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FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF BELGRADE, SERBIA

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LITERARY AND CULTURAL STUDIES

EDITORIAL PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade announces that Belgrade BELLS is now indexed in ERIH PLUS, thanks to the previous editor, Professor Biljana Čubrović, and that we are working on being included in other academic journal indexes.

The first part of this Volume, *Theoretical and Applied Linguistics*, contains six articles from both fields. It opens with a paper by **Andrej Bjelaković** and **Biljana Čubrović**, who present the results of their survey, a forced choice questionnaire, which focused on the pronunciation of the LOT vowel among first-year students of English Language and Literature, whose L1 is Serbian (n=102). The authors determine pronunciation preferences of Serbian learners of English and the extent of the gradual drift towards American pronunciation. **Krasimir Kabakčiev** investigates the probable distribution and re-distribution in diachrony of some aspectual devices in English by using his own model of compositional aspect, while Leiss' theory of the article-aspect interplay in Proto-Germanic in diachrony completes a picture in which aspect in Old English after the emergence of the definite article must have been explicated in compositional terms like in Modern English. **Oleksandr Kapranov** is investigating whether the vowel schwa is problematic for Norwegian learners of English as a foreign language. The investigation is based on a corpus of phonemic transcriptions written by learners in a series of four tasks. The study provided by **Ivana M. Krsmanović** addresses engineering students' attitudes towards the use of computer--assisted language learning (CALL) in EFL courses and of the website which is specially designed as an online learning tool for the courses they attend. **Mateusz Pietraszek** analyses gender and level differences in the attitudes towards English pronunciation. His results are based on the responses of 111 students who took part in the survey. The aim of the paper provided by **Danijela Prošić-Santovac** and **Ana Halas Popović** was to gain insight into students' attitudes towards the use of authentic and non-authentic materials

in English language teaching including their perception of the stakeholders' agency in the process.

The second part of the Volume, *Literary and Cultural Studies*, contains seven articles. It opens with a paper by **Éva Antal** who describes comradeship and sisterhood in 19th century English social-feminist utopias and discusses the current issues of distribution of female and male tasks, forms of comradeship, companionship and sisterhood presented in the framework of ideal-utopian future communities. **Roberta Grandi** sheds light on androcentrism in *Watership Down* and *Tales from Watership Down* by Richard Adams. **Arijana Luburić-Cvijanović** and **Viktorija Krombholc** analyse Will Self's novel *Garden of Unearthly Delights* by examining the antihero as the epitome of his age and the city as the transgressive *locus terribilis*. **Vera Nikolić** investigates the traits of the postmodern Canadian novel, such as historiographic metafiction and fragmentation, while also analysing the novel *The English Patient* and its film adaptation of the same name. **Slađana Stamenković** explores how DeLillo's novels *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence* approach the interaction between hyper-reality and the media in human lives parallelly, seemingly offering the same conclusion – that technology and mass media are the key factors of how people perceive both their environment and self, and in that, how they perceive reality and the world. The paper submitted by **Orsolya Szűcz** consists of two parts: the first part of her paper describes how Eimar McBride's novel *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* addresses both Celtic and Post-Celtic Tiger, modernist and postmodernist challenges while creating an innovative style of its own. The second part analyses how language operates through various narrative devices in the novel, showing the connections with the body, aspects of the reading process itself and stylistic elements. Finally, **Aleksandra Vukotić** examines the value of innocence in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* with a focus on the representation of childhood. Although little children are considered to be inherently innocent, the author shows that it is all but a fantasy for Morrison's youngest protagonists, who enter the world of adulthood prematurely as they are exposed to racial and sexual abuse.

We wish to thank all our contributors and reviewers, who invested so much work and energy in helping us provide the papers you are about to read.

The completion of this Volume would not have been possible without the hard work and effort of many people of the Editorial Team: Tamara Aralica, Andrijana Broćić, Bojana Gledić, Nataša Ilić, Aleksandra Orašanin and Aleksandra Vukelić. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for everything they have done.

Belgrade, December 2021

Nenad Tomović

Theoretical and Applied Linguistics

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ATTITUDES REGARDING THE REALISATION OF THE LOT VOWEL IN ADVANCED SERBIAN EFL SPEAKERS***

Abstract
In this paper we present the results of a survey, a forced choice questionnaire, which focused on the pronunciation of the LOT vowel among first-year students of English Language and Literature, whose L1 is Serbian (n=102). This was part of a series of surveys designed to determine pronunciation preferences of Serbian English learners and the extent of the gradual drift towards American pronunciation that has been noticed in recent decades. The informants were divided into two subgroups according to their answer to the first question, which determined whether the participant was oriented towards GA (General American) or towards SBS (Southern British Standard). Different survey questions tested the pronunciation of the LOT vowel in different contexts with different factors taken

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into account: number of syllables, frequency of the selected LOT words, spelling, and the presence of the given word as a loanword in Serbian.

The results show that the much smaller subgroup that preferred SBS was much more accurate in their vowel choices, only occasionally opting for the GA-appropriate vowel in place of the SBS LOT vowel (85% accurate), as opposed to the larger GA subgroup which displayed a lot of vacillation and uncertainty (29% accurate). The hypothesis that high frequency words will have a higher chance of being assigned the appropriate vowel was confirmed. However, other factors did not seem to have a noticeable effect. On the whole, the results support a previous observation that many advanced learners in fact speak an amalgam of British and American reference accents.

Key words: LOT vowel, Serbian EFL speakers, GA, SBS, accent attitude

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

For years, the authors of this paper have noticed a large-scale, gradual drift towards American pronunciation in the speech of English Language and Literature students at the University of Belgrade, despite the fact that the Southern British Standard model of pronunciation is the only one explicitly taught in detail in English Phonetics and Pronunciation classes. This state of affairs has prompted previous inquiries (Čubrović and Bjelaković 2020a; Čubrović and Bjelaković 2020b), which in turn suggested the realization of the LOT vowel as an avenue for further research. Among other things, these studies indicate that there is a degree of confusion among Serbian L2 speakers regarding the vowel in this lexical set (in addition, Bjelaković (2015) suggests there is often a discrepancy between the variety informants say they use and the actual sound they employ in this lexical set). Therefore, we devised the present study in order to have a closer look upon learners' attitudes regarding the LOT vowel. The results of this and other similar studies could be potentially helpful in pointing to the main sources of confusion when it comes to advanced Serbian learners' pronunciation of English, and could consequently lead to reassessing the

emphasis and approach to teaching English pronunciation in the English Department[1].

We will look into several factors that may influence the students' choice of pronouncing the LOT vowel: frequency of the word in question, number of syllables, and whether they exist as common anglicisms in Serbian. The initial hypothesis is that higher frequency of use may trigger the students who opted for American pronunciation to stay true to the chosen pronunciation model. Discussed will also be the influence of the number of syllables (1, 2 or more) and the influence of spelling of the English loanwords in Serbian (e.g. *popular*, *Washington*).

1.2. AmE vs. BrE pronunciation attitudes and learner behaviour

At various points in the 1990s, different authors anticipated the imminent change of guard, as it were, with American pronunciation starting to dominate the EFL scene. Thus, Bradac and Giles (1991) suggested that Swedish students of English as a Foreign Language may evaluate a Standard American accent (SA) more favourably than an RP accent on certain dimensions, and consequently be more motivated to learn SA (quoted in Ladegaard 1998). Furthermore, Graddol et al. (1999: 8) claimed that:

> … an older person may strive for a flawless RP accent, but a younger person is influenced by American […] Where once upon a time there might have been a British colonial veneer, there will be an American veneer. This will happen to native and foreign users of English. And demographically in the future it will be a veneer over millions and millions of people.

Similarly, Bayard et al. (2001: 44) concluded that:

> American imagery is now employed willy-nilly by the entire world [...] American English seems to be winning hands down, and [...] American English, not British English, will remain the major global form of English into the indefinite future.

[1] Some English departments, such as the one in Nijmegen, have long since offered courses in both British and American pronunciation (Gussenhoven 1992: 472). Rindal reports that at the University of Oslo six of the seven groups are taught the phonetics of RP while one group is taught General American (Rindal 2010: 241).

Seeking to check if these predictions were true, Ladegaard analysed the attitude-behaviour relations of Danish high school students regarding the pronunciation of English (Ladegaard 1998). He found that, while the teenagers' attitudes largely matched their stated attitudes, their cultural preferences went in a different direction. Namely, in terms of accents, "RP appears to be the unsurpassed prestige variety in this Danish context; it is rated most favourably on all status and competence-dimensions, and it is seen as the most efficient, beautiful and correct accent of English" (Ladegaard 1998), and likewise the "result of the reading-test showed that 91% of the subjects had a predominantly British pronunciation." On the other hand, participants seemed to prefer American to British culture (participants opted for American culture (39.6%); other (both British and American; Australian; Irish or Canadian) (39.6%); British culture (18.7%)).

Ladegaard also points out that American TV programmes far outstripped British ones on Danish television at the time, which is undoubtedly related to the impact and dissemination of American culture in Denmark (during a randomly picked week "57% of [the] programmes were Danish productions, 34% were American, 5% were British and the remaining 4% were productions from other countries")[2].

Several years later, Ladegaard and Sachdev (2006) conducted a similar study. Again, a survey of TV programmes was included, with American programmes comprising an even higher percentage (43% this time). And again, there was a language/culture discrepancy, with the majority of participants preferring a British accent and also speaking with a British accent, but opting for American culture over British culture.

Norwegian high school students (n=23), on the other hand, pronounced more than two thirds of the analysed tokens with an American-like pronunciation, as Rindal (2010) reports. All four phonological variables under scrutiny were pronounced with a majority of AmE variants (the four variables were rhoticity, t-voicing, the GOAT vowel and the LOT vowel; overall, students produced the American variant 67% of the time). This is despite the fact that little over half of the participants said they aimed for a British accent. In other words, unlike in Ladegaard's studies here we see a discrepancy between the self-reported variety and actual pronunciation features. In the listening test RP speakers received the most

[2] In a similar vein, Bjelaković (2015) had a look at English-speaking programmes broadcast in Serbia in 2015, and reported that 80% were North American, 16.5% were British or Australian, and the remaining 3.5% were mixed.

favourable evaluation for 11 dimensions, while the remaining 6 dimensions were GenAm-favoured. Rindal concludes that while British English still has higher status than American English, and is the preferred model of pronunciation, American cultural hegemony does have an impact on the L2 situation in Norway. A few years later, Rindal conducted much the same study, with very similar results in terms of the phonological features being predominantly American (this time, however, 29 participants said they aimed at an American accent, and 23 said the same for the British accent) (Rindal 2013). Rindal's figures can be compared with those of Van der Haagen a decade earlier who conducted a comparable study with Dutch students of English (Van der Haagen 1998, quoted in Rindal 2010). There the participants used American pronunciation only 39.1% of the time.

In terms of research done in Serbia, Paunović's survey of English Language and Literature students at the University of Niš (Paunović 2009) showed the discrepancy between the most prestigious and the self-reportedly most used pronunciation standard. Asked "What kind of accent would you *like* to have?", half of the participants opted for the "British" accent (50%). Conversely, when asked to describe their own accent, most participants answered "American" (45.6%) (the remaining answers were "neutral" (24.6%), "Serbian English" (14.9%), and "British" (14.9%)).

Čubrović and Bjelaković (2020a) report that their respondents, who are first-year students of English Language and Literature at the University of Belgrade, predominantly opt for General American (GA) when asked about which reference accent they use or hear more often.

Based on the overview of previous studies, it would appear that the use of American English pronunciation features is increasing among EFL learners in a number of countries. The participants in the cited studies mostly grew up with traditional media, primarily television and cinema, through which they were, when it comes to English, exposed primarily to authentic American speech. As Kautzsch (2017: 38) duly points out there are many influencing factors that feed into the creation of a learner's interlanguage (IL):

> [...] heterogeneity in learner language might not be as orderly or structured all the time. A context in which learners are faced with highly heterogeneous input, resulting from two native standards, from the English of non-native teachers, and from a variety of regional accents of L1, suggest the presence of many competing rules in the learners' ILs.

Finally, we expect that findings of the present study will speak to the degree to which the pronunciation of advanced Serbian learners of English corresponds to what is sometimes termed Amalgam English. Cruttenden describes this as "an amalgam of native speaker Englishes, together with some local features arising from a local L1" (2014: 327). We hope to gain further insight into how consistent our participants are in using their chosen variety of English.

1.3. The LOT vowel

A well-known, salient difference between SBS (Southern British Standard) and GA (General American) involves the quality of the vowel in the standard lexical set LOT[3] (Wells 1982). On the one hand, in SBS, there is a short, rounded vowel, currently approaching [ɔ] in quality, although phonemically, it is traditionally transcribed as /ɒ/ (Cruttenden 2014: 126). On the other hand, GA features a longer, usually fully unrounded, open vowel, of the [ɑː] type. In addition, this lexical set is merged with the PALM set for almost all speakers of North American English (i.e. *bother* rhymes with *father*) (this appears to have taken place by mid-19th century; see Krapp 1925: 141–148; Wells 1982: 122, 245–246; Labov et al. 2006: 12–13). Finally, there is also a difference in the distribution of words, since some words that historically belonged to LOT have moved to THOUGHT in GA, specifically "before back nasals, as in *strong*, *song*, *long*, *wrong*, etc.; before voiceless fricatives (in *loss*, *cloth*, *off*, etc.), and irregularly before /g/, as in *log*, *hog*, *dog*, *fog*, etc. This process occurred by lexical diffusion, leaving many less common words in the [LOT] class, such as *King Kong*" (Labov et al. 2006: 13). Of course, this difference in distribution is increasingly a moot point, considering the advance of the LOT-THOUGHT merger across North America (Labov et al. 2006; Grama and Kennedy 2019).

Returning to the difference in quality between the usual SBS and GA realisation, not only is it quite noticeable, but it arguably makes the GA realisation of the sound cross a perceptual threshold for Serbian speakers, to whom the GA variant sounds closer to their /a/ used with a long pitch accent (usually in the [äː] ~ [ɐ̟ː] range), as opposed to the SBS realization,

[3] Historical sources of this vowel are primarily the Old English /o/ (e.g. *docga* 'dog'), and the Middle English /a/ after /w/ (e.g. *wasp*, *wash*, *watch*, etc.), as well as a smaller number of words that had the Old English /ɑ/ before clusters /ng/ and /nd/ (e.g. *strong*, *long*, *bond*, etc.) (Dobson 1957: 528, 565, 717).

which sounds a lot like the Serbian /o/ used with a short pitch accent (around [ɔ], see Bjelaković 2018).

In terms of contemporary EFL/ESL learners in other countries, this lexical set appears to pose problems for a variety of experienced non-native speakers. Thus, for example, Kautzch reports that even his American English target accent group of German speaking students of English did not merge LOT and PALM (Kautzch 2012: 234–235). In another study, Kautzsch (2017: 234, 240) found that the LOT set shows a great deal of variability that is a result of a merger of LOT and THOUGHT, even more so in the American English target accent groups that spent less time in the US. Kalaldeh, similarly, claims that many if not most Arab speakers adopt a GA accent, and yet the "realization of the LOT vowel is a common error and is usually rendered as the RP rounded [ɒ]" (Kalaldeh 2016: 403). And according to Hommel (2017), Dutch students' LOT vowel is often mistaken for STRUT by British listeners (despite the fact that Dutch has a short, rounded /ɔ/, as in the Dutch 'bot'). This may well be because younger learners of English are influenced by the GA LOT, and remove the lip-rounding (causing British listeners to hear STRUT).

2. Methodology

This study gathered self-reported data regarding the usage of the LOT vowel (among other things). As such, it possesses obvious shortcomings, since the speakers are not necessarily aware of their actual usage, and the answers they provide need not match their everyday production. To what degree the self-reported data match the learners' usage is, however, beyond the scope of this study.

A written questionnaire was distributed among the first-year English Language and Literature students at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade. The number of respondents was 102. The questionnaire contained 23 questions, and they were grouped as follows:

- Questions 1–3 had to do with the varieties of English students use more, hear more or prefer listening to;
- Questions 4–6 were diagnostic questions looking into some of the most conspicuous phonetic differences between SBS and GA other than the LOT vowel, such as rhoticity vs. non-rhoticity, t-voicing and the TRAP–BATH split;

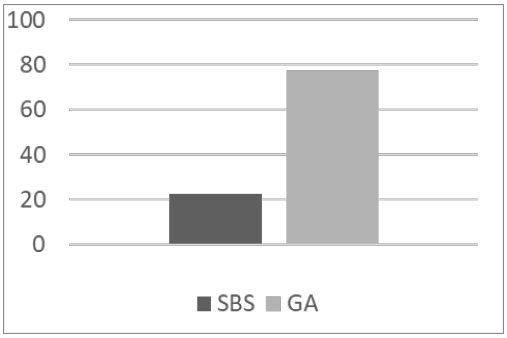
- Questions 7–19 investigated various words of the LOT lexical set (differing in frequency, number of syllables, and whether or not they exist as common anglicisms in Serbian);
- Questions 20–23 involved further attitudes (easier vs. sounds better), the reason behind using the preferred variety, as well as the hypothetical choice of variety to be studied, if offered.

The informants were divided into two subgroups according to their answer to the first question, and the results will be reported contrasting the two subgroups, i.e. students oriented towards GA (General American) as opposed to those oriented towards SBS (Southern British Standard).

3. Results

3.1. Questions 1–3

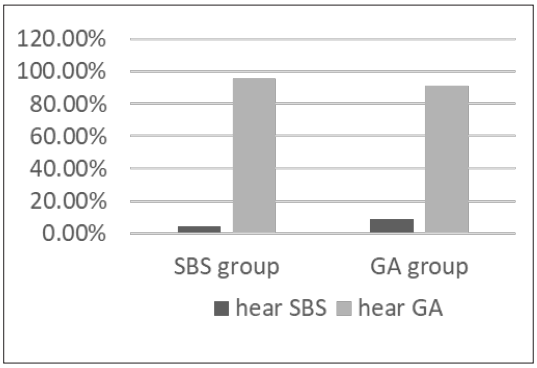
Question 1 was "Which of these varieties of English do you use more often?", with only two options offered: SBS (Southern British English) and GA (General American)[4]. A majority of 77.5% students said they used GA more often. This means that of the total of 102 participants, 79 form our "GA group", while the remaining 23 form our "SBS group".



Graph 1: Preferred accent of participants

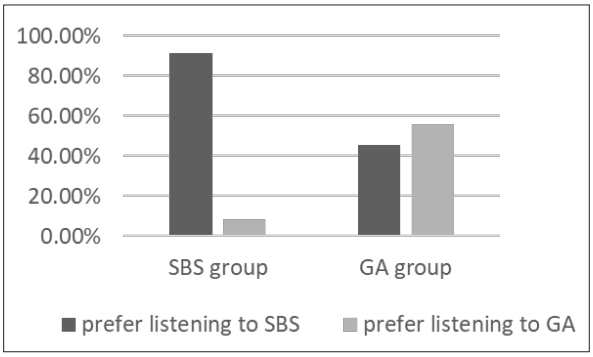
[4] The participants were familiar with these labels, as well as with basic phonetic terms, having already had one semester of mandatory first-year courses in English Phonetics and Pronunciation. The main differences between the two reference accents had been briefly covered in the English Phonetics course, but the focus as ever was on SBS.

Question 2 was "Which of these varieties of English do you hear more often?", with the two options being the same as in the previous question. The two subgroups largely agree inasmuch as they are both overwhelmingly exposed to GA (95.5% of the SBS group and 91% of the GA group).



Graph 2: Variety participants report being more exposed to

Question 3 was "Which of these varieties do you prefer listening to?", eliciting the participants' attitude regarding which of the standard varieties is more "pleasing to the ear" or appealing. Here we see a stark difference between the two subgroups. Namely, while the SBS group overwhelmingly prefers listening to SBS (91.5%), the GA group is split almost in half — 45.5% say they prefer listening to SBS, whereas 55.5% say they prefer listening to GA.



Graph 3: Preferred standard variety of English in terms of being listened to

3.2. Questions 4-6

The next section of the questionnaire explored the level of consistency the two groups of students demonstrate. The questions asked involved some of the most common differences in pronunciation between GA and SBS: rhoticity, t-voicing, and the TRAP-BATH split.

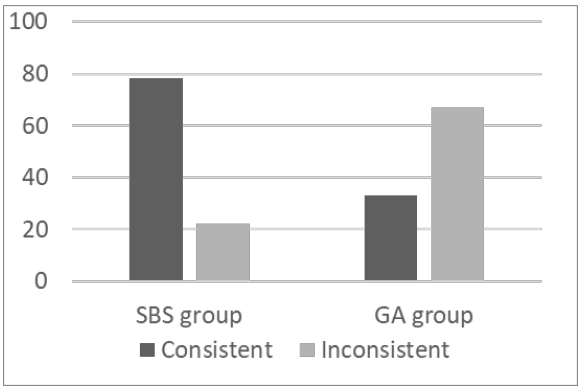
Question 4 dealt with rhoticity, and it was framed as "Do you pronounce all your 'r' sounds in English?", with only two options being offered, "Yes" and "No".

Question 5 investigated the respondents' attitude towards t-voicing and it was framed as "Which sound do you use in the middle of words such as *city*, *beautiful*, *letter*?"; the possible answers were "a) t-like sound" and "b) d-like sound".

Question 6 dealt with the TRAP-BATH split and was framed as "Which sound do you use in words such as *ask*, *path*, *answer*?". The possible answers were "a) an e-like sound" and "b) an a-like sound".

Looking at the responses to the individual questions, we see that the SBS group reported t-voicing in 4.35% of the cases, pronouncing all /r/ sounds in 13% of the cases and using the same vowel in TRAP and BATH in 13% of the cases as well.

On the other hand, the GA group reported not being fully rhotic in 35.5% of the cases, not using t-voicing in 56% of the cases, and using different vowels in TRAP and BATH in 33 % of the cases.



Graph 4: Levels of consistency based on the main salient differences between GA and SBS

To sum up, the SBS group showed a higher score in keeping in line with the expectations of their chosen pronunciation model, whereas the GA group's English is more of an amalgam of the British and the American reference accents.

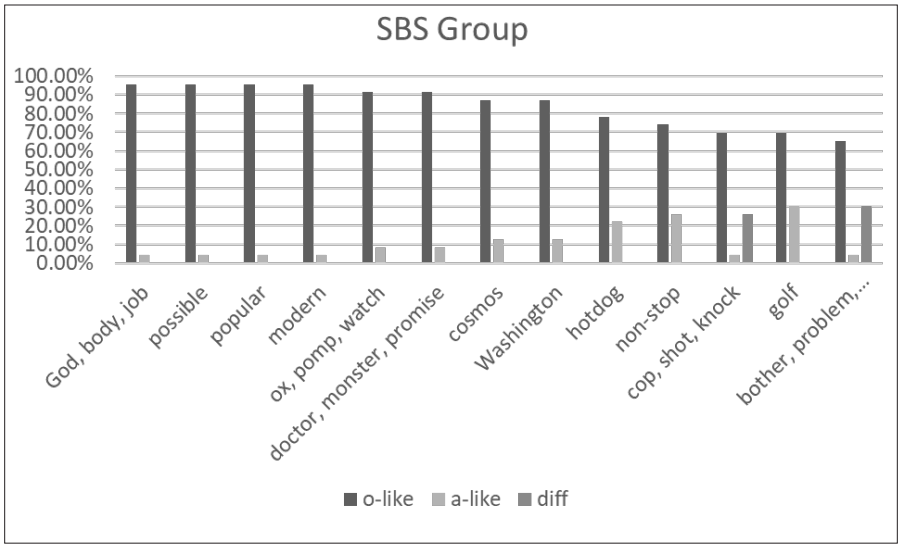
3.3. Questions 7–19

All questions in the next section (7–19) involved a forced choice between an "o-like sound" and an "a-like sound"; the former was meant to represent the closer, rounded SBS-appropriate vowel, and the latter was meant to represent the open, unrounded GA-appropriate option (the labels also refer to Serbian vowels closest to the SBS /ɒ/ and GA /ɑː/ respectively). Questions 8 and 10, however, had a third option as well, namely "vowels are different in these words". All the words were grouped together according to the following criteria: frequency, number of syllables, and whether they exist as common anglicisms in Serbian (in which case they will have /o/ in Serbian, except *Washington*, which is rendered as *Vašington*, with /a/). So, for example, words in questions 7 and 8 (see Table 1) were deemed frequent monosyllabic LOT words, whereas words in question 9 were monosyllabic words singled out as being not as commonly heard in everyday, spoken English (or rather two of them were, with *watch* displaying the less common spelling of LOT); questions 10 and 11 included disyllabic LOT words, while questions 12 and 13 included trisyllabic LOT words; finally, words in questions 14–18 exist as loanwords in Serbian.

7	God, body, job	14	golf
8	cop, shot, knock	15	hotdog
9	ox, pomp, watch	16	non-stop
10	bother, problem, common	17	modern
11	doctor, monster, promise	18	cosmos
12	possible	19	Washington
13	popular		

Table 1: Words used in questions 7–19

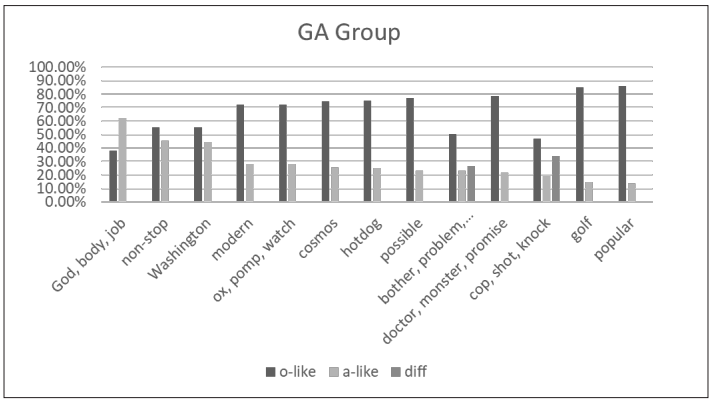
Graph 5 shows the SBS group's responses to questions 7–19, arranged in descending order (with the highest proportion of SBS-appropriate, o-like, answers to the left). What we see is a high proportion of "correct", i.e. SBS-appropriate answers. This seems to be especially true of high-frequency words, such as *God*, *body*, *job*, *possible* etc. However, the two questions that included the option "vowels are different in these words" show that more than a quarter of the SBS group opted for this extra response (26% and 30%, respectively).



Graph 5: SBS group's responses to questions 7–19

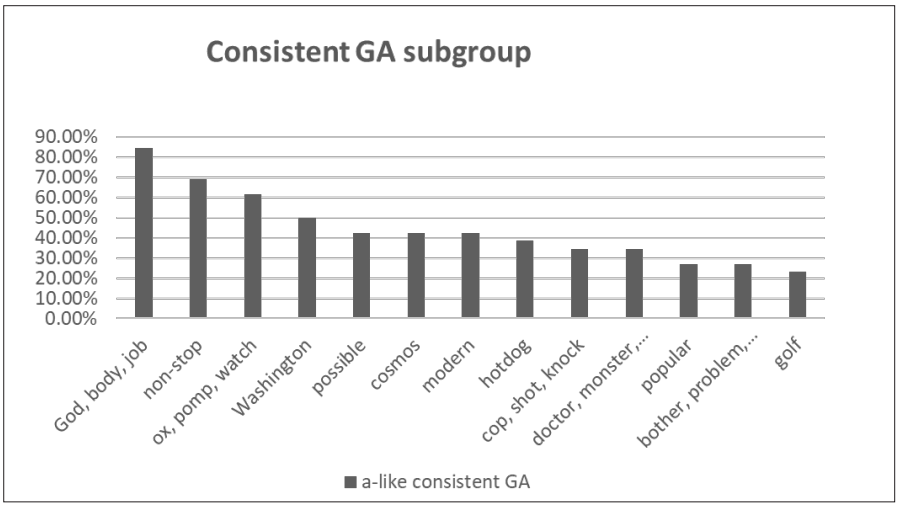
Graph 6 shows the GA group's responses to questions 7–19, arranged in descending order (with the highest proportion of GA-appropriate, a-like, answers to the left). Here we see a situation drastically different from the one in Graph 5. The highest proportion of GA-appropriate answers was again present in the category of high-frequency words *God*, *body* and *job*, but even then, it barely exceeded 60%. The majority of the LOT questions, on the other hand, showed a proportion of GA-appropriate answers that did not exceed 20%–25%. As was the case with the SBS group, the two questions that included the option "vowels are different in these words" display an immodest proportion of the responses (26.5% and 34% respectively). On the far right-hand side of the graph, we see words such

as *popular* and *golf*, which correspond to common anglicisms in Serbian, *popularan* and *golf*, which could explain such a high proportion of o-like answers.



Graph 6: GA group's responses to questions 7–19

Finally, in Graph 7 we single out the results of a subset of GA participants, namely those who consistently picked the GA-appropriate features in questions 4–6; we call these the Consistent GA subgroup. Broadly speaking, these are the students who not only say they use GA more often, but also who are pronunciation-conscious enough to be aware of the main features of GA, based on their responses in questions 4–6. We can see that for each question the consistent GA subgroup, unsurprisingly, had a higher percentage of GA-appropriate answers, with *God*, *body*, *job* exceeding 80%. The descending order of questions is somewhat similar, with a few noticeable exceptions. However, strikingly, even this subgroup of the GA group, in most questions, scores below 50%.



Graph 7: Consistent GA subgroup's responses
to questions 7–19

We will now turn to discussing the most striking results pertaining to the pronunciation of the LOT vowel.

God, body, job – our hypothesis was confirmed, inasmuch as these everyday words, commonly heard in the media, lead the majority of GA students to the appropriate response, and thus to the highest proporition of appropriate responses (62% for the entire GA group, and 85% for the Consistent GA subgroup).

Cop, shot, knock – on the other hand, with these, presumably equally common words, the participants fared much worse (19% GA group, 35% Consistent GA), although this is undoubtedly at least partly due to the fact that they were offered the extra option, namely "vowels are different in these words", which a considerable number of them tended to choose whenever it was offered (25–35% of the participants). This choice points out that these respondents are uncertain about the pronunciation of some lexical items investigated in the survey.

Ox, pomp, watch – this group of words leads to a big difference between the Consistent GA group and the rest of the GA group. Namely, the former achieved a score of over 60% in these less common/unusually spelled words, whereas the latter had a score of around 10%.

Non-stop – this anglicism performed quite differently than the rest, which could mean it is much more frequently heard. Specifically, this

word had the second-highest scoring, with over 40% (almost 70% in the Consistent GA group).

Washington – this word came in third (fourth for the Consistent GA subgroup) in terms of the GA-appropriate response score, possibly suggesting that a number of students are easily influenced by the spelling.

When it comes to other words, such as most anglicisms as well as polysyllabic words (*popular*, *possible*, *hotdog*, *golf*, *bother*, *problem*, *common*, *doctor*, *monster*, *promise*), the participants performed on the whole more or less consistently, but showed rather low scores (around 20% for the GA group overall).

4. Final remarks

One of the most noticeable findings of the current study is the fact that there is a large discrepancy in terms of choosing appropriate responses between the smaller SBS group and the larger GA group, with the former performing much better — appropriate response rate of 85% when it comes to the LOT vowel questions, as opposed to 29% the GA group achieved). This could suggest that the minority of students who opt for SBS, i.e. those who eschew the now default option of picking the variety they are almost certainly more exposed to, tend to be higher-achieving and more pronunciation-conscious.

The degree of uncertainty and vacillation when it comes to the standard lexical set LOT is best illustrated by the fact that a sizeable proportion of participants chose the "vowels are different in these words" option whenever it was offered. The frequently heard, common words did fare somewhat better than average, but only to a degree. Overall, in the aforementioned gradual drift towards American pronunciation, the LOT vowel presents itself as a stumbling block for Serbian advanced learners of English.

Finally, the fact that even the Consistent GA group had trouble choosing the GA-appropriate response a lot of the time clearly reflects the amalgam nature of most students' speech. Some form of the previously mentioned "amalgam of native speaker Englishes, together with some local features arising from a local L1" (Cruttenden 2014: 327) seems to be what most of our participants speak. The results of the present survey thus suggest

that the label of Amalgam English is on the whole appropriate even for advanced Serbian learners of English.

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THE DIACHRONIC MAPPING OF TEMPORAL FEATURES BETWEEN ENGLISH NOMINALS AND VERBS, AND THE ARTICLE-ASPECT INTERPLAY

Abstract
Aspect (the perfective-imperfective distinction) can be verbal or compositional. The probable distribution and re-distribution in diachrony of some aspectual devices in English are outlined in a bid to improve the description of aspect in Old/Middle English. The author's model of compositional aspect is employed with its conceptions of the temporal nature of situation participants, the mapping of temporal features between nominals and verbs in the sentence and the inverse relationship across languages of markers of temporal boundedness in verbs and nouns. Leiss' theory of the article-aspect interplay in Proto-Germanic in diachrony is also employed to complete a picture in which aspect in Old English after the emergence of the definite article must have been explicated in compositional terms like in Modern English.

Key words: English compositional and verbal aspect diachronically and synchronically; definite, indefinite and zero article; articles as markers of boundedness/non-boundedness; mapping of temporal values of NPs; article-aspect interplay

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1. Introduction

Published in BELLS (2013) is an article in which the author points to my work as a "cornerstone of what is known today as compositional aspect" (Bulatović 2013: 65) – invoking a reaction with a discussion of what compositional aspect (CA) is. Obviously, such a discussion must begin with what aspect is. In my understanding, it is a universal phenomenon found in all languages in different disguises but it manifests itself in two structural versions, verbal aspect (VA) and CA, that are mirror images of each other (Kabakčiev 2000: 158–161). VA is prototypically represented by the perfective-imperfective contrast in verbs as lexical entries in many extinct and modern languages: Proto-Indo-European, Early Old English, Gothic, Latin, Old Church Slavic, today's Slavic languages, Greek, etc. The perfective-imperfective contrast is also found in Modern English (ModEng) and closely related languages – systematically, but it is not expressed (marked/denoted/encoded) by verbs as lexical entries. It is mainly explicated/signaled at the sentence/clause level in terms of two semantico-syntactic schemata, a perfective and an imperfective one, discovered by Verkuyl (1972) and known as CA. When found in verbs as lexical entries (as in the Slavic languages) or in the syntactic realization of verbs (as in the English progressive), it is an instantiation of VA. Thus CA and VA are two different types of aspect in terms of language structure but not in terms of semantics.

Although CA is already five decades old and described in hundreds of publications (correctly or not quite), many linguists still have no idea what CA is (also because it is absent in grammars, see below). Let me, therefore, briefly demonstrate how CA works. In (1a-b), perfectivity is signaled: a completed event, temporally bounded. It arises through the so-called quantified/bounded situation participants – bounded through articles, determiners, quantifiers, pronouns, proper names, etc., and mapping their boundedness onto the verb referent. If a participant becomes non-bounded losing its bounding element, the so-called (by Verkuyl) aspectual leak occurs; the sentence becomes imperfective, cf. (1c-d). The leak can be in the verb, too: (1e) is perfective because the verb is telic; (1f) is imperfective because the verb is atelic (Verkuyl 1972; 1993; Kabakčiev 2000; 2019; Bulatović 2019; 2020).

(1) a. Den Uyl gave the Labour party badge to a congress-goer
b. Two patients here died of jaundice
c. Den Uyl gave the Labour party badge to congress-goers
d. Patients here died of jaundice
e. X played the sonata
f. X hated the sonata

CA is extremely intricate and its explanation requires complex argumentation. A major element in my model of CA (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000; 2019) is that participants in situations are *temporal entities in the minds of speaker and hearer*.[1] In (1a-b), temporal boundedness, marked on the situation participants by articles, quantifiers, proper names, etc., is mapped onto the verb referent, triggering perfectivity in it, with some help from the verb itself, its telicity. In (1c-d), the zero article and the plurality marker trigger non-bounded iterativity in the participants and this non-bounded iterativity is mapped onto the verb referent, triggering imperfectivity in it. Thus CA is explained through the impact of articles (definite and indefinite as exponents of boundedness, zero article as an exponent of non-boundedness), unlike in some publications where the existence of aspectual functions of articles is rejected – with little argumentation or none at all (Młynarczyk 2004; Czardybon and Fleischhauer 2014; Fleischhauer and Czardybon 2016; cf. my response – Kabakčiev 2018), or the authors simply fail to see it (Berezowski 2011; Sommerer 2018; Gelderen 2018). In the other camp, that of linguists who duly recognize the decisive impact of articles for aspect (Verkuyl 1972; Leiss 2000; Abraham and Leiss 2012), Bulatović has just published two papers, in the first of which she convincingly argues that CA, with the crucial role of articles, is such an important phenomenon that it must be taught to all learners of English around the world, not only to Slavs (Bulatović 2019). In the second, she strongly criticizes English grammars for their inadequate treatment of aspect as a result of either a profound misconceptualization of CA or lack of knowledge of it and calls for a radical change in their treatment of aspect, tense, nominal determination and aspect-related adverbials (Bulatović 2020).

My aim here is to demonstrate how aspect was – probably – explicated in compositional terms in the history of English, and to outline the distribution or re-distribution of some aspectual devices. This ought to

[1] Participants in situations (a term introduced in Kabakčiev 1984) are also called verb arguments.

help the understanding of the English aspectual system in diachrony, with its radical restructuring from a prototypical VA system in OldEng to a full-blown CA system in ModEng. My model follows to a certain extent Verkuyl's (1972; 1993), and is based on: (i) the inverse dependence across languages of markers of temporal boundedness in verbs and nouns;[2] (ii) its underlying conception of the temporal nature of participants in situations and the mapping of temporal features between referents of nominals and verbs in the sentence/clause (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000; 2019);[3] and (iii) Leiss' (2000) theory of the aspect-article interplay in Proto-Germanic. The diachronic description mentioned above is necessary because, as already shown, the Old English (OldEng) aspectual system appears a puzzle because of the severe misunderstanding of aspect not only in Middle English (MidEng) and OldEng but also in ModEng. Aspect in OldEng/MidEng ought to be based on ModEng – but this is impossible with the failure of ModEng grammars to describe its aspect system (Bulatović 2013; 2020). They do not offer a word on the article-aspect interplay; they severely lag behind linguistic research, and their inadequacies went unnoticed for decades, with rare exceptions (Schüller 2005; Bulatović 2013). After 2000, a ray of hope shone, some ModEng grammars started to admit – slowly and shyly – that perfectivity in English exists (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 118–125; Downing and Locke 2006: 370; Declerck et al. 2006; Langacker 2008: 147ff; Fenn 2010: 277–281), but with no hint of explanation where it suddenly sprang from.[4] In any case, the article-aspect interplay remains a *terra incognita* in English grammars,[5] a fact uncompromisingly revealed by Bulatović (2020).

[2] This dependence was formulated in Kabakčiev (1984) and developed in Kabakčiev (2000). Abraham and Leiss (2012: 326) point to these publications as "the first to note that languages develop either a category of aspect or an article system".

[3] "Participants in situations" is a term introduced in Kabakčiev (1984) to refer to verb arguments that take part in the aspectual composition. In Verkuyl's (1972: 98ff) terminology these shape "the upper bound of the aspects".

[4] Declerck et al. (2006) stands apart from other grammars with the inclusion in it of certain elements of Verkuyl's theory, without Verkuyl being credited (Declerck et al. 2006: 79). The author explains that "grammars are typically written without systematic references to the linguistic literature" (Declerck et al. 2006: 4).

[5] But see Kabakčiev (2017), an English grammar which describes the interplay in detail, see Bulatović (2020).

2. Articles – what are they for?

Most languages have no articles (Heine and Kuteva 2006: 101-103) and standard descriptions of articles contain an explanation that the indefinite article is attached to a noun appearing for the first time in the discourse, whereby the nominal referent is identifiable for the speaker and not for the hearer. The definite article is attached to a noun already introduced or to one whose referent is somehow identifiable to speaker and hearer (Heine and Kuteva 2006; cf. Hewson 1972: 85–116, Hawkins 1978: 172–221; Lyons 1999: 1–13; Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 368–372). Thus, if other markers of definiteness/indefiniteness – pronouns, demonstratives, quantifiers, proper nouns etc., are ignored, in a language with a regular pattern of a definite and an indefinite article such as English, the first appearance of a noun will in most cases be with an indefinite article,[6] and all its following appearances will be with a definite article – or the nominal will be marked definite otherwise. But if in its first appearance a noun is indefinite and in each following appearances it is definite, an important question arises, one that is almost never asked: is the article, viewed as an integral unity of the definite and the indefinite article (i.e., not as a marker of definiteness and indefiniteness separately), necessary at all?

When languages have only one article, it is often definite rather than indefinite (Heine and Kuteva 2006). But logic actually points to the need for the opposite. If definiteness/indefiniteness must be outwardly expressed (for some reason yet unknown), and if we take it that language is better represented in texts rather than isolated sentences, what happens when a noun must be used 50 times in a text/discourse? It will be indefinite the first time, and then definite 49 times. Obviously, the principle of economy ought to interfere and "rule" that it is appropriate to have an indefinite article for indefiniteness and no article for definiteness. On the other hand, even the indefinite article appears superfluous: because the hearer will normally sense if a noun is emerging for the first time in a discourse. If it is, its referent is indefinite. And when this noun pops up a second, third, or n^{th} time, it will be recognized as known and treated as definite. This is obviously what happens in languages without articles. Why, then, this burden of marking nouns as indefinite, when it is clear they are indefinite?

[6] Barring exceptions where the entity is shared knowledge between speaker and hearer (*the sun*, etc.) and taking into account that this is valid for singular count nouns – plural and mass nouns are not afforded an indefinite article.

Why marking nouns definite when they are obviously definite? Why should the definite article be the most frequent word in English (according to the Oxford English Corpus) if marking definiteness is even less necessary than marking indefiniteness? What is the raison d'être of the articles? The answer to this question was provided a long time ago: the article, i.e., the regular pattern of a definite and an indefinite article, *marks temporal boundedness on participants in situations, and this boundedness is then mapped onto the referent of the verb* (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000; 2019).[7] This is the raison d'être of the article – as a unified entity of *a* and *the*.

3. The English definite article diachronically as an exponent of temporal boundedness

Example (2) below is a MidEng sentence from Cursor Mundi (1300 A.D.). It contains three situation participants, like (1a) above: *she* 'she', *þe childe* 'the child' and *þe welle* 'the well':

(2) She dud þe childe drynke of þe welle
'She made the child drink from the well'

Let us analyze the aspectual value of *dud* 'made' (not of *drynke*). It is perfective as a default, prototypically.[8] Being MidEng, not OldEng – where there would be no articles but either verbal prefixes or other specific perfectivization devices, (2) features articles and lacks verbal aspect, in the sense that *dud* is not perfective like many verbs in previous stages of the language, mainly prefixed (on perfective prefixed verbs see Senn 1949; Mustanoja 1960: 446; Gelderen 2007: 294; 2018: 21). According to Verkuyl's and my own CA model, perfectivity here arises through the definite articles in *þe childe* and *þe welle*, marking temporal boundedness on the referents of the nominals, and through the pronoun containing a covert definite article (*she* = "the woman previously mentioned"). The temporal boundedness of the participants is then simultaneously mapped onto the referent of the verb *dud* (see Kabakčiev 2000; 2019). The verb is telic, which precludes the possibility for an imperfective leak.

[7] This is part of a complex mechanism that cannot, for space restrictions, be presented here in depth.

[8] On default, prototypical CA readings, see Kabakčiev (2000: 59, 137; 2019).

Note that *of þe welle* is a situation participant. It may look like an adverbial rather than an indirect object, but whether it is one or the other is a moot question. In any case, contrary to Verkuyl's (1972: 98ff) reasoning about what he calls the upper bound of the aspects,[9] it takes part in the explication of aspect. Cf. ModEng (3a), which is a prototypically perfective sequence, no matter whether the article is *a* or *the*, whereas (3b) is prototypically imperfective, with a non-bounded iterative reading due to the imperfective leak in *from wells* (3b):

(3) a. She made a/the child drink from a/the well
b. She made a/the child drink from wells

Now, if sentence (2) is to be "shifted back in time" to a language stage prior to the emergence of articles, it would have to have a hypothetical form such as (4). The absence of articles makes its translation into ModEng difficult:

(4) *She dud childe drynke of welle[10]
'She made child drink from well'

Note that while ModEng (3a) explicates a single perfective event, the hypothetical (4) without articles in two nominals does not. The aspectual value of *dud* here can be described as "not necessarily perfective". It could be perfective (single event) *or* imperfective (non-bounded iterativity) – because of the elusive referential status of *childe* and *welle* (see below).

In (3a) the covert definite article in the subject allows the substitution of *she* with *the woman* with no change of aspectual meaning – (5a). This allows the construction of sentence (5b) in ModEng, formed by stripping the grammatical (5a) of all the articles – in a hypothetical world in which the English language does not feature articles:

(5) a. The woman made the child drink from the well
b. *Woman made child drink from well

[9] See below on whether instrumental adverbials, a similar type of adverbials, take part in the explication of aspect (discussed in Verkuyl 1972).

[10] An anonymous reviewer points out that the hypothetical sentence (4) here is MidEng rather than OldEng and that in OldEng it would probably read *Heo dyde cild of welle drincan*. In any case, the hypothetical MidEng (4) and the hypothetical ModEng *She made child drink from well* illustrate a language without articles (or other markers of boundedness on nouns) and without perfective verbs *at the same time* – and such a language is conjectured here not to exist (see below).

Apart from hypothetical, (5b) is, of course, also non-grammatical. As for (4), we cannot label it non-grammatical, as there are no MidEng/OldEng speakers to offer judgement. Hence, let us call it hypothetical only, and test (4) and (5b) against existing languages without articles. In such a test on Slavic data, translation is facilitated, there are no articles to insert. Something else is obligatorily required for insertion, however: perfective or imperfective aspect in the verb. Compare (4), (5b) and Serbian/Russian (6a-b):

(6)	a.	Žena	je naterala$_{PFV}$	dete	da pije iz	bunara (Serbian)
		Ženščina	zastavila$_{PFV}$	rebenka	pit' iz	kolodtsa (Russian)
		Woman	made	child	drink from	well
		'A/the woman made a/the child drink from a/the well'				
	b.	Žena	je terala	dete	da pije iz	bunara (Serbian)
		Ženščina	zastavlyala$_{IMPFV}$	rebenka	pit' iz	kolodtsa (Russian)
		Woman	made	child	drink from	well
		'A/the woman used to make/was making a/the child drink from a/the well'				

What strikes the eye in this comparison is that while the Serbian/Russian sentences without articles are semantically and grammatically immaculate, the English one without articles is fully incomprehensible as to what the woman did. Did she make the child drink once? Several times? Often? Always? Such incomprehensibility in Slavic is non-existent, impossible, thanks to the aspectual options in the verb. If we take it that sentence (4) could exist at such a stage of development of OldEng in which perfective verbs have already disappeared but a definite article is still not yet available, and that a sentence such as (5b) can exist in hypothetical ModEng with no articles, a serious question arises: *is such a language possible*? It appears logical to assume that a language without articles and verbal aspect simultaneously, as in (4) and (5b), *cannot exist*! And this is not necessarily because of the simultaneous absence of articles and verbal aspect – something abstract, theoretical, but for an earthly reason. Sentences like (4) and (5b) without articles/determiners in the nominals fail to tell the hearer whether this is a single occurrence of an action or a non-bounded/bounded repetition thereof, something hardly admissible in communication. This allows the hypothesis that the demise of perfectivity in the verb and the birth of the definite article in OldEng happened simultaneously, not one after the other. Note the intriguing circumstance that whether perfectivity or imperfectivity is signaled in (5a-b) depends

not on the verb but on the presence/absence of determiners in the nominal components, and it may even depend on a single nominal (see below).

Thus, when transferring (5b) into a Slavic language without articles, two variants occur: a perfective verb for *made* denotes a single act; an imperfective one portrays the act multiplied an indefinite number of times, cf. (6a-b).[11] When the hypothetical construct (4) is transferred into ModEng, a language with obligatory articles, the ensuing situation is similar, in the sense that, with the relevant articles supplied, the sentence is prototypically perfective (a single completed action) in consistence with CA rules, cf. (3a), (5a). This event can be multiplied a definite number of times by a bounded-repetition adverb, producing another well-formed perfective sentence:

(7) The woman made the child drink from the well three times

But if a Verkuylian leak appears in any nominal component, the aspectual reading of *made* becomes imperfective by default (prototypically):

(8) a. The woman made children$_{\textbf{LEAK}}$ drink from the well
b. Women$_{\textbf{LEAK}}$ made the child drink from the well
c. The woman made the child drink from wells$_{\textbf{LEAK}}$

This is because a single bare NP with a plural marker (*children*, *women*, *wells*), i.e., containing a Verkuylian leak, is sufficient to trigger non-bounded iterativity in the nominal referent and then in the verb associated with it (*made*). The non-bounded iterativity of the nominal's referent – the nominal being not spatial but temporal although it denotes a "physical entity" – is mapped onto the verb's referent, generating imperfectivity in it (Kabakčiev 2000; 2019). Note that while the leak imperfectivizes the relevant verb generating a non-bounded iterative meaning in it, it does not trigger a progressive-like imperfective meaning in *made* in the three sentences in (8). This circumstance, along with the fact that in many languages there are no articles, yet no need is felt in them to mark definiteness and indefiniteness, leads to the assumption that the two ModEng articles (*a, the*) exercise a common function. This function, identified long ago (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000), is to mark temporal boundedness on situation participants – and

[11] A progressive-like meaning is also possible in (5b). Note also that, contrary to some authors' assumptions, Slavic perfectivity does not necessarily force definite readings on direct objects or NPs in prepositional phrases (hence *rebenka/dete* is either "the child" or "a child"), although there may be certain tendencies.

it concurs with the function of the zero article to mark temporal non-boundedness on participants. The idea of the common function of the articles (*a*&*the*) to encode temporal boundedness may have less supporters (Leiss 2000; Abraham and Leiss 2012; Bulatović 2013; 2019; 2020) than adversaries (Młynarczyk 2004; Czardybon and Fleischhauer 2014; Fleischhauer and Czardybon 2016; Gelderen 2018), but it offers definitive solutions to issues related to the article-aspect interplay (Kabakčiev 2019).

Now it can be discussed in further depth how the articles in (3a), (5a) contribute to the explication of the event as a singular one. Obviously, the article (*a/the*) supports the non-iterative (single-occurrence) status of the relevant nominal: (5a) and all the sentences derivable from (3a), using the different combinations of *a/the*, have a common parameter, namely, non-iterativity. Conversely, the three sentences in (8), each of which has a bare plural (marker of plurality), explicate the opposite, iterativity. The iterativity is non-bounded, arising out of the "non-bounded recurrence" feature of only one of the three nominals (situation participants). A question that now begs asking concerns the significance in language of the contrast between a single completed (perfective) event and a non-bounded iterative one (imperfective). It can be conjectured that single completed events are more important than iterative non-bounded ones in human communication – and the former certainly prevail in frequency over the latter. Hence an important general rule appears to exist, traversing all languages: *the explication or direct denotation of single perfective events must be guaranteed by language structure*!

Let us return to (5b). Can it guarantee the explication or direct denotation of a single perfective event? The answer appears negative. Despite the singularity of the three nominals, which ought to presuppose a single event, this is exactly what this sentence cannot guarantee. The construct (5b), if it had a legitimate existence, would mean "A/the woman used to make a/the child drink from a/the well", i.e., it would trigger a non-bounded iterative situation, just like Serbian/Russian (6b) does. Thus, the analysis of the hypothetical (5b) in a language containing these lexical items leads to the assumption that they must be governed by a grammar capable of blocking the non-bounded iterative reading.

Is this requirement met (in one way or another) in the languages discussed here – Serbian, Russian, English? For Serbian and Russian, the answer is positive. The non-bounded iterative reading is blocked by the perfective aspect in the verb: sentences such as (9a) are non-grammatical.

Obviously, the denotation of single perfective events is guarded by the language structure. Note that while the perfective aspect in the Slavic verb does not allow a non-bounded iterative (imperfective) reading in such sentences, it allows a bounded iterative one – which is again perfective and arises when the sentence is complemented by adverbials like *tri puta/ tri raza* 'three times', cf. (9b):

(9) a. *Žena je često naterala dete da pije iz bunara (Serbian)
*Ženščina často zastavila rebenka pit' iz kolodtsa (Russian)
Woman often made$_{PFV}$ child drink from well
'The woman often made a/the child drink from a/the well'

b. Žena je tri puta naterala dete da pije iz bunara (Serbian)
Ženščina tri raza zastavila rebenka pit' iz kolodtsa (Russian)
Woman three times made$_{PFV}$ child drink from a/the well
'The woman made a/the child drink from a/the well three times'

However, in English the system works differently: (5a) in its default, prototypical reading explicates a single event; indeed, it does not exclude the possibility for non-bounded iterativity, but an additional element in the sentence/context is normally required for this to obtain – an indefinite-repetition adverbial (*often*, *regularly*) or a periphrastic imperfective marker of indefinite repetition (*used to*, *would*):

(10) a. The woman often/regularly made a/the child drink from a/the well
b. The woman used to/would make a/the child drink from a/the well

Note here that, due to the failure of English grammars to identify the devices for aspect explication, English *would* and *used to* have always been described not as aspectual markers, of imperfectivity, but as "markers of habituality". The reason for the misnomer is clear. If *would* and *used to* had been termed markers of imperfectivity, this would require an explanation of where the exponents of perfectivity are, an explanation impossible without the discovery of CA.[12] But in any case, in English too, language structure takes care of the explication of single perfective events, effectuating it in this intricate manner within Verkuyl's perfective semantico-syntactic schema, illustrated by sentence (5a), demonstrating the momentous role

[12] And even later, as the CA theory became slowly better understood. On vicissitudes in CA history, see Kabakčiev (2019).

played by the article – in this case in three sentence components. The article, assisted by the telicity of the lexical verb, generates a status of single occurrence and temporal boundedness in each of the relevant NP referents – *the woman*, *the child*, *the well*, to bring about the final perfective reading of the verb (*made*).

