sudden change of heart about the debutante ball, the song's imploration to "move along […] even if your hope is gone" implies the matter is not quite settled after all.

Conclusion

She's the Man is a more faithful adaptation of *Twelfth Night* than it seems at first glance, but this faithfulness is obscured by the radical adjustments necessitated by the changes in genre, historical context, and casting strategy. The influx of women as actors and characters—as well as the different responsibilities towards gay representation—shifts the circulation patterns of homoerotic energy. Capitalist strategies of queerbaiting and the endemic surveillance of a post-9/11 world constrain the available modes of disseminating counter-hegemonic ideas about gender and sexuality. Changes in audience taste drive alternative approaches to spectacle. And yet, even if we read Viola as cis, her blurring of norms of gender and sexuality occasion a smattering of homoerotic moments that, while distinct from the homoerotic elements of *Twelfth Night*, qualify *She's the Man* as a queer film in its own right. While queer representation and aesthetics have certainly progressed since its release (though not exactly consistently), even despite its misogyny, heteronormativity, ciscentrism, and queerbaiting it remains a camp cult classic. In this manner, *She's the Man* successfully translates both the possibilities and limitations of *Twelfth Night*'s gender disruption by relocating the homoerotic elements in different moments of the story and by virtue of its mainstream popularity.

Acknowledgements

This article was written in Amiskwacîwâskahikan in Treaty 6 and Métis Region No. 4 territory. I am grateful to Dr. Stefano Muneroni for editing early drafts of this paper, and to the MLCS Graduate Student Conference at the University of Alberta for their comments on a version of this paper presented there.

References

All-American Rejects, The. "Move Along." *Move Along*, Interscope, 2005, track 3.

Aranjuez, Adolfo. "'I'm a Badass, Hunky Dude': Gender, Hegemony, and *She's the Man*." *Screen Education*, no. 86, 2017, pp. 34-41.

Aristotle. "The Poetics." *Theatre/Theory/Theatre: The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel*, edited by Daniel Gerould, Applause Theatre & Cinema Books, 2000, pp. 45-67.

Atkin, Graham. *Twelfth Night*. Character Studies, Continuum, 2008.

Balizet, Ariane M. "Teen Scenes: Recognizing Shakespeare in Teen Films." *Almost Shakespeare: Reinventing His Works for Cinema and Television*, edited by James R. Keller and Leslie Stratyner, McFarland, 2004, pp. 122-36.

Bate, Jonathan. Excerpt from *Shakespeare and Ovid*. Massai, pp. 60-63.

Belsey, Catherine. "Disrupting Sexual Difference: Meaning and Gender in the Comedies." *Alternative Shakespeares*, edited by John Drakakis, Routledge, 1996, pp. 166-90.

---. "*Twelfth Night*: A Modern Perspective." Shakespeare, pp. 197-207.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2nd ed, Routledge, 1999.

Carroll, William C. "The State of the Art." Findlay and Oakley-Brown, pp. 71-98.

Case, Sue-Ellen. "Traditional History: A Feminist Deconstruction." *Feminism and Theatre*, Macmillan, 1988, pp. 5-27.

Chauncey, George. *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940*. BasicBooks, 1994.

Coddon, Karin. Excerpt from "'Slander in an Allow'd Fool': *Twelfth Night*'s Crisis of the Aristocracy." Massai, pp. 73-75.

DeFrancisco, Victoria, Catherine Palczewski, and Danielle McGeough. *Gender in Communication: A Critical Introduction*. 2nd ed, SAGE, 2014.

Dodd, William. "'So Full of Shape is Fancy': Gender and Point of View in *Twelfth Night*." Massai, pp. 93-96.

Dorwick, Keith. "Boys Will Still Be Boys: Bisexuality and the Fate of the Shakespearean Boy Actress on Stage and Screen." *Journal of Bisexuality*, vol. 7, no. 1/2, 2007, pp. 71-88.

Draper, John. *The* Twelfth Night *of Shakespeare's Audience*. Octagon, 1975.

Elam, Keir. "'Ready to Distrust Mine Eyes': Optics and Graphics in *Twelfth Night*." Findlay and Oakley-Brown, pp. 99-122.

Findlay, Alison and Liz Oakley-Brown, eds. Twelfth Night*: A Critical Reader*. Bloomsbury, 2014.

Friedman, Michael D., ed. *Shakespearean Screen Adaptations for the Teen Market*. Special issue, *Screen Bulletin*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2008.

---. "To Think o' th' Teen That I Have Turned You To: The Scholarly Consideration of Teen Shakespeare Films." Friedman, *Shakespearean*, pp. 1-7.

Greenblatt, Stephen. "Fiction and Friction." *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*, University of California Press, 1988, pp. 66-93. ACLS Humanities e-Book, accessed 6 Mar. 2018.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. Routledge, 2013.

Hutson, Lorna. "On Not Being Deceived: Rhetoric and the Body in *Twelfth Night*." Massai, pp. 97-99.

Kahn, Coppélia. *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare*. University of California Press, 1981.

Klett, Elizabeth. "Reviving Viola: Comic and Tragic Teen Film Adaptations of *Twelfth Night*." Friedman, *Shakespearean*, pp. 69-87.

Kostihová, Marcela. "Post-Communist Nights: Shakespeare, Essential Masculinity, and Western Citizenship." Schiffer, *Twelfth Night*, pp. 131-48.

Martin, Randall. "New Directions: Shipwreck and the Hermeneutics of Transience in *Twelfth Night*." Findlay and Oakley-Brown, pp. 123-43.

Massai, Sonia, ed. *William Shakespeare's Twelfth Night: A Sourcebook*. Routledge, New York, 2007.

Mathijs, Ernest. "Referential Acting and the Ensemble Cast." *Screen*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2011, pp. 89-96.

McConachie, Bruce. "Case Study: Sexuality in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*." *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., McConachie et al., Routledge, 2016, pp. 193-98.

Meyer, Elizabeth J. "*She's the Man*: Deconstructing the Gender and Sexuality Curriculum at 'Hollywood High'." *Counterpoints*, vol. 392, 2011, pp. 231-45.

Nestle, Joan. "The Femme Question." *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*, edited by Nestle, Alyson Publications, 1992, pp. 138-46.

Nordin, Emma. *From Queer Reading to Queerbaiting: The Battle over the Polysemic Text and the Power of Hermeneutics*. M.A. Thesis, Stockholms Universitet, 2015.

Nuttall, A.D. *A New Mimesis: Shakespeare and the Representation of Reality*. Methuen, 1983.

Orgel, Stephen. "Why Did the English Stage Take Boys for Women?" *Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance*, edited by Milla Cozart Riggio, MLA, 1999, pp. 102-13.

Osborne, Laurie E. "'The Marriage of True Minds': Amity, Twinning, and Comic Closure." Schiffer, *Twelfth Night*, pp. 99-113.

---. "*Twelfth Night*'s Cinematic Adolescents: One Play, One Plot, One Setting, and Three Teen Films." Friedman, *Shakespearean*, pp. 9-36.

Pittman, L. Monique. "Dressing the Girl/Playing the Boy: *Twelfth Night* Learns Soccer on the Set of *She's the Man*." *Literature/Film Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2008, pp. 122-36.

Quick, Andrew. "The Stay of Illusion." *Performance Research*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2009, pp. 29-36.

Remple, Lan. "An Explanation of Queer-Baiting and Why It's a Problem." *Antagonist*, Tumblr, 28 Nov. 2012. Accessed 4 Nov. 2017. actualanimevillain.tumblr.com/post/36720884625/an-explanation-of-queer-baiting-and-why-its-a

Reynolds, Margaret. "Ruggiero's Deception, Cherubino's Distractions." *En Travesti: Women, Gender Subversion, Opera*, edited by Corinne E. Blackmer and Patricia Juliana Smith, Colombia University Press, 1995, pp. 132-51.

