Branded in his Mind: Trauma, Violence and Memory in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*[1]

María Ferrández, Universidad de Zaragoza

Abstract
E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* (1971) is unequivocally what has been termed a "trauma novel." This paper examines the protagonist's traumatic condition, concentrating on its causes and on the determining circumstances that contribute to aggravating it. The analysis of Daniel's narrative reveals that he suffers from many of the symptoms associated to PTSD and anhedonia, a psychological condition which frequently co-occurs with PTSD as a consequence of infantile psychic trauma. The paper, then, explores the relationship between the protagonist's traumatic condition and his violent and oppressive treatment of the three main female characters of the novel. Finally, this paper concentrates on the status of Daniel's memories of his traumatic past. As a conclusion, it is contended that the novel's concern with trauma and memory points to the author's preoccupation with remembrance, which he seems to consider the best and only tool to build a better world. Doctorow seeks to highlight the importance of listening to the fragmented voices of those who suffer the effects of trauma in order to develop new social and political perspectives that will guarantee a better future.

Keywords: E.L. Doctorow; The Book of Daniel; Trauma studies; Traumatic memories; Victim-Perpetrator

Published in 1971, E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel* is unequivocally what has been termed a "trauma novel." It eventually achieved an enormous critical and popular success, becoming a finalist for the National Book Award for fiction. On the surface, the novel is the fictional rendering of the conviction and execution of the Isaacsons from the viewpoint of their surviving son, Daniel. The plot is loosely based on the actual trial and execution of the Rosenbergs, the New York communists who were convicted and executed in 1953 for conspiracy to commit espionage leading to the development of the Soviet nuclear program. However, *The Book of Daniel* is much more than a political and

historical fictionalization of a well-known event of North-American history; it is also the testimony of a survivor, a tale of trauma, horror, violence and guilt that depicts Daniel's struggle to find a narrative that will reconcile him with his traumatic past; it is the confession of a sadist perpetrator who seeks to counteract his helplessness through the domination and victimization of his family; and it is the account of his attempt to recover the memories of his traumatic past and assimilate the traumatic experiences that are responsible for his present condition. These terrifying memories have returned to haunt him, triggered by his sister's suicide attempt fifteen years after their parents' execution, and prompt him to write the story that we are reading.

Despite its obvious literary merits, the reception of *The Book of Daniel* was rather divided at first. On the one hand a reviewer praised it as "the political novel of our age," and Joyce Carol Oates went so far as to call the book a "nearly perfect work of art" (qtd. in Williams 1996: 21–22). However, it was virtually ignored by academia for almost ten years, until the astonishing critical and commercial success of *Ragtime* (1975) led to a reexamination of Doctorow's previous novels.[2] The first readings of the novel by reviewers tended to either celebrate it or condemn it on the basis of its political content, but their fixation with the novel's politics blinded them to the richness of content, theme, and style that it displays. However, with the passing of time, *The Book of Daniel* has gradually received the critical attention from academia that it undoubtedly deserves, increasingly becoming the object of scholarly analyses that have contributed to uncovering Doctorow's craft.

After a careful review of the literature, it seemed that the critical perspectives provided by trauma theory and memory studies might provide the possibility to further broaden the critical interpretation of *The Book of Daniel*. As Andreas Huyssen has noted, memory has become an obsession of Western culture; we seem to suffer from a "hypertrophy of memory" (3). This preoccupation with memory, which has emerged as a key cultural and political concern, results from factors such as the prominence of new technologies, massive migration, displacement and diaspora but, most importantly, from the need to deal with the painful

---

[2] The new decade witnessed what John Williams has referred to as the "canonization" of Doctorow's previous novels, *Welcome to Hard Times* (1960) and *The Book of Daniel* (1971) (1996: 60).

legacy of the wars and genocides that have taken place throughout the twentieth century (Whitehead 2009: 1-2). In fact, much of the contemporary memory discourse focuses on traumatic experiences. The interest in memorializing the Holocaust has resulted in a persistent engagement with the notion of traumatic memory, which has been recuperated and developed by theorists such as Dori Laub, Charlotte Delbo, Nanette C. Auerhahn, Marianne Hirsch and Anne Whitehead, among others.

Issues of trauma started to receive prominent critical attention in the 1990s, after the American Psychiatric Association officially acknowledged the phenomenon of trauma and stressed the importance of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. PTSD included the symptoms of what had previously been called shell shock, combat fatigue, delayed stress syndrome and traumatic neurosis, and referred to responses to both human and natural catastrophes (Caruth 1995: 3). Critics such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub and Judith Herman produced groundbreaking studies of the effects of trauma on war survivors, victims of the Holocaust and victims of traumatic childhood experiences. The field of trauma studies would develop quickly thanks to work generated from the perspectives of neurology, psychiatry, psychology, sociology, history and literature, including that of Bessel A. van der Kolk, Robert J. Lifton, Abraham and Torok, Kai Erikson, Dominick LaCapra, and many others. Trauma and memory studies have acquired great relevance for cultural and literary studies in recent times, achieving the status of solid theoretical frameworks for the study of literary texts.

This paper focuses on the protagonist's psychological condition and on the possibility of retrieving the memories of his traumatic past in order to recover from the symptoms from which he suffers. First, I will explore the causes and characteristics of the protagonist's psychic ailment. Secondly, I will deal with the violent consequences of his condition, paying special attention to the problematization of the binary division between the categories of victim and perpetrator. Finally, I will analyze the status of the protagonist's memories, the difficulties that he experiences in recuperating and representing them, and the extent to which his condition has improved at the end of the narrative. With these aims in mind, I will rely on the works and theories of critics such as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Nanette C. Auerhahn, Bessel van der Kolk, Ronald Granofsky, Anne Whitehead and Laurie Vickroy, among others.

I

To begin with, it is worth considering that Daniel's traumatic condition does not result from a single overwhelmingly painful and terrifying event. The origin of his mental disorder does lie at the exposure to his parents' conviction and execution, which implies, after all, "learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member" (DSM IV-TR 2000: 463). However, Daniel's psychic devastation is worsened by a constellation of traumatic life experiences or cumulative micro-aggressions:[3] he struggles all through his childhood as he grows up in poverty and is terrorized by his insane, cursing grandmother. Secondly, he watches his father's beating at the hands of right-wing fanatics. Later on, he witnesses his parents' arrest and the search and dismantling of his home, which cause him to wander from hand to hand—from a repulsive aunt, to a shelter for orphaned children and an unloving foster family who are only interested in his sister and him as propaganda for the Communist Party. Finally, he suffers humiliating visits to his parents in jail, until he finally finds himself an orphan after his parents' execution, which, not having witnessed, he is left only to imagine in terror.

Daniel's traumatic condition is also aggravated by further determining circumstances. On the one hand, Rochelle and Paul Isaacson are convicted and executed by the state for a crime that they may or may not have committed, which for Daniel adds to the traumatic impact of their death for three main reasons. First, the traumatic event results from human design, that is, their deaths are not due to natural causes; the perception of human agency is acknowledged to cause feelings of injury and outrage from which it is difficult to recover and to make the disorder particularly severe or long-lasting (Erikson 1995: 192; DSM IV-TR 2000: 464). In addition, Daniel is left to live alone and defenseless in the society whose legal institutions have deprived him of his family, the society that he perceives has murdered his parents. Finally, his parents' death denies Daniel any possibility of ever achieving moral closure since he cannot be certain of their guilt:

---

[3] See Erikson and Root for analyses of trauma as resulting, not so much from exposure to an overwhelming traumatic event, but from the impact of small traumatic stressors that, when combined, can build to create an intense traumatic impact.

> I have put down everything I can remember of their actions and conversations in this period prior to their arrests. Or I think I have. Sifted it through my hands. I find no clues either to their guilt or innocence. (Doctorow 2006: 159)[4]

Thus, the arrest, conviction, and execution of his parents leave Daniel helpless and disempowered; he cannot do anything to change the outcome of events, just as he cannot, later on, save his sister Susan after her attempt to commit suicide.[5] It has been proved that a sense of helplessness plays a key role in making an experience traumatic (van der Kolk and van der Hart 1995: 175; DSM IV 2000: 463). Finally, Daniel was very young when his mother and father were taken away from him. As Laurie Vickroy has noted, children are particularly vulnerable to trauma, because it affects the way their psyche develops, it impairs their life coping skills and determines the way they relate to other people in the future (2002: 14). Therefore, by the time Daniel and his sister are officially adopted by the loving Lewins, an irreparable harm has been inflicted on them.

Far from healing with the passing of time, Daniel's psychological condition keeps worsening as he grows up into adulthood. Some critics have pointed to his increasing sense of political dissonance as an important factor contributing to the protagonist's illness. Michelle Tokarczyk, for instance, has rightly observed that "Daniel might have had a better foundation for rebuilding [after his parents' death,] had he not also lost belief in the ideals that served as touchstones for his parents" (1987: 12). Daniel's disillusionment with radical politics manifests itself in the bitter criticism of the Communist Party that underlies his narrative; as he explains, most of the Isaacson's (communist) friends quickly turned their back to Daniel's parents, and the party did not hesitate to erase their names from the membership list right after their arrest, fearing that their conviction would be detrimental to North-American communism. Later on, however, when the Isaacson's

---

[4] Further references to the novel will be to the Penguin Modern Classics edition, published in 2006.
[5] Hence Daniel's own tendency to associate or compare himself to the Biblical Daniel, an intertext which is pointed at by the title of the novel and which has been discussed as a symbol of Daniel's inability to save his sister Susan—as opposed to the Biblical Daniel's success in saving Susannah from execution (see Dillon and DeRosa).

potential for political propaganda becomes obvious to the Party, it soon embraces their cause, turning Susan and Daniel into puppets to be exhibited rally after rally, and causing Daniel to eventually lose all faith on radical politics (358). As a result, Daniel's inability to believe in any of the principles for which his parents were executed and that have been enthusiastically endorsed by his sister clashes violently with his perceived sense of family obligation. Above all, Daniel's contempt towards radical politics conflicts with his life-long preoccupation with taking care of and supporting his little sister, who remains the most important person in his life, as will be discussed later on. Therefore, such dissonance results in intense feelings of shame and guilt, which clearly contribute to aggravate his traumatic condition.

As I will try to prove, Daniel's psychological damage takes the shape of posttraumatic stress disorder, since Daniel's narrative reveals that he suffers from many of the symptoms associated to PTSD, as described in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, fourth edition, text revision (DSM IV-TR 2000: 463-68). First of all, Daniel persistently re-experiences the traumatic events in several ways throughout his life. When he was a young boy he would suffer recurrent dreams: "I was afraid to go to sleep. I had terrible nightmares which I couldn't remember except in waking from them in terror and suffocation" (134). Later in his life, the nightmares seem to have given way to a more general obsession with images— "awful visions of his head" (250)—and thoughts that recall his parents' execution. Among these, a few stand out: his constant symbolic references to electricity[6]— his Father is described as tireless and "full of electricity" (59), Grandma's hair is like "electric wire" (83), his electricity pseudo-poem has "ohm," the measure of electrical resistance, as its main image (257), etc. There is also his repeated recalling of Susan's last words before she enters a sort of self-inflicted coma: "They are still fucking us. Goodbye, Daniel. You get the picture" (10); "You get the picture. Good boy, Daniel" (82); THEY ARE STILL FUCKING US. […] YOU GET THE

---

[6] Geoffrey Harpham, who inaugurated a move away from the debate over history and politics in Doctorow's works to an emphasis on narrative technique, has argued that the master principle of the narrative is in fact electricity, and Daniel's fractured story builds to a recreation of his parents' execution. Harpham's analysis supports my contention that Daniel's mind is absolutely possessed by the not-witnessed event of his parents' execution by electrocution.

PICTURE. GOODBYE, DANIEL" (189). To the other symptoms, his frequent preoccupation with the heart and his fixation with different means of execution can be added. Furthermore, his narrative is frequently interrupted by historiographic interludes,[7] in which he deals with issues such as Soviet politics, the Cold War, treason and tyranny, traitors and the law, astrology, failed heart transplants and forms of execution. The latter are the most recurrent ones, which together with the obsession with electricity, point to the fact that he is obsessed with the image of his parents' execution, by the unseen image of their bodies "frying" in the chair (193). This image is not "fully owned," because it was "not assimilated at the time, only belatedly, in its repeated possession," to borrow Caruth's phrasing of the phenomenon (Caruth 1995: 4-5). As Daniel puts it, "there were at least a couple of years, a couple of good years, when none of it had happened" (77).

Daniel also re-experiences the traumatic events and suffers intense psychological distress as a response to cues that resemble his parents' execution. And so, he is strongly disturbed and reacts with extreme violence when it is suggested that Susan's psychiatrist is going to use shock therapy on her (251). In the same way, he somatizes his traumatic condition when exposed to an event that reminds him of the traumatic event. When that happens, he presents breathing difficulties: "I often had spells of difficult breathing. These frightened me. I found that if I ran around and waved my arms like a windmill, I could breathe better for a moment" (195).

Secondly, it is obvious from his narration that before Susan "summoned" him to write, Daniel persistently avoided stimuli associated with his trauma and preferred to bury the haunting traumatic memories in his heart. And so, he used to avoid thinking about his parents' execution or talking about it, numbing himself and refusing to feel anything: "when the real life of his childhood, that had become a dream, became real again, he tried to make contact with Susan. […] We should have talked, we always should have talked" (78). Similarly, Daniel shows throughout the whole narrative a feeling of detachment from others and a very

---

[7] With regard to the historiographic interludes, it is also worth adding that they seem to play a role in providing emotional relief, since they frequently interrupt the narrative at times in which writing seems to become too painful for Daniel to continue. They are used as a sort of distraction tool by Daniel, who employs them to escape the pain of his own narration.

restricted range of affect: he is worried about "establish[ing] sympathy" (8) and he acknowledges that "heart rejection is a problem" (356), while at the same time his behavior proves that he is unable to feel real love for anyone other than his sister Susan, not even for his wife and baby. His attitude is one of absolute disrespect for anyone's feelings, to such an extent that he appears to enjoy hurting his adoptive parents' feelings and physically and psychologically torturing his wife, an issue that will be discussed presently. And yet, he constantly admits to feeling guilty and ashamed of his behavior. Throughout his narrative, Daniel also shows persistent symptoms of increased arousal. For instance, he suffers outbursts of rage and has an irritable temper: "he was GONE! A lucky think [sic] too, I would have killed him" (251); he generally experiences difficulties concentrating on things, such as his dissertation; in addition, he presents episodes of hypervigilance and paranoia, and so, as his sister lies in the hospital bed, he explains that "[t]o be objective, they are still taking care of us, one by one" (255).

To these a few other related symptoms must be added: on the one hand, Daniel's narration has a discomfiting sense of timelessness, which is achieved through nonlinearity and chaotic, fragmented jumps in time and place. In fact, he admits that he is struggling to "work out the chronology" (193). For instance, at one time he does not even seem to know how old he is or in which year he was born: "We moved there in 1945 when I was four years old. Or maybe in 1944 when I was five years old" (118). Secondly, Daniel's traumatic condition at times results in dissociation, which points to his fragmented psyche and is manifested in the narrative through his random shifts of voice, from autodiegetic to heterodiegetic narration and back without warning.

Finally, Daniel's narration also suggests that he suffers from anhedonia. It has been proved that this condition frequently co-occurs with PTSD as a consequence of infantile psychic trauma (Krystal 1995, 81). Anhedonic subjects suffer from a lack of capacity for enjoyment and, as such, Daniel is unable to enjoy any of the activities that are usually found pleasurable, such as hobbies, sexual intercourse, family life, or social interaction. This can be illustrated by one of the most infamous passages of the novel, in which Daniel's capacity to turn a beautiful family scene into an insane nightmare becomes manifest:

> In the park I threw Paul in the air and caught him, and he laughed. Phyllis smiled […]. I tossed my son higher and higher, and now he laughed no longer but cried out.

> Still I did not stop and threw him higher and caught him closer to the ground. Then Phyllis was begging me to stop. The baby now shut his mouth, concentrating on his fear, his small face, my Isaacson face, locked in absolute dumb dread of the breath-taking flight into the sky and even more terrifying fall toward earth. I can't bear to think about this murderous feeling […]. I enjoyed the fear in his mother. When I finally stopped she grabbed Paul and sat hugging him. He was white […]. I took off.
> (161)

This passage shows that Daniel simply cannot enjoy any activity that a healthy person would find enjoyable, and also points to a destructive, violent nature that leads him to victimize every single person around him, especially his wife.

II

This leads to the analysis of Daniel's attitude towards his family, more specifically, his mother, his sister, and his wife. One of the most conspicuous aspects of *The Book of Daniel* is certainly the brutal way in which Daniel treats his wife. To put it plainly, Phyllis is a victim of domestic violence, since Daniel frequently tortures her sexually, physically and psychologically. His mistreatment is suggested as early as page 5 of the novel, where the contemptible sadomasochistic relationship existent between Daniel and Phyllis is already established. He describes his wife as

> the kind of awkward girl with heavy thighs and heavy tits and slim lovely face whose ancestral mothers must have been bred in harems. The kind of unathletic helpless breeder to appeal to caliphs. The kind of sand dune that was made to be kicked around. (5)

This highly degrading description not only establishes the power relationship existent between Daniel, who defines himself as Phyllis's "tormentor," and his wife, who is defined as a "sex martyr" (7); it also determines the bond between Daniel and his readers, since he already challenges their inclination to identify with an autodiegetic narrator who is capable of such a statement. Indeed Daniel is well aware of, and concerned about this issue: "And if the first glimpse people have of me is this, how do I establish sympathy?" (8)

In fact, any possibility of establishing sympathy with the reader is automatically destroyed by his shameless rendering of one of the most

despicable scenes of sexual violence to be found in writing, which confirms Phyllis's victimization:

> Daniel instructed Phyllis to kneel on the seat facing her side of the car, and to bend over as far as she could, kneeled and curled up like a penitent, a worshipper, an abject devotionalist. […] "Don't hurt me. Just don't hurt me, Daniel." He ran his right hand over her buttocks. The small of her back was dewy with sweat. She shivered and the flesh of her backside trembled under his hand. […] Daniel leaned forwards and pressed the cigarette lighter. His hand remained poised. Do you believe it? Shall I continue? Do you want to know the effect of three concentric circles of heating element glowing orange in a black night of rain upon the tender white girlflesh of my wife's ass? (74)

After an episode like this one, even the most sympathetic of readers cannot but morally condemn Daniel's sadism. Nevertheless, Daniel is aware, and at times, even ashamed of this sadistic drive and, therefore, he tries to justify such behavior as a self-assigned mentoring project to educate his wife into suffering. He believes that her leftist political leanings (her hippie lifestyle and her love of peace) are "principles," "political decisions" (7). And so, he must "work on her" (207) to teach her what being a revolutionary and belonging to the American left implies in terms of suffering; after all, their leftist political stance cost his parents their life and Susan and him their mental health; as Daniel puts it, "it is a lot easier to be a revolutionary nowadays than it used to be" (314).

Such explanation of Daniel's cruelty has already been hinted at by Eric Rasmussen, who claims in his paper that the novel embodies the fantasy that "sexual violence, as a mode of extreme and dangerous affective communication, can function as an affective technology for the artful transfer of knowledge and be deployed pedagogically for political purposes" (2011: 190). However, as Avishai Margalit has put it, "it is silly, if not downright obscene, to regard torture as a mere 'communicative act;'" "torture in our culture constitutes an extreme form of humiliation," which implies "denying the victim's very human mode of existence" (2002: 119). Thus, it may make more sense to interpret Daniel's torturing of his wife as a process of what LaCapra, borrowing Freud's concept, has called "acting out" (2001: 21). On the one hand, it evokes Daniel's own strong sense of humiliation after his parents' arrest, a feeling which became particularly acute during the visits to his parents in prison (304). On the other hand, his behavior may also be seen as a

pathetic way of compensating for the impotence and helplessness that result from his status as a traumatized victim, since it allows him to maintain a sense of agency.

His wife and baby are certainly the most evident victims of Daniel's dominating drive, but they are not the only ones. His mother and sister are also submitted to his desperate need for power and control. Therefore, even though he does not actually abuse them physically, it is possible to argue that he seeks to counteract his helplessness and his low self-esteem by dominating their subjectivity. In the case of Daniel's sister, Susan, he loves her dearly, but he feels threatened by her independence and strong will. The bond between Daniel and Susan is too complex, too contradictory and yet too strong to be understood outside the context of their mutual traumatic condition. He took care of her as a little girl (23) and tends to her lovingly when she is at the hospital (10), and yet fights her roughly on every occasion, always trying to exert his power over her; he admits that his life is strongly influenced by hers (214), and yet he is glad to be the one who survives (254); he despises her for her ideas about politics, drugs, and sex (11), and yet he admires her deeply for her strength and determination (97). Furthermore, their relationship is complicated by a sort of mutual incestuous attraction, and Daniel seems to be obsessed with his sister's sexuality. And so he explains that when Susan was thirteen, she "used to work her tentative saucy sex on [him]" (265), and she gave him "glimpses of herself in her underwear" (78). Likewise, Daniel showed her the hair that he was growing around his penis (358), and he admits that "more than once [he has] asked [him]self if [he'd] like to screw [his] sister" (253). Although his own answer is 'no', such fixation with each other's sexuality reveals that the traumatic events of their childhood have impaired their way of relating to each other and to other people. In any case, he feels compelled to eradicate her voice by banning her from expressing her own views and feelings in the narration of a story of trauma that is as much hers as it is his. It is Daniel's tale that the reader gets, in which Susan is relegated to a secondary role—at best—in spite of the fact that she is as much a protagonist as Daniel.

In the case of his mother, Daniel also loves and admires her deeply. Rochelle is described as a very strong, realistic, and intelligent woman. She is an active member of the Communist Party. She faces her trial, conviction and execution with a "composed ironic smile" on her face

(363), and she is executed last because "they had rightly conceived that [his] mother was the stronger" (359). However, it soon becomes obvious through Daniel's narration that he was already starting to begrudge his mother's power and control over the whole family. In fact, she is at times presented as a castrating woman whose authority Daniel cannot but resent[8]: "[m]y mother directs us all like a military commander" (53) and "nothing is really official without my mother's endorsement" (57). Meanwhile Daniel's father, arguably the most important figure for a little boy, is reduced to the role of an "irresponsible child", a man too self-obsessed to take care of practical family matters who "couldn't be trusted to make a living" (45) and who has no authority to speak of (57). Rochelle's premature death leaves Daniel unable to challenge her overwhelming authority. He is caught between mixed feelings of love and rejection that he has been prevented from confronting and resolving by her death and his subsequent guilt. As a result, he reacts by turning her into a mere character of his narrative, by creating for her an invented internal monologue of feelings and thoughts during the last months of her life. In that way, by controlling his mother's and sister's subjectivity, Daniel manages to maintain a sense of agency and counteract his disempowerment.

This effort actually mirrors his sadistic and violent treatment of his wife, Phyllis, a passive woman whose voice is also completely silenced and whose weak character offers Daniel the possibility of being, for once, the one in control, the tormentor and not the victim. Thus, the victim has become a perpetrator, proving that the limits between both categories are not as stable in the context of trauma as one might think. This interpretation points to Daniel's traumatic condition as a likely source for his sadistic behavior. As a result, Daniel's violent, abusive attitude is problematized—though most certainly not justified—by his trauma, to the extent that the reader is frequently torn between feelings of pity and contempt, sympathy and repulsion, as Daniel himself

---

[8] Robert Forrey has gone so far as to argue that Daniel shows unconscious, incestuous, sadistic impulses towards his mother, but his shame causes him to displace then onto his wife (1982: 169). Similarly, Naomi Morgenstern, in her psychoanalytic reading of the novel, has argued that "Daniel's sadism may be an attempt to overcome, by force, his own liminal status as the subject of (and subject to) the primal scene", by which she refers to Daniel's obsession as a young child with spying on his parents' sexual activities (2003: 77).

understands when he broods over his difficulties in establishing sympathy (8).

III

Another aspect of Daniel's traumatic condition that deserves special attention is the status of his memories. After all, being a trauma narrative, *The Book of Daniel* concerns itself with the narration of the memories of a traumatic past. To begin with, it is worth pointing out that Daniel's narration has a discomfiting sense of timelessness, since it is non-linear, fragmented and chaotic, with constant jumps in time and place. This suggests the confused status of the protagonist's mind, who struggles to produce a more or less logical narrative out of the decontextualized memory fragments that he is able to retrieve as he progresses. In addition, Dori Laub and Nanette C. Auerhahn have noted that victims' knowledge can emerge in several other ways, namely, as transference episodes, in which present experiences are distorted or in some way influenced by the earlier traumatic event, and as overpowering narratives, where the traumatized subject can describe past events but continues to feel buried in the traumatic experience (1993, 295). Both forms of retrieving traumatic memories appear in Daniel's narration: on the one hand, the whole text becomes an overpowering narrative, since Daniel is most certainly still absorbed by the original trauma and yet he manages to describe past events, although in a fragmented way. On the other hand, there are frequent episodes of transference, the best example probably being Daniel's rendering of his parents' funeral, which abruptly turns into his sister's funeral without further notice:

> We stand at the side of the graves. An enormous crowd presses behind us. The prayers are incanted. Everyone is in black. I glance at Susan. She is perfectly composed […] I feel her warm hand in my hand and see her lovely eye cast down at the open earth at our feet and an inexpressible love fills my throat and weakens my knees. I think if I can only love my little sister for the rest of our lives that's all I will need. The Lewins ride in the rear seat, Phyllis and I in jump seats at their knees. My mother wears a black hat with a veil over her eyes […] (365)

It is obvious, then, that Daniel's determination to write about his traumatic past after his sister's "summons" is not an easy task, since as Cathy Caruth has put it, the images of traumatic representation, although accurate and precise, are largely inaccessible to conscious control (1995:

151). In fact, as Daniel progressively recovers his memories, they are presented with astonishing accuracy and in minute detail, to an extent that he even wonders at times: "how do I know this?" (63). He constantly calls himself "a little criminal of perception" (37, 41), and remembers with unnatural precision aspects which are far beyond a child's capacity. For instance, when the FBI has started to harass his parents, he proves to have had a general comprehension of everything that was happening:

> Meanwhile, the newspapers have been reporting a chain action of arrests around the world. An English scientist. An American engineer. A half-dozen immigrants in Canada. Secrets have been stolen. The FBI has been finding these people, and convicting them in the same press release. A chain reaction. (133)

This phenomenon has been described by psychiatrist Dori Laub when analyzing his own status as a witness and his awareness as a child survivor (1995: 61). He explains that "it is as though this process of witnessing was of an event that happened on another level, and was not part of the mainstream of conscious life of a little boy" (1995: 62).

Yet, Daniel admits in his narration that there are still many things that he has not managed to recover: "I remember nothing of our trip to the Shelter" (197); or "just two or three images left from this period of our life" (183). In addition, Daniel's memories are not always reliable and he repeats several times that what he just explained has most likely been invented: "Also, a heavy, old diamond shaped microphone from a real radio station. It broadcasts on a secret frequency directly to my father in his jail cell" (149). His problems remembering or knowing lead him to construct an unreliable narrative of the past made of scraps: his own fragmented, but precise memories, the trial transcript, his parent's letters, accounts by the people involved, and his own invented passages. This fact links Daniel's narrative to Sandra Gilbert's notion of "writing wrong" (qtd. in Uytterschout 2008: 64–65). According to Gilbert, who writes about her own personal experiences, "survivors of trauma are left behind with so many questions that all they can (try to) do is filling the gaps of a story […]. Survivors writing about their experiences are in fact *imagining* what happened" (2008: 65). This is precisely what happens towards the end of the novel, where Daniel invents an account of his parents' trial and execution.

Similarly, in some sections of the novel there is a sense of simultaneous knowledge and denial as a result of resistance and

repression: there are certain events that Daniel is only able to partially narrate and which evoke a conflicted or incomplete relation to memory. This is the case with his account of the first weeks that he spends at the Shelter, where he explains that there has been an attempted sodomizing crime and that a kid has been caught with a knife he should not have had. Given Daniel's unreliability as a narrator and the information about his childhood that he has otherwise provided, it is possible to assume that he is trying to narrate his own experience, but he is caught "between the urge to know and the need to deny" (Herrero and Baelo-Allué 2011).

And yet, in spite of his awareness that his narration is fragmented, incomplete, and at times invented, Daniel feels the need to write the story of his trauma. On the one hand, he seeks to relieve his guilt, since he is convinced that "some of the force that propelled [Susan's] razor was supplied by [him]" (36); in other words, he feels responsible for his sister's attempt to commit suicide and assumes that it was his betrayal that led her to try and end her life; he feels that he has failed to support Susan in her own desperate attempt to find peace through the cleansing of the family name, which acts as a sense of summons. Thus, as Walker Bergström has rightly argued, "it is his sense of moral obligation to Susan that sets the plot in motion" (2010: 14). On the other hand, he is ashamed because he has always rejected his past, presumably because it was too painful and maybe also frustrating for him to try and remember what happened to his parents:

> [A]ll my life I have been trying to escape from my relatives and I have been intricate in my run, but one way or another they are what you come upon around the corner, and the Lord God who is so frantic for recognition says you have to ask how they are and would they like something cool to drink, and what is it you can do for them this time. (37)

Thus, Daniel seeks to get rid of the burden that troubles his heart and find some peace. As characteristically happens to trauma victims, he has been silent for years about the traumatic event, troubled by visions that he cannot fully own. Therefore, by attempting to narrate the past he seeks to reach a catharsis and cure his heart of what has been ailing it for a long time:

> "IS IT SO TERRIBLE NOT TO KEEP THE MATTER IN MY HEART, TO GET THE MATTER OUT OF MY HEART, TO EMPTY MY HEART OF THIS MATTER? WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH MY HEART?" (20)
>
> …
>
> "I, Daniel, was grieved, and the visions of my heart troubled me and I do not want to keep the matter in my heart." (21)

Writers on trauma and memory such as Judith Herman, Suzette Henke and Dori Laub stress the importance of creating a narrative of the traumatic event as a strategy to work through the trauma and attenuate the painful memories or at least provide some peace to the traumatized subject. Herman highlights the necessity for the victim to reorganize "fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation" into "an organized, detailed, verbal account, oriented in time and historical contents" (1992: 177). Similarly, Laub argues that a victim must "re-externalize" the traumatic event by articulating and transmitting the story to an "empathic listener" and then "take it back again, inside" (Felman and Laub 1991: 68–69). Further, Suzette Henke points to autobiography as a form of "scriptotherapy," which offers the possibility of "reinventing the self and reconstructing the subject ideologically" and "encourages the author/narrator to reassess the past" (1998, xv). This is precisely what Daniel seeks to achieve, and his dependency on the empathic reader becomes evident in his frequent notes and addresses to him or her throughout the narrative: "I know there is a you. There has always been a you. YOU: I will show you that I can do the electrocution" (359).

The question that arises, then, is whether Daniel's relative success in retrieving the traumatic memories of the past and in narrating them to a more or less empathic reader has eased his condition and healed his ailment. His ability towards the end of the novel to narrate his parents' death by electrocution, the single event that has been eluded throughout the narrative and yet has constantly hovered around it—and also the ability to do it in the past tense—indicates that he has managed, to a certain extent, to "assimilate" the traumatic experience into his model of the world, to borrow Granofsky's phrasing of this phenomenon (1995: 8). However, as Daniel himself puts it, the imprint of Susan's small warm hand in his hand is permanent (214). After all, as B. van der Kolk and O. van der Hart have found,

> in the case of complete recovery […] the story can be told, it has been given a place in the person's life history. However, the traumatic experience/memory is, in a

> sense, timeless. It cannot be transformed into a story placed in time, with a beginning, a middle and an end. If it can be told at all, it is still a (re)experience.
>
> (1995: 177)

And so, the excessiveness of his behavior at his sister's funeral in the last pages of his account suggests that although he has managed to assimilate the past and achieved some closure, he will never overcome his guilt and will continue suffering the aftereffects of trauma.