4. Aspect – what exactly is it?

Aspect, represented by the perfective-imperfective distinction, is a fundamental notion critical for the description of language structure. It is a phenomenon occurring in all languages but in different disguises, yet omnipresent in every language – in the sense that every sentence/clause containing a verb in a meaningful text expresses or signals perfectivity or imperfectivity. Perfectivity is a situation (in terms of Vendler's 1957 model of situations), which is temporally bounded and has an initial- and an endpoint. These two points, together or separately, can be subsumed in a sentence/clause or outwardly given. A perfective situation, apart from being bounded, is also normally "brought to a natural end", whereby the "natural end" is interpreted in broad pragmatic terms, as an inherent result of the situation at the endpoint.[13] Conversely, imperfectivity is a temporally non-bounded situation, whether or not an initial- and/or an endpoint are present or subsumed, whether it describes a generally valid state of affairs or an indefinitely repeated one, or a current activity (as with the progressive). It is worth noting here that the perfective-imperfective contrast may sometimes – rarely – be impossible to explicate because of specificities in the semantics of certain ModEng verbs (11a),[14] or it may be irrelevant to both speaker and hearer, as in OldEng (11b), Sommerer's (2018: 80) example:

(11) a. John pushed the cart
b. æfter þan þæt lond wearð nemned natan leaga
'After that, the land was called Netely'

[13] This is valid for prototypically perfective situations. There are non-prototypical perfective situations too (quasi-perfective), termed "episodes" (Kabakčiev 2000: 279-307), with a somewhat lower prevalence.

[14] The verb *push* is neither telic, nor atelic – there are just a handful of such verbs in English.

Such cases of "absence of aspect" in a sentence in English are exotic. They are very rare, hence negligible.

5. What aspect is not; what it must be

Aspect is not what English grammars have been teaching readers for decades: a distinction between simple and perfect and/or simple and progressive forms (Quirk et al. 1985: 189ff; Hogg 2002: 40; Carter and McCarthy 2006: 405ff; Downing and Locke 2006: 372; Eastwood 2006: 14ff). The progressive is, of course, an aspect: an exponent of imperfectivity restricted to ongoing actions and currently valid states. But it must not be contrasted with the indefinite tenses, including the preterite, because these have no aspectual meaning.[15] What aspect is must be structurally visible, in the form of tangible components. For example, Slavic aspect is visible. It is a grammatical distinction whose exponents reside in the verbal lexicon: every verb has an easily identifiable aspect (perfective/imperfective), save for a small group of verbs called biaspectual. English imperfective aspect, represented by the progressive and the *used to/would* markers of imperfectivity/habituality, is a tangible structural entity too, as is aspect in Proto-Indo-European, Gothic or OldEng in the form of perfective (usually prefixed) versus imperfective verbs (Streitberg 1891; Mustanoja 1960; Wood 2002; Młynarczyk 2004).

What is not visible, or is at least very difficult to see, is aspect in languages like MidEng or ModEng – explicated compositionally in an extremely intricate way at the sentence/clause level. But VA, otherwise visible, is also not easy to understand. Drobnak (1994: 123) notes about OldEng *ge-* that despite the numerous publications purporting to explain its meaning and function, they remain inconclusive, so she abstains from the analysis of aspect (Drobnak 1994: 123). But despite other contentions that the OldEng verbal prefix *ge-* is not a perfectivizing one (Lindemann 1970: 1), most scholars maintain the opposite view (Senn 1949; Mustanoja 1960: 446; Gelderen 2007; 2018). As for ModEng, perfectivity there is mainly explicated compositionally, through a complex interplay of lexical, semantic and grammatical elements at the sentence/clause level – but it can

[15] The English preterite is like "an empty bag". It has no aspectual meaning of its own and can accommodate any aspectual value generated in the sentence/context (Kabakčiev 2017).

also arise in the larger context (Kabakčiev 2000: 59), and be, furthermore, influenced (eliminated/generated) by pragmatic factors, "knowledge of the world" (Kabakčiev 2000: 309–326). Therefore, along the lines of the present approach, aspect, a universal phenomenon in different disguises, ought to have its own structural (visible, tangible) components (that may be very different) in all languages. Hence, in the long run CA can also be said to be visible through Verkuyl's schemata. But it is not readily available to the "naked eye" of the average speaker, as it requires specific knowledge.

6. Fall of aspect, rise of articles in Proto-Germanic – Leiss' theory

OldEng had no articles. They started to emerge in late OldEng, the definite first, later the indefinite. VA started to lose ground earlier; in early MidEng it was already gone (Mustanoja 1960; Gelderen 2007; 2018; Macleod 2012). As pointed out by an anonymous reviewer, some historical linguists (e.g., Ringe and Taylor 2014: 447–449, 464 – along with others), argue that in earlier stages of OldEng there were items functioning as articles: demonstratives, quantifiers (*an* 'one', *sum* 'some'). This thesis confirms the conjecture that the demise of perfectivity and the birth of the article must have occurred gradually and simultaneously, not one after the other, and that the disappearance of verbal perfectivity had to be made up for. On the other hand, the argument about items in OldEng functioning as articles is loose – because demonstratives, quantifiers and similar elements are in wide use also in languages that have no articles, and never had (Latin, Russian, Serbian, etc.). Due to the (previous) absence of a definition of the raison d'être of the articles (*a* and *the*), in historical linguistics there has never been a criterion to distinguish "a true article" from an article-like entity. The main reason is that *a* and *the* have always been investigated not as an integrated entity, "an article", but separately, as exponents of "definiteness" (*the*) and "indefiniteness" (*a*) respectively. This approach completely fails to explain (among other things) why indefiniteness is marked with an article with count nouns and not marked with non-count nouns. As already argued here and elsewhere (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000; 2019), the major function of the article (i.e., the integrated "*a*+*the* entity"), its raison d'être, in English and similar languages is to mark temporal boundedness on situation-participant NPs and thence perfectivity in certain

semantico-syntactic schemata – while definiteness and indefiniteness are residual functions.

The world linguistic community owes the discovery of a link between the demise of aspect and the birth of a definite article to Leiss (2000), who investigated three Proto-Germanic languages, Old Icelandic, Gothic and Old High German, and found that that they featured a definite article, no indefinite article, and a correlation between the weakening of aspect and the strengthening of the definite article. Perfectivity in Leiss' model is a form of "verbal definiteness", analogous to nominal definiteness. Her observations on how perfective verbs were gradually substituted by definite articles are extremely valuable because they describe what happened in the history of not just one but of three languages. Furthermore, what happened was not accidental, it involved remarkable systematicity. The substitution of perfectivity with a definite article was accompanied by a whole plethora of phenomena and/or changes in different spheres: use of the accusative vs. genitive/partitive case distinction for explicating perfectivity and imperfectivity; use of verbs in the historical present together with the definite article (Old Icelandic) to express perfectivity (Leiss 2000: 73–75); the definite article in Old Norse ensured the perfective reading of the historical present – which was not a stylistic device there but a perfectivization tool (Leiss 2000: 99); the initial sentence position of a verb in Old Norse also served as a perfectivization tool (Leiss 2000: 84-88); when prefixes of perfective verbs with a past meaning started disappearing in Old Norse, there came the definite article taking up the function of the prefixes (Leiss 2000: 80–82); the definite article in Gothic and Old Icelandic was found to be primarily an aspectualizer, as it did not originally function to indicate that a NP is to be taken as definite – definite NPs in these two languages represented by proper names, subjects and objects in definite syntactic environments were not additionally marked by the article (Leiss 2000: 159).

Unfortunately, the core of Leiss' (2000) insightful work remains misunderstood and ignored (barring certain exceptions – Abraham 1997; 2017; Fischer 2005; Wood 2007; Bauer 2007; Kabakčiev 2018). Two recent publications stand out as representative of the drift. In a large study of article emergence in OldEng, Sommerer (2018), instead of using the opportunity to explore whether article emergence is not a result of the loss of aspect and then endorse or reject Leiss' model, has just a couple of words to say in a footnote on the article-aspect link (Sommerer 2018:

47). Another new book in the same sphere, dealing with aspect, verbs and verb arguments diachronically (Gelderen 2018), also sidesteps Leiss' article-aspect interplay, barely mentioning it. A decade earlier, Gelderen (2007: 275) had noted Leiss' assertion that definiteness and specificity can be expressed through VA, but the possibility for an article-aspect link is abandoned in Gelderen (2018). An idea from the early and naïve stages of linguistics is maintained instead, viz., that when *ge-* perfective prefixes are lost in Early MidEng, "this role [perfectivizing] is taken up by optional telic particles, such as *up*" (Gelderen 2018: 21). It thus turns out that perfectivity arises mainly or even solely through particles. But these allegedly perfectivizing particles, as is common knowledge, are very far from numerous and are not widely used in English at all. What is more, the naïve view about "telic particles" evades the circumstance that there exist millions of perfective sentences in English without particles – such as (1a,b,e), (3a), (5a), (7). If perfective aspect were expressible mainly through particles, the perfectivity of such sentences would remain a true mystery. Of course, their perfectivity, apart from demonstrated here, was explained in depth half a century ago by Verkuyl (1972).

Along with Leiss, Gelderen argues that the genitive-partitive vs. accusative alternation indicates "a connection between measure and affectedness of the object, i.e., definiteness, and aspect" (Gelderen 2018: 101). But Gelderen sidesteps this issue too, proposing no aspect-case link in which the article, a nominal component, has an impact on aspect – together with or alongside case. She writes: "Where Old English has specialized case and some use of demonstratives to mark definiteness and verbal prefixes and inflections to mark aspect, Modern English uses articles for definiteness and particles and auxiliaries for aspect" (Gelderen 2018: 2). In other words, for Gelderen (2018) particles are used for aspect, while the article has nothing to do with aspect – it only marks definiteness. Apart from that, actually it is precisely the opposite thesis, that perfectivity can be ultimately explicated through the article, that is in need of special consideration, rather than the much more obvious one – that the perfectivity of a verb may lead to interpretations such as definiteness, specificity, etc. of an object NP. A researcher who wishes to subscribe to Leiss' theory of the article-aspect interplay will always need to explain how an article, a NP component, serves the signaling of perfectivity, something related to the verb (see the issue handled above and in Kabakčiev 2000; 2019).

To sum up, the article-aspect interplay, a phenomenon of supreme importance for English grammar synchronically and diachronically, remains severely neglected in the literature, including grammars (see Bulatović 2013; 2020). If Sommerer (2018) and Gelderen (2018) in particular, had not turned a blind eye to Verkuyl's (1972) CA theory, the theory of the Germanic article-aspect interplay in diachrony (Leiss 2000), and the inverse dependence of markers of temporal boundedness with its underlying mechanism of mapping temporal features (Kabakčiev 1984; 2000), a completely different description of MidEng/OldEng grammar could have emerged in the concrete domain – handling together articles and aspect. Below it will be shown again that a correct explanation of English aspect in diachrony can hardly be successful without taking into account the theoretical models above.

7. MidEng/OldEng data demonstrating the article-aspect interplay

It is worth asking to what degree the CA theory can be suitable for analyzing a language like OldEng in view of the absence of articles in the relevant time periods. Examples from OldEng/MidEng with definite articles/demonstratives allow applying Verkuyl's perfective and imperfective schemata. For example, it can be supposed that the subject in (12a) below (from Gelderen 2014: 106) could just as well be without an article or a demonstrative, cf. (12b). Consider the two sentences, with *þa bodan* 'the messengers' in the first and *bodan* 'messengers' in the second. The lack of an article/demonstrative in the second turns the perfective (12a) into imperfective (12b):

(12) a. *Þa bodan us færdon*
'The messengers frightened us'

b. *Bodan us færdon*
'Messengers frightened us'

Although Gelderen (2018) discusses OldEng/MidEng aspect at length, she fails to notice the impact of the definite article for explicating aspect, due to disregarding or misconceptualizing CA.[16] In the two cases above, (12b)

[16] Was Gelderen not familiar with Verkuyl's theory? Verkuyl (1993), proposing a more sophisticated CA theory, is part of Gelderen's (2018) references, so this is obviously not the case.

falls into Verkuyl's imperfective schema, while *þa* 'the' in (12a) bounds the referent of the subject, making it a temporally bounded entity in the mind of speaker/hearer – a single appearance of messengers. The temporal boundedness of *þa bodan* 'the messengers' is mapped onto the referent of the verb, triggering perfectivity. Conversely, the bare plural in (12b) "unbounds" the messengers. It produces a non-bounded time series of messengers instead of a single appearance. The temporal non-boundedness (indefinite iterativity) is then mapped onto the referent of the verb, coercing it into imperfectivity (Kabakčiev 2000; 2019). This conception of the temporal nature of participants and the mapping of temporal values (Kabakčiev 2000) appeared, indeed, later than Verkuyl's (1972) CA, yet almost two decades earlier than Gelderen (2018) to be easily discounted.

Perhaps the temporality of *þa bodan* 'the messengers' and *bodan* 'messengers' is difficult to understand? Taking this into account, a "common-sense" explanation was proposed a long time ago (Kabakčiev 2000: 99ff), called a "TV representation". It consists in conceptualizing participants not as static images but as moving pictures, a video. If (12a-b) are explained through a "TV representation", *þa bodan* in (12a) is not a static picture of physical entities but a moving picture (a video) of people (messengers) appearing on the TV screen and/or in the speaker's/hearer's head *in a single instance*. Conversely, *bodan* in (12b), without a determiner, is, again, *not* a static picture of human beings but a moving picture on the screen and/or in the speaker's/hearer's head. But now they are *a non-bounded temporal series of messengers*, indefinitely re-occurring, not a single occurrence of messengers as in (12a). The explanation is valid, of course, not only for OldEng (12a-b) but also for their ModEng translations.

This is how perfectivity/imperfectivity in (12a-b) arises in OldEng/MidEng, at a stage when an article is already present. In the same way as in ModEng, thanks to the article-zero article contrast in structural language terms, on the one hand; and, on the other, thanks to the ability of the human brain to process situation participants as moving pictures, though in a specific way. It is intriguing why this ability of the brain remains hidden for the native speaker and even the linguist. Obviously, the brain has the ability to subsume the separate occurrences of "physical objects" under concepts that are stable in time as a memory-saving technique (Kabakčiev 2000: 117); why the ability is "hidden" is an open question.

As mentioned, Sommerer's study of article emergence in OldEng sidesteps the article-aspect interplay. Yet some of its data, like Gelderen's (2018), provide proof of the role the definite article plays in marking boundedness on participants, beyond the author's awareness. For example, (13), from Sommerer (2018: 80), manifests perfectivity – triggered by *þa* 'the' and *ðæm* 'those/the':

(13) þy ilcan geare drehton **þa** hergas on East Englum and on Norðhymbrum West Seaxna londs wiðe be þæm suðstæðe mid stælhergum, ealra swiþust mid **ðæm** æscum þe hie fela geara ær timbredon
'The same year **the** raiding armies attacked East Anglia, Northumbria and Wessex widely along the south coast with predatory bands most of all with **the/those** ships which they had built many years earlier'

If these two determiners in (13) are deleted to obtain (14), indefinitely repeated attacks are now described instead of an attack viewed as a single act in (13). The article/determiner is gone, and with it its bounding function; *drehton* 'attacked' now signals imperfectivity (non-bounded iterativity).[17]

(14) þy ilcan geare drehton ~~**þa**~~ hergas on East Englum and on Norðhymbrum West Seaxna londs wiðe be þæm suðstæðe mid stælhergum, ealra swiþust mid ~~**ðæm**~~ æscum þe hie fela geara ær timbredon
'The same year raiding armies attacked East Anglia, Northumbria and Wessex widely along the south coast with predatory bands most of all with ships which they had built many years earlier'

Sentences (13–14) with their ModEng translations are interesting in terms of the CA theory with the role an instrumental adverbial can play for signaling aspect. Verkuyl (1972: 109) maintains that instrumental adverbials are beyond what he calls the upper bound of the aspects. Later research (Kabakčiev 2000: 260–262) showed that instrumental adverbials *can* trigger perfectivity or imperfectivity. This happens in (13–14) through the article-zero article contrast in *mid ðæm æscum* 'with the/those ships' and *mid æscum* 'with ships'. The perfectivity of *drehton* 'attacked' in (13)

[17] Someone could argue that the elimination of definite determiners might be impossible in OldEng – and there are no OldEng speakers to verify or reject the idea. But this is what linguistics is about, making hypotheses.

is signaled through the temporal boundedness of *þa hergas* 'the raiding armies' and [*mid*] *ðæm æscum* '[with] the/those ships'. The imperfectivity of *drehton* in (14) is signaled through the non-bounded iterativity of *hergas* and [*mid*] *æscum*. The temporal (non)-boundedness of NP referents is mapped onto the referent of the verb, making it signal perfectivity or imperfectivity. Of course, for perfectivity to obtain, the verb must have a telic potential (Verkuyl 1972; 1993), which *drehton* 'attacked' here does have.

Being concerned with data related to articles/demonstratives, not so much zero article use, Sommerer's book contains few examples matching Verkuyl's imperfective schema. Here are two:

(15) a. Hy arerdon unrihte tollas
"They levied unjust tolls"
b. […] and him aðas sworon
"[…] and swore him oaths"
(Sommerer 2018: 181, 209).

These are cases of imperfectivity in the form of non-bounded iterativity due to a lack of article/determiner, the two sentences thus falling into Verkuyl's imperfective schema. Although few, such examples reconfirm the thesis that some of Sommerer's (2018) data demonstrate the article-aspect interplay, without the author's knowledge. Gelderen's example (12a) and Sommerer's (13) show the involvement of the subject in aspectual composition through the definite article, beyond the authors' awareness; (15a-b) show the involvement of the direct object through the zero article.

The intriguing picture of aspect in MidEng/OldEng explicated compositionally through the impact of nominals becomes complete when example (2) is added – with the analysis above on the possibilities for unbounding each component. Subjects, direct and indirect objects participate in aspectual composition in MidEng/OldEng too, just like in ModEng.

The analysis of data showing that CA is observable in MidEng/OldEng will end with an element bearing some resemblance to a determiner/article. It is the adverbial *þa* 'then', called an "action marker" (Enkvist 1972; Wårvik 2011, Schulz 2014) and known for its high prevalence.[18] It can be exemplified by this sentence from Wårvik (2011):

[18] Namely, the third most frequent word in OldEng (Wårvik 2011). But one of the reasons for this extremely high prevalence is that *þa* exercised various functions: conjunction, adverb, pronoun, demonstrative determiner (Wårvik 2011).

(16) **Þa** (i) hie **þa** (ii) hamweard wendon mid þære herehyþe, **þa** (iii) metton hie micelne sciphere wicenga, and **þa** (iv) wiþ **þa** (v) gefuhton þy ilcan dæge, and **þa** (vi) Deniscan ahton sige
'**When** (i) they **then** (ii) returned homeward with that booty, **then** (iii) they met a large fleet of pirates, and **then** (iv) fought against **them** (v) the same day, and **the** (vi) Danes had the victory'

It may be difficult to explain the alteration of *þa* between an adverb and a determiner in (v-vi) above, but clearly all the verbs introduced by *þa* exhibit perfectivity: whether as an adverb or a determiner, *þa* signals or amplifies it. Both Wårvik (2011) and Schulz (2014) are works exclusively devoted to *þa*. Wårvik does not discuss aspect, but Schulz (2014: 80) maintains that "*þa*-clauses are usually perfective". As the aspectual functions of *þa* vis-à-vis aspect require further research, they will not be explored here. But they must obviously stand high in the list of priorities for analyses of the MidEng/OldEng aspectual system.

8. The brain and its restricted storage capacity: a video- or a photo camera?

Now it remains to show how exactly perfectivity is generated in real sentences/sequences such as (3a), (5a) in ModEng, and (2) in MidEng, i.e., not in hypothetical sentences, given that the main verb (*made*) has no own aspectual value and allows perfectivity and imperfectivity. Perfectivity arises syntactically through Verkuyl's perfectivity schema (without leaks), and cognitively through a mechanism enabling participants to be treated in the human mind as temporally bounded entities with precisely the same values. Native speakers of a language could admit that *the child* in (5a) *can* be seen as a bounded temporal stretch, starting where the woman starts to persuade the child to drink, and finishing where the child has already drunk (water from the well), but they might also argue that *the well* cannot possibly be seen as a bounded temporal stretch – because it is a stationary object.

This would be an incorrect line of reasoning. Sentences (3a), (5a), and all similar sentences are not about "individuals" (Carlson's 1977) such as "the woman" ("she"), "the child" and "the well" – complex concepts

persisting through time, but encompass temporal stages of the relevant individuals. These are perceived by the observer-speaker and communicated to the hearer within the confines of the relevant sentences: (3a), (5a), etc. How they are perceived and communicated can be demonstrated by the following TV/video representation.

Suppose there exists a 45-minute video, from 00:00 to 45:00, about a woman, a child and a well as "individuals" in Carlson's (1977) terms, and that the time period in which the event in (5a) occurs is 30 seconds, between 30:30 and 31:00. This means that *the woman*, *the child* and *the well*, normally thought to be "physical objects" (Carlson's individuals), are actually nothing more than bounded temporal entities (stages of the relevant individuals), recorded as moving objects in the video (although they could be stationary just as well, i.e., standing still, not moving in space, yet moving in time) and lasting 30 seconds, between 30:30 and 31:00 (cf. Kabakčiev 2000: 99-100). In language, the temporal boundedness of entities/stages like these is directly marked by the article, as in ModEng, or signaled indirectly through the perfective aspect in the verb, as in Slavic (Kabakčiev 2000: 123–151). Note that in an imperfective (non-bounded iterative) sentence/sequence such as (3b), (8c), the referent of the bare noun in *from wells* will map its iterativity (indefinite recurrence) onto the referent of the verb, generating in it an imperfective (non-bounded iterative) reading, a recurring picture of a well/wells with an unknown beginning and an unknown end.[19] Here the plurality of *wells* and the absence of an article, i.e., the absence of a marker of temporal boundedness, block the single-event reading and generate indefinite (non-bounded) iterativity, something expected to be a feature of the verb. The especially intriguing thing is that, instead of being denoted/signaled by the verb, the non-bounded iterativity stems from the NP *wells*. Note also the equally remarkable circumstance that the triggering of non-bounded iterativity cannot, in fact, be ascribed simply to the NP *wells*. Ultimately it is the zero article that is the source of imperfectivity (non-bounded iterativity)![20]

Here above, and in Kabakčiev (2000), it was made clear that the article functions as a marker of temporal boundedness on nominals associated with

[19] The indefinite recurrence will, in turn, be mapped onto *the woman* and *the child* (Kabakčiev 2000: 136ff; 2019).

[20] Compare the insistence throughout an entire book that there is simply no such thing as a zero article; the zero article is "a myth" (Berezowski 2011). As for mapping temporal values in imperfective sentences, see the exact mechanism in Kabakčiev (2019).

a verb (participants in situations), and that this temporal feature can easily be recognized when the relevant situation is presented videographically. Placing *a/the* on nominals in sentences such as (3a), (5a), the brain – both individual and collective, states: "each of these entities participating in this perfective situation is bounded in time"![21] Just like a standard PC today, the brain lacks the enormous memory capacity necessary to keep all situations as videos, with all the stages (bounded/non-bounded) of all individuals taking part in all situations permanently happening around. Hence, the brain resorts to this memory-saving technique, marking referents of nominals as bounded in time through the article – in English and similar languages, or marking the referent of the verb as bounded in time through the perfective aspect – in Slavic and similar languages. Obviously, the marking of temporal boundedness through an article is a photographic rather than a videographic technique. And just like the photo of a child eating a sandwich cannot reveal precisely whether the child ate the sandwich completely or not, whereas a video can, so do the articles (*a*&*the*) signal boundedness, yet they do not carry this boundedness over to the speaker/hearer's awareness. The function of the articles (*a*&*the*) to signal temporal boundedness of nominal referents remains hidden to the native speaker. But linguistic analyses here and elsewhere (Kabakčiev 2000; 2019) demonstrate that articles do signal temporal boundedness – within Verkuyl's perfective schema, in a covert, intricate and highly specialized manner.

9. Possible paths for research into CA diachronically

The analysis here, based on my version of the CA theory with its conception of the inverse dependence of markers of temporal boundedness in verbs and nouns and the mechanism of mapping temporal values between verbal and nominal referents (Kabakčiev 2000), complemented with Leiss' diachronic theory, reveals a causative link in the history of English between the loss of aspect and the emergence of articles. This link (assuming that it is true) ought to accompany the future description of the MidEng/OldEng aspectual

[21] Note that this is not "a general rule", it is valid for Verkuyl's perfective schema! For example, if the articles *the* and *a* in *The kid ate a fig* mark boundedness, this boundedness is eliminated in *The kid was eating a fig*, due to the progressive (Kabakčiev 2000: 163–179).

system. Also, the view that every historical stage in a language displays an equilibrium between various aspectual devices, including peripheral ones, is here further corroborated with respect to article and aspect. But it must be complemented by future research into certain closely related spheres, especially case, and particularly the contrast between accusative and genitive-partitive, for which there are reasonable assumptions that it is intertwined with aspect.

Apart from the definite article (after its emergence), the *þa* determiner (adverb) and certain case markers, many other aspectual devices, less central, can be found in the different historical stages of English. One such device has been shown by Lavidas (2013): cognate constructions of the type *smile a smile*, *laugh a laugh*, etc. These were absent in OldEng and on the rise in MidEng. Similar constructions in ModEng, of the *have a look* type, are associated with perfectivity (Olsson 1961; Kabakčiev 2000: 211–215). It is precisely the mapping of boundedness from the nominal onto the verbal referent that clearly manifests the aspect connection of both groups of phrases. The absence of cognate constructions in OldEng is easily explained by the absence of an indefinite article in OldEng and its appearance in MidEng, but also with the diminishing presence of verbal perfectivity in OldEng and its final loss in MidEng. When grammatical devices in the verb (whether lexical or syntactic) for the denotation of perfectivity in a language diminish or disappear, as this happened in OldEng (loss of perfective verbs), it is logical for their absence to be compensated, and this can be effectuated in the domain of nominals. If/when the history of cognate constructions such as *smile a smile*, *laugh a laugh* etc. is fully revealed, this must also contribute to clarifying the history and role of the *have a look* type phrases – that play an even more significant part in the aspectual system of English.[22]

Another area of the OldEng aspectual system in need of a more precise description is the verbal lexicon with the changes occurring in it. Gelderen (2014: 104) describes the "re-analysis of verb meaning from object experiencer to subject experiencer" in the verb *fear* from the meaning 'to frighten' to the meaning 'to fear'. This is a change from telic to non-telic lexical meaning, hence from perfectivity to imperfectivity in a

[22] The mapping of boundedness from a nominal onto a verb in English (*John had a swim in the river*), as explained in Kabakčiev (2000: 212), is included in the *World Lexicon of Grammaticalization* (Kuteva et al. 2019: 343) as a device related to grammatical perfectivization.

sentence/clause. Recall that meanings of verbs as lexical items are a factor for explicating aspect within Verkuyl's schemata. It can be supposed that a certain portion of the OldEng verb lexicon underwent similar changes, that have to do with the aspect-article interdependence in synchronic and diachronic terms. Future research will reveal further the parameters of these changes.

10. Conclusion

The development from Proto-Indo-European through OldEng-MidEng to ModEng corroborates the idea of the inverse dependence of markers of boundedness (Kabakčiev 2000: 153–161) along the following lines. Proto-Indo-European featured a perfective-imperfective distinction in verbs. In most modern Indo-European languages the distinction was lost, while in some it was preserved. Where aspect was lost, articles gradually appeared, and today most modern Germanic languages feature a regular pattern of a definite and an indefinite article. All these facts are in consistence with what can be called the unified Leiss-Kabakčiev synchronic-diachronic theory of the aspect-article interplay (Leiss 2000; Kabakčiev 2000). To sum up, from the point of view of the continuum between VA and CA languages, where Proto-Indo-European and the Slavic languages occupy one end (VA), and most modern Germanic languages (English, German, Dutch, etc.) occupy the opposite end (CA), MidEng and OldEng can be defined as hybrid languages with their remnants of VA and simultaneously a CA system featuring no definite article in one stage and a gradual emergence of a definite article (and later an indefinite one) in following stages. It can easily be predicted that future research will reveal other features of the complex and highly intriguing system of aspect in the earlier stages of MidEng/OldEng, completely different from ModEng. But if grammarians and diachronic linguists continue to turn a blind eye to the regularities related to the articles – outlined here and initially discovered decades ago (Verkuyl 1972; Leiss 2000; Kabakčiev 1984; 2000), more years and decades may have to pass until it is finally recognized that the emergence of the definite article in MidEng/OldEng was a turning point in the history of English that occurred to fulfill the task of marking temporal boundedness on nominals, and thence perfectivity at the sentence/clause level. The definite and the indefinite article serve the explication of perfectivity

in compositional terms in English: this is their true raison d'être. As for definiteness and indefiniteness, these are features of the articles that are also important, but less important and residual.

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THE ENGLISH VOWEL SCHWA AS A DIFFICULTY TO INTERMEDIATE EFL STUDENTS: EVIDENCE FROM PHONEMIC TRANSCRIPTION**

Abstract
This article presents a study that seeks to investigate whether or not the English neutral vowel schwa (henceforth – schwa) poses difficulties to a group of intermediate students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) whose first language is Norwegian (further – participants). The study involves a corpus of phonemic transcriptions written by the participants in the series of 4 tasks. In the corpus, schwa-related errors are identified in accordance with the methodological approach formulated by Mompean and Fouz-González (2021). The results reveal several substitutions of schwa for /e/, /ɒ/, /æ/, /ɑ:/, and /ɜ:/. These findings correlate with the results of the post-hoc procedure that involves the identification and classification of schwa-related errors in the participants' speech in English. Further, the findings are discussed from the vantage point of schwa as a difficulty to intermediate EFL learners.

Key words: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), error analysis, phonemic transcription, schwa

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1. Introduction

This article presents and discusses a study that seeks to investigate whether or not intermediate students of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) experience difficulties with the English neutral vowel schwa (further in the article – schwa). In the present study, schwa is operationalised as a central unrounded vowel with the neutral lip position that typically occurs in unstressed syllables due to articulatory reduction of peripheral vowels (Čubrović 2007; Flemming 2009; Recasens 2021; Silverman 2011). Schwa is represented in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) as the symbol /ə/ that is placed in the middle of the IPA vowel chart (Carley and Mees 2021). Due to its frequency and systematicity of use in the English language, schwa is often referred to as a default vowel sound (Boswell 2020). In English, schwa is characterised by a free distribution, i.e. it may occur in initial, medial and final positions in a word (Čubrović 2007). In addition to the unstressed syllables in polysyllabic words, schwa is typically associated with the weak forms (e.g., *must* /məst/) of function words due to the rhythm and intonation in the utterance (Carley and Mees 2021). Schwa is not found in the strong forms (e.g., *must* /mʌst/) of function words that are stressed in the utterance and stressed syllables of the stand-alone words, for instance dictionary entries (Cruttenden 2014).

From the point of view of diachrony, schwa is associated with different historical processes of sound change in the English language (Minkova and Lefkowitz 2021). In synchrony, the patterning of schwa exhibits a tendency to vary depending on the variety of English (Heselwood 2007). For instance, in the Southern British Standard variety, or SBS (Čubrović and Bjelaković 2020), schwa is widely omitted without affecting the meaning of a word (Demirezen 2021; Heselwood 2006). In contrast to SBS, however, schwa does not appear to be easily omitted in General American (GA). According to Demirezen (2021: 6), this observation can be illustrated by the following pairs of words in SBS and GA, cf.

N	Word	GA	SBS
1	Military	/ˈmɪləˌteri/	/ˈmɪlɪtri/
2	Ordinary	/ˈɔːrdənˌeri/	/ˈɔːdənri/
3	Secretary	/ˈsekrəˌteri/	/ˈsekrətri/
4	Temporary	/ˈtempəreri/	/ˈtemprəri/

Table 1. The difference between synchronic patterning of schwa in GA and SBS

Whereas schwa is optional in certain positions in SBS, especially as far as the pronunciation of suffixes is concerned (see Table 1), a reverse phenomenon of schwa insertion is found in Irish English (IrE) and Scottish English (ScE). In these varieties of the English language, schwa is inserted in a number of consonant clusters, for instance /l/ + a consonant in IrE (Hickey 2007) and the insertion of schwa in /lm/, /rm/, /rn/ and /rl/ in ScE (Maguire 2018).

Since schwa is frequent in the English language, it seems logical to assume that EFL learners on the intermediate level of EFL proficiency, i.e. on the B1/B2 levels according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, or CEFR (The Council of Europe 2011), are bound to be exposed to schwa in EFL instructional settings. In this regard, Pennington (2014: 94) observes that schwa poses pronunciation difficulties to the majority of EFL students whose first language (L1) backgrounds are characterised by a lack of vowel reduction, for instance, Italian (Wheelock 2016), Korean (Lee 2020), and Spanish (Monroy-Casas 2011). In particular, the literature (Hunt-Gómez and Navarro-Pablo 2020; Monroy-Casas 2011) provides evidence of frequent mistakes made by Spanish L1 EFL learners, who substitute schwa for monophthongs (e.g., /a/ instead of /ə/ in *policeman* /po'lisman/) and diphthongs (/io/ instead of /ə/ in *television* /tele'vision/), whereas Italian L1 EFL learners (Wheelock 2016: 47) appear to insert schwa in atypical positions (e.g., /`sʊpə/ in *soup*). Similarly to Italian and Spanish, there is no schwa in the Korean language, hence Korean L1 EFL learners are reported to substitute it for /ʌ/ (Lee 2020: 105).

Whilst the current literature indicates that EFL learners from a variety of L1 backgrounds encounter difficulties with schwa (Hunt-Gómez and Navarro-Pablo 2020; Lee 2020; Monroy-Casas 2011; Wheelock 2016),

little is known about schwa as a problem to Norwegian L1 EFL students on the intermediate level of proficiency (Rugesæter 2014). In addition, there are insufficient studies that investigate the use of schwa by Norwegian L1 EFL learners in conjunction with the phonetic transcription (either in the broad or narrow sense). Arguably, a scientific inquiry into the use of schwa by Norwegian L1 intermediate EFL learners would be a promising avenue of research given that prior studies (Kapranov 2019a; Kapranov 2019b) report that EFL teachers in Norway consider schwa a problematic sound to Norwegian L1 EFL learners, especially on the beginner's level of proficiency in English. Based upon the literature (Kapranov 2019a), this study seeks to shed light on schwa as a potential challenge to Norwegian L1 EFL students (further in the article – "participants") on the intermediate level of EFL proficiency. Following Mompean and Fouz-González (2021), phonemic transcription in the IPA is employed in the study as a means of identifying schwa-related errors made by the participants. The study seeks to address the following research questions:

> RQ1: Would there be schwa-related errors in the participants' phonemic transcriptions in the IPA?
>
> RQ2: Does a variety of the English language, specifically GA and SBS, impact upon schwa-related errors in the participants' phonemic transcriptions in the IPA?

Further, this article proceeds as follows. First, prior research that deals with schwa as a challenge to EFL learners is discussed. Thereafter, the article presents an overview of the recent literature associated with the role of phonemic transcription in EFL teaching and learning. Afterwards, a brief explanation of the context of EFL teaching and learning in Norway is provided. Following that, the present study is introduced and discussed. Finally, the article is concluded with the summary of the findings and their linguo-didactic implications.

2. Schwa as a challenge to EFL learners

As mentioned in the introduction, the use of schwa poses challenges to EFL learners (Lee 2020; Levis 2018; Pennington 2014). In this regard, Ahn (1997: 258) indicates that the sources of difficulty stem from the

following two variables, namely i) the pronunciation of schwa is not reflected in the orthographic system of English and ii) the lack of an EFL learner's understanding of the phonetic and phonological properties of schwa. This observation is echoed by Nilsen and Rugesæter (2015), who indicate that one of the main problems that a Norwegian L1 EFL learner experiences is associated with vowel reduction in English, which involves the pronunciation of unstressed syllables as schwa. Another variable that is related to EFL learners' difficulties with schwa is accounted by the absence of schwa in their L1. In this regard, Nilsen and Rugesæter argue that "schwa is by far the most common vowel in English. In Norwegian, on the other hand, it is very rare" (2015: 89). The absence of schwa and, obviously, a host of other variables can lead to schwa-related errors that an EFL learner may encounter.

There are several fairly recent studies that specifically address the use of schwa by EFL learners by means of investigating it either in conjunction with other segmental properties of the English language (Bardakci 2015; Bryła-Cruz 2021; Hunt-Gómez and Navarro-Pablo 2020; Kapranov 2019a; Makino 2009; Rehman et al. 2020; Smith 2012; Wheelock 2016) or focusing exclusively on schwa as a source of difficulty to EFL learners (Hida 2020; Lacabex et al. 2008; Lee 2020; Rahal 2016). In particular, Lacabex, Lecumberri and Cooke (2008) examine the Spanish L1 EFL learners' ability to identify the English phonological contrast "full vowel – schwa" in two experimental conditions (auditory and articulatory) that involve the learners' perceptual performance of the contrast in isolation and in utterances. They conclude that phonetic training exhibits positive effects upon the perception and use of schwa by the participants in the study. Hida (2020) examines the effect of direct pedagogical intervention in the form of shadowing on the learners' ability to pronounce schwa. In the same vein as Lacabex, Lecumberri and Cooke (2008), Hida (2020) concludes that explicit didactic strategies of teaching schwa to EFL learners have positive effects on the correct pronunciation. Notably, Lee (2020) arrives at identical conclusions as far as the explicit teaching of schwa in Korean EFL contexts is concerned. Lee's (2020) findings are supported by the study conducted by Rahal (2016), who argues that schwa is a common error among Arabic L1 EFL learners. According to Rahal (2016), schwa-related errors are associated with the learners' insufficient awareness of the phonetic properties of schwa.

In contrast to the aforementioned studies, Bardakci (2015), Bryła-Cruz (2021), Hunt-Gómez and Navarro-Pablo (2020), Kapranov (2019a), Makino (2009), Rehman, Silpachai, Levis, Zhao, and Gutierrez-Osuna (2020), Smith (2012), Visoni and Marlina (2020), and Wheelock (2016) analyse EFL learners' problems with schwa in conjunction with other mispronunciation phenomena. These authors adopt the so-called broad or global perspective on errors in an EFL learner's speech in order to identify a range of frequently mispronounced segmentals. Guided by this perspective, Bardakci (2015) argues that schwa is one of the most common mistakes made by Turkish L1 EFL learners. A possible reason that explains the high frequency of occurrence of schwa-related errors is the substitution of schwa for a similar Turkish vowel /ɯ/ (Bardakci 2015). Unlike in Turkish, there is no schwa in such Romance languages as Italian and Spanish (at least, in their standard varieties), which leads to frequent errors in speech produced by EFL learners whose L1 are Italian (Wheelock 2016) and Spanish (Hunt-Gómez and Navarro-Pablo 2020). However, in contrast to Spanish L1 EFL learners, Italian L1 EFL students add schwa to the English words that end in a consonant (Wheelock 2016). Similarly to Italian and Spanish, schwa is absent in the phonological inventory of the standard Norwegian variety *Bokmål*, which poses problems to young EFL learners whose L1 is Norwegian (Kapranov 2019a). It is reported that Norwegian L1 EFL learners "have difficulties with pronouncing words like *salad*, *forward* with schwa /ə/. They pronounce schwa more like a lip rounding /ø/ or /e/" (Kapranov 2019a: 309). In comparison to Norwegian L1 EFL learners, however, Japanese L1 EFL students make schwa-related mistakes due to i) "the various spellings corresponding to this sound" (Makino 2009: 26) and ii) "the relatively small number of vowels in Japanese and the places of articulation in the mid to low central area" (Smith 2012: 201). These variables result in frequent substitutions of schwa for diphthongs by Japanese L1 EFL learners, e.g., /oʊ/ instead of /ə/ in *of* (Makino 2009; Smith 2012). Likewise, a systematic error analysis conducted by Rehman, Silpachai, Levis, Zhao, and Gutierrez-Osuna (2020) has provided an account of persistent schwa-related errors made by Arabic L1 EFL learners. In an analogous manner, Visoni and Marlina (2020) indicate that schwa is a recurrent error in Indonesian L1 EFL learners' speech in English. A recent study conducted by Bryła-Cruz (2021) reports that schwa is associated with a repetitive type of errors by Polish L1 EFL learners. Notably, Bryła-Cruz (2021) has established that male EFL learners in her study make

more schwa-related mistakes in comparison with female EFL learners on the same level of EFL proficiency.

The meta-analysis of the current literature suggests that schwa poses substantial problems to EFL learners from a variety of L1 backgrounds. The literature shares a common denominator that schwa-related errors should be addressed in EFL instructional contexts (Bardakci 2015; Hida 2020; Kapranov 2019a; Makino 2009; Smith 2012; Wheelock 2016).

3. Recent studies on phonemic transcription in EFL teaching and learning

One of the theoretical premises in this study involves the role of phonemic transcription as a means of EFL learners' error identification associated with the phonological properties of the English language (Mompean and Fouz-González 2021; Mompean and Lintunen 2015). It should be noted that starting from the 1990s, the application of phonemic transcription in an EFL classroom has been comprehensively described in applied linguistics and EFL studies (Jenkins 2004; Lintunen 2013; Mompean 2005; Wells 1996). The prior literature indicates that phonemic transcription is a valuable source of data that sheds light on EFL students' pronunciation errors (Mompean 2017: 480).The majority of publications in EFL studies (Jurida 2014; Lintunen 2005; Mompean 2005; Mompean and Lintunen 2015) share an assumption that errors made by EFL learners in phonemic transcription correlate with the analogous errors in their actual speech production in English. In other words, EFL learners seem to map their common pronunciation mistakes onto their phonemic transcriptions (Łodzikowski 2021; Mompean and Fouz-González 2021).

Whilst meta-analyses of the studies on phonemic transcription in EFL settings published prior to 2015 are amply represented in the literature (see Mompean and Lintunen 2015), there seems to be no systematic review of research on the topic published after 2015. Further, this article provides a brief outline of the recent studies (i.e., published in 2016 – 2021) that explore the use of phonemic transcription across several EFL contexts that involve EFL cohorts with such L1 backgrounds, as Polish (Łodzikowski 2021; Trzeciakowska 2016), Serbian (Tišma and Jeremić 2017), and Spanish (Mompean 2017; Mompean and Fouz-González 2021).

Trzeciakowska (2016) investigates Polish L1 EFL students' errors in phonemic transcriptions in a variety of experimental tasks in order to reveal the connection between errors in transcription and pronunciation. She argues that there is a

> […] correlation between pronunciation and transcription skills. From this perspective, it can be assumed that transcription errors, which vividly resemble faulty pronunciations, should be treated as indicators of deficient knowledge about pronunciation skills.
> (Trzeciakowska 2016: 180–181)

By means of examining a corpus of phonemic transcriptions in the IPA executed by the participants in her study, Trzeciakowska (2016: 175) has established that their mistakes in the IPA are ascribed to i) inadequate knowledge of transcription rules and ii) common pronunciation errors in the participants' speech in English. Similarly to the study conducted by Trzeciakowska (2016), Łodzikowski (2021) examines the use of the IPA in EFL settings in Poland. However, his study focuses on the IPA-based digital transcription tool that is employed in the course in English phonetics in order to facilitate the learners' phonological awareness. Łodzikowski (2021) indicates that the use of the digital transcription tool stipulates the learners' autonomy in the learning process, facilitates their phonological awareness, and helps them with the identification and correction of errors.

Along the lines of the study conducted by Łodzikowski (2021), Mompean (2017) as well as Mompean and Fouz-González (2021) develop the construal of phonological awareness in conjunction with the use of phonemic transcription. In particular, Mompean (2017) operationalises phonological awareness as an EFL learner's sensitivity to the sound structure of the English language. He indicates that the use of phonemic transcription draws EFL learners' attention to linguistic details, contributes to a better sound discrimination both in isolation and within the speech stream, and fosters their capability of auditory discrimination. Based upon the study by Mompean (2017), Mompean and Fouz-González (2021) argue that the linguo-didactic value of phonemic transcription consists in providing the learners with a framework for autonomous learning of the English sounds. In addition, Mompean and Fouz-González (2021) suggest that phonemic transcription should be taught concurrently with practicing pronunciation skills.

The aforementioned contention is echoed by Tišma and Jeremić (2017), who investigate the methodology of teaching phonemic transcription to Serbian L1 EFL learners. Specifically, Tišma and Jeremić (2017) compare two methods, the traditional teaching of broad phonemic transcription based upon rote memorisation and the novel approach developed by Underhill (2005) that "attempts at making articulation empirically testable, i.e., visible, even touchable" (Tišma and Jeremić 2017: 590). Whereas the results of the comparison reveal that both the traditional and novel methods of teaching phonemic transcription are regarded favourably by the learners, the latter appears to be associated with fostering the learners' autonomy and their active engagement in the learning process.

Summarising the recent publications, it seems possible to observe that the literature emphasises a facilitative role of the IPA transcription in EFL learners' phonological awareness (Łodzikowski 2021; Mompean 2017; Mompean and Fouz-González 2021; Tišma and Jeremić 2017; Trzeciakowska 2016). It should be noted, however, that there are no current studies that elucidate the role of phonemic transcription in the EFL context in Norway. Further, a brief outline of the context of EFL teaching and learning in Norway is provided.

4. The context of EFL teaching and learning in Norway

Current research indicates that Norwegians have a generally high level of EFL proficiency (Busby 2021). The English language in Norway has become a part of Norwegian speakers' linguistic repertoire due to its increasing use (Rindal and Piercy 2013). Whilst Norwegians do not speak English as a second language (*Ibid.*), the presence of English in Norwegian educational contexts is significant to such an extent that it is no longer regarded as EFL (Vattøy 2019). Arguably, English in Norway occupies the niche between a second and a foreign language, since it is considered "a natural, supranational language in modern Norwegian society" (Chvala 2020: 1).

In terms of the EFL teaching and learning context in Norway, it should be observed that students are expected to start formal EFL instruction in Year 1 of primary school and continue their EFL studies until Year 10, i.e. by the end of the so-called lower secondary school. At primary and lower secondary school, Norwegian EFL students are assumed to have

been exposed to 588 contact hours of English (Vattøy 2019). As far as the Norwegian EFL curriculum is concerned, it follows the *can-do* statements formulated by the Common European Framework of References for Languages (The Council of Europe 2011).

Based upon the revised curriculum, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (*Udir* in Norwegian) regards the teaching and learning of English pronunciation as an integral part of communicative skills. Specifically, Udir (2021) mandates that

> Communication is achieved through listening, reading, writing, prepared oral production and spontaneous oral interaction, including the use of appropriate communication strategies. It also includes participation in various social arenas, where it is important to train to master an increasing number of genres and forms of expression. Good communication requires knowledge and skills in using vocabulary and idiomatic structures, pronunciation, intonation, spelling, grammar and syntax of sentences and texts. (Udir 2021)

It follows from the revised subject curriculum (Udir 2021) that an EFL learner's familiarity with English pronunciation and intonation is one of the institutionalised requirements of the teaching and learning process. In reality, however, insufficient attention is awarded to phonetics in primary and lower secondary schools (Rugesæter 2014). This observation is echoed by Bøhn and Hansen (2017: 55), who argue that little is known about how pronunciation is taught and assessed in Norway.

One of the peculiarities of the current Norwegian EFL context lies in the rare use of the IPA in an EFL classroom (Bøhn and Hansen 2017; Rugesæter 2014). For instance, the IPA does not seem to be employed in order to teach the English sounds that cause substantial difficulties to Norwegian L1 EFL learners, such as /θ/, /ð/, /z/, and /w/ (Rugesæter 2014). It could be argued that there exists a discrepancy between the institutionalised goal of teaching the English sound system and the lack of focus on phonetics and "little guidance in the assessment of pronunciation" (Bøhn and Hansen 2017: 55) in a Norwegian EFL classroom. In this regard, Bøhn and Hansen (*Ibid.*) observe that whereas Norwegian L1 EFL students are expected by *Udir* (2021) to use language-appropriate patterns in their oral communication in English, there are no clear guidelines concerning

what these patterns involve in terms of pronunciation and intonation and what an EFL teacher should do in order to teach them.

Given that the teaching and learning of English phonetics is not prioritised and the IPA is not used at school often, a typical Norwegian L1 EFL learner might experience a number of difficulties with the English sounds even on the intermediate level of proficiency (Rugesæter 2014). Arguably, one of those difficulties is associated with schwa. The following section of the article presents and discusses a study that seeks to establish whether or not schwa is problematic to Norwegian L1 EFL learners.

5. The present study

The present study is embedded in the instructional setting of a course in English Phonetics offered at a regional university in Norway. The course in English Phonetics is a part of the so-called *Årsstudium* (Year Course in English), which is a stand-alone full-time university course comprised of such modules as Functional Grammar of English, EFL Didactics, English Literature, and Anglo-Saxon Civilization. The course in English Phonetics is based upon the book *English Phonetics for Teachers* by Nilsen and Rugesæter (2015). Following the book, the course is structured as a series of seminars (see Table 2 below that summarises seminar topics).

N	Seminars	Seminar Topics
1	Seminar 1	Introduction. Course expectations and requirements.
2	Seminars 2-3	Articulation. Phoneme and allophone. Syllable.
3	Seminars 4-5	Consonants. Stops. Fricatives. Nasals. Approximants.
4	Seminars 6-7	Vowels. The front monophthongs. The central monophthongs. The back monophthongs. The weak vowels. The front closing diphthongs. The back closing diphthongs. The centring diphthongs.

5	Seminars 8-9	Word stress. Sentence stress. Weak forms. Assimilation and elision.
6	Seminars 10-11	Intonation. The five basic tones.
7	Seminars 12-13	Teaching pronunciation in an EFL classroom.
8	Seminars 14-15	Varieties of spoken English. SBS. GA.

Table 2. The structure of the course in English Phonetics

Elements of the IPA are introduced starting from the English consonants at Seminar 3 and adding English vowels at Seminar 6. Phonemic transcription is taught explicitly with substantial emphasis on practicing it in class and at home. Whilst phonemic transcription is focused on SBS during the first semester (Seminars 1-7), elements of GA are discussed in parallel with SBS starting from Seminar 3. During the second semester (Seminars 8-15), the focus on phonemic transcription shifts towards GA. However, GA is discussed in contrast with SBS at Seminars 8-15. The application of phonemic transcription to other varieties of the English language (e.g., IrE) is not addressed in the course.

The study is inspired by the previous literature (Kapranov 2019a), which indicates that schwa is regarded as one of the sources of difficulties to Norwegian L1 young EFL learners on the A1/A2 levels of EFL proficiency according to CEFR (The Council of Europe 2011). In line with the literature (Kapranov 2019a), the study seeks to examine whether or not schwa is associated with difficulties posed to a group of participants, who are Norwegian L1 EFL learners on the intermediate level of proficiency in the English language (i.e., on the B1/B2 levels). In contrast to the previous studies (Kapranov 2019a), however, this investigation focuses exclusively on schwa without identifying and discussing other segmental elements of the English language that the participants find problematic in their speech production in English.

In line with Mompean and Fouz-González (2021), phonemic transcription in the study is regarded as a diagnostic means of error identification. Hence, the hypothesis suggests that the participants' potential difficulties with schwa would be manifested as schwa-related errors in their phonemic transcriptions in the IPA. As mentioned in the introduction, the study seeks to answer two research questions that focus

on i) the identification of schwa-related errors in the participants' phonemic transcriptions and ii) the impact of GA and SBS upon schwa-related errors in the phonemic transcriptions. Based upon the hypothesis and the research questions, the study involves a series of phonemic transcriptions in the IPA executed by the participants and a post-hoc procedure that consists in the participants' spontaneous oral narratives in English.

5.1. Participants

In total, there are 15 participants (10 females and 5 males, M age = 23.1 y.o., SD = 6) in the study. All the participants are intermediate EFL learners who at the time of the study were enrolled in an EFL programme at a regional university in Norway. The participants' L1 is Norwegian. As far as the participants' L1 background is concerned, it should be explained that Norwegian and Saami are two official languages in Norway, whilst Kven and Romani are regional and minority languages (Hiss, Pesch and Sollid 2021). There are no participants who are associated with the socio-linguistic backgrounds other than Norwegian. The participants indicate that they speak *Vestlandsk*, a dialect of the Norwegian language spoken in Western Norway.

English is a foreign language to all the participants. There are neither English L1 speakers nor early balanced English/Norwegian bilinguals among them. The participants are assumed to be on the intermediate B1/B2 levels of proficiency in English according to CEFR (The Council of Europe 2011). This assumption is based upon their secondary school leaving certificates. In terms of the participants' preferences for a particular English variety, the following should be explained. In an informal discussion at one of the seminars in English Phonetics, nine participants (60%) have reported that they prefer using SBS, five participants (33,3%) speak GA, whereas one participant (6,6 %) uses ScE. These findings correspond to the previous literature (Kapranov 2019c; Rindal and Piercy 2013) which indicates that Norwegian L1 EFL learners typically exhibit preferences for GA and SBS as the varieties that they use in class and extra-murally.

The participants are requested to sign a Consent form that allows the author of the present article to process, analyse and publish their written data for scientific purposes. To ensure confidentiality, the participants' real names are coded. The following coding scheme is used in the study, e.g. P as in "participant" and the number (P1, P2, … P15).

5.2. Materials, methods and procedure

The study involves a series of phonemic transcriptions (total N of tasks = 4) that are executed by the participants during the course of two semesters, i.e. Task 1, Task 2, Task 3, and Task 4. All four tasks involve the so-called broad phonemic transcriptions in the IPA.

The materials in all four tasks are derived from short texts (N = 4) that provide general plot synopses for popular feature films on the web-site Internet Movie Database (www.imdb.com). The Internet Movie Database (also abbreviated as IMDb) is an online database of "information related to movies, television programs and video games, including cast, production crew, fictional characters, biographies, plot summaries and reviews" (Fornacciari et al. 2017: 5). The use of the general plot synopses of feature films as materials for the tasks is explained by the tendency of the IMDb to provide an easy-to-understand descriptive narrative about the film and the main characters in the film (Goldstein et al. 2007).