Schiffer, James. "Taking the Long View: *Twelfth Night* Criticism and Performance." Schiffer, *Twelfth Night*, pp. 1-44.

---, ed. *Twelfth Night: New Critical Essays*. Routledge, 2011.

Shakespeare, William. *Twelfth Night*. 1602. Edited by Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Washington Square Press, 1993.

Shannon, Laurie. "Nature's Bias: Homonormativity and Elizabethan Comic Likeness." *Modern Philology*, 2000, pp. 183-210.

She's The Man. Directed by Fickman, performed by Bynes, Tatum, et al., Paramount Pictures, 2006. DVD.

"She's the Man (2006)." *Rotten Tomatoes*, Fandango, accessed 28 Jan. 2018. www.rottentomatoes.com/m/shes_the_man.

Smith, Bruce R. "'His Fancy's Queen': Sensing Sexual Strangeness in *Twelfth Night*." Schiffer, *Twelfth Night*, pp. 65-80.

Stanivuković, Goran V. "Masculine Plots in *Twelfth Night*." Schiffer, *Twelfth Night*, pp. 114-30.

"Trailer." *She's The Man*. Directed by Fickman, performed by Bynes, Tatum, et al., Paramount Pictures, 2006. DVD.

Traub, Valerie. *Desire & Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama*. Routledge, 1992.
Tyson, Lois. "Lesbian, Gay, and Queer Criticism." *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide*, 2nd ed., Routledge, 2006, pp. 317-57.
Weaver, Harlan. "Monster Trans: Diffracting Affect, Reading Rage." *TransGothic in Literature and Culture*, edited by Jolene Zigarovich, Routledge, 2017. Kindle, loc. 3213-3739.
White, R.S. "The Critical Backstory." Findlay and Oakley-Brown, pp. 27-51.

Political and Ideological Tensions in Palestine: A critical language analysis of news reporting of the 2014 Gaza war

Rami Qawariq[1]

Department of English, An-Najah University, Nablus, Palestine

E-mail: rqawariq@najah.edu

Abstract

It is widely accepted that the struggle over media representation within the Palestinian-Israeli struggle is no less important than the struggle on the ground (Wolfsfeld, 1997). Although the role of the media in this struggle has been a focal interest for researchers, the vast majority of studies adopt top-down approaches with macro-level tools of analysis which lead to a dichotomous positive 'Self' and negative 'Other' representation. This study, in contrast, is a qualitative language-based analysis of three Palestinian news websites, which publish in English, during the 2014 Gaza war. These news websites are indicative of the media landscape in Palestine, and the choice of these outlets is intended to present a range of possible views. The study adds to the effort that approaches media discourse to detect fissures and dissonances, rather than identifying stabilities and symmetries. It aims at revealing some discursive aspects of the way marginal ideologies compete with the dominant discourse in Palestine. This is intended to shed light on the latent change in the Palestinian political culture and how it is discursively articulated. Within the framework of critical discourse analysis, the study takes account of transitivity (Halliday, 1985; Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004), the social actor model (van Leeuwen, 2008) and referential strategies (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009) to conduct its bottom-up analysis. The study finds that Palestinian news websites subtly exploit representations of actions and actors in their struggle for power, representativeness and legitimacy. More importantly, the results of this study reveal that a marginal ideology in Palestine is growing and competing with hegemonic national narratives. While the hegemonically dominant ideology depends on common public knowledge and backgrounds much contextual information, the marginal ideology mainly functions via the extensive contextualization of events, which takes a bottom-up discursive direction in relation to the prevailing socio-political culture.Keywords: Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory; conflict; Shakespeare; Chinese Daoism; education

Keywords: critical language analysis, journalism discourse, ideology, Gaza War, Fatah, Hamas

Introduction

Massive amounts of research have been conducted to study the different aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The vast majority of this research focuses on the competing narratives between both societies, leading constantly to demonstrating practices of positive Self and negative Other representation. This becomes particularly true during violent confrontations, where different political and media discourses line up with the dominant political institution to produce nationally-based representation of actions and actors (Dajani, 2003; Daraghmeh, 2003; Dor, 2004, 2015). However, it seems that the methodological synergies of these studies reproduce the same findings about this conflict, as most of these studies adopt content analysis (see Kempf& Shinar, 2014) with top-down analytic features. They start from basic narratives entrenched in the socio-political structures in both societies, and then move down to see how they are articulated via different practices, such as media discourse. However, with the growing tendency in critical discourse studies that focuses on irregularities and tensions

in representation (see Kelsey, 2014; Macgilchrist, 2014), there is a need to focus on internal conflicts within the Palestinian and Israeli societies to unveil latent political and ideological conflicts that direct the struggle and form part of its future practices. This study, therefore, aims at providing new insights about the way political and ideological conflicts in Palestine are covertly articulated via news discourse. The choice of journalism to identify ideological tensions is based on the assumption that journalism, under the disguise of objective reporting of reality, constructs perspectivized world views, thus having a role in reproducing ideologies that regulate social actors' knowledge and attitudes towards actors' and actions (Fowler, 1991).

Critical Discourse Analysis, Journalism, and Ideology

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a methodological approach that investigates the correlation between discourse and social structures (Wodak, 1996). One of its major interests is to identify ideologies and political interests as they are overtly or covertly articulated in discourse (van Dijk, 1995a). Therefore, media discourse has become a focal interest of CDA in order to uncover how media language plays an important role in the formation of people's perceptions of social realities (Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough &Wodak, 1997; Hart, 2014). Within the theoretical and methodological framework of CDS, this study introduces the ideological role of journalism discourse and then suggests how a textual analysis might reveal some discursive aspects of the way ideologies function in a given society.

One prominent model for the analysis of ideology was developed by van Dijk (1995a). His methodology proved to be useful in analysing specific kinds of texts in specific contexts, such as opinions in newspapers articles that discuss topics related to already discursively constructed groups, e.g. white/ black, Westerners/ (Middle) Easterners etc. But the methodology does not indicate how the implicit ideological tensions within the same group can be spelled out via discourse structures. More importantly, van Dijk assumes that ideologies have a top-down direction where mental representations as attitudes and knowledge 'feature the overall evaluative concepts that also influence lexical choice' (ibid., p. 143). He seems to believe that this mechanism of in-group favouritism and out-group derogation applies to dominant as well as marginal ideologies. One problem with this suggestion is that not all tensions in a society are explicit and classified on a dichotomous scale of representation. For instance, all Palestinians during violent military confrontations identify with the collective in-group. It is unlikely then to find explicit discourse structures that distinguish between different groups of the same collective body.

As marginal ideologies do not have solid and widespread bases in social structures, their challenge to the hegemonic ideology may take a bottom-up direction. Journalism discourse that serves marginal ideologies may change the *attitudes* of people by constructing events differently, especially events which are not explained satisfactorily by the hegemonic ideology. Eventually, constructing different attitudes/ evaluations of a certain social reality may lead to changing people's *knowledge* about it. That is why detecting competing ideologies needs a rigorous and systematic analysis that reveals how alternative discourses influence people's evaluations without challenging their frames of interpretation.

To achieve its objectives, this study is designed in a way that brings together the discursive functions of different linguistic choices to see whether different *stories* arise in the Palestinian news websites while reporting a very sensitive socio-political event, and what ideologies motivate and are reproduced by these differences in representation. The study adds to the effort that approaches media discourse to detect discrepancies and dissonances, rather than identifying stabilities and symmetries, which is a crucial step in developing methodologies that investigate latent ideological tensions in news reporting.

Methods of Analysis

This study focuses on how values and ideologies that underlie news language differ with different forms of expression. In a highly sensitive and controversial context, such as the Gaza war, every linguistic choice is made to fit the news outlets' vigilant political and ideological objectives. Therefore, this study employs three clause-level discursive features: transitivity, social-actor model and referential strategies, which are used to analyse a relatively small number of texts.