IV

In conclusion, when seen in the light of the novel's political and historical content, its concern with trauma, violence and memory points to Doctorow's preoccupation with remembrance, which he defends as the best tool to build a better future. It is possible to conclude that the novelist intends to stress the fact that letting the unsettling and overwhelming remnants of the traumatic past fall into oblivion, or even silencing them, may eventually result in their repetition. It is widely acknowledged that "history tends to repeat itself" and, therefore, it is our duty to avoid the reenactment of situations of historical victimization, such as the one depicted in the novel. As a result, it can be concluded that *The Book of Daniel* seeks to denounce the way a number of social, economic and political structures have traditionally created, and may continue perpetuating situations of traumatic victimization in which the victim may even become, in turn, a perpetrator. Doctorow seeks to highlight the importance of listening to the fragmented voices of those who suffer the effects of trauma in order to develop new social and political perspectives that will guarantee a better future and avoid the repetition of society's darkest mistakes.

References

American Psychiatric Association. 2000. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (4th ed., text rev.)

Caruth, Cathy, ed. 1995. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.

Delbo, Charlotte. 1990. *Days and Memory*. Malboro, Vt: Malboro Press.

DeRosa Aaron. 2009. "Apocryphal Trauma in E.L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Studies in the Novel* 41.4: 468–88.

Dillon, Brian. 1999. "The Rosenbergs Meet Nebuchadnezzar: The Narrator's Use of the Bible in Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Critique*, 40.4: 365–78.

Doctorow, E. L. 2006 (1971). *The Book of Daniel*. London: Penguin.

———. *Ragtime.* 2006 (1975). London: Penguin.

Erikson, Kai. 1995. "Notes on Trauma and Community." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. 183–99.

Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub. 1991. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York: Routledge.

Forrey, Robert. 1982. "Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*: All in the Family." *From Marginality to Mainstream: A Mosaic of Jewish Writers*. *Studies in American Jewish Literature*, vol. 2. Ed. Daniel Walden. Albany: New York State UP. 167–73.

Granofski, Ronald. 1995. *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster*. New York: Peter Lang.

Harpham, Geoffrey G. 2002. "E. L. Doctorow and the Technology of Narrative." *E.L. Doctorow: Critical Views.* Ed. Harold Bloom. Philadelphia: Chelsea House. 27–49.

Henke, Suzette. 1998. *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women's Life Writing*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.

Herman, Judith L. 1992. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. New York: Basic Books.

Herrero, Mª Dolores and Sonia Baelo-Allué, eds. 2011. *Between the Urge to Know and the Need to Deny: Trauma and Ethics in Contemporary British and American Literature*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag.

Huyssen, Andreas. 2003. *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford UP.

Krystal, Henry. 1995. "Trauma and Aging: A Thirty-Year Follow-UP." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. 76–99.

LaCapra, Dominick. 2001. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP.

Laub, Dori and Nanette C. Auerhahn. 1993. "Knowing and Not Knowing Massive Psychic Trauma: Forms of Traumatic Memory." *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 74.2: 287–302.

Laub, Dori. 1995. "Truth and Testimony: the Process and the Struggle." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. 61-75.

Margalit, Avishai. 2002. *The Ethics of Memory*. Cambridge and London: Harvard UP.

Morgenstern, Naomi. 2003. "The Primal Scene in the Public Domain: E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Studies in the Novel* 35.1: 68–88.

Rasmussen, Eric D. 2011. "E. L. Doctorow's Vicious Eroticism: Dangerous Affect in *The Book of Daniel*." *Symploke* 18.1: 189–17.

Root, Maria. 1992. "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality." *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*. Ed. Laura S. Brown and Mary Ballou. New York: Guilford: 229-65.

Tokarczyk, Michelle M. 1987. "From the Lion's Den: Survivors in E. L. Doctorow's *The Book of Daniel*." *Critique* 29.1: 3–15.

Uytterschout, Sien. 2008. "Visualized Incomprehensibility of Trauma in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*." *ZAA* 56.1: 61–74.

van der Kolk, Bessel A. and Onno van der Hart. 1995. "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Ed. Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP. 158-181.

Vickroy, Laurie. 2002. *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*. Virginia: Virginia UP.

Walker Bergström, Catharine W. 2010. *Intuition of an Infinite Obligation: Narrative Ethics and Postmodern Gnostics in the Fiction of E. L. Doctorow*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.

Whitehead, Anne. 2004. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP.

———. *Memory*. 2009. London: Routledge.

Williams, John. 1996. *Fiction as False Document: The Reception of E. L. Doctorow in the Postmodern Age*. Columbia: Candem House.

"Recreations for leisure hours": Popular Entertainment in Collins's *Hide and Seek*

Flora de Giovanni, University of Salerno

Abstract
Collins's *Hide and Seek* (1854), is a valuable contribution to the Victorian debate on popular entertainment, punctuated as it is by references to the circus, the music hall and the painting exhibition. Leisure appears to be a crucial issue for the author: himself a great entertainer and the father-to-be of the sensation novel, he aimed to gain access to the booming reading market of the 1850s-60s without giving up his literary ambitions. The detailed analysis of amusement he carries out in *Hide and Seek* is a significant step in the accomplishment of his objective, paving the way to the rise of sensation fiction, which, he seems to imply, was the recreation, both amusing and instructing, the Victorian cross-class audience was in need of.

Wilkie Collins is the acknowledged father of the sensation novel, which developed in England between 1860 and 1870, raising a heated critical debate. Right form its appearance, in fact, it was seen as a "product of industry", a commercial rather than an artistic phenomenon, in Andrew Radford's words, "synonymous with the swift growth of industrial capitalism and the emergence of large urban centres with newly exploding populations and new social classes" (Radford 2009: 1). According to the Victorian literary establishment, it was not only a substandard genre compared with the "serious" novel, characterized by its moral purpose and shaped after the conventions of realism, but also a dangerous one. Referred to in terms of bodily impact as poison, plague, infection and addictive drug, it was accused of "preaching to the nerves" of the readers—especially of women, who "were considered to be uniquely susceptible to [its] narrative shocks and moral dips" (Allen 2011: 408)—feeding their insatiable hunger for excitement and pathos. In addition, it was held to blur the social boundaries, encouraging miscegenation and dissolving the distinction between the genteel reading habits of the elite and the coarse pastimes of the newly literate working class—that is, dissolving the distinction between "high" and "low"

culture, which was one of the strongholds of middle-class identity and "a means of fending off shifting class relations by reinforcing existing categorical containers" (Radford 2009: 65).

Undeniably, Collins's extremely successful sensation novels marked "a breakthrough in the marketing of fiction as a commodity form" (Law 2006: 97). His reflections on popular readership—"a phenomenon worth examining", as he wrote in "The Unknown Public", published in Dickens's *Household Words* in 1858—attest his interest in expanding his own public, by conquering the submerged market of those, "to be counted by millions", who bought the penny-novel journals for amusement only. Unlike their social and intellectual "betters", who read for information and amusement alike, they are naïve and ignorant, he remarks with some irony, but they can be taught to tell a good book from bad one. And although his reaction to the emergence of the mass audience was on the whole ambivalent (Collins was to become increasingly anxious about his literary status after the success of *The Woman in White*), he is aware that the future of English fiction rests with "the readers who rank by millions", who will make up "such an audience as has never yet been known" (Collins 1858a).

In the 1850s and 1860s, the growing demand for artistic and literary products determined a boom in fiction, painting and theatre, which reached an enlarged and more heterogeneous public – a transformation that Collins warmly welcomed. "King Public", he wrote in 1858, "is a good king for Literature and Art!" (qtd in Pyckett 2005: 11). Like Dickens, for whose periodicals he provided novels and essays, he was ready to cash in on the new trends in cultural production. All the more so, perhaps, because in his life he experienced a peculiar mobility between different cultural networks: the literary world, the theatrical scene and artistic circles, from the Royal Academy to the Pre-Raphaelite brotherhood (Dolin 2006: 9-10). A painter, a dramatist and the adapter of his own stories for the stage, Collins maintained that the novel and the play were "twin-sisters in the family of Fiction; […] and that all the strong and deep emotions which the Play-writer is privileged to excite, the Novel-writer is privileged to excite also" (Collins 2008a). In his activity as author, he acted accordingly, as the recognized influence of melodrama on the sensation novel shows.

Moreover, he was very keen on popular entertainment: an inveterate circus- and theatre-goer, like Dickens, he regularly attended all sorts of

performances, often in the company of his long-term friend and mentor. The range of pastimes and amusements available in Collins's day was extensive and ever increasing, owing to the greater economic security and the improvements in communications which—as he himself acknowledged in "Dramatic Grub Street" (1858)—"more than supply in quantity what audiences have lost in quality" (Collins 1858b). No longer intermingled with work, no longer part of an integrated continuum of communal and ritualized activities, leisure emerged as "a discrete new sector in an increasingly compartimentalised life-space" (Bailey 2003: 20), constituted by the social transformations brought about by the combined processes of industrialization and urbanization. Though by no means a mid-Victorian invention, by the mid-Victorian period amusement had turned into a consumer good "placed for sale on the 'free' market" (Turner 1982: 54). However, even when, in the course of the century, the small-scale entertainments of informal and popular origins, such as the circus and the music hall, developed into big business, they always retained part of their original nature, refusing to be simply colonized by the emergent cultural industry and "answering both to the ritual promptings of an indigenous custom […], and the slicker formulation of mass or middle brow commercial confection" (Bailey 2003: 11).

The middle class benefited most from the wider choice that the market supplied, but the working class too got into the "habit of enjoyment", with the result that the devotees of entertainment formed a socially mixed public. For example, the two classes mingled in the music hall, which came into existence in the 1840s, and the same can be said of the circus, which reached the apex of its popularity in the 1850s and 1860s. Leisure appeared thus as a fairly unstructured area, where the traditional social distinctions and hierarchies were at risk of being ignored or subverted. "A dangerous frontier zone", in Bailey's words, it did not afford the bourgeoisie any protection from unwanted contacts with the lower classes: "To middle-class sensibilities, leisure represented a normative as well as a cultural void and placed alarming new responsibilities upon the individual capacity for self-direction" (Bailey 2003: 20-21), calling for a morally acceptable redefinition. The key concept of respectability, which meant rectitude and economic prudence and self-sufficiency, provided a powerful value system which favored the assimilation of part of the working class—the "respectables", as opposed

to the "roughs"—into the middle-class. It was along the lines of the "respectable/non-respectable formulation", a sharper divide than the one between the rich and the poor, that some order was apparently imposed on the "fluid and open territory" of entertainment.

Moreover, by the second half of the century, the pastimes, which had formerly been attacked by both utilitarian and evangelical disciplines as an invitation to vice, were rehabilitated, since they were assigned the function of giving new strength to those who labored under an excessively demanding work regime. Re-creation, a word preferred to leisure for its moral overtones, offered the workers a moment of relief from the strain of everyday life—a functionalist view of entertainment which was shared by Dickens. In *Hard Times* (1854), in fact, Sleary, the proprietor of the horsemanship of that name, affirms: "People mutht be amuthed […] they can't be alwayth a working, nor yet they can't be alwayth a learning" (1962: 36-37). Far from being an alternative to Coketown, as some critics have maintained, the circus is "a product of and attachment to industrial society" (Stoddart 2000: 137), the safety valve necessary to its survival. As Dickens clearly stated in "The Amusement of the People" (1850): "…We consider the hour of idleness passed by [the lower] class of society as so much gain to society at large" (1897: 162).

However, if *Hard Times* has been considered a valuable contribution to the contemporary debate about popular entertainment, Collins's *Hide and Seek*, published in the same year, has not aroused an equal interest. Surprisingly, because, in my opinion, it is a sort of survey of the pastimes the Victorian middle class allowed itself, punctuated as it is by references to the circus, the music hall, art exhibitions, cribbage and boxing. The novel, though not properly sensational, is nonetheless on the way to sensation, especially in its 1861 edition, where Collins abridged and omitted some passages in the attempt to meet the public's increasing demand for exciting and interesting stories. Thus, like a sensation novel, *Hide and Seek* is melodramatic and sentimental, deals with adultery and illegitimacy, presents startling coincidences and stereotyped characters, and in the end resorts to poetic justice, rewarding virtue and punishing vice. Its plot unfolds along the disclosure of Mary Grice's secret origins by her uncle Mat. The "mysterious foundling! aged 10 years!! totally deaf and dumb!!!" (Collins 1999: 56), who displays her disability in Jubber's circus, is the emotional catalyst of the narration. Little Mary is

adopted by the painter Valentine Blyth and his bedridden wife Lavvy, thus entering a bourgeois home where she receives and reciprocates their loving care. Here she is renamed Madonna after the Madonnas of Raphael, for the "softness, purity and feminine gentleness" inscribed in her features (Collins 1999: 51), and is transformed into the ideal of the angel-like middle-class young woman, "too fragile, unworldly, or innocent to use her tongue" (Gitter 1992: 183), even though she is denied the traditional happy ending—that is, marriage with her beloved Zack Thorpe, who is discovered to be her half brother in the final pages of the novel.

Undoubtedly, Mary is not one of those passionate and purposeful heroines featured in the sensation novel, who reject their female role challenging the domestic ideal. Quite the opposite: she is "an exaggerated type of feminine virtue" (Flint 2006: 158), all the more so because speechless. But, nonetheless, her presence confronts Collins's readers with what was a thorny issue in a society where impairment was believed to produce degeneracy in the unborn child—namely, the disabled woman's right to marriage and motherhood. Whereas in the "twin structure" based nineteenth-century novel non-able-bodied female characters were usually situated on the margins of the plot, leaving the leading romantic role to an able-bodied heroine, significantly in *Hide and Seek* there is no such heroine to usurp Mary's role in the story. Like any other (hearing) girl of her age, she falls in love with Zack, who, however, does not reciprocate her feeling. According to Stoddard Holmes, "Collins's novels construct disabled women as figures of eros rather than pathos" (Stoddard Holmes 2009: 76), thus undermining the current vision of disability, which confined them to a circumscribed, marginal space outside the normative sexual economy. Mary is endowed with desires and expectations and is objectified in erotic terms from the start—that is, "she is characterized as a sexual object before she is identified as deaf" (Stoddard Holmes 2009: 76). But in fact her beauty and womanly virtues cannot counterbalance her anomalous condition, which seems to me the reason why her love story with Zack does not materialize: in my opinion it is precisely her deafness, not the specter of incest, that "disables" the romance, incest being but a sort of emergency measure which allows the author to eschew a potentially alarming and subversive happy ending. Thus Collins's dissident view of the impaired girl as a sexual and domestic subject is ultimately re-contained within the

established order it apparently questions, reinforcing the accepted values and confirming the reader's expectations: Mary ends up an unmarried middle-class daughter who self denyingly takes care of her foster parents, recast as she is in the role of the prepubescent, self-disciplined young woman traditionally associated with female disability.

Within this narrative frame Collins approaches the subject of entertainment, showing a considerable awareness of some of the issues at stake in his age, such as the close connection between urbanization and leisure, its growing commercialization, the threat to the values of the bourgeoisie posed by the socially vulnerable area of enjoyment, the composition of the cross-class audience, the moral dangers young males in particular were exposed to if they overstepped the limits of the evangelically-dominated respectability, applying themselves "more to play than to business" (Huggins 2000: 589-590). His main concern seems to be the amusement of the middle class, which had gained a leading position in the nation thanks to its entrepreneurial spirit and moral values, but which, outside working life, modeled itself on the manners of the aristocracy in order to acquire a higher status—a theme that he explores from the very start of the book, associating it with the massive expansion of London's north-western suburbs between 1837 and 1851. According to Dolin, modernity in Collins is a process in the making, a subterranean force which shapes the landscape, leaving it "in a permanently suspended state of transition from the old to the new", its houses and streets unfinished and unused (Dolin 2006: 17). This is exactly how the residential area around Baregrove Square looks, prey to the triumphant army of "the hod, the trowel and the brick-kiln" (Collins 1999: 26). The author's description of its desolation and the analysis of the demographic distribution of its inhabitants, though much less detailed than in the first edition, are nevertheless very accurate, suggesting how alert he was to the social changes that were taking place. The new neighborhood is inhabited by a multi-layered bourgeoisie, divided up into "middle class with large incomes", "middle class with moderate incomes" and "middle class with small incomes" (Collins 1999: 28). Those with "moderate incomes" represent, in Collins's words, "a sort of neutral ground": their cultural identity, characterized by the absence of any distinctive feature, is threatened both by the "large incomes" and the "small incomes"—a condition mirrored in the architecture of the suburb

they live in, which sometimes resembles the grand mansions of the former, at others the shabby "brick boxes" of the latter.

Significantly, whereas the upper and the lower classes pursue their traditional pastimes according to their tastes and within their means, the fact that the "moderate incomes" have no "characteristic recreations for leisure hours, adapted equally to their means and to their tastes" reveals their identity crisis (Collins 1999: 30). They scorn the amusements of the workers and, "rotten with social false pretences as they generally are", they seek to imitate the gentlemen's life style. As a consequence, their entertainments are devoid of pleasure and these "respectable commercial people"—a unique case in the whole civilized world, the author maintains—found themselves "in no one of their festive arrangements, true to their incomes, to their order, or to themselves; and, in very truth, for all these reasons and many more, got no real enjoyment out of their lives…" (Collins 1999: 31). English middle-class leisure, Collins seems to imply, joyless, grey, somewhat mechanical, is in urgent need of reform and reformulation. How this should be achieved is not suggested in the novel, but I believe that the novel itself provides a solution.

Collins focuses on the clash between Mr. Thorpe, "the rigid modern Puritan of Baregrove Square", and his son Zack, who stubbornly affirms: "I don't want to be respectable and I hate commercial pursuits" (Collins 1999: 45), thus resisting the traditional values of self-discipline, duty, responsibility and commitment to work his father champions. Zack is the embodiment of the reprobate youth, exceedingly fond of entertainment, whose morality was a major concern of Victorian society: the young unmarried male who enjoyed more free time than the older generation and who could be easily lured into vice by the unprecedented abundance of pleasures now at hand. On the contrary, Mr Thorpe—the sternest and the most unreasonable of fathers, as the prologue to the novel shows—represents the evangelical obsession with sin. Convinced that theaters are "the Devil's Houses" and "Labyrinths of National Infamy", the only pastimes he allows his son are the oratorio performances and the scientific lectures at the Royal and Polytechnic Institutions. But, as Dickens affirms, "a people formed entirely in their hours of leisure by Polytechnic Institutions would be an uncomfortable community" (1897: 158), and Zack is all too eager to escape the narrow limits of the respectable residential suburbs where he lives and plunge into "the amusements and dissipation of the town", which granted men at leisure

anonymity and freedom from their neighbors' social control. His secret "nocturnal tours" in the West End, take him to "the disreputable places of public recreation", still open when the respectable ones are all closed—namely, to the Snuggery music hall.

The music hall, which grew out of the informal sing-along in the beer-houses, was to become extremely successful in the course of the century, developing from a small-scale entertainment into a big business which attracted investors and managers. By the time Collins wrote *Hide and Seek*, its distinctive performance style was more or less established. Although the audience was a cross-class one, the performance was mainly addressed to the lower orders of society and to that portion of the upper classes who wished to evade conventional morality (Bratton 2004: 167). For this reason the music hall was repeatedly attacked by the purity campaigners, whose targets were drunkenness and lasciviousness. Collins's Snuggery is definitely no respectable place; rather, it is "utterly vicious". And vice, openly displayed, is exactly what attracts the drunken "roughs" of the working-class who every night pack into the shabby and unwholesome hall devoid of all ornaments and comforts, where worn-out performers exhibit their scant musical talent:

> Here, in short, was vice wholly undisguised; recklessly showing itself to every eye, without the varnish of beauty, without the tinsel of wit, without even so much as the flavour of cleanness to recommend it. Were all beholders instinctively overcome by horror at the sight? Far from it. […] For, let classical moralists say what they may, vice gathers followers as easily, in modern times, with the mask off, as ever it gathered them in ancient times with the mask on. (Collins 1999: 180)

Although Collins grew increasingly impatient with his family's evangelicalism and occupied a liminal position between orthodoxy and unconventionality throughout his adult life, his description of the Snuggery seems to echo his own father's moral stance and concern with propriety, reflecting the stereotyped bourgeois view of the lower class, which, in fact, was not so drunken, bawdry and unruly as it was depicted (Davis and Emeljanow 2004: 94-95). The place, perceived precisely as a socially permeable area which defied control, reveals the (physical) dangers of inter-class relationships, in so far as the young gentleman Zack gets involved in a gigantic brawl with those very "roughs" he is supposed to shun: "Yells of 'Turn him out!' and 'Police!' followed; people at the other end of the room jumped up excitably on their seats;

the women screamed, the men shouted and swore, glasses were broken, sticks were waved, benches were cracked, …" (Collins 1999: 183). Far from being a large and glittering purpose-built hall, the Snuggery is in fact one of those early establishments meant to serve a small community, where "everybody seems to know everybody" and "the audience appear to constitute quite a happy family" (qtd in Bratton 2004: 168). The brawl is sparked by a stranger who captures the attention of the company for his unusual appearance (his brown skin, his scars, his cool and piercing eyes), and especially for wearing a black velvet skull-cap, since, as we learn, he has been scalped by the Indians of the American prairies. "The English" Collins remarks, "are the most intolerant people in the world, in their reception of anything which presents itself to them under the form of a perfect novelty" (Collins 1999: 181). The man, Mat Grice, is thus provoked and assailed for being a disturbance to the audience's sense of identity, that "us" that the music hall performance constantly reinforced, presenting and defining the local or the national type (Bratton 2004: 177). His otherness is what makes him the real attraction of the Snuggery: all eyes converge on the foreigner, establishing the dynamics of staring which enacts the social ritual of exclusion from the community (whether national, racial, able-bodied, or whatever), whose standards for self-definition are produced and authorized by comparison with those on the fringes.

The exhibition of what is anomalous and extraordinary also appeals to the "crowd of rustics" who attend Jubber's circus, where the deaf and dumb little Mary—the Marvel of Nature, the Eighth Wonder of the World—plays card tricks, displaying, in fact, her disability: "[Mr Jubber] then lifted her upon the broad low wall which encircled the ring, and walked her round a little way […], inviting the spectators to test her total deafness by clapping their hands, shouting, or making any loud noise they pleased close at her ear" (Collins 1999: 59). Here the "us/them" dynamics, though equally subservient to an excluding definition of normalcy, elicits a sympathetic rather than an aggressive response in the paying public, which the ringmaster is ready to exploit to the utmost, staging a "spectacle of afflictions". Mary's entrance into the ring, "the great circle of gazers", is greeted in fact with murmurs of sympathy, which Collins, however, disapproves of, tainted as they are with "traces of degradation", since their craving for unnatural sights and their willingness to abandon themselves to conventional sentimentality are

essentially degrading. This time the member of the bourgeoisie found in the company of such a coarse party is the artist Valentine Blyth, a "moderate incomes" who, nevertheless, is very different from his neighbors and, like Collins himself, occupies a position somewhere in between social conformity and dissidence. Valentine is no regular circus-goer: he is neither excited nor amused by the performance, and he is certainly out of place among the audience, which shows a "dastard insensibility to all decent respect for human suffering [feasting] itself on the spectacle of calamity paraded for hire, in the person of a deaf and dumb child of ten years old" (Collins 1999: 57-58). A "monster audience", it appears, similar to the one that in "The Unknown Public" is said to be lacking in inborn taste and delicacy and to be attracted by melodrama.

The increasing commodification of the circus which, in obedience to the law of supply and demand, develops to fulfill the wishes of the consumers, implies Collins's fear of the vulgarization of leisure, which, as he wrote in "A Plea for Sunday Reform" (1851), should on the contrary be devoted to improvement, instruction and enjoyment. Jubber, who sells exactly what his audience want to buy, puts advertising to good use to maximize his profits and exploits his defenseless performers, is the fictional embodiment of the "new kind of organization that enabled the circus to develop into a trade" (Assael 2005: 44). Of all forms of entertainment, the circus is the one which best exemplifies the nineteenth-century commercialization of amusement, becoming a proper business venture in the Victorian period, even though it had proved financially rewarding from the start: Astley, for example, devised a pay-for-entry arena for the "display of acts which had previously been characterised by their dispersed, itinerant and singular nature" (Stoddart 2000: 13-14). The comparison between *Hard Times* and *Hide and Seek* reveals two different visions of the circus, although the superficial similarities in their descriptions are such that, possibly, the two writers were remembering the same show, "perhaps one they had seen together" (Peters 1999: XIV). Whereas Dickens's emphasis lies less on the economic nature of the enterprise than on the pleasure the performers take in their work (Schlicke 1988: 7), Collins is aware of the extent to which their life depends on both the whimsical demands of the audience and the tyranny of the impresario—that is, on the market laws. In his unsentimental view, the circus, far from being a happy family like in

Dickens, is rather a place where life can be as miserable, harsh and unhappy as in the industrial workspace. The case of Little Mary, exploited, threatened and beaten by Jubber, may well have reminded Victorian readers of child labour in factories and mines, but Collins's highly dramatic description of the accident in which she loses her hearing while galloping around the ring also seems to herald the public campaign resulting in The Children's Dangerous Performance Bill (1879), that prevented children under fourteen from performing life-endangering circus acts.

If the circus, alternatively perceived as transgressive and safe, respectable and disreputable, had a somewhat contested role in Victorian England (Assael 2005: 7), certainly Collins resorted to its dark side to depict Jubber's venue, highlighting its dubious moral and artistic reputation. He apparently sides with those who condemned it as a corrupting, irrational amusement, against those who remarked, on the contrary, that it was altogether innocent and could exert a soothing influence on the working classes, encouraging their participation in a sober pleasure. Although it was also very popular among the upper-classes, who occupied the boxes of the grand amphitheaters according to a hierarchical pricing policy, Collins suggests that in fact it is no middle-class recreation, like the music hall. Which takes us back to the opening question as to how the bourgeoisie are to spend their leisure time properly and satisfyingly. But the genteel pastime he describes in *Hide and Seek*—namely, Valentine's exhibition—proves no solution to the problem, devoid of all pleasure as it is.

As Flint convincingly argues, Victorian society was characterized by the "accelerated expansion of diverse opportunities for differing sorts of spectatorship", caught up as it was in "a sort of frenzy of the visible" (Flint 2002: 2-3). This fascination with the eye and the act of seeing was responsible for the wide popularity enjoyed by new forms of visual display, which ranked high especially among middle-class entertainments: the exhibitions that celebrated commerce and art, panoramas, dioramas, museums and art galleries. Paintings were exhibited not only in institutions such as the Royal Academy and the likes, but also in private salesrooms and venues, attracting an expanding public. A painter brought up among painters, Collins was very familiar with art and art criticism and a careful observer of the growing interest painting was arousing in those years. Despite the fact that his father was

a member of the Academy and that he himself had exhibited there in 1848, Collins criticized its "strictly conservative policy" and its commonplace pictures. However, he did not approve of the Pre-Raphaelites' innovative style either, because he deemed its minute detail wanting in overall harmony and singleness of effect. Moreover around 1854, while writing *Hide and Seek*, he launched an attack on the classicism of Claude and Poussin, of which Valentine's pictures appear to be a poor imitation.

In his author's intentions, Blyth was to represent a "startling novelty" in fiction: an artist, that is, who was not "friendless, consumptive and penniless", but who was rather an amusing character (qtd in Peters 1999: 432). In the hilarious scene of his home exhibition, the targets of Collins's irony seem to be the worlds of both art and entertainment. Blyth, who is devoid of talent as a painter, gives a pompous and boring talk on the meaning of his pictures to an audience which seems to be altogether disinterested in and ignorant about painting. Lecturing on Art Pastoral and Art Mystic, he takes on the role of the critic—a "middleman" between public and artist, in Whistler's words—whose increasingly influential task in Victorian age was to educate the rising number of those who had no training in aesthetics but who, nonetheless, visited the painting exhibitions and purchased artworks. In "To think, or to be thought for" (1856), Collins strongly objected to criticism, "which has got obstructively between Art and the people", assuming that in order to make up our mind about a picture, all we need is a pair of eyes and "the undisturbed possession" of our senses, since no "other branch of intellectual art […] has such a direct appeal, by the very nature of it, to every sane human being as the art of painting" (Collins 1856). However, like his Victorian fellow-critics, who focused on the narrative content and/or the didactic message of the painting, Valentine does not speak to the spectator's eye. First, conforming to the rules of contemporary connoisseurship (Flint 2002: 213), he deciphers the symbolism of *Columbus in Sight of the New World*. Then, turning to what he calls "Reality", he examines the "fidelity to nature" of Columbus's muscular system, pertinaciously interrupted by the doctor, whose remarks are no less unwarranted and useless for the purpose of taking pleasure in art than Valentine's own:

> 'Follow the wand, my dear madam, pray follow the wand! This is the *Biceps*, […].
> The *Biceps*, Lady Brambledown, is a tremendously strong muscle—'

'Which arises in the human body, your Ladyship', interposed the Doctor, 'by two heads—'
'Which is used ', continued Valentine, cutting him short—'I beg your pardon, Doctor, but this is important—which is used—'
'I beg yours', rejoined the Doctor, testily. 'The origin of the muscle, or place where it arises, is the first thing to be described. The use comes afterwards. It is an axiom of anatomical science—'
'But, my dear sir!' cried Valentine—
'No', said the Doctor, peremptorily, 'you must really excuse me. This is a professional point. If I allow erroneous explanations of muscular system to pass unchecked in my presence—' (Collins 1999: 241-242)

The visitors Blyth admits into his painting-room, we are told, belong to all social classes—an unusual leveling tendency encouraged by his noble patroness, the Dowager Countess of Brambledown, whose pleasure is "to exhibit herself to society as an uncompromising Radical". But, it seems, no one is there out of a genuine interest in art and Valentine's home exhibition is itself above all a social event. The aristocracy of money, in fact, "came quite as much to look at the Dowager Countess as to look at the pictures" (Collins 1999: 229)—that is, to mix with the aristocracy of race, whose entertainments it sought to imitate for rank's sake. But, worse still, the visitors, irrespective of their differences in origin and class, are irresistibly attracted by the deaf and dumb Mary, who turns out to be a key figure in Collins's view of entertainment, providing an example of how the "heterogeneous congregation of worshippers at the shrine of art" reveal no better taste and delicacy than the "crowd of rustics" who attend the circus in search of sensation. Although the new name of Madonna seems to redeem her from her dishonorable past, transforming her cheap visibility as a circus star into a lofty pictorial one, her metamorphosis is only superficial, hindered at heart by her bodily difference, which defies the mainstream notions of normalcy, awaking people's morbid interest. Collins appears to be aware of the stare-and-tell ritual that "constitutes disability identity in the social realm" (Garland Thomson 2000: 335), since in the novel Mary's defectiveness summons the gaze and raises questions. In order to disrupt the visual dynamics between the non-disabled onlooker and the disabled curiosity, Blyth removes her from sight as much as possible, in compliance with the separate spheres ideology which prescribed women's confinement to the private dimension of domestic life, thus granting her the invisibility becoming to her new bourgeois status. But, whether performing in the

circus as a child, or simply leading the middle-class woman's retired life, she is on show, unwittingly staging the spectacle of her disability by her mere presence, as Valentine's painting exhibition suggests. Here she offers a "much more interesting sight than *Columbus* or *The Golden Age*" (Collins 1999: 249) to the 'lovers of the arts' of all social conditions, who equally revel in the display of impairment. Quite surprisingly, Collins denies the simplistic equation between class and natural feeling which he himself implicitly establishes in "The Unknown Public", where he distinguishes the middle-class readers of cultivated tastes from the newly literate majority of lower social rank, who show "inconceivably dense ignorance, inconceivably petty malice, and inconceivably complacent vanity"—a divide to be ascribed not only to the latter's lack of education but also to the seemingly very little "share of taste and delicacy they have inherited from Nature" (Collins 1858a).