The materials in all four tasks are edited by the author of the article to ensure that they do not pose substantial problems to the participants in terms of the lexical and syntactic complexity. After the materials have been edited, they are comprised of frequently used non-specialist vocabulary items and the maximum of two T-units per sentence. All the materials that are used in the transcription tasks are stylistically neutral narratives. The texts that are used in Tasks 1-2 are lexically and syntactically similar in terms of the total number or words, sentences, and T-Units. The author of this study follows the definition of the *T-unit*, or minimal terminable unit of language, provided by Hunt (1965), who defines it as "a single main clause (or independent clause) plus whatever other subordinate clauses or non-clauses are attached to, or embedded within, that one main clause" (Hunt 1965: 93). Whilst Tasks 3 and 4 differ in the total number of words, they are identical in terms of the total number of sentences and T-Units, as seen in Table 3 below.

N	Descriptive Statistics	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
1	Total N of words	30	39	88	122
2	Total N of sentences	4	2	4	4
3	Total N of T-Units	4	4	10	10

Table 3. The descriptive statistics of the texts used in Tasks 1–4

From the point of view of research methodology, the approach to error identification in the tasks (i.e., Tasks 1 – 4) should be explained in detail. The author of this article concurs with Lintunen (2005), who posits that EFL learners' errors associated with English vowels are problematic to identify and compare due to difficulties in the limits of acceptability. In this regard, Vishnevskaya (2011: 78) argues that acceptability may involve the levels of variability associated with the varieties of English, word stress patterns, and phonetic variation in English polysyllabic words, to name just a few. Taking these variables into account, error identification in this study factors in phonetic variability. In order to illustrate the procedure of error analysis, let us consider how phonemic transcription of the noun *expectations* is analysed in the study. Both /ˌekspekˈteɪ**ʃə**nz/ and /ˌekspekˈteɪ**ʃn**z/ are accepted and, consequently, not identified as errors, whilst, for instance, /ˌekspekˈteɪ**ʃɒ**nz/ is counted as a mistake. Additionally, the procedure of error identification in the study factors in textual constrains of the tasks. It means that the materials in Tasks 1 – 4 do not involve individual words in isolation. Subsequently, the materials in the tasks should not be transcribed as individual stand-alone lexical items. For instance, in the present error analysis the transcription of the indefinite article *a* as /æ/ and/or /eɪ/ in the sentence *It's a cat* is counted as a mistake, whereas the transcription of *a* as/ə/ is considered to be correct. Prior to each task, the participants have been reminded about the importance of paying attention to transcribing sounds in the speech flow and observing the stress in phonetic words and sentences rather than stressing all individual words. Furthermore, the participants are advised that the texts in all four tasks are stylistically neutral and non-emphatic.

Guided by the aforementioned approach to error identification, the participants' phonemic transcriptions in the tasks are analysed quantitatively per group. First, the participants' errors associated with schwa are manually identified in the tasks by the author of the article and converted into numerical representations that are subsequently entered into the Statistical Package for Social Sciences, or SPSS (IBM 2011). Thereafter, means and standard deviations per error type per group are computed in SPSS (IBM 2011). Second, the percentage of the participants who have made errors associated with schwa per type of error per group is calculated in SPSS. Finally, the participants' errors are double-checked by an experienced phonetician who works at the university examination board.

As far as the procedure in the study is concerned, the participants are requested to transcribe Tasks 1 and 2 in the IPA in SBS in the first semester of the course in English Phonetics, while Tasks 3 and 4 are transcribed by the participants in the second semester of the course. Task 3 is requested to be transcribed in the IPA in SBS, whereas Task 4 is asked to be transcribed in the IPA in GA. All tasks are executed by the participants electronically on their personal computers at home. In addition, after the completion of all tasks, the participants are requested to record spontaneous oral narratives that are analysed in the post-hoc procedure.

5.3. Results

The error analysis has revealed several types of schwa-related errors made by the participants in all four tasks. These errors are summarised in Table 4 in the form of means (M) and standard deviations (SD) per group.

N	Error type	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
1	/e/ instead of /ə/	M 1.1 (SD 0.3)	M 4 (SD 2)	M 1 (SD 0)	M 2.5 (SD 3.3)
2	/ɒ/ instead of /ə/	M 1 (SD 0)	M 2.1 (SD 0.8)	M 1.2 (SD 0.4)	M 4.6 (SD 1.7)
3	/æ/ instead of /ə/	M 1.6 (SD 0.9)	M 1.8 (SD 4.9)	M 1 (SD 0.7)	M 4.8 (SD 1.2)
4	/ʌ/ instead of /ə/	–	M 1.4 (SD 0.5)	M 2.3 (SD 0.9)	–
5	/ɑː/instead of /ə/	M 1.3 (SD 0.5)	M 1 (SD 0)	M 3.5 (SD 2.5)	–
6	/ɜː/ instead of /ə/	–	M 1 (SD 0)	–	–
7	/ʊ/ instead of /ə/	M 1 (SD 0)	–	M 6.7 (SD 1)	M 2 (SD 1)
8	/eɪ/ instead of /ə/	–	–	–	M 1.8 (SD 0.4)

Table 4. Means and standard deviations of errors associated with schwa

Table 5 illustrates the percentage of participants per group, who made schwa-related mistakes.

N	Error type	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4
1	/e/ instead of /ə/	46.6%	53.3%	13.3%	40%
2	/ɒ/ instead of /ə/	6.6%	46.6%	33.3%	40%
3	/æ/ instead of /ə/	73.3%	40%	46.6%	60%
4	/ʌ/ instead of /ə/	–	33.3%	20%	–
5	/ɑː/instead of /ə/	40%	26.6%	13.3%	–

6	/ɜ:/ instead of /ə/	–	6.6%	–	–
7	/ʊ/ instead of /ə/	26.6%	–	60%	40%
8	/eɪ/ instead of /ə/	–	–	–	26.6%

Table 5. Percentage of participants, who made errors associated with schwa

5.4. Discussion

As mentioned in the introduction, the study seeks to provide answers to two research questions. Whereas the first research question is concerned with the identification and classification of schwa-related errors in the participants' phonemic transcriptions in the IPA, the second research question aims to answer whether or not a variety of the English language impacts upon errors associated with schwa in the participants' phonemic transcriptions. These research questions will be discussed in detail in the following subsections of the article.

5.4.1. Discussing research question 1

It is evident from Table 4 that whilst schwa-related errors are present in all tasks, the types of errors and their distribution in the tasks differ. Figure 1 below illustrates the difference between the distribution of error types in Tasks 1 and 2.

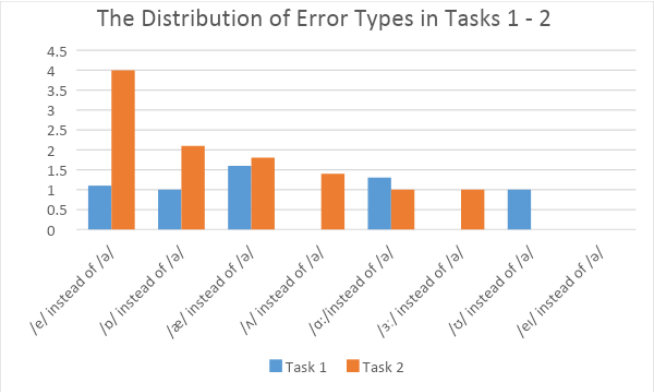

Figure 1. The distribution of schwa-related error types in Tasks 1 and 2

As previously described in the article, Tasks 1 and 2 involve texts that are phonologically balanced and similar in terms of the number of words to be transcribed (see Table 3). Furthermore, Tasks 1 and 2 are offered to the participants for transcription in the first semester of the course in English phonetics, when the participants could be assumed to be at the initial stage of familiarity with the IPA. Additionally, the participants are instructed to transcribe both Task 1 and Task 2 in SBS. Arguably, these variables render the tasks comparable as far as the error analysis in the present study is concerned.

The results of the error analysis indicate that there are several types of errors associated with schwa that involve a substitution of schwa for another vowel (see Table 4). Several error types have been identified both in Task 1 and Task 2, for instance, the substitutions of /ə/ for /e/, /ɒ/, /æ/, and /ɑ:/. These errors could be related to a number of variables, such as the influence of the English orthography, a nascent stage of transcription skills, and, perhaps, an over-taxed capacity of the participants' long-term memory associated with the retention of the IPA symbols in order to use them properly in the transcriptions. Another variable could involve the participants' insufficient attention to schwa due to the focus on the transcription of the English consonants that are absent in the Norwegian language, such as /z/, /θ/, and /ð/. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this study to provide a comprehensive error analysis, it should be mentioned that 93% of the participants make mistakes by substituting the fricative

/z/ for /s/. The lack of understanding of the /s/ – /z/ contrast in English by the participants has been one of their major challenges during the course in English Phonetics. Arguably, the participants have redirected their cognitive resources, attention, and working memory allocation from schwa towards transcribing other sounds, for instance /z/. Subsequently, this phenomenon may contribute to the increase in schwa-related errors in Task 2 even after the participants have received more instruction associated with phonemic transcription in the IPA.

Whereas the substitutions of /ə/ for other vowels (for instance, /e/, /ɒ/, /æ/, and /ɑ:/) are similar in Tasks 1 – 2 (see Figure 1), the substitution of /ə/ for /e/ increases in Task 2. In this task, nearly one half of the participants (46.6%) make this mistake (see Table 5). The substitution of /ə/ for /e/, especially in Task 2, could be explained by the following reasons. First, the participants have insufficient skills in the IPA transcription in the first semester of the course. Obviously, the lack of skills in transcription affects not only the correct transcription of schwa, but other vowels and some consonant sounds as well (e.g., the English fricative /z/ is consistently transcribed by the participants as /s/). It should be noted that similar observations are made by Mompean (2017), Tišma and Jeremić (2017), and Trzeciakowska (2016), who suggest that low levels of the IPA transcription skills correlate with the errors in phonemic transcription in the IPA irrespective of an EFL's learner understanding of the phonetic and phonological properties of the English language. Notably, the same pattern of substitution of schwa for /e/ is reported in the study by Rahal (2016), who attributes this error to an EFL learner's insufficient awareness of the phonetic properties of schwa. Second, the spike in the substitution of /ə/ for /e/ in Task 2 could be explained by means of referring to the conclusions made by Łodzikowski (2021), Mompean and Fouz-González (2021), Tišma and Jeremić (2017), and Trzeciakowska (2016), who point to the orthographic system of English as a cause EFL students' difficulties associated with schwa. Judging from the data, the major bulk of the substitution of /ə/ for /e/ in Task 1 and, especially, in Task 2 occurs in the definite article *the*, which the participants transcribe as /ðe/. Given that there is neither /ðɪ/ nor /ðiː/ in the data, the stress placement as a cause of this error should be factored out. Hence, it is argued that the error in the substitution of /ə/ for /e/ is caused, predominantly, by the impact of the English spelling upon the participants' transcriptions in the IPA.

Judging from the data, another error is manifested by the substitution of schwa for /æ/ in Tasks 1 and 2. This error in Task 1 appears to be confined, mostly, to the transcription of *and* (e.g., /ænd/ instead of /ənd/). This type of error is made by 73.3% of the participants and its mean occurrence per group in Task 1 is M = 1.6 (SD 0.9). The results of the error analysis indicate that 11 out of 15 participants have made between one and two errors of this type in their IPA transcriptions. It seems that the high percentage of the participants who substitute /ə/ for /æ/ in Task 1 is reflective of the participants' problems with i) the English stress on the level of phrase and sentence and, concurrently with that, ii) insufficient understanding of the phonetic and phonological properties of schwa.

Data analysis indicates that only two participants do not have schwa-related mistakes in their transcriptions in Tasks 1 – 2. This finding is illustrated by Figure 2 that presents the number of errors per participant in Tasks 1 – 2.

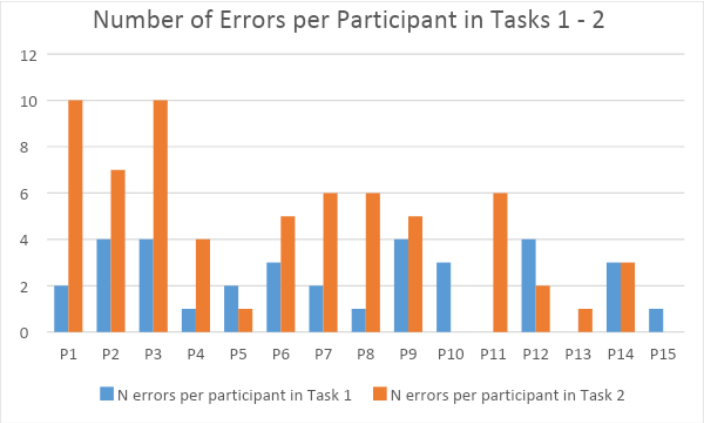

Figure 2. The number of errors per participant in Tasks 1 – 2

It is evident from Figure 2 that the standard deviation of all error types per group in Task 2 is higher (SD = 2, 81) in contrast to that of Task 1 (SD = 1,14). This finding illustrates that several participants (for instance, P1, P2, P3, P7, P8, P11) make the major bulk of the schwa-related errors, whereas the rest of the participants make between one and two errors in Tasks 1 and 2 (see Figure 2). Judging from the observations of the participants

at the seminars in English Phonetics, one of the reasons for the increase in schwa-related errors could be attributed to the participants' individual differences in mastering phonemic transcription in the IPA. Specifically, the author of this article, who was the course teacher, noted that a group of participants (namely, P1, P2, P3, P7, P8, P11) required more help with the completion of the transcription tasks and demonstrated problems with remembering and retaining the IPA symbols. This observation feeds into the construal of individual differences in the EFL learning process that highlights the relevance of psychological and individual factors in mastering pronunciation (Pennington 2021: 3).

5.4.2. Discussing research question 2

The second research question addresses how schwa-related errors are distributed depending on whether or not the participants transcribe the tasks in SBS or GA. In order to elucidate this issue, the participants have been asked to transcribe one text in SBS in Task 3 and one text in GA in Task 4. It should be specified that the text in Task 3 is written in accordance with British spelling conventions, whereas the text in Task 4 is written in American English. The results of the error analysis reveal that the participants make schwa-related mistakes regardless of the variety of the English language. Arguably, this finding seems to be novel given that the prior literature (Łodzikowski 2021; Mompean and Fouz-González 2021; Tišma and Jeremić 2017; Trzeciakowska 2016) does not report the correlation between the occurrence of schwa-related errors and the variety of English. The application of the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to the means of error types in Tasks 3 – 4 indicates that the result is not significant at $p < .05$, [$F(1; 22) = 0.39$, $p = .54$]. Judging from this finding, the distribution of schwa-related errors in Tasks 3 and 4 appears to be similar.

However, in terms of the raw values, the substitution of schwa for /ɒ/ and /æ/ is more common in Task 4. It appears to be associated with the participants' errors in transcribing the prepositions *of* as /ɒv/ instead of /əv/ and *on* as /ɒn/ instead /ən/. The substitution of schwa for /æ/ is illustrated by the participants' transcriptions of the preposition *as* as /æz/, and the conjunction *and* as /ænd/ instead of /ənd/. These errors could be accounted by the participants' reliance on the English spelling whose rules are, presumably, mapped onto the respective transcriptions. In addition,

the errors are indicative of the participants' insufficient understanding of the vowel reduction in weak forms and a lack of awareness of how functional words are transcribed on the sentence level.

It follows from the results of the error analysis that there are several substitutions of schwa for monophthongs in the participants' transcriptions both in SBS and GA. Specifically, schwa is substituted for /e/, /ɒ/, /æ/, and /ʊ/ regardless of the aforementioned varieties of the English language. However, the substitution of schwa for /ʌ/ and /ɑ:/ occurs only in the transcriptions in SBS, whereas the substitution of schwa for the diphthong /eɪ/ is an error found only the participants' transcriptions in GA. These findings are exemplified by Figure 3 below.

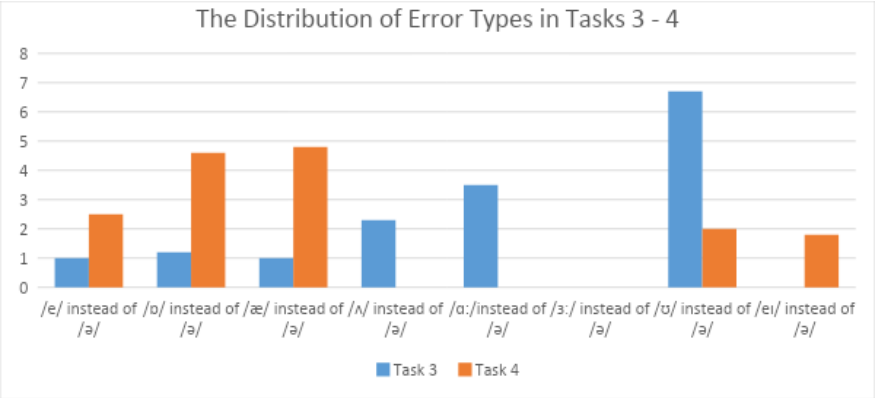

Figure 3. The distribution of types of errors associated with schwa in Tasks 3 and 4

In contrast to Task 4, the substitution of schwa for /ʊ/ is the most frequent schwa-related error in Task 3, which is made by 60% of the participants. Similarly to the substitution of schwa for /æ/, this error could be argued to reveal the participants' lack of attention to weak forms and sentence stress. Given that this type of error occurs both in SBS and GA, it could be assumed that the participants' insufficient awareness of the English stress and weak forms does not correlate with the varieties of the English language. Obviously, this finding should be treated with caution, since it is based upon the error analysis of phonemic transcriptions executed in two varieties of English, SBS and GA. Arguably, a study that involves phonemic

transcriptions in other varieties of the Inner Circle of English (for instance, ScE, IrE, etc.) would provide results that are different from the present ones.

Another observation that is evident from the data analysis is that the standard deviation of all error types in Task 4 (M = 8.03; SD = 3.87) is higher in contrast to the standard deviation in Task 3 (M = 8.08; SD = 2.87). This finding indicates that Task 4 is characterised by a noticeable variation in the total number of errors, as illustrated by Figure 4.

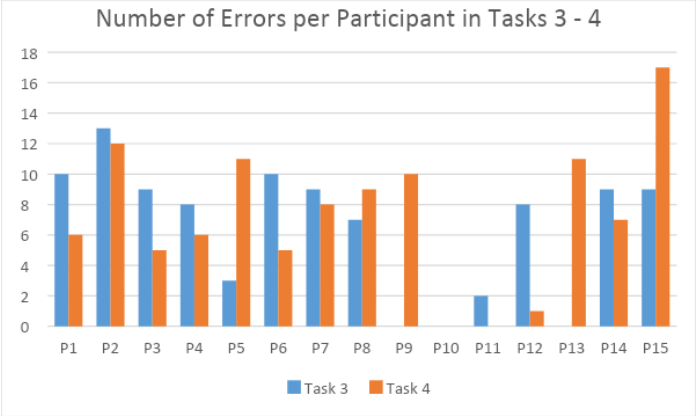

Figure 4. The number of errors per participant in Tasks 3 – 4

It is seen in Figure 4 that the total number of errors per participant in Task 4 ranges from N = 1 (Participant P12) to N = 17 (Participant P15), whereas only one participant (P10) has no errors both in Tasks 3 and 4. In case of Participant's P15 spike in errors in GA, the error analysis indicates that the majority of them are associated with the transcription of *the* that is erroneously transcribed as /ðe/.

Another observation that is evident from Figure 4 concerns Participants P9, P13, P15 and P12, whose schwa-related errors are distributed differently from the rest of the group. In particular, whilst the schwa-related errors per group appear to be similarly distributed in Tasks 3 and 4, errors in Participants' P9, P13, and P15 transcriptions in GA are above the group mean (M = 8.03). In contrast, however, Participant P12 makes substantially more mistakes in SBS in Task 3, whereas the participant's errors in Task 4 are below the group mean (M = 8.03). These findings could

be explained by the participants' individual preferences in terms of their preferred variety of the English language. In this regard, it should be noted that Norwegian L1 EFL learners are free to choose the variety of English they speak in instructional contexts. In practice, it means that there is no institutionalised policy that mandates Norwegian EFL teachers to teach their students by means of using, for instance, SBS (Graedler 2014; Rindal and Piercy 2013). On the contrary, it is up to an individual EFL teacher to use the variety of the English language the teacher is comfortable with. Similarly, a Norwegian EFL student is not limited to using only SBS in the instructional settings. Given that Norwegian EFL students are exposed to GA via media, travel, and personal contracts (Rindal 2010), many of them use it both in intramural and out-of-classroom contexts. The current literature indicates that whereas Norwegian L1 EFL learners tend to prefer SBS at school (Rindal 2010), they exhibit preferences for GA in out-of-school contexts. Presumably, Participants' P9, P13, and P15 schwa-related errors in Task 4 are accounted by their preferred use of SBS and, consequently, insufficient use of GA. Similarly, Participant's P12 numerous schwa-related errors in Task 3 are explicable by the participant's preference for GA, given that in Task 4 this participant makes substantially fewer schwa-related mistakes (see Figure 4).

5.5. The post-hoc procedure

The post-hoc procedure in this study involves an oral task in English. In the second semester of study, the participants are asked to produce a spontaneous narrative of approximately five minutes in duration about their quotidian experiences. In total, 11 out of 15 participants have sent their recordings with the narratives (M duration = 3,7 minutes; SD = 1,35; minimum = 1,25 minutes; maximum = 6,4 minutes). The narratives have been examined by the author of the article and the experienced phonetician who works at the university examination board. The results of the error analysis of the participants' oral speech in English reveal that the participants make several schwa-related mistakes. Table 6 below presents these types of errors and provides the percentage of the participants (N = 11) who make them.

N	Error type	Percentage of participants who make schwa-related errors in speech
1	/e/ instead of /ə/	36.4%
2	/ɒ/ instead of /ə/	45.5%
3	/æ/ instead of /ə/	63.6%
4	/ʌ/ instead of /ə/	-
5	/ɑ:/ instead of /ə/	36.4%
6	/ɜ:/ instead of /ə/	-
7	/ʊ/ instead of /ə/	27.3%
8	/eɪ/instead of /ə/	9.0%

Table 6. Schwa-related errors in the post-hoc procedure

It follows from the error analysis summarised in Table 6 that schwa-related errors occur in the participants' speech in English as well as in their phonetic transcriptions in the IPA. In line with the prior literature (Łodzikowski 2021; Mompean and Fouz-González 2021; Tišma and Jeremić 2017; Trzeciakowska 2016), this finding could be taken to indicate that phonemic transcription appears to be a useful means of identifying errors in EFL learners' speech production in English. Specifically, the participants' spontaneous speech in English in the post-hoc task is characterised by eight error types associated with schwa (see Table 6).

Judging from the data, the substitutions of schwa for /ɒ/, /æ/, /ʊ/, and /eɪ/ are related to the participants' use of the full forms instead of weak ones. This finding supports the results of the error analysis of the participants' phonemic transcriptions in the IPA that are marked by the presence of similar, if not identical, schwa-related mistakes. Presumably, schwa-related errors that are manifested by the substitutions of schwa for /ɒ/, /æ/, /ʊ/, and /eɪ/ are reflective of the participants' lack of attention to stress in English, especially on the level of phrase and sentence.

In the post-hoc, the substitution of schwa for /e/ is typically associated with the definite article *the*, whereas the substitution of schwa for /ɑ:/, to a substantial extent, occurs in the preposition *about*. Arguably, these types of errors could stem from the English spelling conventions and,

perhaps, the influence of Norwegian, the participants' L1. Obviously, these assumptions are tentative, since a more substantial corpus of errors and a more representative number of participants are needed in order to ascertain the exact cause/causes of schwa-related errors in Norwegian L1 EFL learners' speech in English.

6. Conclusions

The study presented in this article discusses schwa-related errors in a series of phonemic transcriptions executed by the participants, who are Norwegian L1 EFL students on the intermediate level of proficiency in English. The meta-analysis of the current literature reveals that little is known to-date about whether or not intermediate EFL students whose L1 is Norwegian experience problems associated with schwa in phonemic transcriptions in the IPA. To shed light on this issue is especially topical in light of the recent publications (Kapranov 2019b) that indicate that young EFL learners in Norway encounter problems with schwa. Judging from the results of the present study, the same could be posited about Norwegian L1 EFL learners on the intermediate level of proficiency.

In line with Mompean and Fouz-González (2021), phonemic transcription is regarded in the study as a diagnostic means of identifying the participants' problems with schwa. The results of the error analysis of the participants' phonemic transcriptions reveal the presence of several types of schwa-related errors that appear to correlate with the results of the post-hoc procedure. These errors involve the substitutions of schwa for /e/, /ɒ/, /æ/, /ɑ:/, /ʊ/, and /eɪ/. Whereas the substitutions of schwa for/ɒ/, /æ/, /ʊ/, and /eɪ/ are indicative of the participants' problems with the sentence stress English, the substitutions of schwa for /e/ and /□:/ seem to be accounted by the impact of the English orthography, which, presumably, is coupled in these cases with the negative transfer from the Norwegian language into English. To reiterate, these findings should be approached with caution, since the study involves a limited number of participants (total N = 15).

Whilst there are limitations in the study, it has, nevertheless, revealed a novel aspect that is associated with a potential impact of the variety of English upon schwa-related errors in the participants' phonemic transcriptions. In particular, it has been found that the impact of the variety of the English

language, specifically, SBS and GA is not statistically significant as far as the distribution of schwa-related errors in the participants' phonemic transcriptions is concerned. In this regard, the author acknowledges that these findings should not be generalised, since, ideally, more varieties of the English language should have been tested in the study. Hopefully, the present findings could offer a promising avenue of future research.

In terms of the linguo-didactic implications of this study, the following could be summarised. First, the use of phonemic transcription in EFL instructional settings allows to identify and classify EFL learners' mistakes associated with segmental and suprasegmental properties of English, in particular, schwa-related errors. Consequently, the author argues that phonemic transcription as a useful diagnostic tool should be more amply employed in the EFL teaching and learning contexts, especially on the B1/B2 levels of EFL proficiency. Second, the results of the study point to schwa as a problem to intermediate EFL learners whose L1 is Norwegian. Judging from the results of the study, schwa as a source of problems reflects the lack of the learners' awareness of the sentence stress that results in a series of substitutions of schwa for other English vowels. In this regard, it seems pertinent to allocate more resources towards the teaching and learning of English stress, especially on the level of phrase and sentence.

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ENGINEERING STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS COMPUTER-ASSISTED LANGUAGE LEARNING IN EFL

Abstract
With a promise of high efficiency, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has become a much-exploited teaching approach in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). The use of computers to assist language learners in their studies has shifted from being an innovative approach sporadically applied by an engaged teacher, to becoming the inevitable segment of in-class activities, nowadays almost prescriptively built in syllabi. Attitudes towards CALL constantly re-shape the learning process and affect the learning outcomes. The study addresses engineering students' attitudes towards the use of computer-assisted language learning in EFL courses taught at the Faculty of Technical Sciences Čačak in Serbia. The study is also concerned with the students' attitudes towards the use of the website www.englit.net as an online learning tool specially designed for the courses they attend, which is used on a regular basis for in-class practice and self-study. The findings indicate that CALL is perceived as an efficient supporter of the EFL teaching-learning process, generally adding to students' overall improvement in EFL competence, while at the same time empowering them to engage more in self-study.

Key words: EFL, Computer-assisted language learning, attitudes, engineering

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1. Introduction

Given that there are 743 million non-native speakers of English around the world (Eberhard et al. 2020), English is not only the most dominant language in business and science, but the most commonly "learned" foreign language around the world, and things will probably not change dramatically in years to come. Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL), which refers to the specialized field of language teaching designed for those whose primary language is not English, has come a long way from the initial baby-steps instruction based on the triangular "teacher-textbook-student" concept to the most advanced teaching approaches available in the 21st century.

Nowadays, EFL publishers regularly make sure that their textbooks are either accompanied by multimedia and/or a CD, or that printed issues are additionally enriched by online extensions of their courses. In that sense, Chapelle makes a great point when she asserts that "today almost anyone who is working on materials for classroom language learning is working in CALL" (Chapelle 2010: 67). CALL owes its tremendous popularity with students of all ages to, on the one hand, both students and teachers who are moving from being mere users of technology with basic functional literacy to rhetorical literacy in which they become producers of technology with a high level of digital skills.

On the other hand, rapid technological advances have dispelled a common misconception that computers are primarily for scientific or business use, so the everyday use of easily-accessed tools and applications for education is what we may refer to as a phenomenon of electronic democracy – equal language learning opportunity for all, unrestricted digital inclusion and active engagement in a process for which everyone is eligible. Consequently, the use of computers for entertainment or communication has given rise to the field known as "edutainment" (Beatty 2010: 189), used to denote teaching contents with entertainment value, often quite interactive, a growing industry of its own.

With the advent of technology, we are experiencing the pervasiveness of gadgets with significant educational potential. Such trends are rightly dictated by those who are being born in the age of the digital revolution, usually referred to as "Digital Natives" or "millennials" (Vukićević-Đorđević 2015: 486), who are familiar with computers from an early age, and whose educational matrix is exclusively inclusive of technology. Additionally,

invaluable growth of educational technology is based on the fact that "technology is seen as an amplifier of cognition" (Vukićević-Đorđević 2015: 493), which has drastically changed the teaching process itself and all the parties affected, thus bringing new opportunities and challenges for students and practitioners.

2. Computer-assisted language learning and EFL

The term Computer-assisted language learning (CALL), which was adopted at the 1983 TESOL conference in Canada (Zhang 2011: 4), broadly defined, denotes "any process in which a learner uses a computer and, as a result, improves his or her language" (Beatty 2010: 7). It is a subfield of applied linguistics that deals with the use of technology in the teaching-learning processes in EFL (Rahimi 2015: xxi). However, due to rapid changes in technology which have enriched the field, scholars suggest a revision of the term, so a definition of CALL should be expanded to include, besides computers, "a variety of technology used for language learning" (Chapelle 2010: 66), that is, all the related networks connections and many other technological devices and applications, while the "improvement" of a language refers to learning efficiency and effectiveness, motivation and material access (Hubbard 2009: 2). Although CALL is a multi-disciplinary field at the intersection of disciplines – torn between very different traditions – sciences, social sciences and education (Stickler and Hampel 2015: 383), it has its origins in the development of the first mainframe computers and their application in language education in the 1980s. Throughout all the 3 stages in its development (Behaviouristic/Structural, Communicative, Integrative and Interactive) (Warschauer 2000; Yang 2010; Davies et al. 2017), CALL has changed dramatically, constantly adapting to novice and challenging technological advances, engaging many scholars and language practitioners to better fine-tune its classroom implementation to enhance language learning, and make it more productive, but less time-consuming. CALL, which is an instructional technique, or a teaching tool, not a method, has taken over classrooms all over the world, causing tremendous changes in teaching methodologies.

2.1 Previous research in CALL – state of the art

Since CALL has been constantly growing and expanding, it has clearly become a "frustrating field" (Hubbard 2009: 1) both for scholars and ESL practitioners. As a dynamic field, CALL has brought many challenges to practitioners, yet, one of the most significant points was elaborated in the EUROCALL 2010 Research Policy Statement; since keeping pace with emerging tech trends is a never-ending, time-consuming process, it is necessary to shift the CALL focus from exploring the availability of new technology to developing language pedagogies related to it (Đorđević and Blagojević 2017: 248). Accordingly, more diverse research into how to make the best use of it is a core concept for the future of CALL.

In recent research on CALL, CALL-ists have advocated numerous benefits in surpassing the "chalk-and-talk" teaching method in which CALL appears as an effective supporter of a student-centered teaching/learning approach. Recent research has provided evidence of CALL fostering learner autonomy and helping learners adapt learning to their own pace and needs (Ali Ghufron and Nurdianingsih 2021; Rachmawati et al. 2020; Ismaili 2014; Vasbieva and Saienko 2018). In addition, many studies have shown that CALL enhances increased motivation and enjoyment to learners (Đorđević 2020; Rachmawati et al. 2020; Asrifan et al. 2020; Ismaili 2014; Afshari et al. 2013; Lockley and Promnitz-Hayashil 2012; Vasbieva and Saienko 2018), boosts the learning process (Kremenska 2007; Demirdöken 2019; Vasbieva and Saienko 2018), allows revisiting on numerous occasions and flexibility in using learning materials due to no time restrictions for users (Beatty 2010; Demirdöken 2019) both for practice and further study. Additionally, CALL has a proven track record in providing benefits when it comes to improving learners' vocabulary (Farahnia and Khodi 2017; Sadaghatkar 2018), grammar (Ghorbani and Ebadi 2020; AbuSeileek and Rabab'ah 2007), listening skills (Bontha 2016), writing skills (Ali Ghufron and Nurdianingsih 2021; AbuSeileek and Abualsha'r 2014; Kremenska 2007), overall proficiency (Delibegović and Hasanspahić 2020) while it is also promoting a higher level of interaction (Rachmawati et al. 2020; Afshari et al. 2013; Vasbieva and Saienko 2018). What is more, CALL is, reportedly, a rich source of authentic oral models of language (songs, podcasts, e-books), not restricted to any particular age group. Scholars emphasize CALL's capacity to bring forth intercultural understanding (Kern, Ware, and Warschauer 2008), to influence learners'

critical thinking skills (Bontha 2016; Ismaili 2014), and to increase their overall knowledge of global issues.

On the other hand, certain constraints of CALL have been widely debated; one of the most critical issues are learners' individual needs, the type of feedback they receive, and a level of trust in the available online materials. Additionally, it has already been emphasized that schools may lack funds for software or equipment implementation (Paul 2020; Tafazoli et al. 2018), whereas teachers may face various challenges in preparing teaching materials (Tafazoli et al. 2018), and instructors might also require additional (or constant) training or support (Vukićević-Đorđević 2015; Baskaran and Shafeeq 2015). Among the researchers who had negative viewpoints about CALL, some argued that CALL is a waste of time and money (Zhang 2011: 4), while others had concerns about computers being inadequate to provide a more natural language as teachers appear to be inexperienced to produce quality learning material (Levy 1997: 2). Moreover, recent studies reveal that practitioners' list of CALL disadvantages includes the cost of equipment, time-consuming preparation activities, and lack of teacher training and experience (Bani-Hani 2014). As some research also suggests that students do not use CALL as much as their teachers believe they do (Wiebe and Kabata 2010), students' attitudes can reflect the reality of utilization of computer technology-based EFL courses.

2.2. Attitudes in CALL

Addressing attitudes towards CALL of both teachers and students seems to be as significant as evaluating learners' language improvement, since attitudes allow us to predict people's behaviours in certain circumstances. For that reason, "attitude" is emphasized as a fundamental aspect of the teaching/learning process which directs and reshapes education. As a psychological phenomenon, an attitude is the way in which a person expresses either their favour or disfavour towards something or someone (Tafazoli et al. 2018: 40), or as Triandis (1980) puts it, an attitude is an opinion charged with emotion. In a broader sense, attitudes are related to affective factors (Foroozesh-nia 2015: 23; Afshari et al. 2013: 853), which are considered emotional factors that significantly affect learning (Foroozesh-nia 2015: 23), and along with many other factors (self-esteem, defence mechanisms, beliefs, emotional intelligence, anxiety etc.), attitudes in a certain way stem from motivation (Foroozesh-nia 2015: 8).

Attitudes are of (1) affective, (2) behavioural, and (3) cognitive quality, and are strongly associated with achievement (Kao and Windeatt 2014: 3), so positive or negative attitudes can significantly affect learning outcomes. Given that attitudes possess a synergetic potential among the 3 of their listed qualities, attitudes as a positive or negative value that people assign to situations or objects significantly affect people's perception and channel their behaviour within different activities. Along with motivation and cognitive style, attitudes can be broadly categorized under "learner conceptualization" (Larsen-Freeman 2001) which, altogether, affect whether language learners perceive themselves as under-achievers or as competent as their peers. The influence of feelings and emotions, as well as displeasure and frustration, are as important as cognitive or mental abilities (Foroozesh-nia 2015: 8). In other words, a positive attitude (as a learned predisposition for responding favourably in a coherent way) is the desired feedback in learning, which makes the learning easier and fun, while a negative attitude (responding unfavourably) is perceived as a crucial barrier to accomplishing the learning goals.

As attitudes are learned predispositions, they are likely to be stable over time (Rahimi 2015: 9). Such quality of attitudes may greatly influence both slow and eager learners, in different directions, of course, since what links attitudes and behaviours is the assumption of consistency. In that context, what we might find an essential educational intervention is to be aware of the presence of negative attitudes with learners, to prevent their further deepening. Longer exposure to such attitudes may lead to continual repetition of negative trends in behaviour that might finally culminate with strong unfavourable behavioural patterns which could develop into a harmful educational matrix in the long run (over time). Fortunately, the predictive nature of attitudes can help us reassess and re-shape the educational process to encourage a more positive attitude as the desired feedback.

A significant role of attitudes in EFL has been highlighted in many recent studies (Delibegović and Hasanspahić 2020; Paul 2020; Asrifan et al. 2020; Tsintavi 2017; Vasbieva and Saienko 2018; Afshari et al. 2013; Ismaili 2014; Zhang 2011). Demirdöken (2019) reported that an attitude towards CALL, as the most common constant variable for all learners, has been one of the most popular non-linguistic variables in the language learning environment (Demirdöken 2019: 2700), concluding that "language learning is highly dependent on the learner's attitude toward

achieving the competency in the target language". In a large-sample study with 208 Chinese university students, Zhang found that students' attitudes toward CALL are a key factor for predicting the success in CALL (Zhang 2011), concluding that students who had more than 3 CALL-based courses had a more positive attitude towards CALL than those who received no CALL ESL course (Zhang 2011: 84). In the similar-context research with 94 students of informatics at a faculty in Bulgaria, the respondents expressed their overall satisfaction with a CALL-based course they had attended, with minor improvements suggested to the teacher related to the choice of ESP texts (Kremenska 2007). Likewise, a study on CALL with a sample of 100 Malayan students of Languages and Linguistics indicated that students had moderate attitudes towards CALL, while it also provided evidence that the key determinants of attitudes towards CALL are perceived usefulness (PU) and perceived ease of use (PEU) of computers (Afshari et al. 2013).

For a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon in the real in-class contexts, students' attitudes towards CALL have been researched in depth. However, diverse studies show disparate findings across similar-context studies for different aspects. For example, students' attitudes towards CALL, although overall positive, still reveal too wide a range of positive attitudes, starting from 98% as the highest result (Basheer 2013), to 97.8% (Tsintavi 2017), then 91.9% (Tafazoli et al. 2018), then 85% (Vasbieva and Saienko 2018) or over 80% (Lockley and Promnitz-Hayashi 2012), then 78% (Ismaili 2014), to only 66% in certain studies (Basheer 2013). Similarly, discrepancies are found in other CALL-related perceptions; for example, some studies revealed that students believe that CALL is equally helpful with all 4 language skills, with grammar being rated the highest and speaking the lowest (Shafaei 2012). However, in contrast to this, Kremenska (2007) found that within her scope and sample, grammar was improved "a little", with the lowest score, whereas speaking was the most improved skill, from the respondents' viewpoint. Similar inconsistencies are seen with differences in results for other CALL preferences across different studies; thus, as many as 84% of the students turn to the Internet while searching for the unknown word meanings (Vukićević-Đorđević 2015: 489), whereas similarly, in another study, 87.8% of the students also expressed their belief that the Internet has the advantage over books when looking for some information (Tsintavi 2017). However, Tsintavi found that percentage to be slightly lower in the similar-context research; using dictionaries online is preferred by 65.2%

of the students. As for CALL at home vs. CALL at school preference, some studies suggest that 72.2% of the students prefer utilizing computers at school (Tsintavi 2017) with the most important advantage of such utilization being better equipment they have at schools (100%), and with peer-cooperation being a highly valuable asset. On the other hand, slow or inconsistent internet connection and lack of technology-based instruction are reported as a common disadvantage when CALL application at schools is concerned (Vasbieva and Saienko 2018). However, contrary to this, Ismaili (2014) found that 68% of the students enjoy using computers outside the classroom, whereas, as another study reveals, homework assignments are what CALL is particularly useful for (Bontha 2016: 165).

What recent studies concur about is that there is clear evidence that CALL has radically changed teachers' role from being "dominators" to becoming "facilitators" (Vasbieva and Saienko 2018: 132). Recent findings also suggest that students feel that computers cannot substitute teachers (Tafazoli et al. 2018), and when students were asked to compare CALL to learning with teachers in a real setting (face-to-face), almost half of the respondents had negative or neutral attitudes towards CALL effectiveness (Demirdoken, 2019: 2702). These facts imply that attitudes are of the utmost importance in CALL as they affect the teaching/learning process and direct the process of ESL acquisition. To conclude, although the attitude studies received much attention in earlier studies, little research has been done into engineering students' perceptions of CALL, especially if they use a specially designed tool for learning English. This study aims at filling the gap in the current research and hopes to offer a fresh perspective that might be beneficial for both scholars and practitioners.

3. Research Methodology

This study is primarily concerned with students' attitudes towards CALL and, more specifically, to their utilization of the website www.englit.net as an online learning tool which is specially designed for the English-based courses they attend at the Faculty of Technical Sciences Čačak. The ENGLIT lab (comprising 20 computers with a fast Internet connection, access to the custom-made website www.englit.net), where the treatment and the research were conducted, was initially launched at the Faculty as the outcome of the project titled "Innovation in teaching English fostering

IT skills and entrepreneurial potential with students" in 2018. The project was fully funded by the National Ministry of Education and Science. After the syllabi of 4 English-based courses (2 General English and 2 ESP courses) had been adapted for both face-to-face and online learning alternatively, the website www.englit.net was implemented as a supporting tool and updated on a daily basis, for in-class teaching and practice, and self-study. The material available on the website was used as teaching material for all the listed courses, regularly, every week for 2 semesters throughout the academic year 2019. Apart from the course-related materials, the website has been enriched by blogs, writing skills lectures, literature references. The project author (Ivana M. Krsmanović) is a website administrator, although other language teachers and students participate as contributors.

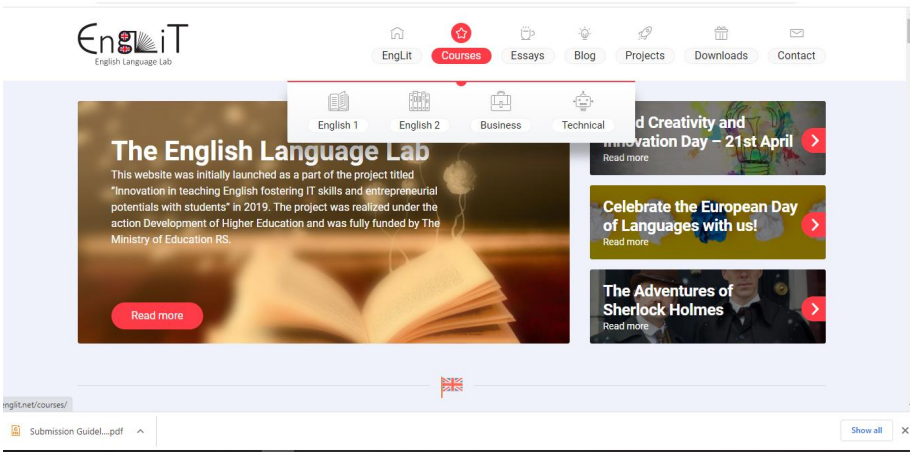

Figure 1. Englit.net website front page

Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following research questions and test the following hypotheses:

> RQ1: What are the attitudes of engineering students towards the use of CALL?

RQ 2: To what extent do engineering students find the website www.englit.net beneficial for improving their English language competence?

Hypothesis 1: Engineering students have positive attitudes towards the use of CALL.

Hypothesis 2: Engineering students find the website englit.net useful for improving their English language competence.

In order to answer the research questions adequately, the methodology and findings of recent research on CALL have been used to structure the current research design. As CALL is a multi-faceted and fast-changing activity, it cannot easily be captured with one research approach. However, exploratory approaches allow CALL researchers to study potentially new phenomena with an open mind (Stickler and Hamper 2015: 386). Instead of measuring the progress of individual learners in an experimental study with the help of a pre-test and post-test approach and associating results with the success or failure of a particular treatment, many researchers favour examining learners in their context (Stickler and Hamper 2015: 389). As for the specific research focus, Chapelle (2003) distinguishes three types of research in CALL: with a focus on (1) software, (2) on the learning task or task pedagogy, and (3) on the learners. Having considered all of the above, the purpose of this study is exploratory, the research approach is a survey, and the study focuses on the learners.

3.1. Research method

The current study was conducted at a state faculty in Čačak, Serbia, in December 2019. The participants were selected by using criterion sampling, as a part of the purposeful sampling method (Patton 2014). The sample criteria were: all the participants in the study were active students who (1) have attended and passed at least one course in English (out of 4), (2) have used the website www.englit.net in classes or at home. A qualitative method with the use of quantitative measures was chosen as the most adequate for the study. Since there is no appropriate instrument to measure students' attitudes towards CALL, the researcher developed an original questionnaire, taking into account the questionnaires designed

for the research with similar purposes (Ismaili 2014; Demirdöken 2019; Tsintavi 2017; Bontha 2016; Al Shammari 2007). All students have access to computers and the Internet either at home or at the college, the majority of them both.

Upon the completion of the courses (which correlates with the treatment), a 2-section survey questionnaire (given in the Appendix) was administered to the participants who volunteered for this study and were assured of the confidentiality of their responses. Questions regarding personal information were eliminated. The instrument was composed of 15 statements related to CALL (closed-item), 10 of which were related to general attitudes towards CALL (the first section), and 5 of which were statements related to the website www.englit.net (the second section). To the first three questions (questionnaire section 1) the participants evaluated statements on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (wherein 1 corresponds to "never") to 5 (wherein 5 corresponds to "always"). One question in the first section was a multiple choice question (allowing the respondents to choose a maximum of 3 options), while 6 questions in the first section had two options to choose from; yes and no. The second section of the questionnaire consisted of 3 questions with two optional responses given (yes-no), and 2 questions offered multiple choice answers, allowing the respondents to choose more than one response. The online questionnaire, which was designed in Google Forms application and forwarded to the participants via e-mail, was previously reviewed by two experienced college lecturers of English, to ensure validity and reliability.

The sample of the study consisted of 108 undergraduate and postgraduate students. As for demography, among the respondents, 65.1% were male, while 34.9% were female. In terms of age, 55.6% were between 20 and 25 years old, 29.6% were younger than 20, and 14.8% were older than 25. As for the major they were studying at the college, 30.6% of respondents studied Mechanical engineering, 22.2% studied Electrical engineering, 18.5% studied Information technology, 17.6% studied Graphic technology, and 11.1% studied Production management and ecology. On average, each participant took less than 10 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

4. Results and discussion

The first section of the questionnaire was aimed at investigating whether students used CALL on a regular basis. As many as 35.2% of the respondents admitted to having moderate CALL habits (grade 3 of the Likert Scale), while 31.5% admitted to using CALL at all times (question 1). Only 1.9 % of the respondents never used CALL. These results (Table 1) imply that almost 60% of the respondents (59.1%) used CALL very frequently, namely always or often.

Question	...never	...rarely	...sometimes	...often	...always
1. I use CALL...	1.9%	13.9%	35.2%	17.6%	31.5%
2.When I need grammar instruction or a word translation, I use the Internet...	0%	8.3%	13.9%	17.6%	60.2%
3. I find the answer I am looking for on the Internet on a language learning application...	2.8%	7.4%	35.2%	30.6%	24%

Table 1. Attitudes towards CALL – distribution of responses for questions 1-3

The second question was aimed at exploring how much students relied on the Internet as a CALL resource for grammar instruction or a word translation. As for the statement "When I need grammar instruction or a world translation I use the Internet..." (never-always), the majority of the respondents admitted to always exploiting the Internet for such purposes (60.2%), while, interestingly, none of them felt they never used the Internet for grammar or translation (0%). As given in Figure 1 and Table 1, the percentage of students who often resorted to the Internet as a resource for grammar instruction or a word translation is 17.6%, whereas only 8.3% of them rarely used the Internet for such a purpose. These findings reveal that the Internet seems to be the first choice for EFL instruction for almost

80% of the students, while 20% of the respondents feel that they search for language instruction elsewhere.

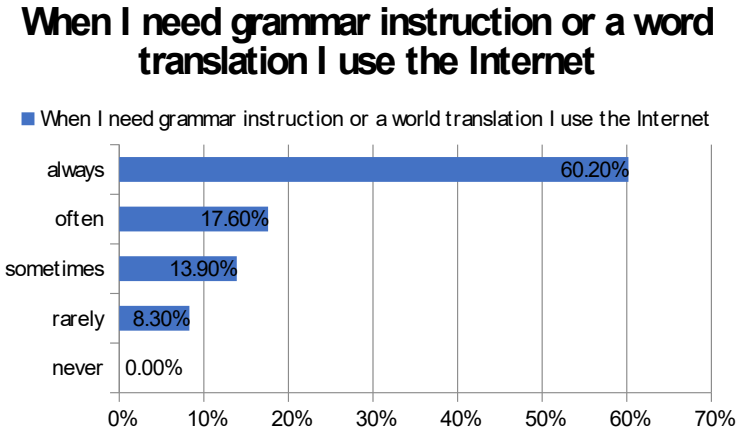

Figure 2. Students' frequency of using the Internet for studying English

Question 3 was designed to investigate how successful students were at finding what they were looking for, related to ESL and CALL as a medium of instruction. As shown in Figure 2, approximately one-third of the respondents (35.2%) confessed that they did not always find the answers they were looking for on the Internet or within a language learning application, whereas only 24% of the students always found what they needed. As many as 10.2% of the respondents felt that their hunt for the desired content was not successful ("never"/"rarely" responses). These data imply that whereas 54.6% of the students find the material they are looking for within the CALL process, the other half of the respondents feel quite the opposite, which points to the conlusion that the frequent use of CALL does not guarantee that the actual learning is taking place. It rather indicates that a significant amount of time is wasted on the search for the needed content, or that there are distractions that interfere with the learning process (inadequate level of the target language, poor competencies in digital skills, prior knowledge etc).

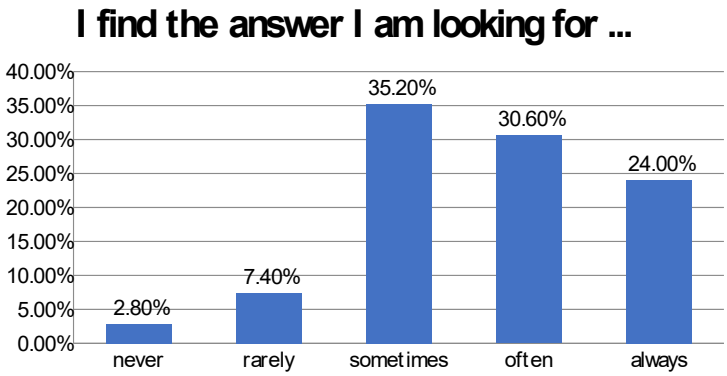

Figure 3. Students' perceived success at finding content in CALL

The fourth question of the first section was aimed at investigating students' attitudes towards the perceived usefulness of the CALL in their language improvement, and it was given in the form of a statement with 2 answers "yes" or "no". As many as 87% of the students believed that CALL could help them master the English language, whereas 13% thought that was not the case (Figure 3). This suggests that students perceive technology as a highly-valuable tool in the learning process that can improve their ESL competencies.

Figure 4. Students' attitudes towards the perceived usefulness of the CALL

Questions 5 and 10 were designed to explore how students perceived a teacher's role in CALL. When they needed a word translation or help with some unclear grammar instruction (question 5), the students felt they could trust their teacher (88%) rather than the information gained online (12%). Interestingly, when asked whether they feel more anxious or afraid not to make a mistake in a face-to-face class compared to making mistakes in the CALL instruction (question 10), as many as 62% admitted that they were not more afraid or anxious when learning with a teacher. Yet, 38% of the students felt more nervous when learning with a teacher rather than by a computer (Figure 4). Such a large percentage of responses in favour of teacher instruction suggests that teachers are still perceived as pillars of education with a pivotal role in the teaching-learning process, with their dominance not likely to be replaced by computers. In other words, although belonging to the 'Net Generation', students are not especially motivated by high-tech apps and tools when utilized for educational purposes. On the contrary, it seems that they are willingly abandoning the benefits of the Internet for a more traditional approach to teaching.