Analytical Methods at the Clause Level

The analytical body of this study has two complementary sections: the representation of *Actions* and the representation of *Actors*. Actions are analysed using transitivity (Halliday, 1985; Halliday &Matthiessen, 2004), while actors are analysed using the social-actor model (van Leeuwen, 2008) and referential strategies (Reisigl&Wodak, 2009).

Transitivity

For the analysis of actions and events, the study adheres to Halliday's (1985) transitivity model which is a subsystem of systemic functional grammar (SFG), a

conceptualization of the role of grammar in creating meaning.

Transitivity has been widely used in CDA due to its analytical potential for uncovering the relationship between grammar and ideology (Fowler, 1991; Halliday, 1985; Hart, 2014; Richardson, 2007). It 'provides systems of resources for referring to entities in the world and, crucially, the way that they interact with or relate to one another' (Hart, 2014, p. 22).

Simpson (1993, p. 88) argues that transitivity encodes people's perceptions of reality in terms of a set of processes. These choices necessarily involve a structuring of the contextual elements in a way that conveys the writer's point of view. Unchosen grammatical potentials would then have different constructions of the same *reality*.

Transitivity is the 'foundation of representation', the way the clause is used to analyse events and situations as being of a certain type (Fowler, 1991, p. 71). It reflects 'goings on' as they take place in the inner or outer worlds of language users (Halliday &Matthiessen,2004). It can 'enable us to see how, by making certain grammatical choices rather than others, the producer of a text is able to 'foreground' certain meanings in discourse while others are suppressed' (Chen, 2001, p. 190). It can unveil a world view encoded by linguistic choices and provide a method of analysing ideologies that construct these world views (ibid.).

Transitivity includes three main elements: *processes*, *participants* and *circumstances* (Hart, 2014, p. 22). Halliday distinguishes between six types of processes based on two main characteristics: whether the process takes place in the inner or outer world of the speaker/ writer, viz. whether it happens in or outside their mind, and whether it represents a dynamic action (actual doing) or a state of being (static relation). These processes are:

- material processes;
- relational processes;
- verbal processes;
- mental processes;
- behavioural processes;
- existential processes.

The processes that appear in my data are the material, the relational, the verbal, and the mental processes. Below I give brief explanations of these processes. As for the behavioural and existential processes, they are almost missing from the analysed data. More about their linguistic components and semantic functions can be found in Halliday &Matthiessen (2004).

Material Processes:

Material processes are to a greater or lesser degree the ones that demonstrate physical actions. They represent an entity doing an action (on/to another entity). Material processes, therefore, are the ones primarily investigated to see how changes are brought about in the (real) world which involve issues of agency and responsibility

Relational Processes:

Relational processes establish a more or less static relationship between two concepts, with the process signalling this relationship. A typical realization includes two nominal phrases in which one characterizes or identifies the other by the process 'be' (including is, was, are and were).

Verbal Processes:

Verbal processes, or verbs of saying, are intermediate material and mental processes: 'saying something is a material action that reflects mental operations' (Thompson, 2004, p. 100). Every verbal process includes a Sayer participant, the one who or which sends the message. It can also include a Receiver, the participant to whom or which the saying process is directed, a Target, which is the entity at which the message of the verbal process is directed, and the Verbiage which is the message itself.

Mental Processes:

Mental processes represent 'goings on' as they happen in the internal world of the mind and reflect some aspects of the mental states of actors. They are classified into four sub-types: processes of *emotion* (feeling), processes of *cognition* (deciding, knowing, understanding etc.), processes of *desideration* (wanting) and processes of *perception* (seeing, hearing etc.). These processes involve two main participants: the *Senser* in whose mental world the process occurs, and the *Phenomenon* which is the entity that triggers the happening of the mental process.

Social-Actor Modeland Referential Strategies

Van Leeuwen's (2008) social-actor model is a comprehensive inventory developed to analyse the representation of social actors by a network of socio-semantic categorizations. This inventory starts from the social and investigates how a specific role is variably constructed in a text by different linguistic realizations. It is thus concerned with the functions particular linguistic

choices have in relation to the distribution and presentation of social roles.

Van Leeuwen proposes a detailed network of socio-semantic roles which account for the most occurring social roles and their textual realizations. The network is comprehensive and detailed; different studies choose relevant categorizations and exclude others. Van Leeuwen developed his categories based on other specific texts. I have chosen the categories that occur in my data. These include *Exclusion/ Inclusion*, *Activation/ Passivation*, *Functionalization/ Identification*, *Objectivation*, *Nomination*, *Indetermination*, *Individualization* and *Collectivisation*. It is worth mentioning here that these categories are in a hierarchy, so some of the distinctions only apply to one specific category of actor representation.

Referential strategies, on the other hand, (Reisigl&Wodak, 2009) are linguistic and rhetorical tools with which individuals and groups are identified (Richardson, 2007). The analysis of referential strategies is assumed to reveal *what is in a name*. The main distinctive characteristic of analysing referential strategies is a detailed account of all possible denotations and connotations a noun phrase that refers to social actors may have.

Frameworks of Systematization and Interpretation: Aspects of Representation and Macro-Strategies of Representation

Since the study is based on detailed language analysis of news, I suggest aspects of representation and macro strategies of representation as features that systematize the linguistic choices and link them to the wider socio-political contexts. Aspects of representation are mappings of all the grammatical configurations and linguistic choices that have the same discursive functions in relation to a specific group of actors or specific event. Each aspect of representation is the sum of micro-textual choices distributed in and across texts.

All similar aspects of representation are summed up to form macro-strategies of representation. The term is borrowed from Unger (2013) and refers to groupings of discursive strategies which may eventually lead to particular constructions of actors, events and social phenomena. Macro-strategies link the discursive to the context. In other words, they identify the contextual function of aspects of representation based on the discursive function itself (e.g. foregrounding vs backgrounding) and on the analyst's awareness of the context.

Criteria for Data Selection

This study chooses to analyze news reports from the Palestinian Information Centre (*PIC*), which is affiliated with Hamas, and Palestine News and Information Agency (*WAFA*), which is affiliated with Fatah. The study also analyzes news reports from *Maan*, an independent news agency, in order to compare its discourse with the factional discourse. This is intended to provide a systematic comparison that reveals consistencies in representing actions and actors.

I analysed 12 news articles from each news outlet taken from the first three days of the ground invasion: 20–22 July 2014. The choice of articles is based on their chronological appearance in the newspapers and on news websites, so the first four articles are chosen from each day.

Analysis and Discussion

The analysis in this study is organized into three main salient macro-strategies which are realized by different aspects of representation, while linguistic choices are demonstrated by using indicative examples. As we will see below, the analysis could reveal subtle differences between the three Palestinian news websites in representing pivotal aspects of the struggle. These differences are mapped together to show how they reflect deep political tensions in Palestine. They also refer to some important changes in the Palestinian political culture, especially in relation to the notion of resistance and the role of civilians in the violent conflict with Israel.

Palestinian Civilians are the Main Victims of the War: *WAFA*, *Maan*, and *PIC*

The most salient macro-strategy on the three Palestinian news websites represents Palestinian civilians as the main, if not the only, victims of the war. This may not be surprising in light of the large numbers of Palestinian civilian fatalities. It is also not surprising in light of the Palestinian media tendency to construct a victim 'Self' and perpetrator 'Other' image in violent confrontations (Daraghmeh, 2003). However, this macro strategy involves varying micro choices that build into differing aspects of representation, in which each news website, especially the factional *PIC* and *WAFA*, shows subtle and ideologically-motivated exploitation of the notion of victimhood.

The three media platforms share an essential aspect of representation in which the Palestinian civilians are represented as the main/ only receivers of the Israeli military action. The major difference, however, lies in the varying

emphasis the news websites put on the doer and the receiver of the actions.

First, *Maan* and *WAFA* massively focus on the victimhood of Palestinian civilians by using passive processes that leave the doer unmentioned, as the following example from *WAFA* shows.