Collins's vision of how the middle-class spends its leisure time undoubtedly provides the answer "no" to his opening question "Do these people ever manage to get any real enjoyment out of their lives…?" (Collins 1999: 30). In the author's opinion, they did not have any pastime, at once respectable and pleasurable, suited to their tastes: the music hall was vicious and dangerous; the circus satisfied the spectators' diseased craving for unnatural sights, thus reinforcing their irrational side; the painting exhibition, which was expected to instruct and amuse, was devoid of both instruction and amusement. This utterly negative description, made as it was by a writer who was alive to the problems of middle-class recreation, the expansion of the leisure market and the improvement of the broadening public's poor tastes—a writer, in short, whose interest was to propose his own literary production as the entertainment the middle-class was in need of—seems to pave the way for the rise of the sensation novel. Collins's depiction appears to draw on the artificially constructed image of the lower class and its expected behavior and the prejudiced view of enjoyments some members of the middle class had. However, since he was a somewhat dissident bourgeois who held the cult of respectability of his own class in contempt, with its conventional morality and social pretension, he did not adhere to the ideology of the dominant class wholeheartedly, but rather challenged it, showing how its habits and likings were also questionable. If Dickens constructed an audience in need of the civilizing stimulus of popular entertainment in his fiction and weeklies (Davis and Emeljanow 2004:

98-99), which played a major role in the cultural boom of the 1850s and 1860s, Collins, who was a regular contributor, may well have devised an image of middle-class leisure subservient to his own literary projects, sharing his mentor's concern for the reformation of amusement. The detailed analysis of entertainment he carries out in *Hide and Seek* seems to be a significant step in the accomplishment of his objective.

Collins's ambition to have access to the booming reading market and, at the same time, to be taken seriously as a novelist was not easy to fulfill, as his life-long worries about his literary reputation attest. In the prefaces to his novels he repeatedly resorted to "adherence to the truth", and "the light of reality"—i.e., to the precepts of Victorian "high" literature – to certify his seriousness of intent as a writer and the aesthetic value of his achievements, but he was also conscious that fiction, in order to be successful, had to be amusing—which means, had to meet the reader's demands. The newly-literate public hungered for strong emotions, like the circus-goers in *Hide and Seek*, but the well-educated middle-class readership might well have had the same wish, as the visitors to Valentine's exhibition seem to suggest. Was this wish legitimate, in Collins's opinion? Apparently it was not, as we have seen, but in fact strong emotions are exactly what he decided to give the audience of his sensation novel, imbuing his fiction with the same "combination of fierce melodrama and meek domestic sentiment" and the same "strong situation" he criticized in the serial stories, which were the chief attraction of the penny-novel journals (Collins 1858a). In so doing, Collins appears to challenge the intellectually elitist stance which saw high and popular culture as appealing respectively to reason and emotion—the elitist stance, that is, which he took up in "The Unknown Public". This challenge echoes Dickens's own, who, at the end of "The Amusement of the People", remarked that the Italian Opera and melodrama staged the same extreme and conventional passions, which excited both the common people and the aristocracy: "So do extremes meet; and so there is some hopeful congeniality between what will excite Mr. Whelks and what will rouse a Duchess" (Dickens 1897: 177).

Such "hopeful congeniality" Collins was willing to exploit, addressing a public whose boundaries, no longer delineated along class lines, he redrew to include the "enormous, outlawed majority of the […] three millions" who "must obey the universal law of progress, and must, sooner or later, learn to discriminate" (Collins 1858a). This was his

target market in the age of the insurgence of mass culture and, in order to become a writer for all classes, he gave his readership the excitement it demanded. This, however, was no escapist choice, as it may seem: by doing so—that is, by adopting a mode of excess and exaggeration, which the stern contemporary critics perceived as opposed to common sense experience (Radford 2009: 17)—he managed to tell its audience what it did not want to hear, allowing himself a depiction of the Victorian society which the realistic representation of "high" literature with its stringent moral purpose could not afford. Dealing with crime, adultery, bigamy and illegitimacy—all shameful secrets, concealed in an apparently proper bourgeois household—the sensation novel undermined the traditional image of the middle-class, resulting in a somewhat subversive attack on its beliefs and values, as the recent critical reassessment of Collins's work and of sensation fiction at large has repeatedly underlined. He held a mirror up to the bourgeoisie, the mirror of cultural performance, which, according to Turner, reflects a social group in a magnifying, diminishing, or distorting fashion, nonetheless heightening its self-awareness: "For no one likes to see himself as ugly, ungainly or dwarfish. Mirror distortions provoke reflexivity" (Turner 1982: 105). This is precisely what the leisure genres of art and entertainment are expected to do in those complex, vast-scale industrial societies of which Victorian England was an early example.

References
Allen, Emily. 2011. "Gender and Sensation". *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*. Ed. Pamela K. Gilbert. Oxford: Blackwell. 401-413.
Assael, Brenda. 2005. *The Circus and Victorian Society*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.
Bailey, Peter. 2003. *Popular Culture and the Performance in the Victorian City*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Bratton, Jacky. 2004. "The Music Hall". *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. Ed. Kerry Powell. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. 164-182.
Brooks, Peter. 1976. The Melodramatic Imagination. Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess. New Haven and London: The Yale University Press.

Collins, Wilkie. 1856. "To Think, or to be Thought for". Last modified September 2, 2012. http://www.web40571.clarahost.co.uk/wilkie/etext/sites.htm. Accessed June 14, 2013.

Collins, Wilkie. 1858a. "The Unknown Public". Last modified September 2, 2012. http://www.web40571.clarahost.co.uk/wilkie/etext/sites.htm. Accessed June 14, 2013.

Collins, Wilkie. 1858b. "Dramatic Grub Street". Last modified September 2, 2012. http://www.web40571.clarahost.co.uk/wilkie/etext/sites.htm. Accessed June 14, 2013.

Collins, Wilkie. 1999. *Hide and Seek*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Collins, Wilkie. 2008a. *Basil*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Collins, Wilkie. 2008b. *No Name*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Davis Jim and Victor Emeljanow. 2004. "Victorian and Edwardian Audiences". *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. Ed. Kerry Powell. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. 93-108.

Dickens, Charles. 1897. *Old Lamps for New Ones and Other Sketches and Essays*. New York: New Amsterdam Book Company.

Dickens, Charles. 1962. *Hard Times*. London: Dent.

Dolin, Tim. 2006. "Collin's Career and the Visual Arts". *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*. Ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. 7-22.

Easton, Susan, Alun Howkins, Stuart Laing, Lind Merricks and Helen Walker. 1988. *Disorder and Discipline. Popular Culture from 1550 to Present*. Aldershot: Temple Smith.

Flint, Kate. 2002. *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.

Flint, Kate. 2006. "Disability and Difference". *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins.* Ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. 153-167.

Garland Thomson, Rosemarie. 2000. "Staring Back: Self-Representations of Disabled Performance Artists". *American Quarterly* 52: 334-338.

Gitter, Elisabeth. 1992. "Deaf-Mutes and Heroines in the Victorian Era". *Victorian Literature and Culture* 20:179-196.

Griffin, Emma. 2002. "Popular Culture in Industrializing England". *The Historical Journal* 45: 619-635.

Huggins, Mike J. 2000. "More Sinful Pleasures? Leisure, Respectability and the Male Middle Classes In Victorian England". *Journal of Social History* 33: 585-600.

Law, Graham. 2006. "The Professional Writer and the Literary Marketplace". *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*. Ed. Jenny Bourne Taylor. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press. 97-111.

Peters, Catherine. 1999a. "Introduction". *Hide and Seek*, by Wilkie Collins. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. VII-XXIII.

Peters, Catherine. 1999b. "Explanatory Notes". *Hide and Seek*, by Wilkie Collins. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press. 432-440.

Pyckett, Lynn. 2005. *Wilkie Collins*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

Radford, Andrew. 2009. *Victorian Sensation Fiction*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Schlicke, Paul. 1988. *Dickens and Popular Entertainment*. London: Unwin Hyman.

Stoddard Holmes, Martha. 2009. *Fictions of Affliction. Physical Disability in Victorian Culture*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press.

Stoddart, Helen. 2000. *Rings of Desire. Circus History and Representation*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

Turner, Victor. 1982. *From Ritual to Theatre. The Human Seriousness of Play*. NewYork: Performing Arts Journal Publications.

Traveller or Tourist? The Sensible Observations of Roland Barthes and George Sandys[1]

Andrew Hadfield, University of Sussex

Abstract
Is it better to be a tourist or a traveller? Tourists are usually denigrated as vulgar and ignorant while travellers are thought to be more sensitive and observant and to be performing more useful cultural work. However, the iconoclastic writings of Roland Barthes might persuade readers to rethink these commonly-held assumptions. Barthes' insights into the nature of travel and tourism provide us with a way of exploring the history of travel writing and the relationship between ideas of travelling and tourism. George Sandys' *Relation of a Journey begun An; Dom: 1610* (1615) can be read as a work that thinks about and values tourism, setting its author apart from his contemporary travel writers Thomas Coryat, William Lithgow and Fynes Moryson. While they concentrate on their own ability to understand and appropriate the value of other cultures for their readers, Sandys writes for a reader who might wish to follow in his footsteps and enjoy the experience of encountering other places. A strong case can be made that Sandys' book is the ancestor of the late nineteenth-century guides that did so much to encourage European tourism, Baedeker and Cook.

Keywords: Travel; Tourism; George Sandys; Roland Barthes; China; The Orient; Jerusalem; religion; crocodiles

Is it better to be a traveller or a tourist? In a certain form of popular culture, there's a consensus that everyone who moves from one country to another for short periods of time wants to be a traveller not a tourist. Tourists are vulgar, interested only in their own pleasure, indifferent to the cultures of the countries they visit, and ignorant. Travellers are more savvy, staying long enough to learn something about the places they visit and the people they encounter, and able to articulate a clear sense of the identities of both in the works they subsequently publish (Francis n.p.).

But can we be so certain that this is a meaningful distinction? Mary Louise Pratt was not convinced that a meaningful distinction could be made between tourists and travellers. She had especially hard words for

---

[1] This is a revised version of a paper presented at the 12th Nordic Conference for English Studies (NAES), "Places and Non-Places of English," hosted by Prof Robert Applebaum, at Uppsala University, 10-13 October, 2013.

the 'fine writing' of Paul Theroux's account of his travels in Patagonia, its absence of interest for the jaded traveller eager to impose his Western values on the apparently empty landscape. For Pratt, Theroux is the modern equivalent of the imperial travellers to Africa in the nineteenth century, a man with his own implicit confidence in his ability to judge and, in doing so, to dehumanise:

> The white man's lament is also the lament of the Intellectual and the Writer. It may be thought of in part as an attempt to drown out the chatter of another monolithic voice emerging in the same decades: the voice of mass tourism. The depth-creating powers of the travel writer must compete with the ten-day nine-night air-hotel package, tips included, and the glossy, disembodied fantasies of tourist propaganda. In the 1960s and 1970s exoticist visions of plentitude and paradise were appropriated and commodified on an unprecedented scale by the tourist industry. 'Real' writers took up the task of providing 'realist' (degraded, counter-commodified) versions of postcolonial reality. (Pratt 1992: 221)[2]

For Pratt, travel and tourism are two sides of the same coin. If tourism has a problematic history, travelling is far, far worse and the desire to correct misapprehensions only succeeds in creating more. As another cliché has it, a little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

Even so, there is surely nothing necessarily wrong with wanting to go to other countries to experience new things, even if one does not have a committed interest to finding anything out really. Most medieval and early modern people did not travel a great deal: one needed to be rich enough to afford a horse or stay in an inn to travel more than about seven miles from one's house (McRae 2009). But they loved the numerous holidays that punctuated the routine of a hard working life, were curious about other cultures, and travelled whenever they could (Wilson, 2002). In the fourteenth century there were guidebooks available for those intrepid enough to set off on pilgrimages, works that were as much about where to stay and what to see they were about the holiness of religious experience (Ohler 1989: 184-9). People would have travelled further and more often had they had the leisure time to do so (Jusserand, 1888). Sometimes when we assume that the past was different we find that the people who inhabited it were more like us than we realise.

The intertwined issues of travelling, tourism, their relative ethical status, and what knowledge we can have of other cultures is dramatically

---

[2] Paul Theroux's book is *The Old Patagonian Express* (Theroux 1978).

demonstrated by the recent publication in French and English translation of a diary of a notorious visit to China in the mid-1970s. There have been few writers of distinction in the later twentieth century who have made more of a virtue of remaining within their own culture than Roland Barthes. Barthes' reflections on a wide variety of cultural forms are familiar to generations of readers in translation. It is important to recognise that Barthes deliberately restricts his focus to what he knows: French culture and French writing, a conscious and deliberate choice. All his literary references are French: Balzac, Mallarmé, Baudelaire, Proust, and Montesquieu, a roll call of Frenchness. His books are all about French writers and Frenchness: *Writing Degree Zero* is about French literary style; *S/Z* about Balzac's *Sarrazine*; *Sur Racine* speaks for itself. Even when he does turn to non-French writers, such as Edgar Alan Poe, these are Frenchified, part of French literary tradition through the translations of Baudelaire. It was *Mythologies*, which is very specifically French which taught generations of foreign readers that steak and chips was, in fact, a French dish (Barthes 1973: 62-4). There have surely been few writers who have provided more insight into the general understanding of culture through the exploration of their own, a lifelong enterprise that earned Barthes a global reputation as a writer, stylist and theorist of distinction. Even when Barthes talks about racism and national identity it is in terms of France and the colonial war in Algeria; most significantly in his famous discussion of the negro soldier saluting the French tricolour in *Paris Match* (Barthes 1972: 116-27).

However, in the last decade of his life Barthes did start to travel and reflect on other cultures in his own idiosyncratic manner. Barthes was characteristically perverse. Just as he deliberately reflected widely on all cultures by sticking resolutely to his own, so was he ingenious and nonconformist in choosing what he wanted to see and how he recorded his observations. *The Empire of Signs* (1972) records his impressions of Japan, a country that Barthes found fascinating at a time when it was seen as something of a curiosity by the West with its incomprehensible combination of tradition and modernity (1972 was the year of Yukio Mishima's bizarre failed coup d'état). At this time many left-wing writers, in particular the groups with whom Barthes was associated, were turning to emerging nations—Africa, and, in particular, China—more obviously appealing to their sympathies in (Wolin 2012). In contrast, Barthes makes a virtue of his pleasure in experiencing Japan. He admires

its semiotic possibilities and enjoys the fact that he knows that he does not understand its culture. As usual, he is provocative and writes in a manner that will horrify readers not willing to be challenged:

> Orient and Occident cannot be taken [. . .] as "realities" to be compared and contrasted historically, philosophically, culturally, politically. I am not lovingly gazing towards an Oriental essence—to me the Orient is a matter of indifference, merely providing a reserve of features whose manipulation—whose invented interplay—allows me to "entertain" the idea of an unheard-of symbolic system, one altogether detached from our own. What can be addressed, in the consideration of the Orient, are not symbols, another metaphysics, another wisdom (though the latter might appear thoroughly desirable); it is the possibility of a difference, of a mutation, of a revolution in the property of symbolic systems. Someday we must write the history of our own obscurity. (Barthes 1982: 3-4)

What Barthes admires about Japan is the riot of signification, the fact that its systems go beyond his capacity to understand and contain them: "the empire of signifiers is so immense, so in excess of speech, that the exchange of signs remains a fascinating richness, mobility, and subtlety" (Barthes 1982: 9). He confesses that this is exactly what he enjoys about being abroad:

> The murmuring mass of an unknown language constitutes a delicious protection, envelops the foreigner (provided the country is not hostile to him [sic]) in an auditory film which halts at his ears all the alienations of the mother tongue: the regional and social origins of whoever is speaking, his degree of culture, of intelligence, of taste, the image by which he constitutes himself as a person and which he asks you to recognize. Hence, in foreign countries, what a respite! Here I am protected against stupidity, vulgarity, vanity, worldliness, nationality, normality. (Barthes 1982: 9)

Barthes makes an explicit virtue of not understanding a culture, one reason why he likes Japan so much. He does not expect to understand Japanese life and culture and so enjoys himself more than he would in other countries where he is expected to be able to respond in an intelligent way. Losing his sense of identity is one of the pleasures of encountering somewhere new and unfamiliar. Put another way, he is a tourist not a traveller, foregrounding the virtue of ignorance.

We might contrast Barthes' joy at his Japanese encounter with his sardonic and much more negative encounter with China, his description of which has only just been published. Barthes visited China in 1974 as part of a delegation of *Tel Quel* figures, including Julia Kristeva and

Philippe Sollers. Many of the intellectuals associated with *Tel Quel* were enthusiastic Maoists keen to support the Cultural Revolution and to bring back its message of permanent revolution to the West. Barthes was not, and recounts how he had an awful time in China. He was bored by visits to factories and what he saw as endless proselytizing by both the Chinese and their French visitors. He particularly disliked the leading role that Sollers took in openly proclaiming the virtues of proletarian revolution to his hosts (Wood 2009).[3] Barthes' diary, *Travels in China*, deliberately repeats the solipsistic nature of his reflections of his experience of Japan. In China, however, he observes brutish buildings and eats unpleasant meals. He muses on attractive young Chinese men and his irritation with his compatriots, especially Sollers, for his simplistic analysis of China and belief that he has the ability to understand an alien culture without much effort: "Another discussion in which Philippe Sollers [. . .] absolutely has to renounce Buddhism as religion, idealism, political power, etc. Voltaireanism. But the problem, the only one, is Power" (Barthes 2009: 104). In contrast to his happy experiences in Japan, Barthes finds a lack of signification and complains often about the uniformity of Chinese culture: "It's only children who have individualised clothes, with anarchic colours" (Barthes 2009: 122). He hates the art they are taken to see: "A horrible painting, socialist realist: gathering of primitive folk round a fire, a woman with her finger raised, domineering, is speaking, we are told: 'discussion of problem by villagers!'" (Barthes 2009: 121). Barthes takes particular exception to being manipulated. He is especially irritated by the campaign then raging against Lin Biao, the former ally of Mao, who had turned against his leader and had subsequently died in a mysterious plane crash: "Ballet of girl militias: 'Aim at the object': caricature of Lin Biao on a placard (always depicted, alas, in the style of anti-Semitic caricatures)" (Barthes 2009: 83). He comments frequently on how it is forbidden to move freely in China: "Impossible to mingle. The organizers don't want us to. Hands off bodies. Exclusions" (Barthes 2009: 14).

Barthes' reaction to China is in stark contrast to the enthusiasm demonstrated by some of the other travellers. Julia Kristeva's *On Chinese Women* (1974) was a notably successful and widely-reprinted book that also resulted from the same visit. Kristeva is as enthusiastic

---

[3] I am grateful to Paul Davies for bringing this article to my attention.

about China as Barthes is disparaging. She sees it as the revolutionary way forward for other nations to copy. Kristeva is especially keen on China's attitude to women and the possibilities opened up for them in China, and frequently endorses Mao's pronouncements on women. She even attributes a female quality to Chinese writing alien to the West:

> Not only has Chinese writing maintained the memory of matrilinear pre-history (collective and individual) in its architectonic of image, gesture, and sound: it has been able as well to integrate it into a logico-symbolic code capable of ensuring the most direct 'reasonable' legislating—even the most bureaucratic—communication: all the qualities that the West believes itself unique in honouring, and that it attributes to the Father. (Kristeva 1986: 57)

Kristeva dismisses the achievements of Western linguistics and later makes the claim that Chinese eliminates Western notions of "objective truth," shifting "people to a symbolic situation in literature or in the past, selecting according to the influence it continues to exert in the present" (Kristeva 1986: 58). Kristeva concludes with a statement that might have been written in response to the impressions of Barthes. Addressing her reader directly she states: "For after all you know now about Chinese society, you will well understand that it's not worth the trouble to go to China if you're not interested in women, if you don't like them" (Kristeva 1986: 158). This statement, of course, makes it clear that only a misogynist could criticise China, or fail to be impressed by the actions carried out in the name of the Cultural Revolution.

The question is, who is being more ethnocentric, myopic and deluded here? The tourist Barthes, who clearly had some inkling that terrible events were taking place behind the scenes which the French visitors were not allowed to see? Or the traveller, Kristeva, who has done some homework on China, which she is eager to demonstrate to the reader? In acknowledging that he cannot understand a culture is Barthes not actually respecting cultural difference and establishing a dialogue? And in imagining that she can understand and appropriate another culture for her beliefs and causes is Kristeva not actually guilty of an ethnocentrism that imagines itself as anti-ethnocentric, as Derrida wrote about Levi-Strauss's enthusiasm for the cultural innocence of Brazil's interior? (Derrida 1974: 107-18).

The opposing assumptions and perceptions of Barthes and Kristeva provide a useful way of thinking about early modern English travel

writing. This was the first time when English writers who had travelled abroad were able to disseminate their works in printed form, and so set the terms for subsequent assumptions about the purpose and value of visiting foreign lands: in the early seventeenth century published travel writing as a literary genre was in its infancy as a genre (Hadfield, ed. 2001). Moreover, it was hard to travel in this period: a passport was needed and few were granted because there was an understandable fear that once abroad, many English travellers to Europe would turn Catholic and become traitors (Chaney and Wilks, 2014). Writers had to try and establish their own audience and market. They were acutely concerned with the central issues of travel writing just as Barthes and Kristeva were in the 1970s: whether travel writing's principal aim was to inform the reader or to give pleasure, and whether an understanding of foreign places demonstrated that other cultures were similar or different to one's own culture. In fact, relevant debates occur in Thomas Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594), before the actual rise of travel writing as a genre, written by someone whose furthers voyage was to The Isle of Wight (Hadfield 2009).

The form and shape of early travel writing demonstrates that this was a genre that generated anxiety about its purpose, authors attempting to establish the nature of their writing and engage with an audience. Few books could be more eccentric than Thomas Coryat's *Coryat's Crudities* (1611), which foregrounds the carefully fashioned identity of its author. Coryat exaggerates and draws attention to himself as a traveler and a writer, with a vast number of dedicatory poems praising the author (the longest in relation to any book yet published), a strange picture of Coryat enthusiastically greeting a Venetian courtesan), and other eccentric features (Coryat 1905; Hadfield, ed. 2001: 52-63). Few could be more obviously bigoted than Fynes Moryson's massive *Itinerary of his Travels* (1617), which established him as the first properly professional travel writer but which he had to struggle so hard to get published (Moryson 1907; Moryson 1903; Hadfield 2003). It might seem strange that someone with Moryson's views about the duplicity and savagery of foreigners bothered to travel at all, but Moryson was covering his back, making sure that his Protestant loyalty could never be in doubt, as well as expressing his prejudices. There was also a bitterness about the hard road he had to follow to see his work into the public domain. Even so, Moryson's travails are easy to understand given the inordinate length of

the *Itinerary* and the often repetitive nature of the narrative which is often little more than a series of lengthy ranting observations about the inferior foreigners one finds throughout Europe, the Levant and North Africa. Moryson was not alone in his forceful opinions. William Lithgow in his *Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures and Painefull Perigrinations* (1632) is, if anything, even more blinkered than Moryson and wears his prejudices more lightly (Lithgow 1906). Like Moryson, Lithgow establishes himself as the authentic Protestant voice of reason as he bulldozes his way from Lanark to Jerusalem, following a similar route through France, Germany, Italy, North Africa and Turkey, albeit with an ill-advised return through Catholic Spain (Bosworth 2006).

There is one exception to these models: in many ways the writer who has been least celebrated but who probably had the most lasting influence on the development of English travel writing: George Sandys (1578-1644), humanist, traveller and later, North American colonist.[4] Sandys, son of the Archbishop of York, Edwin Sandys (1519?-88)—and brother of Sir Edwin Sandys who wrote the influential treatise on toleration, *A Relation of the State of Religion* (1599)—was a scholar whose humanist and ecumenical principles led him to take a serious interest in other cultures so that he could represent them fairly and dispassionately for his English audience (Collinson 2014; Rabb 2014; Dickens 1986: 441). As his contemporaries did, Sandys headed south through Europe to the Levant, the Ottoman Empire and the Holy Lands, his *Relation of a Journey begun An; Dom: 1610* (1615) advertising this route in a prefatory map.

Sandys' book was clearly a success—certainly in comparison to Moryson's *Itinerary*. It sold well throughout the seventeenth century, with four editions appearing in just over twenty years, which is why it has a strong claim to be the work that establishes the dominant mode of later English travel writing. Sandys was a significantly less flamboyant and far more reclusive character than Coryat, Moryson, and Lithgow, and spent most of his last twenty years in obscurity after he had returned from the Virginia Colony, working among his books (Davis 1955: chs. 5-10). He was a thoughtful writer who worked hard at the genres he chose to adopt and adapt, most notably his influential translation of the *Metamorphoses*, as befits a man who took his intellectual lead from

---

[4] On Sandys' life, see Davis 1955.

Hugo Grotius (Ellison 2002: 234-46). Like his intellectual inspiration, Sandys was nothing if not a proponent for toleration, and he was dismayed when the king, under the influence of Archbishop Laud, started to persecute religious dissent (Ellison 2002: 242-3).

Sandys clearly tried to understand how other religions made sense of the world, even though he had to regard them as inferior to Christianity. Analysing the significance of the pyramids, which are represented in a striking illustration embedded in the text, Sandys comments that the Egyptians "erecting such costly monuments, not onely out of a vaine ostentation, but being of opinion, that after the dissolution of the flesh the soule should survive; and when thirty sixe thousand yeares were expired, againe be ioyed vnto the selfsame body, restored vnto his former conditions gathered in their conceipts from Astrnomicall demonstrations" (Sandys 1615: 130-1). Contemporary readers would surely have noted that this belief sounds exactly like the mortalist heresy, that the soul died and was then reunited with the body to live again on the Day of Judgement, a belief that may have attracted John Milton, a writer who certainly knew Sandys' writing (McDowell 2010). Sandys also provides a principled defence of the Jews against Christian persecution:

> A people scattered throughout the whole world, subject to all wrongs and contumelies, which they support with an inuincible patience. Many often times haue I seene abused; some of them beaten; yet neuer saw I Jew with an angry countenance. They can subiect themselves vnto times, and to whatsoeuer may advance their profit. In general they are worldly wise, and thriue wheresoever they set footing. The Turke imployes them in receipt of customes, which they by their pollicies haue inhanced; and in buying and selling with the Christian: being himselfe in that kind a foole and easily cousened. They are men of indifferent statures, and the best complexions. (Sandys 1615: 146)

Sandys is clearly eager to counter-act prejudice against the Jews and to remind his readers of their duties to allow other faiths and versions of faith to exist, especially as he was well aware that Islam was invariably a far more tolerant religion than Christianity. There follows a learned account of Jewish religious practices and beliefs, one that is indebted to Sandys' wide reading and interest in religions and cultures (Ellison 2002: 76-80).

Sandys is critical of the Ottoman Empire and its religious practices, although he is not writing from a position of ignorance and has read

widely about them both. In the frontispiece, as Nebehat Avcioglu has pointed out, the Ottoman Emperor, Ahmed I, is represented as a tyrant and a usurper, leading an empire whose goal is the self-perpetuation of the ruling class at the expense of its own citizens and those they conquer and enslave (Avcioglu 2001). Sandys is waiting for the empire to start its decline, as much a wish fulfilment as a political observation:

> And surely it is to be hoped that their greatnesse is not onely at the height, but neare an extreme precipitation: the body being growne too monstrous for the head; the Sultans vnwarlike, and neuer accompanying their armies in person; the Souldier corrupted with ease and liberty; drowned in prohibited wine, enfeebled with the continuall converse of women; and generally lapsed from their former austeritie of life, and simplicity of manners [. . .] it hath exceeded the obserued period of a Tyrannie, for such is their Empire. (Sandys 1615: 50)

His substantial analysis of Islam, respectful enough in terms of the standards of the day, is based on the assumption that such religious belief is an inauthentic and deluded offshoot of Christianity. Writing of the Arabs in North Africa, Sandys concludes: "Their religion is Mahometanisme; glorying in that the Imposter was their countryman" (Sandys 1615: 139).

Elsewhere *A Journey* provides extensive information on a number of sects relatively unknown to an English audience, including the Coptic Christians in Egypt, who, he affirms, are "true Aegyptians" as well as authentic Christians "notwithstanding they are circumcised" (Sandys 1615: 110). Sandys supplies his readers with a series of Classical literary references, charting the main episodes in the Odyssey as he travels around the Mediterranean. He confirms that the Cyclops was a native of Sicily using the familiar trope of the eye-witness: "Their bones in sundry places digged vp, and at this day to be seene, do giue a sufficient testimony of their Gyant-like proportions" (Sandys 1615: 236; Ho 1991). Sandys also includes helpful commentary on subjects that his readers might find intriguing, such as the preservation techniques of Egyptian mummies, and the nature and significance of the crocodile, a beast they were unlikely to have encountered. The crocodile is described as a strange exotic creature, very like those recently discovered in the New World:

> In shape not vnlike a Lizard, and some of them of an vncredible greatnesse. So great from so small a beginning is more then wonderfull, some of them being aboue thirtie

foot long; hatched of eggs no bigger then those that are layd by a Turkie. His taile is equall to his body in length; wherewith he infoldeth his prey, and draws it into the river. His feete are armed with claws, and his back and sides with scales scarce impenetrable; his bellie tender, soft and is easuily pierced his teeth indented within one another; hauing no tongue, and mouing of his vpper jaw oneley; his mouth so wide when extended, as some of them are able to swallow, an entire heifer. (Sandys 1615: 100)[5]

This is an accurate description—crocodiles do have tongues, but they cannot poke them out of their mouths—one that will excite the imagination of the reader to think about the wonders of the Old World.[6]

Sandys' writing is miscellaneous and hybrid, exactly what one might expect in an early piece of travel writing. Therefore, it should not surprise us that he has been thought of in very different ways by different critics. For James Ellison Sandys was, like his brother, a tolerant liberal, a bookish humanist, each demonstrating an "open-mindedness and willingness to learn from their experiences abroad that was not the norm [. . .] their attitudes were quite remarkable for the time" (Ellison 2002: 52). For Jonathan Haynes, Sandys was less an observer than an intellectual and he argues that "A great deal of the Relation could have been written without leaving England" (Haynes 1986: 47). Indeed, the book bears no resemblance to a journal—although Sandys would undoubtedly have kept one on his travels—and many passages "could only have been written in a library" (Haynes 1986: 46). In this reading Sandys resembles the exiled English lord in *The Unfortunate Traveller* who advises Jack Wilton that he will learn more in his warm study than through travel itself, a lesson that Richard Hakluyt and Samuel Purchas certainly understood (Hadfield 2009). Haynes further points out that Sandys' personal opinions are deliberately suppressed in his account of his travels because his book is intended to serve as a guide, primarily for readers eager to learn about the Levant, the Ottoman Empire and southern Europe, but also, to a lesser extent, travellers. For Julia Schleck, Sandys is a "traveller witness" and his reflections on the countries he visits are determined by his understanding of social economics, in particular the ways in which land is used by those who inhabit it. According to Schleck, Sandys is particularly concerned with the category

---

[5] On the animals of the New World, see Sloan (2007: 182-223, 232-3).

[6] See "AnimalQuestions.org" (http://animalquestions.org/reptiles/crocodiles/do-crocodiles-have-tongues/) (accessed 24.2.14).

of "waste," the fear that land was not being used in a properly productive manner which meant that the natives had sacrificed all moral right to ownership and should cede their possession to people who were able to make better use of what was there (Schleck 2011: ch. 1). It was one of the cornerstones of early colonial discourse—and, perhaps, one can find echoes in Paul Theroux's comments on the barren and dull landscape of Patagonia, a landscape that fails to excite the Western travel writer. "Waste" was a category that was extensively applied by the English in Ireland. To describe land as "waste" meant that it was not being used productively and so could be appropriated by colonisers. The concept would have had a further significance for Sandys, given the leading role he played in the Virginia colony in the 1620s (Hadfield 2001 ed: 262-5). Sandys contrasts the abundance of Greece to the "waste" of the Ottoman Empire. In making his observations he has no interaction with the peoples who inhabit the lands—certainly none are mentioned in Sandys' account of his travels—surveying the territories rather like a landowner charting his estates, a mode of representation that was becoming vital to Europeans as mapping and printing techniques became ever more sophisticated.