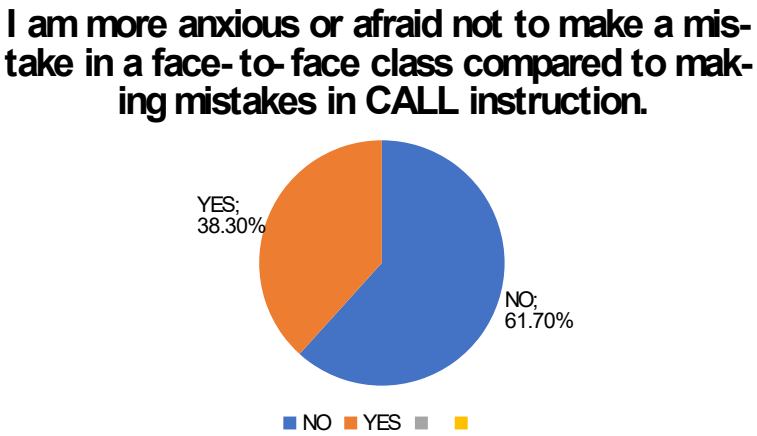

Figure 5. Students' anxiety towards making mistakes in face-to-face instruction vs. CALL

The sixth question of the first section was designed to test students' preferences related to the type of CALL instruction they most enjoy having. Out of the 7 options offered; (1) YouTube, (2) Social Networks, (3) Mobile

phone apps, (4) Websites for learning English, (5) Multimedia for learning English, (6) Newspapers, articles and blogs, (7) Games and quizzes, they were allowed to choose maximum 3. The most preferred CALL instruction was YouTube with 62%, closely followed by Social Networks instruction (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) with 41.7%, while the third most popular choices were games and quizzes with 38%. Websites for learning English were preferred by 34.3% of the respondents, mobile phone applications by 33,3%, newspapers, articles and blogs were chosen by 24.1% of the students, and finally, multimedia for learning English was selected by only 17.6%. These results (Figure 5) suggest that students are generally attracted to: 1) relatively short audio-visual content, themed or otherwise specially designed (such as YouTube videos); 2) up-to-date, instant communication platforms aimed at socializing and promotion (as in Twitter, Instagram and Facebook); 3) interactive and fun (on-line) activities which foster competitiveness and can be co-played with peers (for games and quizzes). These 3 top choices are interconnected with certain similarities; (1) they all belong to the social media field which broadcasts certain pre-prepared content, (2) they are easy and free to access online, (3) they are all available 24/7. Additionally, (4) all 3 top choices feature emerging trends in different communities, (5) include the audience of some kind (subscribers, followers, fellow players), and (6) can be re-visited and navigated on request. This supports the assumption that, due to its major impact on young people, popular culture is likely to determine and expand the educational pathways. Practitioners who can make popular culture a trusted ally in EFL teaching will, for obvious reasons, better meet the learning outcomes.

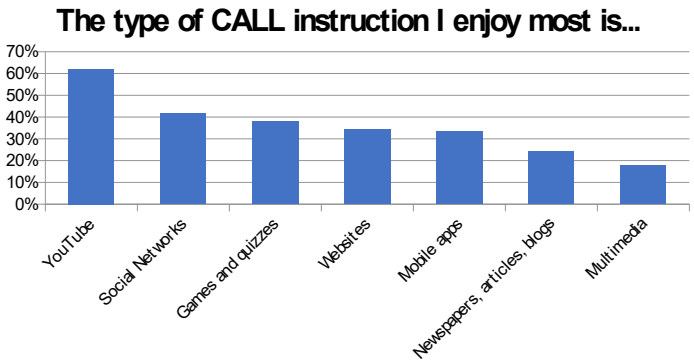

Figure 6. Students' preferences to the type of CALL they most enjoy

When asked (question 7) whether they enjoyed using CALL for in-class learning activities, 56.5% confessed to enjoying it, whereas for the use of CALL for self-study activities or homework assignments at home or elsewhere (question 8) as many as 78.7% admitted to enjoying such activities. These responses suggest that students perceive CALL as an adequate tool for self-study while they still expect a traditional classroom to be face-to-face teaching.

Question 9 of the first section was aimed at assessing students' motivation to learn English related to the medium of instruction of the content ("I am more motivated to engage in self-study if the content is presented as computerized instruction than in the traditional way"). As many as 52.8% of the respondents were more motivated to learn if the content was given as computerized instruction while 48.1% were more motivated when using more traditional methods such as textbooks and printed dictionaries. These responses complement the previous conclusion; given that half of the respondents felt that a traditional educational setting with a language instructor and a textbook was more engaging, we can conclude that, based on these findings, non-computerized instruction and a face-to-face teaching approach still have a tremendous value for students.

The second part of the questionnaire were questions related to students' experience of using the website www.englit.net. Question 1 of the second section aimed at assessing students' motivation to commit to self-study if/when they use the website englit.net. As many as 63.9% of the respondents declared they were more motivated (with a significant level

of autonomy) when learning English on englit.net. The second question dealt with the availability of materials related to exam preparation and it was given as a statement ("Englit.net helps me find the content I need for the exams (mock tests, mid-term exams, past examination papers"). A large percentage of the respondents (84.3%) found the website helpful when looking for exam-related materials, while 15.7% thought the website was not helpful. Question 3 was aimed at exploring which improvements of the website students would find useful: out of 5 offered choices which refer to sections that could be implemented (quizzes and games, chat, forum, video lectures, audio lectures) students chose the top 3: (1) video lectures (54.6%), (2) quizzes and games (32.4%) and (3) audio lectures (30.6%). "Forum" and "chat" were the least popular options with 10.2% and 20.4%, respectively. These findings (Figure 6) imply that students are not interested in communicative channels in which they can exchange ideas with colleagues, but they feel that seeing/hearing a teacher (like the most valuable digital replacement for a traditional teaching setting) in a target language would be the most beneficial.

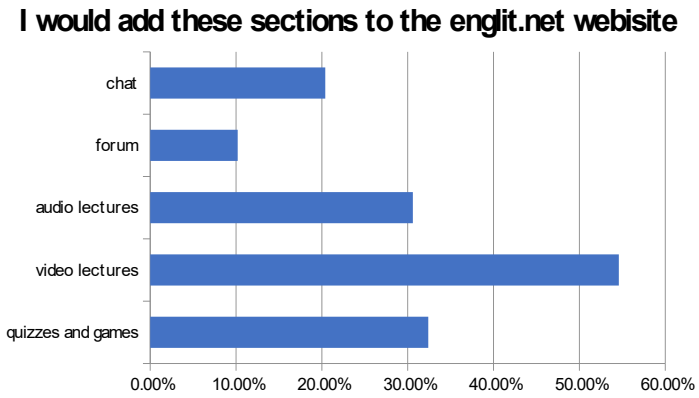

Figure 7. Students' preferences for adding new content on englit.net

Question 4 was "What do you like most about the website englit.net?" The offered responses included 7 items: (1) practice, (2) past exams, (3) essays and blogs, (4) material availability 24/7, (5) lectures on grammar rules, (6) video content, and (7) Twitter and an Instagram feed. The respondents were allowed to choose 3 items of their preference. Interestingly, as given

in Figure 7, (7) Twitter and Instagram feed and (3) essays and blogs were the least liked, with 3.7% and 17.6%, respectively. The most liked feature of the englit.net website was (1) material availability 24/7 with 52.8%, followed closely by (2) lectures on grammar rules with 50.9% and (3) practice with 50%. The option "Past exam papers" also had a high score of 47.2%, whereas the video content was not that liked (23.1%).

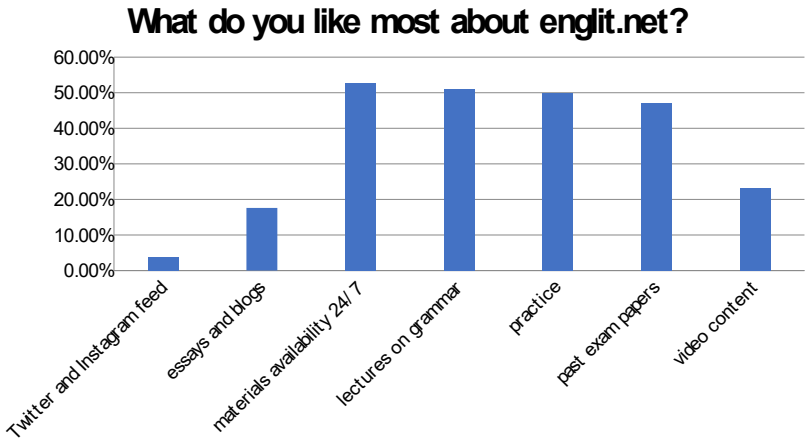

Figure 8. Students' preferences related to the offered content on englit.net

Several conclusions can be drawn based on these data. The first conclusion is that having content closely correlated with the lectures (textbook, mock-exams, handouts) is highly valued by students. It is evident from these results that open access to the adapted, exam-related materials enhances learners' interest and bears great potential for students to engage more in self-study. Additionally, this indicates that students tend to clearly differentiate between leisure activities, such as Social networking, and the learning activities they partake in for exam preparation, so there is no perceived usefulness of Instagram or Twitter feeds on the englit.net website. Another observation stemming from these findings is related to video content. Despite the fact that 54.6% of the respondents suggested that video lectures should be implemented on the website (question 4), it is quite interesting that the existing video content on the website was liked only by 23.1% of them (question 3). These findings imply that while

students highly value video content (54.6%), website-featured videos are poorly rated since they are perceived as inadequate or unrelated to the syllabi. In our case, the video content available on the website was not language instruction but a selection of interesting TED talks, aimed at improving learners' listening for gist and critical thinking skills. To conclude, these data further reveal that the students' attitudes towards both learning material and social networks feeds are the same; whatever is perceived as "beyond" and "out of" syllabus content is regarded as incidental and unnecessary.

The last question of the section was a statement "Englit.net helps me to adapt the pace of learning to my personal needs (which lectures to study, when, how much)", which was to be evaluated with "yes" or "no". As many as 78.1% of the respondents chose "yes", while 21.9% chose "no" as their response. This implies that a custom-made website is perceived as a flexible learning tool that allows learners to overcome individual differences in learning, which might additionally affect success. Moreover, such a resource is perceived to increase learner independence.

5. Conclusion

Computer-assisted language learning, which has revolutionized the way English is taught, has been constantly re-purposed in the light of new and exciting discoveries in the field of teaching ESL. Although there is general consent that CALL's apparent benefits for learners include immediate feedback, self-pacing, privacy and learner autonomy, among others, some major constraints of CALL have also been experienced in real classroom settings. In the age of "Digital Natives" those drawbacks have been conditioned by the everyday abundance of various apps and gadgets whose effectiveness in a language learning process is even difficult to track, due to their being too easily and too quickly replaced and surpassed by new, more advanced ones. Recent studies suggest that what remains the main CALL limitation is extra expenses imposed upon universities to invest in the equipment, so more affordable technology is a clear demand for the future.

As CALL "has come of age" (Davies et al. 2017: 34), the CALL-ists' focus has shifted from expanding the CALL field overburdened with the advent of technology, to finding the best fit for CALL to be implemented in

the real classroom contexts. Such a task seems to be equally challenging for both practitioners and learners since the pervasiveness of easily accessed gadgets and users' overdependence on technology interferes with their digital literacy skills and affects the teaching/learning outcomes. In order to come closer to the goal, it is advised to consult contemporary findings in pedagogy which rely upon the idea that "[c]urrent pedagogy advocates collaborative knowledge construction rather than simple instructivist learning, as well as authenticity and task orientation" (Davies et al. 2017: 33). With its tremendous potential in the field of English language acquisition, if used properly, with clear objectives and adapted to the learners' needs, CALL promises of efficiency are not questionable.

Students' self-reported perception or attitudes towards CALL, as important factors in learning success, can help additionally pinpoint the direction of CALL in which teachers are acknowledging the need for change in their practices to best support their classrooms. The findings from this study indicate several important implications of CALL in relation to students' attitudes. Firstly, 60% of the students use CALL very frequently. A high percentage of the students (87%) believe that they can improve their English with CALL, however, 88% of them trust their teacher more than online instruction. Almost equal distribution of responses is divided between traditional vs CALL instruction preference; namely, 52.8% of the respondents prefer CALL, whereas 48% prefer traditional classes. CALL is, as the findings of this study reveal, best utilized for homework assignments (78.7%). Another observation is that, although 80% of the students rely on the Internet as a CALL resource for EFL instruction, they admit to enjoying face-to-face instruction more due to the fact that only 54.6% of them find the needed language content on the Internet. These data reveal that a conventional type of contact classes with the teacher-centred authority is strongly emphasized and, accordingly, in relation to the Internet-based learning environment, the students feel that such an approach is more learner-friendly, anxiety-free or better supportive of their specific needs. As this research study shows, teachers are still perceived as the most reliable, ubiquitous form of delivering instruction. Yet, it must be emphasized, CALL features certain highly valued characteristics with learners; (1) it allows students to adapt their learning to their own pace (78.1%), and (2) has a significant advantage (over traditional teaching) in providing learning materials 24/7 (84.3%). When it comes to social networks as a segment of CALL, they are strictly associated with leisure

activities, and the same applies to video content – if a video is perceived as unrelated to the course syllabi, it is not enjoyed at all. Also, the students believe that forums/chats are a thing of the past, but they also feel that video lectures are what they would implement in a custom-made website (54.6%). Finally, the study suggests that the ENGLIT lab experience has empowered engineering students to study and collaborate in a more interactive and intensive manner, which supports Beatty's idea that for collaboration at the computer to be successful, a supportive environment needs to be established (Beatty 2010: 165). On the basis of the foregoing results, the following conclusion seems to be justified: engineering students have positive attitudes towards the use of CALL and find the website www.englit.net useful for improving their English language competence. This infers that both the 1st and the 2nd hypotheses have been supported. The final remark of the study refers to our revisiting the definition of CALL, so that we must additionally highlight the adjective which constructs the concept itself. In other words, computer-assisted language learning is, as its name indicates, an approach *assisted* by computers, not guided by, and should remain so.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on engineering students' attitudes towards CALL in EFL

Section 1 – Personal information

1. What are you majoring in at Faculty of Technical Sciences Čačak?
   a) Electrical Engineering
   b) Information Technology
   c) Mechanical Engineering/Informatics
   d) Graphic Technology
   e) Production Management and Ecology
2. What's your gender? – male/female/other
3. How old are you? – younger than 20/between 20-25/over 25

Section 2 – Questions on CALL

1. I use CALL for learning English – 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4 (often), 5 (always)
2. When I need grammar instruction or a world translation I use the Internet – 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4(often), 5 (always)
3. I find the answer I am looking for on the Internet on a language learning application – 1 (never), 2 (rarely), 3 (sometimes), 4(often), 5 (always)
4. I believe I can improve my English with CALL. (yes/no)
5. I have more trust in my teacher than the information gained online.(yes/no)
6. The type of CALL instruction I enjoy most is... (choose max 3):
   a) YouTube
   b) Social Networks (Instagram, Facebook, Twitter)
   c) mobile phone apps
   d) websites for learning English
   e) multimedia for learning English
   f) games and quizzes on the Internet
   g) newspapers articles and blogs
7. I enjoy using computers (phones) for learning English in classes (at the university). (yes/no)

8. I enjoy using computers (phones) for learning English at home (or elsewhere). (yes/no)
9. I am more motivated to engage in self-study if the content is presented as a computerized instruction (than in the traditional way). (yes/no)
10. I am more anxious or afraid not to make a mistake in a face-to-face class compared to making mistakes in CALL instruction. (yes/no)

Section 3 – Questions on englit.net

1. I am more motivated to engage in self-study if I use the website englit.net. (yes/no)
2. The website englit.net is helpful for providing access to the materials I need tor exam preparation or homework assignments. (yes/no)
3. I would add these sections to the englit.net webisite:
   a) quizzes and games
   b) chat
   c) forum
   d) video lectures
   e) audio lectures
4. What I like most about the website englit.net is:
   a) practice
   b) past exams
   c) essays and blogs
   d) material availability 24/7
   e) lectures on grammar rules
   f) video content
   g) Twitter and Instagram feed
5. The website englit.net helps me adapt the pace of learning to my personal needs (which lectures to study, when, how much). (yes/no)

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GENDER AND LEVEL DIFFERENCES IN THE ATTITUDES TO ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION AT A SPANISH UNIVERSITY**

Abstract
A group of 111 Spanish university students (61 males and 50 females) were surveyed on their attitudes to English pronunciation using a sociodemographic and an attitudinal questionnaire. The L2 Motivational Self System was used as a point of departure in the analysis of the collected data. On average, advanced Spanish speakers of English at university level see the native standard as the model to imitate. The average student in the sample is also fairly satisfied with their accent in English, contrary to popular belief. It was revealed that the women found pronunciation to be more important than the men, and that the men were more prone to negative self-assessment. While the level did not affect the perceived importance of pronunciation, it did have an impact on communicative confidence and pronunciation self-rating.

Key words: English pronunciation, attitudes, gender differences

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1. Introduction

Attitudes have been widely investigated in the field of psychology over the past decades (Cunningham and Zelazo 2007: 97). Most psychological conceptualisations of attitudes refer to the natural tendency or need of human beings to evaluate objects (Ajzen 2001: 28; Jarvis and Petty 1996: 172). Those "psychological objects" may be different in nature as they may involve real-life items and beings, ideas, problems or actions (Marcinkowski and Reid 2019: 461). Evaluative judgments have also been found to be more engaging than non-evaluative judgments in neurological research (Crites and Cacioppo 1996: 320-1), which suggests they involve a special kind of cognitive processing. The very reason why attitudes are of interest to psychologists is their potential to predict behaviour as represented by the commonly accepted three-way attitudinal model comprising the cognitive, affective and behavioural components of attitudes (Marcinkowski and Reid 2019: 461). The present study is mainly concerned with the first two.

In the field of linguistics and second language acquisition research, attitudes can be defined as "beliefs, feelings and intentions" or "mental constructs acquired through experience, predisposing a person to certain feelings and reactions" (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck and Smit 1997: 116), although no agreement has yet been reached on the weight of the different components. It is worth noticing that in most early L2 motivation research, the term *attitudes* referred to the native speakers of the language being acquired and were measured as an almost exclusively social construct (*cf*. Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 176). Gardner (1985: 9) operationalises attitudes as "an evaluative reaction to some referent or attitude object, inferred on the basis of the individual's beliefs or opinions about the referent" based on how they have been measured in studies using statement evaluations on scales. Gardner's definition appears to be satisfactory for the purpose of this study where only self-reported reactions to statements (i.e. attitudes) were measured. In other words, the participants were asked to assess to what extent they agreed with statements evaluating different aspects of their pronunciation and English usage and those ratings were construed as manifestations of their attitudes.

Whereas the definition of attitudes is a relatively easy task, motivation as a research construct remains somewhat controversial. It has been an extremely prolific subfield of study over the past decades, reaching over 100 journal articles in the 1990s (Dörnyei and Skehan 2005: Section 8).

Although motivation studies within applied linguistics were historically based on social psychology theories – and thus, unlike some other subfields, have had a firm theoretical foundation from the very beginning – no consensus has yet been reached regarding the exact meaning of the term *motivation*. Different models may be based on seemingly contradictory premises (Dörnyei 2000: 425) and the abundance of underlying psychological theories may confuse the readers as they invoke not only the cognitive, environmental and social dimensions of the human being, but also his/her personality and – most importantly – identity (Dörnyei 1998:18).

Based on a quick survey of online dictionaries, motivation could be defined as the driving force or the stimulus that makes people act. Following Dörnyei (2005: section 8), it is "responsible for *why* people decide to do something, *how long* they are willing to sustain the activity, and *how hard* they are going to pursue it". In other words, motivation studies are concerned with people's *reasons* for choosing a particular activity, their *persistence* and their *effort* in the achievement of the established goals. However, from the psychological perspective, the mechanisms underlying people's motivation are complex and the choice of factors determining motivation may differ from one theoretical model to another (*Ibid.*). If those are properly integrated, however, they can be enriching for our understanding of this multifaceted phenomenon (Dörnyei 1998: 117), which is nowadays seen more as a process rather than a static reflection of our instincts or as a definite goal.

Be that as it may, it is worth mentioning that motivation and attitudes were not clearly distinguished in the early studies (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991: 175). What seems obvious, however, is the fact that both dimensions seem to be inextricably bound together, although the exact nature of the relationship may differ depending on the adopted model. Hermann (2000: 56) admits that motivations and attitudes research should take into consideration not only the learner's pre-established attitudes but also the changes in their attitudinal and value system throughout the learning process. And even more importantly, attitudes "may overlap with the cognitive domain and may even become conative" (2000: 56), or in other words, they may stimulate action in an individual who functions as a psychological unit due to the dialectic interaction between the cognitive and affective domains (*Ibid.*). This non-linear *holistic hypothesis* – as it is dubbed by Hermann (2000: 55) – is represented below.

Figure 1. Holistic hypothesis

Recently, the convergence of the fields of self-theory and motivational theory in psychology has taken place (Dörnyei 2009: 10) resulting in the birth of the *L2 Motivational Self System*. The reason why this new field of research is relevant to this study is the fact it allows for the contemplation of the acquisition of English from a multidimensional, multicultural and multilingual perspective. Indeed, identity (or self) is of crucial concern to those investigating in the fields of World Englishes, English as a Lingua Franca or multicultural communication. Dörnyei (2009: 29) posits a three-way *L2 motivational Self System* which contemplates motivation from the perspective of the learner's identity:

a) Ideal L2 self – motivation is aroused when a learner speaks the L2 trying to bridge the gap between their *real self* and *ideal self*; an intrinsic aspect of motivation;
b) Ought-to L2 self – the speaker wants to meet the social requirements and avoid negative consequences; a more extrinsic aspect of motivation;
c) L2 Learning Experience – related to the immediate context learning process and its participants (group, teacher, institutions, curricula, etc.).

The fact that pronunciation is important to students seems to be evident. In a Spanish study by Edo Marzá (2014: 265), 96.1% of the respondents felt "concerned about their own pronunciation." In another study conducted in the Spanish context by Calvo Benzies (2013: 44–5), 96% of the sample (strongly) agreed that learning correct pronunciation was important. At the same time, there were more students who considered the acquisition of

a native(-like) accent to be important that there were those who thought otherwise, although around 37% of those sampled had a neutral opinion on the importance of native(-like) pronunciation. Similarly, the importance of the segmental and suprasegmental features of English pronunciation was rated at an average of 7.3-8.7 out of 10 in another study with L1 Spanish and Basque speakers (Cenoz and García Lecumberri 1999: 8).

Although "successful L2 phonology learning [thus] cannot be attributed exclusively to the existence of positive attitudes towards the target accent" (Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck and Smit 1997: 126), certain evidence has been found that aspects of motivation and attitudes may be correlated with the learner's phonological performance. Still, there is a dearth of available studies making a link between motivational or attitudinal variables and specific pronunciation performance – rather than just measuring the former or the latter separately. This study of attitudes is embedded within a broader research project which addresses this problem but is beyond the scope of this paper.

Taking the *L2 Motivation Self System* (Dyörnyei 2009) as a point of departure, the attitudinal scores (dependent variables) in this research were grouped under the following headings with relatively self-explanatory labels: pronunciation self (*cf.* Markus and Nurius 1986; Jenkins 2007; Moyer 2007), pronunciation importance (*cf*. Edo Marzá 2014), communicative confidence (*cf*. Saito et al. 2018; Sardegna, Lee and Kusey 2018), and pronunciation self-rating (*cf*. Moyer 2007). The *pronunciation self* within this research might be defined as the evaluation of the extent to which the participants accept their pronunciation, how much they identify with their accent and/or how much they would like to modify it. Within the L2 Motivation Self System, all of those variables relate to the students' ideal selves and ought-to selves, although the distinction between the two dimensions is not always clear-cut as it is hard to tell whether a person desires something because of an externally imposed value or because it is part of their true core self.

2. Aims and research design

The main aim of the paper is the presentation of the results of a quantitative analysis of Spanish university students' attitudes towards the pronunciation of English from the perspective of English as an International Language or

English as a Lingua Franca (Jenkins 2000; Walker 2010; Seidlhofer 2011). The term lingua franca is broadly understood as "any use of English for communication among speakers of different languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice" (Seidlhofer 2011: 7) and thus should not be identified solely with Jenkins' (2000) core pronunciation features. Not only is English used all over the world but it is now also chosen as a means of communication intra-nationally with a view to internationalising degrees and facilitating the students' future careers (*cf*. Mauranen 2012). This broad ELF perspective permeates the design of the instruments for the present research where, for example, the construct of communication confidence (*cf*. Saito et al. 2018) is measured separately for communication with native speakers and other non-native speakers of English.

The two specific aims of the paper are (1) to gauge the participants' attitudes toward the native standard as a pronunciation model and (2) to determine the impact of the informants' gender and level of English competence on the attitudinal variables mentioned at the end of the previous section.

For the aforementioned purposes, a questionnaire consisting of 22 Likert-type items regarding attitudes to pronunciation of English as an International Language was designed and administered to the participants. The participants agreed or disagreed with the statements on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). A 30-item sociodemographic questionnaire was also devised with the aim of providing information about the participants' social and educational background. The information provided by the latter was crucial for inferential statistics as it allowed splitting the students into groups by gender and their reported level of competence in English, which were chosen as the independent variables in this study. Both questionnaires were validated by two external experts and administered to university students (N = 111) enrolled in bilingual and non-bilingual degrees at a university in the Region of Madrid, Spain. The vast majority of the participants were at B2 and C1 levels of competence in English, which makes it legitimate to claim this study investigated the attitudes of advanced students. Descriptive and inferential statistics were performed using IBM SPSS.

3. Findings

The distribution of the language proficiency level and gender (independent variables) is presented first in this section, followed by the descriptive and inferential statistics for each dependent variable. For most attitudinal variables – with the notable exception of Pronunciation Self – the reported figures are the averaged results for all questionnaire items comprising the scale, i.e. individual item scores are not included. Those aggregate scale results were also used when conducting inferential statistics unless otherwise indicated. All inferential statistics were carried out using non-parametric tests due to the ordinal character and the abnormality of all our data as revealed by Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests. An advantage of employing the same type of tests for all analyses was the fact that effect sizes were more easily comparable. Mann-Whitney *U* tests were used to detect gender differences, while level differences were tested using Spearman's non-parametric correlation coefficient and Kruskal-Wallis tests when considering levels B1 to C2. Additionally, as the most represented reported levels in the sample were B2 and C1, those two levels alone were compared using Mann-Whitney *U* non-parametric tests.

3.1. Sample description

Amongst the 111 participants, 61 were male (55%) and 50 were female (45%). 82 reported their level while 29 did not. Table 1 below presents a breakdown of the participants' levels. The majority of the students had a B2 level of English while only under 10% were below that level. There was only one participant whose level was A2, who was naturally excluded from the inferential statistics. As shown in Figure 2, the levels were evenly distributed between both genders.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	A2	1	.9	1.2
	B1	6	5.4	7.3
	B2	44	39.6	53.7
	C1	23	20.7	28.0
	C2	8	7.2	9.8
	Total	82	73.9	100.0

Table 1. Level breakdown and distribution by gender

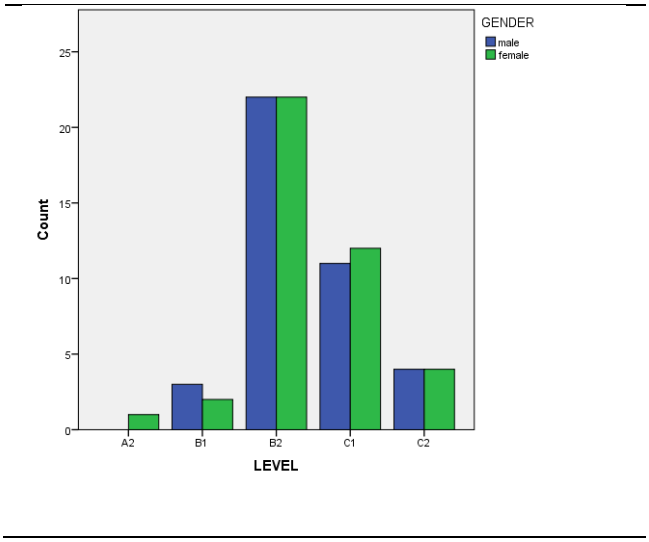

Figure 2. Level breakdown and distribution by gender

3.2. Pronunciation Self: accent as identity

The four questionnaire items related to the informants' Pronunciation Self were analysed separately as they were thought to measure different dimensions of the students' self-perception, i.e., (1) accent as an identity marker *(My pronunciation when I speak English is part of who I am*), (2) the

desire to sound like a native speaker *(I want to sound like a native speaker*), (3) the satisfaction with the students' own accent *(I like my accent when I speak English*) and (4) the desire to lose one's foreign accent (*I'd like to lose one's accent when I speak English*). On average, the students strongly agreed they would like to sound like native speakers and they agreed they would like to lose their accent. At the same time, they agreed their pronunciation was part of their identity and they were not certain whether they like their accent or not[1].

	N		**Mean**	**Median**	**Mode**	**SD**
	Valid	***Missing***				
My pronunciation when I speak English is part of who I am	110	1	3.5545	4	4	1.05436
I want to sound like a native speaker	111	0	4.3604	5	5	1.00718
I like my accent when I speak English	111	0	3.0541	3	3	1.09410
I'd like to lose my accent when I speak English	110	1	3.6727	4	5	1.36878

Table 2. *Pronunciation Self variables: descriptive statistics*

Mann-Whitney *U* tests showed that gender was only a good predictor of differences in the desire to lose one's foreign accent ($U = 1021.5$, $p = .003$, $r = 0.28$[2], $N = 110$). The effect size was small, reaching medium. The women ($M = 4.12$, $Mdn = 4$, SD 1.09, $n = 49$) were more willing to lose their accent than the men ($M = 3.31$, $Mdn = 4$, $SD = 1.47$, $n = 61$). No correlations were found between any of the Pronunciation Self variables and the four levels of competence represented in the study. However, group comparisons between B2 and C1 speakers showed a significant difference in the satisfaction with accent ($U = 253$, $p = .001$, $r = 0.33$, $N = 67$). C1

[1] The average scores were interpreted using five equal intervals between the minimum and maximum possible score: 1-1.8 strongly disagree, 1.81-2.6 disagree, 2.61-3.4 undecided, 3.41-4.2 agree, 4.21-5 strongly agree

[2] Size effect *r* (expressed as a correlation 0-1) was calculated following the guidelines outlined in Herrera Soler et al. (2011).

speakers (M = 3.78, Mdn = 4, SD = .95, n = 23) were more satisfied with their accents than B2 students (M = 2.75, Mdn = 3, SD 1.04, n = 44).

3.3. Pronunciation importance

In order to calculate how important pronunciation was to participants, three items from the questionnaire were averaged and grouped into a pronunciation importance scale (α = .836). The three questions regarded the general importance of English pronunciation (*English pronunciation is important for me*) and its importance when communicating with native and non-native English speakers (*It is important for me to have good pronunciation when I speak to native speakers/non-native speakers*). The average results were fairly high regarding the mean and median, as shown in Table 3. The item *I don't care how I sound in English* was analysed separately as its negative correlation with *Pronunciation is important for me* – although expected to be high – was actually fairly low (r_s = -0.295, $p < 0.01$).

	N		Mean	Median	Mode	SD
	Valid	***Missing***				
IMPORTANCE (Scale)	111	0	4.3784	4.6667	5	.72820
I don't care how I sound in English	111	0	1.5946	1	1	.84615

Table 3. *Pronunciation Importance: descriptive statistics*

While the level variable was statistically insignificant in this case, gender significantly predicted the outcomes (U = 1052.5, p = .004, r = .027, N = 111), although the effect size was small. The women (M = 4.63, Mdn = 4.67, SD = 0.51, n = 50) were more likely to assert pronunciation was important than the men (M = 4.18, Mdn = 4.33, SD = 0.82, n = 61). Students at different levels did not differ in their assessment of pronunciation importance as shown by the Kruskal-Wallis test (p = .382).

Similarly, it was noted that the results for the item omitted from the scale (*I don't care how I sound in English*) differed between the two genders as well (U = 993.5, p < .001, r = .34, N = 111). The men (M = 1.87, Mdn = 2, SD = .99, n = 61) were more likely to agree more with this

statement than the women (M = 1.27, Mdn = 1, SD = 0.45, n = 50). Both the statistical significance and the effect size were higher in the case of this item in particular than for the entire scale.

3.4. Communicative confidence and positive pronunciation self-rating

Initially, self-rating (positive) and communicative confidence were conceived of as two different scales, each measured by two questionnaire items. The reason those two scales were grouped together for the final analyses in this study was the data-driven observation that they actually measured the same dimension, as revealed by the calculation of Cronbach's alpha (α = .858). Therefore, for the final inferential statistics all items were averaged and grouped under one scale comprising pronunciation confidence (*I feel comfortable when speaking to native speakers/non-native speakers of English*) and self-assessment (*My pronunciation in English is good/People understand my pronunciation well when I speak English*).

	N		***Mean***	***Median***	***Mode***	***SD***
	Valid	***Missing***				
CONFIDENCE-POSITIVE ASSESSMENT Scale	111	0	3.5428	3.5	3.25	.87767

Table 4. Confidence-self-rating (scale): descriptive statistics

Gender had no significant effects on confidence or positive self-assessment as shown by a Mann-Whitney U test (p = .156). Nevertheless, the level variable was a significant predictor (Figure 3). The Mann-Whitney U test comparing B2 and C1 speakers (U = 183, p < .001, r = -.41, N = 67) showed that C1 speakers (M = 4.17, Mdn = 4.25, SD = .62, n = 23) rated themselves significantly higher than B2 speakers (M = 3.3, Mdn = 3.25, SD = 0.71, n = 44). The effect size was medium. Similarly, the non-parametric Spearman's correlation test between levels (B1-C2) and the confidence-positive-assessment scale rendered statistically significant results (r_s = .576, p < .001).

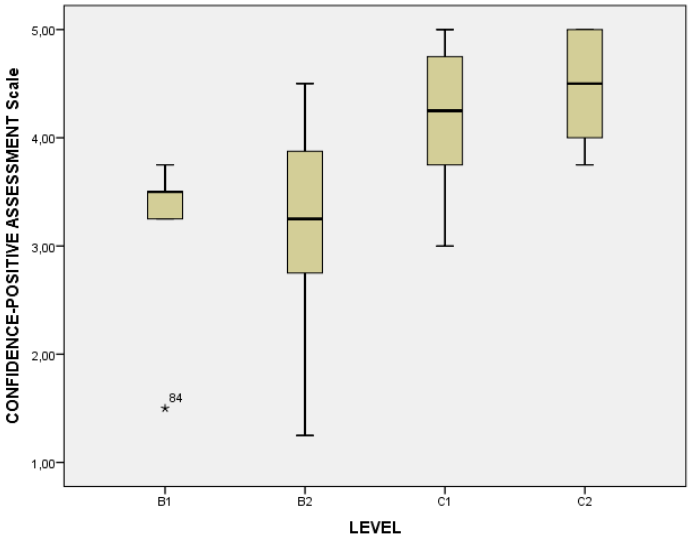

Figure 3. Level and confidence-positive assessment box plot

4. Discussion

The image of a Spanish university student's attitudes to pronunciation which emerges from the conducted surveys reveals that, in spite of negative popular beliefs (Galván 2010; Poyatos Soguero 2016; El Confidencial 2014; La Razón 2019), an advanced student rates their pronunciation positively. On average, they also feel confident when communicating in English both with native and non-native speakers. The descriptive statistics in this study also showed that although the students neither liked nor disliked their accent in English, the native speaker was still the pronunciation model they generally aspired to emulate. This is consistent with previous research, which reports that in this ever-changing world where non-native speakers greatly outnumber native speakers, native pronunciation is still looked up to as a model to be imitated and the belief that non-natives should conform to native standards is still alive and well (Calvo Benzies 2013; Jenkins 2007, 2014). The adherence to a native model leads to a conflict between the students' perceived *real selves* and their *ideal* or *ought-to selves*. While they consider their accent to be part of their identity, they would also like

to lose it, although the participants' opinion on the latter was divided, as shown by the standard deviation of the scores, which was higher than in the case of the other items. At the same time, the self-assessment of their own pronunciation performance is relatively positive, which suggests they are satisfied with how their pronunciation serves communicative purposes, although they may not like the way it sounds. What is more, the average score showing the desire to sound like a native speaker (*ideal self* or *ought-to self*) is approximately 1.5 out of 5 higher than that showing a positive attitude towards their own accent, which suggests that the aforementioned conflict is substantial. Whether or not it could be turned into action by students, and how, is beyond the scope of this research. However, the learners' satisfaction with their own pronunciation – which goes against popular beliefs – should be emphasised and used to boost the morale of students at lower levels of proficiency, as well as to debunk the somewhat negative domestic opinion on the English spoken by Spaniards.

The effect sizes in the case of both gender and level differences were small to medium. Thus, although the scores were not dramatically divergent, c ertain significant tendencies were definitely detected. The gender difference analysis revealed that this variable was a significant predictor of the importance attached to pronunciation as well as other dependent variables, including the desire to lose one's accent and the indifference to pronunciation. As in previous studies (Calvo Benzies 2013; Cenoz and García Lecumberri 1999), pronunciation was seen as an important aspect of language acquisition across both genders. However, the women did not only consider pronunciation more important than the men did, but they were also more likely to be willing to lose their accent suggesting a stronger desire to conform to a standard, although both genders would like to sound like native speakers. Moreover, the men were more likely to state they did not care about their pronunciation in English. This suggests the male participants were more inclined to project an image of indifference when asked directly about a potential change or their emotions. These findings confirm earlier studies where girls were usually found to be more interested in language learning and boys more likely to be self-deprecating in the assessment of their language skills and motivation (*cf*. López Rúa 2006).

As mentioned before, this paper investigated mostly advanced students, the vast majority being between levels B2-C1, of those who reported their level. All levels considered pronunciation to be equally important.

Although due to the numbers in the sample, we cannot be sure whether any real differences exist between B1 and B2 and C1 and C2, the post-hoc tests in this study show clearly that that C1 students are happier with their accent than those at the B2 level and also rate themselves better. This could be tentatively explained by the growing level of competence, which leads to a better perception of one's own performance. What is interesting is that differences were observed only between levels B2 and C1, which might suggest that only reaching C1 do speakers feel comfortable with their pronunciation and communication skills.

One of the obvious limitations of this study is the number of participants and the fact that data regarding the proficiency level was not available for all of them. Additionally, grouping variables into scales is necessarily an arbitrary task, albeit supported by statistical results. In this study, it might be argued, for example, that the item *I like my pronunciation when I speak English* refers more to the student's perceived pronunciation performance (i.e. self-rating) rather than being a variable related to the speaker's pronunciation self. Needless to say, further studies should be conducted in order to corroborate the conclusions herein and examine whether these can be extrapolated to all advanced English speakers in Spain. Yet another, perhaps the most compelling, research avenue would be contrasting attitudinal and performance scores in order to investigate the association between the two and gain insight into the relationship between reported attitudes and actual measurable skills.

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STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS USING AUTHENTIC AND NON-AUTHENTIC MATERIALS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AT UNIVERSITY LEVEL

Abstract
The aim of this quantitative research using a questionnaire as its instrument was to gain insight into students' attitudes towards the use of authentic and non-authentic materials in English language teaching including their perception of the stakeholders' agency in the process. The results of the research show that, in terms of the used teaching materials, students' ELT experience differs from their preferences to a certain extent. Furthermore, students generally have a positive attitude towards textbooks, as the most commonly used non-authentic material, but they also consider that it is not enough for teachers to rely solely on this

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material to motivate their students. What is more, they are supportive of the inclusion of learners in decision making in the teaching process.

Key words: attitudes, authentic materials, non-authentic materials, EFL, ELT

1. Introduction

A textbook is certainly the most commonly used material in foreign language teaching. It can be assumed that it has deserved this title due to important roles it has in the teaching or learning process, such as being a source of activities for learners' practice, providing syllabus and support for less experienced teachers, serving as a resource for self-study, etc. (Cunningsworth 1995: 7). However, there is no perfect textbook that suits every teacher and his or her students' needs, interests and abilities. Technological advancement and globalization have contributed to a widening of the diversity of learners' needs, that include intercultural competence, global communication, communication in various settings, etc., which is why most experienced teachers sometimes "replace textbook material with their own ideas" (Harmer 1998: 112).

In addition to activities found in a textbook, a teacher can use alternative ones that, for instance, cover a wide range of topics in accordance with their students' interest, such as: politics, religion, gender and racial equality, sports, fashion, culture with a special focus on popular culture (e.g. popular music, films, magazines, etc.), literature, art, etc. The preparation and carrying out of such activities often require the use of various materials which can include those designed specifically for language learning and teaching, such as dictionaries, flash cards, or graded readers, but also some items from our everyday lives that can serve the given purpose, such as newspapers, popular songs, fashion magazines, TV series, etc. Therefore, two groups of materials for foreign language teaching can be established – authentic and non-authentic ones. The frequency of using one or the other type of materials in ELT classes depends, among other factors, on both teachers' and students' attitudes towards each type.

2. Authentic materials in ELT

The communicative approach to language teaching has brought a new perspective of the goal of language learning, which refers to acquiring communicative competence or, in other words, effective language use in everyday or real-life situations. This focus on communicative language learning has significant implications for various aspects of teaching practice including teaching materials, which are, in this context, required to be more authentic. As McDonough, Shaw and Masuhara define authenticity, it is "a term that loosely implies as close an approximation as possible to the world outside the classroom, in the selection both of language material and of the activities and methods used for practice in the classroom" (2013: 27). Therefore, authentic teaching materials can be considered those that are not designed for language teaching purposes, but for native and non-native speakers of a given language, who use them for their communication and everyday and social life purposes (e.g. Harmer 1991, Jordan 1997, Peacock 1997, Sanderson 1999, Corbett 2003, Kilickaya 2004, etc.). In a language classroom they keep their original form, i.e. they are not adapted in any way for language learners who are, thus, exposed to real-life language as used by native and non-native speakers in their language community.

These materials can be audio (e.g. radio programmes, taped conversations, advertisements, announcements, songs, etc.), visual (e.g. photographs, post cards, schedule boards, street signs, wordless picture books, etc.), printed (e.g. magazines, newspapers, restaurant menus, movie reviews, memoranda, diaries, greeting cards, brochures, song lyrics, etc.), but they can also include realia, i.e. objects used in everyday life. In addition to the aforementioned instances, authentic multimedia materials can also be used in a classroom to bring real-life language use to it, such as films (from Hollywood or some other production), documentaries, TV series, etc. Unabridged novels, short stories and poetry should not be neglected either in this context. The range of this type of materials is vast especially since they can easily be found on the internet, as their most significant source, and, what is more, they are constantly updated (Belaid and Murray 2015: 28). Taking into consideration such a diversity of authentic materials that can be used in a foreign language classroom, a teacher should take into account the following selection criteria: relevancy to the textbook used and the students' needs, topics in accordance with students' interests, cultural appropriateness, logistic problems, cognitive

and linguistic demands, the quality of materials and exploitability, etc. (Sujono 2017: 141).

Some of the advantages of authentic materials use include the fact that students are exposed to "real" language, the materials positively affect students' motivation, they can be more in accordance with students' interests, both teachers and students can keep track of language changes mirrored by these materials, a variety of text types is offered and, finally, teachers can be more creative in their approach to teaching (Tamo 2009: 75-76). Authentic materials have a greater potential in developing students' communicative competence than traditional textbooks (Gilmore 2007: 103), and can be used as a source of "authentic cultural information" (Kilickaya 2004). On the other hand, potential difficulties in the use of authentic materials can arise due to their language being too complex for learners at a particular level of knowledge (Richards and Schmidt 2002). In addition, teachers' preparation of these materials for the use in the classroom can be time-consuming (Tamo 2009: 76).

Regarding students' perception of authentic materials, Sujono's study (2017) shows that they had positive attitudes towards the use of these materials in an EFL classroom and that their most favourable materials of this type were songs and films. However, the study has also revealed that students faced certain difficulties in using authentic materials, such as: dealing with unfamiliar vocabulary, the low-quality of materials, advanced speaking fluency and students' lack of self-confidence. In a comparison of teachers' and learners' attitudes towards authentic reading materials, AbdulHussein (2014) has reached the conclusion that learners' attitudes are significantly more positive than the teachers'. Finally, the importance of using authentic materials in a foreign or second language classroom is clearly emphasized in the observation by Kelly et al. (2002) according to which these materials make a lesson more lively and introduce the real world into the classroom.

3. Non-authentic materials in ELT

Contrary to authentic materials, non-authentic ones are produced specifically for language teaching purposes and designed exclusively to meet teachers' and learners' needs. Therefore, they are frequently adapted, planned and created with specific curricula in mind. While authentic

materials are perceived to contribute more to the development of learners' communicative competence, non-authentic ones are usually more focused on language forms and structures (Belaid and Murray 2015: 28). Another difference is that authentic materials contain imperfect everyday language including incomplete sentences, pauses, etc. (*Ibid.*), while the language of non-authentic ones tends to be free from these and controlled.

In addition to textbooks, printed non-authentic materials include dictionaries, which can be monolingual, bilingual and multilingual, as well as native-speaker or learners' ones, depending on their target-users. The latter ones are particularly significant in the context of language learning since they are specifically designed to meet the needs of language teachers and learners. Graded readers are another kind of printed non-authentic materials, and they can be further divided into fiction and non-fiction, with the complexity of their language adapted to the level of knowledge of the target reader. There are also visual non-authentic materials, such as flashcards and posters for vocabulary or grammar teaching or learning, and audio ones, such as CDs for listening activities accompanying coursebooks, materials for teaching or learning pronunciation and graded audiobooks. Multimedia non-authentic materials can likewise be efficiently used for teaching or learning purposes, such as CDs with interactive activities accompanying coursebooks, video lessons, language learning TV series (e.g. Wizadora, Big Muzzy, etc.) or even video language courses.

The significance of a textbook or a coursebook, as the most common material in language teaching and learning, lies primarily in the fact that it can be regarded as a universal element in this area, which is used for teaching purposes all over the world (Hutchinson and Torres 1994: 315). Coursebooks set clear objectives for learners, provide the syllabus for a course as well as ready-made activities and achievement tests, etc. (Chou 2010). They are helpful for both less and more experienced teachers, since they provide guidelines to the former and prepared material to work with to the latter (Scrivener 1994: 43). Other factors, such as economy and convenience, make coursebooks the cheapest source of learning material for learners, taking into account the offered amount of provided materials which are bound, light, small, easily packed and not dependant on any hardware or electricity supply (Ur 1996: 184). However, no single coursebook can satisfy the needs of all learners who have different learning styles, abilities and level of knowledge and might offer topics that are not interesting and relevant for every class (Ur 1996: 185). Moreover, Gilmore

points out that the language of textbooks does not faithfully reflect the real, everyday, authentic language used by native speakers (2007: 98-99). Another potential issue is the uncritical following of a coursebook on the part of a teacher, which can lead to a lack of the teacher's initiative and creativity and, consequently, to students' boredom and a lack of motivation (Ur 1996: 185).

Taking into account the fact that there is a positive relation between students' positive attitudes towards EFL textbooks and their attitudes towards learning English as a foreign language (Rahimi and Hassani 2012: 71), one of the teachers' main tasks should be to critically analyse, select, adapt and use a textbook so that it suits their students' needs, and to enrich the lessons with a variety of different materials at their disposal.

4. Research aims

The aim of the research was to obtain data on the participants' experience and attitudes towards the use of authentic and non-authentic materials in English language teaching, as well as their views of the stakeholders' agency in the process. With this in mind, three research questions have been formulated:

1. Which authentic and non-authentic materials have been previously used in classes in the course of the participants' English language learning?
2. Which authentic and non-authentic materials would the participants like to use in their ELT classes and how frequently?
3. What are the participants' views of the stakeholders' agency in the process of decision making?

In addition, taking into account the independent variable of gender, the following null and alternative hypotheses were created:

1. H_0: There is no statistically significant difference between the female and male participants in terms of their attitudes towards the use and the desirable frequency of use of authentic materials in ELT classes.
2. H_0: There is no statistically significant difference between the female and male participants in terms of their attitudes towards the use and the desirable frequency of use of non-authentic materials in ELT classes.

3. H_0: There is no statistically significant difference between the female and male participants in terms of their views of the stakeholders' agency in the process of decision making.
4. H_1: There is a statistically significant difference between the male and female participants in terms of their attitudes towards the use and the desirable frequency of use of authentic materials in ELT classes.
5. H_1: There is a statistically significant difference between the male and female participants in terms of their attitudes towards the use and the desirable frequency of use of non-authentic materials in ELT classes.
6. H_1: There is a statistically significant difference between the male and female participants in terms of their views of the stakeholders' agency in the process of decision making.

5. Methodology

A quantitative approach has been taken to acquiring data in this study, via a survey. The data collected centred on the attitudes, as well as the experiences the participants had related to their English language learning, the use of authentic and non-authentic materials in teaching, and their views of the stakeholders' agency in the process.

5.1. Sample

The study used a convenience sample, which consisted of 235 students at the Faculty of Philosophy, University of Novi Sad, who attended 14 different study programmes (Table 1). A majority of the participants were female (82.2 %), with only 17.8 per cent of male participants, which is a relatively common gender distribution at the faculty. Their mean age was 20.07 at the time (M = 20.07, Mdn = 20.00, SD = 1.32), and most of them were students of the first year at the faculty (79.2 %), the second-years constituting 22 percent of the sample, the third-years 4.3 percent and the fourth-years 2.6 percent. Their first language was mostly Serbian (88.4 percent), then Hungarian (7.8 %), Slovak (2.2 %), Ruthenian (1.3 %) and Montenegrin (0.4 %). Only one person started learning English at

the faculty (0.4 %), while others started much earlier: 18 percent in the kindergarten, 36.9 percent in the first grade of primary school, 19.3 percent in the third grade, and 25.3 percent in the fifth. Their subjective assessment of their own English language proficiency, on a scale from 1 to 10, was an average grade of 7.2 (M = 7.20, Mdn = 7.00, SD = 1.62), and their actual grades at the end of the first semester of attending the general English as a foreign language course at the B1 level of the Common European Framework of Reference more or less reflected their self-assessment, with the average grade being 8.03 (M = 8.03, Mdn = 8.00, SD = 1.21).

Department	**Percent**
Philosophy	2.1
German Studies	3.4
Hungarian Studies	3.4
History	6.4
Comparative Literature	2.1
Media Studies	6.4
Pedagogy	16.2
Psychology	15.7
Slavic Studies	2.1
Slovak Studies	1.3
Sociology	3.4
Serbian Language and Linguistics	7.7
Serbian Literature	8.1
English Studies	21.7
Total	100.0

Table 1. The distribution of students across the departments

5.2. Instrument and procedure

The instrument employed was a questionnaire (see Appendix), which featured both closed- and open-ended items in students' L1, and answer options ranging from fill-in to multiple choice answers (yes/no, and Lykert-type scale), yielding non-parametric data, nominal, as well as ordinal. The questionnaire was created by the authors of the study, and was not based on any previously existing forms. The calculation of the internal consistency of the instrument showed that it was highly reliable, with Cronbach alpha 0.83. The first part focused on obtaining the background information about the participants, with the following parts concentrating on the participants' attitudes and experiences related to their English language learning, and the use of authentic and non-authentic materials in teaching. The items were formulated in such a way that the participants could understand which material is being referred to in the statement without the academic knowledge of teaching methodology (e.g. "Abridged novels, retold films or books written on a certain topic, adapted to various CEFR proficiency levels (graded readers)" instead of the technical term "graded readers" only). The survey was performed anonymously, with questionnaires distributed over the span of two years. The participants were provided with the questionnaires in the paper-and-pen form, during their EFL classes at the end of the second semester of studying, and their participation was entirely on a voluntary basis. The software package used to analyse the data was SPSS IBM Statistics.

6. Results and discussion

The research yielded results on the participants' experience and views on the use of authentic and non-authentic materials in English language teaching, as well as their views of the stakeholders' agency in the process.

As the standard non-authentic material prevalent in teaching, the textbook was singled out to start with, and, when asked to evaluate the textbook used in their EFL classes in terms of the level of interest it holds, more students were inclined towards the characterization of the textbook as 'interesting' (assigned value 10 on the scale) than 'boring' (assigned value 1) (M = 7.17, Mdn = 8.00, SD = 2.05), the opinions being normally distributed, with skewness of -.854 (SE = .159) and kurtosis of .375

(SE = .318). A t-test failed to reveal a statistically significant difference between the female participants' average textbook assessment (M = 7.18, SD = 1.95) and that of the males' (M = 7.38, SD = 2.7), (t(204) = 0.583, p = .561, α = .05). However, regardless of such a generally positive attitude towards the textbooks they encountered, a great majority of the participants was of the opinion that it was not possible to motivate learners using solely a textbook in class (81.7 %), while only 18.3 percent believed that it was, and there was no statistically significant difference between female and male participants in this regard either ($X^2(1) = 0.947$, $p = .33$ (an alpha level of .05 was adopted for this and all subsequent statistical tests)).

Almost all of the participants thought that the teacher had the ability to influence the content that was to be delivered in class (94.5 %), and a smaller number, but still significant, believed such agency should be bestowed upon learners as well (88.5 %). A Chi-Square test was performed here, as well, and it showed that there was a statistically significant difference between the two genders ($X^2(1) = 9.035$, $p = .003$), where the females assigned greater agency to teachers than the males did, but that there was no significant difference between the groups in the case of learners' agency ($X^2(1) = 0.135$, $p = .714$). Therefore, the null hypothesis regarding the female and male participants in terms of their views of the stakeholders' agency in the process of decision making was only partly supported, for the learners as stakeholders, while it was not supported for the teachers. What both genders mostly agreed on was that the teachers should use additional materials in accordance with the learners' interests (95.7 %), although, surprisingly, there were those (4.3 %) that believed these should not be taken into account ($X^2(1) = 0.032$, $p = .857$).

Similarly, 96.2 per cent of the participants thought that the teacher ought to insert into the curriculum the topics that the learners are interested in ($X^2(1) = 1.554$, $p = .212$). They also expressed their opinion on certain topics and their use in ELT (Table 2), with the most undesirable topic being politics and the most desirable one – art. A t-test revealed a statistically significant difference between males' and females' opinions (marked by * in the table) in the case of religion (t(205) = 3.025, p = .003, α = .05), gender equality (t(202) = 3.462, p = .001, α = .05) and racial affiliation (t(203) = 2.047, p = .042, α = .05). The participants were largely of the opinion (89.4 %) that cultural contents in general should be a part of EFL curricula ($X^2(1) = 0.651$, $p = .42$), and were even more supportive (97 %) of the inclusion of popular culture ($X^2(1) = 0.061$, $p = .805$).