> (1) [*WAFA*] [At least 11 people {Goal} were killed {Material Process}] [including {Identifying Relational Process} 7 children {Token/ Identifier}] [and more than 20 others {Goal} were injured {Material Process} mostly in critical situation {Circumstance}].

Palestinian victimhood is further emphasized in *WAFA* by using pre-modifiers that foreground the victims' powerless status, such as *innocent* in the following example.

> (2) [*WAFA*] More than 50 innocent civilians {Goal} were killed {Material Process} today on Sunday {Circumstance} in Shuja'iyya neighbourhood to the east of Gaza city {Circumstance}.

WAFA and *Maan* also emphasize the suffering of Palestinian civilians by representing their own actions. This is basically realized by material processes in which civilians are Agents of involuntary actions. For instance, the process *fled* in both clauses below is not a happy choice by civilians to move from one place to another, but an involuntary action due to the military action inflicted on them.

> (3) [*Maan*] Residents who {Agent} fled {Material Process} their homes in Shujaiyya {Circumstance} "under fire" {Circumstance} to the hospital for shelter {Circumstance}.

The focus on the Palestinians' victimhood in *Maan* and *WAFA* is also realized by extensive spatial contextualization of the processes. As the examples below show, many of the constructions include more precise references to places where actions were carried out. Such contextualization informs the reader about the circumstances of actions and adds more information about the victims, which mostly indicates their innocence.

> (4) [*Maan*] His brothers Muhammad, 30, and Hamzah, 21 {Goal}, were killed {Material Process} in al-Juneina neighbourhood of Rafah {Circumstance}.

> (5) [*Maan*] Bilal Abu Daqqa and Abdul-Rahman al-Qarra {Goal} were killed {Material Process} in an airstrike {Circumstance} on the al-Mughrabi family home east of Khan Younis {Circumstance}.

Another closely related aspect of representation in *Maan* and *WAFA* represents hospitals and medical staff in Gaza as being unable to deal with the mounting numbers of the Palestinian casualties.

> (6) [*WAFA*] Cancer, thalassemia and kidney patients in Gaza hospitals {Carrier} are also facing {Attributive Relational Process} severe difficulties {Attribute} due to mass shortage of medical supplies and drugs {Circumstance}.

With the absence of a wider contextualization of the event, in which Israel is directly responsible for the blockade that prevents medicine from getting into Gaza, the war seems to be the only reason for civilians' suffering. This is particularly distinctive of *WAFA's* reporting, which excludes any reference to Palestinian military 'achievements'. Relying merely on extensive representation of civilians' suffering constructs provocative images and a state of urgent human crisis. The war, therefore, is constructed as being between a very powerful and advanced Israeli army and helpless and passive Palestinian civilians. This representation does not address major constructs in the Palestinian political culture, such as resistance, which are part of the Palestinians' *knowledge*. They do, however, target people's attitude towards immediate contextual realities that impose a challenge for the hegemonic macro narratives. As the following example shows, *WAFA* represents stopping the suffering of civilians as the ultimate goal of political and diplomatic endeavours, downplaying the political significance of this suffering as part of the national struggle.

> (7) [*WAFA*] Presidential spokesperson, Nabil Abu Rdainah {Initiator} demanded {Process:-} the Israeli government {Actor} to stop {Material Process} its aggression {Goal} on the Gaza Strip {Circumstance} immediately {Circumstance}.

WAFA adopts what Chouliaraki (2006) calls a mode of representation that evokes empathy with the sufferers by focusing on their state and explicating their suffering. This representation provokes an emotional affiliation of the audience to the victims but not indignation towards the persecutor (Boltanski, 1999), which overemphasizes feeling 'at the expense of rationality' (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 179). Central political issues, such as the siege imposed on the Strip, thus remain irrelevant given the urgent need to stop the human crisis resulting from the war.

The representation in *WAFA* is sharply contrasted by a systematic reference in *PIC* to the brutality of the doer, which shifts readers' focus from the human crisis of Palestinians into the violent actions of the Israeli army and

the wider political context of the war. This is mainly realized by a major aspect of representation that represents the Israeli army as brutally and intentionally acting on Palestinian civilians.

> (8) [*PIC*] Israeli forces {Agent} had targeted {Material Process} al-Qassas family {Goal} to the west of Gaza City {Circumstance} with a direct rocket {Circumstance} without a prior warning {Circumstance}.

Unlike the extensive contextualization of resultative attributes of the victims on *WAFA*, the Circumstances in these processes explicate the actions themselves to emphasize that they were meant to kill civilians.

Other processes include adverbs that modify processes and represent them as intentional in the sense that they are meant to achieve specific goals, such as the adverb *deliberately* in example (9). Others use pre-modifiers that highlight the violence of the doer, such as *vicious* in example (10).

> (9) [*PIC*] [Israel {Agent} is deliberately targeting {Material Process} Gazan civilians and children {Goal}]

> (10) [*PIC*] The Israeli army's vicious attack {Agent} on the Palestinian people {Recipient} in Gaza {Circumstance} ruthlessly {Circumstance} targeting {Material Process} civilians and their homes {Goal}.

The same applies for the adverb *ruthlessly* which modifies the process *targeting*; while *targeting* represents the intentionality of the action, *ruthlessly* intensifies its brutality and inhumanity.

It seems that the representation of the effects of the military action on *PIC* is mostly contingent; the Palestinian suffering is consistently associated with the Israeli military brutality. *PIC* seems to be preoccupied with ascribing a criminal role to the Israeli forces more than a victim role to Palestinian civilians. It is a presentation that mobilizes 'indignation towards the unfairness of the event' (Chouliaraki, 2006, p. 157), rather than evoking the emotions of the reader towards the sufferers. This mode of representation is oriented towards action, in that it necessitates the identification and accusation of the persecutor (Boltanski, 1999).

The War is Between Two Military Sides: *PIC* and *Maan*

In contrast with the suppression of the Palestinian fighters in *WAFA*, which leads into a representation of the war as being between the Israeli army and the Palestinian civilians, *PIC* and *Maan* represent the fighters as a very influential social group in the war. This is basically realized by an aspect of representation that constructs the Palestinian fighters acting on Israeli soldiers or on material objects associated with the army, as the following examples show.

> (11) [*Maan*] [The armed wing of Hamas {Sayer} claimed {Verbal Process}] [it {Agent} kidnapped {Material Process} an Israeli soldier {Goal}].

> (12) [*Maan*] Palestinian militants {Agent} have engaged {Material Process} the Israeli military {Goal} in fierce fighting {Circumstance} across the Gaza Strip {Circumstance}.

In this respect, however, a major difference between *Maan*and *PIC* arises. The former uses some processes from Israeli and Palestinian military sources, conferring a sense of objectivity on reporting or at least a sense validation of what is reported. It is quite surprising, however, that some lexical choices have negative connotations in representing Palestinian actions. The verbal group *kidnapped* in example (11) above is associated with immoral unacceptable criminal actions, usually against civilians. In example (12), the reference *militants*, which refers to the Hamas fighters, backgrounds the political legitimacy of the actors by merely identifying them based on what they do. This deviates markedly from the hegemonic political values in Palestine which tend to glorify the image of the *fighter* (Jamal, 2003). In contrast, the macro political structures seem to inform *PIC's* representation of the same events. The news website uses the verbal group *captured* instead of *kidnapped*.

> (13) [*PIC*] [He {Sayer} said {Verbal Process}] [that the soldier {Goal} was captured {Material Process} in the battle {Circumstance} in Shujaia suburb {Circumstance}].

The semantic meaning of this choice is different as it draws on legitimate military action. It is thus pragmatically, and morally, acceptable.

The above examples show that *Maan* maintains a clear distinction between Palestinian civilians and Palestinian fighters. Although this might not be surprising, the distinction between the two groups is later compared with a completely different representation on *PIC*. Furthermore, some instances on *Maan* blur the Israeli intentionality of targeting civilians. For example, the Palestinian civilians in the following example are foregrounded as the Goal. The Circumstance *in ongoing fighting* contextualizes the event as resulting from military action between two military sides: Israeli forces and Palestinian fighters. The process does not provide any clues about who is responsible for killing

civilians, which obfuscates Israeli agency and intentionality in doing the action.