Sandys is certainly not a traveller who places any store by his own personal experiences or makes his reactions key points in the narrative. It is worth comparing his account of his pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the most sacred Christian place, to William Lithgow's description of his approach to the city:

> At last wee beheld the prospect of Jerusalem, which was not onely a contentment to my weary body, but also being ravished with a kinde of unwonted rejoicing, the teares gushed from my eyes for too much joy. In this time the Armenians began to sing in their owne fashion, Psalmes to praise the Lord: and I also sung the 103 Psalme all the way, till we arrived neere the wals of the Citty, where we ceased from our singing, for feare of the Turkes. (Lithgow 1906: 179)

Lithgow tries to give his readers an accurate sense of how he felt as he approached the Holy City so that they can share this vital experience with him without actually being there (although, of course, reading his account might make them want to make the journey themselves). He describes his own involuntary emotional response to reaching his destination; the reactions of other pilgrims, the dangers they faced in a

hostile land and the precautions they were forced to take. Lithgow's sense of himself as witness is key to our understanding of the event.

Sandys also feels obliged to record some sort of personal response but he suppresses the nature of his feelings—perhaps they were not especially vital—and uses the opportunity to write about the need for not drawing attention to the experience of the individual traveller:

> From hence [a small village outside Jerusalem] to *Ierusalem* the way is indifferent euen. On each side are round hils, with ruines on their tops; and vallies such as are figured in the most beautifull land-skips. The soile though stony, not altogether barren, producing both corne and oliues about inhabited places. Approaching the North gate of the Cittie, called in times past the gate of *Ephram*, and now of *Damascus*, we onely of all the rest were not permitted to enter. When compassing the wall vnto that of the West, commanded by the Castle, we were met by two *Francsicean* Friars: who saluted and conueyed vs to their Conuent.

> Although diuers both vpon inquisition and view, haue with much labour related the site and state of this Cittie, with the places adioyning; (though not to my knowledge in our language) insomuch as I may seme vnto some, but to write what hath bene written already: yet notwithstanding, as well to continue the course of this discourse, as to deliuer the Reader from many erring reports of the too credulous deuote, and too too vain glorious one

> Do toyes diuulge –

> The other characterised in the remainder carried in that Disticke:

> Still adde to what they heare,
> And of a mole-hill do a mountaine reaere.

> I will declare what I haue obserued, vnswayed with either of their vices. (Sandys 1615: 154)

Sandys is not an excitable tourist. While Lithgow records his tears and need to burst into song, Sandys tells his readers that one needs to be careful on the path leading into the city and then warns readers of the vices of inaccurate description before launching into a substantial historical and topographical account of the city. The significance of the moment is acknowledged but deliberately played down. Sandys seems almost embarrassed that this is the first published account of a visit to the Holy City in English, a modest acknowledgement that he is not worthy to have produced such writing. Sandys makes clear to his readers that he is

not providing anything like the last word on the subject but a guide for them to follow.

The ways in which Sandys narrates his journey are as important as what he actually shows and tells. In fact, there is little real difference between Sandys' guide to the chief monuments and sites of the city and that of Lithgow, who is rather good at linking descriptions of sacred places to the Biblical history they contain. But in marked contrast, Sandys has effaced his identity and all-but disappeared from the text, surveying all that he can encompass without revealing himself. Instead, Sandys concentrates on the literary associations and connections of the places he visits, and an array of Latin quotations enables the reader to imagine Sandy's journey around the Mediterranean in terms of a shared cultural history. A case in point is the description of the approach to Naples:

> That night we arriued at a little village some twelue miles beyond: where we lodged, as the night before, in a little Chapell. The next morning betimes we reached the Cape: from,
>
> Whose stormie crowne farre off high Pallas sees (Seneca)
>
> Her Temple there being said to haue bene erected by *Vlysses*; and formerly called the Promontory of *Minerva*. Here also stood a renowned *Atheneum*, flourishing in the seuerall excellencies of learning and eloquence. In so much as from hence grew the fable of the *Sirens* (famed to haue inhabited hereabout) who so inchanted with the sweetnesse of their songs, and deepnesse of their science: of both, thus boasting *Ulysses*
>
> Hither thy ship (of Greekes thou glorie) store:
> That our songs may delight thee, anker here.
> Neuer was man yet in sable barke sail'd by,
> That gaue not eare to our sweete melodie.
> And parted pleasd, his knowledge bettred farre.
> We know what Greeks and Troians in Troys warre
> Sustained by the doome of Gods: and all
> That doth upon the food-full Earth befall [Homer, *Odyssey*]
>
> the same attributes being giuen vnto them which were giuen to the Muses. But after that these students had abused their gifts to the colouring of wrongs, the corruption of manners, and subuersion of good gouernment; the *Sirens* were famed to haue bene transformed into monsters, and with their melody and blandishments, to haue inticed the passenger to his ruine: such as came hither, consuming their patrimonies, and poisoning their vertues with riot and effeminacy. (Sandys 1615: 251)

This is clearly a description from a tourist guide holding out the promise for the reader that they too can follow in the footsteps of Ulysses and see where the sirens lured sailors to their doom, with the frisson of recollected danger rather than the real thing. And is this not just like what we do on holiday today: stand where the ancient Cretans built their palaces, see where Ruskin looked out over Lake Coniston, where Galileo discovered that feathers and lead descended to earth at the same rate, or where Shakespeare's feet might have trodden? In many obvious ways *A Relation of a Journey* is the ancestor of Baedeker and Thomas Cook's guides.

Travel writing will always be a hybrid genre: what the literate and sophisticated George Sandys understood, an insight closely linked to his belief in the need for tolerance, is that what readers would value in his work is a knowledge they could share. *A Relation of a Journey* enables readers to enjoy a benign feeling of cultural superiority, coupled with a curiosity about the world around them and a desire to enjoy new experiences. Sandys gives his readers history and literature lessons: one can find the lives of Christ and Mohamed in *Relation of a Journey*, as well as the course that Ulysses followed home from Troy; information about what to see; and when his personality does intrude, it is so that the reader can share his understanding of what it is like to experience a particular place. Sandys is not always an exciting, or even an engaging, writer and he can be rather dull at times, but he is never obnoxious—unlike Lithgow and Moryson—or eccentric in the studied and mannered style of Coryat. They are travel writers, the ancestors of Paul Theroux, Bruce Chatwin, Michael Palin, and, arguably, Julia Kristeva. Sandys is a tourist, a scholar and a thinker, whose goal is to share his experiences with his readers, suggesting that he was a writer much more like Roland Barthes. Sandys and Barthes acknowledge that their actual encounters with other lands probably tell them much less about the difference of other cultures and other peoples than extensive reading could have done. Accepting one's level of ignorance is a vital starting point if one is to respect the difference of others and to inform one's readers properly. That is why it is almost always better to be a tourist, open to the enjoyment of new experiences, than a traveler. Tourists like Sandys and Barthes realise that they can know so much more than they do.

References

Avcioglu, Nebehat. 2001. "Ahmed I and the Allegories of Tyranny in the Frontispiece to George Sandys's *Relation of a Journey Anno. Dom.1610*." *Muqarnas: An Annual on the Visual Culture of the Islamic World*. 18. 203-26.

Barthes, Roland. 1973. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. London: Paladin.

Barthes, Roland. 1982. *Empire of Signs*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang.

Barthes, Roland. 2009. *Travels in China*. Trans. Andrew Brown. Cambridge: Polity.

Bosworth, Clifford. 2006. *An Intrepid Scot: William Lithgow of Lanark's Travels in the Ottoman Lands, North Africa and Central Europe, 1609-21*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Chaney, Edward and Timothy Wilks. 2014. *The Jacobean Grand Tour: Early Stuart Travellers in Europe*. London: I. B. Tauris.

Collinson, Patrick. accessed 24.2.14. "Sandys, Edwin," *ODNB*.

Coryat, Thomas. 1905. *Coryat's Crudities*, 2 vols. Glasgow: MacLehose.

Davis, Richard Beale. 1955. *George Sandys, Poet-Adventurer: A Study in Anglo-American Culture in the Seventeenth Century*. London: Bodley Head.

Derrida, Jacques. 1974. *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Dickens, A. G. 1986, rpt. of 1967. *The English Reformation*. London: Fontana.

"Do Crocodiles Have Tongues?". N.p. Animalquestions.org. http://animalquestions.org/reptiles/crocodiles/do-crocodiles-have-tongues/. Accessed 24.2.14

Ellison, James. 2002. *George Sandys: Travel, Colonialism and Tolerance in the Seventeenth Century*. Woodbridge: Brewer.

Francis, Justin. N.p. "Tourist vs. Traveler". Weather.com The Weather Channel. http://www.weather.com/outlook/travel/vacationplanner/greentravel/articles/rt-4. accessed 10.11.14

Hadfield, Andrew, ed. 2001. *Amazons, Savages and Machiavels: An Anthology of Travel and Colonial Writing, 1550-1650*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hadfield, Andrew. 2003. "Moryson, Fynes." *Literature of Travel and Exploration: An Encyclopaedia*. Ed. Jennifer Speake. 3 Vols. New York: Fitzroy Dearborn. II, 817-9.

Hadfield, Andrew. 2009. "The Benefits of a Warm Study." *The Global Renaissance*. Ed. Jyotsna Singh. Oxford: Blackwell. 101-13.

Haynes, Jonathan. 1986. *The Humanist as Traveller: George Sandy's Relation of a Journey Begun An. Dom. 1610*. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson Press.

Ho, Elaine Y. L. 1991. "The rhetoric of the 'I'−witness in Fulke Greville's The Life of Sir Philip Sidney." *Literature and History*. 2nd series, 2.1 (Spring): 17−26.

Jusserand, J. J. 1888. *English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages (XIVth Century)*. Trans. Lucy Toumlin Smith. London: Unwin.

Kristeva, Julia. 1986. *About Chinese Women*. Trans. Anita Barrows. New York: Marion Boyars.

Lithgow, William. 1906. *The Totall Discourse of the Rare Adventures and Painefull Perigrinations (1632)*. Glasgow: MacLehose.

McDowell, Nicholas. 2010. "Dead Souls and Modern Minds? Mortalism and the Early Modern Imagination, from Marlowe to Milton." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 40: 559-92.

McRae, Andrew. 2009. *Literature and Domestic Travel in Early Modern England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Moryson, Fynes. 1903. *Shakespeare's Europe: Unpublished Chapter of Fynes Moryson's Itinerary*. Ed. Charles Hughes. London: Sherratt and Hughes.

Moryson, Fynes. 1907. *An Itinerary Containing His Ten Yeeres Travell*, 4 Vols. Glasgow: MacLehose.

Ohler, Norbert. 1989. *The Medieval Traveller*. Trans. Caroline Hillier. Woodbridge: Boydell Press.

Pollard, A. W., G. R. Redgrave, W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson and Katharine F. Pantzer. 1976-91. *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640*. 3 Vols. London: The Bibliographical Society, 1976-91.

Pratt, Mary Louise. 1992. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge.

Rabb, Theodore K. accessed 24.2.14. "Sandys, Sir Edwin." *ODNB*.

Sandys, George. 1615. *A Relation of a Journey Begun An: Dom: 1610. Fouvre Bookes. Containing A Description Of The Turkish Empire, Of Aegypt, Of the Holy Land, Of The Remote Parts of Italy, and Ilands Adioyning*. London: Barren.

Schleck, Julia. 2011. *Telling True Tales of Islamic Lands: Forms of Mediation in Early English Travel Writing, 1575-1630*. Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna University Press.

Sloan, Kim. 2007. *A New World: England's First View of America*. London: British Museum.

"The Difference Between Tourists and Travellers". 2009. TravelBlogs.com. http://www.travelblogs.com/articles/the-difference-between-tourists-and-travellers. Travellerspoint Travel Community. accessed 10.11.14

Theroux, Paul, 1978. *The Old Patagonian Express*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

Wilson, Richard. 2002. '"Is this a holiday?": Shakespeare's Roman Carnival', in Richard Wilson. Ed., *Julius Caesar: Contemporary Critical Essays*. Basingstoke: Palgrave. pp.55-76

Wolin, Richard. 2012. *The Wind from the East: French Intellectuals, the Cultural Revolution, and the Legacy of the 1960s*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Wood, Michael. 2009. "Presence of Mind." *London Review of Books*. 19 Nov. 11-12.

Dante's Dream: Rossetti's Reading of the *Vita Nuova* Through the Lens of a Double Translation

Chiara Moriconi, La Sapienza Università di Roma

Abstract

Dante Gabriel Rossetti's work as an interlinguistic and intersemiotic translator of the *Vita Nuova* reveals much about his characteristic adaptation of Dante to the new sensibility of Victorian poetry and art. After translating the episode of the dream of Beatrice's death into English, Rossetti goes on to illustrate it in an early watercolor version (1865), and then in a final monumental oil (1871) which will be closely examined in this article. By focusing on both phases of Rossettian translation this article means to show how Rossetti derives from the Florentine a distinctively Dantesque iconographic repertoire which he then develops into a post-Romantic set of poetics. It is precisely in the distance between Dante's poetry and Rossetti's double works of art that the latter's understanding of and autonomy from Dante has to be traced.

Keywords: Dante Gabriel Rossetti; Dante Alighieri; Vita Nuova; intersemiotic translation; interlinguistic translation; Victorian literature and art; Pathetic Fallacy

One of the most crucial episodes of the *Vita Nuova* is Beatrice's death as dreamt by Dante. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's deep love of Dante Alighieri, inherited from his father Gabriele,[1] led him to an early reading and translation into English of this chapter of the Florentine's 'rubrica'. He set to illustrate the passage in 1848. The project, however, was soon laid aside and resumed between 1855 and 1857, when the artist made a watercolor of the same episode, *Dante's Dream at the Time of the Death of Beatrice*. Rossetti started to work on the last version of the painting in 1871. His interlinguistic translation of the episode, including the Dantesque prose passage and the 'canzone' "Donna pietosa e di novella

---

[1] An exiled patriot from Naples and supporter of the liberal constitution, Gabriele Rossetti (1783-1854) lived in England from 1824, where he spent his life teaching Italian Literature at London's King's College. His works on Dante Alighieri centre on an esoteric reading of the Florentine, with undertones ranging from the markedly political to the overtly mystical. At the core of Dante's works Rossetti envisioned an initiatory mind's religion which worked for a radical regeneration of spirituality away from the temporal power of the Church.

etade", together with the two versions of the painting, delineate the course of Rossetti's artistic development, with their visual and verbal elements combined in an ever enriching process. This essay will first examine Rossetti's work as an interlinguistic translator and then relate his translating strategies to the process of intersemiotic transfer. It will be clear, then, how Rossetti's own poetics come to actively interact with Dante himself, insomuch as to achieve a definite autonomy with respect to its source text.

A close look at the original text by Dante is essential. In the prose passage (chapter XXIII according to Fraticelli's edition, 1906), the young Dante has an awesome vision, a dream in which Love leads him to Beatrice's deathbed. His last farewell to her is preceded by an apocalyptic scene, in which the sun is obscured, the earth quakes, birds fall from the sky and angels fly on high singing to the Almighty. Differently from what happens elsewhere in the *Vita Nuova*, the work being marked by a typical vagueness of description, this passage abounds in iconographic details, accurately drawn by the Florentine Poet to make its own imagery more vibrant. The dream seems even more real than reality itself. Dante goes on to describe the central part of the dream, in which he sees a group of weeping women around Beatrice's deathbed, covering her lifeless body with a white shroud. Next, the youth finds himself in his own room and he proceeds to beseech Death to carry him away into the afterworld. The passage is dear to Rossetti first of all because of the richness of its imagery, to whose density the details of the following song "Donna pietosa e di novella etade" ("A very pitiful lady, very young") definitely contribute. Every iconographic detail featured by the Dantesque narrative represents in fact the literal pre-text for an addition and multiplication of sense through Rossetti's most typical strategies of translation, which we will now consider in more detail.

Being himself a poet, Rossetti's most challenging instance of interlinguistic translation is that of the Florentine's song, rather than the latter's prose passage. It will therefore be most illuminating to start by examining how the poet-painter proceeded in his English version of the Italian 'canzone'. The peculiarities of Rossetti's style as translator of Dante are in fact more easily traceable in the verse translation, where, in order to shape a metrical and rhyme scheme close enough to the original, he avoids a word-for-word rendering, thus complying with two of the most renowned among his tenets on translation.

In the preface to his volume of translations from the Italian Primitives, *The Early Italian Poets* (1861), Rossetti describes his translating strategy as aiming at fidelity rather than precise interlinguistic literality. Rossetti believed in fact that a faithful (and therefore, not strictly literal) translation is always to be preferred to a literal one, for poetry ultimately resists scientific exactness (Rossetti 1861: viii)[2]:

> Poetry not being an exact science, literality of rendering is altogether secondary to this chief aim. I say literality, —not fidelity, which is by no means the same thing. When literality can be combined with what is thus the primary condition of success, the translator is fortunate, and must strive his utmost to unite them; when such object can only be attained by paraphrase, that is his only path. (*Ibid.*)

Though originally referred to his activity as an iterlinguistic translator, Rossetti's concern for fidelity of rendering can be broadly related to his work as illustrator too. The commitment to a faithful interlinguistic rendering of his Italian originals acquires in fact a far wider resonance when referred back to the next tenet on translation Rossetti devised for his activity as a poet-painter. The following distinctive trait of Rossetti's work regards in particular his intersemiotic transmutations, and consists of the technique he himself defines as "Allegorizing on one's hook". With this expression Rossetti refers to a precise strategy through which the illustrator enriches with new information, according to his own initiative, the semiotic material given to him by the source text: writing about his illustrations for the Moxon Edition of Tennyson prepared during the late Fifties, Rossetti argues that "one can allegorize on one's own hook on the subject of the poem, without killing, for oneself and everyone, a distinct idea of the poet's" (Rossetti 1967, I: 239). Though respectively referred to his typical approach to interlinguistic translation, in the first case, and to intersemiotic translation, in the second one, these two principles end up being fused by Rossetti and indifferently applied to both translating processes. Far from indicating a lack of systematic application of rules, Rossetti's free resorting to both of these tenets regardless of the translating field for which they first seem to be created sheds light on the importance he placed on the overall process of translation, a practice that transcends for him a single media or artistic

---

[2] "Rossetti seems, understandably, to have settled for preserving the appearances of the poems he translated" (Gitter 1974: 353).

expression. This must not appear surprising, since Rossetti's aim in weaving his double works of art is anything but a harmonic accretion of meaning through the interaction of different media. On the contrary, and as Lawrence Starzyk underlines, for Rossetti the "verbal … is rarely a simple analogue of the visual … the image in the process, in other words, becomes recalcitrant or antagonistic" (Starzyk 2009: 29). Through the Rossettian double-work of art, the process of communication and representation is thus indefinitely expanded in what eerily foreshadows the dynamics of Perice's "flight of interpretants" (Silverman 1998: 50-52). Such characteristic raises to a more explicit level Rossetti's own alertness to the chief crisis his culture was facing throughout the mid and late Victorian age: a crisis in epistemology, and more particularly, a crisis in language, deriving from the Romantics' failed attempt at a reconciliation between man and the outer world. For Rossetti is first of all a post-Romantic artist, and his poetics are fundamentally informed by the experience of poets like Wordsworth, Shelley and Keats (Cimini 2010: 249). In the backwash of a secularization of culture which had been brought about by the philosophers of German Idealism at the end of the 18th century (Abrams 1973: 91-95), the first and second generations of Romantic poets had set out on their quest for a recovery of what was left to human apprehension and understanding, namely nature. In the aftermath of such secularization, the pre-Romantic and typically Augustinian vision of the world, featuring a tripartition of God, man and Nature, had in fact been reduced to a dualism of man and universe:

> The tendency in innovative Romantic thought […] is greatly to diminish, and at the extreme to eliminate, the role of God, leaving as the prime agencies man and the world, mind and nature, the ego and the non-ego, the self and the non-self, spirit and the other, or (in the favorite antithesis of post-Kantian philosophers) subject and object. (*Ivi*: 91)

Most importantly, though, the Romantic experience had been characterized by the poet's failure in his attempted re-appropriation of nature: the more nature is sought for, the more it reveals itself as an impossible goal. Hopelessly severed from both God and Nature, the Romantic poet first, and the Victorian then, are unavoidably trapped within the prison of their own solipsism. Such Romantic legacy informs the aesthetics of natural representation of many Victorian artists, and of Rossetti in particular. If the poets' self-conscious remove from nature

was made palpable in the characteristically anti-natural imagery of Romanticism (Bloom 1970: 9), then the Victorians were faced with the threat of exasperating that anti-naturalness into a distortion of truth. Most significantly, the chief of Victorian tenets on artistic representation is the principle of the pathetic fallacy, the artist's typical

> informing of objects other than the self with the self's tendencies. This poetic tendency results from romanticism's need to find companionable forms as local habitations for the artist's diverse and multitudinous tendencies or selves. (Starzyk 2009: 30)

We must settle for a partial, limited projection of our own moods and feelings onto the outer world: a compromise between self-expression and one's emotional control is not only desirable but the only decent choice for the artist (Breton 2013: 21): this is what Ruskin defines as the proper use of the pathetic fallacy. John Ruskin sensed in fact the danger awaiting a projection of man's mood onto nature that is too far indulged. Man and nature, the self and its object, sign and referent never actually meet, and exasperating such severance in any excited state of the feelings can only result in an irrational distortion of truth. In a typical gesture that sets him apart from the majority of his contemporaries, most notably his Pre-Raphaelite Brethren, Rossetti soon came to sense such limitation as an impossible restraint upon the faculties of the belated and post-Romantic artist. It is most significant to consider how such breach of the bonds Ruskin recognized as proper to the pathetic fallacy is to be observed in Rossetti even by an early stage of his career: a similar tendency to exasperate and anthropomorphize the forms of nature into a an utterly unnatural imagery would soon result in his estrangement from Ruskin himself. The exquisitely anti-natural extremes of artistic representation are those Rossetti most relishes in, his depiction of "common things" being always and unreservedly "full of human or personal expression, full of sentiment", in the words of Walter Pater (Pater 1889: 234). His art is increasingly bent towards an exasperation of the impossible escape from the prison of the self. Any knowledge of the reality which lies outside the self is thoroughly denied to man, whose only access to nature is granted by the distorting mirror of art. Again, in the revealing words of Pater

with Rossetti this sense of lifeless nature, after all, is translated to a higher service, in which it does but incorporate itself with some phase of strong emotion. Every one understands how this may happen at critical moments of life…To Rossetti it is so always, because to him life is a crisis at every moment. (*Ivi*: 235)

The crisis Pater refers to is of course nothing but the crisis in representation we are here discussing. It consists, in other words, of man's inability to represent the immediacy of a moment of experience with the external world. Since such attempt at a representation of the world can do no more than record the world's very remove from man (Wagner 1996: 19), art is accordingly reduced to a ritual re-enactment of such abortive act of appropriation: the performative stance of the representational procedure remains the only viable aesthetics that is left to the modern artist. In light of such an impossible communion of subject and object, sign and referent, image and word, the only chance to define a meaning of sorts through art lies in performance and repetition, particularly through the recovery of old and traditional narratives: the elaboration of forms and materials issuing from older times of un-self-conscious art is the only pale guarantee of a new meaning in poetry. The recovery of Dante's narrative perfectly fits into such Rossettian, post-Romantic aesthetics of representation. The Victorian poet-painter, as Warwick Slinn underlines, misreads Dante so that the latter's conventional lyricism becomes gradually absorbed by the "abstractions of its own method, the language of Dantesque idealism and symbol" (Slinn 2003: 65): it is therefore the strangeness of the allegorical machinery underlying Dante's *rubrica* that is most prized by Rossetti himself. His misreadings of Dante are meant to tackle the reader with the sophistication of an unfamiliar set of conventions; the only accretion of knowledge that is to be derived from art according to Rossetti lies in fact in the expanded receptivity which Dante's medieval conventions forces upon a modern and self-conscious readership (Helsinger 2008: 3). A number of "unexpected or novel connections" (*Ibid.*) are disclosed by the intensified concentration implied in the cultural swerve separating Dante's *Vita Nuova* from its Victorian afterlife. The post-Romantic, epistemological crisis suffered by a culture of "material and temporal repleteness" (*Ivi*: 10) is therefore fought against through the very material loveliness of Dante's art. Most importantly, it is the recovery of Dante through the double lens of an interlinguistic and intersemiotic translation which engages the reader-spectator into a difficult and self-

conscious act of attention, the only possible moments of cognition art can still lead the reader-spectator to (*Ivi*: 3). Clearly, indeed, the episode of Dante's dream acquires a new resonance if re-considered in the light of my discussion up to this point: the mirror structure of the Dantesque episode, whose narrative is articulated both as prose and as verse, is appealing enough for an artist like Rossetti, who lived to explore the articulated nooks and passages lying between different cultures, arts, media and literary genres. Even before being actually engaged in his own translation of the passage, Rossetti sees in the double-representation of Dante's experience a first instance of that chase game in which sign and referent are forever engaged: by interlinguistically and intersemiotically transmutating Dante, Rossetti aims at exasperating the patterns of variation which the Dantesque episode already featured in its original form. My purpose here is to consider each instance of Rossetti's "allegorizing" or swerving away from Dante in order to draw into sharp focus how such missing correspondence between translated text and Dantesque original is unfailingly deliberate. Let us therefore begin by considering his interlinguistic rendering of the 'canzone'.

The first instance of Rossetti's non-literal approach to the translating process is evident in the third stanza of the song:

> Qual dicea: "Non dormire",
> e qual dicea: "Perché sì ti sconforte?"
> Allor lassai la nova fantasia,
> chiamando il nome de la donna mia.
> Era la voce mia sì dolorosa … (11-15)

The 'nuova fantasia' ('new fantasy', translation mine) of line 13 is translated as an eclipse, "With that, my soul woke up from its eclipse" (Rossetti 1861: 269). The choice to add the image is not merely motivated by matters of rhyme and rather represents the first instance of a typical Rossettian use of the pathetic fallacy, revealing the translator's intention to connect the youth's gloomy mood to the darkness of an awesome scenery, filled with omens. The darkening of the sun, in fact, was there in the prose section of the *Vita Nuova* chapter (Fraticelli 1906:86), which reads "pareami vedere il sole *oscurare*", and it is later reaffirmed in the fourth stanza of the song, "Poi mi parve vedere appoco appoco/ Turbar lo Sole ed apparir la stella" ("The while, little by little, as I thought,/The sun ceased, and the stars began to gather", 49-50). In the

1871 painting such obscurity is focused on glimpses of Florence perceivable beyond the room's walls, and in the 'artificial' illumination of the setting, where only a small lamp affords a little light. The English translation of the 'canzone' just mentioned then precedes this particular chromatic reprise in the painting. Thus the "eclipse" of line 13 triggers a number of sign multiplications which not only reverberate through Rossetti's following transmutation of the episode into its pictorial version, but which reach back to Dante himself and his prose passage: Dante and Rossetti result therefore as associated by a specific sign constellation (McGann 2003: 44-45). Moreover, this choice reveals Rossetti's own resolution, ever stronger during his career, to attribute an iconic value to the signs of verbal language, and to transfer the symbolism of the linguistic system to the visual signs that shape the canvass.

Another crucial element is found in the fourth stanza of the 'canzone': when referring to his dream, Dante calls it "vano immaginare, ov'io *entra*i", line 44, thus endowing the whole vision with that vividness and thickness of colors and images referred to before. This happens because of the use he makes of the verb 'entrare' ('to enter', translation mine), with its very concrete connotations. This time Rossetti's translation is literal, maintaining the same perception of materiality conveyed by the Italian verb in the corresponding English 'to step into'. His translation ("the uncertain state I *stepped into*") reveals how Rossetti means to preserve the mood of the source text: the concreteness of the original passage constitutes in fact the material and beautiful strangeness of the Dantesque allegorical machinery. It remains, in other words, the only guarantee that is left for a post-Romantic, self-conscious readership to experience those moments of cognition implied by an attentive reading of the *Vita Nuova* itself. Though remaining close enough to the 'littera' of the original, and therefore lacking those elements of addition to the source text referred to before, the accurate translation of this passage helps Rossetti convey his personal reading and interpretation of the whole chapter: what he seems to be suggesting here is that the dream itself is for him more revealing than the waking state. As Joan Rees explains in her analysis of "The Portrait", Rossetti's aim in creating a poem or a painting consists in freezing the moment in time, to be able better to examine and to return to it time and again.

> The picture creates a world of its own. […] The poet takes the whole experience deep into his mind and there, in some psychic region, he […] approaches a vision of timelessness of crucial experiences existing eternally in spite of time. (Rees 2010: 29)

The intersemiotic shift further enhances the tactile strength of the scene. The perfect symmetry of the painting, the 'Keatsian' kiss never reaching Beatrice's cheek, the whole setting of the work, create an impression of suspended time in which the reader is taken by the hand (as Love himself takes Dante), stepping into it to examine the episode in the land away of aesthetic eternity. Moreover, its huge size turns the picture into a real "life-porch into eternity"[3], a place one has the actual perception of being attracted to and included into. To go back to the 'canzone', then, even when apparently literal, Rossetti's interlinguistic translation is meant to add a new dimension to the original significance of the text: what for Dante had been a verb simply determining space and movement, in Rossetti becomes the indicator of a whole conception of art, which needs be concrete and appealing to a readership that is getting ever detached and removed from the art-object itself.

Another important detail in the Rossettian interlinguistic translation (with consequences for the way the painter will later visually translate the whole episode) is to be found in line 50, fourth stanza. In the source text we find a description of the sun and the stars that seem to be crying together (emphasis mine):

Poi mi parve vedere appoco appoco
turbar lo Sole ed apparir la stella,
e pianger egli ed *ella*. (49-51)

Rossetti's translation reads:

The while, little by little, as I thought,
The sun ceased, and the stars began to gather,
And each wept *at* the other. (49-51)

The preposition Rossetti uses here, unlike the Italian conjunction 'ed', implies mutual compassion between the two celestial bodies, which appear to be anthropomorphized in an attitude of shared human

---

[3] Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, "Memorial Thresholds" (11).

sympathy that is more marked than in the original. This detail becomes crucial if contextualized in Rossetti's complex poetics and related back to his characteristic breach of the proper bonds Ruskin had imposed on the use of the pathetic fallacy. Though apparently unimportant, such translating choice is an early clue to what would become Rossetti's profound delight in the artistic exasperation of the poet's moods and feelings. Anything but concerned about a possible and desirable balance between his self-expression and his emotional control, Rossetti everywhere discerns signs of his own exasperated isolation and solipsism, even back in Dante's work. Though intimately harboring his awareness of man's isolation from nature, Dante Gabriel Rossetti recognizes in the apocalyptic passage by Dante a reflection of the writer's most intimate self. The exasperation of the natural element in the face of nature's irrecoverable stance generally results in Rossetti's increasingly "anti-natural" imagery, a trait which he inherited again from his Romantic precursors. As Harold Bloom argues, in fact, "Romantic nature poetry, despite a long critical history of misrepresentation, was an antinature poetry, even in Wordsworth who sought reciprocity or even a dialogue with nature but found it only in flashes" (Bloom 1970: 9). Not only does Rossetti translate such features into his English version of the Dantesque episode, but he exaggerates the complicity of the heavenly bodies, making them cry 'at' each other. This detail sheds light on the way Rossetti will later illustrate the dream episode. For our present purpose, it is sufficient to anticipate how the painting's background reflects the desolation shared by the sun and the moon: the windows that stand on the two sides of the room show a forsaken city, sharing in its deep isolation the utter pain of the young Poet. Again, Rossetti intervenes in the translated text in order to pave the way for his later visual rendering of the episode, quintessence of his post-Romantic re-reading of Dante and of his poetics.