Topic	**Should be avoided (1) – Percent**			**Neutral (2) – Percent**			**Should be strongly focused on (3) – Percent**		
	all	female	male	all	female	male	all	female	Male
Art	2.9	3.5	0.0	19.7	17.5	29.7	77.4	78.9	70.3
Literature	4.8	5.3	2.7	19.2	19.9	16.2	76.0	74.9	81.1
Sport	10.6	11.7	5.4	42.3	41.5	45.9	47.1	46.8	48.6
gender equality*	18.6	14.4*	37.8*	45.6	46.1	43.2	35.8	39.5*	18.9*
fashion	19.8	18.1	27.8	54.6	54.4	55.6	25.6	27.5	16.7
racial affiliation*	29.3	26.8*	40.5*	46.3	46.4	45.9	24.4	26.8*	13.5*
religion*	38.6	33.5*	62.2*	51.2	55.3*	32.4*	10.2	11.2*	5.4*
politics	60.9	60.8	61.1	29.4	31.0	22.2	9.7	8.2	16.7

Table 2. The participants' opinion on the inclusion of certain topics into ELT

6.1. Authentic materials: Attitudes and experience

The participants were asked to denote which authentic materials they had had experience with in their ELT classes, and, of the options offered, short film segments scored the highest, while picture books aimed at adults were the least frequent choice of their teachers (Table 3).

No	Authentic material	Percent
1.	*Short film segments*	87.5
2.	Photographs	66.1
3.	Documentary films	62.5
4.	Older popular music (e.g. The Beatles)	55.4
5.	Poetry	44.6
6.	Video advertisements	39.3
7.	Newly composed foreign music (e.g. Rihanna)	39.3
8.	Complete films (Hollywood, or different production)	33.9
9.	Daily newspapers and journals	25.0
10.	Classical music (e.g. by Mozzart)	25.0
11.	Bestsellers (e.g. novels by foreign authors)	23.2
12.	*TV series*	21.4
13.	Graphic novels	19.6
14.	TV programme (e.g. news)	17.9
15.	Paintings by famous artists	16.1
16.	Picture books aimed at adults	5.4

Table 3. Authentic materials marked as previously used in classes in the course of the participants' English language learning

Based on the answers recording the experienced frequency of use of the listed authentic materials (Table 3) and the comparison with their desired frequency (Table 4), one can conclude that the teachers' views on this matter and those of their learners' are not aligned, as only three items hold the same place in the hierarchy: short film segments, photographs

and TV series (marked by italics in both tables). A statistically significant difference between female and male participants' opinions (marked by * in Table 4) was present for graphic novels (t(205) = 3.722, p = .000, α = .05), paintings by famous artists (t(59) = 2.604, p = .012, α = .05), classical music (t(203) = 2.280, p = .024, α = .05), and older popular music (t(204) = 2.249, p = .026, α = .05). Thus, the null hypothesis was not supported for these items, while the alternative hypothesis was, showing that there was a statistically significant difference between the female and male participants in terms of their attitudes towards the desirable frequency of use of these four items in ELT classes, with higher scores present for males in all four cases. In addition, an average mean was calculated from the table for all the items included in order to compare general desirability of authentic and non-authentic materials (M = 3.42, M_{female} = 3.19, M_{male} = 3.28).

No	Authentic material	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Female	Std. Deviation	Mean Male	Std. Deviation
1.	*Short film segments*	4.53	1.09	4.55	1.09	4.32	1.23
2.	*Photographs*	4.39	1.47	4.47	1.51	4.13	1.44
3.	Older popular music (e.g. The Beatles)*	3.96	1.40	3.86*	1.42	4.44*	1.34
4.	Poetry	3.88	1.37	3.84	1.41	4.08	1.21
5.	Documentary films	3.82	1.16	3.88	1.18	3.62	1.19
6.	Bestsellers (e.g. novels by foreign authors)	3.56	1.31	3.46	1.37	3.81	1.20
7.	Paintings by famous artists*	3.41	1.52	3.31*	1.59	3.94*	1.20
8.	Classical music (e.g. by Mozzart) *	3.41	1.51	3.30*	1.51	3.92*	1.38

9.	Complete films (Hollywood, or different production)	3.41	1.17	3.43	1.19	3.22	1.18
10.	Daily newspapers and journals	3.23	1.48	3.19	1.48	3.23	1.68
11.	Graphic novels*	3.11	1.40	2.93*	1.37	3.86*	1.42
12.	TV series	2.86	1.44	2.83	1.45	3.03	1.46
13.	Newly composed foreign music (e.g. Rihanna)	2.84	1.48	2.79	1.50	2.78	1.46
14.	Picture books aimed at adults	2.83	1.55	2.76	1.56	2.77	1.53
15.	TV programme (e.g. news)	2.80	1.47	2.72	1.46	2.94	1.60
16.	Video advertisements	2.63	1.50	2.69	1.53	2.29	1.34

Table 4. Specific authentic materials in the order of the desired frequency of use in ELT classes

In practical terms, the students expressed their opinions on how often each of the materials should be used in class, ranging from very frequent use, in every class, to complete undesirability of use (Table 5).

No	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Short film segments	0.0	5.6	11.5	26.9	36.8	19.2
2.	Photographs	7.2	5.1	10.2	22.6	28.1	26.8
3.	Older popular music (e.g. The Beatles)	6.4	9.4	18.0	28.8	21.9	15.5
4.	Poetry	6.0	11.6	17.6	28.8	24.9	11.2
5.	Documentary films	1.3	12.0	26.5	31.2	21.8	7.3
6.	Bestsellers (e.g. novels by foreign authors)	7.0	15.2	21.7	33.5	15.7	7.0
7.	Paintings by famous artists	15.7	13.5	18.8	25.8	17.9	8.3
8.	Classical music (e.g. by Mozzart)	15.9	12.1	20.3	26.3	17.7	7.8
9.	Complete films (Hollywood, or different production)	5.2	12.0	41.6	25.8	9.0	6.4
10.	Daily newspapers and journals	17.0	16.1	20.9	24.3	16.1	5.7
11.	Graphic novels	17.5	16.7	22.2	28.2	11.1	4.3
12.	TV series	24.3	16.5	25.2	19.6	10.9	3.5
13.	Newly composed foreign music (e.g. Rihanna)	26.7	16.8	20.7	21.1	11.2	3.4
14.	Picture books aimed at adults	28.8	14.8	24.0	14.4	12.7	5.2
15.	TV programme (e.g. news)	27.0	17.2	22.3	18.9	11.2	3.4
16.	Video advertisements	32.9	18.6	18.2	16.5	10.8	3.0

Table 5. The participants' opinions on the desirable frequency of use of specific authentic materials in English language teaching (*1 – never, 2 – once in an academic year, 3 – once a semester, 4 – once a month, 5 – once a week, 6 – in every lesson)*

6.2. Non-authentic materials: Attitudes and experience

The most frequently used non-authentic materials participants had had experience with in their ELT classes, as expected, were textbooks, as the most common teaching material in general (Table 6). Flash cards were the rarest addition to their learning experience, perhaps due to the advanced

technological age they live in and the potential obsoleteness, or, perhaps due to their young adult status, as flash cards may be viewed by some teachers as more appropriate for younger learners.

No	Non-authentic material	Per cent
1.	*Textbooks*	95.1
2.	CDs which accompany textbooks (e.g. audio recordings for listening in class)	85.2
3.	Workbooks that accompany textbooks	80.3
4.	Websites containing grammar and vocabulary exercises	55.7
5.	Bilingual dictionaries (e.g. English – Serbian, Serbian – English)	47.5
6.	Copies of previously used tests	47.5
7.	Websites containing tests (e.g. reading, listening, grammar, vocabulary, etc.)	42.6
8.	Abridged novels, retold films or books written on a certain topic, adapted to various CEFR proficiency levels (graded readers)	39.3
9.	Posters containing grammar overviews	34.4
10.	Handouts created by the teacher for grammar or vocabulary development	32.8
11.	Monolingual dictionaries adapted to various CEFR proficiency levels (e.g. English – English)	31.1
12.	Bilingual dictionaries adapted to lower CEFR levels (e.g. learners' dictionaries)	26.2
13.	*Monolingual dictionaries for advanced users (e.g. English – English)*	23.0
14.	*Posters created specifically for a topic focused on in class*	21.3
15.	CD-ROM English language courses	18.0
16.	Texts created by learners themselves	16.4
17.	Video courses (e.g. Big Muzzy)	8.2
18.	Flash cards (with pictorial representations of the words being introduced in class)	8.2

Table 6. Non-authentic materials marked as previously used in classes during the course of the participants' English language learning

A comparison of the answers recording the experienced frequency of use of the non-authentic materials listed (Table 6) and their desired frequency (Table 7) yielded slightly different results than in the case of authentic materials, with more items overlapping: textbooks, websites containing tests, monolingual dictionaries for advanced users, posters created specifically for a topic focused on in class, and texts created by learners themselves (marked by italics in both tables). No statistically significant difference was found between female and male participants' opinions for any of the items in the tables, which supported the null hypothesis regarding the use and the desirable frequency of use of non-authentic materials in ELT classes. The average mean for all the items included in Table 7 ($M = 3.61$, $M_{female} = 3.61$, $M_{male} = 3.67$) was higher than the average mean for authentic materials ($M = 3.42$, $M_{female} = 3.19$, $M_{male} = 3.28$), signalling a slight inclination towards the use of non-authentic materials in ELT classes over authentic ones.

No	Non-authentic material	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Female	Std. Deviation	Mean Male	Std. Deviation
1.	Textbooks	5.50	1.05	5.55	1.06	5.37	.877
2.	Workbooks that accompany textbooks	4.63	1.56	4.63	1.55	4.58	1.46
3.	CDs which accompany textbooks (e.g. audio recordings for listening in class)	4.52	1.59	4.64	1.51	4.28	1.60
4.	Bilingual dictionaries (e.g. English – Serbian, Serbian – English)	3.95	1.64	3.94	1.63	4.21	1.43
5.	Bilingual dictionaries adapted to lower CEFR levels (e.g. learners' dictionaries)	3.93	1.68	3.89	1.67	4.27	1.50
6.	Posters containing grammar overviews	3.71	1.82	3.79	1.87	3.70	1.51
7.	Websites containing tests (e.g. reading, listening, grammar, vocabulary, etc.)	3.66	1.58	3.72	1.58	3.44	1.52
8.	Handouts created by the teacher for grammar or vocabulary development	3.63	1.72	3.62	1.77	3.83	1.36

9.	Abridged novels, retold films or books written on a certain topic, adapted to various CEFR proficiency levels (graded readers)	3.62	1.53	3.58	1.61	3.79	1.20
10.	Websites containing grammar and vocabulary exercises	3.60	1.52	3.65	1.51	3.44	1.46
11.	Copies of previously used tests	3.59	1.50	3.60	1.51	3.72	1.42
12.	Monolingual dictionaries adapted to various CEFR proficiency levels (e.g. English – English)	3.56	1.76	3.62	1.78	3.62	1.71
13.	Monolingual dictionaries for advanced users (e.g. English – English)	3.18	1.75	3.20	1.78	3.22	1.60
14.	Posters created specifically for a topic focused on in class	3.08	1.64	3.05	1.72	3.18	1.23
15.	Flash cards (with pictorial representations of the words being introduced in class)	2.81	1.60	2.77	1.64	3.00	1.39
16.	Texts created by learners themselves	2.66	1.56	2.60	1.57	2.81	1.42
17.	CD-ROM English language courses	2.66	1.53	2.59	1.55	2.81	1.31
18.	Video courses (e.g. Big Muzzy)	2.64	1.53	2.59	1.57	2.85	1.30

Table 7. Specific non-authentic materials in the order of the desired frequency of use in ELT classes

The specific distribution of the frequency of use of non-authentic materials that the students would like to see applied in ELT classes is presented in Table 8.

No	Item	1	2	3	4	5	6
1.	Textbooks	1.3	1.8	4.4	5.3	11.9	75.2
3.	Workbooks that accompany textbooks	7.0	6.1	9.2	12.7	24.5	40.6
2.	CDs which accompany textbooks (e.g. audio recordings for listening in class)	8.4	4.9	11.5	13.3	25.2	36.7
5.	Bilingual dictionaries (e.g. English – Serbian, Serbian – English)	12.6	9.0	13.1	23.0	21.2	21.2
12.	Bilingual dictionaries adapted to lower CEFR levels (e.g. learners' dictionaries)	13.7	9.1	13.2	19.6	23.3	21.0
9.	Posters containing grammar overviews	21.3	8.3	10.6	16.7	23.6	19.4
7.	Websites containing tests (e.g. reading, listening, grammar, vocabulary, etc.)	15.7	8.8	16.2	23.1	25.5	10.6
10.	Handouts created by the teacher for grammar or vocabulary development	19.9	8.1	14.5	18.1	24.9	14.5
8.	Abridged novels, retold films or books written on a certain topic, adapted to various CEFR proficiency levels (graded readers)	12.7	12.3	17.3	28.2	16.8	12.7
4.	Websites containing grammar and vocabulary exercises	14.4	8.1	22.1	23.9	21.6	9.9
6.	Copies of previously used tests	14.2	9.1	21.0	24.2	22.8	8.7
11.	Monolingual dictionaries adapted to various CEFR proficiency levels (e.g. English – English)	20.5	10.5	15.0	18.2	18.6	17.3
13.	Monolingual dictionaries for advanced users (e.g. English – English)	25.8	14.7	15.2	16.6	14.7	12.9
14.	Posters created specifically for a topic focused on in class	27.0	10.2	21.4	18.6	14.9	7.9
18.	Flash cards (with pictorial representations of the words being introduced in class)	31.4	15.0	17.9	18.4	11.6	5.8
16.	Texts created by learners themselves	33.8	17.8	16.0	18.3	8.9	5.2

15.	CD-ROM English language courses	35.4	11.8	21.2	19.8	7.1	4.7
17.	Video courses (e.g. Big Muzzy)	34.3	15.5	19.2	18.3	8.0	4.7

Table 8. The participants' opinions on the desirable frequency of use of specific non-authentic materials in English language teaching (*1 – never, 2 – once in an academic year, 3 – once a semester, 4 – once a month, 5 – once a week, 6 – in every lesson)*

7. Conclusion

The research aimed to obtain data on the participants' experience and attitudes towards the use of authentic and non-authentic materials in English language teaching, and their views of the stakeholders' agency in the process of decision making. This study confirmed the well-known fact that both authentic and non-authentic materials have their rightful place in ELT classes. It also showed that the selection of specific materials used in ELT classes is not completely in accordance with the students' expectations. In other words, in the context of materials used in classes, the students' ELT experience differs to a certain extent from their preferences. The results indicate that, within the pool of authentic materials, short film segments and photographs were the highest on the list, both in terms of the participants' experience (via their teachers' decision making), and their own preferences. The students' preferences were mostly consistent across genders, except in their attitudes towards the use of graphic novels, paintings, classical music and older popular music, where male participants held more positive views in terms of the desired frequency of use of these materials in ELT classes. On the other hand, in the case of non-authentic materials, there was no statistically significant difference between the male and female opinions regarding any of the specific materials, with textbooks in the first place in terms of both desired and actual frequency of use.

Textbooks were also considered to be rather interesting by the students, although not sufficient to motivate learners on their own. These results show that the students have a rather positive attitude towards the use of textbooks in classes, although textbooks tend to be frequently criticized in literature by both teachers and students for their being boring, stifling,

inappropriate in terms of students' age, level of knowledge, interests, etc. or for their lacking of variety. The students' positive attitude can be explained by Harmer's observation that, for learners, "the textbook is reassuring. It allows them to look forward and back, giving them a chance to prepare for what's coming and review what they have done" (1998: 117). Still, teachers' creativity has its role since the textbook as the only material used in classes is not motivating enough for the students. Therefore, teachers should rely on other non-authentic and, especially, various authentic materials in their teaching and the results of this research can serve as guidelines in the selection of specific materials according to students' preferences. One of the factors in the selection of authentic materials that should be taken into account, as indicated by the results as well, is the students' gender.

A great majority of the participants expressed the belief that teachers' agency was considerable in enriching their classes, which is an attitude that was present to a greater extent in the female part of the population. However, when it comes to learners' agency, there was no such difference in terms of gender, with many participants advocating the inclusion of learners in decision making, as well. A pedagogical implication of this is the suggestion to include learners more frequently and intensively in the teaching process, in a variety of ways, in order for the learning to be successful. For example, a general conclusion from this study was that the most appealing topics for discussion in ELT classes for the sample in question were art, literature and sport, while the least desirable ones were politics, religion and racial affiliation, with differences between genders on the last two and gender equality and male participants expressing a more negative opinion on these. This offers possible directions for teachers in selecting topics for discussion in their classes. However, this does not mean that the topics preferred by students should be the only ones discussed in classes. For the purpose of vocabulary expansion, less preferred ones should be included as well, though not to the same extent as the preferred ones. Taking into consideration the most appealing topics according to the research results, it should be noted that the current study is limited by the sample consisting of students focusing on social sciences in their studies, and the results could be different for a differently oriented group of students, regardless of the size. Thus, a suggestion for future research would be to conduct action research in specific ELT classes, which, depending on the actual gender distribution in a specific class, and the characters of the individuals included, uncovering the desirable discussion

topics and the appealing teaching materials, both authentic and non-authentic, would represent a valuable piece of information for a teacher and support adequate decision making in the teaching process.

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Appendix

UPITNIK

Ova anketa je **anonimna**. Sve informacije koje ispitanici daju smatraju se **poverljivim** i koristiće se isključivo u svrhe istraživanja. Molimo Vas da odgovorite na **sva** pitanja i popunite **sve** tražene podatke, kako bi Vaš upitnik mogao biti uvršten u istraživanje. Unapred hvala na trudu.

Pol ispitanika: ŽENSKI / MUŠKI (*zaokružiti*)
Studijska grupa/odsek: _____ Godine starosti: _____
Godina studija: _____ Ocena na kraju prvog semestra: _____
Maternji jezik: _____

Od kada učite engleski jezik: *(zaokružiti broj ispred odgovora*)
od vrtića
od 1. razreda osnovne škole
od 3. razreda osnovne škole
od 5. razreda osnovne škole
od 1. razreda srednje škole
od 1. godine fakulteta

1. **Ocenite svoje znanje engleskog jezika na skali od 1 do 10** (*zaokružiti*):

veoma slabo znam engleski jezik	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	veoma dobro znam engleski jezik

2. **Ocenite udžbenik iz engleskog jezika po kojem radite sada ili ste radili tokom svog prethodnog školovanja na skali od 1 do 10** (*zaokružiti*):

Veoma dosadan	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Veoma zanimljiv

3. **Da li mislite da**: *(zaokružiti)*

1.	je moguće motivisati učenike koristeći isključivo udžbenik?	NE	DA
2.	profesor može da utiče na sadržaje koji se obrađuju na časovima engleskog jezika?	DA	NE
3.	učenici treba da utiču na to što uče?	NE	DA
4.	profesor treba da ubaci u kurikulum teme koje interesuju učenike?	DA	NE
5.	kulturni sadržaji (umetnost, književnost, itd.) treba da budu prisutni na času engleskog jezika?	NE	DA
6.	popularna kultura (filmovi, novine, muzika, itd.) treba da bude prisutna u učenju engleskog jezika?	DA	NE
7.	profesor treba da koristi dodatne sadržaje koji su u skladu sa interesovanjima učenika?	NE	DA

4. **Zaokružite broj pored svake navedene teme u skladu sa svojim mišljenjem o njenoj upotrebi u nastavi** (1 – tema koju treba izbegavati, 2 – neutralna tema, 3 – tema na koju se treba dosta fokusirati):

1.	politika	1	2	3
2.	religija	1	2	3
3.	rodna ravnopravnost	1	2	3
4.	rasna pripadnost	1	2	3
5.	književnost	1	2	3
6.	umetnost	1	2	3
7.	sport	1	2	3
8.	moda	1	2	3
9.	drugo: _____	1	2	3

5. **Koliko često bi, po Vašem mišljenju, sledeće stavke trebalo da budu uključene u nastavu engleskog jezika?** *(Zaokružite broj od 1 do 6, pri čemu je 1 – nikada, 2 - jednom u školskoj godini, 3 - jednom u semestru, 4 - jednom mesečno, 5 - jednom nedeljno, i 6 – na svakom času).*

a. Autentični materijali u nastavi stranog jezika:

1.	celi filmovi (holivudski, ili drugih produkcija)	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	inserti iz filmova	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	dokumentarni filmovi	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	reklame	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	TV serije	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	bestseleri (npr. romani stranih autora)	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	poezija	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	stripovi	1	2	3	4	5	6
9.	dnevne novine i časopisi	1	2	3	4	5	6
10.	TV program (npr. vesti)	1	2	3	4	5	6
11.	fotografije	1	2	3	4	5	6
12.	slikovnice za odrasle	1	2	3	4	5	6
13.	slike poznatih slikara	1	2	3	4	5	6
14.	klasična muzika (npr. Mocart)	1	2	3	4	5	6
15.	novokomponovana strana muzika (npr. Rijana)	1	2	3	4	5	6
16.	starija popularna muzika (npr. Bitlsi)	1	2	3	4	5	6

NAPOMENA: Zaokružite broj ispred stavki koje ste do sada imali prilike da koristite na času u toku svog dosadašnjeg učenja engleskog jezika.

b. Neautentični materijali u nastavi stranog jezika:

1.	jednojezični rečnici za izvorne govornike (englesko-engleski)	1	2	3	4	5	6
2.	jednojezični rečnici prilagođeni nivou znanja studenata (englesko-engleski)	1	2	3	4	5	6
3.	dvojezični rečnici (englesko-srpski, srpsko-engleski)	1	2	3	4	5	6
4.	dvojezični rečnici prilagođeni nivou znanja studenata (školski rečnici)	1	2	3	4	5	6
5.	udžbenik	1	2	3	4	5	6
6.	radni list koji se dobija uz udžbenik	1	2	3	4	5	6
7.	CD koji prati udžbenik (audio snimci za puštanje na času)	1	2	3	4	5	6
8.	posteri izrađeni na određenu temu koja se obrađuje na času	1	2	3	4	5	6
9.	posteri sa pregledom važne gramatike	1	2	3	4	5	6
10.	skraćeni romani, prepričani filmovi ili knjige napisane o određenoj temi prilagođene nivou znanja studenata (graded readers)	1	2	3	4	5	6
11.	radni listovi koje izradi sam predavač za rad na gramatici ili vokabularu	1	2	3	4	5	6
12.	primeri ranije korišćenih testova	1	2	3	4	5	6
13.	video kursevi (npr. Big Muzzy)	1	2	3	4	5	6
14.	CD-ROM kursevi engleskog jezika	1	2	3	4	5	6
15.	veb sajtovi sa vežbama gramatike i vokabulara	1	2	3	4	5	6
16.	veb sajtovi sa testovima (čitanja, slušanja, gramatike, vokabulara, itd.)	1	2	3	4	5	6
17.	fleš kartice (sa slikovnim predstavama reči koje se uvode)	1	2	3	4	5	6
18.	tekstovi koje su student sami kreirali	1	2	3	4	5	6

NAPOMENA: Zaokružite broj ispred stavki koje ste do sada imali prilike da koristite na času u toku svog dosadašnjeg učenja engleskog jezika.

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COMRADESHIP AND SISTERHOOD IN ENGLISH SOCIALIST-FEMINIST UTOPIAS OF 1880S–90S**

Ours is the world, despite all;
that is, for the worker and for woman.
(August Bebel 2009 [1904]: 346)

Abstract
The figure of the New Woman, being articulated in the second half of the nineteenth century, is "a feminist in search of New Women" and it is strongly utopian. Utopian works written by female and feminist writers were published from the 1870s: we can refer to such socialist-feminist works as Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore, or, A Socialist Home* (1888), Elizabeth Corbett's *New Amazonia* (1889), Lady Florence Dixie's *Gloriana* (1890), Isabella Ford's *On the Threshold* (1895), and Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers* (1900). The dreamlike new harmonies of the *fin de siècle* feminist utopias are also related to the socialist debates about "the Woman Question" which involved, for instance, Friedrich Engels, Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling, and August Bebel. Consequently, analysing the literary works, I discuss the current issues of distribution of female and male tasks, forms of comradeship, companionship and sisterhood presented in the framework of the ideal-utopian future communities.

Key words: New Woman, Woman Question, utopias, comradeship, sisterhood, *fin de siècle*

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1. Introduction: On the Woman Question

The second half of the nineteenth century, not only on the Old Continent but also in Great Britain, is marked by revolutionary tendencies. Focussing on the last two decades, the *fin de siècle*, feminism and socialism together present a unique blend of radical views but, as Sally Ledger says, their "tentative marriage [...] was far from a happy one" (Ledger 1997: 58). However, in this sentence, slight irony can be sensed since the comradeship of feminists and socialists was not claimed to be a bad match after all. In the sociological, political, economic, and journalistic writings on the status of women, the question of their emancipation — the so-called Woman Question — was frequently discussed. The question itself was placed in the framework of "general emancipation" that also involved women's emancipation as Marx and Engels claimed in 1845, quoting Fourier's "fantasies" in their anti-utopian critical work, *The Holy Family*.[1] In *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (*Woman under Socialism*), August Bebel emphasises that "the complete emancipation of woman, and her equality with man is the final goal of our social development" (Bebel 2009 [1904]: 320). The author's ideas are prophetically revolutionary:

> The woman of future society is socially and economically independent; she is no longer subject to even a vestige of dominion and exploitation; she is free, the peer of man, mistress of her lot. Her education is the same as that of man, with such exceptions as the difference of sex and sexual functions demand. Living under natural conditions, she is able to unfold and exercise her mental powers and faculties. She chooses her occupation on such field as corresponds with her wishes, inclinations and natural abilities, and she works under conditions identical with man's. Even if engaged as a practical working-woman on some field or other, at other times of the day she may be educator, teacher or nurse, at yet others she may exercise herself in art, or cultivate some branch of science, and at yet others may be filling some administrative function. She joins in studies, enjoyments or

[1] The quoted Fourier passage goes: "The change in a historical epoch can always be determined by the progress of women towards freedom, because in the relation of woman to man, of the weak to the strong, the victory of human nature over brutality is most evident. The degree of emancipation of woman is the natural measure of general emancipation" (Marx and Engels 1956 [1845]: 259).

> social intercourse with either her sisters or with men, — as she may please or occasion may serve. (Bebel 2009 [1904]: 315)

Bebel also realises that the state of women's awareness should be raised as every woman is "to prove that she has comprehended *her true place in the Movement* and in the struggles of the present for a better future" (Bebel 2009 [1904]: 345, italics are mine). The motto of my text gives Bebel's concluding statement about the comradeship of the working men and women, which, on the one hand, is truly enthusiastic, recalling the style of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and such energetic phrases in *The Communist Manifesto* as "let the ruling classes tremble at a communist revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!" — citing one of the most frequently quoted statements in the conclusion (Marx and Engels 1998 [1848]: 30). On the other hand, Bebel is still speaking about a concept, *the woman*, which foreshadows the problematic place (cf. "the true place") of such an ideal "New Woman" and makes the conclusion sound abstract and utopian.

In their review of Bebel's book, more exactly of its first English translation published in 1886, Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling also emphasised that the Woman Question was being strongly related to the economic basis of the "organization of society as a whole" (Aveling and Marx Aveling 1886). The review just slightly criticises Bebel's work (and the errors of the translation); instead it displays the status of women in the nineteenth century society. The Avelings harshly attack social and sexual inequality in marriage (being "worse than prostitution"), divorce, and education, placing special emphasis on sex education and co-education; the latter, as they refer to it, was already advertised in England by Mary Wollstonecraft back in the 1790s. They also urge that "we as Socialists" should get rid of the vague notions of *the woman* and the old, mythical understanding of womanhood. Emancipation and equality will bring about the independence of women, and in the perfect future, in the (utopian-) socialist monogamy, the equal partners will have "love, respect, intellectual likeness, and command of the necessities of life" (Aveling and Marx Aveling 1886).

2. The New Woman and Her Utopia

Although the above quoted review is strikingly open when sexual and gender norms are concerned, the utopian tone features throughout and all the supporting examples are literary ones. As the author couple claims, "Socialism is at present in this country little more than a literary movement" (Aveling and Marx Aveling 1886). On the one hand, the Avelings' statement criticises the small numbers of socialists' circles in England, on the other hand, it also refers to the importance of "circulating," the actual sharing of similar values and ideas. In several literary works written by women in the last two decades of the nineteenth century, the question of the New Woman was thematised, where the authors move beyond the conventional understanding of solidarity in fellowship, comradeship, and sisterhood. The female writers question "old" readership: they are "feminist[s] in search of New Women" — as Matthew Beaumont points out — with the belief in the "inter-subjective solidarity of the ideal collective" (Beaumont 2009: 97–98).

The phrase "the New Woman" first appeared in journalistic pieces with a pejorative sense due to the hostility of the male dominant "discursive phenomenon" and it soon generated a "reverse" discourse. Sally Ledger remarks that in self-defence, the New Woman, being exemplified by the advanced women of the decades, began to speak on *her* own behalf (Ledger 1997: 10). Besides journalistic writings, literary works were published by a great amount of female authors in the 1880s–90s. The so-called New Woman novels show variety of forms (and genres), from educational novels and fantastic utopias through Gothic novels to atypical socialist-feminist novels. After this socio-political introduction, in my paper, I will analyse the radicalism of some selected *fin de siècle* novels and my main focus will be put on socialist-feminist novels: on Jane Hume Clapperton's *Margaret Dunmore, or, A Socialist Home* (1888), Florence Dixie's *Gloriana, or the Revolution of 1900* (1890), Isabella Ford's *On the Threshold* (1895), and Gertrude Dix's *The Image Breakers* (1900) with the aspects of family relations, gender roles, and sexual norms.

The *Fin de siècle* displayed the taste for utopias — either practical, or fantastic, and socialist ones. The end of the century was characterised by not only the disillusionment of the old, decadent values but also by the hope of the new age coming in the human attitude of "wishful thinking" (Bloch 1988: 106). In France and in England, Jules Verne and Herbert

George Wells popularised scientific romances, while other novelists published visionary and dreamlike works (e.g. William Henry Hudson's *The Crystal Age,* 1887), or socialist ones; the dream-narratives of the American Edward Bellamy (titled *Looking Backward 2000–1887,* 1888 and *Equality,* 1897) and William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890) can be mentioned. Quite early, even in parallel with the male utopias and male dreams of transformation, feminist utopias appeared. In Elizabeth Corbett's *New Amazonia* (1889), a suffragist imagines an ideal state with a petticoat government of women controlling the country that was originally Ireland, having been colonised by the female. It is a fantastic utopia, where, due to the usage of electricity, healthy diet (the Amazonians are vegetarian) and natural living, the citizens live longer and happier; moreover, their life can be prolonged in the process of "rejuvenation". While New Amazonia is a true female utopia, in her political and critical prologue, Corbett refers to the historical framework of her novel: she attacks a group of contemporary female-fellows who argued against the importance of getting the right to vote. In her prologue she differentiates three groups within "the feminine genus *homo*": the rich *ladies*, the rebellious self-conscious *women* and the exploited working *slaves*. The members of the first group, the *ladies*, do not work, living under their husbands' protection, while the *women* and the *slaves* struggle to earn their own livelihood. Corbett urges to unite the forces of the latter two groups, standing up for justice for their sex, with the help of MEN (capitalised) who support women, "promoting the general welfare of the nation" (Corbett 2014 [1889]), 28–32, italics in the original).

In the practical, less fantastic feminist-socialist utopias, the "gynotopic impulse" emerged and the new genre fused "the feminist and historical perspectives into entirely new forms of social interactions and gender relationships" (Beaumont 2009: 107). Special emphasis is laid on the "educative aspect" of utopia, which Ruth Levitas in *The Concept of Utopia* also highlights (Levitas 1990: 122): the novels teach the readers solidarity (comradeship and sisterhood), while raising their self-consciousness. These works present moments of revolutionary changes as well as examining the issues of gender and class politics. Ruth Levitas also suggests the use of the term "critical utopia", borrowed from Tom Moylan, and McKenna and also agrees on the transformative quality of such utopian visions, where, instead of "seek[ing] for a final, static goal [...] it is the process of transformation itself that is our task" (McKenna 2001: 8–9).

3. Mentors and Mothers

In Jane Hume Clapperton's less utopian, more practical novel titled *Margaret Dunmore, or, A Socialist Home* (1888), Margaret, the female protagonist dares to step beyond the boundaries and realises her utopian impulse. In the opening scenes, Margaret and Vera, two old school friends, now in their twenties, exchange letters about their prospects of marriage, then with a sudden turn, referring to Miss José's socialist influence on the heroine, the girls' letters discuss the possibilities of social reforms. Miss José, the well-educated French governess, proposes that the transformation of society and education should be started in the family since the English "home itself must evolve" (Clapperton 2017 [1888]: 59). As she claims in a letter to her French comrade, Henri Martin:

> I hold that for true progress the first and most necessary step is the creation of a modern domestic system, favourable to the bringing into the world humanity of a new type. This humanity will spontaneously reject competition in industry, and rise above class distinctions. (Clapperton 2017 [1888]: 22)

Thérèse José acts like a mentor in Margaret's life, "her true teacher in the philosophy which every being craves who has the intellect and soul to desire harmony, consistency, unity, in human life" (Clapperton 2017 [1888]: 59–60). As a result, a group of men and women — two married couples with their parents, a mother with her two sons, a widower with his children, a young doctor and a housemaid with the initiators of the idea — build their own utopia, "a socialist home", forming a "provincial communistic" household (Clapperton 2017 [1888]: 23). The large house, renamed "La Maison", has been bought and owned by the well-to-do middle-class woman, Margaret Dunmore (with her telling name, 'done more'), while the expenses of the experiment are financed by two-thirds of the annual income of the wage earners. The communal life in the house is cleverly organised and controlled, promoting healthy living, providing day-school for children (also open to the public for a considerable fee), distributing all the household chores, and eschewing all unnecessary luxuries and insensible money spending. The elected members, men and women, of the decision making committees (Finance, Amusement, Education, and Public Service Committees) operate well and even children are involved so that they can accustom to the socialist functioning of their Unitary Home.

After a time, babies are born in the newly organised household, and the nursery, the garden, the work-shop, the sewing-room, the library and the laboratory, besides the school-room, all have important roles in their education while the youth can choose their profession freely afterwards. The novel openly displays domestic conflicts; for instance, the shared rearing of children and the false expectations of men and women in marriage. One of the couples, the humble Vera and the authoritative Joe, needs considerable time to learn to mutually respect each others' preferences and become a real family, a valuable part of the community. The scientist Frank and the artistic Rose Ray have a happy marital life, bringing up their child, while Margaret has a strong intellectual bond with the man. It is not a conventional love triangle as the extra-marital relationship is strictly Platonic though Rose is rather jealous of her husband's other companionship. Rose — as Beaumont presents — is a sensitive musician, who is so deeply concerned about the social problems of her own time and she is on the verge of becoming hysterical due to the lack of "a practical outlet for her reforming spirit" (Beaumont 2009: 117). In the commune, she can free her previously suppressed volatile political energies and the couple together with Margaret are united in the nurturing of their "noble, tender, unselfish dream" about a perfect community (Clapperton 2017 [1888]: 169).

Margaret, as "a peerless woman", is the inspirational centre of the novel and she remains unmarried; she does not become a mother — as Miss José says, Margaret's baby is their "socialism of the new era" (Clapperton 2017 [1888]: 22). Miss Dunmore also gives direction to the development of the group, guiding the talented men to find new solutions; due to her influence, Frank leaves behind chemistry and starts to examine "social economics" (Clapperton 2017 [1888]: 157). In the last chapter, besides their well-working day-school, the Lecture Hall is opened to invite comrades to give lectures on social topics. The members of the audience (like at an open university) are welcome to learn about the principles of their utopian "scientific meliorism", relying on the results of the group's communal home experiment:

> [...] scientific meliorism — a subject which embraces the rendering of humanity gentle and refined; the enlarging and improving of domestic life; the rationalizing of education and training; the organising of industry, and the whole field of labour; and socialising of general society. (Clapperton 2017 [1888]: 204).

While Clapperton's intellectual utopian Margaret dedicates herself to the working on the new society, there are novels in which the female protagonist can achieve independence, a political career and marital happiness. In Florence Dixie's rebellious *Gloriana, or the Revolution of 1900* (1890), a brave woman, Speranza de Lara, dares to leave her brutal husband to start a new life and have a loving family. Her daughter, Gloria(na), at the age of twelve promises that she should change the world and fight for equal rights for women. And fifteen years later, beneficial changes are observed in England: the franchise is granted to all women and their educational opportunities are enlarged due to the foundation of the Hall of Liberty, while thousands of women joined the Woman's Volunteer Corps and the White Guard Regiment of the Women's Volunteer Companies (Dixie 2018 [1890]: 82–87). The utopian future has been realised by the great efforts of a young Eton graduate, Hector D'Estrange, who, having become the Prime Minister in 1900, is planning to introduce "his bill for the absolute and entire enfranchisement of the women of his country" (Dixie 2018 [1890]: 128) in the Parliament, which also entails the acceptance of female MPs and female students at Oxbridge. In the great speech about women's emancipation, he relies on the natural equality of the sexes:

> Slavery in no form is natural; [...] But if honourable gentlemen will believe me, Nature is stronger than custom, and more powerful than law. Nature is a force that cannot be repressed finally and absolutely. [...] Through countless years woman has been repressed. [...] Nature gives strength and beauty to man, and Nature gives strength and beauty to woman. In this latter instance man flies in the face of Nature, and declares that she must be artificially restrained. [...] To the subjection and degradation of woman I ascribe the sufferings and crimes of humanity, nor will Society be ever truly raised, or ennobled, or perfected until woman's freedom has been granted, and she takes her rightful place as the equal of man. (Dixie 2018 [1890]: 128–130)

At first, he fails then several years later, following adventures of fighting, treachery and attempted assassination, finally, he, more exactly she, achieves what she planned in her childhood. Truly, the remarkably talented Hector is not a man: he is Gloriana, who in her camouflage, under the guise of Hector, is making the future path for women's emancipation. Her,

or, his career is not a conventional one, thus, Gloria's is a man's story of development. In the novel, till the moment of Gloria's coming out, she is continuously referred to as a "he" — even in their conversation with *his* mother, when the reader is first informed about *his* secret.

In the New Woman novels, male characters are not models or mentors: instead of the fathers, women play the important roles — men are only friends, partners, or comrades. In addition to Gloria and her mother, Speranza, there are two other outstanding female characters in Dixie's work. Gloria's alterego is the clever, well-educated and boyish looking Léonie, who is employed by Gloria's enemies to destroy her. Nevertheless, "the female Judas" goes through a great development and in a fateful heroic act dies, saving Gloria's life. Hector/Gloria's right hand is Flora Desmond with "bright independent spirit" and "dreams of a bright future, an adventurous career" (Dixie 2018 [1890]: 35), who, having had no other alternatives, escaped from her mediocre home into marriage. However, after the bankruptcy and suicide of her husband, Flora dedicates her life to the reforms and she initiates the rebellion, leading the women's troops — the "élite army of suffragists" (Beaumont 2009: 112) — to rescue Hector/Gloria after the trial. After Gloria's death, Lady Flora carries on her reforms and she is appointed the second female Prime Minister. The new nation's, more accurately, the Imperial Federation's important monument is the marble gravestone of the three comrades: the married couple, Gloria, Evelyn and Flora (who was secretly in love with the man). In a feminist novel, female characters should work on their prospect and in the studied works, the female protagonists have indeed succeeded in building a new world, a *true* utopia. Gloria's life-story ends in her marrying her best friend, her ex-comrade, Evelyn, the Duke of Ravensdale; meanwhile, with her experiences and struggles under the pretence of being a man, she has also written her own fictitious, male story, where her genius "triumsphantly established the fact of woman's equality with man" (Dixie 2018 [1890]: 324).

4. Comrades and Sisters

In Isabella Ford's *On the Threshold* (1895), the female protagonists spend a few months in London as art students: the narrator, Lucretia studies music, Kitty, her younger friend creative arts (both are in their early twenties). The protagonists are full of volatile spirits, believing that the world can

be and should be made a better place. Ledger calls the reader's attention to the middle-class status and the bohemian attitude of the young ladies (Ledger 1997: 55), who, for the first time in their lives, leave their parental homes, experience liberty, and have the possibility to express their own opinions. The narrator depicts the beginning of their voyage: "We were, in short, as absolutely ignorant, and self-opinionated, and, I suppose, as uninteresting, as are most well-brought-up young Englishwomen of twenty-two and twenty-four" (Ford 1895: 10). In their self-education, they choose what to read: Mill's *Subjection of Women* and Shelley, then later Ruskin — philosophical, poetic and art critical works. At the same time, greatly due to their lack of experience, they are quite naive to think about the world in simple moral terms, dividing their acquaintances into either good or bad. In the process of their upbringing in London, they are to come across hypocrisy, corruption, ingratitude, crimes, and depression though they keep their lively spirit and belief in man throughout. Lucretia thinks that caring women can change the world, and they swear to do it, sealing their oath with a kiss: "We seemed to be on the threshold of a great unknown world, and we were filled with awe, though our faith and courage, like our ignorance, were great, boundlessly great" (Ford 1895: 52).

Ford definitely shows uneasiness when describing the lifestyle of the public houses and the horrible situation of the poor lodgers in London. The novel discusses such issues as prostitution, emigration, generation gap, and bonds between girls (with some hints at Lucretia's lesbianism) in the socialist framework. In the decades of the 1880s and 1890s, when new socialism emerged, its ideas attracted lots of women who wanted changes and aspired to equality and independence. In *On the Threshold*, new socialism is presented by the younger girl's (Kitty's) admirer, Estcourt, whose ideas recall Owenite influence.[2] Estcourt is an idealist, putting his faith in "a more spiritual society [...] that will bind everybody together as comrades" (Ford 1895: 34), but what he reaches for is the publication of his revolutionary poems about freedom. Lucretia and Kitty quickly become involved in the meetings of the Socialist Debating Society. In the society, they have conversations on the best way to reform the world, supporting the idea of friendship between men and women, which is the way of transforming the world (cf. "one of the leavening forces of the world" (Ford

[2] About Robert Owen's impact on feminism in nineteenth-century England see Barbara Taylor's remarkable monograph titled *Eve and the New Jerusalem: Socialism and Feminism in the Nineteenth Century* (2016).

1895: 28)), and it is more important than falling in love. In the socialist meetings with a dozen men and half a dozen women, gender roles are also discussed and, while they agree upon sharing chores in the co-operative household, some of the members think that women are more conservative and more spiritual than the acting, working men. Lucretia proudly asserts that "we were all Socialists, more or less, and any disagreement amongst us concerned merely the particular manner in which we believed our ideal future would be realized" (Ford 1895: 30).

On the whole, this *new* socialism is rather utopian: it talks about reforms, not real acts.[3] But the two young girls try to act and save a poor and uneducated maid-of-all-work, Beatrice, even selling their valuable jewellery, but they fail. Beatrice Ratcliffe is introduced as the first female character though she is not a heroine in the narrative. The narrow-minded Beatrice is an average working woman of mediocre looks with a meek and servile attitude and her life is only about hard work, hard words without any pleasures. She escapes from her newly found household, having been fired from the previous one, and finally she is killed by her brutal boyfriend on the street. Not only Beatrice's life is destroyed but also Miss Burton's, the teacher. Miss Burton, who is a socialist, also experiences the inequality between men and women; according to her, comradeship is impossible as men do not hate women, "only despise them" (Ford 1895: 61). However, she is socially concerned and regularly visits the poor in London and, helping them, she writes journalistic pieces about the life in London slums. As a result, she is forced to depart: she emigrates to the United States to start a new life. Miss Burton plans to open a school for poor children but she dies before realising her dream. Ironically, both the lower-class Beatrice and the educated clever Miss Burton are exploited by a man and their emotions cause their fall.

The novel does not provide much information about Lucretia's and Kitty's parents but their few statements reject the new, mainly socialist and feminist ideas. The old way of thinking is also exemplified by the spinster Aunt Henrietta, but the Aunt also utters the most insightful ideas about womanhood, rebellion and independence. Colm Tóibin accentuates the importance of aunts in Victorian fiction: "The novel in English during the nineteenth century is full of parents whose influence must be evaded or

[3] Some reforms aim at to abolish philanthropy, industrialism, class distinctions, dress codes, top hats, even to get rid of the words, "capitalist" and "respectable", "by abolishing all idle, able-bodies loafers and paupers" (Ford 1895: 30).

erased, to be replaced by figures who operate either literally or figuratively as aunts, both kind and mean, both well-intentioned and duplicitous, both rescuing and destroying" (Tóibin 2011). Here, the old lady is still Victorian, being keen on having her beloved possessions around; she especially loves her cosy pieces of furniture. When she invites young Mr Estcourt, she is worried about the time of the dinner and the young socialist man violating the dress code.[4] In their conversation, the man reveals how he detests philanthropy, while the Aunt sticks to the old values. The Aunt is rather sceptical about the new schemes: she has seen so many reforms but the world still remains bad. However, she wants her niece and Kitty "to have more freedom that [she] had in [her] young days [...] too much discipline is bad for women, it makes them rather helpless, and [...] it is time [...] men came in for your share of it" (Ford 1895: 179). Aunt Henrietta still believes in marriage; more exactly, she accepts it and considers it as the best choice for all women. Interestingly enough, she is unmarried, as marriage also means that a woman "has to give up very much" and she thought that it could have been a "little too much" for her (Ford 1895: 107).

In one of the central scenes, the Aunt is explaining the importance of settling-down in a woman's life. Lucretia sees it as a process, like a long, narrow street spectrally lit, "leading to death and darkness", while she has

> [...] a longing, a great, burning longing, for a real life with real people in it; [...] with real thoughts; and for a real love which would care for all troubles, not merely one's own troubles, and which would help towards bringing in light to all the dark, miserable places in the world? (Ford 1895: 134)

The aged woman reveals that in her "wicked, rebellious" youth she also wanted to transform the world but, as she admits, a woman's life is dedicated to self-sacrifice: "women, of course, can never be happy in this world" (Ford 1895: 135). Then Lucretia has to read out loud a book on female education about "the necessity for gentleness and submission [...] and the beauty of complete self-sacrifice" (Ford 1895: 137). This episode explicitly shows how self-obedience has been propagated to young women for centuries.

[4] One of the funniest sentences, displaying the clashing of life styles, is said by the Aunt: "for Socialists don't approve of late dinners, do they?" (Ford 1895: 167).

In the novel, Kitty admits the importance of sisterhood, probably sensing her friend, Lucretia's attachment: "women's love for each other is endless, boundless; you know it is" (Ford 1895: 186). She also differentiates women and men: the former are like passionate and wild "spirits of the woods", while the latter, being controlled by laws are regulations, are rather shadows, empty creatures (Ford 1895: 187–189). That is, men traditionally and habitually are to live in certain chosen roles, accepting their walls and barriers, while women, the *outcasts*, are likely to pretend keeping the patriarchal rules but inside they can keep their fiery spirit alive that is the source of potential changes and overall social reforms. All the women are caring creatures in the novels; however, they cannot liberate themselves or others. Beatrice and Miss Burton fall — these two female life-paths fail together with Kitty's nursing her father. Her planned marriage to the socialist Estcourt presents the limited options for Lucretia and underlines the *threshold state* of female independence. The narrator closes the story-line with the hope of a new dawn, flashing in her comrade's lovely eyes.

5. Lovers and Companions

Sally Ledger says that while "New Woman characters are pathologised as 'lesbian'" by male writers, in feminist fiction, the so-called "'romantic friendship' model of same-sex female relationships" was presented (Ledger 1997: 124–125). In Ford's *On the Threshold*, though Lucretia and Kitty enjoy intimate companionship and in Dixie's *Gloriana*, the boyish Léonie gives her life to save the heroine, all narratives customarily end in heterosexual relationships (partnership or marriage). Dix's *The Image Breakers* (1900) is the novel that, in a feminist-socialist framework, focuses on the questions of the true partnership. The title of the novel refers to the 'iconoclastic' acts of the central female characters, who do not accept and this way destroy the traditionally accepted models of partnership.

In *The Image Breakers*, conventional sexual and gender roles are challenged from the very beginning when a feminine anarchist Charles Whiston is introduced and Rosalind turns out to be publishing socialist articles under a man's name (more exactly, simply using the signature R. Dangerfield). At their meetings, the socialist men and women believe in comradeship, brotherhood and sisterhood as companionship is more

important than love or marriage. The young Leslie still lives "in a world mainly populated by maiden aunts" (Dix 1900: 15). and she is supported by her Aunt Letitia and Aunt Julia in London where she studies economy. Then she meets the wealthy woman Rosalind Dangerfield, who is married to Herbert Dangerfield, the mill-owner capitalist. Having joined the socialists, Rosalind leaves her husband to work together with Justin Ferrar (also known as Alvan) and with the other "comrades" they together live in the countryside, in a utopian "communal village", a self-supporting colony, based on Fourierism (Dix 1900: 52). Unfortunately, the experiment fails and the couple, being accused of "free love", has to leave the settlement. As Rosalind explains:

> We have broken the laws of the world, not merely for our own selfish indulgence, but in obedience to something higher. [...] our great desire is to help others to substitute better ideals than those of ordinary marriage. (Dix 1900: 275)

Here, in the question of sexual relations, from the second half of the nineteenth century, the socialists are also influenced by Robert Owen's ideas and by the "Owenite marriage doctrine — with its emphasis on voluntary sexual liaisons and the equality of both partners within them" (Taylor 2016: 138–139). Justin, having recovered from a serious illness, moves away from his Owenite principles and becomes a "fanatical mystic socialist" (Ledger 1997: 57). Rosalind feels that love, more exactly her passion, has destroyed their comradely companionship and she does not believe in their bright future any longer. She is looking for true companionship and even tries to get intimately connected to Leslie, "the girl she had loved" (Dix 1900: 289). Finally, the young woman decides to get married, and Rosalind remains alone. Having lost her faith in the socialist future advertised by Justin, she starts to work at a factory "as a *hand*" (Dix 1900: 376, italics in the original) to have first-hand experience and get related to the working women. Meanwhile, she seems unable to forgive herself for being an adulteress and, ironically, she keeps living together with the socialists to guarantee her capitalist husband's safety.

The other heroine of *The Image Breakers* is the rebellious and independent Leslie Ardent, an artist, whom the masculine Redgold woos and wants to marry. Redgold is a reformer and a politician but, regarding his marital ideas, he sticks to the old-fashioned conception of marriage. He is convinced that after their marriage Leslie should not work and he wants

the woman to stay at home, dedicating herself solely to him and their would-be family. Redgold does not think much of women's independence, and even though he values Leslie's cleverness, he takes her for "a foolish child" (Dix 1900: 253) on several occasions. Due to the man's authoritative and "tyrannous" behaviour, the woman, though she truly loves Redgold, cancels their wedding as she cannot be the man's "free, happy comrade" (Dix 1900: 263). The woman thinks that she has made Redgold free, letting him accomplish his political dreams with another woman more fitting into his future career. Losing the man then later her job (and her income as well), Leslie escapes to Aunt Julia in the country to gather her strength. She is broken-hearted and disillusioned and the aunt who lives with her brother does not ask tormenting questions: she "grew reconciled to the fact that she had refused the destiny of *nice situations* for which she had prepared her to become a lady-artist in London" (Dix 1900: 341, italics in the original). Then, when the man finds her and asks her again, this time respecting each other's desire for freedom, she accepts his proposal. In the last scene of the novel, the self-determined, "quicksilver-like"[5] woman is looking in the mirror:

> The smooth surface of the glass it held was like life — life in which one sees one's self. Suddenly as she stood there she drew a deep breath, still gazing into the mirror, and beside her own face, rosy with the wind and the sun, lo! the face of the man also. (Dix 1900: 392)

This future marriage portrait presents an ideal bond between a man and a woman: a utopian, perfect one, having been articulated by the Avelings in the conclusion of their Bebel review. As they envisioned, in the future, the married partners share "love, respect, intellectual likeness, and command of the necessities of life" (Aveling and Marx Aveling 1886).

[5] In a socialist meeting, a man fantasises about the difference between men and women as "men were like many waters — sweet and salt, clean and foul — they'd all blend. But women were either oil or quicksilver, and you'll never mix 'em — never! The quicksilver woman was a new and fascinating discovery" (Dix 1900: 36).

6. Conclusion: On Sisterhood

In the conclusion of *The Image Breakers* "the belief in the possibility of social transformation through socialism has been more or less abandoned", as Sally Ledger claims (Ledger 1997: 58). Ford's heroines seem to get stuck *on the threshold*, while the other New Women, Margaret and Gloriana, succeed in accomplishing their aims. All the novels display the struggles of the antis, the rebellious sisters for emancipation, their desire for reforms. According to Eve Bannet, the narratives are revolutionary since "they involved a clearly defined strategy for bringing about social change [via] social action" (Bannet 1991: 197). The heroines of the analysed socialist-feminist novels are metaphorically standing on (and crossing) the threshold of a new life, or a new home, or a new world: their individual development is embedded in the altering age, of which the boundaries are blurred. Rita Felski in her *The Gender of Modernity* highlights the transforming quality of the nineteenth-century female narratives. As she claims, in the female novelists' works written in the second half of the century, "the narrative of long-term evolutionary change was replaced by an impassioned description of the founding moment of the revolutionary body, as a spontaneous process of self-creation almost *ex nihilo*" (Felski 1995: 165). The central characters are not orphans but they leave their families, so the parents cannot protect them any longer and do not support their "independent" daughters financially and emotionally. Consequently, the New Women help each other like sisters and are supported by their aged female relatives, in particular their aunties, who act as step-mothers or mentors.

Moreover, the readers are also invited to take part in the heroines' educative path that directly influences their worldviews. Cora Kaplan in her "Pandora's Box" emphasises the importance of self-education in England in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as reading meant

> [...] a critical link between the psychic play of reason and passion and its social expression. New social categories of readers, women of all classes, [...] are described in this period by contemporaries. Depending on their political sympathies, observers saw these actively literate groups as an optimistic symptom of social and intellectual progress or a dire warning of imminent social decay and threatened rebellion. (Kaplan 1991: 866)

The analysed novels offered the female readers the opportunity to get connected, to think individually and also collectively about the actual issues of "the woman question", socialist reforms and social development. The reader comes across several female biographies and realises which options could be taken by a woman at the *fin de siècle*. The socialist-feminist works helped the female readers to formulate their questions, search for their possibilities and try to find their own way, thus enlarging the scope of a *literary sisterhood*.