> (14) [*Maan*] Three others {Goal} were killed {Material Process} in ongoing fighting {Circumstance} in the besieged Shujaiyeh neighbourhood of Gaza City {Circumstance}.

The claim here is not that *Maan* criminalizes the Palestinian fighters. Instead, it seems that the news websites emphasizes the distance between Palestinian fighters and civilians. This makes the killing/ suffering of the fighters more predictable and less emotionally provocative, as they are intentionally taking part in military actions.

Maan is also distinguished by representing the Palestinian military actions affecting Israeli civilians. As the following process shows, the moral superiority of the Palestinian fighters is problematized in *Maan*, though infrequently.

> (15) [*Maan*] Two Israeli civilians {Goal} have also been killed {Material Process} by rocket fire {Agent}.

Moreover, *Maan* is the only news website that includes material processes in which the Israeli forces have the Agent role while the Palestinian fighters have a Goal role. Most of these processes are reported from Israeli military sources in which some lexical choices convey the political and ideological connotations of the source by using the functionalizing reference *terrorists* to refer to Palestinian fighters and the abbreviation *IDF* to refer to Israeli forces, which contrasts sharply with *PIC's* attempt to circulate the counter-argumentative nomination *Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF).*

> (16)[Maan] [IDF {Agent} intercepted {Material Process} and killed {Material Process} more than 10 terrorists {Goal}]," [Lieutenant Colonel Peter Lerner {Sayer} wrote {Verbal Process} on his official Twitter feed {Circumstance}].

PIC, in contrast, excludes completely the representation of the Palestinian fighters as receivers of military actions. Instead, the news website maintains a systematic representation of the fighters as militarily, and morally, superior.

> (17) [*PIC*] [Hamas's armed wing, the Qassam Brigade, {Sayer} said {Verbal Process} on Sunday {Circumstance}] [that it {Agent} managed to capture {Material Process} an Israeli soldier {Goal} during the heavy clashes east of Gaza city {Circumstance} Saturday night {Circumstance}].

The complexity of the action at the operational level is constructed in the verbal group *managed to capture* and in the Circumstance *during the heavy clashes* which represents the fighters as an adversary to be reckoned with. It is important to mention here that this action is one of the very few cases in which reference is made specifically to Hamas fighters, precisely *the Qassam Brigades*, and not to *Palestinian resistance* as the following macro strategy shows.

Hamas' Military Action is Legitimate and Representative of all Palestinians: Passive and Active Forms of Resistance: *PIC*

This macro-strategy is mainly found on *PIC* and involves all aspects of representation that foreground one or more of the reasons that deem Palestinian military action to be legitimate. Not only do these representations draw on immediate contexts, but they also draw on macro out-of-context political narratives that provide fixed and flat interpretation of events and actions.

The first aspect of representation in this macro strategy represents the Palestinian resistance aiming at achieving legitimate human and political needs. The Palestinian involvement in the war is contextualized in the wider context of a struggle in which the political and human needs of Palestinians are at stake. For instance, the verbal process *affirmed* in the following example expresses the authoritative position of Hamas in dictating its conditions, while the relational process identifies these conditions as *stop the Israeli aggression* and *meet the resistance's demands*.

> (18) [*PIC*] [Hamas Movement {Sayer} has affirmed {Verbal Process}] [that its top priority at present {Value/ Identifies} is {Identifying Relational Process} to stop the Israeli aggression on the Palestinian people and to meet the resistance's demands {Token/ Identifier}].

PIC emphasizes that these needs are not merely human, e.g. stopping the Israeli operations, but also political. In this respect, Hamas is represented as pursuing collective Palestinian rights.

In another ideological representation, the demands are represented not only as aiming to serve the Palestinian people, but also as being dictated by them. The following example is a relational process that is followed by three material processes. Each of the material processes identifies one of the Palestinian demands.

(19) [*PIC*] [Deputy Chairman of Hamas's political bureau Ismail Haneyya {Sayer} said {Verbal Process} Monday {Circumstance}] [that the Palestinian people's demands for ceasefire {Carrier} are {Attributive Relational Process} clear {Attribute}]: [stop {Material Process} the aggression {Goal}], [do not repeat {Material Process} it {Goal}], [and lift {Material Process} the siege on Gaza {Goal}].

As the above demands are legitimate, the human losses on the Palestinian side are perceived to be understandable when aiming at supreme collective aims. This is made explicit by the following relational process. The speaker, a Hamas official, vows that Palestinian fatalities will never stop the pursuit of Palestinian demands. Palestinian victims are referred to by the national/ religious nomination *martyrs*, which in itself implies that the victims voluntarily or involuntarily sacrifice their lives for supreme goals.

(20) [*PIC*] "[Our martyrs' blood {Carrier} will never go {Attributive Relational Process} in vain {Attribute}]" [Hamas {Sayer} said {Verbal Process}].

The second aspect of representation in *PIC* that gives rise to the macro strategy of representation at hand represents the Palestinian resistance as an inclusive Palestinian body. When the line between fighters and civilians is blurred, the actions of the resistance are legitimized as having a wide national affiliation. For example, *Palestinian resistance* appears as the Sayer in the following verbal process, while the projected relational process states a *fact* about the losses of the Israeli army.

(21) [*PIC*] [Palestinian resistance {Sayer} said {Verbal Process}] [that Israeli casualties {Carrier} are {Attributive Relational Process} far greater than declared {Attribute}].

Although the audience could work out that Palestinian resistance refers to Hamas' military wing, the reference presupposes that this group of actors represents all Palestinians. As Druckman (2001, p. 228) suggests, the use of different, but logically equivalent, lexical choices create a 'considerable change in the preference of the audience when the same issue is being produced and presented in different vocabularies'. This also sends a clear message to Israel that Hamas is 'an adversary to be reckoned with, rather than an unrecognized regime that can be forcibly removed' (Joudeh, 2012).

More ideologically, *PIC* uses references that completely blur the distinction between the civilian body and the resistance body. For instance, the following relational process includes the synecdoche *Gaza* to refer to fighters. The process does not represent a particular event but introduces a proposition in which *Gaza* encompasses all Palestinians.

(22) [*PIC*] "Gaza {Carrier} is {Attributive Relational Process} a graveyard for its invaders {Attribute}".

In sum, *PIC* emphasizes that Hamas is a resistance movement, which is a basic reason for the movement's popular legitimacy (Hroub, 2006). However, at this critical moment, its legitimacy is enhanced by representing military resistance as a popular Palestinian choice. This, in addition to legitimizing Hamas's actions as being representative of all Palestinians, backgrounds its discrete decision to go for a large-scale military confrontation with Israel, which is a major conflictual point between Hamas and Fatah.

Another focal aspect of representation in *PIC* represents the passive and the active forms of resistance as contingent. The news platform legitimizes Hamas's military actions and normalizes civilian losses by the interplay between the voluntary actions of fighters and the involuntary actions of civilians. In many cases, the boundary between the two groups is obfuscated and so one collective body of Palestinians is constructed. One of the typical linguistic realizations of this aspect of representation is the use of the inclusive pronoun *we*.

(23) [*PIC*] "[We {Agent} decided to end {Material Process} Gaza siege {Goal} by our blood and resistance {Circumstance}]", [he {Sayer} said {Verbal Process}].

The process *decided to end* describes a voluntary action carried out by the Agent *we*, which does not draw a clear boundary between Hamas/ fighters and other Palestinians. Moreover, the Circumstance juxtaposes the suffering of civilians, *by our blood*, with the military action of the fighters, *resistance*, representing them as one action that represents all Palestinians. The verbal complex *decided to end* associates the mental state of the actors with their material action. It represents the deliberate involvement of civilians in the war, as if they voluntarily chose to sacrifice their lives to end the siege.