Another interlinguistic deviation from the source text, which becomes relevant to an intersemiotic analysis of Rossetti's work, occurs in line 67, stanza five. Here we have the core of the vision, the moment when the young Poet finds himself facing the corpse of Beatrice (emphasis mine):

L' immaginar fallace
Mi condusse a veder mia donna morta;
E quando l'ebbi scorta,
Vedea che donne la covrian d'un velo. (65-68)

The Rossettian interlinguistic translation shows one detail in particular which overtly anticipates the later intersemiotic rendering of the passage:

These idle phantasies
Then carried me to see my lady dead:
And standing at her head
Her ladies put a white veil over her. (65-68)

In the original song, line 67 simply referred to the moment Dante perceived the dead Beatrice ('and when I saw her', translation mine). Translating the said line as "standing at her head" could be motivated by mere rhyme. However, the addition of a new clue on the perspective *whence* Dante sees Beatrice sheds light on that "allegorizing on one's own hook" technique which constitutes Rossetti's most crucial principle in his illustrations of Dante. In Rossetti's translated text, the scene displays its characters in a much more concrete way than Dante's text had done. Again, what needs be highlighted here is the augmented emphasis Rossetti lays on the work of art as a material object, the verbal expression moving swiftly towards its visual *after-life*. The shift between different media always represents for Rossetti a chance to multiply the signification implied in the original text. Details that are scarcely mentioned or utterly omitted in the source concretely take shape in the translated text and afterwards in the illustration. Rossetti frequently resorts to this kind of explicitation; thus the Dantesque vision, though detailed if compared to the rest of the *Vita Nuova*, becomes in Rossetti even more accurate in determining the position of the two ladies covering Beatrice with a shroud, and anticipates therefore the actual collocation of the figures in the later canvas.

Finally, in line 79 Dante implores Death to carry him away to the afterworld, "Vieni, che'l cor ti chiede". Rossetti translates the original 'cor' ('heart') as 'soul' ("My soul entreats thee, Come"), another choice which does not seem to be motivated by rhyme or metrics. To fully understand the cause of such a distance from the source text, one should bear in mind the meaning the author assigns to the experience of love, a true revelation of the poet's most intimate self. Being left with his sole

self, and severed from both God and Nature, the post-Romantic poet looks at love as the only "basis for a significant relationship between the subjective and the objective worlds" (Spector 1971: 432).The importance of the love experience as an attempt to evade man's prison of solipsism determines Rossetti's unflinching partiality for Dante's *Vita Nuova*, the Florentine's account of his early and earthly love for Beatrice. However, love ultimately negates that hoped-for escape from a tautological and sterile isolation of the self, and the poet is left with a sense of his own isolation coming doubly strong onto him. As is the case for sign and referent in Rossetti's art, the beloved remains forever distant and unknowable for the artist: this notwithstanding, Rossetti's quest for his beloved women is ever on the go, thus again testifying to the poet-painter's unmistakably Romantic descent. Just as Wordsworth had recognized the very power of the modern poet in the awareness of his own limitations, so does Rossetti stick to his quest for an escape of solipsism in a stubborn exasperation of solitude through a projection of his moods onto his beloved women. Both spirit and senses are engaged in this quest for otherness, for the dualism of mind and matter is annulled in the poet's quest, which needs the unflinching aid of any power that can be invoked, be it natural, human, or spiritual. Love therefore constitutes an inevitable instrument of enquiry into the soul, and it is for this reason that translating 'heart' as 'soul' is relevant to Rossetti's personal 'reading' of Dante: where the heart stands for the sensual and erotic side of the love experience, the world 'soul' stands for the spirituality that same experience entails, a combination that is envisioned by Rossetti as the only source of progress in human knowledge for the modern poet. Undeniably, though, Rossetti shows a partiality for the path of the senses: the growing isolation that the poet is gripped by can only be fought against through the material concreteness of the arts. As Elizabeth Helsinger argues, the real knowledge that modern art and poetry can provide according to Rossetti consists in living through the feelings and to be aware that one is doing so (Helsinger 2008: 35-36). Though never engaged in a sustained reflection on religious questions (Marucci 2003: 741), Rossetti was nonetheless ready to believe that the only possible transcendence of reality and history lied along the path of the senses. Sensually experiencing love grants the modern and self-conscious poet a last hope of a «momentary contact with the immortal» (Rossetti 1967, II: 727). The delicate balance of senses and spirit, soul

and heart, must be preserved by Rossetti throughout his production. Dante's account of his love for Beatrice in the *Vita Nuova*, moving as it does from a concrete apprehension of the 'Gentilissima' towards a new and celestial vision of her, proves to be the most adaptable of all narratives to the rising importance sensuality and spirituality acquire in Rossetti's poetics. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that in the two versions of the painting the features of Beatrice are respectively those of Elizabeth Siddal and of Jane Burden, the two great loves of Rossetti's life. If the experience of love becomes vehicle for a deep knowledge of the artist's soul, then the beloved woman is the most precious emblem of such a love, and, consequently, of such an exploration of one's intimate being. In other words, she becomes a synthesis of heart and soul. The fundamental coexistence of heart and soul must be kept in mind for it will structure the imagery of the Victorian poet and painter throughout his career: significantly, it is from Dante that Rossetti derives the premises of his distinctive aesthetics, which set him aside from any other Victorian artist and grant him a lasting originality.

Even as an interlinguistic source-text, Dante is then approached *creatively* by Rossetti, who strives to adapt his Italian precursor to the new contingencies of his modern sensibility. The additions and innovations to Dante as a literary pre-text will be even more clearly traceable in the intersemiotic rendering of the *Vita Nuova* episode, where Rossetti most strikingly *swerves* away from his precursor, increasingly realizing how real explanatory power rises from distance rather than from proximity to the source (McGann 2000: 23). The visual translation of the *Vita Nuova* passage by Rossetti will now be examined, specifically the late monumental oil. A few references to the ekphrastic annotation written by Rossetti himself to his 1871 version will be helpful:

> The subject of the picture is drawn from the 'Vita Nuova' of Dante, the autobiography of his earlier life. It embodies his dream on the day of the death of Beatrice Portinari; in which, after many portents and omens, he is led by Love himself to the bedside of his dead lady, and sees other ladies covering her with a veil as she lies in death. The scene is a chamber of dreams, where Beatrice is seen lying on a couch recessed in the wall, as if just fallen back in death. The winged and glowing figure of Love (the pilgrim Love of the *Vita Nuova* , wearing the scallop-shell on his shoulder,) leads by the hand Dante, who walks conscious but absorbed, as in sleep. In his other hand Love carries his arrow pointed at the dreamer's heart, and with it a branch of apple-blossom, which may figure forth the love here consummated in death,—a blossom plucked before the coming of fruit. As he

reaches the bier, Love bends for a moment over Beatrice with the kiss which her lover has never given her; while the two dream-ladies hold the pall full of may bloom suspended for an instant before it covers her face for ever. These two green-clad women look fixedly on the dreamer as if they might not speak, with saddened but not hopeless eyes. The chamber of dreams is strewn with poppies; and on either side of the recessed couch two open passages lead to staircases, one upward one downward. In these staircases are seen flying two birds, of the same glowing hue as the figure of Love,—the emblems of his presence filling the house. In these openings, and above where the roof also lies open, bells are seen tolling for the dead; and beyond in the distance is the outer world of reality—the City of Florence, which, as Dante says, 'sat solitary' for his lady's death. Over all, the angels float upwards, as in his dream, 'having a little cloud in front of them;'—a cloud to which is given some semblance of the beatified Beatrice.[4]

This gloss reveals much about the strategies followed by the artist in his intersemiotic translation of the episode, let alone standing out as a further mirroring of the original Dantesque prose passage: it will be therefore often referred to as the most genuine expression of Rossetti's intentions in visually translating Dante's chapter.

Now let us proceed to the 1871 oil. The dreamlike mood of the passage is visually recreated by Rossetti through more than one device. The first impression one gets of the Rossettian work is that of a "chamber of dreams", an unearthly scene, as the artist himself argues in his note. The chamber of dreams is timeless, neither ancient nor modern, apparently belonging, in its rigid symmetry, to a reality that is far from that of everyday life[5]. It is in the eidetic and topological organization of the painting, that is in the disposition of lines and object in the canvas, that the first precise choices of translation are to be perceived (Greimas 2001: 203-204). The artist is determined to reflect the feeling of estrangement experienced by the young Poet of the *Vita Nuova* (his being projected in an unknown and suffocating room) in the alienating and unnatural symmetry the whole visual work is built upon. At the centre of such a complex symmetry stands Love, a pivotal character for Rossetti, who is always concerned about conferring on the god a distinct concreteness and vividness. Love is portrayed in the act of exhorting the

---

[4] The Rossetti Archive: http://www.rossettiarchive.org/docs/23p-1881.broadside.rad.html

[5] "The chamber wherein she lies dead is as much a portion of his imaginative conception as aught else. It is a large room, not exactly of medieval and still less of modern aspect" (Sharp 1882: 222).

Poet, reminding us of the words he addressed to the youth in the song, line 64: "Vieni a veder nostra donna che giace"[6]. The line is visually translated in the concrete gesture with which the god takes Dante by the hand and leads him unto his dead beloved.

Love is represented by Rossetti according to Dante's depiction of him, though not in this very passage: not confining himself to the mere description to be found in the episode itself, Rossetti seems determined to draw ideas and details from the whole of the *Vita Nuova*. Developing from the 'amoretto' of the watercolor into the man of the 1871 oil,[7] Love finally appears in the later canvas as the "figura d'uno signore, di pauroso aspetto a chi lo guardasse" (Fraticelli 1906: 54) that we find in the third chapter of the 'rubica', long before Dante's dream[8]: anything but the little cherub of Rossetti's first version. This represents the first instance of Rossetti's refusal to concentrate on a single episode whence to draw all the information he needs to re-read Dante, and his resolve to consider the Florentine's 'rubrica' in its totality. Love's attire is an additional feature which Rossetti draws from another passage of the *Vita Nuova.* In Rossetti's 1871 painting, the god wears pilgrim clothes, exactly as he does in chapter IX of the Florentine's 'rubrica', where the divinity appears "come peregrino leggermente vestito, e di vili drappi" (*Ibid*.: 61)[9]. Love's pilgrim clothes anticipate the importance given to the figure of the wayfarer in Rossetti's poetry, and attest to the latter's capacity to transform originally Dantesque iconography into the means of a totally modern significance: in the centrality attributed to the pattern of the life-journey, Rossetti's poetry is again quintessentially Romantic, recovering from poets like Keats the fundamental structure of an internalized quest romance, that "basic tendency to conceptualize the course of human aspiration as a quest" (Waldoff 1985: 43). In *The House*

---

[6] "Come and behold our lady where she lies" (Rossetti 1861: 271).

[7] "Love's first incarnation was young Edward Hughes, nine-year-old nephew of Arthur, before his face was 'discarded as having too much of the Greek Adonis about it'. Then came sixteen-year-old Johnston Forbes Robertson, son of a dramatist known to Rossetti. [...] 'At the first sitting I remember he said "I am sorry, my dear Johnston, there is no beautiful creature for you to kiss." I can feel my blushes now'" (Marsh 1999: 409).

[8] "The figure of a lord of terrible aspect to such as should gaze upon him" (Rossetti 1861: 226).

[9] "Clothed lightly as a wayfarer might be" (*Ibid*.: 236).

of Life, human existence is often conceived as a long and difficult path, a strong reminiscence of Dante's *Vita Nuova* and Petrarch's *Canzoniere*. From his Italian models, the English poet-painter had also drawn his typical conception of Love, divinity of eros and soul and god of mutability and change, as the subtitles to the two sections of the Rossettian 'canzoniere' overtly reveal.[10] Rossetti's iconographic elaboration of the character of love and of the topos of the journey testifies therefore to his deliberate resolve to define a "sign constellation" (McGann 2003: 44-45) which brings together his literary original and his own allegorizations of it: his peculiar reading of Dante results from a deliberate superimposition of Medieval literary conventions and topoi and images that are quintessentially Romantic.

There are details used by Rossetti to depict Love which he himself devises through his "allegorizing" strategy: apart from Love's main attribute, namely the arrow he bears in his hand pointing at Dante's heart, Rossetti adds a branch of apple blossom, meant to take on a symbolic meaning. As specified by the painter himself in his ekphrastic note, the branch (emphasis mine) "*may* figure forth the love here consummated in death – a blossom plucked before the coming of fruit". Floral symbolism is employed by Rossetti in the painting, in order to compensate for the absence of other iconographic details of the original text by Dante that have been neglected, such as the crying women that gather round the Florentine or the birds that drop dead onto the floor. Apart from this observation, though, a more specific point has to be made here with reference to the addition of the apple branch and its shedding light on the importance symbols assume in Rossettian art. Symbolism for Rossetti always involves an exegetical process in which the beholder becomes fully responsible for the determination of the ultimate meaning of art (Camilletti 2005: 31-32): in the inevitable self-referentiality of modern literature, the work of art then finds its new *raison d'être* in the process of self-knowledge and education it offers the beholder to undergo, an exploration of those "dark passages" poetry was to enhance according to one of Rossetti's most illustrious precursors, John Keats (Keats 1958, I: 281). Rossetti's note thus introduces a simple suggestion as to what the branch "may figure forth": the detail's symbolic quality actually implies an active participation of the reader-beholder in the ultimate

---

[10] Respectively titled "Love and Change" and "Change and Fate".

determination of meaning. In other words, the branch is there to take on the significance that the reader-beholder will need to attribute it, therefore functioning as the trigger for an exegetical process which represents the ultimate justification for the existence of any work of art.

The use of symbolism is clear in other iconographic elements of the painting, generally contributing to define the mood of the place where the action is set. The room has an opening in the ceiling, whence a crowd of angels, carrying Beatrice's soul to heaven on a white cloud, can be perceived. These cherubs appear in Dante too, recovered by Rossetti to delineate the correspondence between heaven and earth, outer and inner space, high and low which represents one of the most important conceptual and narrative bases of the *Vita Nuova*. In the depiction of this particular setting Rossetti works without help from the Italian Poet, thus becoming the one responsible for making explicit what in the source text remained unsaid. At the two opposite sides of the room there are two staircases, one leading upward and the other downward (thus reflecting again the two main movements that define the whole structure of Dante's poetry). Two openings behind them reveal glimpses of a deserted Florence, incarnation of the "sola civitas" of Jeremiah's *Lamentations* (I, i). The recurrence of contrasting elements in the topological symbolism of the "chamber of dreams" contributes to reaffirm that duality of spirit and matter that lies at the core of Rossetti's conception of art and life

Moreover, the reference to Jeremiah sheds light on a characteristic of Rossetti referred to above, namely the artist's refusal to confine himself to the spatial and temporal boundaries of one single episode by Dante: to this observation, a new and critical element must be added. Besides connecting different chapters of Dante's 'rubrica' to illustrate the Florentine, Rossetti in fact appears also concerned in creating a network of connections between *his own* different translations and paintings of Dantesque inspiration. Permeating the whole atmosphere of the Dream oil, the line from Jeremiah's *Lamentations* is inscribed at the bottom of Rossetti's masterpiece of Dantesque pictorial revisionism, *Beata Beatrix*,[11] and constitutes an ideal bridge between the latter canvas and the Dream oil. The connection between the two paintings finds further

---

[11] The unfinished painting that was to become Rossetti's *Beata Beatrix* was begun by the artist before 1863. Rossetti resumed his work after the death of Elizabeth Siddal (1862), who died by an overdose of laudanum: this drug is extracted from the seeds of poppies. The painting was finished in 1870.

confirmation in the floral symbolism of the poppy. The room depicted in the Dream oil is in fact bestrewn with the said flower, which in Rossetti's poetics assumes a double symbolic value. Besides representing sleep and death, the poppy comes to stand for something even deeper if considered with relation to the poet's personal experience. With *Beata Beatrix* the image of the poppy (reinforced by the quotation from Jeremiah) definitely closes the circle of that ideal coincidence between Rossetti and Siddal' s love, on the one hand, and Dante and Beatrice's, on the other. The poppy becomes a symbol of the beloved's death conceived as the indispensable negation of desire within the process of reflection and investigation on the poet's most intimate self. Again Rossetti proves to be the perfect inheritor of a specific Romantic legacy, that Wordsworthian doctrine reversing

> the cardinal neoclassic ideal of setting only accessible goals, by converting what had been man's tragic error–the inordinacy of his "pride" that persists in setting infinite aims for the finite man–into his specific glory and his triumph. (Abrams 1970:110)

The impossible love for a dead Beatrice that the poppy symbolizes is nothing but the finest development of the Romantic poetic revolution, which had found its victory in dejection and loss. The floor painted on the canvas is bestrewn with such flowers, representing the ultimate conveyance of Beatrice's soul into heaven. The painting thus features a number of iconographic elements and references to Dantesque episodes other than the principal source-text: the iconographic residue deriving from Rossetti's deliberate allegorizing and additions to Dante results in a cultural residue, the only true cognitive burden that remains after the translating process has taken place (Helsinger 2008: 23). These same added details actually constitute the modern quality of Rossetti's vision, eventually turning the painting into a new pre-text to a following network of Rossettian canvasses and poems.

For his portrait of Dante, Rossetti follows the last stanza of the 'canzone':

> *Io diventai del dolor sì umile,*
> *Veggendo in lei tanta umiltà formata,*
> *Ch'io dicea: Morte, assai dolce ti tegno;*
> *Tu déi omai esser cosa gentile.*
> *Poiché tu se' nella mia donna stata,*
> *E déi aver pietate, e non disdegno.*

Vedi che sì desideroso vegno
D'esser de' tuoi, ch'io ti somiglio in fede. (71-78)[12]

The character of Dante drawn by Rossetti faithfully follows the image reflected in these lines. Rossetti portrays an extremely shy and bashful Dante, with eyes cast down and faltering steps. This depiction suggests an almost symmetrical correspondence with Rossetti's portrayal of Dante in the episode of Beatrice's salutation in Purgatory[13]: Rossetti suggests that, whether in Florence, in Purgatory or facing her deathbed, meeting the 'Gentilissima' never fails to arouse humility. Another element of the original text that the painter faithfully renders is the main chromatic feature of this character: through an anticipation of the lines of the canzone ("Vedi che sì desideroso vegno / D'esser de' tuoi, ch'io ti somiglio in fede", lines 77-78) in the prose narrative of the same chapter, Dante has already declared that he is wearing the colors of Death ("or vieni a me che molto ti desidero: tu vedi ch'io porto già lo tuo colore"[14]). Following the Poet's self-portrait, Rossetti manages to define in the figure of Dante a focal point for his whole canvas, where the rich dyes of green, red and brown dispose themselves in a sort of vortex around the greyish-black of the Poet's tunic, emanation of a mourning that pervades the whole scene. Used to emphasize the lyric intensity of the passage (Helsinger 2008: 23), color results as a further declension of that pathetic fallacy Rossetti was so keen on.

The poet-painter explicitly refers to Love in his ekphrastic note to the painting, describing him as he walks "conscious but absorbed, as in sleep", and thus reminding his reader of how this peculiar attitude is not only due to the humility inspired in him by the whole scene, but also to the fact that he is actually immersed in a dream. That dreamlike mood evoked in the Dante passage by the obsessive repetition of terms such as

---

[12] "And I became so humble in my grief,/Seeing in her such deep humility,/That I said: 'Death, I hold thee passing good/Henceforth, and a most gentle sweet relief,/Since my dear love has chosen to dwell with thee:/Pity, not hate, is thine, well understood./Lo! I do so desire to see thy face/That I am like as one who nears the tomb" (Rossetti 1861: 272).

[13] For such a comparison, see *The Salutation of Beatrice* (both versions, 1849-50 and 1859).

[14] "Wherefore come now unto me who do greatly desire thee: seest thou not that I wear thy colour already?" (Rossetti 1861: 267).

'sembrare', 'parere', 'immaginare', 'fantasia', 'fallace', 'dubitoso', is conveyed in the painting by more than just one iconographic element: indeed it is not only suggested by the stiff symmetry that defines the whole composition, but by the attitude of the characters themselves. With their literally dreamy gesture, even the two women bearing Beatrice's shroud help create an unreal scene. Rossetti describes them in his ekphrastic note: "These two green-clad women look fixedly on the dreamer as if they might not speak, with saddened but not hopeless eyes". The symmetrical structure invariably sought by Rossetti for his painting is further reflected in the number of women, though their crucial function lies in their eyes. Their dreamy and almost forgetful gaze contrasts with the grave mood of the whole scene, thus adding to the degree of detachment and unreality conveyed by the composition. However, the adjective "hopeless" used by Rossetti in his note proves revealing at this point. The *Vita Nuova* is precisely concluded on a note of hope and with a new and celestial image of Beatrice, now far from the Stilnovisitc principles whence the Poet had first moved. The two parts that make up *The House of Life* end on the same note of hope, as it clearly appears in the two sonnets "Love's Last Gift" and "The One Hope". The way Rossetti depicts the two women bearing Beatrice's shroud then reveals much about his own interpretation of the 'Gentilissima''s death; for him, too, this episode becomes the interpretative key to his own artistic growth, leading him to a notion of death that is conceived no more as mere mourning and bereavement, but rather as a unique and privileged life-porch into a different 'reading' of his experience as a man and a poet, wherefore loss ultimately proves to be the only possible gain in consciousness and knowledge.

Rossetti's reading of Dante is surely motivated by a number of definite interests. First of all, a text such as the *Vita Nova* is preferred to the *Commedia* because of the relevant meanings it still bears for a 'new' and Victorian target-public. A great interpreter of the Romantic and self-conscious awakening to history, Rossetti welcomes a recovery of the 'primitive' Middle-Ages that embraces the latter's anti-mimetic tendencies, rejecting its realities in favor of an ideal revival of it (Frye 1968: 37). Rossetti recovers the medieval work of Dante in a way that completely differs from what artists such as Ruskin or Holman Hunt were performing during those same years. What they wanted to recover from the Italian 'Duecento' was actually the firm moral and religious

zeal on which all artistic expression was then grounded.[15] Through his translation of the Italian Poet's love story, Rossetti prepares instead the ground for a personal and almost dissenting investigation of his own experience that will keep maturing through the years and will eventually appear in full bloom in his sonnet sequence *The House of Life.* Both the interlinguistic and the intersemiotic translations prove definitely crucial to the development of Rossetti's poetics after his re-reading the Dantesque work. The main resources employed by Rossetti in the double rendering of the original text can be summarized as follows: first, Rossetti is determined to avoid a word-for-word (or image-for-image) translation of all his source texts, firmly believing in the utterly non-scientific character of poetry, on the first place, and of the translating process as well. He therefore applies the method he himself defines as "allegorizing on one's own hook", which implies an addition of iconographic details invented by the painter to those described by Dante, without "killing a distinct idea of the poet's" (Rossetti 1967, I: 239) and which works in accordance to a deliberate breach of the proper pathetic fallacy. Moreover the Rossettian illustrations of Dante usually tend to condense pictorial elements deriving from more than just one episode of the original text into a single scene. Such a tendency reveals the painter's unfailing endeavor to assimilate two entities that tradition had often considered to be at odds: painting with its focus on space, on the one hand, and the literary work with its focus on time, on the other. Originally, his canvases overtly display a 'narrative' character, with their typical mixture of visual and verbal signs. Through the years, though, a synthesis in the narrative component of Rossetti's paintings is clearly to be discerned: his previous love for narrative within his pictorial production is gradually replaced by an analytical approach to the overall

---

[15] For further reading about the outdatedness of the original Pre-Raphaelite project, see Fabio Camilletti on *Saint Agnes of Intercession*: "è altrettanto chiaro […] come Rossetti stia giustificando, in *Sant'Agnese*, la propria inattualità: l'inattualità dei Pre-raffaelliti, la stessa inattualità di cui era stato accusato Ingres, l'inattualità del primitivismo *tout-court*. Ma—e questo è importante—egli non la giustifica con le parole di un Ruskin o di un Holman Hunt: il primitivismo non è cercato, inseguito, perseguito a finalità di rinnovamento artistico, di rinnovamento morale: esso è inseguito in quanto è qualcosa di estremamente personale, e dunque—di conseguenza—necessariamente attuale" (Camilletti 2005: 111-112).

structure of the paintings, which will eventually come to be much more developed in depth rather than in width. *Beata Beatrix* clearly epitomizes such a change, leading Rossetti to the most celebrated phase of his career as a painter. Though finished before *The Dream* oil, *Beata Beatrix* is certainly a later work in conception and represents the climax of the poet-painter's personal reading of Dante, with Rossetti's eventual dismissal of the narrative offered by the Italian Poet, and his imposition of a clearly modern, post-Romantic interpretation to the overall original prose. As argued by Fabio Camilletti, no Dantesque episode can be here referred to the Rossettian painting of Beatrice's ecstasy:

> L'ipotesto di partenza non è più un'*auctoritas*: esso può essere smembrato, frammentato, completato. L'opera di Rossetti e quella di Dante si compenetrano. (Camilletti 2005: 121)

At this point of his career Rossetti is mature enough to proceed with a reading of Dante 'without' Dante; yet the Florentine is there, easily traceable in that iconographic repertoire that originates from Rossetti's translations of Dante's *Vita Nuova*, including details such as the dove and the poppy. The extensive range of symbols and iconographic elements drawn from the Florentine constantly re-emerges in Rossetti's later pictorial and poetic production. It would then be impossible to understand the progress of his artistic work without a careful account of his Dantesque phase, culminating with *Beata Beatrix*. A notion of intersemiotic translation becomes essential to understand and fully appreciate Dante Gabriel Rossetti's last artistic phase: canvas and sonnet are continually matched and compared though they never perfectly harmonize. Because of the many questions such a missing complementariness leaves unanswered, an unprecedented responsibility in the process of interpretation is then conferred on the reader-beholder. In the central role attributed to the interpreter lies the timeless allure of Rossetti's art.

References

Abrams, Meyer Howard. 1970. "English Romanticism: The Spirit of the Age". *Romanticism and Consciousness*. Ed. Bloom, Harold. New York: Norton & Co. 91-119.

———. 1973. *Natural Supernaturalism, Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature.* London: Norton & Co.

Alighieri, Dante. 1906. *La Vita Nuova*. Ed. Fraticelli, Pietro. Firenze : G. Barbera Editore.

Benedetti, Maria Teresa, Frezzotti, Stefania, Upstone, Robert. 2011. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti Edward Burne Jones e il mito dell'Italia nell'Inghilterra vittoriana*. Milano: Electa.

Bloom, Harold. 1970. "The Internalization of Quest Romance." *Romanticism and Consciousness*. Ed. H. Bloom. New York: Norton & Co. 3-24.

Breton, Rob. 2013. "John Ruskin's Juvenilia and the Origins of the Pathetic Fallacy." *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*. New Series 22: 17-36.

Camilletti, Fabio. 2005. *Beatrice nell'Inferno di Londra*. Lavis: La Finestra editrice.

———. 2010a. "D.G. Rossetti tra 'religione della mente' e decostruzione dell'Io." *I Rossetti e l'Italia*. Eds. Oliva, Gianni, Menna, Mirko. Lanciano: Rocco Carabba. 333-358.

———. 2010b. "Veils. A Reading of Dante Gabriel Rossetti's St. Agnes of Intercession". *Ravenna*, III. http://oscholars-oscholars.com/ravenna/ravenna-3/ravenna-3-1/ online.

Cimini, Mario. 2010. "La prima ricezione critica della poesia di Dante Gabriel Rossetti e dei Preraffaelliti in Italia." *I Rossetti e l'Italia*. Eds. Oliva, Gianni, Menna, Mirko. Lanciano: Rocco Carabba. 235-262.

Chiummo, Carla. 2010. "Hand and Soul e un'idea di estetica per la fine secolo Italiana." *I Rossetti e l'Italia*. Eds. Oliva, Gianni, Menna, Mirko. Lanciano: Rocco Carabba. 295-314.

Eco, Umberto. 1995. "Riflessioni teoriche-pratiche sulla traduzione." *Teorie contemporanee della traduzione*. Ed. Neergaard, Siri. Milano: Bompiani. 121-146.

Frye, Northrop. 1968. *A Study of English Romanticism*. New York: Random House.

Gitter, Elizabeth. 1974. "Rossetti's Translations of Early Italian Lyrics." *Victorian Poetry*. Vol. 12, No. 4: 351-362.

Gizzi, Corrado. 1984. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Milano: Mazzotta.

Greimas, Algirdas Julien. 2001. "Semiotica figurativa e semiotica plastica." *Semiotica in nuce* II. Eds. Fabbri, Paolo, Marrone, Gianfranco. Roma: Meltemi. 196-210.

Helsinger, Elizabeth. 2008. *Poetry and the Pre-Raphaelite Arts: Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Keats, John. 1958. *The Letters of John Keats, vol. I*. Ed. Rollins, Hyder Edward. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Marsh, Jan. 1999. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Painter and Poet*. London: Orion Books.

Marucci, Franco. 2010. "Dante Gabriel Rossetti traduttore e tradotto." *I Rossetti e l'Italia*. Eds. Oliva, Gianni, Menna, Mirko. Lanciano: Rocco Carabba. 193-212.

———. 2003. *Storia della letteratura inglese, dal 1832 al 1870: Il saggismo e la poesia*. Firenze: Le Lettere.

McGann, Jerome. 2003. "A Commentary on Some of Rossetti's Translations from Dante." *Haunted Texts, Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism*. Ed. Latham, David. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.

———. 2000. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game That Must Be Lost*. New Haven: Yale UP.

———. *The Complete Writings and Pictures of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: a Hypermedia Research Archive*, http://www.rossettiarchive.org/,

Pater, Walter Horatio. 1889. *Appreciations, With an Essay on Style*. London and New York: MacMillan.

Rees, Joan. 2010. *The Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Modes of Self Expression*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Rossetti, Dante Gabriel. 1901. *Collected Works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti*. Ed. Rossetti, William Michael. London: Ellis and Elvey.

———. 1967. *Letters of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, vol. I- II*. Eds. Doughty, Oswald, Whal, John Robert. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

———. 1861. *The Early Italian Poets From Ciullo D'Alcamo to Dante Alighieri (1100-1200-1300)*. London: Smith, Elder, and Co.

Sharp, William. 1882. *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Record and A Study*. London: Macmillan and Co.

Silverman, Hugh. 1998. *Cultural Semiosis: Tracing the Signifier*. New York: Routledge.

Simonelli, Picchio. 1994. *Beatrice nell'opera di Dante e nella memoria europea, 1290-1990: atti del Convegno internazionale: 10-14 dicembre 1990*. Firenze: Cadmo.

Slinn, Warwick. 2003. "Rossetti's Elegy for Masculine Desire: Seduction and Loss in the House of Life." *Haunted Texts, Studies in Pre-Raphaelitism*. Ed. Latham, David. Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press.

Spector, Stephen. 1971. "Love, Unity, and Desire in the Poetry of Dante Gabriel Rossetti." *ELH*, XXXVIII/III: 432-458.

Starzyk, Lawrence. 2009. "My Soul Another Echo There": Rossetti's "The Portrait" and Ekphrastic Disavowal." *The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies*. XVIII: 27-40.

Wagner, Jennifer Ann. 1996. *A Moment's Monument*: *Revisionary Poetics and the Nineteenth-century English Sonnet*. Cranbury NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Waldoff, Leon. 1985. *Keats and the Silent Work of Imagination*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

"Loved with an L…": The Lesbian Continuum in Three Works by Sylvia Townsend Warner

Ronald Paul, University of Gothenburg

Abstract
This article takes as its critical point of departure Adrienne Rich's concept of a *lesbian continuum* of female sisterhood, support and dissent against the norms of patriarchal society. In particular, Rich's term is used to explore three key works from the 1930s by the English writer, Sylvia Townsend Warner – *Opus 7*, *Whether a Dove or Seagull* and *Summer Will Show*. Not only does Warner herself emerge both politically and personally as a radical lesbian writer during this turbulent period of the 1930s. The article seeks to argue in this context that these three works also represent in themselves a progressively connected delineation of a lesbian continuum of women's lives through the individual female and lesbian voices that are articulated in Warner's writing at this crucial stage in her career.