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"ANYWAY, WHAT'S A DOE MORE OR LESS?" ANDROCENTRISM IN *WATERSHIP DOWN* (1972) AND *TALES FROM WATERSHIP DOWN* (1996) BY RICHARD ADAMS

Abstract
When Adams's *Watership Down* reached the US market, it came under strong criticism for "its anti-feminist bias" (Resh Thomas 1974: 311). Several years later, Le Guin reiterated the censure of its "egregious sexism" (2009: 82), taxing the novel with falsifying animal behaviour. However, through the comparison of Lockley's *The Private Life of the Rabbit* (1964) and Adams' text, it is possible to prove that the latter's representation of rabbits' society is actually strongly indebted to his source text for its blatant androcentrism. The sequel, *Tales from Watership Down*, published in 1996, ostensibly tries to give the does more "floodlight" (Adams in Monaghan 2011: 14) and make amends for some of the accusations received. However, as the paper highlights, while the novel undeniably conveys a strong ecological message, its point of view remains strenuously patriarchal.

Key words: ecofeminism, ecocriticism, androcentrism, sexism, *Watership Down*

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1. Introduction

In 1964, the ethologist Ronald M. Lockley concluded his study of wild rabbits' behaviour with these words: "Rabbits are so human. Or is it the other way round – humans are so rabbit?" (1964: 164). His observation was the fruit of several extended considerations about rabbits' social habits and, more poignantly, about their tendency to destroy their habitat with their unregulated breeding and feeding. Two years later, Richard Adams started writing his first novel, a story about rabbits he had invented to entertain his two daughters during a car trip to Stratford, and he used Lockley's essay to learn the fundamentals of rabbits' behaviour. When his book was finished, he sent it to several publishers; but it was rejected every time. Adams, however, did not give up and finally found a small publishing house, Rex Collings, which printed it in 1972.

A year before Lockley's first edition, in 1963, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, the journalist and feminist thinker Gloria Steinem published the account of her undercover experience as a Bunny in a Playboy Club. In the collection of essays she released more than thirty years later, she thus epitomized the last, but not least, "long-term resul[t]" (1995: 74) the article had had on her life: "Realizing that all women are Bunnies" (1995: 75). The harsh description of the conditions in which the young waitresses were required to work, amid constant sexual harassment and garments constricting to the point of physical torture, confirmed the widespread objectification of women and their reduction to a homogenized sexual commodity, "a non-person in a bunny suit" (Steinem 1995: 54). This association of events is presented here not to suggest that Adams had any notions of Steinem's work, or any interest in feminist positions, nor to hypothesize any connections between *Watership Down*'s rabbits and Playboy Bunnies (as a matter of fact, it has already been done, as will be shown below). The purpose is to contextualize the birth of this literary work and to uphold the legitimacy of an ecofeminist appraisal of Adams's children's book.

The association between women and animals has been widely studied and dates back to the origins of the Western culture (see Plumwood 1993: 19). Moreover, it is made evident and consolidated in everyday language by using animal terms to describe women – "pets, cows, sows, foxes, chicks, serpents, bitches, beavers, old bats, old hens, mother hens, pussycats, cats, cheetahs, birdbrains, and harebrains" (Warren 1997: 12). The consequence

of this animalization of women in an anthropocentric culture such as ours, "where animals are seen as inferior to humans (men)", is, according to Warren, that of "reinforc[ing] and authoriz[ing] women's inferior status" (*Ibid*.). Likewise, the same is true for the reverse process: feminizing nature "reinforces and authorizes the domination of nature" (*Ibid*.) by attributing to it female qualities which, in an androcentric society, are considered "subordinate and inferior" (*Ibid*.). Words are not just words, then, since, as Carol Adams posits, "[a] primary means of making a subject into an object – of objectifying a being – is through depictions, representations" (2018: 18).

The juncture between inter-dependent forms of oppression is where, according to Gaard, ecofeminism originates and finds its reason to exist: from the twentieth century, women "[m]otivated by an intellectual and experiential understanding of the mutually-reinforcing interconnections among diverse forms of oppression" (Gaard 2012: 15), and guided by the feeling of a relationship between "other animals (including humans) and environments (specific trees, rivers, plants, as well as places)" (*Ibid*.), have started seeing "their own liberation and well-being as fundamentally connected to the well-being of other animal species" (*Ibid*.). Ecofeminist literary criticism, by combining feminist and environmental themes and methods of analysis, offers "literary and cultural critics a special lens" (Legler 1997: 227) to investigate not only the representations of nature and the environment in works of fiction, but also the way these "are linked with representations of gender, race, class, and sexuality." (*Ibid*.) In other words, ecofeminist criticism focuses both on ecological-environmental themes and on social (and interspecies) justice, and this perspective becomes of primary importance when applied to the study of children's literature because of the inherent pedagogical nature of this kind of fiction.

Watership Down is what Le Guin labelled as an "animal novel" (2009: 73), a book belonging to the "Jowl side of [her] spectrum" (*Ibid*.) which entirely focuses on "earth others"[1]. In stories such as Adams's, authors ground their plots and the way their protagonists behave in real science but, according to Le Guin, they also add "a fantasy element: what the animals do is a mixture of behavior proper to their species and human

[1] Here I adopt Warren's definition: "'human Others' (such as women, people of color, children, and the poor) and 'earth Others' (such as animals, forests, the land). The reference to 'Others' is intended to highlight the status of those subordinate groups in unjustifiable relationships and systems of domination and subordination." (2000: 1)

behavior" (2009: 73–4). Adams's original oral tale contained several fantasy elements: the rabbits had "bows and arrows … they built a bridge across a river" and even "pretended to be Chinese" (Bridgman 1990: 12) when they visited Efrafra. When he set down to transform the story into a novel, however, he decided to adopt a more rigid line about the amount of anthropomorphism he wanted to assign to his rabbits and, following Kipling's model, he determined "to attribute to his animal characters human thoughts, human powers of converse, even human values (e.g. loyalty) but never to make them do anything of which real animals would actually be physically incapable" (Bridgman 1990: 12–13). According to Plumwood, this form of "weak anthropomorphism" (2002: 57), which consists in "representing animals in intentional or communicative terms" (*Ibid.*), should not be considered a symptom of an anthropocentric attitude: endowing earth others with agency, intentionality, subjectivity and communicativity actually allows the writer to avoid the colonizing device of impoverishing and diminishing the other, actuated, in this case, by the "hyper-separation of human and animal natures" (*Ibid.*) which assumes that "there is no overlap of characteristics between humans and non-humans" (Plumwood 2002: 56).

I have elsewhere (Grandi 2021) argued that *Watership Down*'s defamiliarizing narrative technique enacts the posthumanist refusal of anthropocentrism and its embracing of an eco-centric mindset, that the rabbits' ability to communicate with their fellows and with animals of other species contends men's supposed intellectual superiority and that the book invites readers to embrace *animality* as a better, more inclusive, less-exploitative, more *humane* essence than humanity. The immersive narration which shifts the point of view from the human to the non-human sphere is what makes of this long – and sometimes difficult – novel a compelling read for children.

However, there is a second layer, or, better, a "clashing voice" as Mey (1999: passim) would call it, that, from time to time, breaks the illusion and awakens the more adult reader to a different perspective. The frequent authorial interventions and the epigraphs opening every chapter design a framework that can be defined as traditional and androcentric: the words of the author mingle with those of many other writers, thinkers, and commanders from the past. They belong to a Western culture which is white, Christian, classic, and – needless to say – male, and help identify the authorial ideology as conservative and traditionalist. In the midst of

the "unsatisfactory disorder of the Sixties" (Bridgman 1990: 5), Adams shaped his tale as an attempt "to restore moral and cultural touchstones to a generation that he believed had been robbed of them" (*Ibid*.) and, when considered in this light, the many rejections the novel received before its publication appear less surprising: as Bridgman suggests, "[a]ll those who read it, the men and women who turned it down, were also scenting unconsciously its authoritarian stance" (Bridgman 1990: 58).

2. Slaves and Kings

In the analysis of the rejection letters, Bridgman makes another interesting observation, i.e. that the harshest criticisms came from women editors, and hence wonders: "Did feminist hackles rise at reading a novel where the chief function of the female was to breed, whose author could be a chauvinist?" (Bridgman 1990: 54) Her question appears more than pertinent when we consider the reactions of two popular writers and critics after *Watership Down* regularly appeared on the US best-seller list. In June and August 1974, Selma G. Lanes and Jane Resh Thomas upbraided *Watership Down* for its being a work where the "males are superhuman and the females subhuman, creatures who occupy only a utilitarian place in the novel's world" (Resh Thomas 1977: 311) thus betraying an "anti-feminist bias" (*Ibid*.) and "an attitude toward females that finds more confirmation in Hugh Heffner's *Playboy* than R. M. Lockley's" book (Lanes 1974). Though Resh Thomas does not deny the overall worth of Adams's novel ("[he] has created a splendid story, admirable for its originality as much as for its craft" (1977: 311)), she gives voice to a feeling of injustice and offense that echoes in both Lanes's article and, many years later, in Le Guin's essay: "I felt he had treated me and my kind with a contempt I couldn't be silent about." (Resh Thomas in Piehl 1982: 17).

The core of the feminist argumentation rests on two pillars: one concerning the narrative construction of the plot and the characterization, and the other revolving around its betrayal of the scientific treatise Adams officially declares to be his source (an accusation which is, at least in part, unfair). In *Watership Down*, the first third of the book is devoted to the heroic, epic adventures of a "tenacious band" (Adams 2012[2]: 120) of bucks

[2] Henceforth abbreviated as *WD*.

as they leave their homeland to start a new warren. Only when they have finally settled down does their chief realise that "[d]oes are desperately needed, but only as instruments of reproduction, to save his male rabbits' triumph from becoming a hollow victory" (Lanes 1974). What follows in the remaining part of the novel is "a ruthless, single-minded and rather mean-spirited search for females – not because *Watership Down*'s males miss their companionship or yearn for love but rather to perpetuate the existing band" (*Ibid*.).

The females are procured with a mission that inevitably reminds us of the Rape of the Sabine women, with the mitigating circumstance that they are actually asked whether they wish to leave (though, in the original oral version they were in fact abducted)[3]. In her ground-breaking study about rape culture, *Against Our Will* (1975), Brownmiller explains how, historically, the status of women in patriarchal society was equal to that of "chattel" (1993: 17): a woman was man's "first piece of real property" (*Ibid*.), "the original building block, the cornerstone, of the 'house of the father'" (*Ibid*.), and a crime committed against her was "a property crime of man against man" (1993: 18). As a consequence of this, "bride capture, as it came to be known, was a very real struggle: a male took title to a female, staked a claim to her body, as it were, by an act of violence" (1993: 17), and this way of acquiring wives continued to be acceptable "in England as late as the fifteenth century" (*Ibid*.).

In *Watership Down*, does are represented almost as "mindless breeding slaves" (Le Guin 2009: 79), they are introduced merely for their biological role but systematically denied the psychological insight and the emotional investment the bucks are allotted, thus presenting them as "colourless", "peripheral" and "scarcely noticeable" (Resh Thomas 1977: 311). An exception to this is the character of Hyzenthlay, a "resolute, sensible" (*WD*: 340) doe graced by the gift of precognition like Fiver. From her first talk to Bigwig, she emerges as a complex personality and her name is cited throughout the novel twice as many times as that of Clover's and Thethuthinnang (59 to 27 and 31), two among the few other does to have a specific role in the tale. Notwithstanding all this, her role during the escape from Efrafra and the ensuing siege is passive and mostly silent.

The second flaw ascribed to the novel concerns Le Guin's "fantasy element": according to her and, thirty years before her, Lanes, *Watership Down* departs from reality in its depiction of the warren organization and

[3] Bridgman 1990: 13.

the role of does, which do not reflect what Lockley's *The Private Life of the Rabbit* (1964) had described. Adams depends on the naturalist's study for most of his notions on rabbitry, his name appearing in the acknowledgments, twice in the epigraphs and two other times within the narration. However, Adams chooses to depict the rabbits' society as hierarchic and militaristic, even inventing a "band of henchmen or soldiers, the Owsla – all male" (Le Guin 2009: 79) under direct command of their chief rabbit. Moreover, as Lanes gathers in her "cursory reading" (1974) of Lockley's text, the scientist specifically writes that "[t]he doe is the centre of the rabbit community, a matriarchy" (1964: caption to picture 1), that "[i]t is always the doe who initiates the new colony" (1964: 154) and that "nursing does drive large cats away from nesting stops where young kittens [are] living. The doe will […] successfully defend her weanlings even against ferret, stoat or weasel; she seems endowed with a fierce maternal strength" (1964: 159). Adams's rabbit world, instead, is a patriarchy where does with litter hide trembling in their burrows and need to be entertained by the "rather effeminate" Bluebell (Lanes 1974) while the bucks fight against the invasion of the rabbits from Efrafra in chapter 47.

What Adams wrote in *Watership Down* would indeed be a sad betrayal of Lockley's ideas if these quotations reflected the real tenor of the treatise. Problem is, they do not. On careful – not cursory – reading, it appears evident that the sentences cited by Lanes and Le Guin are almost the only notions which can be found on these topics in the entire book. It is true that rabbit societies are matriarchies and that does have a very active role in them, but if our only source of information were Lockley's study, we could hardly be aware of it. The naturalist focuses most of his attention on the behaviour – more easily observable – of the bucks, talking about the dominant male as a "king" (Lockley 1964: passim), "a royal master" (Lockley 1964: 64), who "reign[s] supreme" (Lockley 1964: 42) over his territory, usurps another's "throne" (Lockley 1964: 54), and lives in a "royal palace" (*Ibid*.) with "his train of wife and concubines" (Lockley 1964: 64). He speaks of "the hierarchy of the royal court" (*Ibid*.) to describe rabbit society and even portrays one dominant male as "a model dictator, head of a benevolent autocracy" (Lockley 1964: 69). The king usually "behave[s] like a loyal, courteous husband" (Lockley 1964: 45) towards his queen, "obey[ing]" when she wants to be left alone (*Ibid*.) and "behav[ing] as a courtier to her, protecting her, licking her face, mating with her." (Lockley 1964: 63) The description of the does' behaviour could not be more

different: the dominant doe is not "unduly aggressive" (Lockley 1964: 46) towards other females, and she rarely moves "from a warren once she had bred there" (Lockley 1964: 72). It is not uncommon, finally, to find in Lockley the presence of "sweeping generalisations" (Le Guin 2009: 81) that assimilate does' and women's behaviour in an extremely regressive perspective: a "mature female rabbit" is like a "woman [who] makes the home and usually does not wish to leave it unless compelled by necessity, by fear or other *force majeure*" (Lockley 1964: 55); two adult does are compared to "middle aged ladies who, like the majority of women the world over, loved, lived, and stayed at home" (Lockley 1964: 76); a buck searching for the attention of his former mate is compared to "a husband temporarily tired of the too soothing company of a compliant wife" (Lockley 1964: 78), and he even explains that

> the queen doe will not actively prevent the king having sexual relations with her or the [secondary females], provided [they] do not enter her home and she will only attack them if they obstruct her path when grazing near by [sic]; married man has a similar relationship, albeit more furtive and clandestine, if he takes a "mistress". But neither man nor buck will usually allow another male to approach his female sexually, if he can prevent it. (Lockley 1964: 163)

The examples provided here do not mitigate the "egregious sexism" (Le Guin 2009: 82) that can be traced in *Watership Down,* but can perhaps absolve its author from the accusation of having "cheated … misrepresent[ing] Lockleys' actual description of rabbit behaviors" (*Ibid*.). Moreover, as Muth interestingly – but maybe a bit hastily – claims, since the novel addresses political concepts such as "totalitarianism, fairness, the nanny state, the police state, how to deal with crises of leadership, and so forth" (Muth 2017), we might also give it the benefit of the doubt and consider its depiction of a world featuring "an exclusion of women from decision-making and some degree of misogyny" (*Ibid*.) as "a win for realism" (*Ibid*.) and not a demerit.

3. The Sequel

We might give *Watership Down* the benefit of the doubt, that is, if we had not read the sequel *Tales from Watership Down* that Adams published in 1996, more than 20 years after his debut novel. Thanks to the unexpected success of his first work, Adams could resign from his job and become a professional writer, authoring 15 more books[4], including children's stories, an autobiography, and two erotic novels, *The Girl in a Swing* (1980) and *Maia* (1984), which is centred on the adventures of a young teenager who, after being – happily – seduced by her stepfather, climbs the social ladder from a talented sex slave to a satisfied family housewife. But the rabbits stayed with Adams all along, so, he decided to make a "concession" to all those faithful readers who "were clamouring for more" (Adams in Monaghan 2011: 14) and publish a collection of short stories which expanded on the rabbit mythology, depicted the future of the Watership Down warren, and even introduced new characters, does in particular. Adams openly admitted the latter to be one of the principal reasons behind his decision to write the new tales: even if, as he always maintained, his original novel "was simply told with no thought of reactions from the public. No idea it would be subjected to criticism as it has done. It was never an anti-feminist book, it was simply a spontaneous story" (AMA! 2013), he finally recognized the actual need to give the does more "of the floodlight" (in Monaghan 2011: 14) in his new work.

Not surprisingly, however, *Tales from Watership Down* is not entirely focused on female rabbits: the first two parts, consisting of 11 chapters, are mainly devoted to what we could call "Lapine lore". El-ahrairah is the protagonist of the majority of the stories, but other familiar characters, namely Rabscuttle, Lucy, and Lord Frith make their appearance as well. The opening chapter, "The Sense of Smell", is powerful and ambitious: it depicts the journey of the rabbit hero through the realm of the King of Yesterday, the netherworld of all extinct animal species such as Oregon bison, too many woodpeckers, some kinds of lions, tigers, jaguars (Adams 2012b[5]: 21) and so on. "It is entirely by human beings that every one of my subjects has been destroyed" explains the king, "Some, like my Mexican friend here [a grizzly bear], the men quite deliberately shot, trapped

[4] In the years from 1996 to his death in 2016, he published three more works.

[5] Henceforth *TfWD*.

and poisoned out of existence; but many others vanished because men destroyed their natural habitats and they couldn't adapt themselves to live elsewhere." (*TfWD*: 21–22) There is also a vast forest which "grows daily. … It consists of all the forest [sic] destroyed by human beings. Of late years it has grown so fast that Lord Frith has told me that he is thinking of appointing a second king to rule it." (*TfWD*: 22) This long passage conveys with vivid efficacy the feeling of the accelerated genocide[6] of animals carried out by humans and the "massive losses of species and biodiversity" (Colebrook 2018: 150) identified as the sixth mass extinction.

The eight remaining chapters give large space to the protagonists of the original novel, the bucks Hazel, Fiver, Bigwig and the others, but also the does Hyzenthlay, Vilthuril and Thethuthinnang. New characters are introduced as well, both male (Sandwort, Groundsel and Stonecrop in particular) and female (Flyairth and Nyreem). Is the inclusion of more does and the more ample space given to some existing female characters in *Tales from Watership Down* a real attempt at introducing the most basic gender diversity in the rabbit world, or should we instead talk about gender tokenism[7]? That is to say, is all this sufficient to make amends for the accusations of sexism and chauvinism which Adams's previous work received? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Not at all. While at least a couple of stories of the collection would probably pass the Bechdel-Wallace test[8], the representation of does the author provides still brims with patriarchy and androcentrism.

> There were two other bucks with me, my friend Stitchwort and a rather timid rabbit named Fescue. And there was a doe too – Mian. […] Everything went wrong […] a stoat found us […] we all three just sat there while it killed Mian; she never made a sound. (*TfWD*: 80–1)

> […] he began persuading other young rabbits, both male and female, to accompany him on expeditions beyond the warren […] "Where's Crowla?" asked Silver […] "How should I know?"

[6] For the use of the term "genocide" applied to non-human animals, see Cafaro 2015: 389.

[7] "Tokenism, n.: The practice or policy of making merely a token effort or granting only minimal concessions, esp. to minority or suppressed groups." *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, September 2021. Web. 15 October 2021.

[8] See Garber 2015.

> replied Sandwort. […] Crowla did not come back […] Sandwort showed no particular concern" (*TfWD*: 222).
>
> Campion had the sense to begin in a small way, with short, easy Patrols […] the first casualty occurred about midsummer, when a doe named Lemista […] fell victim to a dog (*TfWD:* 260–1).

On many occasions Adams introduces female characters in action sequences, he even gives them a name, but he provides no real characterization for them and this makes of them the predestined victims. Male characters are granted, in the great majority of cases, deeper insight, wider context and, thus, more ample chances of survival in the narrative. Does were already passive, silent and objectified in *Watership Down*: the beautiful but voiceless Nildro-hain (the few words attributed to her are only reported) dies off scene when the bucks leave the warren of the snares in chapter 17. Moreover, during the epic escape from Efrafra there are only two casualties: Thrayonlosa, fatally injured by a bridge girder, who dies in chapter 40, and another unnamed doe caught by a fox when they are almost safe. On her demise Blackavar callously comments: "Anyway, what's a doe more or less?" (*WD*: 387).

In her essay "Androcentrism and Anthropocentrism: Parallels and Politics", Plumwood offers a list of "the chief features" which help define androcentrism, that is the "centric structure between the masculine Center and the feminine Other" (1997: 337). Some of those are useful to describe, as well, the sort of "Buck-centrism" that can be identified in Adams's rabbit saga. The expendability of the does is a direct effect of the "homogenization" that the dominants project onto the subjects. When the Other is homogenized, it is not seen as "an individual but is related to as a member of a class of interchangeable items which are treated as resources to be managed to satisfy the center's need." (*Ibid*.). "We don't like our girls to have any background […] we just want you to fit the bunny image" is what Steinem (1995: 38) was told during her job interview to be accepted in the New York Playboy Club.

4. Androcentrism and Rape Culture

Adams's androcentrism becomes ever more conspicuous in the two extended episodes involving does which should constitute the core of the "amendment" provided by *Tales from Watership Down*. In chapter 12 we are introduced to the account of a "secret river" of knowledge, a "thought transference" (*TfWD*: 197) flowing directly from the warren Thinial to the does in Efrafra. The vision they receive night after night, is that of a community ruled by two does Flyairth and Prake, "so strong and confident about what they meant to do that they could persuade other rabbits, bucks and does, to come with them" (*TfWD:* 155). In that place a female Owsla ensured the order and "bucks seemed content under the control of the does" (*TfWD:* 157). Flyairth's "growing obsession" (*TfWD:* 159) with the Blindness (the extremely deadly and contagious myxomatosis), however, makes her behave more and more inflexibly, and she is finally dethroned and expelled. From chapter 13 to 15, then, the same Flyairth makes her entrance in the Watership Down warren where she is perceived as a threat by many bucks. In the end, she is allowed to take some rabbits with her to found a new warren elsewhere. When she departs, Silver's comment is "I'd imagine she'd be a very good Chief Rabbit, … as long as she had a male partner to – well, you know – to balance her when she needed it" (*TfWD:* 206).

The "model dictator" Hazel decides to act upon Silver's idea and offers to his mate Hyzenthlay the chance to share the power with him. Her acceptance speech sounds very much like the classic banter of a wife with her husband: "I promise to be the biggest nuisance he's ever met in his life, and to disagree with him about everything!" (*TfWD*: 206) The next chapter is entirely dedicated to "Hyzenthlay in Action": in her first day as Chief Rabbit – with Hazel far from the warren – she puts her life in danger during an expedition to save the life of Nyreem, a new doe in peril, but needs the help of Bigwig (who first questions her authority, then contravenes her direct order) to get back safe to the warren. After that exploit, her leadership disappears in the following chapters and Hazel remains firmly the maker of all decisions for the warren.

What is disturbing here is no longer the insignificance of does, but the way they are represented, in particular, the double-standard under which they are assessed. Quoting again from Plumwood, "radical exclusion marks out the Otherized group as both inferior and radically separate" (1997:

337), and in Adams it means that not only are does usually described as passive, easily frightened, and fickle in their resolves (as Nyreem in *TfWD*: 218–220) but, when depicted as strong and attempting to rise from their usual role to attain a higher position in the hierarchy, the same features and behaviours that in bucks were considered as signs of strength, in does are deemed as weaknesses. Hyzenthlay's action to save Nyreem's life is rushed and dangerous, while Hazel's standing by the injured Pipkin or running towards what was believed to be the Black Rabbit of Inlé in *Watership Down* (chapters 6 and 19) were pure acts of courage. Even worse is the treatment of Flyairth: her firmness and determination in the protection of her warren from the Blindness is described as an impairing obsession, while in *Watership Down* the Trearah "had coolly – some even said coldly – stood firm during the terrible onslaught of the myxomatosis, ruthlessly driving out every rabbit who seemed to be sickening. He had resisted all ideas of mass emigration and enforced complete isolation on the warren, thereby almost certainly saving it from extinction" (*WD*: 10). It is inevitable to think of de Beauvoir's observation: "Other seers prophesy that in casting off their femininity they will not succeed in changing themselves into men and they will become monsters" (1953: 681). The threat that this physically and mentally strong female poses to the balance of the warren is such that when Bigwig proposes "Shall I go back and kill her, now, before she does any harm?", the moderate and peaceful Hazel replies, "No don't do that … Or not yet, anyway" (*TfWD*: 202).

One last element which is worth noticing is the permanence in the sequel of a certain objectification of the female in the rabbit society, in particular with regard to mating. Plumwood talks about "instrumentalism", consisting in valuing a woman "as a means to ends … deriving her social worth instrumentally from service to others, as the producer of sons, etc." (1997: 338) and indeed in *Watership Down* there are numerous examples of how the does are considered principally as "breeding stock for the warren" (*WD*: 246) as Adams himself makes clear. After Hazel sets the two farm does free in chapter 27, they constitute "the warren's only asset" (*WD*: 228) but still he wonders "Are they any good?" (*WD:* 246). Moreover, the fact that the Watership Down rabbits only realize they need does once they have established their warren and gone through many adventures, could be easily explained as a consequence of "denial or backgrounding" that determines that "in an androcentric context, the contribution of women to any collective undertaking will be denied, treated as background,

as inessential, or as not worth noticing" (Plumwood 1997: 338). Once the bucks do, however, realise that they indeed need some females, an authorial intervention in the text points out a correspondence with man's behaviour which is extremely revealing: "It may seem incredible that the rabbits had given no thought to so vital a matter. But men have made the same mistake more than once – left the whole business out of account, or been content to trust to luck and the fortune of war" (*WD*: 185).

The "fortune of war" means the rape of the Sabine women, it means "raiding other groups for wives" (Sanday 1981: 164)[9], which, according to the American anthropologist, is an indicator to measure male aggression against women in a society. Another indicator is "the institutionalisation or regular occurrence of rape" (*Ibid*.) which, while not explicitly recognized, appears to be the praxis in Efrafra. During Bigwig's undercover mission, as a member of the Owsla, he is told that "if you want a doe, you have one – any doe in the Mark, that is. We're not officers for nothing, are we? The does are under orders and none of the bucks can stop you" (*WD*: 316). This custom is a matter of great distress for the females ("Oh, Thlayli! Shall we mate with whom we choose and dig our own burrows and bear our litters alive?" (*WD*: 328)) and in a very touching scene, Hyzenthlay seems to be utterly terrified at the prospect of a new violence perpetrated against her: "I am in the Mark, sir, and under your orders. But you have made a mistake." "No, I haven't," replied Bigwig. "You needn't be afraid. Come in here, close beside me." Hyzenthlay obeyed. He could feel her fast pulse. Her body was tense: her eyes were closed and her claws dug into the floor." (*WD*: 323) This fact is reaffirmed in *Tales from Watership Down* by Vilthuril as she remembers: "the officers wanted you to do absolutely nothing: to keep still, not to talk and not even to think, between silflays, unless you were required for mating, and there wasn't much enjoyment in that" (*TfWD*: 153–154). If we should choose the "fantasy element", according to Le Guin's labelling, that most departs from Lockley's account, it would be this: in his treatise, the naturalist makes it very clear that the choice of the buck to mate with and the time to do it are entirely a prerogative of the doe.

Fanghanel explains that "Rape culture describes a status quo in which sexual violence and exploitation (in all its forms) is normalised" (2019: 8), so the fact that we find it in Efrafra, a totalitarian, patriarchal, chauvinist community does not come as a shock. However, she continues, the fact

[9] See also the tables on pp. 253–-256.

that the female is perceived as "a sexual object within a heteropatriarchal striation of public space" (2019: 15) means that "the latent menace and objectification that accompanies this violence" also goes with "chivalry in the form of the advice about safe-keeping" (*Ibid.*). Perhaps, then, it should not surprise – yet it does – that in the penultimate chapter of *Tales from Watership Down*, when the newcomer Stonecrop fortuitously saves the liberal and civilized Vleflain warren from the attack of more than four weasels, the Chief Rabbit invites him to go to live there and, to make the proposal more enticing, adds "You can have your personal burrow and choose any doe you fancy!" (*TfWD*: 249), as if the warren females were a property the dominant male could freely dispose of.

5. Conclusion

In this short analysis, it has been suggested that some of the feminist criticisms that Adams' first children's novel received were, at least in part, not justified. It has been shown how the scientific source he used was itself pervaded by a male chauvinism that provided an idea of rabbit societies as patriarchies (while, instead, they are communities revolving around a dominant female).

We might wonder, then, what it would be like to live in a rabbit matriarchy. Adams made an attempt at depicting such an "exception" when he described Thinial. In the warren ruled by two queens, females were, finally, endowed with auto-determination in sexual matters: "the small Owsla of does … chose bucks whom they liked and mated with them" (*TfWD*: 158) and when they got pregnant, they could avail themselves of a sort of maternity leave until the moment "when the young rabbits didn't need them anymore, they rejoined the Owsla." (*Ibid.*) It all sounds very good, but if we consider that Adams published this in 1996 and maternity leave had been granted to all working women in the UK three years earlier, perhaps he could have stretched his imagination a bit further. The problem is that, in his attempt to imagine a model of rabbit matriarchy, Adams only limits himself to transforming male rules and structures into female ones, and gives shape to "a warren in which the does would predominate" (*TfWD:* 155), detaining the power and enjoying sexual liberty.

Ecofeminism, however, has taught us that things can, and should, be different. In was as early as 1911 when Charlotte Perkins Gilman published the first book of her feminist utopian trilogy *Herland*, in which she imagined a female society that knows no war or interspecies violence, "a vision that emphasized collectivity, emotional bonding, and an organic (or holistic) concept of life" (Donovan 1990: 358). In such a land, not only "there is no hierarchy, among humans or between humans and animals," (Plumwood 1993: 7) but also the peaceful feminine reign, by neutralizing the need for male "technological mastery" (*Ibid*.), prevents the destruction of "both nature and less technologically 'rational' cultures" (*Ibid*.) which we have witnessed so far. Indeed, according to Warren, ecofeminist ethic "must be anti-sexist, anti-racist, anti-classist, anti-naturist, and opposed to any 'ism' that presupposes or advances logic of domination" (2000: 99).

In patriarchal, androcentric (and anthropocentric) societies, instead, women are otherized and objectified in the same way as animals and nature are. In *Watership Down*, when the liberated Efrafran does finally promise to repopulate the Watership Down warren, Bigwig rejoices: "It looks as though we really are going to live a natural life again at last, doesn't it?" (*WD*: 408). But "natural life" in *Watership Down* implies an objectification of the female, its systematic exclusion from power dynamics, and the unconscious endorsement of a rape culture. Inspired by de Beauvoir's reflections in *The Second Sex* (1949), we might say that the way women / does are represented in Adams's novel is not only the product of "anatomy and physiology" (1953: 18) but also of culture, a culture still deeply affected by a conception of a patriarchal society, of the passivity and weakness of women and of how their biological differences account for their inferiority (1953: 24). Only a few exceptional beings emerge from that condition and try to rise to the roles detained by men but, in doing so, they either show their inadequacy (Hyzenthlay), or lean into excess (Flyairth).

The anti-feminist bias of *Watership Down* and *Tales from Watership Down* should not blind us to the unquestionable merits of these works. They denounce "the fallacies and life-threatening impact of modernization on the natural world" (Battista 2011: 163) and deliver a strong teaching in interspecies respect and the importance of conservation. The rabbit world created by Adams in 1972 and then expanded in 1996 is indeed an ecocentric environment where the reader can experience what it feels like to be a rabbit in a man's world. However, when read with more care, they

also provide a sad depiction of what, in the mind of the author, it feels like to be a female in a male world.

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WILL SELF'S "GARDEN OF UNEARTHLY DELIGHTS": THE ANTIHERO AND THE CITY IN *DORIAN: AN IMITATION*

Abstract
Will Self's *Dorian: An Imitation* recasts the decadence and wit of Oscar Wilde's narrative as the full-blown excess of image-obsessed contemporary Britain riddled with drugs, AIDS, and terminal boredom. Brutal satire and imagery of death, war, disease, and destruction align the novel with the contemporary genre of transgressive fiction which has established a new satiric tradition. The aim of this article is to analyse Self's novel within that tradition by examining the antihero as the epitome of his age and the city as the transgressive *locus terribilis*.

Key words: antihero, city, *Dorian: An Imitation*, satire, transgressive fiction, Will Self

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1. Introduction

As one of the most daring and controversial genres of contemporary literature, transgressive fiction has attracted quite a lot of readerly and media attention. Its appeal is such that Robin Mookerjee goes so far as to consider it the most significant literary movement of our time. Even if Mookerjee's claim is somewhat exaggerated and unconvincing, transgressive fiction is beyond doubt a prolific and radical genre that draws on a centuries-long satiric tradition to deliver its social critique. First coined in 1993, the term "transgressive fiction" has come to refer to a wide variety of authors, from Bret Easton Ellis and Chuck Palahniuk to Angela Carter and Martin Amis, who are said to belong to a new satiric tradition. Frequently criticised for its matter-of-fact representation of taboo content and misjudged as a call for violence, transgressive fiction as a form of satire has not received enough serious scholarly attention, so this article is an attempt to add to the existing debates. By first outlining transgressive fiction as a mode and genre and then focusing on Will Self's *Dorian: An Imitation* (2002), we wish to show how the transgressive energies of the novel are mobilized to satirize the (self-)destructive tendencies, institutions, ideologies, and moral relativism of the 1980s and 1990s in Britain.

While the lyricism of Self's prose aligns *Dorian: An Imitation* with modernism, its unforgiving satire and brave portrayal of unpleasant subjects define the novel as a transgressive postmodern satire. As the title suggests, *Dorian: An Imitation* is a rewriting of Oscar Wilde's provocative novel on the pursuit of eternal youth. Recasting aestheticism and gay subculture at the turns of two centuries – the 1890s in Wilde's original and the 1980s and 1990s in Self's "imitation" – Self's novel focuses on the hedonism and decadence of the wealthy few but paints a disturbing broader picture of British society consumed by excess, social and political crises, and the AIDS epidemic. Wilde's characters are recast as Henry Wotton, an outed homosexual and drug addict, Baz Hallward, a video artist whose installation *Cathode Narcissus* redefines Wilde's painting for a narcissistic age, and the sexually omnivorous epitome of the time's narcissism, Dorian. Together with a group of so-called friends, lovers, and acquaintances, they expose the agenda of the entrepreneurial 80s as essentially selfish as the story delves into the life of the stigmatized gay community against the background of an image-obsessed world marked by perpetual conflict and a near-total lack of empathy.

Despite the obvious transgressive features, *Dorian: An Imitation* has mostly been read within other theoretical frameworks, such as Neo-Victorianism, so this article wishes to offer a new perspective on Self's novel. The aim is to read it within the tradition of satiric transgressive fiction and specifically examine the role of its most characteristically transgressive aspects, the antihero and the city, in Self's critique. To do so, the article employs Robin Mookerjee's and M. Keith Booker's theoretical considerations of the development, features, and varieties of transgressive fiction both as a mode and as a genre. To properly understand the links that the novel establishes between transgression, the body, sexuality, and death, the analysis also relies on Michel Foucault's theorization of transgression, Georges Bataille's reflections on desire, eroticism, and death, as well as Julia Kristeva's insights into narcissism and the abject. Finally, in its exploration of the threatening and disordered city as the staple setting of both urban dystopia and transgressive fiction, the article enters into a dialogue with some of the latest theoretical literature on the city in contemporary fiction. For the purpose of providing a wider context for the interpretation of Self's novel, the article starts by tracing a brief history of transgressive fiction.

2. Transgressive fiction: mode and/or genre?

Drawing clear theoretical demarcation lines is at times notoriously difficult, so it comes as no surprise that transgressive fiction can and should be understood as both mode and genre, where transgression possibly implies the traversing of any boundaries, formal, generic, linguistic, or cultural, and not only those of conventional morality. To hint at the usefulness of such a broad view of transgressive literature in general, one needs only to think of the complexity of transgression in magical realism, itself read as both mode and genre, transgressive in its defining criss-crossing of the boundary between fantasy and reality, and inclusive of particularly subversive transgressive variants intent on disruption of fixed categories (Bowers 2004: 66–82). Unlike magical realism, however, transgressive fiction as a genre reflects transgression primarily as "profanation in a world which no longer recognizes any positive meaning in the sacred" (Foucault 1977: 30), as such present, though by no means inevitable, in transgressive literature and mythology since antiquity.

From its birth as a mode in the works of forerunners like Ovid, a "proto-transgressive author" (Mookerjee 2013: 33), to its contemporary transformation into a genre, transgressive literature has been characterized by violence, moral ambiguity, sexual deviancy, transformation, and satirical views of society, its norms and systems of belief. In its modern varieties, transgressive fiction expectedly also disturbs the form of the traditional novel, redefines generic categories, and reaches far beyond the standards of propriety in language. All these features are now seen to have determined transgressive fiction as a distinct genre emerging in the 1970s, with a few earlier novels, notably *Lolita* (1955) and *Naked Lunch* (1959), which are read as transgressive in the contemporary sense. In the course of a few decades, the genre has become so prolific and attention-drawing that Robin Mookerjee considers it "the most significant literary movement of our time" (Mookerjee 2013: 14). While Mookerjee perhaps places too much importance on a single genre, transgressive fiction does attract a wide readership by its controversial content and manner of representation which boost publicity and sales, and is undoubtedly among the most provocative genres today.

Together with similarly cult recent genres like bizarro fiction, transgressive fiction evolved from the 1970s' interest in the grotesque in writers like Martin Amis, Ian McEwan, Phillip Roth, J. G. Ballard, or Kathy Acker, whose works offer savagely bitter, satirical, and disturbing portraits of corrupted contemporary society reigned by death, sexual and psychological perversion, drugs, alcohol, violence, and madness, frequently conjoined with a willingness to shock and narrative self-consciousness. These "troubled moralists … of an increasingly grotesque and alien world" or "troubling, self-conscious, experimental visionaries" (Bradbury 1993: 390–91) depict social and psychological disorder, and the resultant breakdown of the self, in a fantasy- or thrillerlike world whose moral constitution is set in doubt. Having reached its peak in the 1980s and 90s, transgressive fiction was first marked out as a genre and termed transgressive in a 1993 article by Michael Silverblatt, who defined American transgressive writing as having "violation at its core: violation of norms, of humanistic enterprise, of the body" (Silverblatt 1993). This determinative trait has inspired other terms whose derogatory ring defies their initially descriptive purpose. Kathryn Hume's aggressive fiction and James Annesley's blank fiction refer equally to content, style, and an author's disposition, but neither encompasses all transgressive fiction, nor does it always seem to grasp its implications.

Mookerjee attempts to compensate for this failure by outlining transgressive fiction as a subgenre of postmodernism consistent with the satiric tradition, at the same time acknowledging that the rhetoric of transgression is also closely related to modernism (Mookerjee 2013: 6; 9). He traces its origins to the earliest satirists, Petronius, the Menippean school, and Ovid, who dealt with one dominant, "overarching mythology", while contemporary satirists share their predecessors' obscure, ambiguous, and evasive authorial presence but face a number of systems and beliefs (Mookerjee 2013: 2–3). Through satire, transgressive fiction is linked with folk literature, itself a response to the norm, and follows up on major satirists like Jonathan Swift, George Gordon Byron, and Marquis de Sade. Although contemporary transgressive fiction often draws inspiration from the satiric tradition, in his analysis of Salman Rushdie, M. Keith Booker points out that the satiric edge is common but not indispensable in transgressive works (Booker 1991: 49–71). It is, however, vital to Will Self's writing, which would belong to what Mookerjee calls "the transgressive canon" (Mookerjee 2013: 147) if the notion of the canon were not so questionable.

Satiric or not, contemporary transgressive fiction is a topic of endless heated debates and an (un)intentional target of harsh criticism. Despite its involvement in the dismantling of institutions and ideologies, the genre is continuously berated in literary criticism precisely for its matter-of-fact representation of "unpleasant content" (Mookerjee 2013: 1). Kathryn Hume's impressionistic reading of American fiction since the 1970s as "designed not to give readers pleasure" (Hume 2012: ix) serves well to illustrate this tendency. In a text prone to gross generalizations, Hume asserts that these "aggressively off-putting novels" inevitably make the readers feel "attacked and abused", and widely uses terms such as "user-unfriendly fiction", "aggressive fictions", "irritating fictions", or "transgressive fiction" (Hume 2012: ix–x; 40; 25) to cover novels as diverse as Phillip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969), Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006). The sheer frequency of such views shows that transgressive fiction is certainly and purposefully unpleasant. While undermining literary paradigms and beliefs, transgressive fiction upsets by its straightforward representation of taboo subjects like extreme violence, bizarre behaviour, deviant and pornographic sexuality, abuse of drugs, or disease. All conventional notions concerning family, human relations, the body, or morality are thrown in disarray in critical considerations of sexuality and society, the two major themes of transgressive fiction

according to Mookerjee (Mookerjee 2013: 5). Its dystopian cities abound in imagery of destruction, decay, grotesquerie, and monstrosity, with the city and body as mirror images of each other.

Central to these fictions' transgressive standpoint is the figure of the alienated, antisocial, immoral/amoral, at times monstrous and brutally honest antihero. Endowing him with doubles – Patrick Bateman/Paul Owen in *American Psycho*, Joe/Tyler in *Fight Club* (1996), John Self/ Fielding Goodney in *Money* (1984), Dorian/Narcissus in *Dorian: An Imitation* – allows authors to blur the distinction between right and wrong, good and evil, normal and deviant. Most disturbing of all is transgressive fiction's blunt, morally neutral or ambiguous manner of presentation which collapses the distance between reader and content (Mookerjee 2013: 2), enabling authors, whose implied presence is seen as inherited from the earliest satirists, to refrain from any moral stand. The genre, which exhibits a clear preference for the confessional mode, is therefore seen as more "interrogative than declarative" (Mookerjee 2013: 174) and critical of specific cultures and their value systems or the contemporary world at large, making "a socially relevant statement" (Mookerjee 2013: 1).

Transgressive fiction has proven time and again that it certainly can be a vehicle for political statements as the "transgressive energies of literature … are directed … at dominant institutions and ideologies in the real world of politics and history" (Booker 1991: 3). Its social critique is often expressed in the "flat, clinical" (Mookerjee 2013: 1) style of which Ellis is taken as exemplary. Silverblatt's claim that American transgressive authors "take the simple declarative sentences of the minimalists a few notches further toward blankness or numbness" (Silverblatt 1993) has inspired Mookerjee to postulate the existence of the transgressive style. While it is characteristic of a number of authors like Ellis or Palahniuk, others like Nabokov, Amis, Self, or Angela Carter show that there is no such thing as the transgressive style. Yet, in all its varieties, style seems to provide a significant contrast to the subject matter. Blank style helps present morally suspect content in a neutral way, turning into an instrument of mockery when, for example, the language of advertising in *American Psycho* parodies an obsession with brands and status symbols among yuppies in the 1980s. On the other hand, the stylistic and verbal mastery of a Nabokov, Carter, Amis, or Self can act as a screen that "obscures … violent acts" (Mookerjee 2013: 94) or beautifies them.

All these features are carefully juggled in transgressive fiction to express an antipathy to systems, to mock and/or defy "proscriptive tendencies that attend broad belief systems", using the specialized language of commerce, technology, or advertising for parodic purposes (Mookerjee 2013: 3–5). Transgressive fiction voices an "uncompromising aversion to all formulae that organize experience" (Mookerjee 2013: 8) in a spirit of carnivalesque anarchy which makes ample use of inversion, duality, doubles, the profane, carnality, sexuality, the grotesque, transgression of boundaries, ex-centricity, mockery of the official/normative, and degradation of the revered. In tune with Bataille's assertion that "[o]ften the transgression is permitted, often it is even prescribed" (Bataille 1986: 63), Booker reminds us that the carnival is authorized transgression (Booker 1991: 6), giving rise to one of the numerous ambiguities of the genre, which newer generations of transgressive authors seem to abandon in favour of more explicitly disturbing material (Mookerjee 2013: 100). Both ambiguity and disturbance play an important part in the harsh portrayals of values and culture in Self's *Dorian: An Imitation*, a novel which defies the idea of a blank, flat style as symptomatic of transgressive fiction. Self's transgressive rewriting of Wilde's equally transgressive original employs various aspects of transgression to satirically examine contemporary British society, and its critique is most persuasively delivered through the antihero and the city.

3. The transgressive antihero as the epitome of an era

Like the tellingly named John Self in *Money*, virtually all protagonists of Will Self's metafictional revision of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1891) pose as antiheroic epitomes of their eras, the 1980s and 1990s. The 1980s are suggestively called "Dorian's decade" (Self 2003: 108), a decade marked in Self's novel as one in which the antihero seeks closeness with death through drug and alcohol abuse, unprotected sex, and murder. As M. Hunter Hayes observes, "[r]ather than a will to live, the characters in *Dorian* embody a nihilistic compulsion" (Hayes 2007: 148). Most in their late twenties or early thirties, Dorian, Wotton, and the rest of Self's set engage in abusive treatment of others and self-destructive behaviour which, ten years later, leaves their battered bodies in ruins. The systematic and gradual (self-)destruction mirrors the entrepreneurial 80s with their discourse founded on myths of money of the socially and culturally

privileged, the self-employed, consumerism, and junk culture. Although the time's anti-immigration politics and race riots remain confined to the background, Self's focus on mostly upper-class gay subculture decadence, marked by moral corruption, drugs, eccentricities of all kinds, terminal boredom, and self-destructive tendencies, may be read as a response to the decade's partiality to traditional family values that effectively outlawed positive gay and lesbian images. The 1990s are no less reflected by the novel's prevailing sense of class divisions which also reverberate in the background as Self eschews explicit treatment of the 1990s' underclass cut off from consumer society, or the growth of poverty and homelessness which sparked off riots in poor urban areas. Instead, an image of a divided Britain and a divided world, marked by a loss of all innocence and hope, serves as the framework for ruminations on the decadence of a social microcosm which, as the author reveals in an interview with Laurie Taylor, refrain from moral judgment to make the readers think for themselves in a time of moral relativism (Taylor 2007).

Moral relativism is most convincingly articulated in the novel by vampire-like Wotton, a prototype of upper-class snobbery and affectation signalled by his compulsive use of French, and the voice of disillusionment whose bitterly ironic commentary on the world speaks of contempt for humanity which earns him the comparison with "poison running in the gutter" (Self 2003: 23). It is Dorian himself, however, who best illustrates the moral and physical decay of the image-obsessed decades in an intricate play between representation and reality. As in Wilde's novel, Dorian's physical degradation as a reflection of his ever-deeper immersion in immorality is hidden from view and it is the appearance that becomes the reality. Self's Dorian is an embodiment of Baudrillard's simulacrum who finds "acting so much more *real* than reality", "in an age when appearances matter more and more", and even flower arrangements seem "anti-natural" (Self 2003: 108; 20; 184). In this, he is Mookerjee's transgressive hero as trickster, distinguished by a transgression of boundaries, sexual transgression, and transformation, who quite literally tricks people into believing a lie and, like a predator, thrills at the possibility of perversion and ruin.

Dorian is the force of corruption whose instruments are charm and sexual omnivorousness (Self 2003: 98). His sexuality is "not … liberated" though but "carried … to its limits", offering itself "in the superficial discourse of a solid and natural animality" (Foucault 1977: 30–31) suggested, as we shall see, by the novel's dominant animal imagery. Dorian

is sin incarnate on a mission to ruin people "irrespective of age, gender, race or sexual orientation" (Self 2003: 226). During the 1980s and early 1990s AIDS epidemic, initially called gay-related immune deficiency and gay plague, he is "the true retrovirus" (Self 2003: 108) that brings ruin and death. Self's antihero can therefore be understood as a metaphor for the threat that loomed large over the decades and stigmatized the gay community. While it may be true that the novel runs the risk of aligning gay subculture with both depravity and vapidity, a charge brought against it by more than one critic (see Alderson and Canning), George Matthews argues convincingly that the novel also seeks to unlock the hidden traumas from the past as it retraces the history of homosexuality, with its apparent decriminalization on the one hand, and its medical pathologization on the other (Matthews 2016: 108).

In addition, *Dorian: An Imitation* raises Self's concerns above the AIDS epidemic to consider it in the context of decadence on a much wider scale. On his mission to infect the society, Dorian also personifies eroticized abjection. Kristeva considers abjection a precondition of narcissism, so to reflect a narcissistic age preoccupied with media-induced images of beauty, Self appropriately replaces the painting in Wilde's original by a video installation titled *Cathode Narcissus*. Like abjection itself, Dorian is "immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that dissembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you" (Kristeva 1982: 4). Even in self-abuse Dorian courts abjection for "[i]n transgressive satire abjection is the relinquishment of the self" (Mookerjee 2013: 196). No other words describe Dorian better than the following definition of the threatening abject as a form of otherness.

> The abject is perverse because it neither gives up nor assumes a prohibition, a rule, or a law; but turns them aside, misleads, corrupts; uses them, takes advantage of them, the better to deny them. It kills in the name of life …; it lives at the behest of death …; it curbs the other's suffering for its own profit …; it establishes narcissistic power while pretending to reveal the abyss …. Corruption is its most common, most obvious appearance. That is the socialized appearance of the abject. (Kristeva 1982: 15–16)

Self admittedly plays with the idea of the most obvious appearance of the abject through the motif of duality taken from Wilde. Duality is essential to transgression, and Dorian's duality is literalized by the artistic installation *Cathode Narcissus*, exemplifying the society's narcissistic obsession with image, body, and youth. In transgressive fiction, the double "serves as a way for the hero or heroine to observe and reify herself" – Dorian literally observes himself in the video and mirrors – and must often be attacked or killed "so that the hero can reclaim himself" (Mookerjee 2013: 143). Like a number of transgressive characters who epitomize psychic disorder, Dorian possesses a public and private self, the first charming and innocent-looking, yet increasingly grotesque and uncanny because he does not change, the other hidden from view in an artistic studio, suffering the consequences of Dorian's reckless debauchery, and grotesque in its decay. Dorian's double Narcissus highlights Will Self's portrayal of characters as emotional zombies surfing "a tidal wave of debauchery" (Self 2003: 55) and representing extreme alienation despite their endless socializing. They are led by the motto that life must be lived "foreshadowed by death … and degradation", and Wotton defines them as epitomes of their time when he asserts "*Too* decadent? Who gives a shit about being too decadent, when to be contemporary is to be absolutely so?" (Self 2003: 47; 59).

Complementing death and violence throughout the novel is a play with grotesquerie, for the grotesque as bizarre, perverse, or incongruous (Edwards and Graulund 2013: 1–2) dominates character description. When marked by apparent disproportion or hybridity, the grotesque body is easily perceivable. However, Dorian possesses a body which is grotesque in being unnatural, ambiguous, and uncanny. Incongruence lies here in an underlying duality sensed by Dorian's lover Helen, whose comment on Dorian's surprisingly youthful appearance at a mature age marks his body as grotesque: "At first … I found your silky hair and smooth skin a turn-on, but, to be frank, Dorian, they give me the creeps now … I also find your baby body revolting in itself … it isn't natural" (Self 2003: 246–47). Grotesquerie bordering on monstrosity is further evoked through overwhelming animal imagery alluding to reptiles, predators, and prey, which effectively erases the border between man and animal and brings us back to abjection. "The abject confronts us … with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*", and in early societies "animals and animalism … were imagined as representatives of sex and murder" (Kristeva 1982: 12, italics in original; 13). Animalism is suggested not only

by explicit comparisons with animals (Wotton is likened to a chameleon and a lizard who approaches Dorian's would-be lover like a predator advancing towards his quarry) or by characterization through naming (a character's nickname is the Ferret) but by an elaborate play with language. That is why the camera focusing on Dorian in the installation gives the impression of "the most intense, carnivorous, predatory voyeurism", while a gay orgy is vividly described as "a conga line of buggery" (Self 2003: 12; 68). Dorian is the novel's most dangerous predatory omnivore, so places are his "hunting grounds" and people are perceived as "game" or "specimens" whenever he is "on the lookout for the lone quarry, who could be separated out from the herd and brought to the dusty ground in a welter of stale intoxications" (Self 2003: 227).

Unlike the figures in Hieronymus Bosch's legendary painting, who at least get to relish the earthly pleasures, however false or ephemeral, on their way to Hell, the menagerie of this "garden of unearthly delights" (Self 2003: 94) never manages to truly satisfy their animal appetites. As in *Money* and other prototypically transgressive fictions, sexuality is stripped of all emotion since love is seen as "every man's psychosis" (Self 2003: 59). There is no love-making, but only unsatisfactory intercourse, with sexual encounters repeatedly reduced to "fucking", "screwing", and "sodomizing". Although frequently violent and orgiastic, gay intercourse is at times lyrically described, as when Baz reminisces about Dorian "screaming with delight, trussed in a sheet, his erect cock arched like a bow, a pearl of his semen on Baz's tongue" (Self 2003: 23), but heterosexual coitus never fails to disappoint. Of the Wottons, the novel asserts that "she seemed too vague and he too disengaged for them to bring their genitals into sufficient proximity with each other at the right time" (Self 2003: 41). Emphasized by technical and medical vocabulary, such emotional zombiism takes its toll on relationships, beauty, and innocence. Dorian's world is one in which beauty decays, the three Graces are substituted by she-males, and all innocence is lost. Arguably the strongest Blakean implication that captures this world in a single sentence is found in the scene where the Wottons' little Phoebe says good night to their guests: "Round and round, kiss after kiss, the imprint of lewd lips, lascivious lips, leftover lips, pink-lipsticked lips, all on her white brow." (Self 2003: 147).