The above correlation between the two forms of resistance make a basic structural concept in the Palestinian national discourse. *PIC* is reproducing this political value in a critical moment where the lives of hundreds of thousands are at stake. It explains the immediate events by referring to national narratives and values that are accepted by the massive majority of Palestinians. For instance, the following process contextualizes the war in the Palestinian quest to liberate Jerusalem.

(24) [*PIC*] "[Gaza {Identified/ Token} is {Identifying Relational Process} the bridge to the liberation of Jerusalem {Identifier/ Value}]", [he {Sayer} said {Verbal Process}].

Jerusalem, which is a key element of the Palestinian national identity, functions here as an ideological symbol that links military action with national aspirations that invoke collective Palestinian experiences (Singh, 2012, p. 536). This forms the 'symbolic capital' from which the group and its leaders derive authority (Singh, 2012, p. 534).

Since civilian suffering is represented as part of the resistance, the success of Palestinians is measured by the continuity of their defiance regardless of the large numbers of fatalities. This appears in the following negated process *failing to score* which underlines the main goal of the Israeli operation by the Scope *any military achievement*.

(25) [*PIC*] Israeli occupation forces {Agent} failing to score {Material Process} any military achievement {Goal}.

PIC backgrounds Palestinian suffering and foregrounds the notion that Palestinian military defiance remains intact. This is an Israeli failure and, of necessity, a Palestinian success. In other words, the civilian losses are not considered strategic losses as long as the resistance still has its military capability.

Conclusion

The analysis of Palestinian news websites showed that *WAFA*, *PIC* and *Maan* proliferated different discourses and thus constructed different *realities* concerning the war and its human and political implications. Each newspaper had different discursive strategies that may index its journalistic objectives, as well as its position in the socio-political structure.

First, *WAFA* adopted a humanizing mode of representation that focused mainly on civilian victims and their suffering. However, *WAFA* did not problematize the brutality of military action as much as it put emphasis on the vulnerability of civilians. More surprisingly, the news website completely excluded any representations of Palestinian fighters, whether as doers or receivers of military action.

Hardly ever did *WAFA* associate civilians' suffering with the Palestinian political struggle against the occupation. It excluded important contextual factors, such as the Israeli siege of the Strip, and focused instead on the consequences of military action. Stopping the war and saving civilians was associated with the political endeavours of the Palestinian Authority which was represented as the only legitimate representative of Palestinians to take responsible actions.

Since an explicit denunciation of resistance was not possible, *WAFA* relied on extensive contextualization of human suffering. It did not openly challenge the Palestinian political culture in which resistance is an essential means of liberation. Instead, it highlighted the destructive consequences of the war and provided a challenging evaluation of particular events.

In contrast, *PIC* constructed a different image of the war based on hegemonic narratives and collective Palestinian political and strategic objectives. It was a war between Israel, an occupying force, and all Palestinian people. The war was represented as massively affecting Palestinian civilians. However, *PIC* employed a political mode of representation that was based on denouncing the perpetrator – Israeli occupation. Actions were consistently associated with their political and military context.

In its representation of the Palestinian military action, *PIC* drew on national narratives that represent resistance as a collective Palestinian decision. The involuntary passive role of Palestinian civilians was constructed as a voluntary action of steadfastness and defiance. This normalized Palestinian fatalities as having supreme national objectives, such as lifting the siege and liberating Jerusalem.

Finally, the *Maan* news website represented the war as being between Hamas and Israel but referred to civilians as the main party affected by military action. *Maan* highlighted the human aspect of the war by explicating the Palestinian civilians' suffering. However, *Maan* represented Palestinian fighters as doers and receivers of military action. A more political representation appeared in the distinction the website established between *the people of Hamas* and the rest of Palestinians. Unlike *PIC*, *Maan* did not frame Hamas' actions within super national narratives, but it showed their immediate impact on current Palestinian issues. It was thus left to the reader to evaluate the war in light of the political and strategic objectives it may achieve.

The above findings made it possible to uncover some aspects of the discursive strategies that hegemonically dominant and marginal discourses in Palestine employ, especially in sensitive and controversial contexts. First, the hegemonic discourse, represented by *PIC*, adopts top-down discursive strategies. It draws on popular macro narratives in representing events and (de)legitimizing actions. Therefore, *PIC* tended to use presuppositions in representing events and explaining their political relevance. Its representations are goal-oriented; they undermine some contextual peculiarities by linking actions with ultimate desirable (national) goals.

This can blur the line between what happened and what was meant to happen. Consequently, people do not evaluate events based only on their contextual relevance, but also according to already established categorizations of social relations and social roles, which leaves considerable space for stereotypical and essentialized representations. For instance, *PIC* presupposed that Palestinians were willing to support the military resistance because it is essential in the Palestinian national struggle. The war was thus represented as a consensual Palestinian decision, which backgrounded crucial contextual information about the role of Hamas as the responsible authority in the Strip. These presuppositions were basically realized by language choices that constructed external realities, such as *Palestinian resistance*, which have national connotations.

In contrast, marginal and alternative discourses, represented by *WAFA*, seem to employ bottom-up discursive strategies in relation to the social structure. They rely on extensive contextualisation of events in a way that shakes people's attitudes towards a particular sensitive reality, especially when people's personal interests are stake, without challenging their knowledge. In the long run, this may lead to basic changes in the way people think, especially if hegemonic discourses fail to provide satisfactory explanations. For instance, with *WAFA's* consistent comparison between the huge human losses and the very limited achievements of the war, Palestinians may change their attitude towards military resistance as a sufficient strategy to deal with Israel, at least for the time being. In the long run, they may adopt different frames of interpretations that support, for instance, political strategies which do not involve them in disproportionate wars.

Finally, it is interesting to find that less ideological news platforms employ different discursive strategies in reporting important events. As the analysis of *Maan's* reporting shows, such platforms rely on a wider process of contextualization, where almost all aspects of the war are referred to. *Maan*, for instance, referred to the macabre consequences of the war on Palestinian civilians, but it did not use a highly sensationalized tone of representation. On the other hand, it referred to the Palestinian resistance but avoided any rhetorical discourse that draws on national sentiments.

It could be argued, therefore, that the position of the media outlets in the political and ideological landscapes decides much of their discursive tendencies. The closer the newspapers are to social structures, the more they rely on macro-narratives in representing actions and actors. By the same token, the further they are from social structures, the more they rely on extensive context-bound representations that produce different *realities* but without overtly challenging what people believe to be true. I emphasize here that these findings were based on comparing nuances of representations at the clause level. It was the method, a detailed linguistic analysis that made it possible to capture these nuances.

References

Boltanski, L. (1999). *Distant Suffering. Politics, Morality, and the Media*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Chen, L. (2001). The Effect of Functional Role on Language Choice in Newspapers. (Doctoral Thesis). University of Durham.

Chouliaraki, L. (2006). *The Spectatorship of Suffering*. London: Sage.

Dajani, M. (2003). Press Reporting During the Intifada: Palestinian Coverage of Jenin. *Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture, 10*(2).

Daraghmeh, M. (2003). Effects of the Conflict on the Palestinian Media. *Journal of Politics, Economics and Culture, 10*(2).

Dor, D. (2004). *Intifada Hits the Headlines: How the Israeli Press Misreported the Outburst of the Second Palestinian Uprising*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Dor, D. (2015). *The Suppression of Guilt: The Israeli Media and the Reoccupation of the West Bank*. London: Pluto Press.

Druckman, J. (2001). The Implications of Framing Effects for Citizen Competence. *Political Behavior, 23*(3).

Halliday, M. A. K. (1985). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*. London: Arnold.

Halliday, M. A. K., & Mathiessen, M.I.M. (2004). *An Introduction to Functional Grammar* (3rd ed.). London: Arnold.

Hamas Covenant.(1988). Retrieved from: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp.