Keywords: Sylvia Townsend Warner; *Opus 7*; *Whether a Dove or Seagull*; *Summer Will Show*; lesbian continuum; politics; literature; 1930s

In her provocative and ground-breaking essay, "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence", first published in 1980, Adrienne Rich discusses different forms of female experience that have often been hidden from history, involving the alternative existences of women who have broken the bonds of traditional heterosexuality. Women have chosen to opt out and live their lives on the margins of patriarchal society without men, "as witches, *femmes seules*, marriage resisters, spinsters, autonomous widows, and/or lesbians" (Rich 1994:31). These varying degrees of women's non-collaboration with the sexual status quo Rich characterizes as a "*lesbian continuum*" of female dissent:

> I mean the term *lesbian continuum* to include a range — through each woman's life and throughout history — of woman-identified experience, not simply the fact that a woman has had or consciously desired genital sexual experience with another woman. If we expand it to embrace many more forms of primary intensity between and among women, including the sharing of a rich inner life, the bonding against male tyranny, the giving and receiving of practical and political support, if we can also hear it in such associations as *marriage resistance* and the 'haggard' behavior identified by Mary Daly (obsolete meanings: 'intractable,' 'wilful,' 'wanton,' and

> 'unchaste,' 'a woman reluctant to yield to wooing'), we begin to grasp breadths of
> female history and psychology which have lain out of reach as a consequence of
> limited, mostly clinical, definitions of *lesbianism*. (Rich 1994:51-2)

Even though this refusal to adapt to the expectations of conventional
gender roles might only remain very much on a private level, Rich's
understanding of the term nevertheless suggests a broader genealogy of
female resistance to the prevailing system of male dominance. Women
who choose to live alone or together with other women represent
therefore a continuous challenge to this masculinist power, creating a
narrative of disobedience that has been fragmented or repressed: "We
begin to observe behavior, both in history and in individual biography,
that has hitherto been invisible or misnamed, behavior which often
constitutes, given the limits of the counterforce exerted in a given time
and place, radical rebellion" (Rich 1994:57). The recognition of this
concept of a lesbian continuum has a number of important critical
implications. Firstly, there is clearly a greater reluctance among women
to submit to the pressures of what Rich calls 'compulsory
heterosexuality'. Secondly, this complex history of the female
recalcitrance needs to be acknowledged more in the discussion of gender
relations, since it has an impact on the condition of women everywhere:

> The denial of reality and visibility to women's passion for women, women's choice
> of women as allies, life companions, and community, the forcing of such
> relationships into dissimulation and their disintegration under intense pressure have
> meant an incalculable loss to the power of all women *to change the social relations
> of the sexes, to liberate ourselves and each other*. (Rich 1994:63)

Thirdly, and most relevantly to this present study, the awareness of a
lesbian continuum should help inform the work of feminist critics and
researchers who seek to recover the experience of women who have been
unwilling to define themselves solely in terms of the conventions of
marriage and motherhood and whose 'double life' has been hidden from
history. As Rich herself concludes: "The lesbian continuum, I suggest,
needs delineation in light of the 'double life' of women, not only women
self-described as heterosexual but also of self-described lesbians. We

need a far more exhaustive account of the forms the double life has assumed" (Rich 1994:67).[1]

Rich's radical feminist assertion of a lesbian continuum has not been without controversy of course. Critical reactions have gone from rejecting the term for being either too broad or too restrictive. Diana Fuss, for example, argues that "Rich's notion is too inclusive, too vague [...] ahistorical and amaterialist—too imprecise to be useful epistemologically, though enormously evocative politically" (Fuss 1990:44). Caroline Gonda refers in contrast to "lesbians [who] protested that once again the specificity of lesbian experience was being blurred: where was the sense of lesbianism as an erotic 'commitment of skin. blood, breast and bone'" (Gonda 1998:119). Cora Kaplan also expressed critical misgivings about "Rich's simple belief in the all-embracing political possibilities of lesbian existence", arguing that "her rejection of the political integrity of heterosexual feminism constitutes a denial both of the specificity and variety of female sexuality and the specificity and variety of feminism" (Kaplan 1986:55). In Rich's defence, however, Peta Bowden and Jane Mummery counter by stating that the idea of a lesbian continuum provided the point of departure for Rich to develop "a feminist theory aiming to connect women's culture with their past and contemporary realities, give voice to hitherto silenced aspects of women's culture, and re-vision patriarchal assumptions" (Bowden & Mummery 2009:53).

Without delving further in what is an ongoing debate within feminism about the theoretical, political and personal connotations of Rich's characterisation of both compulsory heterosexuality and the lesbian continuum, I want nevertheless to adapt the latter concept in particular to a discussion of three key works of the English writer, Sylvia Townsend Warner: *Opus 7* (1931), *Whether a Dove or Seagull* (1933) and *Summer Will Show* (1936). The reasons for choosing to apply Rich's term to these texts are linked directly to her appeal for the need to trace a

---

[1] A prominent example of the pioneering research done within this field is the work of Lillian Faderman, who is Professor of English at California State University. Her now classic histories include: *Surpassing the Love of Men: Romantic Friendship and Love between Women from the Renaissance to the Present* (1981), *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America* (1992), and *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians have done for America – A History* (2000).

paradigm of 'woman-identified experience' through the lesbian continuum, not least within literature. In the case of Sylvia Townsend Warner, I want to show that not only did she herself emerge both politically and personally as a radical lesbian writer during this crucial period of the 1930s. I will also argue that these three texts in themselves represent a progressively connected delineation of the continuum through the individual female and lesbian voices that surface in Warner's writing at this stage. In both cases, narratively and biographically, the concept of the lesbian continuum helps situate these three works within a context of Warner's own commitment to the portrayal of women who choose to challenge the parameters of heteronormativity.

A case could certainly be made for extending the choice of Warner's texts to include work she published both before and after this particular period and which would also fall within the scope of a literary lesbian continuum. Her very first published novel, *Lolly Willowes* (1926), for example, is the story of a so-called maiden aunt in a middle-class family who rebels against her role as unpaid nanny, deciding instead to live on her own in a cottage in a village where she eventually joins a local witches' coven. Despite its pastoral elements of an escape to the country, there is clearly something gender subversive about a woman who refuses offers of marriage, drops out of refined society and ends up seeking the company of female devil worshipers. A similar focus on women living in self-sufficient isolation can be found in Warner's later work*, The Corner That Held Them* (1948), which is a historical novel about a group of nuns in a 14th century convent over a period of thirty years. Although Warner herself said that she based this depiction of women dedicated to a life without men "on the purest Marxian principles, because I was convinced that if you were going to give an accurate picture of the monastic life, you'd have to put in all their finances, how they made their money" (Warner 2012c:404), the novel is also an exploration of female empowerment in a context where the nuns themselves live, work, worship, eat, sleep, socialise and grow old together with very little direct male interference. Thus, the existence of a lesbian continuum could be established at least in these two novels, if not in others among Warner's oeuvre. For my own purposes, however, I feel that the restriction to three works will suffice, since, as I have mentioned earlier, I want to also link this discussion to a decisive moment in Warner's development of her own lesbian identity.

In his introduction to the most recent collections of Warner's writings, *With The Hunted* (2012), Peter Tolhurst reminds us that despite being "one of the most accomplished writers of the last century [Warner] was largely ignored during her lifetime" (Tolhurst 2012:i). He also refers to Warner's biographer, Claire Harman, who explains this critical neglect in the following terms: "Being a woman and a lesbian and a Communist certainly didn't endear Warner to the establishment or to the literary canon-mongers" (Quoted in Tolhurst 2012:i). Maroula Joannou has raised a similar question about the condescension of literary history in this context: "Townsend Warner was a redoubtable feminist who always regarded women's rights as inseparable from other struggles for peace, democracy and freedom [...] Why, then, is such a remarkable writer still neglected?" (Joannou 2006:iv). Since Warner's death in 1978, there have been repeated attempts at rescuing her work from this historical amnesia, to which the *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner* collection, in which Joannou's article appeared, represents the most recent and concerted challenge. The republication of many of Warner's novels and stories by the feminist Virago Press in the 1970s and 80s, the appearance of Wendy Mulford's study of Warner's lesbian relationship with Valentine Ackland, *This Narrow Place*, in 1988, as well as Claire Harman's comprehensive biography, *Sylvia Townsend Warner*, in 1989, have all contributed to a renewal of interest in Warner's writing. In both these pioneering biographical studies, there is, however, little or no discussion of the two later works in my own selection as having anything more than a veiled lesbian subtext, while *Opus 7* is ignored altogether in this connection. One important literary historical link is nevertheless made by Wendy Mulford. Sylvia Townsend Warner's and Valentine Ackland's collaborative collection of poetry celebrating their own lesbian relationship, *Whether a Dove or Seagull*, as well as Warner's tale of a woman's encounter with lesbian love and revolution in France in 1848, *Summer Will Show*, are both brought together biographically in Mulford's book:

> [*Summer Will Show*], written at the height of the creative encounter between herself and Valentine, when they were collaborating on *Whether a Dove or a Seagull* [sic] and entering into their political commitments together, draws upon aspects of her and Valentine's relationship. (Mulford 1988:121)

Although Claire Harman is herself rather dismissive of the significance of the lesbian love poems in *Whether a Dove or Seagull*, stating merely that it "was generally assumed that Valentine was a man" (Harman 1989:132), in *Summer Will Show*, she draws a similar autobiographical parallel between the two main female characters: "Minna and Sophia are to a great extent Sylvia and Valentine" (Harman 1989:149). In contrast, recent criticism, not least that written by feminists, has been more inclined to underscore the radical lesbian politics of Warner's work. The collection, *Whether a Dove or Seagull*, has been the object of particular attention in this context. In her anthology of *Women's Poetry in the 1930s*, which addresses the neglected contribution of women poets to the predominantly male paradigm of the 'Auden generation', Jane Dowson points to the particular significance of Warner's writing in this 1930s nexus of politics and literature:

> Sylvia Townsend Warner clearly should have belonged to the canonised poetry of the Thirties. Her commitment to the cause of the Spanish Republicans was an extension of her opposition to the injustices of class inequality […] In her poems, as in her prose, Warner attacks institutions and bureaucracies which perpetuate poverty and illiteracy […] As a communist with a concern for the plight of the rural poor, Sylvia Townsend Warner was writing out of 'the discovery that the pen could be used as a sword.' (Dowson:1996:150-1)

In connection with the first complete reprint of *Whether a Dove or Seagull* in 2008, Frances Bingham comments in a similar way on the status of the collection as an underground lesbian classic that pushed the gender boundaries of poetry in this most iconic period of radical literary engagement:

> Out of print since that first edition, this has become an almost legendary text, frequently cited and long overdue for republication. It is an important collection, crucial to any overview of women's poetry at that period, and a moving account of love between two poets who are able to write about their relationship with subtlety and clarity. (Bingham 2008:1)

Continuing her own critical downplay of the radicalism of Warner's *Summer Will Show*, however, Claire Harman tends towards a further blurring of the connection between lesbianism and liberation when she introduced a recent edition of the book (Harman 2009:x). I will return in more detail to this question of the lesbian continuum of love and

revolution in the novel later. Suffice to say that in contrast to Harman, I think that the themes of lesbianism and radical activism become so intimately interwoven in Warner's writing at this time that they define the whole direction of her left-wing literary project.

In relation to Warner's epic poem, *Opus 7*, the critical consensus that can be discerned tends towards viewing this work as a minor piece, containing a somewhat quirky portrayal of a lonely alcoholic woman in a country village, the gender implications of which are left rather vague. Introducing the first reprint of this much neglected poem, Harman for example says that it shows "how essentially, if untypically, feminine a writer Warner was, using the freedom of her gender to say both harsh and simple things, 'not hampered', as she remarked in a lecture on 'Women as Writers', 'by an attribution of innate moral superiority'" (Harman 2008:4). In her preface to the recent collection of critical essays, Joannou repeats Warner's own throwaway characterisation of the poem as her "pastoral in the jog-trot English couplet" (Joannou 2006:i) without further comment, even though Warner also described it as a "truthful pastoral", very much opposed to the bucolic idealisation of rural life that often occurs within this tradition of poetry (Quoted in Mulford 1988:48).

In contrast to the equivocal critical response to the three works indicated above, I intend instead to reassert the intrinsic lesbian consciousness that these texts reflect. Not only in order to situate them within a continuum of dissenting woman-identified experience, but also to discuss them in the light of Warner's own attempt to turn a specifically female reality of resistance into the aesthetics of poetry and fiction.

<p align="center">*</p>

Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland became lovers on 11 October 1930. For Warner, it was her first experience of a lesbian relationship: "I got into her bed, and found love there", as she recalls in her diary (Warner 1994:70). It was clearly a turning-point in her life that gave her a profound sense of personal release, as Harman records in her biography:

> The cool autumn morning into which Sylvia awoke was unlike any other. Everything had changed, unsurmisably and for the good. She was joyful, and she

> was secure in her joy. The difference in their ages – Valentine was twenty-four, Sylvia thirty-six – and the sameness of their sex, things which in cold blood might have presented themselves as impediments to a lasting love, were simply part of the new landscape in which Sylvia moved. She was excited as never before, released and unconstrained. (Harman 1991:100)

Their relationship was to last a lifetime, but was also quickly turned into active collaboration, both poetically and politically. The first fruit of this co-operation was the publication of their love poems to one another, *Whether a Dove or Seagull*, the title of which reflected the ambiguities of their own lesbian identity. Despite the happiness, emotional fulfilment and security that their companionship provided, they were both nevertheless deeply concerned about developments in the rest of society at this time. The rise of fascism throughout Europe filled them with alarm: all these authoritarian men in black or brown uniforms – Hitler, Mussolini, Franco, and Oswald Mosley in Britain – who were bent on wreaking havoc on the world.[2] Like many writers in the 1930s, Warner and Ackland looked for a solution in radical leftwing politics. Not only were they concerned about the international situation and the threat of war, the growing levels of unemployment in Britain, not least in the countryside, brought home the reality of the crisis of the system. As a consequence, in 1934, they both took the decision to join the Communist Party. Apart from politics, there were also other more tangible personal reasons for their membership, as Harman notes:

> Another element in Sylvia's wholehearted enthusiasm for Communism was the way in which it underlined the sense of ostracism she and Valentine had been made to

---

[2] Perhaps not surprisingly, this list does not include Stalin. As members of the Communist Party, both Warner and Ackland saw the Soviet Union as the main bulwark against fascism in the 1930s and 40s. It wasn't until much later that they became critical of stalinism. In an interview she gave in 1975, Warner described herself in terms of an anarchist: "I was a Communist, but I always find anarchists very easy to get on with. I think that's because, if the English turn to the left at all, they are natural anarchists. They are not orderly enough to be good Communists and they're too refractory to be good Communists. I became a Communist because I was agin the Government but that of course is not a suitable frame of mind for a Communist very long. But you can go on being an anarchist for the rest of your life, as far as I can see, and doing very well. You've always got something to be anarchic about – your life is one long excitement" (Warner 2012c:402).

feel because they were lesbians. Rather than being slightly outcast, they could move themselves beyond the conventional altogether. Thus Communism conferred a blessing on their marriage and, because it was so closely tied up with their love for each other, became sacrosanct. (Harman 1991:142)

Both Warner and Ackland were very active throughout the decade of the 1930s, writing poems and articles for leftwing journals, campaigning for socialism and against the threat of fascism and war. In Warner's case, she also published a series of novels, poems and stories that articulated her new-found marxist-feminist view of society. It is in this context of fascism and war, gender politics and radical commitment, that the lesbian continuum within the work she produced in the early years of the 1930s can be understood. It is therefore to these key thematic elements in her writing that I now want to turn.

Women and War: Opus 7

In her introduction to Warner's *New Collected Poems*, Claire Harman correctly observes that "The war had haunted her early poems, with their cast of lone women and traumatised men […] The passage about the war from *Opus 7* is as forceful a statement on the subject as any by a non-combatant, I believe, and shows her long preoccupation with it" (Harman 2008:4). The passage of the poem in question, of which Harman only quotes the first part, depicts the First World War in terms of a monstrous banquet, "/w/hen grandees feasted have", a reference to those who instigated the mass slaughter in the trenches and who thrived on the sacrifice of young soldiers served up and devoured in the interests of class privilege and colonialist power:

> I knew a time when Europe feasted well:
> bodies were munched in thousands, vintage blood
> so blithely flowed that even the dull mud
> grew greedy, and ate men; and lest the gust
> should flag, quick flesh no daintier taste than dust,
> spirit was ransacked for whatever might
> sharpen a sauce to drive on appetite.
> From the mind's orient fetched all spices were –
> honour, romance, magnanimous despair,
> savagery, expiation, lechery,
> skill, humour, spleen, fear, madness, pride, ennui…
> Long revel, but at last to loathing turned,

and through the after-dinner speeches yawned
those who still waked to hear them. No one claps.
Come, Time, 'tis time to bear away the scraps!
(Warner 2008:162-3)

Although Harman gives an indication of Warner's pacifist sympathies, she does not develop their fundamental links with the portrayal of Rebecca Random, the central character of the poem. Instead, she views the work as being "deliberately thin", mainly "constructed as a vehicle for the poet's strong views on the state of English Pastoral" (Harman 2008:4). The personal impact of the war on Rebecca is not mentioned, for example that her alcoholism and decision to live alone might both be indirect consequences of the trauma of the military conflict. Rebecca, it could be argued, has decided to opt out of a patriarchal society that has brought only death, destruction and dislocation to herself and her world:

War trod her low.
Her kin all dead, alas! too soon had died;
unpensioned, unallowanced, unsupplied
with pasteboard window-boast betokening
blood-money sent from a respectful king,
she on her freehold starved, the sullen bait
of every blithe philosopher on fate.
Dig she could not. Where was the farmer who
would hire her sodden limbs when well he knew
how shapely land-girls, high-bred wenches all,
would run in breeches at his beck and call?
To beg would be in vain. What patriot purse
would to a tippler open, when its terse
clarion call the *Daily Mail* displayed:
Buckingham Palace Drinking Lemonade?
So fared she worsening on, until the chimes
clashing out peace, renewal of old times –
but bettered – sent her stumbling to the inn.
No! No reduction in the price of gin.
(Warner 2008:163-4)

The other key figure, apart from Rebecca herself, in this context of post-war social disruption is the "crippled Anzac" soldier who passes through the village, buying wallflowers from her garden and taking time to talk to her. Although he helps her realise that she could live by selling flowers, he also represents, more significantly, the embodiment of all the broken lives that the war has left by the wayside. Following in the wake of his

great-grandfather who was transported to Australia for "firing ricks", an act of social protest involving the burning of haystacks belonging to the landowners, the young man has himself been transported back to England to fight for the Empire, the patriotic myths of which he was inculcated with as a boy. Ironically, he now finds himself part of another lost generation of young men who have been condemned to the lowest and worthless category of physical and mental unfitness by the army – the C3's:

> When I was a pup
> I felt to come to England I'd give up
> all I could ever have – and here I am,
> her soldier. Now, I wouldn't give a damn
> for England. She's as rotten as cheese,
> her women bitches, and her men C3's.
> (Warner 2008:164)

Warner allows for no heterosexual love interest to develop between Rebecca and the soldier in the poem. The young man is crippled and brutalised by the war, a stranger in a foreign country that treats him like a vagrant. Rebecca also remains herself an outsider figure in the village, one whose planting and tending of flowers by night make her perceived as a witch, fearful to men, although fascinating to women. To the women, her cottage and garden appear as a source of magic female fecundity, aptly named "Love Green", a secret space beyond male control:

> To sow by lantern light – it was a scene
> unpaired in all the annals of Love Green,
> flat against nature and good usage, less
> act of a wantwit than a sorceress.
> Outlandish her vast shadow prowled and stayed –
> a rooting bear, a ghoul about her trade –
> beheaded, with her rising, into dark.
> Birds scolded at her, dogs began to bark,
> John Pigeon, reeling home to fight his wife,
> checked at the glare, and bellowed out *The strife
> is o'er, the battle done*, to scare the fiend;
> while him forgetting, Mrs Pigeon leaned
> out of the bedroom window in her nightgown,
> rapt as a saint at gaze, to track the light down.
> (Warner 2008:173-4)

Apart from the bohemian lifestyle of Rebecca in which she devotes herself to the pleasures of drink, her cultivation of flowers takes on a powerful regenerative meaning as a symbol of physical and spiritual recuperation. It is an act of female defiance in the face of the death drive of patriarchal society, a reassertion of the life-giving forces of nature with which she is identified.[3] Rebecca lives by herself, but in symbiosis with her surroundings, growing flowers that become an integral part of the social and family rituals of the village. That she thrives on the produce of her garden, not least financially, is another corroboration of the female counter-culture that her life comes to signify:

> A like kind providence now brooded over
> Rebecca's steps, even when she was sober.
> Her ways were plenteousness, her paths were peace;
> all summers, even wet ones, brought increase,
> and markets matched themselves to her supply –
> as in political economy.
> None gave a tea-party or funeral
> lacking her wares; she decked the village hall
> for whist-drives, and the set bouquet supplied,
> with fern bewhiskered, and with ribbon tied,
> for Lady Lee who opened the bazaar.
> […]
> She filled the chimney vase, the silver bowl

---

[3] In 1938, faced with the threat of yet another world war, Virginia Woolf made a similar connection in *Three Guineas* between the struggle for women's liberation and the fight against fascism and war. Like Warner, Woolf also suggested that it is natural for women to opt out of a system of patriarchy, patriotism and imperial war-mongering: "'Therefore if you insist upon fighting to protect me, or 'our' country, let it be understood, soberly and rationally between us, that you are fighting to gratify a sex instinct which I cannot share; to procure benefits which I have not shared and probably will not share; but not to gratify my instincts, or to protect either myself or my country. For', the outsider will say, 'in fact, as a woman, I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world.' […] Such then will be the nature of her 'indifference' and from this indifference certain actions must flow. She will bind herself to take no share in patriotic demonstrations; to assent to no form of national self-praise; to take no part of any claque or audience that encourages war; to absent herself from military displays, tournaments, tattoos, prize-givings and all such ceremonies as encourage the desire to impose 'our' civilisation or 'our' dominion upon other people" (Woolf 1977:125).

> whose bright undinted cheek looked back the rife
> wrinkles of Fanny Grove, a virtuous wife
> for five-and-twenty years and polishing still,
> and the cracked teapot on the window sill
> of sluttish, sickly, smiling Jenny Prince,
> of all save love of flowers deflowered long since.
> Gentle and simple, shamed and proud, she served
> (Warner 2008:177)

The ultimate act of female solidarity, which also makes up the climax of the poem, is however Rebecca's visit to the village churchyard, in order to check that the wreaths she made for the funeral of Bet Merley, the now deceased mother of seven children, are still on her grave. Bet, who had breast cancer, is another of the anonymous female inhabitants in the village resurrected in the poem, a woman who was "bandaged in oblivion of morphia, moaned and vomited, and died" (Warner 2008:183). In a revealing, if macabre flashback, a race develops between Bet and an old "patriarch" who is also dying. The question is who will go first. The value of their lives is put into sharp, gendered contrast by Warner, as Bet's cancer is linked to the breastfeeding of her seventh child, a disturbing image of motherhood, at once as giver of life and carrier of death:

> What though the patriarch was stale in vice,
> renowned for ancient rape and present lice,
> and Bet had held her head up with the best
> until her seventh bit her in the breast
> and graffed a cancer there?
> (Warner 2008:183)

In a graveside encounter with Bet's ghost, a scene that forms part of the 'truthful' pastoral corrective of the poem, Rebecca is confronted with a narrative of birth, labour and death that is the lot of women in the village. Ostensibly, this is an aspect of the poem that is reminiscent of Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Church Yard*, but without the pastoral consolation of Gray's reassurance that the "rude Forefathers of the Hamlet sleep", finally at rest from their toil. If Gray's "short and simple Annals of the Poor" projects an enobling image of humble village men, Warner writes back at this gendered trope by counter-posing the grim rural reality of a working woman's life:

'What is this talk of flowers? No flowers are here.'
'Yet sorrowing neighbours laid them on your bier.'
'Neighbours I have who nothing feel for me.'
'In course of time they'll grow more neighbourly.'
'Time may the living ease; us it helps not.'
'You should lie easy now, your cares forgot.'
'My cares were me. While I endure, so they.'
'Ay, you'd a mort of troubles in your day.'
'And seven my womb drove out, like days to know.'
'The seventh was avenged on you, if so.'
'Life grinds the axe, however we may end.'
'Are all the dead doleful as you, my friend?'
'How are the living? Look in your own heart.
Farewell.'

(Warner 2008:187-8)

Symbolically, the poem ends with an apocalyptic image of Rebecca drinking her last bottles of gin on Bet's grave as the storm rages about them, anointing herself and the soil with alcohol and then fading into frozen death in a sisterhood of self-sacrifice. A similarly defiant note of fallen female identification is voiced by Warner earlier on as the narrator of the poem where she refers to herself as: "I […] a sister-soul to my slut heroine" (Warner 2008:169). It is also this community of ordinary women in life and in death that situates their poetic rehabilitation within a lesbian continuum of recovered female experience. The figure of Rebecca is without doubt one of Warner's most powerful poetic portrayals of a woman who is both victim and virago, one who nevertheless succeeds in carving out a corner for herself within the confines of patriarchal society. The poem represents therefore a decisive first stage in Warner's deployment of a radical feminist aesthetic in her 1930s writing.

In Warner's and Ackland's collection of love poems, *Whether a Dove or Seagull*, published two years after *Opus 7*, the lesbian continuum is taken another significant step further, both socially and sexually, by two women writers who turn the intimacies of their life together on the margins of a country village into transgressive art. The collection stands, moreover, as the most explicit, personal commitment to lesbian love that Warner ever came to make in her writing. In the next section, I want to look more closely at the lesbian personae that these pioneering poems seek to construct.

Women and Love: Whether a Dove or Seagull
In her critical reassessment of the work of women poets in the 1930s, Jane Dowson places Warner's and Ackland's candid, poetic collaboration within a gender-bending tradition of lesbian literary correspondence:

> Poems about shared loved are remarkably few and difficult to categorise. There is nothing of the confessional, even if there is conversational intimacy. The love songs of Valentine Ackland and Sylvia Townsend Warner, such as in the title poem of *Whether a Dove or a Seagull* [sic] are the most lyrical. These, like some by Vita Sackville-West, should be read in the light of a lesbian aesthetic of mutuality and coded declaration. (Dowson 1996:22)

Wendy Mulford also describes their compilation of poems as forming "part of a continuing dialogue between the two lovers" (Mulford 1988:50). In the same vein, Harman characterises the book as a "conversation between two intriguingly different voices" (Harman 2008:5). While agreeing with this point about the intimate reciprocity of the poems, I myself want to explore in what particular ways the collection contributes more tangibly to a lesbian continuum in terms of its poetic elaboration of woman-identified experience. After the depiction of the implicit ties of solidarity between working women in *Opus 7*, the poems in *Whether a Dove or Seagull* take the continuum to the very core of shared lesbian existence and consciousness. Here we find not only a coming out of women as lesbians, but also a bold attempt to translate the sensibilities of homosexual love into the literary craft of poetry.

The volume was first published in America in 1933, collectively attributed to "T. W. and V. A.", and then reissued in Britain the following year, together with a key to the actual authorship of each of the poems. It was a political as well as a poetic decision, reflecting the response of the two writers to the challenges of collective commitment in the 1930s. The most important underlying themes of the poems dramatise both this oppressive political situation, as well as the contrasting emotional and physical liberation of their new-found love. The tension can be seen in several of the poetic exchanges in the collection in which the two women cling together in a literal and metaphorical night that is filled with pain, conflict and death. It is the microcosm of their bedroom that seems at first to offer shelter from the

storm, but which provides only a temporary respite from the troubled world outside:

> But to wake at night with the wind blowing,
> With time flowing,
> With cancers growing,
> To look this way and that, from nation to nation,
> To see desolation,
> Battle and starvation,
> To search the mind for what is left it,
> Since cold cleft it,
> Or base use bereft it,
> And then to turn and see the loved one sleeping,
> And know doom creeping,
> Is to fall – Oh, is to fall a-weeping!
> (Quoted in Ackland 2008:54)

In the poem that follows, Ackland responds by projecting a mirror-image of the limitations of love to displace this condition of political and existential angst. It is also one of several occasions in the collection where the poems have clearly been arranged together in order to create a dialogue of night thoughts and feelings that balances between desire, doubt and the demands of their shared social conscience:

> Open your arms to me,
> Open your eyes, to see
> What crowd of misery
> Invades me ceaselessly.
>
> Wild things cry aloud:
> 'No rest for the proud – '
> Let be your bright head bowed
> Over me –
> And cover me –
> Lest your eyes discover me
> You, my mistress, cover me
> With your gleaming shroud
> (Quoted in Ackland 2008:54)

As part of this poetic interrogation of the power of lesbian love, there are also a number of overtly erotic poems that explore the tentative expressions of the physical aspects of their relationship. These appear as part of a secret nocturnal life that the two women cultivate behind closed

doors. Warner also muses about the impression they might have made as they walked out together in the village "paired in spring as the cuckoos do" (In Ackland 2008:93). At the same time, it is a sign of the social invisibility of lesbians that many people, including reviewers of the collection, often mistook Valentine for a man. There was however one notable exception: the American poet, Robert Frost, to whom the volume was originally dedicated. Frost was horrified by the "more physical poems in the book", and requested not to be connected further with it. Writing to the critic, Louis Untermeyer, Frost admitted to his sense of disgust and fear of castration on reading the book:

> Don't you find the contemplation of their kind of collusion emasculating? I am chilled to the marrow, as in the actual presence of some foul form of death where none of me can function, not even my habitual interest in versification. This to you. But what can I say to them? (Quoted in Harman 1988:133)

It was poems like the following, written by Ackland, that produced such a homophobic shock in Frost. In a mixture of strikingly anomalous metaphors of technology, geography and sexuality that are influenced by both Metaphysical and Futurist poetry, Ackland contrasts the binaries of rational and emotional, capture and release, active and passive in the sensual exploration of the female body:

> The eyes of body, being blindfolded by night,
> Refer to the eyes of mind – at brain's command
> Study imagination's map, then order out a hand
> To journey forth as deputy for sight.
>
> Thus and by these ordered ways
> I come to you – Hand deft and delicate
> To trace the suavely laid and intricate
> Route of your body's maze.
>
> My hand, being deft and delicate, displays,
> Unerring judgment, cleaves between your thighs
> Clean, as a ray-directed airplane flies.
>
> Thus I, within these strictly ordered ways,
> Although blindfolded, seize with more than sight
> Your moonlit meadows and your shadowed night.
> (Quoted in Ackland 2008:46)

Once again in reply, Warner herself plays upon the alliterative elusiveness of lesbian identity that is suggested by the L-word followed by three dots, almost like an abbreviated love that dare not speak its name. There is certainly an intended pun on the pronunciation of the letter L, which in French sounds like "elle", meaning either she or her (the poem also contains the old French word 'demoiselle', denoting young lady).[4] Moreover, for someone like Warner, who had been heterosexual for the first twenty years or so of her adult life, the poem recalls her wonder at falling in love with Valentine Ackland, whose androgynous persona was clearly a revelation to her. It was the great love of Warner's life, love with a capital L, rebellious and exotic, with Valentine metamorphosed as an elemental force of nature:

> Loved with an L…
> Lynx-eyed and leopard-thew,
> Whom first I knew
> Like the crane demoiselle
> Long-legged and prim.
> Limber in love and light
> As lambs that dance in white,
> Unmatchable delight
> Of lip and limb;
> Leda for hue, and fell
> As lioness to smite
> With lust's renew.
> Now, for the world's spite
> What more shall I tell?
> Loved with an L…
>   (Quoted in Ackland 2008:96)

This aspect of the lesbian continuum connects with another theme in the collection to which they both often return. Although the poems focus mainly on the inner world of two lovers cocooning in a small cottage, their relationship is also linked to the seasons, to a love that responds to the changing times. They both seek therefore to depict the dynamic of their feelings as something correspondingly natural, integrated and authentic in their daily lives. Warner, for instance, recycles the classic

---

[4] Warner was a fluent speaker of French and later acclaimed translator of the work of Marcel Proust.

trope of locating their love in an organic impulse, one that was rooted both in nature and nurture:

> This sapling love
> That you by chance have planted
> In me, unwanted,
> Shall never wander or remove
>
> Out of my grief;
> Thence it shall thrust and nourish
> Till it is flourished
> With steadfast power of limb and leaf.
>
> Stray as you will
> Through time and into distance
> It with insistence,
> Unmoved, shall follow you, until
>
> Being full-grown
> It touch you into its tether,
> And we together
> Under my shade and banner of love lie down.
>   (Quoted in Ackland 2008:83)

In contrast to this image of love's exclusive introversion, there is also, as I have indicated, an urge to reach out to another world, one that is not so private and secure. As in *Opus 7*, this takes the form of short, poetic sketches of other women, usually working-class, whose lives are more constrained by the hardship of domestic work in cottages that have very few amenities. The condition of the rural poor became the focus of Warner's and Ackland's first public activism together, involving them in campaigns for the rights of village wives and serving girls, against the long working hours of farm labourers, the low wages, the lack of health care and schools. Apart from in their poetry, this commiment culminated in the radical sociological study that Ackland published herself in 1936, *Country Conditions*, which Mulford describes as a "handbook setting out all the disadvantages the agricultural worker suffered, in work, housing, transport, education, health, wages and social life" (Mulford 1988:79). In another poem in the collection, "Being Watched", Warner connects herself to a tradition of struggle of women to cultivate gardens that provide fruit, berries and vegetables for the table, a task that is seen in terms of "warfare [...] taken on with weeds". More compellingly, she

imagines herself being observed by the former female occupants of the cottage, with whom she shares a sisterhood of physical labour among women throughout history. The ghosts of these nameless housewives, who have coaxed the same reluctant soil, gather while she digs, creating a continuum of truculent female experience and consciousness:

> 'I fought these twining foes my lifetime through:
> Now they have shackled you.'
> I raise my eyes to confront the darkened air,
> And other watchers are there.
> Us with indifferent contented gaze
> The empty house surveys.
> The hedgerow ash its gossip with the wind
> Breaks off a while to find
> New talking matter in a comparison
> Of her newcome, her gone.
> 'One woman or another, 'tis no odds,
> Now this one grubs and plods,
> Much as the other did who now stands by.'
> 'No odds,' the weeds reply;
> And silently plum-tree and apple-tree
> Reach on, and root in me.
>
> (Quoted in Ackland 2008:100)

Thus, the figure of Rebecca comes back to haunt Warner's poetry also in this new context. Warner's identification with women who eek out a living from the soil, often demonised for their trouble, reverberates through several of her poems in the collection, most evocatively in "Wintry is this April, with endless Whine". Once more, Warner imagines an encounter with an older woman in a garden, preparing the ground for planting. In this very much down-to-earth vignette, Warner documents the life of a working woman, with whom she clearly feels a strong affinity, both because of her physical toughness and ostracized social status. As in previous poems, Warner oscillates between positive and negative images of the earth, sometimes seeing it as a source of spiritual regeneration, at others as a physical enemy to be fought but never completely conquered. Repeatedly, however, she shows her awareness that labour on the land was no idyllic pastime, but a hard-won battle for survival, not least in the growing of garden crops that was traditionally the task of the women:

I passed the house
Where under sagging thatch dwells she whom all
Think witch, and call
Grannie – though she goes light-foot as a girl
Under her threescore years and ten. There,
With wind-wisped hair
Straggling under hat rammed down, and roughshod
Small foot on spade, obstinate to the blast,
The ill day's last
Opponent, she worked her winter ground for spring.