4. The city as a "dystopic labyrinth"

Loss of innocence and absolute decadence are trademarks of contemporary urban settings in transgressive fiction. Dystopian cities, by no means inevitably counterparts of soothing nature, have for long been common in literature, especially since the Industrial Revolution, and are found in works by authors as disparate as William Blake, Charles Baudelaire, Miguel Piñero, Don DeLillo, or Angela Carter. Latham and Hicks trace the urban dystopia from its emergence in the second half of the nineteenth century, which "coincided with – and responded to – an outburst of utopian writing … centering on the city as a site of human perfectibility" (Latham and Hicks 2014: 163). In the aftermath of the First World War and even more so of the Second, dystopian cities became the dominant symbols of "negative possibility, as spaces of oppression, blight, and ruin" (Latham and Hicks 2014: 163) and have since suppressed all association between the city and perfectibility into oblivion. As the dark, putrescent city was a familiar image in literature prior to the eighteenth century, however, "neither the Romantics nor the modernists after them needed to invent the spectacle of the city as a dystopic labyrinth" (Gillespie 1996: 109). The same is even truer of postmodernists and post-postmodernists, whose cities drive our perceptions of urban wilderness to the extreme. DeLillo's *Cosmopolis* (2003) and Carter's *The Passion of New Eve* (1977), for instance, showcase urban chaos distinguished by street riots, crime, homeless people, urban freaks, blood, and drugs, offering direct insight into the state of society. Within this framework, transgressive fiction uses the city as *locus terribilis*, home of postlapsarian man and reflection of his fallen nature. In this incarnation, the city which "from its origins and such episodes as the Tower of Babel, acquired a shadow", contradicts its projection as "a meaningful human order" (Gillespie 1996: 107).

Given Self's interest in psychogeography, it is hardly surprising that the urban landscape in *Dorian: An Imitation* reflects the degradation of his antiheroes. In fact, the prevailing disorder and decadence are indicated by both exteriors and interiors. Streets, houses, yards, and cars are all marked by squalor and decay, mirroring the protagonists' and society's moral and physical degradation. In view of the specific subcultural context, the squalor may also be a reminder of the staple meeting place for casual sexual encounters, the public lavatory as "a key symbolic feature of urban infrastructure in gay male literature" (Woods 2014: 237). More importantly

perhaps, the squalor contributes to an all-pervasive degradation sensed in images like those of the cut flowers in Wotton's hospital room "silently screaming as they smellily expired" and reflecting the inmates' condition, or of the filthy clutter inside Wotton's house and car that summons the idea of a "jaded century … utterly exhausted" (Self 2003: 79; 21). *Dorian: An Imitation* displays a tendency to complicate the parallel between city and society by an added comparison with the body and sexuality in an Amisesque manner. Contrary to a legion of nineteenth-century "[p]opularizers of the theme of a connection between female sexuality and the physical decay and moral sickness of the city" (Gillespie 1996: 110), *Dorian: An Imitation* connects the physically and morally devastated city and male body and sexuality. The highly sexualized, yet drugged and infected, male body is particularly well reflected by green spaces as sites of degradation. No longer representing the city's "internalized tamed wilderness" (Gillespie 1996: 120), Hyde Park, where Sir Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace once stood as a landmark of urban utopia and proud architectural reminder of Britain's leading role in technological advancement, is now turned into "a green gangrenous fistula in London's grey corpse" (Self 2003: 26). The image of London as a grey (Gray?) corpse aligns it with *Cathode Narcissus*, as it performs the same function as Hallward's artwork, hideously transformed under the burden of its morally corrupt inhabitants. Similarly, Battersea Park is "an old shambles", and "[n]o amount of imperial landscaping can cover up this malodorousness" as "the swamp lies beneath the pleasure gardens" (Self 2003: 62). This is exactly what the exceptionally beautiful and increasingly uncanny body of Dorian is, a pleasure garden on top of a malodorous swamp, a body whose celebration of "the pleasures of the sexual carnival" reveals "the skull beneath the skin" (Woods 2014: 239).

Self's novel further strengthens the link between the threatening, bruised city and body through the images of Soho as "the stinky inky heart of tentacular London" and New York "like Ancient Rome with a pituitary disorder", with "the twin towers … like the severed legs of a brutalist robot god" (Self 2003: 178; 113). Such images evoke Ballardian spaces and are as far as possible from Le Corbusier's vision of the Radiant City, representative of Brutalism, the architectural style that Self's word choice clearly suggests. To enhance the impression, such images are juxtaposed with frequent references to interiors which are "chilly", "overstuffed", "unnecessary" and "as comfortable as a colonoscopy" (Self 2003: 54). Wotton's flat is filled with spoons, syringes, cigarette buds, joints, "overflowing ashtrays,

empty bottles, stained wine glasses, crumpled bits of this and that", "so many empty bottles" that they form "a kind of anti-bar" (Self 2003: 4–5), while his luxury car is equally littered with opera programmes, cocaine wraps, and flasks, and covered in dust and bird droppings. The underlying impression is that Self's city is a necropolis ruled by decay and destruction simultaneously pervading the minutest details of the protagonists' microcosm and the macrocosm of world politics.

An interest in politics, vital for a piece of writing to be transgressive beyond matters of literary convention and morality, seeps into *Dorian: An Imitation* via occasional comments on the story's social and political background that finds its reflection in the city. The only stand the novel takes, however, is one of general critique. Britain is "a Government at once repressive and progressive, a monarchy mired in its own immemorial succession crisis, an economic recession", while resent towards America finds outlet in a denigration of the First Lady, nicknamed a transvestite, a "warmonger's wife", and the "fat Yank friend" of Princess Diana (Self 2003: 3; 76; 80). An even more general outlook on world politics in an atmosphere presided by disease, squalor, death, global warming, monstrosity, grotesquerie, animal imagery, and ambiguous sexuality, presents a world enmeshed in war and violence. The backdrop is painted in disconcerting images of street riots, with newspaper and television headlines serving violence as spectacle and murder as a form of popular entertainment: the civil war in Yugoslavia, Milwaukee Murders, the collapse of the Soviet Union, massacres in Rwanda, the coup in Moscow, or an earthquake in Los Angeles. The omnipresence of conflict and ensuant destruction is additionally implied by details like flowers on terraces as "a veritable riot of verdancy against an urbanity all around" above which "spore hung like a mist of blood over an ancient battlefield" (Self 2003: 6). The AIDS hospital ward is "a casualty station near the front line with Death" and a "den of disease and derangement", a service centre on the M3 has "the air of an extermination camp for drivers", trains carry nuclear waste, and a fancy restaurant offering a variety of Crustacea shells equips the eager customer with "implements required to poke, probe and scour the flesh from them" (Self 2003: 78; 107; 175; 97). The abundance of such images suggests that violence is inherent to the act of transgression; transgression is unleashed towards that which imprisons it "in its movement of pure violence" (Foucault 1977: 35). Although the novel's exquisite wording constantly reminds us of violence as a distinctive feature of the world around us, Self

refrains from adding "a strong communal element" which would make *Dorian: An Imitation* "truly effective in a political sense" (Booker 1991: 93–94).

Despite, or perhaps because of its disturbing nature, the real world remains a mere background to the characters' microcosm: the world's soundtrack is muted and the radio news provides "information concerning a parallel world" (Self 2003: 8). The isolationism of Dorian's upper-class microcosm highlights the selfishness of the Thatcherite entrepreneurial agenda and showcases the same social inequalities that marked the fin de siècle dystopian cities (Latham and Hicks 2014: 163–64) and continued to widen the gap between the less privileged and the decadent elite in the 1980s. Yet, Dorian's isolated lacuna is not spared the prevailing squalor, disorder, illness, decay, and death, but is thoroughly immersed in them. As in H. G. Wells's or Ignatius Donnelly's cities, Self's postmodern urban space is where "[w]ondrous luxury coexists with brutalizing squalor" (Latham and Hicks 2014: 164). Dilapidated exteriors and interiors host bodies rapidly deteriorating due to drugs and AIDS, whose victims are compared, through another indirect political statement, to starving Africans and concentration camp inmates (Self 2003: 78). Death that lurks in the city is heralded by AIDS-affected members of the gay community who share a needle and then enjoy an orgy as "five apocalyptic jockeys" (Self 2003: 66) to the music of Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart".

Bentley finds in Self's divided and decomposing city a type of postmodernist city that is "a palimpsest of histories and narratives evoked in the psyche of the observer" (Bentley 2014: 176). He also reminds us that "the metropolis as unpredictable and potentially dangerous, where crime is rife and the darker human desires find release" (Bentley 2014: 176) is a modernist trope. Self makes ample use of this trope in depicting a world of unleashed dark desires, and it is precisely their release that makes the city unpredictable and dangerous. The sense of unpredictability and danger is highlighted by the transgressive characters' indispensable closeness with death that is consciously maintained through the destructive and self-destructive acts of Self's "rotten bunch" (Self 2003: 104). In their world of dangerous urban decadence, even working out fails to contribute to the population's health and is, instead, yet another plague from the US designed to counterbalance HIV (Self 2003: 129). Unpredictability and danger are further developed through Self's replacement of "the acceptable homosocial conventions of society clubs and residences" and Dorian's 1890s' excursions

to the docklands "to experience the riskier, racier pleasures" (Woods 2014: 235) in Wilde's original with an omnipresence of such pleasures in the 1980s and 90s. Homoeroticism, widely perceived as a threat during the AIDS epidemic, ventures forth from clubs, private residences, brothels, and opium dens to pervade every social space. Dorian's originally secret life becomes his public life and his erotic interest in "the physical heft of proletarian masculinity" (Woods 2014: 235) transforms into flamboyant sexual omnivorousness wedded to the grotesque and the animalistic.

The city is thus configured in *Dorian* as the site of abjection itself, the entry point to Kristeva's "territories of animal", where the antihero's degradation and self-destructiveness find their spatial expression. At the same time, the extreme nature of the imagery used to describe Self's urban landscape mired in decadence and depravity can be seen as satirical commentary on the social order which casts his antiheroes both as its apotheosis and as its diseased and depraved Other. The medicalized images of the city's decay ("gangrenous fistula") hint at the flip side of the entrepreneurial glitter of the greed-driven decade – the acute reality of human suffering under the weight of the AIDS epidemic. This is further underscored by the novel's epilogue, which reveals that the narrative is in fact written by the ailing Wotton. The hedonistic excess of the central narrative is thus relativized as a fictitious account written by a dying man, and the focus is shifted away from the wild(e) decadence of the gay community, which led to accusations of "cheap flippancy" and "hostile prurience" (Canning 2014), towards the wider social context in which the novel operates – both the Thatcherite entrepreneurial eighties and the New Labour policies of the nineties. Dorian, the true retrovirus of Wotton's manuscript, sowing death and misery wherever he treads, is reintroduced as a successful media mogul, a lithe embodiment of the image-obsessed spirit of the age, the flag on his imposing headquarters fluttering "like a banner" (Self 2003: 265) over the city, claiming it for its fashionable CEO. The epilogue also offers a sanitized, aestheticized version of the homosexual which can be coopted by mainstream consumerist culture owing to a shared "embrace of style over content" (Matthews 2016: 112), but which can also serve as a convenient, already reviled symbol of "social privilege and ostentation" (Alderson 2006: 320), a useful target for the rage of the disaffected and the disenfranchised.

The epilogue at first seems to offer another view of London, in a cavalcade of glitzy addresses couched in the "world spirit of stylishness"

– the Grosvenor House Hotel, Primrose Hill, the smart clubs of West End, the Royal Academy – mirrored by the "immaculate interior" of Dorian's car and the neat geometrical layout of his business premises, "the go-faster chevrons of the mullions, the balconies like the pulled-out drawers of a filing cabinet" (Self 2003: 266; 262; 265). However, as Wotton's voice starts to invade the framing narrative, the cityscape changes again, first with a "silent throng … converging on Kensington Palace", as the crowds gather to mourn the death of Princess Diana, then a whiff of "the sickly perfume of a thousand bunches of cut flowers", eventually followed by a turn into "Rotten Row", sliding into "a pile of horse droppings" (Self 2003: 276–77). As Wotton metamorphoses into Ginger and leads Dorian to his death, the two narratives and the two cityscapes converge in a place of abjection, the public toilet, in "the piss-filled runnel of the urinal" (Self 2003: 278). Dorian's anodyne version of the homosexual is thus confronted with the site of the public toilet, loaded with subcultural significance, where it is literally destroyed, "hardly likely to remain fashionable for very long at all" (Self 2003: 278). Furthermore, Alderson suggests that the murderer may be read as a random skinhead who takes the form of Ginger in the increasingly ambiguous final pages of the narrative, in which case the site of dubious sexual freedom is reinterpreted as a site of homophobic violence, persistent even in the age of wider social acceptance of alternative sexualities (Alderson 2006: 325).

5. *Dorian: An Imitation* and the new satiric tradition

The novel's ambiguous ending contributes to Self's quoted intention to stimulate the readers to think for themselves in a time of moral relativism. His overall satiric critique is designed to do the same, and its principal instruments are the novel's most obviously transgressive features, the antihero and the city. In-depth analysis has shown that these features are the novel's primary source of subversive potential, which is aimed at the dominant ideologies and institutions of the entrepreneurial 80s and the 90s, confirming Booker's idea that a truly transgressive work needs to address the real world of history and politics. *Dorian: An Imitation* debunks the era's myths of money and mocks its preference for traditional family values by focusing on a small group of decadent and narcissistic individuals whose social and cultural privilege grants them no success. The

morally neutral description of their empty socialising, substance abuse, and emotion-free sexuality indeed reveals a world that, according to Foucault, no longer recognizes the positive in the sacred.

To deliver this point effectively, Self portrays Dorian as a fitting antihero, Mookerjee's transgressive trickster, "sleek monster", and perfect embodiment of "the transgressive artist's penchant for revealing what is true but not ordinarily visible" (Mookerjee 2013: 7; 10). In Bataille's terms, for Dorian every prohibition is there to be transgressed, so his sexual omnivorousness makes him an apt metaphor for the greed and narcissism of the decade that he epitomizes. The novel's physically beautiful but morally decrepit model for *Cathode Narcissus* is also representative of Kristeva's threatening abject that denies prohibitions, rules, and laws, and his rebellion against the tenets of conventional society is presented as a corrosive force. Within the context of the AIDS epidemic that discredited the gay community, Dorian is the virus at work in society at large, and the havoc he wreaks is mirrored by the pervasive disorder of the expectedly dystopic urban setting.

Like Self's antihero, the city is a site where luxury and squalor meet in exteriors and interiors characterized by filth, clutter, and dilapidation as a reflection of the society's fallen state. The city as Gillespie's dystopic labyrinth is where the antihero's sexuality and desire for closeness with death find their outlets in expressions of violent animality. The pervasive animal imagery helps to transform the city as a projection of order into an urban wilderness where the affluent and the underprivileged of all ages, genders, races, and sexual orientations are bound together by a sense of danger that lurks in the form of the retrovirus, AIDS and Dorian.

Self's portrayal of a violent, grotesque, and emotionally depraved world of narcissistic and (self-)destructive antiheroes aligns *Dorian: An Imitation* with what Mookerjee sees as the new satiric tradition. While it is too far-fetched, and untrue, to claim that the transgressive fiction which Self's novel represents is "hostile … to the western civilization" (Hume 2012: xi) as a whole, the novel certainly provides a critique of its decadence. *Dorian: An Imitation* paints a picture of an aggressive reality whose incoherence endows the novel with subversive energies, unlocking its transgressive potential (Booker 1991: 212). The novel fulfils this potential in the form of biting satire whose chief instruments are the antihero and his setting that expose the corrosive forces at work in society: widespread economic disparity, political manipulation, moral

degradation of both individual and society, and violence as its common outlet. Establishing a dialogue with the turn of the 20th century, Self takes a historical look of the social, economic, and moral evils of the end of the 20th century. Dorian's set exemplifies the decadence that follows excess at the expense of the underprivileged, cultural stagnation, moral vapidity, and emotional sterility, all reflected by physical decay, and Self's "imitation" of Wilde's narrative indicates that such excess and decadence change context but persist. Following on Wilde, Self offers a close-up of dehumanization that results from "a character intent on gorging on metropolitan excess" (Bentley 2014: 176–77), taking his cue from the age-old idea of the sexual perversity of city life. Admittedly, Self's novel is no example of political satire of the kind we encounter in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), which "forecasts the political devolution of the city into a tyranny of centralized administration and control" (Latham and Hicks 2014: 166), nor is it a dystopian projection of the future. Instead, the images of Self's sin city take a more general satirical outlook on progress, technological growth, and advancement towards a more civilized existence.

As Booker reminds us, "[s]ubversion requires a target: transgression of boundaries requires that those boundaries initially be in place" (Booker 1991: 87–88). Employing transgression, identified by Booker as a technique of subversion, Self's novel satirizes a civilization at the point of exhaustion that dismisses the ideas of progress, growth, and advancement. To formally enact this, the novel runs the risk of exhausting itself in an incessant play of boundaries and transgression. Even transgression itself may be exhausting its nature by a constant crossing and re-crossing of boundaries: "Does transgression not exhaust its nature when it crosses the limit, knowing no other life beyond this point in time?" (Foucault 1977: 34). Instead of answering this question, Self allows it to hover over his narrative in which everything is exhausted: culture, economy, climate, politics, morality, body, and emotion. It is no wonder then that Hume feels reading such transgressive fiction is evidence of "reader masochism" (Hume 2012: xiii). Yet, this fiction is perfectly fit for an age which witnesses transgressions of borders of such magnitude that they become blurred. Subversion through transgression in fiction that has all but forgotten traditional patterns of plot, character, and structure which gratify reader expectations has become so prevalent that more traditional and realistic narratives such as Min Jin Lee's *Pachinko* (2017) read like refreshing anachronisms. If literary transgression depends on the transgressive energies of the reader,

on their identification and acceptance of the work's transgressive potential (Booker 1991: 15), then fiction like *Dorian: An Imitation* requires readers who do not derive pleasure from "moral rightness" (Hume 2012: 5). In its questioning, through character and setting, of the moral rightness of the times, *Dorian: An Imitation* represents one of those revolutionary moments in the history of literature which exemplify that transgression of boundaries is "an essential feature of literariness" (Booker 1991: 3).

Contributing to a long satiric tradition that relies on that essential feature, Self seems to ridicule the uphill task of attempting to "achieve any kind of authentic transgression in our modern cultural climate" (Booker 1991: 10). His self-ironic "imitation" undermines authenticity in a time when it is increasingly difficult to avoid the appropriation of subversive energies by the very dominants that one is intent on satirizing. Perhaps it is because the subversive energies of transgression have been exhausted by the fact that some form of transgressivity is expected in literature and art that the movement headed by Burroughs has led "toward more and more shocking and graphic depictions of transgressive violence in modern literature" (Booker 1991: 146). This tendency seems to have reached its peak in the last decade of the 20th and the first decades of the 21st century. Self refrains from such depictions but, like the more graphic *Fight Club* or *American Psycho*, puts violence to satiric purpose. Negative criticism which shows that transgressive satire causes a disturbance, much like it did when Swift published *A Modest Proposal* (1729), treats transgressive fiction as shock lit. Irvine Welsh, himself an exponent of transgressive literature, claims that anyone can write shock lit, so the point is to make the book bigger, to make it about the world we live in (Welsh 2016). In that sense, he sees *American Psycho* not as a novel about an individual's psychotic behaviour, but a book about the economic system which compels such behaviour. While such fiction disturbs by its satiric outlook on society which confirms that "[t]here exists no prohibition that cannot be transgressed" (Bataille 1986: 63), it also serves as an eye-opener that destabilizes common perceptions of the world. In our self-righteous moment in history when phenomena like cancel culture pose a threat to critical thought and open debate by insisting on intellectual conformity, *Dorian: An Imitation* and transgressive fiction at large reinstate the importance of critique that opposes dogmas and nourishes dialogue.

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MAPPING MEMORY AND DESIRE IN *THE ENGLISH PATIENT*: A POSTMODERN NOVEL'S ADAPTATION TO FILM

Abstract
The exploration of the adaptation of Michael Ondaatje's postmodern Canadian novel, *The English Patient*, into Anthony Minghella's film of the same name, is based on a postmodern approach to the theory of adaptation that distances itself from the fidelity critique in and dualistic approach to adaptations and views them as instances of intertextual dialogism. Additionally, the postmodern approach that is developed by Peter Brooker and Gordon Slethaug implements ideas of supplementation and surplus value to adaptations and indicates how meaning can be broken down and destabilized. The paper investigates the traits of the postmodern Canadian novel, such as historiographic metafiction and fragmentation, while also analyzing the novel *The English Patient* and the film *The English Patient*. Namely, the novel's narrative organization according to the dynamics of memory and the film's exploration of transgressive desires are presented, thus creating a detailed analysis of the adaptation of Ondaatje's novel into a new cinematic work.

Key words: film adaptation, supplementation, surplus value, postmodern Canadian novel, adaptation of a postmodern novel

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1. Introduction

Adaptation theories originated from a practice of determining the faithfulness of texts, particularly the faithfulness of films to the original texts that served as their basis. However, due to films and literature being "different rhetorical, semiotic, technical, and cultural forms of expression" (Slethaug 2014: 34), faithfulness did not hold up as an effective measure of the successfulness of adaptations. Concepts indicating the "transcendental meaning of language, literature, and film" allowed for the dissolution of an approach to adaptations that was rooted in fixedness and faithfulness and instead upheld an approach recognizing the diversity of relations between texts (Slethaug 2014: 34). The significance of the evolution of the approach to adaptation that stems from a postmodern perspective is highlighted by Gordon Slethaug: "[I]ntertextuality goes well beyond linking a single text to its origin, but allows for the complete range of textual relationships within culture, resulting in historical discontinuity, indeterminacy, decanonization, and fragmentation" (2014: 73). Slethaug further asserts the possibilities enabled by moving away from a traditional approach to adaptations: "[b]ecause of the history of adaptation criticism, there is the temptation to judge films on the basis of likeness in content, style, and meaning between filiated texts, but intertextuality is more about innovative and revolutionary ways of perceiving textuality, cultural matrices, and emergent meaning" (2014: 74).

This postmodern approach to adaptations allows for a more pertinent and effective consideration of the adaptation of postmodernist texts that are intrinsically characterized by fragmentation, temporal disorder and a disdain for historical continuity, traits that are also found in postmodern Canadian fiction, which is further realized in the works of historiographic metafiction, a form that incorporates self-reflexive art and historical reality. An approach to adaptations based on the understanding of the free play and indeterminacy of meaning and negation of fixedness and faithfulness, serves as a beneficial basis for the deliberation of the complexity and richness of the adaptation of the postmodern Canadian novel, *The English Patient*, which transposes Ondaatje's fragmentary narrative into a film. The central dynamic of memory in the novel is transformed in the film that explores how the characters transferred from Ondaatje's novel realize transgressive desires. The postcolonial themes of the novel are transformed into the film's counter-nationalist themes. By establishing visual equivalents of Ondaatje's

narration, as well as inventing new aspects of the story in the film, the film *The English Patient*, which was directed by Anthony Minghella, adapts the core of Ondaatje's story, while simultaneously creating a completely new and independent story.

2. Postmodern theories of adaptation

Peter Brooker and Gordon Slethaug, critics that directly deal with postmodern adaptations, list terms such as Bakhtin's dialogism, Roland Barthes' death of the author, and Genette's hypertextuality, as the theoretical basis of a postmodern approach to adaptations, which is furthered by Robert Stam, by viewing adaptations as intertextual dialogism, and Linda Hutcheon, by establishing a theory of adaptation as a process and product (Brooker 2007: 107; 112; 113, Slethaug 2014: 3; 4; 5). Namely, Brooker defines adaptations from a postmodern perspective as acts of translation which are "radically heterogenous" and in which the translator is simultaneously an interpreter in the unstable relationship between the writer and the reader, pointing out that such approach destabilizes ideas of equivalence and similarity between former and future texts, and that adaptation is similar to translation as a "hybridizing instance" which is marked by "disparity, gaps, and indeterminacy". Additionally, Brooker, relying on Bertolt Brecht, opposes the stance of Frederic Jameson on the impossibility of discovering anything new in postmodernism, stating that the potential for "originality" is renewed through adaptations by "re-function[ing]" existing narratives or images, by adapting them to a new medium with a renewed "social or artistic purpose". Brooker stresses the ability of the adaptation to radically edit, shift and supplement original texts. He points out that adaptations are always a process of change, and that that process can reverse the chronological order of the source text and adaptation, and if an adaptation remains in a "significant textual contact" with the source text, it will not only change the source, but the understanding and evaluation of the primary text on behalf of the reader (Brooker 2007: 113; 114; 117; 118). In the investigation of the postmodern adaptations, Slethaug relies on the terms "supplementation" and "surplus value", which were coined by Jacques Derrida, on the basis of which it can be viewed how an adaptation and the original work exist in a complex relationship, in which the original does not possess all of the value, and the adaptation is not just

a diminished version of the original, but holds supplementary values that transcend the original, and because of which the viewer must observe the surplus value of the new work and view the original once more in relation to the changes (2014: 28). Slethaug also asserts that an adaptation is a "citation" repurposed in a new context that does not destroy the meaning of the source text, but "disseminates" it. Namely, an adaptation "exceeds the limits of the source/s, denying hierarchy and suggesting that meaning is indeterminate for both origin and adaptation", while "indeterminacy and de-hierarchization" are crucial aspects of a postmodern approach to adaptations, and as originals cannot control the free play of meaning, this creates the possibility for the free play of textuality. By disregarding the question of fidelity, the slightest surplus value disturbs the meaning of and opens up a dialogue between the original and the adaptation (Slethaug 2014: 28; 29; 31; 34).

3. The postmodern Canadian novel

The prevailing characteristics of postmodern literature include temporal disorders, fragmentation and the impossibility of the separation of the text and the world. In postmodern fiction, the order of time is destabilized through apocryphal history, which offers imaginary representations of great historical events, but also through the amalgamation of historical events and personal memories and stories. Through the deconstruction of plot, characters, settings and themes, authors create the fragmentation of text and story so as to circumvent "the wholeness and completion associated with traditional stories", by finding alternative ways of establishing structures of narratives. This rejection of wholeness and the use of fragmentation differentiates postmodernism from the modernist movement. Postmodern texts also disturb the clear difference between texts and reality by introducing known historical figures into a text accompanied by descriptions that clash with realistic representations of such figures or representations of the unknown parts of their lives (Lewis 2001: 124–133).

Hutcheon stresses that the term "postmodernism" refers to art that is self-conscious, i.e., conscious that it is art, as well as referring to literature that is written and read as part of a specific culture and that creates "the means to a new engagement with the social and the historical world"

(1989: 1). Furthermore, postmodernism is characterized by the exploration of the possibility of establishing order or truth. Postmodern Canadian fiction, which shares these fundamental postmodern tendencies, is also defined by authors that exist on the margins in relation to the cultural center, i.e., on the marginal position that opens up new possibilities and uncovers that borders are not equivalent to limits. Postmodern irony that refuses the resolution of opposites also defines postmodern Canadian authors, who question the relationship between the "structures of social and cultural power" (Hutcheon 1989: 1–10). One of the main forms that the postmodern Canadian novel manifests is "historiographic metafiction". Namely, historiographic metafiction relates to fiction that is "self-reflexively art, but is also grounded in historical, social and political realities", and that represents nontraditional historical novels that are self-conscious in the process of "reading and writing history as well as fiction" (Hutcheon 1989: 13; 14). In such works, art and society, as well as the past and present cannot be separated, and historical facts are not disregarded for the sake of art nor are they used solely to authentically represent fiction, but in them history and art enter into a "critical dialogue". Historiographic metafiction enables the questioning of the causal, linear construction of history as well as metanarratives. Fragmentary representations of stories oppose the completion of history and more accurately represent a meaning of the past that is not unified. Within historiographic metafiction, the reader, who has an active role in the creation of the meaning of the text, confronts history in a "world of imagination" and questions the relationship between fiction and reality (Hutcheon 1989: 14–17). The purpose of historiographic metafiction, the form of postmodern Canadian fiction that also uses conventions of realism by destabilizing the unity of narrative, a reliable point of view and clear characterization, is to question the "human process of writing – of both history and fiction" so as to explore how people come to know and give meaning to history. Much like historiographic metafiction, the works of Michael Ondaatje also exist on the border between history and fiction, as well as poetry and prose (Hutcheon 1989: 21–22).

4. The English Patient: novel and film

Michael Ondaatje's novel, *The English Patient*, connects the lives of multiple characters:

> Count Laszlo de Almásy (the "English" patient); Katherine Clifton, Almásy's married lover; Hana, his nurse; Kip, the kind and gentle Sikh, who falls in love with Hana while serving as a British army lieutenant in a bomb disposal squad; David Caravaggio, Hana's childhood friend and a morphine addict, who carries a personal vendetta against Almásy and who turns up one day at the villa; and Geoffrey Clifton, Katherine's husband. (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 132)

The English patient from the novel, Almásy, who is actually a Hungarian cartographer, and whose character was based on a real-life spy who worked for the Nazi regime in Africa, is only a patient with burn injuries and a memory loss who Hana takes care of in the crumbling villa in Tuscany at the beginning of the novel. The English patient gradually beings to remember his past, his work in northern Africa, his affair with Katherine and the tragic end of that affair (Welsh 2005: 118, 119). Real historical figures of the novel are minor and not immediately recognizable; they serve Ondaatje's reinvention of history by shifting it from the representations based on facts to an understanding of indeterminacy (Novak 2004: 225).

The novel investigates postcolonial themes and "the uncertainty and indeterminacy of identity and nationalism and the extent to which politics constructs selfhood" (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 132). Namely, Ondaatje attempts to rewrite the history of World War II from the perspective of colonized nations in his postmodern novel. Not only is the "re-writing of history a post-modern idea, but the novel itself is written using post-modern strategies" (Morgan 1998: 159). Although none of the main characters in the novel are English, they can all be viewed as "patients of the English" who attempt to discover an identity that is not rooted in colonialism. Aside from the novel's representation of Almásy retrieving his memories so as to reconstruct them in a new history, all the characters face their past and question the war in that conflict with the past, but Kip is the only character who directly questions the problems of colonialism. Kip's story in Ondaatje's novel succeeds in telling the "unspoken", "unwritten" and "unhistorical" stories. By establishing the character of Kip in opposition

to Almásy, who is based on a real historical figure, Ondaatje's rewriting of history is "polyvocal". Following the fall of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Kip experiences a breakdown due to the conflict of the idea of the English as allies and the English as colonizers, and the focus of the novel shifts from the subject of war to the issue of colonialism. Finally, all the characters gathered in the Tuscan villa, including the English patient, are victims of colonialism, but with Kip's breakdown, Ondaatje gives a voice to the "anger of the colonized" (Morgan 1998: 159–165). The fall of the atomic bombs and Kip's coming to terms with this event shatters the security of the novel's readers and "differentiates the novel as postcolonial and postmodern text from its characters as colonial subjects" (Shin 2017: 225–226).

The failed relationships in the novel between Katherine and Almásy, Katherine and Geoffrey, Caravaggio and Gianetta, Hana and her fiancé, and Hana and Kip, also reflect the "issues of identity and postcolonial theory" (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 132–133). In the novel, Hana and her relationship with Kip is the central point of the novel, while Almásy is attempting to remember his affair that only starts to be revealed around the third of the novel (Welsh 2005: 119). The love between Katherine and Almásy is marked by tropes of fire, that takes and gives life, but also by the desert sand, which is "unstable, ever-shifting, threatening, and mystifying", while the love between Kip and Hana is marked by tropes of art and explosives. Hana is tired as a result of the explosives and the sudden deaths that they bring, while Kip holds a deep knowledge of them and can't help seeing them everywhere. When Kip shows Hana the paintings in an Italian church, he shares with Hana his understanding that humanity is capable of destruction, but also the creation of beauty (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 132–134).

Linda Costanzo Cahir describes the narrative structure of the novel, as well as Almásy as a narrator, in the following way:

> His narration is intermittent, fragmented, non-linear, and often dream-like. Its qualities define not only Almásy's narration, but the narrative structure of the entire book, also. The novel, which spans seven years, is assembled from ever-shifting, multiple points of view, Almásy's being only one of several consciousnesses that we enter. (2006: 132)

Not only does Hana take care of Almásy, she also "constructs the story of his wasted life through dim memories" shaped by morphine and the copy of Herodotus that belongs to the patient. Moreover, when Almásy speaks to Hana about his life, his memories are "fragmented and incomplete" (Welsh 2005: 119). The structure of the novel is "dispersed, broken, and divided" because it represents the "multiplicity of stories and of voices" (Morgan 1998: 161). Amy Novak also states that the patient's recollection organizes the narrative of the text, as she quotes *The English Patient*: "He whispers again, dragging the listening heart of the young nurse beside him to wherever his mind is, into that well of memory he kept plunging into during those months before he died" (Novak 2004: 207). Namely, the memory of the patient serves two purposes in the novel as it provides structure to the discourse of the patient in the story and the narrative as a whole. As Novak asserts: "Memory moves the text forward, draws in the characters around him, and leads to a further unfolding of his own memories and those of the other characters" (2004: 207). Nonetheless, each revelation of the past through memory prompts other memories, and these memories, as well as the fragments of images and sentences that comprise these memories, resist linearization and do not offer a clear representation of the past (Novak 2004: 207). Such a narrative of the past that consists of "fragmentary memories" shows that the relationship between the present and the past is not rooted in causation, but reflects that the past is incomplete and that the past and the present can permeate one another, and that the meaning results from the "play of signification" that is constantly shifting. The quickening transitions from the past to the present and from the present to the past in *The English Patient* show how fragmentary memories supplement the present with a moment from the past or the past with the present, while the meaning of the past or present stems from this process of supplementation (Novak 2004: 208–209). A narrative organized on the basis of the "dynamics of memory" that drags the past into the dimension of the present with fragmentary memories does not establish linear or causal relationships between events, reflects the ambiguity of the past and negates the attempt at "constructing a cohesive singular narrative of the past" through the representation of memory (Novak 2004: 211; 225; 226). Although every character of *The English Patient* attempts to create a complete representation of their past, the fragmentary nature of memory and the ghosts that cannot be contained in their pasts reject the possibility of a clear organization of the narrative.

This "narrative scheme" of every character's story organizes the whole novel, which is continually "exploring how we understand and narrate the past", as well as exploring how we understand traumatic events such as nuclear explosions (Novak 2004: 220). Almásy's exploration of the desert and the past is also connected to his desire for truth, but his attempt to establish order in the instability of the present and the past is unsuccessful, as the narrative of memory prevents the connection of the events that have occurred (Novak 2004: 216–217). Finally, as Costanzo Cahir illuminates: "Ondaatje's use of maps, geography, and cartography work as metaphors for people, for their particular contours, and for our need to explore and to know – to *map* – the intricate terrain of those we love" (2006: 132).

Costanzo Cahir classifies the adaptation of *The English Patient* as a traditional translation as it transfers the key meanings of Ondaatje's text, since the director and screenwriter Anthony Minghella creates "the equivalents of Ondaatje's fragmentation" (2006: 134) with a narrative that goes back into the past and returns to the present, by breaking up the story and using nonlinear narration, which encompasses multiple points of view. Namely, Minghella's use of nonlinear structure mirrors Ondaatje's ideas that memory cannot be coherently organized (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 134–135). Conversely, James Welsh asserts that the narrative of the film is not completely organized nonlinearly because even though the "epic love story" is represented with flashbacks, they are organized chronologically. Additionally, while Minghella maintained the basis of the novel such as the characters, settings and themes, the characters of Hana and Kip, their love affair, as well as the character of Caravaggio, are minimized in the film and reduced to a framing story, while the focus is placed on the relationship between Almásy and Katherine (Welsh 2005: 119). The film romanticizes the character of Almásy, thus distancing itself from the novel, that does not fully resolve the patient's cooperation with the Nazis, while the film clearly represents that cooperation as morally motivated in order for Almásy to save Katherine (Welsh 2005: 119, Costanzo Cahir 2006: 135). Nevertheless, Ondaatje noted about the adaptation of *The English Patient* that: "What we have now are two stories… Each has its own organic structure… but somehow each version deepens the other" (Welsh 2005: 119). The film, which shifts from the realistic to the dream-like, from the past to the present, and from one pair of lovers to the other, succeeds in telling "its story largely through visual images, rather than through dialogue taken from the novel", thus establishing the lyrical style

of the novel within the cinematic medium. Some of the most recognizable images of the film include the scene of Hana and Kip in the Italian church, the Cave of Swimmers, as well as the image of Almásy carrying Katherine's body wrapped in a silk parachute (Costanzo Cahir 2006: 137). Minghella, who was motivated to adapt the novel so as to "articulate the passion" between Katherine and Almásy, successfully realized the love story of the novel, but in doing so, he also marginalized Kip and distanced himself from the exploration of the postcolonial problems of the novel. The past and the memories of Kip, Hana and Caravaggio that were presented in the novel, are lost in the film, which only presents Almásy's past in Cairo and in the desert, and whose only narrating voice is Almásy's voice. Consequently, the film "denies the other characters the right to history" and "reduces Ondaatje's polyvocal novel into a univocal narrative" (Morgan 1998: 165). One of the biggest changes of the film that neglects the problematization of colonialism depicted in the novel is the removal of Kip's reaction to the fall of atomic bombs, which affects his motivation to leave Hana. In contrast to this, the film shows how Kip leaves Hana out of love so as to protect her from the suffering she would feel in the case of his death on duty (Morgan 1998: 164–166). The replacement of the political conflict stemming from the fall of the atomic bombs with the death of the character of Hardy, the film adaptation switches the focus of the novel from postcolonial issues to a love story (Hutcheon 2006: 12). By placing the focus of the film on the two white protagonists of the film united in death, instead of placing it on the relationship between Hana and Kip that ultimately ends, the political perspective of history that is established in the novel is removed, replaced by the prevailing message of a love worthy of loss. Without Kip's conflict resulting from the atomic bombs, he does not come to an awareness of "racial hierarchies" and his own culture, but the story ends with a narrative of friendship and love. Moreover, in the end of the film Hana becomes a "conduit between the past and the present", while the film ends with a scene in which Almásy and Katherine fly over the desert, depicting an "image of transcendence" over the past and history (Shin 2017: 225; 228; 229; 230; 231).

Despite focusing on the relationship between Almásy and Katherine instead of the relationship between Hana and Kip, these characters "embody and enact desires that transgress both national and familial boundaries" (Hsu 2005: 50) in the film that functions as a "post-national romance" that uses "extra-marital bonds as metaphors for international alliances" (Hsu

2005: 50). That desire transpires among the couples, when Kip shows Hana frescoes in a church, or in a scene where Hana feeds Almásy a plum, and leads the characters to "unsanctioned pleasures". Minghella also visually connects the depictions of bodies with landscapes with an initial scene that depicts the painting of bodies followed by a shot of the desert resembling a body. By engaging in extramarital relationships, the characters of the film abandon the boundaries of desire defined by marriage, in the same way that maps represent the boundaries of nations, although these attempts and desires to transcend "social and national boundaries" mostly fail. The depictions of transgressive desires include the abovementioned scenes with the plum and the shot of the desert resembling a body, as well as Hana's love for Almásy, Kip's love for Hardy, and Maddox's love for the desert. Although these "lines of flight" are mostly unsuccessful, Kip and Hana succeed in transcending the boundaries of sexuality and nationality (Hsu 2005: 50–55). Kip moves across these borders by disposing of bombs and "removes potentially violent traces of imperialism", thus enabling desires to not be limited by imperialism, war or maps (Hsu 2005: 55). In contrast to Katherine, who dies immobile in the dark, Hana crosses the boundaries in the "surrogate love scene" in the church, and by surrendering to desire, she enters an active role of an observer and lights up the frescoes around herself, thus transgressing the borders that surround her (Hsu 2005: 50; 55; 56; 59).

The remaining transgressions of borders are established with the use of flashbacks. Namely, flashbacks that follow the scenes in which Hana reads texts and that show Katherine reading or writing these texts in the past, while their voices are heard one after the other, transition the film from one story to another, enabling Hana to integrate Almásy's traumatic past into her memory. The transitions from one space and time into another space and time i.e., from Africa in 1939 into Italy in 1945, enable the viewers themselves to transgress boundaries. The ending of Minghella's *The English Patient* represents a total dissolution of boundaries by connecting the voice of Katherine with the voice of Hana, by connecting the song, which is first heard when Hana plays it on the piano, with Almásy's Hungarian song, which he plays to Katherine during the film, while Hana leaves the villa in Tuscany "riding in a truck, staring at the sun in tears" (Hsu 2005: 58–60).

Finally, some of the issues presented in the novel are transferred in the film, especially the questioning of the issue of national relations affecting the relationships of individuals, with a focus on the ideas of

counter-nationalism. These ideas are reflected in the film, when Katherine advocates that the relationships of individuals should transcend nations, and when Kip leaves Hana in the film because of his feelings for her, and not because she comes from a country that is a former colonial power. The film also manages to impart the idea that art can "transcend borders and nationalities", as the songs and sounds heard during the film, melt into one another, like the Hungarian folk song melting into the sound of a prayer, while later on the music of Bach merges with the Hungarian folk song. Hana also confesses to Kip that she would continue to return to the church to look at the paintings that she saw with Kip, showing how Hana and Kip achieve unity through art (Morgan 1998:167–171).

5. Conclusion

Viewing adaptations from a distinctly postmodern perspective recognizes that they can be characterized by instability in meaning, oppose similarity and uphold indeterminacy. The refunctioning of narratives that occurs through adaptations allows for a new way of discovering originality enabled by radical shifts from the initial meaning found in texts, while the creation of new texts in relation to old ones creates surplus value, thus establishing a process of supplementation between texts.

The process of supplementation is evident in the adaptation of the novel *The English Patient*, which is marked by postmodern characteristics such as fragmentation and the disordering of the past and present, thus rejecting the wholeness and completion of more traditional narratives. The novel also remains reflexive of the history within which it is written, while it places art and history in a critical dialogue and questions the relationship between the past and the present in an act of re-writing the history of World War II. *The English Patient* has a fragmented narration, which revolves around an attempt of retrieving memory, and a dispersed structure containing multiple perspectives, and ultimately examines the issues of colonialism, while showing how history resists linearization. The film *The English Patient* transfers the novel's fragmentation, while shifting the narrative's primary focus, which becomes the love affair between the characters of Katherine and Almásy, and relegating the remaining characters to the framing story of this love affair. These changes distance the film from the novel's postcolonial critique and its resistance to the possibility of

constructing a coherent image of the past, but are accompanied by the film's visual prowess, in a rich and lyrical presentation of the novel's story. Thus, the cinematic adaptation of the novel *The English Patient* reinterprets and recreates the original work into a new text using processes of transformation of the story and plot. The new story is simultaneously marked by similarity and difference, and the fragmentation and nonlinearity of the novel are transferred, but also altered together with the shift of the film's focus in relation to the literary story. Based on this, the narrative of the memory of multiple characters in a/the novel filled with desire, becomes, in the film, a narrative of desire, which is found in the memories of one character, while the story of the novel *The English Patient* does not end with the novel, but continues in the film.

Finally, the adaptation shows how an intentional and radical process of innovation of an original text led by a renewed artistic purpose, promotes the free-play of textuality and how the recognition of the relationship between the meaning of texts, and a surrender to the indeterminacy of meaning allows for textual supplementation and the unobstructed creation of surplus value. With an understanding of supplementation, radical transformations and the diversity of textual relations, the adaptation of the postmodern novel *The English Patient* into a film can be appreciated for its surplus value and remain unburdened by evaluations of its faithfulness.

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HUMAN IDENTITY IN HYPER-REALITY: THE HYPERREAL SELF IN DON DELILLO'S *COSMOPOLIS* AND *THE SILENCE*

Abstract
In his novels, DeLillo frequently tackles the concept of hyperreality and its effect on human lives, as well as on fundamental concepts of human existence, such as the concept of personal identity. In *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence*, the interference of hyperreality propagated by technology and the media in human lives and the quotidian is regarded from different angles. This paper observes how the novels approach this unique interaction parallelly, seemingly offering the same conclusion – that technology and the mass media are the key factors in how people perceive both their environment and self, and in that, how they perceive reality and the world. These elements prove to be essential to the contemporary society of DeLillo's novels.

Key words: hyperreality, personal identity, DeLillo, *Cosmopolis*, *The Silence*

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1. Introduction

One of the main themes of DeLillo's prose that connects *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence* is human identity in contemporary society, specifically regarding the media hyperreality that engulfs the American quotidian in DeLillo's novels. Both novels focus on the complex question of human existence in the high-tech society, only from different perspectives. *Cosmopolis* all but boasts the presence of cutting-edge technology, whereas *The Silence* explores the potential scenario of losing it altogether. At first sight, it seems that the novels focus on the influence of modern technology on American society, but there is also a more complex issue behind the obvious one. Rather than considering it a mere influence, DeLillo discusses the fusion between the human and the mechanical (thus exploring the existence of the so-called *homo technologicus*) as a central issue of contemporary society. He observes this merger as the "new" reality, which Baudrillard defines as hyperreality (Baudrillard 1994: 22). The term *homo technologicus* (as seen in Laist 2010, among others) could be defined as a unique representation of a human individual that has come to exist in somewhat of a symbiosis with technology, requiring it for different aspects of life (for example, to facilitate daily activities and chores, to provide information, to help one's positioning in the community one inhabits and other similar aspects of life). As a result, one's perspective of reality becomes modified, as frequently seen in DeLillo's novels (besides the ones that are discussed in this paper, examples of this issue are *Zero K*, *Falling Man*, *Underworld* and *Libra*, or plays such as *Valparaiso*). In such a confusing state of reality, the concept of the Self, or personal identity, also becomes thwarted, and the issue of what it means to be human suddenly poses a much more complex and abstract question. This paper analyzes DeLillo's approach to human identity in contemporary society that is a markedly technological dystopia within which the issue of what it means to be human becomes deeply conditioned by the media and technology.

In *Cosmopolis*, DeLillo's protagonist is Eric Packer, a multi-billionaire on a day-long journey to get a haircut. He is a representative of the "New World Order global elite," as Noble notes (Noble 2010: 58). Arguably, we might call him a contemporary, and much more egoistical, Leopold Bloom or even Odysseus, cruising the New York City in his high-tech limousine, monitoring the flow of the cyber-capital. In this sense, we can discuss this character as DeLillo's means of mythical deconstruction, or more precisely,

the deconstruction of the "negative myths that are created as the means of repression" (Paunović 2017: 178). Packer is a protagonist who seems to be greater than life (as he seems to perceive himself, most notably because of his financial power), but he is also a metaphor, DeLillo's means of "merging the universal and the individual" (Paunović 2017: 181). Packer is also a shell of a man, since he exists almost entirely in the digital world of information, to an extent defined by the hyperreality he inhabits. DeLillo uses him to portray contemporary society's obsession with money and the contemporary incarnation of the American Dream. Moreover, DeLillo uses his protagonist to introduce the question of our changing perception of reality, as well as of what it means to be human in a hyperreal world. Packer is a representative of a typical American citizen (though extremely and even unbelievably rich) that lives a mobile life, constantly blurring the line between the real and the hyperreal. In such circumstances, the question of personal identity becomes elusive. Eric Packer is predominantly defined through his work and the things he owns (gadgets and real estate to the seemingly same extent), but when it comes to him as a person, other than his vague childhood memories that subconsciously dictate his itinerary throughout the day, there is not much at disposal. He is by far more *technologicus* than *homo* throughout the novel.

As opposed to Eric, the protagonists of *The Silence* are each a vivid representative of *homo non-technologicus*, albeit without their consent, since they are forced into existence without technology by factors outside of their control (in this case, it is a mysterious global failure of media and communication technology). The novel introduces a contemporary catastrophe only imaginable (and feared) by the society of the late 2010s and early 2020s – a world forcedly stripped off of its technological extensions. *The Silence* begins with a threat of a plane crash, but it is the media and communication technology that crash spectacularly. Left together, yet alone, the protagonists (a group of friends gathered to watch the Superbowl game) try filling the void left by the sudden absence of the media and media content. However, they soon discover that they are in desperate need of both the media and technology in order to function on a daily basis, either as individuals or persons operating within a group. Their communication diminishes and disappears altogether, even between spouses, because they cannot seem to tackle human interaction in any meaningful way without the media to guide their consciousness and conversational topics. Where *Cosmopolis* highlighted the overwhelming

presence of technology and the media in people's everyday lives, *The Silence* dares to imagine the world without either, thus ironically highlighting the importance they have in the contemporary era. The novels flirt with the concept of destruction and potential dystopian society that might emerge from the media engulfed society DeLillo observes. *Homo technologicus*, it seems, has no hope in avoiding an apocalyptic scenario in the near future of DeLillo's America. The factor that brings about this destiny of *homo technologicus* is something that contemporary society created itself: hyperreality. This phenomenon is introduced by Jean Baudrillard (Baudrillard 1994: 22) and his theories of simulacra and hyperreality. The concept is discussed as a vital element of the media- and technology-led society of the 21st century in DeLillo's novels. It suggests deeper patterns of behavior that affect human perception of reality and their environment, as well as of their identity.

In the context of DeLillo's earlier novels, both *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence* represent a natural development of similar ideas and observations about the society of the late 20th century and its future. His early ideas about technology and the mass media (as something interwoven into Western society and its quotidian) are evident in almost all his novels, most notably in *Underworld*, *White Noise* and *Ratner's Star*. Each of them seems to suggest that the bond between people and technology is an ever-evolving dependency, leading to people's inability to live a life without the aid of technology. Regarding the mass media in particular, DeLillo has always taken a step further, suggesting, as Duvall notices using the example of television in *White Noise*, that it "does not stop at structuring the conscious thinking of DeLillo's characters" but indeed influences their entire perception of reality on a subconscious level, as well (Duvall 2008: 176). This is not true only for the Gladneys in *White Noise*, but also for David Bell in *Americana*, Lyle and Pammy Wynant in *Players*, and different members of the Shay family in *Underworld*, to name a few examples. All of them subconsciously build not only their perception of the world, but also of themselves, as well as of the numerous interpersonal relationships with other people. As Stojmenović notes, DeLillo constantly observes the "effects of media produced […] representations of the quotidian"[1] on the patterns of behavior in everyday human lives, in which she includes representations produced by television, film and advertising, but also literature, popular culture and other critical and theoretical influences (Stojmenović 2019:

[1] Translated by the author of this paper.

41). *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence* represent the contemporary incarnation of each of these ideas. It could be said that these novels are, to an extent, the result of extremization of such ideas, since the effects of the media and technology are arguably much more intensified in these two novels than they are in DeLillo's earlier fiction.

2. Baudrillard's Theories of Hyperreality and Simulacra

Introduced and defined by French theorist Jean Baudrillard, hyperreality represents a constructed reality (Baudrillard 1994: 22). It is no longer real, objective and universal, but highly invented, generated and artificial. At the heart of such a notion lies Baudrillard's theory of simulacra and simulation, which defines a simulacrum as a basic unit of hyperreality. A simulacrum could be defined as a copy that exists without an original, or rather a copy whose "original no longer even exists" (Baudrillard 1994: 99). It is a replica that has surpassed its original referent and become completely independent by denying any connection between the two in the process. Although such ideas existed long before Baudrillard throughout history, it is Baudrillard who defines simulacra as distinctly postmodern phenomena. According to him, contemporary society has become has only gradually become more prone to confusing the real and the simulacrum. The boundaries between the real and the fictional (or fictionalized) have become more and more blurred because the imitation has become so similar to the original that the differences are almost imperceptible. In such conditions, clear borders between the real and the non-real have disappeared, since the real has become "more real than the real" (Baudrillard 1994: 81). As Noble reinterprets Baudrillard's theory, "the hyper-real transcends representation only because it is entirely in simulation" (Noble 2010: 186). The result is an unclear blend of the two, which Baudrillard describes in the following way:

> It is no longer anything but operational. In fact, it is no longer really the real, because no imaginary envelops it anymore. It is a hyperreal, produced from a radiating synthesis of combinatory models in a hyperspace without atmosphere. (Baudrillard 1994: 2)

With the loss of distinction between the simulacrum and the reality, it is plausible to discuss the loss of reality itself (i.e. Baudrillard's "real" that he proclaims lost not only in *Simulacra and Simulations*, but also in his other publications, such as *America*), as well as the loss of the idea of Self and personal identity, since the referent for its construction has become unattainable. In other words, personal identity (and thus the idea of Self) depends on the perspective of reality, given that identity is "a matter of defining the self against a given environment" (Leach 2020: 31). Without any solid basis within the real, the Self becomes evasive, insufficiently structured and grounded. Since the real has become replaced, or at least interfered with, by the nonreal, the concept of Self also acquires some of the traits of the hyperreal – the blend between the real and the simulated. Thus, society no longer has a firm reality, and is left with simulacra only – personal identity included. This, of course, has not happened spontaneously or independently. Several phenomena have influenced the merger of reality and simulacra, and they are all features of postmodern society. One of them is the mass media. With the development of mass media, the connection between the "real" events and the "pseudo-events" (or simulacra of events) has gradually disappeared, because contemporary Western society has become obsessed with the image. The mass media as a means of simulation is what generates hyperreality, according to Baudrillard's observations about the quantity of information present in Western civilization (1994: 74), and what masks the fact that the real no longer exists. Although this claim might sound exaggerated, Baudrillard's suggestion here can be interpreted as a lament on the disappearance of the pure real – the real that has not been modified or upgraded by technological or media input. On a physical level, we can still discuss reality as unchanged, yet the technologically unaided perception of reality might indeed be as lost as Baudrillard suggests, especially in DeLillo's novels. The media provide their audience with information they represent as real and the audience is expected to accept it without any question or doubt. The most important aspects of such culture, which Douglas Kellner proclaims the media culture, are the entertainment factor and the phenomenon of the spectacle (Kellner 2003: 1). Baudrillard further argues that "what we have now is the disappearance of the referent – and it is in relation to this disappearance of the referent that there is a sort of omnipresence to the sign" (Baudrillard 2003: 142). In other words, since postmodernists discarded the real as a construct, all that is left are signifiers to characterize hyperreality. Those

signifiers are the filters which participate in hyperreality's creation. Some of them are language, information and the system of its flow, the system of communications, but perhaps the most important is the media or the mass media. Baudrillard proclaims: "We are presently living with a minimum of real sociality and a maximum of simulation" (Baudrillard 1990: 155). What he is trying to say is that there is no purely real process in the world today – there is only simulation.