Hart, C. (2014). *Discourse, Grammar and Ideology: Functional and Cognitive Perspectives*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Hroub, K. (2008). Palestinian Islamism: Conflating National Liberation and Socio-political Change. *The International Spectator, 43*(4), 59–72.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media discourse*. London: Arnold.

Fairclough, N., & Wodak, R. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse as a Social Interaction (Discourse Studies: A multidisciplinary Introduction)* (pp. 258–283). London: Sage.

Fowler, R. (1991). *Language in the News: Discourse and Ideology in the Press*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Jamal, A. (2003). Palestinian Dynamics of Self-Representation: Identity and Difference in Palestinian Nationalism. *HAGAR: Studies in Culture, Polity & Identities*. *4*(1/2). p65

Joudeh, S. (2012, Nov 19). *Analysis: Media wars escalates in Gaza*. Retrieved from: http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/11/201211191359299871 20.html%20Analysis:%20Media%20war%20escalates%20in%20Gaza.

Kempf, W., & Shinar, D. (Eds). (2014). *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: War Coverage and Peace Journalism*. Berlin: Regener.

Kelsey, D. (2014). The myth of the city trickster: storytelling, bankers and ideology in the Mail Online. *Journal of Political Ideologies, 19*(3), 307-330.

Richardson, J. (2007). *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.Reisigl, M., & Wodak, R. (2009). The discourse-historical approach (DHA). In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds), *Methods of critical discourse studies* (pp. 87–121). London: Sage.

Simpson, P. (1993). *Language, Ideology, and Point of View*. London: Routledge.

Singh, R. (2012). The Discourse and Practice of 'Heroic Resistance' in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: The Case of Hamas. *Politics, Religion & Ideology, 13*(4), 539–545.

Unger, J. (2013). *The Discursive Construction of the Scots Language: education, politics and everyday life*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

van Dijk, T. A. (1995a). Power and the news media. In D. Paletz (Ed.), *Political Communication and Action* (pp. 9–36). Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press.

van Dijk, T. A. (1995b). Ideological Discourse Analysis. In E. Ventola & A. Solin (Eds), *Interdisciplinary Approaches to Discourse Analysis* (pp. 135–161). Helsinki: University of Helsinki.

van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and Practice: New Tools for Critical Discourse Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Wodak, R. (1996). *Disorders of discourse*. London: Longman.

Wolfsfeld, G. (1997). *Media and Political Conflict: News from Middle East*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Il divino istinto di sopravvivenza/ The Divine Instinct of Survival

Valentina Benvenuti [1]

[1] Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: vbenvenu@gmx.ualberta.ca

1.

Come stai?
Sopravvivo, vivo, respiro.
Mi sveglio ogni giorno
al rintocco
di duecento bip ospedalieri,
tra infermiere isteriche
e odori nauseabondi
mentre uomini senza gambe
e donne senza braccia
gironzolano sulle loro ruote
ed io cammino
ben eretta
eppur soffro
e tu piangi
perché non ti muovi.

Allora ti bacio
dolcemente
il volto ed i capelli
per portarti via
vanamente
granelli di dolore.

Li sciolgo in lacrime
le porto via con me
le racchiudo
in me di notte
mentre dormi
e sogni di volare.

Le piango di nascosto
dentro,
in silenzio,
mentre
assieme
contempliamo
l'immobilità
della vita
deprivati
avvinghiati
l'uno all'altro
— ciò che resta.

2.

Hanno preso il tuo corpo.
Hanno preso il mio corpo.

3.

Anche questa notte
il mio respiro bianco
si accascia sul tuo
lontano.

Giaccio sfinita
accanto a te
inerme,
non posso
abbracciarti.

Hanno preso il tuo corpo.
Hanno preso il mio corpo.

Ora giace immobile
davanti a me — imprigionato.

Ma la nostra anima
si eleva al di là
di aghi, tubi, e flebo
mentre ti racconto
di quel gabbiano
che volava
alto alto nel cielo
e tu ti addormenti
come un bimbo.

4.

Vorrei che le mie vene
fossero le tue
i miei nervi i tuoi
che le nostre spine
si sovrapponessero
come mano su mano
bocca su bocca
petalo su petalo.

5.

La neve d'aprile danza
come pulviscolo al sole.

Per fortuna, negli ospedali esistono
le finestre.

Le pareti del cuore
si purificano
mentre cade
la neve leggera
sulle ferite aperte
impalpabile
nel suo volo inaudito
mentre il miracolo del sole
mi sorprende ancora.

Accostati alla finestra.

Vorrei che il sole
ti portasse via
ogni tormento
che l'erba verde
appena nata
spolverata di bianco
ti desse speranza
e che la neve
in pieno aprile
ti facesse ridere
almeno un po'
e pensare a quanto
è strano il mondo,
o per lo meno Edmonton.

6.

Guarda il cielo.
Osserva le nuvole
lente
ondeggiare,
le piante
e il loro lieve
movimento.

Muoviti con loro
dolcemente
senza il bisogno
di bruschi
repentini scatti
di gambe
e sguardo.

Rinnega il movimento degli umani.

L'impercettibile germogliare
del verde,
il peregrinare del sole
sulle cose del mondo.

Sii un po' come loro.

Rinnega il movimento degli umani.

Sii anima vegetale per qualche ora.

E accogli
la Luce
E accogli l'Immenso.

Sii foglia
e cielo.

7.

La mattina
la sofferenza della notte
si scioglie in un bicchier d'acqua
le lacrime si riassorbono nel cuscino
le parole si fanno più leggere
gli occhi cominciano a risplendere
con l'alba
anche se non la vediamo.

Viviamo al chiuso
in queste mura ospedaliere
attendendo
una sorta di miracolo
senza fede
ripensando la vita
dal suo principio
da quel punto infinitesimale
prima del camminare.
Vivo diciotto ore al giorno
in ospedale
tu ne vivi ventiquattro
e in una o due
di queste
troviamo
comunque
assieme
la Gioia.

8.

Ogni mattina
percorro quel corridoio
a vetrate ammantato
di un bianco abbacinante.

É una purificazione
dal tormento della notte,
dalle lacrime,
dal vuoto.

Mi abbandono
a un abbraccio di luce.

Poi
dopo qualche ora di riposo
ritorno da te e mi bagno
della luce dei tuoi occhi
che riflettono tutto
come la superficie placida
di un lago di montagna.

Quella luce
mi fa tornare
ogni giorno
affrontare la notte
e poi
camminare
svuotata
liberata
per quel corridoio
ammantato
di un bianco
ospedaliero,
ancora una volta.

9.

Lenire le tue pene
con il palmo
della mano
pronta a risollevare
il flusso della vita

per portarlo
in alto
Là
dove cresce la speranza
e le piante danzano nel sole

— la pace immobile —

la calma
del cuore.

Curare l'anima con la tenerezza.

Trasfondere in te
Estraendolo da me
il divino istinto
di sopravvivenza
a furia di baci.

--

1.

How are you?
I survive, live, breathe.
I wake everyday
to the ring
of two-hundred hospital beeps,
hysterical nurses
and nauseating smells
while legless men
and armless women
wander
on their wheels
and I walk upright
though I suffer
and you weep
for you cannot move.

So,
I tenderly
kiss your face
and hair
to vainly
take away
grains of sorrow.

I dissolve them
into tears,
lock them to me
at night
while you sleep
and dream
of flight.

I cry them in secret
I cry them in silence
as we
contemplate
the immobility
of life.

Together,
deprived
clutching
each other
— all that is left.

2 .

They took your body.
They took my body.

3.

Even tonight
my white breath
collapses on yours
so remote.
Though
I lie exhausted
beside you
I am helplessly
far away
for I cannot
embrace you.

They took your body.

They took my body.

Now it lies still
before me — imprisoned.

But our souls soar high
above these tubes and needles
while I tell you
about that seagull
that once soared up
in the sky
and you instantly
fall asleep
like a kid.

4.

I wish my veins were yours
I wish my nerves were yours
I wish our spines overlapped
hand over hand
mouth over mouth
petal over petal.