Above the wind rang the spade's stroke on flint,
As she by dint
Of versed limb's long cunning clod after clod
Wrenched from the sullen hold of earth and turned
Backward and spurned
Free of her steel, and with the wind were borne
Her grunts, angry and triumphing, as though she laboured a foe
                    (Quoted in Ackland 2008:35)

The lesbian relationship between Warner and Ackland, of which the poems in *Whether a Dove or Seagull* were a literary celebration, proved without doubt a turning-point in their political and writing careers. After joining the Communist Party, they became in Mulford's phrase "Writers in arms", both literally and metaphorically (Mulford 1988:70). Not only did they use their writing and speaking talents to promote the struggle against fascism and for socialism. When the Spanish Civil War broke out in 1936, they refused to just sit on the sidelines, volunteering instead to serve at the front as part of an ambulance unit in Barcelona. Warner herself became an executive member of the *International Association of Writers for the Defence of Culture*, attending conferences in London, Paris and Madrid, while the civil war still raged in Spain, where she argued for active solidarity in deed as well as in word.

The 1930s was also a prolific period of literary production for Warner, resulting in two of her most overtly political novels – *Summer Will Show* in 1936 and *The Death of Don Juan* in 1938. The first was set in Paris during the revolutionary uprising of 1848, the second was what she herself called "a political fable" (Quoted in Mulford 1988:124), based on the Spanish Civil War. *Summer Will Show* is certainly her most ambitious and elaborate feminist work of fiction, detailing the complex historical dialectic of lesbian love and revolutionary political activism. It

represents the culmination of Warner's contribution to a literary dramatisation of the lesbian continuum.

Women and Revolution: Summer Will Show

In her introduction to a recent reprint of Warner's *Summer Will Show*, Claire Harman makes another rather surprising disclaimer, in light of the previous feminist discussion of Warner's work, that, in her view, the story is not primarily concerned with either sexual or socialist politics: "Just as this lesbian novel refuses to unpick and categorize the characters' sexuality, so there is no special pleading on behalf of the author's own political ideology" (Harman 2009:x). Although she admits, using a curiously disdainful metaphor, that "we may see 1936 poking its face through the fabric, a reminder that Warner wrote *Summer Will Show* of and for her own troubled times. The ultimate message is, however, a fatalistic and pessimistic one", that is of the delusions of revolutionary social change (Harman 2009:xv). More perceptively, Maroula Joannou emphasizes instead the radical co-relation between the themes of gender and social liberation in the novel: "The issues of sexual and political revolution in *Summer Will Show* are seen to be inextricably linked and the one to be a prerequisite for the other" (Joannou 1998:100). Although Joannou does not explore this critical observation in any detail, she has nevertheless put her finger on what is a pivotal point in the novel. Using the concept of the lesbian continuum, it is possible to develop her comment further and argue that the gender war that is waged against Sophia by her husband, who cheats on her, abandons her, strips her of her income and takes away her children, is a personal projection of the 1848 class war in France, into which Sophia is also drawn. Thus, the sexual attraction that Sophia subsequently feels towards Minna, the charismatic ex-mistress of her husband, and the radical political involvement that Minna also represents, are intimately bound together in the novel. Moreover, this aspect of the gendered experience of these women provides the basis for their becoming both lesbian lovers and revolutionary activists together. Paris offers therefore not merely a physical escape route for Sophia from the prison-house of her marriage in England, but also the possibility for her to free herself psychologically, socially and sexually from the constrictions of heteronormative convention.

Ostensibly, the starting point of Sophia's transformation is her decision to leave her privileged, but pointless, domesticity in Dorset and go to Paris to confront her husband's mistress, Minna. Her desire to have an illegitimate child of her own is also an indication of her desperate determination to break with her past. Instead, her encounter with Minna leads to her questioning much more than her own personal submission to male authority. It is Minna who helps her gain an understanding of the patriarchal structures that have determined her life as a woman, a wife and a mother:

> 'You have run away,' said Minna placidly. 'You'll never go back now, you know. I've encouraged a quantity of people to run away, but I have never seen any one so decisively escaped as you.' […]
> 'But what have I run away from?'
> 'From sitting bored among the tyrants. From Sunday Schools, and cold-hearted respectability, and hypocrisy, and prison.
> 'And domesticity,' she added, stepping out of the dusters. (Warner 2009:179)

It is however not only her husband's male chauvinist behaviour that compels Sophia to see herself in new ways, but also the concomitant destabilising of her own heterosexual female identity. It is the discovery of her physical attraction to and desire for Minna as a woman that is the catalyst that changes everything. Without the shame or moral misgivings Sophia feels about her own marriage, their relationships awakens the passionate, spontaneous and sensuous sides of Sophia's nature that have previously remained dormant:

> Never in her life had she felt such curiosity or dreamed it possible. As though she had never opened her eyes before she stared at the averted head, the large eloquent hands, the thick, milk-coffee coloured throat that housed the siren voice. Her curiosity went beyond speculation, a thing not of the brain but in the blood. It burned in her like a furnace, with a steadfast compulsive heat that must presently catch Minna in its draught, hale her in, and devour her. (Warner 2009:120)

Although the scenes of love-making between the two women are discreetly drawn in the novel, it is nevertheless this sexual conversion that opens up a life that is radically different, liberating and satisfying to Sophia. It is this new-found freedom that encourages her to question her own class prejudice and eventually embrace the libertarian ideas that Minna advocates. A parallel is therefore intimated between Sophia's coming out as a lesbian and the struggle for an alternative world that is

going on outside in the streets. Thus, Warner weaves together the personal and the political conflicts through the psychological tensions between individual and collective in the story. In both contexts, the novel articulates a historically grounded, yet utopian desire for a different way of life, where social inequalities are redressed, but more significantly, human relations are transformed.

At the beginning of her relationship with Minna, however, Sophia thinks only of her own personal liberation: "I am fascinated, she thought. I have never known such freedom, such exhilaration, as I taste in her presence" (Warner 2009:183). It is her dramatic loss of marital status and demotion into the ranks of the dispossessed that fundamentally challenge her aristocratic attitudes. Her rather melodramatic experience as an unsuccessful street singer also triggers a radical shift in consciousness. Being drawn into political activism is seen therefore as a logical consequence of her social descent, even though it is once again Minna who functions as the female principle of conscious resistance in the narrative, the one who explains the radical transcendence of Sophia's new life. This personal revelation also corresponds to the symbolic coming-to-fruition that the title of the novel suggests, *Summer Will Show*:

> '/I/t is not true, Minna, that I have left Frederick and renounced my income because my sympathies are with the Revolution. I am here as I am because I saw a chance of being happy and took it. As for the Revolution, when I smacked my husband's face and sent him to the devil, I never gave it a thought.
> 'Anyhow,' she added, countering a look of triumph on Minna's face, 'I had done with Frederick long before. The smack was only a postscript.'
> 'You had done with Frederick, yes. But what is that? So had I. So had dozens of other women. To give up a thing or a person, that is of no significance. It is when you put out your hand for something else, something better, that you declare yourself. And though you may think you have chosen me, Sophia, or chosen happiness, it is the Revolution you have chosen.' (Warner 2009:226-7)

Sophia's trajectory starts with her alienated condition as the personal property of her upper-class husband: "/T/o think that the stables and sheepfolds and kennels of Blandamer House had not produced a more vigorous or better-trained animal than she" (Warner 2009:9). However, instead of remaining a thoroughbred servant, she strives to become a fully human being whose existence is validated by the control that she gains over her own body. Living on the margins of class society and

beyond the norms of heterosexual behaviour, her increasingly compromised status as a lady is depicted in inverse proportion to the physical and emotional freedom she experiences as an independent woman:

> The decorum of class had gone, the probity of class had gone too […] With a step she had ranged herself among the *mauvais sujets*, the outlaws of society who live for their own way and by their own wits. There had been no tedium about her fall, and with a flash every false obligation was gone. […] Her happiness, blossoming in her so late and so defiantly, seemed of an immortal kind. (Warner 2009:235-6)

Warner's novel is historical in that it is set in the past, but there is also a more modern Marxist consideration of residual, dominant and emergent ideology that goes beyond its specific 19th century context.[5] Different levels of political and gender awareness are reflected in the narrative. This is something Warner saw herself as a prerequisite for writing historical fiction: "There were tolerable Marxists before Marx. But they were before Marx. And a historical novelist who includes (and I think the historical novelist should) the economic ground-base, must simultaneously recognise the social-economic variations which move that ground-base […] The historical novelist cannot dodge the obligation, so it seems to me, of knowing pretty accurately how people clothed their minds" (Warner 2012c:270). There are certainly elements in both

---

[5] These categories of residual and emergent aspects of culture are usually associated with Raymond Williams, who discusses them at length in his book, *Marxism and Literature* (1977). In an earlier essay, Williams defines the two concepts in the following terms: "I have next to introduce a further distinction, between residual and emergent forms, both of alternative and of oppositional culture. By 'residual' I mean that some experiences, meanings and values, which cannot be verified or cannot be expressed in terms of the dominant culture, are nevertheless lived and practised on the basis of the residue - cultural as well as social - of some previous social formation [...] By 'emergent' I mean, first, that new meanings and values, new practices, new significances and experiences, are continually being created. But there is then a much earlier attempt to incorporate them, just because they are part - and yet not a defined part - of contemporary pratice. Indeed it is significant in our own period how very early this attempt is, how alert the dominant culture now is to anything that can be seen as emergent. We have then to see, first, as it were a temporal relation between a dominant culture and on the one hand a residual and on the other hand an emergent culture" (Williams 2001:170-1).

Minna's and Sophia's consciousness of class and gender that appear somewhat before their time.[6] Of course, Warner is also writing back at the contemporary political conflicts of the 1930s, showing how revolutions throw up ideas that connect both to the past and the future.[7] However, it is at such liminal junctures in her development within the lesbian continuum that Sophia is shown making a leap towards a higher level of feminist awareness. There is therefore a dialectical link made between a woman's marginalization as a lesbian and the sort of situated knowledge that this social and sexual position makes available. As Adrienne Rich also notes:

> By the same token, we can say that there is a *nascent* feminist political content in the act of choosing a woman lover or life partner in the face of institutionalized heterosexuality. But for lesbian existence to realize this political content in an ultimately liberating form, the erotic choice must deepen and expand into conscious woman identification – into lesbian feminism. (Rich 1994:66)

In Sophia's case, she comes to understand more clearly how the personal deepens the meaning of the political. Thus, she goes from being a foot soldier of the revolution, smuggling ammunition and political pamphlets, to seeking a greater theoretical grasp of its strategies of struggle. She begins therefore to intervene herself in the debates, sometimes in order to question the opinions of the leaders, most of whom are men. At one point for example, both Minna and herself reach the same prescient critical conclusion about the shortcomings of this male leadership, whose decisions will have such dire consequences for the revolution:

---

[6] The novel also contains other more tangibly anachronistic details, such as the fact that on the last page of the book, Sophia reads from the opening paragraph of the *Communist Manifesto* in English in the 1888 translation by Samuel Moore, which begins with the famous words: "A spectre is haunting Europe - the spectre of Communism". The very first version in English of the *Manifesto* was translated by Helen Macfarlane and published in 1850, still too late for Sophia to read it in 1848, however. Macfarlane's translation also begins: "A frightful hobgoblin stalks through Europe. We are haunted by a ghost, the ghost of Communism". See further, Rowbotham 1998:3.

[7] I use the term "writing back" in the same post-colonial sense of engaging with the dominant ideological discourse of the time. See further Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2002:6.

'Yes, I know about lock-outs. It is a device often used in England. But are you going to stand it?' [Sophia] enquired.
'No!' said the man.
'No,' said Minna.
'Decision is a great deal,' pondered Sophia. 'But not quite sufficient. I think you would do well to get rid of some of your ridiculous leaders for a start.'
'That idea has occurred to us also, as it happens. The more so, since we do not consider them our leaders. At first, our go-betweens; and now, for some time, our betrayers.' (Warner 2009:250).

Similarly, in the key political discussion about "Bread or Lead", that is reform or revolution, Sophia searches herself for ideological clarification, before taking a stand of her own: "Now into the most outrageous rumours and theories the question of the workless penetrated, and those words, *Bread or Lead*, clanged through every conversation. Sophia found herself believing, arguing, theorising, with the rest" (Warner 2009:283). Although this is undoubtedly a novel of historical ideas, one of the strengths of Warner's depiction of the 1848 revolution in Paris is that its conflicts and contradictions do not merely make up the backcloth of the plot, but are dramatised through the clash of intellectual and emotional responses of the characters themselves, in particular those of the women.

In the end, after fighting herself on the barricades and witnessing Minna being bayoneted in the breast, it is Sophia who is left to deal with the consequences of the revolutionary defeat. Thus, the novel concludes with a contrasting set of images that both hark back to the isolated and frustrated woman she once was and the personification of female agency she has become. It is a point in the novel that could easily have become psychologically simplistic and ideologically reductive, but is left deftly in the balance of personal confusion and radical political hope:

Ah, here in this empty room where she had felt such impassioned happiness, such freedom, such release, she was already feeling exactly as she had felt before she loved Minna, and wrapping herself as of old in that coward's comfort of irony, of cautious disillusionment! How soon her blood had run cold, how ready she was to slink back into ignominy of thought, ignominy of feeling! […] She took up one of the copies, fingered the cheap paper, sniffed the heavy odour of printer's ink, began to read. […]
'*A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of Communism.* […]
'*Communism is now recognised by all European Powers to be itself a power.*

'It is high time that Communists should lay before the whole world their point of view, their aims and tendencies, and set against this spectre of Communism a Manifesto of the Party itself.'
She seated herself; and leaning her elbows on the table, and sinking her head in her hands, went on reading, obdurately attentive and by degrees absorbed.
(Warner 2009:328-9)

Thus, the novel closes on a note of critical reflection, of Sophia's need to come to terms with her sense of profound individual loss and new-found political conviction. As at the start of her story, she finds herself once more alone. However, the difference is that now she has been part of a counter-culture of rebellious women and men, who have tried to live together in solidarity, against the tyranny of conventional social habit. Moreover, her love for Minna remains a challenge to heteronormative practice, a defiant memory that continues to pose the potentially utopian question: what if?

Thus, Warner's novel not only extends the experience of female bonding in her writing, it also stands as a fictional testimony to a lesbian continuum of gender-based resistance. Sophia's liberation encapsulates what Adrienne Rich has herself identified as the essential driving force behind this continuum: the struggle of women to recover the power over their own personal and sexual identity. There is, moreover, an intrinsic link between the political and the erotic, in that the trajectory of the lesbian continuum involves different forms of resistance to compulsory heterosexuality: "/W/e can connect these rebellions and the necessity for them with the physical passion of woman for woman which is central to lesbian existence: the erotic sensuality which has been, precisely, the most violently erased fact of female experience" (Rich 1994:57). *Summer Will Show* is Warner's greatest tribute to this radical lesbian tradition of dissenting women.

*

It is these woman-identified values that inspired Warner's own literary pursuit of the deviant lesbian condition, past and present. My discussion of this female consciousness, sometimes oblique and at others more explicit, in her early 1930s work has therefore been based on the same radical feminist rationale. I hope moreover that my adaptation of Adrienne Rich's concept of the lesbian continuum has shown how

relevant this can be in illuminating more fully aspects of Warner's writing that have previously been blurred or ignored by other critics. In an article she published in *Left Review* in 1936, Warner wrote about her view of the essential social function of literary criticism: "A literary critique is not merely concerned with literature. As literature is concerned with living, its criticism must have a life interest also, must express an outlook on behaviour and social conditions" (Warner 1936:178). In my own approach to Warner's lesbian literary project I have tried to remain true to the spirit of this radically oriented, critical practice.

References

Ackland, Valentine. 2008. *Journey from Winter: Selected Poems*. Manchester: Carcanet.

Ashcroft, Bill & Griffiths, Gareth & Tiffin, Helen. 2002. *The Empire Strikes Back: theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*. London: Routledge.

Bowden, Peta & Mummery, Jane. 2009. *Understanding Feminism*. Stocksfield: Acumen.

Dowson, Jane. 1996. *Women's Poetry of the 1930s: A Critical Anthology*. London: Routledge.

Fuss, Diana. 1989. *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference*. London: Routledge.

Gonda, Caroline. 1998. "Lesbian Theory". In Jackson, Stevi & Jones, Jackie. *Contemporary Feminist Theories*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. pp. 113-130.

Harman, Claire. 1991. *Sylvia Townsend Warner: A Biography*. London: Minerva.

Joannou, Maroula. 1998. "Sylvia Townsend Warner in the 1930s". In *A Weapon in the Struggle: The Cultural History of the Communist Party in Britain*. Edited by Andy Croft. London: Pluto Press. pp. 89-105.

Joannou, Maroula. 2006. Preface to *Critical Essays on Sylvia Townsend Warner, English Novelist 1893-1978*. Edited by Gill Davies, David Malcolm & John Simons. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press. pp. i-v.

Kaplan, Cora. 1986. *Sea Changes: Culture and Feminism*. London: Verso.

Mulford, Wendy. 1988. *This Narrow Place. Sylvia Townsend Warner and Valentine Ackland: Life, Letters and Politics 1930-1951*. London: Pandora.

Rowbotham, Sheila. 1998. "Dear Mr Marx: A Letter from a Socialist Feminist". In *The Communist Manifesto Now: Socialist Register 1998*. Edited by Leo Panitch & Colin Leys. Rendlesham: The Merlin Press.

Rich, Adrienne. 1994. "Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence". In *Blood, Bread and Poetry: Selected Prose*. New York: Norton.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 1931. *Opus 7*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 1936. "Competition in Criticism". In *Left Review*. January 1936. Volume 2. pp. 178-9.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 1982. *Letters*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 1989. *After the Death of Don Juan*. London: Virago Press.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 1994. *The Diaries of Sylvia Townsend Warner*. Edited by Claire Harman. London: Chatto & Windus.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 2008. *Sylvia Townsend Warner: New Collected Poems*. Edited by Claire Harman. Manchester: Carcanet.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 2009. *Summer Will Show*. New York: New York Review Books.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 2012a. *Lolly Willowes*. London: Virago Press.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 2012b. *The Corner that Held Them.* London: Virago Press.

Warner, Sylvia Townsend. 2012c. *With The Hunted. Selected Writings*. Edited by Peter Tolhurst. Norwich: Black Dog Books.

Williams, Raymond. 2001. *The Raymond Williams Reader*. Edited by John Higgins. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

Woolf, Virginia. 1977. *Three Guineas*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

Resisting the Hero's Tale: The Trope of the Cowardly Soldier in the Literature of the Great War

Cristina Pividori, TecnoCampus (Universitat Pompeu Fabra)

Abstract
Among the experiences of otherness that unsettled the imperial trope of the warrior hero, this paper focuses on the representation of the coward in three autobiographical responses to the Great War. By following the traces of the malingerer, the deserter and the psychologically injured soldier in Herbert's *The Secret Battle* (1919), Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929) and Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930), the hero-other distinction induced by Victorian standards will be explored as a popular theme that becomes problematic on the Western front, as the figure of the (heroic) self and of the (antiheroic) other start to move away from the rigidity of the binary system. While Herbert, Aldington and Manning keep a strong component of their own class and patriotic identity both in their novels and in their lives, the Great War experience suggests the possibility of removing the association traditionally maintained between heroism and the Victorian notions of manliness. Such openness not only challenges the norm, but paves the way for the elaboration of a new sense of heroic selfhood. Particular attention is given to the representation of the shell-shocked soldier as a site of struggle and negotiation between the trope of cowardice and its reality.

Key words: trope; hero; coward; shell-shock; masculinity

1. Introduction

The trope of the soldier as a warrior hero, whose essential traits were physical strength, courage and aggression, on the one hand, and a moral dimension to justify war on the other, was a dominant paradigm in the literary construction of the heroic masculine ideal that prevailed in mid- to late-nineteenth century Britain and in the years prior to the Great War. The depiction of masculine traits as innate essences, unchanging and ahistorical, derived from an overemphasis on an essentialist view of male roles, the function of which was to divide, separate, and thus manage masculinities based on a binary opposition between the (heroic) self and the (antiheroic) other.[1] In the context of this Manichean confrontation,

---

[1] Essentialist theories of gender—in opposition to what has been called "constructionism" or "social construction of masculine identity" (Gilmore 1990: 1; Connell, 2005: 67-70; Kimmel 2004: 93-116)—assert that "masculine or feminine traits are innate (essences) in the individual" (Buchbinder 1994: 4).

the representation of the warrior hero was thus constructed against "a negative stereotype"—embodied by women, cowards, homosexuals and the omnipresent military enemy— that "failed to measure up to the ideal" and projected "the exact opposite of true masculinity" (Mosse 1996: 6). Blurring this type of distinction, which Thompson calls "bonding-by-exclusion" (1982: 176), seemed to invoke chaos and defeat. As British colonial expansion continued into the twentieth century, together with the military demands and the need to perpetuate the status quo, the blank acceptance of the idea that "by not being Others we define ourselves" (Barkan 1994: 180) started to reveal the anxieties behind the traditional concepts of manliness.

In fact it was the encounter with modern warfare and with the unprecedented scale of death during the Great War that acted as the final straw in the subversion of the apparently stable imperial discourse. While still promoted through the use of uniforms, the pride in the regiment and the remembrance of the fallen, this binary system, whereby the British soldier had the right to assume superiority over the antiheroic-other, started to raise questions and concerns about the rule making process. The borderlines between 'the hero' and 'the other' either disappeared or shifted sharply; the meaning of 'them' started to be seen as a variation of the meaning of 'us' and the alterity of the other could not be always secured. As Barrell suggests, "what at first is seen as the other—utterly foreign, repugnant, disgusting—is 'made over the side of the self'" (qtd in Steedman 1995: 72).

Among the experiences of otherness that unsettled the normative image of the British soldier, this paper focuses on the representation of the coward. In Hadlock's words, "the coward is a telling figure, in every sense" (2006: 239). The idea of cowardice as providing an exact mirror of the anxieties and fears of the soldier hero is distinctive of World War One literature. The coward is an outsider that inspires fear and rejection

---

This essentialist approach to gender was a constant in Victorian literature and allowed for the construction of the binary oppositions that distinguished warrior-heroes from the others—females, cowards and enemies— and made them appear either as the protectors or seducers of women or as the feared enemies of other men (Buchbinder 1994: 3; Mosse 1996: 9; Braudy 2003: 24). Consequently, Victorian writers and readers were encouraged to praise forms of heroism that not only excluded women but—because of their racial, class and ideological components—also excluded large numbers of men.

and is always stereotyped in much the same manner as it faces the accepted norm; yet it also internalizes the need to incorporate certain non-normative aspects into the soldier's experience. My contention is that the exploration of the figure of the cowardly soldier demands a reconceptualisation of the concept of the heroic self in more significant and subtle ways than have been acknowledged by dominant narratives. In that sense then, the coward emerges as an agent of resistance, embodying the conscious or unconscious abandonment of pre-war ideals of manly behaviour. By following the traces of the cowardly soldier—in the representation of the malingerer, the deserter and the psychologically injured soldier—I will explore how the hero-other distinction induced by Victorian standards became problematic during the Great War, as both hero and other start to move away from the rigidity of the binary system.

In order to develop my arguments I will focus on three autobiographical responses to the Great War, Herbert's *The Secret Battle* (1919), Aldington's *Death of a Hero* (1929) and Manning's *Her Privates We* (1930). The three texts share a common theme: Herbert's Harry Penrose, Aldington's George Winterbourne and Manning's Bourne are similarly affected by the war, exhibiting the type of stoic resistance that may have won them a Victoria Cross, yet, their power of action is driven too far to resist the weight of war and they are turned into victims rather than heroes or, better said, into the victims-as-heroes. Although the three writers represented, enacted and reproduced the circulating codes of manhood both in their novels and in their lives—they came from middle-class and upper-middle-class backgrounds; they had been to public schools and served as officers at the front—their attitudes towards cowardice suggest the possibility of removing the association traditionally maintained between heroism and normative masculinity. Functionally, the presence of the cowardly soldier in the texts may be attributed to the need to distinguish it from proper male behaviour, yet it may also be read as the expression of the writers' own restrained impulses, as fear was the driving force behind their stories. In effect, as Scheunemann suggests, fear is not only "the emotion most intimately connected with war" but "fear and cowardice may appear to be too closely connected" (2012: 181). The three novels are structured around fear, or rather around the tension between the desire for and the fear of war.

Moreover, Winterbourne's suicide and Penrose's alleged desertion, which were essentially related to cowardice at the time, are in fact the result of severe war trauma. The question of "shell-shock," then, will be brought to the fore, not just as mental injury, but as a site of struggle between courageous and demonic stereotypes of military identity. The figure of the shell-shocked soldier becomes a metaphor that goes beyond the sense of oppression and futility that permeated the Great War experience. It has to do with certain masculine impulses and behaviours that departed from the hero's tale and revealed the tension between traditional gender roles and the private, emotional experience of war. My contention is that the appreciation of the wide spectrum of acts ranging from the courageous to the cowardly is critical to understand how cowardice is represented both as trope and reality in the literature of the Great War.

2. The Malingerer, the Deserter and the Shell-shocked Soldier

As a countertype to the hero, the trope of the coward goes back in time to Aristophanes' comedy *The Knights* in 424 BC, in which the cowardly soldier is first introduced as a purely comic type: Cleonymus was an Athenian general who dropped his shield in battle and fled. Whether in the form of a mock-hero or in a more tragic, evil or pitiful portrait, the coward has been a recurrent theme in literature, probably because manly courage has always had a heightened social dimension.[2] In the late

---

[2] Unlike Aristophanes' mock-heroic treatment of Cleonymus, Sir Walter Scott's *The Fair Maid of Perth* (1828) follows the tragic destruction of the coward. Self-aware and ashamed of his cowardice, Conacher commits suicide after fleeing a duel with Henry Gow, his rival for the hand of the fair maid Catherine Glover. In 1884, Guy de Maupassant takes his readers into the mind of another tragic coward. "Le lâche" was published in *Contes du jour et de la nuit* (1885) and tells the story of Vicomte Gontran-Joseph de Signoles. After what may be regarded as a mental duel with himself, the Vicomte commits suicide rather than face the fear of death. This is because duels were fought "for the sake of male honour, and the concept of honour was to last, associated with courage […] [T]o be called a coward was the worst insult" (Mosse 1996: 18), even worse than death. The representation of character traits contesting traditional representations of the heroic can also be seen in Shakespeare's plays. All the complexity of cowardice and courage is contained in the character of Hamlet who, faced with evidence that his uncle murdered his father, becomes too

nineteenth century, a New York Times editorial argued that "to be brave is as essential for a man as to be chaste is for a woman" and that "these fundamental points of honor are rigidly exacted in proportion to the elevation of society" ("The Crime of Cowardice" 1863). No matter how much the traditional masculine ideal has varied in detail, it has always served as a symbol for the hopes of society at large. Its enemies, then, are seen as the enemies of society as well, as the image of the courageous soldier willing 'to do his bit for King and country' has been built in opposition to all that this single standard of manhood is not.

Despite this alleged 'stark opposition' between the courageous and the cowardly, the history of literature has allowed for a more complex appreciation of what seems to be a highly subjective and disputable matter. The complexity of the so-called "unheroic modes" (Brombert 1999: 1) and the idea that the anti-hero emerges as "a special category of heroes" (Lubin 1968: 3) make it possible to suggest that perhaps the courageous was twinborn with the cowardly, that inherent to the classical heroic ideals was the human failure to achieve or at least to sustain those ideals: "Every hero has his weakness, and we may believe every coward has a point where he comes to bay and will fight the world" ("The Coward in Literature" 1909: 255).

The Victorian imperative to rebuke cowardice and embrace courage profoundly affected how soldiers behaved at the front. While performance in battle was especially subject to judgement in these terms,

---

indecisive and thoughtful for revenge yet too bold for suicide. Macbeth, on the other hand, can be regarded as a coward, if compared with Lady Macbeth, yet he is strong and brave as a soldier. As mentioned above, sometimes the coward serves as comedy relief. School stories dwell mockingly on the representation of the coward, particularly Thomas Anstey Guthrie's *Vice Versa: A Lesson to Fathers* (1882). By some magic trick, the amiable business man Paul Bultitude finds himself transformed into his son's person and expected to fight his battles in a boarding school ruled by the hated Dr. Grimstone. As to the cowardly villain, the rich Barney Newcome, in Thackeray's *The Newcomes* (1855), is a genuine Victorian specimen of the braggart type. Dickens' *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) brings about one of the most abject cowards: the hangman in Newgate prison. Edward Dennis' horror of being executed is in exact proportion to his enjoyment of inflicting death on others. Because of their unsettled roots, Jews were not only considered as outsiders, but as a prime target for cowardice; the Jew picture-dealer in Kipling's *The Light that Failed* (1890) is an interesting example.

the challenge to preserve and enhance manly reputation was an ongoing concern. It entailed both avoiding conduct that might have invited the charge of cowardice and keenly upholding manhood, often at the expense of other men. Those who, because of their unmanly behaviour, were regarded as cowards could not align with the genuine soldiers and were marginalised by the group. Of Lance-Corporal Miller, a deserter on the Somme who was now under arrest, Manning's Bourne feels "a wave of pity and repulsion" (Manning 1999: 122).[3] Miller is deemed to be inadequately masculine: "after one glance at that weak mouth and the furtive cunning of those eyes, Bourne distrusted him […] he had the look of a Hun" (123). Not only does his bodily structure differ from that of the rest of the men in the battalion, his mind is under suspicion as well: "he carried with him the contagion of fear" (122).