5.

The April snow dances
like fine dust in the sun.

Luckily, hospitals have windows.

The walls of the heart
purify themselves
while the snow gently falls
on the open wounds
so impalpable
in its inaudible flight
while the miracle of the sun
surprises me
once again.

Come by the window.

I wish the sun could
take your torments away
I wish the fresh newborn
white sprinkled
green grass
could bring you
hope
that the snow
in the middle of April
would make you laugh a bit
and think about
how strange the world is,
or at least Edmonton.

6.

Watch the sky.

Observe the clouds
and their slow flow,
the plants
and their light
movement.

Move with them
but gently,
without the urge
for sudden
spasms of legs
and gaze.

Renounce the human movement.

The imperceptible germination
of the green,
the peregrination of the sun
on worldly things.

Be a bit like them.

Renounce the human movement.

Be a vegetal soul,
for a little while.

Embrace
the light,
Embrace
the immense.

Be leaf
and sky.

7.

In the morning
the night suffering
dissolves into a glass of water,
tears into a pillow
words get lighter
and eyes start to shine
along with the sunrise

though we cannot see it.

We live enclosed
within these hospital walls
waiting for
a sort of miracle
without faith
thinking life
all over again
from its origin
from that infinitesimal dot
before walking.

I live eighteen hours a day in the hospital
You live twenty-four
and during one or two of these
we
somehow
find
joy.

8.

Every morning,
I walk down this
dazzling white glass hallway,
a purification
from the torment,
from the tears,
from the emptiness
of the night.

I abandon
myself
to its luminous embrace.

Then,
after a few hours of rest
I come back to you
and I plunge
into the light
of your eyes
like the placid surface
of a hidden lake.

That light pulls me back
to you
every single day
to face the night
and then to walk
through
the
glass-white-dazzling-hospital
hallway
once again.

9.

With the palm of my hand,
I soothe your pain,
lift you
up high
up there
where hope germinates

— the immobile peace —

the calm of the heart.

Healing the soul
with infinite tenderness.

To transfuse to you,
extract from me,
The Divine Instinct
of Survival,
by dint of kisses.

Proceso de balcón en cuarentena/ Quarantine balcony in the midst

Sofia Monzon Rodriguez [1]

[1] Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: monzonro@ualberta.ca

Nunca seré ya página en blanco:
los nuevos horizontes se reescriben
en medio de mi memoria
pero los recuerdos de mi natal legado
no consiguen desdibujarse.

El terreno, si bien estos inviernos
permanece nevado,
siempre llevará ese olor cálido-árido
y las líneas, *aperpendiculadas*,
son eternas llanuras en polvo.

En sed y olvido brotarán los pulgares:
savia escasa entre escasas aspas.
El lienzo permuta,
cambia de pincel
de mano.

Los tonos dejan de ser de miel
pero son en proceso,
siempre en el llegar a ser
en la volatilidad de la fragmentación,
en el cambio de ciudad
de lengua
de continente
del dador de amor.

Todo se redibuja en mi multiplicidad
y el fondo – nunca ya blanco
no dejará de ser el flujo de la página inicial.

--

Never will I ever be
a blank page again:
rewritten in the midst of memory,
inherited reminiscences
cannot blur themselves.

The soil,
still covered in snow,
carries a warm-arid scent
and the lines, almost perpendicular,
eternal dusty plains.

In thirst and oblivion sprouts bloom;
scarce sap amidst scarce blades.
The canvas transforms
alters the brush
alters the hand.

The tones, no longer honey-coloured,
but in process
in becoming
in the volatility of fragmentation
in changing cities
languages
continents
the love-giver.

Everything redrawn in this multiplicity
and the background – never white ever again
to be the flow of the first page.

The Roots of the Poet

María Jesús Monzón[1]

[1] ESNE (Escuela Universitaria de Diseño, Madrid, Spain)

E-mail: mariajesus.mon.ro@gmail.com
Website: https://mariajesusmonzonr.weebly.com/

Claro demais para uma tarde sonolenta/ Too Clear for a Somnolent Afternoon

Bruno Soares dos Santos[1]

[1] Modern Languages and Cultural Studies, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

E-mail: brunosoares@ualberta.ca

Quando chegou a notícia, o bolo ainda assava no forno. Olhei para você, o corpo de repente tão pequeno, embrulhado no edredom do sofá, a mesa de trabalho abandonada no corredor do apartamento. Tentamos insistir em terminar o dia como planejado, os sonhos guardados debaixo da cama, os pratos cheios de açúcar nos colos, nos perguntando mais uma vez de onde vinha aquele jazz, seria do apartamento ao lado, ou de cinco quadras à frente. O sol, porém, voltou a entrar pela janela, e a sala ficou clara demais para uma tarde sonolenta.

Passamos os últimos meses com os pescoços espichados por trás das cortinas, a observar o ponto de ônibus desavisado em frente ao nosso prédio, as ruas que despertavam inúteis. Essa cidade, que antes disso tudo já era vazia, percebeu que não precisava mais fingir ser cidade, e a neve nunca mais deixou de cair. Pelo contrário, depois da chegada da primavera, passou a descer cada vez mais espessa, e como estávamos distraídos, nos perguntando de onde vinha aquele jazz, cozinhando somente pela alquimia, tomou a liberdade de cobrir o chão por um ano inteiro. Não nos demos conta, mas os corvos multicoloridos desapareceram um por um. Os gansos até sobrevoaram nosso mapa, ouvimos o choro deles, mas nunca chegaram a pousar aqui.

Agora, nos cantos das esquinas, a lama escura no pelo dos cachorros e nos sapatos dos mendigos denuncia que, assim como nós, a cidade precisa vestir a roupa solene, oficial, e correr atrás do verão. A claridade torna-se ainda mais forte, o suficiente para fazer as meias grudarem nos pés. A fumaça desliza pelas portas do forno, e o alarme de incêndio soa. Você pula do sofá com aquela sua cara de quem não sabe como agir, abre as janelas para fazer escapar a fumaça, mas o vento que entra não é tão frio. Giramos panos de prato próximos ao teto, tentando cessar o alarme, que insiste em ecoar, deixando nosso domínio e chegando aos corredores, ao saguão, aos outros apartamentos. O bolo sai preto do fogão, intragável, e vai direto para a lata de lixo. Contra a nossa vontade, os metais daquele jazz são substituídos pelo barulho de sirenes.

--

When the news arrived, the cake was still in the oven. I stared at you, your body suddenly too small wrapped in the comforter on the couch, far from the work desk abandoned in the apartment corridor. We tried to move on with the day as planned, dreams kept under the bed frame, plates full of sugar in our laps, wondering once again where that jazz came from, was it the apartment next door or five blocks away. The sun, however,

came in through the window, and the living room turned too clear for a somnolent afternoon.

We've spent the last months with our necks strained behind curtains, spying on the unsuspecting bus stop in front of our building and on the streets that would wake up useless. This city, which was deserted even before all of this, realized it no longer had to pretend being a city, and the snow never stopped falling. Instead, it started to fall thicker every day, and as we were distracted, wondering where that jazz came from, cooking for the sake of alchemy, it felt entitled to cover the floor for the entire year. We didn't notice, but the multicoloured crows disappeared, one by one. Even the geese flew over our map, we heard them crying, but they never landed here.

Now, in the corners of the blocks, the black mud on the dogs' fur and under the shoes of the homeless announces that, like us, the city has to wear solemn, official clothes and leave after summer. The clarity has become stronger, enough to make socks stick to feet. Smoke escapes through the oven's door, the fire alarm sounds. You leap from the couch, with that face you make when you don't know how to act, open the windows to let it go, but the wind that comes in is not so cold. We fan dishcloths at the ceiling, try to stop the alarm which insists on echoing, leaving our domain and reaching the hallways, the lobby, the neighbouring units. The cake comes out black, inedible, and goes straight to the trash can. Against our will, the brass of that jazz is replaced by sirens.