Miller symbolises physical and moral disorder. This dual cowardly dimension emerges from the equally dual personality of the hero—both strong body and pure soul—yet one-dimensionally perceived as a harmonious whole. Either because he is physically weak or because he was suspected of avoiding suffering, the spectacle or even the very idea of pain, Miller fails to measure up to proper male behaviour. Manning's judgment is maintained even after Miller's death sentence is commuted to penal servitude and he returns to duty: "'They ought to 'ave shot that bugger,' said Minton, indifferently; ''e's either a bloody spy or a bloody coward, an' 'e's no good to us either way'" (Manning 1999: 193). Yet, although the cowardly Miller constitutes a complication Bourne and his chums wish they did not have—"he was a ghost who unfortunately hadn't died" (123)—none of them would choose to be part of the firing squad. Conveniently, then, Miller vanishes once again on the eve to the next attack and so does the uncomfortable reminder of his cowardice. Miller's desertion becomes the vehicle through which Bourne vindicates the grim courage and endurance embodied in the figure of one of his pals, Weeper Smart:

---

[3] It is important to mention that desertion was rare; only "21 soldiers deserted out of every 10000" during the first year of the war and "the rate fluctuated around 6 and 9 for the rest of the war" (Bourke 1996: 80). However, Bourke adds that "forging signatures to ensure that they were miles away at zero-hour, getting another man to answer their names at roll call, dodging parades and slipping out of camp were habitual activities for many servicemen" (80).

> […] for no one could have had a greater horror and dread of war than Weeper had. It was a continuous misery to him, and yet he endured it. Living with him, one felt instinctively that in any emergency he would not let one down, that he had in him, curiously enough, an heroic strain. (Manning 1999: 193-194)

Manning stresses that "the interval between the actual cowardice of Miller, and the suppressed fear which even brave men felt before a battle, seemed rather a short one" (82), suggesting that given the most extreme conditions, anyone could break down. Yet it is the fearful Weeper Smart who carries Bourne back to the trenches when he is hit by a bullet at the very end of the book (246). In this sense, friendship emerges as a higher value, even higher than all forms of patriotic and idealistic exhortation. The difference between the cowardly Miller and Weeper Smart is that Weeper cares for his friends. The 'isms' for which Manning's Bourne is fighting become less important than himself and the men next to whom he fights. The quality of the ties emerging from the common experience favours a secret bond among Bourne and his chums, "a sense of having a collective, 'clandestine' self, which could not be made visible to those 'outside' the war" (Leed 1979: 113). Manning thus rejects those who, by their cowardly actions, betray this bond, and therefore attempt to challenge his idea of heroism. In that sense, his condemnation of cowardice goes beyond Miller; he blames those who made the decisions at the expense of the sufferings of the men in the ranks. Unlike Winterbourne and Penrose, Manning's Bourne was not an officer but "a man from the formally educated classes who […] decided to enlist as a ranker" (Parfitt 1988: 85), who bridged the gap between the soldiers and the high command to place himself on the most vulnerable side of the divide.[4]

---

[4] Manning came from a world of wealth and privilege, yet when the war broke out he enlisted in the King's Shropshire Regiment as "Private 19022" (this is how he first identified himself as an author) where he lived together and trained with the men in the ranks, mostly miners and farm labourers. He was selected for officer training, but failed the course. In 1916 he was sent to France with the 7th Battalion and had a few months at the front; there he experienced action at the Battle of the Somme and was promoted to lance-corporal. In 1917 he was posted to Ireland with a commission as a second lieutenant in the Royal Irish Regiment but did not get along with the other officers (he had a drinking problem, which led him into frequent fights). While the enigmatic Bourne is indeed endowed with most of the author's own qualities, artistic detachment was

Herbert makes this unbridgeable gap even more visible when he refers to those who, because of their physical and moral distance from the actual fighting, were only destined to be the negative countertype. Of one of these "stupid generals" (Hynes 1992: X), Herbert says:

> [The Major General at Harry Penrose's Court Martial] had many rows of ribbons, so many that as I looked at them from a dark corner at the back, they seemed like some regiment of coloured beetles, paraded in close column companies. All these men were excellently groomed: 'groomed' is the right word, for indeed they suggested a number of well-fed horses; all their skins were bright, and shiny, and well kept, and the leather of their Sam Brownes, and their field boots, and jingling spurs, and all their harness were beautiful and glistening in the firelight. (1982: 116)

There is something clownish and ludicrous in the portrayal of the Major General; the idea of a circus parade, of the "groomed" and "well-fed" horses, ironically mirrors the loss of order and ineptitude that defined the British High Command during the Great War. Herbert's mocking observations about the Major General may also be in consonance with the "lions led by donkeys" attitude suggested by Clark (1991: 19-20).[5] The Major-General's position in the army had been awarded by privilege, not merit, having being spoiled by upper-class luxury and greed. Herbert's disdain is inspired by the 'manly' man's conviction that the true nature of the countertype could only be seen in its proper dimension if both the ideal and its antithesis were put side by side.

For those like Aldington's Winterbourne who struggled to conform to the norm, the search for an identity proved distressing: So much so

---

achieved by describing the experience of the ranks on the Western Front. Such a viewpoint put the author at a unique position in relation to his contemporaries as he had the chance of giving more prominence to the hitherto largely neglected men in the ranks.

[5] The expression "Lions led by donkeys" has been widely used to compare the bravery of the British soldiers with the incompetence of their commanders. Although Evelyn Blücher had attributed it to the German GHQ in her memoir *An English Wife in Berlin* (1921), the expression came to be popularly known as the title of Alan Clark's *The Donkeys* (1961). Clark was unable to specify the exact origin of the expression and credited it to a conversation between two generals in the memoirs of Falkenhayn: "Ludendorff: 'The English soldiers fight like lions.' Hoffman: 'True. But don't we know that they are lions led by donkeys'" (Clark *Epigraph* 1991).

that "he was afraid of being afraid" (Aldington 1984: 23).[6] Wandering absentmindedly through the streets of London while on leave, Winterbourne is overwhelmed by the imposing presence of the strong-looking American marines, who "walked in London with the same propriety swagger that the English used in France" (Aldington 1984: 341). The standard of manliness is set, but how is it to be reached? Winterbourne secretly knows that he will never be able to measure up to it. The fact that he is mistaken for a deserter and then reprimanded for not carrying his pass speaks for itself (341). However, he is determined to 'do his bit' and 'stick it out' to the end. His wish to take part in the war is reinforced by his encounter with the experienced soldiers coming back from the front:

> There was something intensely masculine about them, something very pure and immensely friendly and stimulating. They had been where no woman and no half-man had ever been, could endure to be. [...] They looked barbaric, but not brutal; determined, but not cruel. Under their grotesque wrappings, their bodies looked lean and hard and tireless. They were Men. With a start Winterbourne realized that in two or three months, if he were not hit, he would be one of them, indistinguishable from

---

[6] Winterbourne was also at pains to adapt to public school traditions and rules and satisfy general expectations:

> Long before he was fifteen George was living a double life—one life for school and home, another for himself. Consummate dissimulation of youth, fighting for the inner vitality and the mystery. How amusingly, but rather tragically he fooled them! How innocent-seemingly he played the fine, healthy, barbarian schoolboy, even to the slang and the hateful games! [...]. 'Rippin' game of rugger today, Mother. I scored two tries.' Upstairs was that volume of Keats artfully abstracted from the shelves. (Aldington 1984: 74-75)

Yet Winterbourne was not the only one living a double existence; most boys knew that deviation from the masculine ideal was subject to dismissal and strong sanctions. As a commentator wrote in 1872: "a nation of effeminate, enfeebled bookworms scarcely forms the most effective bulwark of a nation's liberties" (Turley qtd in Mangan 2000: XXIV). It was in this dialectic interplay between bloods and non-bloods, manliness and effeminacy, power and powerlessness that masculinities were constructed and constantly transformed. Unlike the "type of 'thoroughly manly fellow'" (Aldington 1984: 83) who possessed the virtues of physical strength and athletic talent, boys like Aldington's Winterbourne, who were poor at games and "sank absorbed in his books, his butterflies, his moths, his fossils" (73), appeared as counter-figures to public-school standards.

> them, whereas now, in the ridiculous jackanapes get-up of the peace-time soldier, he felt humiliated and ashamed beside them. (Aldington 1984: 253)

War offers an almost exclusively masculine experience to Winterbourne, where no women and no-half-men are allowed. Courage is, of course, a prerequisite for heroic quality. These "intensely masculine" men have absolutely no objection to rushing bravely into dangerous confrontations. Their sense of abandon is something Winterbourne envies. Without having undergone the rite of passage into manhood, he feels childish, feminine. His admiration for the fortitude and stoical endurance of the more experienced comrades constitutes a source of both attraction and distress, as he relishes—and fears—the chance to do his bit and prove himself to them.

The fear of being seen as a coward dominates Penrose's idea of manhood as well: "I've a terror of being a failure in [war], a failure out here—you know, a sort of regimental dud, I've heard of lots of them; the kind of man that nobody gives an important job because he's sure to muck it up" (Herbert 1982: 11). His efforts to maintain a manly façade mask everything he does. He needs to prove himself in the eyes of his friend Benson, the narrator, and in the eyes of history. While looking at the plain of Troy, the classical surroundings of the Gallipoli campaign, Penrose praises the feats of the Greek heroes and promises not to be a failure, not to be a regimental dud: "I'll have a damned good try to get a medal of some sort and be like—like Achilles or somebody" (Herbert 1982: 12). Penrose's feelings are those of the boy who was raised to feel courageous, but deep down does not feel it.

But what was the normative standard of courage? Rather than pointing at the willingness to fight, Aldington argues that the ideal of manly courage was built upon "determination and endurance, inhuman endurance." And he ironically adds that "it would be much more practical to fight modern wars with robots than with men" but that "men are cheaper" (1984: 267). This inhuman, 'machine-like' standard of courage determined the judgment of those who differed from the norm. In Rutherford's words, it was "an heroic ideal, stripped of romantic glamour certainly, but redefined convincingly in terms of grim courage an endurance in the face of almost unbearable suffering and horror" (1978: 65).

Expectedly, not all men could bear the threat of physical and mental devastation for long periods of time: Unlike robots, "men [had] feelings"

(Aldington 1984: 267). Those who could not maintain the zest for warfare and did not manage to desert used their bodies as a form of protest. Malingering, "the wilful fabrication of physical or emotional symptoms to avoid an unwanted duty" (Lande 2003: 131), became one of the responses to the failure of becoming a war hero. It originated in the most basic human emotions such as exhaustion, desperation, resentment and fear and grew as a practice as the war progressed. As Bourke writes, "this inflation may be represented in Sir John Collie's book on Malingering and Feigning Sickness, first published in 1913. When a revised edition was released during the war, the book was nearly twice the size" (Bourke 1996: 85). Benson, Herbert's narrator, speaks of the genuine exposure to risk that successful malingering required:

> S.I.W is the short title for a man who has been 'evacuated' with self-inflicted wounds—shot himself in the foot, or held a finger over the muzzle of his rifle, or dropped a great boulder on his foot—done himself any reckless injury to escape from the misery of it all. It was always a marvel to me that any man who could find courage to do such things could not find courage to go on; I suppose they felt it would bring them the certainty of a little respite, and beyond that they did not care, for it was the uncertainty of their life that had broken them. You could not help being sorry for these men, even though you despised them. (Herbert 1982: 94-95)

Even if it was almost impossible to trace this type of scam, commanders, doctors and surgeons remained vigilant to detecting it. When the pretence was discovered, the malingerer was morally condemned by the group. Yet the situation led inevitably to injustice when "the malingerer stole social benefits that should have been reserved for the truly disabled" or if "legitimate illness" was mislabelled "as fakery" (Lande 2003: 132-133). The harsh treatment given to malingerers might be attributed to the fact that the victim was, in reality, only expressing the soldiers' own impulses. Herbert's Penrose despises men with self-inflicted wounds, perhaps because "in these wrecks of men he recognized something of his own sufferings" (Herbert 1982: 95). His scorn, "was a kind of instinctive self-defence—put on to assure himself, to assure the world, that there was no connection—none at all" (96). Accepting that the cowardly emerged from the heroic to subvert it would mean admitting to the existence of a negative side of the heroic ideal or, in Manning's words, to an "extreme of heroism" that was "indistinguishable from despair" (Manning 1999: 8).

Although suicidal impulses were uncommon, sometimes suicide was regarded as the only possible alternative to holding on to fear-based emotions. Aldington's novel is basically the account of how George Winterbourne is progressively and inevitably forced to commit suicide at the war's end: "I think that George committed suicide in that last battle of the war. I don't mean he shot himself, but it was so very easy for a company commander to stand up when an enemy machine-gun was traversing" (Aldington 1984: 23). By revealing Winterbourne's tragic outcome at the beginning of the novel (the very title betrays itself), Aldington follows the structure of Greek tragedy "to avoid any cheap effects of surprise" and "give free expression to the feelings and ideas of one very minor actor in that great tragedy" (Aldington 1968: 302). Aldington's narrator, both a soldier and a friend, assumes his "blood-guiltiness" (Aldington 1984: 35) for his pal's death: "I told him then that he ought to apply for a rest, but he was in agony of feeling that he was disgraced and a coward, and wouldn't listen to me" (1984: 33). He knows Winterbourne is in no condition to continue fighting: "by November '18 poor old George was whacked, whacked to the wide" (Aldington 1984: 23). And then he blames both the institutions, for overexposing Winterbourne to spiritual and mental failure on the battlefield, and Winterbourne's indifferent and impervious family at home:

> The death of a hero! What mockery, what bloody cant! What sickening putrid cant! George's death is a symbol to me of the whole sickening bloody waste of it, the damnable stupid waste and torture of it. You've seen how George's own people— the makers of his body, the women who held his body to theirs—were affected by his death. The Army did its bit, but how could the Army individually mourn a million "heroes"? (Aldington 1984: 35)

The death of the hero on the eve of the Armistice is doubly ironic: Aldington mourns the death of the generation who, in Dodd's words, "spent their childhood and adolescence struggling, like young Samsons, in the toils of the Victorians" (1929: 232) and of the values that had ruled their lives. In effect, those who had been educated in the Victorian heroic tradition broke down under the continuous strain of having to repress fear. Just like Penrose's intolerance towards malingering, the narrator's guilt over Winterbourne's death suggests that it was the men who could not live up to tradition that provoked the deepest anxiety among those

who were still part of the norm. Moreover, to the extent that Winterbourne's failed manhood bears the marks of the shell-shock that imploded his mind, the novel conveys an extreme pessimism and disillusionment that may have been attributed to Aldington's own experience of shell shock:[7]

> He looked unaltered; he behaved in exactly the same way. But, in fact, he was a little mad. We talk of shell-shock, but who wasn't shell-shocked, more or less? The change in him was psychological, and showed itself in two ways. He was left with an anxiety complex, a sense of fear he had never experienced [...] And he was also left with a profound and cynical discouragement, a shrinking horror of the human race. (1984: 323)

Because fear was part of a representational framework that had to be repressed or silenced, "officers and men alike seemed anxious to restrain their feelings" (Manning 1999: 21). Men were ashamed to let other men see they were afraid: "fear, in that generation, was a crime" (Terraine 1982: XII). The acknowledgment of fear was evidence that men were not as courageous as they pretended to be. Winterbourne's fear is the fear of shame and shame leads to silence, the silence that keeps other men believing that he can keep pace with war demands. Silence keeps Winterbourne's war going until the endurance of nerve-shattering conditions culminates in his mental breakdown.

The term shell-shock was coined during the Great War to refer to the conditions resulting from the concussions from the exploding shells. Yet the history of combat stress reactions and the different labels assigned to them—soldier's heart, battle fatigue, Post-traumatic Stress Disorder and Gulf War syndrome, among others—have shown that the term in fact refers to the psychological disorders resulting from the stress of battle. Among the symptoms associated with shell-shock at that time were: "Stupor, confusion, mutism, loss of sight or hearing, spasmodic

---

[7] When Aldington returned from Belgium in 1919, he divorced Hilda Doolittle and moved to the countryside. The eight years he spent in Berkshire village helped him cope with the effects of having been severely gassed and shell-shocked. Yet he never fully recovered from the physical and mental damage that the war had inflicted on him. In a letter to Amy Lowel he confesses to his mental breakdown: "Since I got back I have only been able to work three days a week; if I work more I get horrible pains in my head, due, people say, to a sort of deferred shell-shock" (Aldington qtd in Gates 1992: 53).

convulsions or trembling of the limbs, anaesthesia, exhaustion, sleeplessness, depression, and terrifying, repetitive nightmares" (Leys 1994: 624).[8] Since giving medical treatment to the great numbers of men who were suffering from war-induced mental illnesses would have implied accepting that the long-held moral values and physical standards were being threatened by the Great War, most of these men were convicted—and some of them executed—for cowardice.[9]

Based on the case of Edwin Dyett, the naval sub-lieutenant shot for cowardice, *The Secret Battle* dares suggest that cowardice was not only a matter of discipline and character. In the novel, Harry Penrose is a brave officer whose nerves are shattered by overexposure to combat. Like Winterbourne's suicide, Penrose's death at the hands of his own men of D Company demands a reappraisal of traditional gender roles. In Benson's words, "my friend Harry was shot for cowardice—and he was one of the bravest men I ever knew" (Herbert 1982: 130). Indeed, "like many another undergraduate officer of those days" (5), Penrose was "all eagerness to reach the firing-line" (15). Despite his suffering from shell-shock, he does his best not to surrender to mental disease by acting courageously until he cannot bear it any longer. Of Penrose's military heroism, Herbert says:

> On the fifth day in the line he did a very brave thing—brave, at least, in the popular sense, which means that many another man would not have done that thing. To my mind, a man is brave only in proportion to his knowledge and his susceptibility to fear; the standard of the mob, the standard of the official military mind, is absolute; there are no fine shades—no account of circumstance and temperament is allowed—and perhaps this is inevitable. (Herbert 1982: 36)

---

[8] In recent years, psychiatry has expressed a growing interest in the study of "post-traumatic stress disorder"—PTSD—which essentially results from the unavoidable imposition on the mind of horrific events that the mind cannot control. As Young explains, the syndrome is "based on the idea that intensely frightening or disturbing experiences could produce memories that are concealed in automatic behaviours, repetitive acts [hallucinations, flashbacks and other intrusive phenomena] over which the affected person exercise[s] no conscious control" (Young 1996: 4).

[9] The War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell-Shock," (1920-22) gives the following statistics: "two years after the Armistice, some 65,000 ex-servicemen were drawing disability pensions for neurasthenia; of these, 9,000 were still undergoing treatment" (Bogacz 1989: 227).

By portraying Penrose as a sympathetic, understandable figure, Herbert finds a way not to upset a readership used to the heroic rhetoric. The sufferings of those who struggled to repress their fears and do their duty threw into question widely accepted medical and military ideas. So much so that from 1920 to 1922, the War Office Committee of Enquiry into "Shell-Shock," under the chairmanship of Lord Southborough met in London to try to answer some of the distressing issues raised by the shell-shock phenomenon, particularly the fact that most of the convicted 'cowards' were men like Harry Penrose, that is to say, "volunteer[s], most likely of middle-class origin, who had proved [their] valour repeatedly in the war—and who had still cracked under the continuous strain of trench warfare" (Bogacz 1989: 247).

While some of the members of the committee remained faithful to the pre-war beliefs that saw shell-shock either as a somatic reaction to high-explosive or as a failure of character; others, including the respected W.H.R. Rivers, argued that the origin of the affliction was mental. Since Freud's psychological theories were still suspect in the early 1920s, the report issued by the committee adopted a "half-way house" treatment, "both physical and mental in its aims" (Bogacz 1989: 242), and which struggled "to reconcile the modern ambiguous notion of shell-shock with the traditional absolutist norms of behaviour in war and peace" (248).

Yet the committee had no other alternative but to acknowledge that shell-shock was beyond self-control, that those who could not fight because of psychological disorders should not be simply seen as cowards. The combined effects of war neurosis and repression together with the proliferation of the efforts aimed at masking the magnitude of the crisis around pre-war medical, military and moral values had accelerated the need to re-examine these values.

Herbert's novel is the story of a breakdown, in which the major theme is the extraordinary perseverance of Penrose in his "secret battle" to fulfil the role of the hero: "Fellows like him keep on coming out time after time, getting worse wind-up every time, but simply kicking themselves out until they come out once too often, and stop one, or break up" (Herbert 1982: 125). In Hynes' words, "Herbert succeeded in constructing a new kind of war novel, and a new kind of memorial—an anti-monument to a condemned coward" (Hynes 1992: 306). According to the dominant discourse, those who, like Penrose, were executed at

dawn brought shame on their families and country.[10] Yet Penrose's is one of a number of cases who, because of mental disease, was unjustly sentenced. Discussing Penrose's feelings previous to the death sentence, Benson claims:

> There are, of course, lots of fellows who feel things far more than most of us, sensitive, imaginative fellows, like poor Penrose—and it must be hell for them. Of course there are some men like that with enormously strong wills who manage to stick it out as well as anybody, and do awfully well—I should think young Aston, for instance—and those I call the really brave men. Anyhow, if a man like that really does stick it as long as he can, I think something ought to be done for him, though I'm damned if I know what. He oughtn't… (Herbert 1982: 126-127)

These "sensitive, imaginative fellows" who felt things more than the rest were compelled by their principles and public honour to keep on fighting, yet they could hardly reconcile the consequences of such decisions to their private feelings. Tradition had been so thoroughly instilled in Penrose that it is almost impossible for him to break away from it. His feelings are not the feelings of a powerful man. His are the feelings that come inevitably from the rupture between the social and cultural perceptions of what he was supposed to be and what he really was. Penrose's determination in constructing his own heroic narrative conceals the tensions and uncertainties with which his self-identity is fraught. So much so that he begins to lose sight of his real needs and desires and becomes traumatised.

When the shell-shock experience is foregrounded in Harry Penrose's story, the gap between trope and reality narrows, the bridge is shortened. Shell-shock itself is the opening through which reality can affect discourse, marking the eruption of a variety of conflicts that go beyond

---

[10] To the High Command, soldiers' executions served a twofold purpose: deserters would be punished and similar ideas would be dispelled in their comrades. The Court was anxious to make an example "for they were just men […]. They would do the thing conscientiously" (Herbert 1982: 117). However, "as judges they held the fatal military heresy, that the forms and procedure of Military Law [were] the best conceivable machinery for the discovery of truth. It was not their fault; they had lived with it from their youth" (1982: 117). Those who were condemned to death usually had their sentences confirmed by Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig on the evening following their court-martial. A chaplain was dispatched to spend the night in the cell with the condemned man and execution took place the following dawn.

war trauma into the cultural and gender perceptions of those who suffered the war. The shell-shock crisis puts an end to the soldiers' struggle to maintain an image of themselves which was continually being disconfirmed by their experience. The term then "turn[s] from a diagnosis into a metaphor," framing not only "the war's scale, its character, its haunting legacy" (Winter 2000: 7), but also "a disguised male protest not only against the war but against the concept of 'manliness'" (Showalter 2009: 172). While a single standard of manhood had encouraged most volunteers of the generation of 1914, the growing awareness of the existence of men who could not be labelled heroes—or cowards—in the traditional sense becomes an important concern.[11]

3. Conclusions

Although the figure of the hero is irreversibly fragmented after the Great War, the trope of the coward does not emerge triumphant. Cowardice is shown to have played a significant role in the decline of the values that manliness and society as a whole had required, yet it cannot be considered as a unified, unproblematic whole. The existence of a culturally normative ideal of male behaviour has continued to play a major role in war literature; yet being heroes at a time when the reality of war was in flagrant contradiction with the desired Victorian manly ideals, appears to be an impossibility.

   The three novels discuss the progressive decline of the Victorian heroic rhetoric and stress the presence of a cowardly countertype threatening to weaken and destabilise it. Cowardice is linked to the paradoxical in a twofold sense. On the one hand, the figure of the cowardly soldier acts as a trope, that is, as the anti-heroic opposite to the

---

[11] Nearly 90 years after their deaths, 306 soldiers who were shot at dawn between 1914 and 1918 were granted posthumous pardons from the British Ministry of Defence. The pardon recognises that the men were not 'cowards' or 'deserters' and should not have been executed for military offences. They were upgraded to being 'Victims of War.' Among them was Private Farr, shot for cowardice in 1916. His family had been campaigning for years for him to be pardoned, arguing that he was suffering from shell-shock and should not have been sent back to the trenches. Not one of the executed soldiers would have been executed today, since the British military death penalty was outlawed on 29 April 1930.

highly praised Victorian manly codes and, on the other, it functions as an agent of resistance revealing the inner fractures and contradictions within the hero's tale.

As a trope, cowardice contradicts and, by opposition, exhorts to heroism, for the coward represents all that the soldier was not supposed to be according to Victorian standards. The insistence on attaching the codes of manliness to the three characters in the novels attempts to preserve the continuity with the old heroic tradition, but inevitably deflects it in a new direction. The unparalleled slaughter and devastation caused by the Great War did not distinguish between heroes and cowards; all became victims of its destructive equality. The resulting panorama is one of contradiction: firstly, because the boundaries between courage and cowardice are now less clear and more questionable; and, secondly, because the figure of the soldier enters into a transitional space which draws attention to these ambiguities. In effect, courage is no longer constructed in binary opposition to cowardice, but rather as a reaction against institutions and a national ideal of military comradeship, essentially responding to the need for soldiers to recover their common humanity and a sense of belonging and individual worth.

This leads to the other possible reading of cowardice as a budding form of confrontation through which the texts seek to challenge pre-war values. The figure of the coward articulates certain voices and experiences that had not found much possibility for expression until then because of the complex and multifaceted reality they embody. Not only do the three novels re-open the question of what makes a soldier hero, but ultimately aim to prove that courage and cowardice coexist in the most complex and interesting works of war fiction. The difference between the trope and its reality is articulated by the different shades of fear triggered in the soldier's minds: physical horrors and anxieties, painful awareness of death and even the fear of being afraid, that is, the fear of not measuring up to the trope. Most importantly, the cases of shell-shock portrayed in the texts are not only perceived in their traumatic dimension but as a metaphor for the anxieties resulting from the vanishing of pre-war certainties and from the reliance on more subjective and personally defined values.

The perseverance in the representation of courage in combat and the implicit connection between this figure and the emerging coward have complicated the search for the real Great War soldier in the texts. The

complexity of the representations under study has allowed for the tracing of two quite different portrayals of the soldier, yet separating them has not been possible to any degree of certainty. The result has been the emergence of a disjointed, fragmented and self-contradictory hero-coward that cannot uphold the hegemonic status to which he is supposed to aspire. Seen in such contrasting terms, the soldier enacts a complex and lively role identity which not only intertwines trope and reality, especially in the dramatic descriptions of mental disturbance, but allows for the appropriation, understanding and humanisation of the cowardly other within the self. This seems to pave the way for the adoption of more inclusive masculine roles. Moving away from the manly ideal as the norm results in an awareness of the individual and of the moments that are produced in the articulation of difference. Taken together, these findings suggest that the resultant friction in the shaping of masculine identities does not merely mean a distance from the trope but the opportunity for the elaboration of new signs of heroic behaviour.

References

Aldington, Richard. 1968 [1941]. *Life for Life's Sake: A Book of Reminiscences.* London: Cassell.

Barkan, Elazar. 1994. "Post-Anti-Colonial Histories: Representing the Other in Imperial Britain." *The Journal of British Studies*. 33.2: 180-203.

Bogacz, Ted. 1989. "War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: the Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell-Shock'." *Journal of Contemporary History*. 24.2: 227-256.

Bourke, Joanna. 1996. *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War*. London: Reaktion Books.

Braudy, Leo. 2003. *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity*. New York: Random House.

Brombert, Victor. 1999. *In Praise of Anti-heroes: Figures and Themes in Modern European Literature 1830-1980.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Buchbinder, David. 1994. *Masculinities and Identities*. Carlton: Melbourne UP.

Clark, Alan. 1991 [1961]. *The Donkeys.* London: Pimlico.

Connell, R. W. 2005 [1995]. *Masculinities*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dodd, Lee W. 1929. "Cursed like Orestes." *The Saturday Review of Literature*. 232-233.

Gates, Norman T. 1992. *Richard Aldington: An Autobiography in Letters.* University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press.

Gilmore, David. 1990. *Manhood in the Making: Cultural Concepts of Masculinity*. New Haven and London: Yale UP.

Hadlock, P G. 2006. "What Is a Coward? According to Celine's *Voyage Au Bout De La Nuit.*" *Romance Notes.* 46.2: 235-242.

Hynes, Samuel. 1992 [1990] *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture*. London: Pimlico.

Kimmel, Michael. 2004 [2000]. *The Gendered Society.* New York: Oxford UP.

Lande, R G. 2003. *Madness, Malingering, and Malfeasance: The Transformation of Psychiatry and the Law in the Civil War Era.* Washington, D.C: Brassey's, Inc.

Leed, Eric J. 1979. *No Man's Land: Combat and Identity in World War I.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP.

Leys, Ruth. 1994. "Traumatic Cures: Shell Shock, Janet, and the Question of Memory." *Critical Inquiry*. 20: 623-662.

Lubin, Harold. 1968. *Heroes and Anti-heroes: A Reader in Depth.* San Francisco: Chandler Publishing Company.

Mangan, J. A. 2000. "Introduction to the New Edition". *Athleticism in the Victorian and Edwardian Public School: The Emergence and Consolidation of an Educational Ideology.* By Mangan. London: Frank Cass Publisher.

Mosse, George. 1996. *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*. New York: Oxford UP.

Parfitt, George. 1988. *Fiction of the First World War: A Study.* London: Faber & Faber.

Rutherford, Andrew. 1978. *The Literature of War: Five Studies in Heroic Virtue*. London: MacMillan Press.

Scheunemann, Klaus. 2012. "Fight or Flight – Fear in War Movies." *Who's Afraid of...? Facets of Fear in Anglophone Literature and Film.* Ed. Marion Gymnich. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht. 181-192.

Showalter, Elaine. 2009 [1987]. *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980*. London: Virago.

Steedman, Carolyn. 1995. "Inside, outside, Other: Accounts of National Identity in the 19th Century." *History of the Human Sciences.* 8.4: 59-76.

Terraine, John. 1982. Introduction. *The Secret Battle.* By A.P. Herbert. 1919. Oxford: Oxford UP.

"The Crime of Cowardice: To the Editor of the New York Times." 13 March 1863. *Editorial. New York Times.* <http://www.nytimes.com/1863/03/13/news/the-crime-of-cowardice-to-the-editor-of-the-new-york-times.html> (accessed January 3, 2014).

"The Coward in Literature." January 23, 1909. Boston: *Living Age*: 253-255. *Internet Archive.* (accessed March 12, 2014).

Thompson, E. P. 1982. *Beyond the Cold War: A New Approach to the Arms Race and Nuclear Annihilation.* New York: Pantheon Books.

Winter, Jay. 2000. "Shell-Shock and the Cultural History of the Great War." *Journal of Contemporary History.* 35.1, *Special Issue: Shell-Shock*: 7-11.

Young, Allan. 1996. *The Harmony of Illusions: Inventing Post-traumatic Stress Disorder.* Princeton NJ: Princeton UP.

Primary Sources

Aldington, Richard. 1984 [1929]. *Death of a Hero.* London: Hogarth Press.

Herbert, A.P. 1982 [1919] *The Secret Battle.* 1919. Oxford: Oxford UP.

Manning, Frederic. 1999 [1930]. *Her Privates We.* London: Profile Books.