In "Requiem for the Media", Baudrillard determines that the main task of the media is "[t]he production of meaning, messages, and signs" (Baudrillard 1972: 279) thus raising the question of communication. As he claims, in the contemporary era there is no direct communication, there is only the simulation of it, since in our world "there is more and more information, and less and less meaning" (Baudrillard 1994: 79). According to Baudrillard, such loss of meaning is directly caused by the mass media, which is "a place of disappearance" (Baudrillard 2003: 85). Following McLuhan's principle that the medium is the only message that has remained in the postmodern era, he advocates that "[m]essages no longer have an informational role, they test and take polls, ultimately so as to control" (Baudrillard 1993: 62). In other words, the media becomes the main protagonist of the process of simulation, masking the real and hiding the fact that there is no pure realilty; there is only hyperreality created by the media. Kellner seems to support this argument by stating:

> The rise of the broadcast media, especially television, is an important constituent of postmodernity for Baudrillard, along with the rapid dissemination of signs and simulacra in every realm of social and everyday life. By the late 1970s, Baudrillard was interpreting the media as key simulation machines which reproduce images, signs and codes which in turn come to constitute an autonomous realm of (hyper)reality and also to play a key role in everyday life and the obliteration of the social. This process constitutes a significant reversal of the relation between representation and reality. Previously the media were believed to mirror, reflect or represent reality, whereas now they are coming to constitute a (hyper)reality, a new media reality, 'more real than the real,' where 'the real' is subordinate to representation thus leading ultimately to a dissolving of the real. (Kellner 1989: 68)

Kellner reintroduces Baudrillard's ideas of the hyperreal that represents a unique blend between the real and the simulated. These ideas will serve as a good basis for his *Media Culture*, a study of the effect television and the mass media have on the patterns of behavior in Western civilization. McHale seemingly agrees with the idea of the mass media affecting one's perception of Self and personal identity (1987). He believes that "[a] ll around us – on advertisement hoardings, bookshelves, record covers, television screens – these miniature escape fantasies present themselves" whose incorporation (although frequently subconscious) into the very core of one's identity results in people's living "as split personalities [whose] private life is disturbed by the promise of escape routes to another reality" (McHale 1987: 38). In other words, it is the general confusion created by hyperreality that makes people reach for fictionalization. Baudrillard introduces the term "TV verité" (French for the truth) in *Simulacra and Simulation* and claims that "it is TV that is true, it is TV that renders true" (Baudrillard 1994: 29). When Buckingham observes different influences on the identity (one of which is media culture), he notes that "all these [contemporary] developments are contributing to a sense of fragmentation and uncertainty, in which the traditional resources for identity formation are no longer so straightforward or so easily available" (Buckingham 2007: 1). Hence, people turn to what is readily available in order to acquire certain and successful patterns of behavior and define themselves against the existing tradition. In DeLillo's novels, the protagonists base a large portion of their identities on what they see in the media and define themselves in relation to the society and reality which are either directly shaped or modified by the mass media.

3. The Perception of the Self in Hyperreality of DeLillo's Novels

The initial appearance of hyperreality in DeLillo's fiction is by no means related to either *Cosmopolis* or *The Silence*. This concept has long been present in his novels starting from the very first – *Americana* – which is set inside the world of television and film production, both of which can be interpreted as hyperrealities. Baudrillard's hyperreality is frequently involved in DeLillo's novels with the content created by technology or the mass media (including radio, television, film and the Internet, as well as press and advertising). Television reoccurs as the central hyperreality in

many of his novels, most notably in *White Noise*, but also in *Americana*, *Libra*, *Falling Man*, *Underworld* and *Players*. In each novel, television seems to function as an augmentation of existing reality, adding traits to the lives of numerous protagonists, regarding their personalities or attitudes. In *White Noise*, Gladneys will acquire symptoms of intoxication from both television and radio broadcasts covering the toxic spillage. In *Americana*, David Bell will fashion himself and his manners after different movie stars. In *Underworld*, Nick's mother will regard the world of television as more real than the real (the episode in which she compares the animals on TV and animals in the zoo), while Nick himself will feel that people in advertising know him better than perhaps anyone else in his life. When television is not the chief operator of the hyperreal, it is some other media outlet; in *Running Dog*, it is newspapers, in *The Names* it is documentaries, in *Underworld* it is also the radio and the Internet (the former concerned with the baseball match, the latter with sister Edgar's obsession with tabloid websites). Technology will also contribute to the creation of hyperreality in DeLillo's novels, sometimes indirectly (as a means of media operation and functioning) and sometimes directly, like in *Ratner's Star* (concerning the operation of the scientific center which tries to analyze the mysterious signal detected in outer space) or *Zero K* (concerning the institution that oversees the process of cryopreservation). The joint issue of every hyperreality is reflected in DeLillo's protagonists, each of whom struggles with their personalities and relationships with the people that surround them. All of these seem to come from the same issue seen in *Cosmopolis* – "the disturbed relations between the past, present and future" (Paunović 2017: 186). Under the influence of the media and technology, the notions which people use to define reality become more difficult to grasp and understand, which in turn leads to a perplexed perception of the Self.

Jeremy Rifkin, studying the influence of science and technology on American society, states that "sometimes, adoption of a single technology can be transformative in nature, changing the very way our minds filter the world" (Rifkin 2004: 89). In *Cosmopolis*, Eric Packer adopts every single item of the latest technology as it appears. His mind is under the influence of technological wonders to the extent that he wants to "live on a disc" (DeLillo 2003: 105). He is connected to various material things in his life, not only to his gadgets but his other possessions, as well. The first scene introduces Packer as feeling strangely connected to his home – the modern, high-tech building that embodies his values to a significant

extent. As Laist puts it, "his material environment is a crucial component of his characterological makeup" (Laist 2010: 261). This contributes to the way he perceives reality, and thus himself. For him, technology is a way to foresee the future, outgo the present and triumph over it. The technology in his limousine helps him predict the events, thus allowing him to control the flow of cyber-capital. Technology is a way to work with his capital directly but by using its digital representation. It helps him be completely distant from the physicality of money, yet make it increase in his bank account. It also helps him seem distant and unaffected by the world in chaos brought by the changing conceptions of time and space, as well as of Self and reality. As Packer's antagonist in the novel Benno Levin states, Packer is "always ahead, thinking past what is new" (DeLillo 2003: 152). His ability to see into the future is more a matter of the technology available to him and to a lesser degree a matter of natural gift. Eric Packer is not a prophet; he is an analyst. DeLillo represents him as the man who has mastered technology to the level that he is able to see patterns in reality and make assumptions about the future.

As opposed to him, the protagonists of *The Silence* are far less obsessed with technology, or so it seems at first glance. Indeed, they do not think about it as much as Eric. They do not depend on it to the extent that he does, especially since their professions are not directly related to technology. Their connection to technology seems to be a subconscious, taken-for-granted sense that technology is a normal part of their everyday lives. They are not aware of it in normal circumstances, yet its sudden absence shocks them to the core. Jim and Tessa do not think much about their airplane on their way home to New Jersey, or the technology of screens Jim follows so obsessively on the flight. However, when the crash of communications forces their pilot to make an emergency landing), they face life-threatening destruction once technology suddenly disappears from their lives. Diane and Max (the couple whose Superbowl watch-party Jim and Tessa are about to attend) are unaware of their attachment to their television screen until it blanks, and they see themselves reflected in the blackness of the flat surface, not recognizing a functional human being that is able to have a conversation, at a minimum, without the aidance and guidance of the media content. They live their lives unaware of the isolation technology and the media inflict on their lives. However, once these elements disappear from their environment, they realize that neither they nor the rest of the society knows how to function in a community.

In a similar way, Eric Packer is completely involved in the digital world, isolated from almost any human contact in his high-tech limousine. Not only is he separated from the outside world by the glass and chassis of his limousine, but he also does not watch the events directly through the window – he monitors them on the screen, often even before they occur. This can be seen as an echo of DeLillo's previous novels, namely the concept of media mediation that Duvall notices in *White Noise* and describes as "the intertextual web of prior representations" (Duvall 1994: 181). Packer does not predict the future as much as he notices patterns that he has previously noted in the media and applies them to his surroundings. Moreover, he approaches his surroundings through media mediation sometimes entirely. At one point, he comments on the riot outside the car, stating that it "makes more sense on TV" (DeLillo 2003: 89). What is striking about the limousine is the fact that from the outside, it is completely normal, even common on the streets of New York. It looks generic and resembles numerous other non-distinct limousines that sail the streets of New York. It almost echoes William Gibson in *No Maps for These Territories* (2000), a documentary in which the author travels in a similarly technologically super-equipped limousine while discussing several dystopian points and potential scenarios we also see in *Cosmopolis*; namely, the influence of technology on the future of our civilization. Interestingly, both authors have ominous expectations of the future world. Much like Gibson's, Eric's limousine completely blends into the environment on the outside. However, on the inside, it is highly equipped, enabling Packer to constantly monitor the flow of information, equally concerning the economy and the media. It is a surreal machine, "less an object than an idea" (DeLillo 2003: 10). With its flat plasma screens and surveillance systems it becomes his whole world – it replaces the office, the bar, the place where he can meet his mistresses. This way it forms a hybrid environment, a surreal and hyperreal cell that traps him inside the world of never-stopping data. He himself is fascinated by this world, mesmerized by the information and completely enchanted by "the hell-bent sprint of numbers and symbols, the fractions, decimals, stylized dollar signs, the streaming release of words, of multinational news, all too fleet to be absorbed" (DeLillo 2003: 80). However, he fails to recognize that these signs are all there is – they are just the image of reality with no real value in it, other than the abstract value we ascribe to it. The digital representation of capital is a signifier, Baudrillard's simulacrum – an arbitrary construct which might as well be empty of any meaning.

This is why Eric works with cyber-capital; on a metaphorical level, DeLillo involves him with a simulacrum and not real, palpable money to highlight the lack of connection between the real world and the image that only claims to be real.

The lesson that escapes Eric is painfully learned by the protagonists of *The Silence*. Faced with the total absence of technology, they ponder upon the meaning and purpose of human existence. Once screens go blank, and while waiting hopefully and somewhat naively for their reignition, Diane contemplates "the many millions of blank screens" and tries to imagine "the disabled phones" (DeLillo 2020: 52). Waiting for their friends, her husband Max and Diane somehow manage to retain the structure of their day still revolving around the media and technology. They are suddenly left without them, but they stay within their bubble, as much as Eric Packer does. They wait for the screens to start broadcasting the game of the Superbowl and keep preparing for the event as if it is still going to happen. They never leave the seat in front of the screen empty, "waiting for something to splash onto the screen" (DeLillo 2020: 84). If we compare the two novels, the ominous silence that fills their apartment only highlights the isolation embodied by all the functional screens in *Cosmopolis*. Nevertheless, Diane spares a moment or two to timidly think about the possibility of the screens' never functioning again. Then, she poses a question that might as well be directly related to Eric Packer: "What happens to people who live inside their phones?" (DeLillo 2020: 52). In other words, she voices DeLillo's concern with the society that functions highly (or even entirely) relying on technology. The suggested answer is – silence.

A similarly sharp and philosophical character in *Cosmopolis*, Vija Kinski is absorbed in information and in the world of statistics and she states that they "are not witnessing the flow of information so much as pure spectacle, or information made sacred, ritually unreadable" (DeLillo 2003: 80). She is much more aware of the true nature of this spectacle, and she often analyzes the media and contemporary society in a similar fashion Murray Siskind does in *White Noise*, for example. They are both able to perceive the deeper level of media messages and sense some profound meaning and influence on the audience. However, while the author seems to be exceedingly ironic in representing Siskind's observations about the true nature of media messages, his approach to Vija Kinski is less ironic and more critical, since her observations are less related to conspiracies and more to the socio-cultural implications of a media-led society. She allows

herself to contemplate and discuss the possibility of future destruction (and the potential disappearance of technology), though she does not seem able to surpass the environment she inhabits – she is, like Eric, stuck in the simulation of the world. While other employees that Eric meets throughout the day mention hints of their lives outside their work within Eric's hyperreality, Vija seems to exist solely within philosophy and theory. Moreover, her relationship with Eric never crosses the level of discussion (about hyperreality almost exclusively) and she remains unable to offer a glimpse of anything real (in terms of activities unpolluted by the hyperreal, such as the hairdresser's story, the taser Eric's bodyguard uses on him or Danko's narration of the war he was previously in). Vija and Eric remain the only two characters who do not offer anything authentic beyond the hyperreal, either in activity or experience. However, the difference between the two of them (and between Eric and the protagonists of *The Silence*) is that he seemingly feels comfortable in the simulation of the contemporary era. He is no more than a data processor – more an object than a man, since his body and the real world are of secondary meaning to him, a "meat space" as he keeps calling it throughout the novel. Moreover, he is equally surreal to the people around him. For example, Didi has to put her hand on Eric's chest to "determine he was here and real" (DeLillo 2003: 25). To his wife Elise, he is almost a stranger; she is baffled by some of his physical traits (his eyes, for example), unsure of his likes and dislikes, and sometimes even fails to recognize him physically when she encounters him in unexpected settings outside their home. Furthermore, Eric cannot seem to grasp the identity of the people around him either. He contemplates "putting his sunglasses on the associate's [doctor Ingram's] face, to make him real" (DeLillo 2003: 53) since "[i]t is what people think they see in another person that makes [their] reality" (DeLillo 2003: 57). He cannot recognize Elise any better than she can recognize him and knows her even less than she knows him; she is just a wife with whom he is yet to consummate their marriage. It is quite obvious that Eric is not aware of what is real, even though he insists that he does not live "an unreal life" (DeLillo 2003: 58). He is aware of the fluidity of the new reality but experiences it completely indirectly. For example, despite being aware that he is at a film location, he contemplates: "It tore his mind apart, trying to see them here and real, independent of the image on a screen in Oslo or Caracas. Or were those places indistinguishable from this one?" (DeLillo 2003: 176). At this point, we can again observe the resonance that *White*

Noise has in this novel; namely, the similarity between Eric's observation about the movie set and the phenomenon of the most photographed barn in the US from *White Noise*, whose merit does not lie in its appearance or historical significance, but rather in its being a media spectacle. The scene in *Cosmopolis* occurs while Eric simulates stiff bodies with his wife on a movie set – a hyperreality of its own.

For Eric, the actual reality, the world in the streets, is what offends the "truth of the future" (DeLillo 2003: 65). However, as a practical man he is, he still needs human contact, much like Benno for whom "there are times when [he wants] to rub [himself] against a door or wall, for the sympathetic contact" (DeLillo 2003: 58). Both in fact yearn for any sort of true and real connection with other people. This is precisely why Eric insists on knowing Benno's real name or having sex with his wife on the movie set. In fact, when it comes to movies, it is a common saying among people that something in real life is "just like in the movies" and Eric embodies this idea. For example, before bursting through the door of Benno's apartment he thinks about what characters in the movies do when they burst in through the door, kicking the thing only once and it always flies open at the first attempt. He enacts the action, proving that the action has the same result in both reality and fiction, further proving the premise that the two are the same thing. In a similar way, Martin states that "[o]ne escape is the movies" (DeLillo 2020: 51) when he discusses the strategy to avoid facing one's confusion about the Self. In this manner, the hyperreality of the movies takes dominance over authentic reality in DeLillo's protagonists' perspective.

Like Eric, Benno Levin (or Richard Sheets, which is his real name) has a distorted perception of reality. His reality is highly subjective, an example of a postmodern merger of facts and fiction, reality and imagination. For example, he convinces himself that he is suffering from diseases and conditions that he found and caught online, because he read about their symptoms, much like the Gladneys children in *White Noise*. He is convinced that things are real just because he believes in them. He says: "Whether I imagine a thing or not, it's real to me. I have syndromes where they're real, from Malaysia for example. The things I imagine become facts. They have the time and space of facts" (DeLillo 2003: 213). Eric will scorn Benno's intention to kill him, describing it as a "cheap imitation" (DeLillo 2003: 213) because it is something that the world has already seen. "Do people still shoot at presidents?" Eric asks (DeLillo 2003: 20). By doing this, Eric

degrades every experience that is not original, ironically ascribing more importance to the real than to the fictional. However, it is questionable whether anything can be truly original in the world that has seen it all from the media. As previously discussed in the chapter on Baudrillard's hyperreality, society no longer functions on the unmediated real. Therefore, any comparison with the pure real is ungrounded and needlessly exclusive in DeLillo's novels.

In *The Silence*, DeLillo's protagonists are faced with similar identity issues. Yet, their approach is much less self-assured than Eric's. For example, he would never ask himself whether he is "being a little too self-important" (DeLillo 2020: 102). Eric is too immersed in the world of the media and technology; his attention is elsewhere, and he has no time for self-inspection. As opposed to him, Max, Diane, Tessa, Jim and Martin have nothing but time and space which are respectively to be filled with introspection and their newfound awareness of their humanity, or lack thereof. They are reduced to their most immediate physiological functions (sleeping, eating, breathing) and – conversing with the people surrounding them. For example, once Jim and Tessa crash-land and survive their violent arrival home, they conclude that "[t]here was nothing for them to do but to keep walking" (DeLillo 2020: 63). However, these, otherwise completely normal, activities of human lives become increasingly difficult for them. As they spend time without technology and the media, they become highly introspective. Each of them withdraws deep within, to the point at which they stop noticing each other. On several different occasions, Diane has to remind herself to pay attention to her surroundings. "It began to occur to Diane that Martin was speaking, although not necessarily to her," the narrator notes (DeLillo 2020: 50). What DeLillo seems to imply here is that the sudden switch, which brings the characters back to their basic daily operations and activities, does not manage to switch off the bubble previously created by the media – the one that, in his novels (mainly and most notably *Underworld*) keeps people deeply connected with the media content, but distant from other human beings. With such unexpected upset, their normal activities become exaggerated. For instance, they talk to themselves, like Martin, for the sake of talking. They sleep excessively and yearn for sleep when they pretend to be fully awake like Jim and Tessa, whose tiredness does not seem to come solely from their accident but also from the overwhelming new reality they find themselves in. They become obsessed with their appearance, like Martin who cannot stop discussing

(out loud, yet for himself) how he looks at himself in the mirror, yet does not recognize the man he encounters in that reflective surface. Without technology and the media, they seem lost.

The reason for this is, DeLillo seems to suggest, that people rely on technology and the media to tell them what is real and how to behave. The examples such as Jane Melman in *Cosmopolis*, who prefers face-to-face communication, rather than consulting one of Eric's many screens for information, are rare and even perceived as strange, out of touch with the real world merely for the fact that they are actually out of touch with the hyperreality they inhabit. Moreover, they all constantly seem to perform. It is as if they have acquired the type of behavior they see on television and in the movies and try to incorporate it into their quotidian, making thus another level of hyperreality. As Benno Levin puts it, in the contemporary world "it's hard not to lie" (DeLillo 2003: 150) suggesting that they all pretend to some extent. They all seem to be reduced to roles; it is just a question of how obvious they are in performing them. An example of how much role-play is present in the hyperreal world of these two novels is seen in Benno Levin, who is acquiring the role of his victim Eric. He starts talking like him, even thinking like him. He is similar to Walter White from *Breaking Bad* for example, who also picks up the habits of his victims (concerning the sandwich crust, the towel etc.) or even more so of Nabokov's Hermann from *Despair* who also tries to morph into another man – Felix. This might be interpreted as representation of human identity as a construct since Benno is shedding one and adopting another as if it is a piece of clothing. If we compare the novels, this only seems to be highlighted by the bareness of character that the protagonists of *The Silence* exhibit. None of them performs their roles like Benno or Eric because they are uncertain of what they are supposed to imitate now that they no longer have a referent in the media world. Yet, DeLillo does not represent them as completely authentic or purely real, either. They may have been stripped off the media referent for behavior, but there are still remnants of performance practices acquired from the media. For example, while talking to Martin, Max does not talk, he "announces" (DeLillo 2020: 51). Martin himself seems to be an echo of an actor performing a play, although his musings about Self and life in general resemble more a coping mechanism, an action one performs to distract oneself from the horrors of reality. Furthermore, traces of performances can be seen in the scene when Max decides to go outside and see what other people are doing to cope

with the new situation, and Diane "almost feels obligated to sit in front of the TV set on his behalf" because that is how one is expected to behave on a Superbowl Sunday – she overtakes his role of a spectator (DeLillo 2020: 84). Their actions are infused with fear and confusion, but the patterns exhibited in them are still quite media-affected.

In *Cosmopolis*, similarly, everything people do is "for effect," as Eric puts it when he takes off his sunglasses to have a conversation with his wife. He has quite a few metanarrative moments, almost all of which take place while he communicates with his wife, showing exactly how even their marriage is a performance. Participating in a conversation is a performance, as well – he notices that he is noticing, that he is complimenting, he is literally uttering every part of the social behavior that is expected and that he performs. The only thing that seems to "strip them of appearance" and performance is sex, or at least they perceive it as such. "Sex finds us out. Sex sees through us. That's why it's so shattering. It strips us of appearances" Eric states (DeLillo 2003: 50). He finds it to be the only way to reality. However, even that premise is questionable. Sex seems to be a pure simulation in the novel, as well. The most obvious example is the experience that Eric and Jane share, when they do not even touch each other, they only simulate. Moreover, Eric and Elise have their first marital sex on the movie set, highlighting the fact that they just perform their marital roles. Sadly, this proves that even such an intimate level of one's personal life is not spared of the effect of the popular media, since all of them seem to reenact something they have previously seen represented by media culture.

There do not seem to be any aspects of life left that the media has not affected somehow. They create a media image of everything (such as a perfect man, a TV spectator, an action hero), and it is by rule always perfect and beautiful, an ideal people should strive for, whether it concerns physical looks or possessions or actions. This is probably why Eric is so bothered by the asymmetry of his prostate – it is not picture perfect like the media shows it ought to be, like everything ought to be. Inevitably, the world that is so obsessed with appearances is doomed to fail, because no matter how much it tries to be resemblant of what the media represent as the ideal, it will never succeed at achieving that ideal, mainly because it is a pure simulation, a thing that is almost completely disconnected from the actual life. "'The future is always a wholeness, a sameness. We're all tall and happy there,' Vija says. 'This is why the future fails. It always

fails. It can never be the cruel happy place we want to make it'" (DeLillo 2003: 91). Her comments might be DeLillo's ironic observation about the society that regards the future as the land of fairytales. Nevertheless, people still try to reach it, the chief reason being that, like the "glow of cyber-capital," it is also so "radiant and seductive" (DeLillo 2003: 78). It is precisely seduction that is another important element that the media incorporates in the making of spectacles. It is the aura of exoticism that lures people to watch something, just because it is new. For this reason, the reporters repeat the word *dacha* in *Cosmopolis* and the protagonists of *The Silence* stubbornly wait for the Superbowl to start, even though no piece of technology functions in their surroundings – the audience is always lured by the spectacle in DeLillo's novels.

4. The Concept of Disappearance

In order to return the balance to the world, Vija Kinski states that there must be some destruction, that something needs to be destroyed to stop the world from rushing into the future. This occurs as she perceives a huge discrepancy between past and present ways of life. In *Cosmopolis*, destruction will symbolically be embodied in Eric Packer´s death. Similarly, the world in *The Silence* has to experience a unique technological catastrophe or the destruction of technology and mass media. Eric can be interpreted as a representative of the contemporary American society and a symbol, a "third Twin Tower," as Laist calls him (Laist 2010: 257). The Twin Towers stood as symbols of an economic ideology, and so does Eric Packer[2]. He is deeply defined by the ideology of contemporary society. In a similar way, Max, Diane and others are also symbols of the ideology, only from a different angle – they are what the ideology can and will leave behind. Eric seems to run into destruction almost willingly, as he pursues potentially dangerous activities and areas. He lives the day aware of the constant threat and gets reports of various potential assassins multiple times. However, he does not seem to mind – on the contrary, he seems to long for it. The characters of *The Silence* are not as self-hazardous as he is, indeed, yet that might

[2] It should be stated that *Cosmopolis* is set in 2000, and there are no explicit references to 9/11 in the novel. Therefore, the symbolism of the Twin Towers as mentioned in this paper is entirely related to the time before their destruction, when they represented American economic supremacy and their monetary power.

only be due to the initial shock of losing solid ground of familiar reality. They are left with no technology and are represented in a state of initial confusion after a catastrophe, whereas Eric has become an integral part of the digital world and currently lives its apex. Laist notes that Eric is "completely fused with technology" (Laist 2010: 259). As a result of such oversaturation, he feels the need to exist outside it, even though he is unaware of it. For this reason, he wants to get his haircut in his childhood neighborhood; he is on a quest for some real, authentic experience outside the hyperreal. Symbolically, he unconsciously leads himself to the financial "haircut" and death, as well. On the other hand, Diane and her friends are forced into stupefaction by the circumstances (the sudden, but total, disappearance of functioning media and technology). Nevertheless, the protagonists of these novels are quite similar. Eric is a man who does not experience reality directly anymore, much like the protagonists from *The Silence* – his sexual encounters, his medical examination – he seems above it all, existing as a supervisor of his own life. He cannot even experience his own death – he foresees it on a screen. Diane, Max, Martin and the rest do not command technology openly, but once they are left without it, they find themselves incapable of leading a technology-free life. They act as if the whole world has been destroyed when the failure only extended to technology-based practices. In both novels, technology has completely alienated all DeLillo's protagonists from nature and culture, but from people as well. In addition to technology and language, interpersonal relationships constantly become obsolete, as well. Packer does not need human interaction – he cannot even tell if he is alive without the data from his medical results. That is why he does not recognize his wife whenever she appears. That is why she does not know his eyes are blue. Regarding *The Silence*, it is for this reason Diane and Max cannot communicate openly with each other or with others, especially Martin. Their media experience dominates human interaction, which is why they wait desperately for the broadcast to reappear instead of doing something together. As DeLillo says in *Cosmopolis*, technology "can go either way" (DeLillo 2003: 95) – to the future or to the ruin of it. What is only hinted at in *Cosmopolis*, occurs in *The Silence*. The future and the ruin were always meant to be synonymous.

5. Conclusion

As in other DeLillo's novels, in *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence*, we encounter one of the crucial topics of contemporary society: the never-ending hyperreality present in every aspect of life. The society as DeLillo represents it in his novels has come to the point where technology is defining human lives and existence. As Vija Kinski says, "The present is harder to find. It is being sucked out of the world to make room for the future of uncontrolled markets and huge investment potential" (DeLillo 2003: 79). In *Cosmopolis* and *The Silence*, the characters experience hyperreality in a similar, yet strikingly different manners. These novels could not be farther removed on the spectrum of DeLillo's novels regarding the level at which hyperreality operates. The former is the noise, the latter the noiselessness; the former is the peak of technological dominance, the latter its utter failure. In *Cosmopolis*, the omnipresence of technology and the media directly dictates the lives of Eric Packer and the rest of DeLillo's protagonists. In *The Silence*, the utter absence of these elements indirectly highlights the level of importance technology and the mass media play in the protagonists' lives. Under the influence of these elements, the shifted perception of the world that DeLillo's protagonists experience is reflected in their identity issues. DeLillo's dystopian America of these two novels directly results in his characters' becoming lost, unsure of themselves and always on a never-ending quest for something real in their lives. All protagonists exhibit complete and unconditional reliance on technology; Eric Packer's abundant use of technology is parallel to the desperate yearning for the reestablishing of the media and technology experienced by the protagonists in *The Silence*. The issues of human identity and perception of Self, as well as of what it means to be human in a hyper-technological dystopia of DeLillo's America, are suggested to be under an unerasable influence of the hyperreal, one that cannot be diminished even by a total removal of the media content and technology. In such a state, DeLillo's protagonists are left to seek authentic experiences deeply unaware of the fact that they no longer have the ability to truly experience them on a direct, technology-free level.

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LANGUAGE, BEING AND THE BODY IN EIMEAR MCBRIDE'S *A GIRL IS A HALF-FORMED THING*

Abstract
Presence and participation are key aspects in McBride's narrative; it allows the reader to access the point where thought becomes language so that it is still closely linked to the experiencing body. It tells the story of a young girl and her troublesome teenagehood filled with abuse, loneliness and the need to heal. Even if it is through the context of a literary work, the novel seeks to be taken seriously, demanding a corporeal presence from the reader. The first part of the following paper describes how the work addresses both Celtic and Post-Celtic Tiger, modernist and postmodernist challenges while creating an innovative style of its own. The second part analyses how language operates through various narrative devices in *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing*, showing the connections with the body, aspects of the reading process itself and stylistic elements.

Key words: contemporary Irish fiction, body, narrative, experimental language

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1. Introduction

Concurrently as Ireland slowly moved away from the economic boom years of the Celtic Tiger era[1], so did its writers from a definable, dominant literary style or trend. The only valid term that can be used to capture contemporary post-Celtic Tiger Irish fiction is innovative. Experimentation and innovation are the main approaches taken by today's novelists. They challenge but also paradoxically re-invent old modes of writing stretching genre conventions. The diversity of narrative voices and structures reflect the dynamic state of Irish life and Irishness itself. Critic Claire Bracken observes that "what we see in the post-boom period is a paradox of explosive literary activity" (2017: 2). Contemporary Irish fiction is in an age of prosperity, women's fiction, in particular, is in a phase of vitality.

Eimear McBride is a contemporary Irish writer whose works reflect this surplus capacity of innovation, challenging traditional literary traditions. Her style can be described as experimental prose, operating a language that plays with both modernist and postmodern techniques. She has published three novels so far and won several prizes, including the Baileys Women's Prize for Fiction in 2014. She is definitely amongst the representative voices of today's literary smorgasbord. However, it is important to highlight that her first novel, entitled *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2013) went through a challenging publication process. McBride wrote the novel in 2007 and after nine years of publishers' rejections, it was finally presented to the public in 2013. Her struggle to get the work published points to several important aspects of the Irish cultural scene. During the economically prosperous years of Celtic-Tiger Ireland, consumerist policies created an atmosphere of what Bracken described as "hyper-masculinity" (2017: 1). Concurrently with the economic strength, writers and especially women writers found it hard to make their voice heard under the oppression of materialist consumerism policies. Novelist Anne Enright (Jordan 2015) described this period in an interview as a struggle: "during the Tiger times, there was a sense of 'get with the programme, you're off message'". McBride's novel was similarly 'off-message' with her peculiar, experimental language. The economic factor of investment potential also delimited publishing. Although the notion of censorship is not a working criterion anymore in Irish culture, its

[1] Celtic-Tiger is a term used to describe the Republic of Ireland's economically prosperous years from the mid-1990s to the late 2000s. A great financial collapse followed it in 2008, the Post-Celtic Tiger era refers to the period after the late 2000s.

capitalist counterpart has similarly controlling effects. Publishing houses can decide -often on personal matters- what they consider as 'sellable' material and by doing so they also have a certain power over what is being read. According to McBride, her work was rejected because "it did not fit into any niche" (Kellaway 2016). In the end the Galley Beggar Press, an independent Norwich firm published the novel in 2013.

The following paper analyses the specific narrative style of this novel, focusing on how it operates language on a challenging, new experimental level.

2. Modernist challenges

The plot of the novel is rather simple; it follows the deeds and thoughts of a girl from her childhood throughout her adolescence, stopping at the important events that shaped her as a human being. Her name is not revealed, none of the places or characters' names are, but they all inhabit an unmistakably Irish environment that is yet blurred in its historical specificity. The protagonist is a product of a broken family unit: her father abandoned the family before her birth. She grows up having an emotionally distant mother and a mentally and physically ill older brother for whom she feels responsible. She is also portrayed as a product of the religious and hypocrisy filled Irish rural environment from which she continuously struggles to escape: "we're living in a country cold and wet with slugs going across the carpet every night. Now when you are seven eight. Me five. This house, green growing up the outside." (McBride 2014: 9). The narrative carefully follows the troubles and traumas of this girl who is being bullied at school, who feels abandoned while trying to keep her brother safe and who is sexually molested and raped by her uncle. The perspective itself is monolithic, the whole story is told through her eyes of the first-person narrator. The narrative is divided into five chapters that refer to the different stages of the protagonist's life: Lambs, A Girl is a Half-formed Thing, Land Under the Wave, Extreme Unction and The Stolen Child. The timeline is constructed in a peculiar retrospection, the logic dictates that it is obviously built upon the re-evaluation of memories, but at the same time it is suspended through the lack of past verb forms in an eternal present. By choosing to suspend the narrative on this mythic level of continuous

presence, the novel allows entrance into the character's embodied life that is redundantly 'performed' in a suspended time of experience.

In an interview McBride stated that her main ambition when constructing the language of her novel was to show how a person is feeling or reacting, what they're feeling about the feeling (...) what other thoughts are going through their heads and their gut reactions and physical sensations (Cochrane 2014).

There is no direct speech type communication in the novel, it operates in a flow, and everything follows the non-coherent workings of memory. The dialogues are constructed reflexively: rather than following an utterance, they follow the visceral reactions that the spoken and heard words produce. McBride creates a genuinely experimental prose that, as Gorra (2016) argues: "attempts to get under the readers' skin of thought, indeed to find the point at which thought and physical sensation prove inseparable." In the main character's psychological quest there is a gloomy and implicit depiction of a future that reiterates generational faults and sins. The plot ends in an ambiguous tone, implying that the Girl possibly commits suicide. This can be seen both an escapist move, suggesting that the physical world cannot provide a safe, sheltered existence, but at the same time, it is also a protest for change: "The coldest water. Deepest mirror of the past and in it I am. (…) and we are very clean here like when we wash our hands." (McBride 2014: 202).

The Girl[2] refers nostalgically to a past that was "clean", yet it was full of trauma, loneliness, and betrayal. She self-deceivingly wishes for the past to be changed, thereby suggesting that one can only achieve a livable present and presence by changing the past itself because there is no future redemption. There is no possibility of a religious salvation in a context where some of the traumas spring from the unrecognized falsity of that very system. The Girl learns at an early age that "there is no Christ here" (McBride 2014: 58) and that the female body is something that presents a threat to the religious society, something that is meant to be hidden and is often abused. The only possible hope towards change is the re-evaluation of the past, starting on an individual level: "What if. I could. I could make. A whole other world a whole civilization in this city that is not home (…) no one cares. And no one's falling into hell." (McBride 2014: 88). The lonesome quest for a meaningful existence creates a strong feeling

[2] Due to the anonymity of the protagonist, the capitalized 'Girl' is used in this essay to denote the main character.

of isolation. The Girl can never be sure that her pain is acknowledged. Language often acts as a barrier, as an impervious tool for uttering what is going on inside the body.

This distrust of the past and the need for a future that is both hopeful and dangerous can be seen as a modernist preoccupation. Anne Fogarty termed the novel one of those narratives that shows "that the modernist project is not complete; its quest 'to make it new' lives on in a present-day Ireland marked by its formidable commitment to nostalgia, to memory, to commemoration" (2016: 4). There have been several debates around the validity and time-span of modernism. Certain critics suggest that modernism did not end in the mid-twentieth century but that its practices and forms continued. Susan Friedman points out that modernism is not a fixed temporary phenomenon but a "multiple, polycentric and recurrent" (2006: 425) one. The core of it being rooted in the quest to value the present while seeking to find new modes of expression that can make that meaningful. Modernism, in this sense, can be re-assessed through contemporary writers' challenging new forms and practices. McBride's novel carries elements of this recurrent modernism. It attempts to stretch the language and dismantle syntax while giving direct access to the character's consciousness and visceral experiences. It fixates the plot into a recurring present, which is valued as the only possible path, but continuously shows how memories and effects of the past permeate every moment of the character's life. The narrative experiments with language and its power but it doesn't lose faith in it. At the same time, the novel's techniques make use of postmodern perspectives too. There is a constant questioning of 'being' as a fixed construction. The value and substance of language is a significant concern of the plot, and the reader is viewed as an active participant and possessor of the fictional world. It is a style that transcends and also fulfills modernism, being termed by some reviewers as "astoundingly innovative" (Cahill 2017: 159).

3. Presence, language, and the body

Presence and participation are key aspects of McBride's narrative. At certain moments in the plot the language functions as the direct expression of the physical reactions, as if it would be generated by the visceral. Sounds and tactile experiences that apply to the senses feature strongly in the

plot. The novel seeks to be read both with the mind and the body: "Lungs heave up blood they would if I. (…) Eyes burn with thud through arteries and eyeball veins." (McBride 2014: 19). Contemporary neuroscientist Michael S. Gazzaniga highlights that our emotions and the physical reactions in our body precede conscious thought, "feelings happen before we are consciously aware of them – and most of them are the results of nonconscious processes" (2016: 78). McBride's novel can be interpreted as an experiment to go back to this pre-thought state and capture the gut reactions. At the same time even when language delimits the expression of pain, the body always keeps the score. When the physical sensations are the strongest, the words of the Girl dismantle into a semi-conscious mumbling of sounds:

> Hurts m. Jesus skreamtheway he. Doos the fuck the fuckink slatch in me. Scream. Kracks. Done fuk me open he dine done on me. Done done Til he hye happy fucky shoves upo comes ui. Kom shitting ut h mith fking kmg I'm fking cmin up you. Retch I. Retch I. (McBride 2014: 149)

The text does not use grammatical order, nor does it apply syntactic relief from statement or question, yet, it is still comprehensible. Anne Enright (2013) suggests that this prose is an experiment of a "pre-verbal state" and as such, it is not only a story of the Girl, but a philosophical linguistic experiment.

The characters are not given a name so that the primary signifier that could denote fixation and identity is ripped out of the plot. According to contemporary philosopher, Jean Luc-Nancy words are comprehensible through the body and are essentially linked to what the body experiences (2008: 15-16). At the same time, as he sustains, body as materiality is a complex "open space" and not a "filled space," it is a "place of existence" that is not settled but is in a constant flow (Nancy 2008: 15). If bodies are "places of existence" (Nancy 2008: 15) then they also are spaces of interchange, where "events of the body: rejoicing, suffering, thinking, dying, sexing, laughing, sneezing, trembling, weeping, forgetting" (Nancy 2008: 17) unfold. There are no actual bodies in the literary text, but it can be suggested that this body-space can be opened up and occupied through the process of reading. As Nancy describes, "writing is thinking addressed, thinking sent to the body (…) the writing 'I' is being from bodies to bodies" (2008: 19). Literary works can have the power to carry

their readers into this act of possessing a 'body-space' by allowing entry into characters' experiences, so that through reading our "emotional and cognitive repertoire expands" (Mahon 2017: 103).

The Girl goes through the laborious denouncement and repossession of her body and identity. After being raped by her uncle, the sense of ownership over her body and her sense of self are flummoxed. As a mantra and 'healing' process, she paradoxically starts to hurt her body and gets involved in various sexual encounters as if to regain control over her embodied life. It is a quest of repossessing that can be best described with Nancy's words as the "constant, silent assertion of lone presence" (2008: 154). By the act of reading the individual reader is also invited to step into this presence and possess it. The "for you" addressing at the beginning of the narrative is also an invitation for the reader to inhabit this fictional world that permeates body.

The performative aspect of both plot and narrative embedded into the experimental language, create a genuinely new type of *Bildungs* genre. Anne Enright (2013) termed it "an account of Irish girlhood," but it is more than that, it is also an authentic account of an individual embodied existence. "For you. You'll soon. You'll give her name. In the stitches of her skin she'll wear your say." (McBride 2014: 3). These are the introductory words of the novel. They carry an *in medias res* type of guidance into a complex fictional world, but they constitute a point of address and access as well. The narrative mechanism and the linguistic strata of the text are in a complex mingling. The plot is rather simple: it follows the unnamed Girl's deeds and experiences from her pre-birth state up to her adolescence. Chronologically it sustains linearity, but the perspective only allows glimpses into selected events meaningful to the main character. There are no past verb forms, thereby emphasizing the present moment's value, bringing the experience closer in a repeated framework of happening.

In the first part of the novel, the "I" as a locus of individuality is blended into a plural one. The Girl 'speaks' from the womb so that her existence is still physically linked to the mother's body. Her experiences are felt and created in a multidimensional location. The dialogues also blur the meaning of the pronouns, because they occur within the text's flow. However, the narrator signals the difference in the positions "she says, she saw"; as if also suggesting that even from the womb she already has a space of her own "I" that can comprehend and form thoughts:

> In the stitches of her skin she'll wear your name. Mammy me? Yes you. Bounce the bed I'd say. I'd say that's what you did. Then lay you down. They cut you round. Wait and hour and a day. (…) I want, she says. I want to see my son. (…) I know. The thing wrong. It's a. It is called. (McBride 2014: 3)

The first "I" here is the Girl's pronoun, whereas all the others are the mother's. The Girl sees through the mother's eyes: she sees his brother falling from the stairs, being taken to hospital and getting diagnosed with the incurable disease. She also feels the worry and anxiety of the mother, who senses the seriousness of the situation. The mother's cognitive and physical state also affects her directly; there are verbal indices: "She praying in a coat until I am froze. Hard chapel-kneelers bare-kneeled real repents. She does. And our father was. Where? Somewhere there. I think. (…) Jesus in her blood that minute." (McBride 2014: 4).

The "I" here is that of the Girl's. On an experimental level it is really interesting how the Girl also feels the touch of his brother, who is a constant presence in her life from her pre-natal existence: "poke belly of baby that's kicking is me. Full in myself (…) And I loved swimming to your touch." (McBride 2014: 5). The brother is the bearer of the first and the last "you" of the novel. He is the one who is promised the right of name-giving at the beginning and he is the one with whom the Girl wishes to unite just moments before her death. His function is more than that of a sibling; some critics term him as "a lost twin and an alter-ego" (Fogarty 2015: 24). At an early age, he is diagnosed with cancer and suffers severe brain damage after his operations. He is a silent character in the narrative: his voice is never audible through the mediated language of the Girl, but it can be suggested that he is the primary addressee: "for you" (McBride 2014: 3). This recommendation or offering can also be interpreted as being the mother's. She talks to the older brother, preparing him for his sister's birth: "you'll give her name" (McBride 2014: 3). Thus the Girl's whole existence is "offered" to "you", to the brother, by the act of name giving. However, it can also be the Girl's voice, who directs her retrospection towards her beloved brother. The Girl is 'half-formed' because her other half is her brother, and with his death she loses all hope for 'full-formedness' and balance. The narrative ends soon after the brother's death with the Girl's suspected suicide, described by Fogarty as "an effort to re-unite with her brother who now has become a kind of succubus luring her to death"

(2015: 23). There is a desperate outburst just after the brother's death, when the Girl asks hopelessly: "who am I talking to? Who am I talking to now?" (McBride 2014: 189). On the textual meta-level, this moment is the ending of the main narrative itself, the narrator questions the viability of her utterance after the death of the main addressee. However, she does not stop communicating and even in her last goodbye, before she drowns herself, she clings onto the "listening brother":

> And under water lungs grow. Flowing in. Like fire torch. Like air is. That choke of. Eyes and nose and throat. Where uncle did. No. Gone away. Where mother speak. Is deaf my ears. Hold tight to me. I. Will I say? For you to hear? (McBride 2014: 203)

The mother's "speech" here is not comprehended, it falls on "deaf" ears, but the brother is imagined as receptive, the one who will "hear". The narrative can also be interpreted as a story told within the story. The Girl remembers her past, paradoxically reiterating everything in a stream of consciousness utterance that is tied to the present. The memories are vivid and relived in this metafictional level, where she 'talks' to the brother, creating a story within the story, while the whole plot is held together through the consciousness of her actual, temporal 'now'. By choosing to relive the painful memories vividly, she also suggests that the past permeates every moment of her present consciousness.

It is interesting that the Girl's internal language is meant to be received by a character that cannot master language and cannot use it as a tool for communication. The brother has trouble learning and is constantly bullied in school. The Girl tries to be protective, but gradually gives up hope of his brother's salvation.

There is a continuous and gradual dehiscing and estrangement in the Girl's life: from religious comfort, from family ties, from her own body, from her own language, and yet her whole narrative is built upon the wish to be heard, perceived and accepted. Áine Mahon suggests that the language of the first-person narrator in the novel is meant to be understood even if it is syntactically broken (2017: 111). The Girl addresses both her brother and herself with the desired aim of being heard and acknowledged. She seems to be speaking to herself, but she uses this inner language as a tool of connection. As Mahon sustains, she "can never be sure that her pain is acknowledged or appreciated by others around her" (2017: 111), but she secretly always hopes to be heard. This also accentuates the peculiar

character of language itself: though the narrative follows the inner, pre-verbal state of language, it still is – even in its most privatized moment – a tool condemned to be directed and understood by others. Even pain that is believed unutterable at times finds its ways through language to seek acknowledgment and sympathy from others.

It is not only the Girl's language that has seemingly lost its connective, communicative value. The other characters are also unable to express and utter their thoughts and emotions meaningfully. They all inhabit a world of estrangement: no functional relationships survive in this landscape. There is no authentic mother-daughter bond, although the Girl longs for it: "Is Mammy with you? Ah no of course. Ach she's not able. She said that alright before." (McBride 2014: 11). The mother is authoritative and she also carries the weight of generational hurt. When the grandfather visits, the dialogue transmitted through the Girl's first-person utterance is emptied of communicative elements. It is more the monologue of the grandfather who is not compassionate and who uses language to express her disappointment and blame: "And when I went to have that eye test you never called. (…) But sure what's the point. It's like talking to that brick wall." (McBride 2014: 15). This powerless and submissive mother is the only female role model available to the Girl. This general circumstance approximates to the image portrayed by sociologist Zygmunt Bauman of our contemporary European society, suffering because of moral insensitivity, "compassionless and heartless type of behavior (…) an indifferent posture manifested towards other people's trials and tribulations" (2013: 13). Bauman also questions the dynamic of "human togetherness" (2013: 13), of the human communities. Nevertheless, as it is shown in McBride's novel, everyone seeks to be heard, to be addressed, to be listened to, to be connected.

There are several types of social micro-communities captured in the novel: the family, the sibling cohesion, the mother-daughter-cohesion, the school, the church, the little town, and the culture as well. Thus, on a multi-layered structure, it portrays different social groupings throughout an individual's life, making it a universal (her)story and a nation's microhistory. The Girl always refers to her parents from the plural of the "our,": "our mother, our father." Nevertheless, as a physical presence, it is only the mother who stays in their life; the father is the "empty space" (McBride 2014: 3). He leaves the family before the Girl's birth. The coined expression "our father" denotes both the paternal figure and the transcendental entity, God. The Girl's language keeps reiterating religious phraseology, ripping

words out from their context thus giving them new power. The prayers and sermon quotes should function as tools of deprecation and purification for her, but they become mere 'empty spaces' as well. The mother continually prays, and the Girl overhears it as early as from the womb: ""Gethsemane dear Lord hear our prayer our. Please. (…) Please God don't take. Our. Holy Mother of all, humbly we beseech thee." (McBride 2014: 4).

The Girl and her brother are taken to church regularly. One of the main prayer that is continuously overheard in the novel is "Our Father," its rhythmical mumbling lingers around the Girl's life. From the moment of her birth, she is promised this prayer: "For this grant of Nurse I will. Learning you Our Fathers art. And when you slept I lulled in joyful mysteries glorious until I kingdom come." (McBride 2014: 5).

It can be suggested that "Our Father" acts as a performative word in the religious context, being able to act and achieve divine presence by its pure utterance. For the Girl, there is no performative capacity behind it, only the lack of presence. She attends church and mass from a young age, but as it is revealed from later scenes, she does not find safety in the religious spirit. It is rather seen as a desperately needed, but eventually meaningless ingredient to her identity that could never offer real guidance.

It is very telling when the grandfather visits them (the Girl is already five) and quarrels with the mother about the lack of 'religiousness' of the kids. He argues that they don't know the prayers well enough:

> And that child only made his communion a year ago and he can't even his Hail Mary. Have you no morals? I mean what kind of way is that to rear you son? (….) And look at that one. What way is that to rear a girl? Look at her. Forward rolls in a skirt. It's disgusting. It is perverted. (…) How's she supposed to be a child of Mary? (McBride 2014: 15-16)

The Catholic atmosphere of the novel is one of the indices that point towards an Irish context, but there is no direct reference to a place. The setting is blurred in its geographical specificity. Other suspected Irish 'elements' include: focus on a small, enclosed community (probably in the West of Ireland as some critics speculated [Fogarty, 2015]), the Catholic Church as an overarching presence in the lives of the characters, revealing the hypocrisies underlining it, conflictual family ties, absent father. Nonetheless, behind these Irish connotations there is a need to universalize: the main philosophical queries evoked and the existential

struggle of the Girl is mainly a human one. The author admitted that there was an inescapable Irish perspective at work, but she also wanted every reader "to feel they were her and that what was happening to her and inside her was also happening within themselves" (McBride 2016). Regarding the theme of girlhood, Anne Fogarty argues that the novel's Bildungsroman quality is a form embedded in Irish tradition: "Narratives focusing on the child and adolescent are nothing new and have always featured centrally in the European novel and formed an especially vital and distinctive vein in Irish fiction." (Fogarty 2015: 13). She also sustains that this type of *Bildungsroman* is still viable, "paradoxically it survives as a mode, because many of its characteristics are inverted or suspended especially by modernist authors" (Fogarty 2015: 14). McBride's novel can thus be termed a modernist Irish *Bildungsroman* that focuses on the refusal of embracing social norms and a refusal to grow up. Refusal is a crucial element of the Girl's existence. It is not always a conscious denial, but rather incapacity. From the moment of her birth, she regrets the bodily separation from the mother. This can be seen as the acknowledgment that the reality of the world cannot offer her a graspable and livable presence:

> A vinegar world I smelled. There now a girleen isn't she great. Bawling. Oh Ho. Now you're safe. But I saw less with these flesh eyes. Outside almost without sight. (…) Dividing from the sweet mother flesh that could not take me in again. (McBride 2014: 5)

She continually fails to inhabit this world and her body while striving to take control and ownership. This quest is further eschewed after the rape committed by her uncle. That particular event in the Girl's life is portrayed by her as something willed and rejected at the same time. This creates an ethical imbalance in the plot and a total loss of moral balance in the character's life. She wants to be in charge of her own sexuality with the paradoxical desire for the rape, but she also seeks the victim's role:

> I am lying. I am not I am. By the cold rage in my white drip shirt. Caught me. Went about me tooth and claw that I wanted. Felt within the time has come. No Christ here in the kitchen floor. (…) Oh God. It hurts me take it out. (…) No. Take me down under. (…) I must be almost I am dying when he does it (…) My nail my nail. That's it. I've done to him. What's done in me. (McBride 2014: 57–58)

The language describing the rape is the least articulate as if to suggest that when the experience is too strong, the body cannot utter it into comprehensive language. On the other hand, the impressionistic, terse sentences communicate far more authentically what she experiences physically than a more polished, controlled narration. This is also the moment of an inverted epiphany, she loses her body, her control and her own being in a way, "who turned the sound back on? (…) my eyes back" (McBride 2014: 59) a moment of total blindness and insanity "I am laughing all the way up the stairs." (McBride 2014: 59). She drags herself into the illusion that this was the moment of her rebirth, of the total possession of her body. Later on, she seeks to relive this moment by an "enraged and disaffected take on her sexual body" (Fogarty 2015: 23). She involves herself mercilessly in several sexual encounters throughout her school years. As a university student, she invites the uncle to her house, asking him to beat her while having sex with him. She implicitly craves the affection and motherly care that she lacked as a child. The abusive connection is the only meaningful one that she knows and by inviting the uncle she can also seemingly regain control while swirling deeper into self-loathe: "Well I'm here doing what you want. Put yourself on me then, in me. (…) Do whatever you want. The answer to every single question is Fuck. Save me from all this" (McBride 2014: 131). Even when horrible things are happening to her, she wants to regain agency: "Saying yes is the best of powers." (McBride 2014: 71). Anne Fogarty describes this as a constant "restaging of the primary scene that has defined not just her sexuality, but her vey Being" (2015: 23).

Jean Luc Nancy (2008) sustains that the character of human existence and knowledge is essentially embodied and not abstract. At the same time being means possession of this embodiment:

> In truth "my body" indicates a possession, not a property. In other words, an appropriation without legitimation. I possess my body (it) however in its own turn possesses me: it pulls or holds me back, offends me, stops me, pushes me away. We're both possessed, a pair of demonic dancers. (Nancy 2008: 154)

All damage taken on the body is bared by the "I" too, who is the ultimate possessor and thus the body itself. The Girl can never separate herself from the body that she abuses and offers up for mistreatment. She is

seeking control and wishing for purity, pretending that she can cleanse and repossess.

With its symbolic subtitles the structure of the novel reflects this gradual loosening and invasion of the body/being. It is divided into five parts, all carrying a distinctive title. The first one is entitled 'Lambs', signals the purity and vulnerability of the body, freshly ripped of the mother's corpus. The second that contains the traumatic encounter with the uncle is: 'A Girl is a Half-formed Thing', as if signaling that there is no chance of a full formation, of a controlled presence from this moment onwards. The body becomes a tool that cannot be possessed by the "I": it is continuously claimed by other bodies, and it is invaded and taken over. The focalized viewpoint changes in this part to a narrator who lives the illusion of being in the locus of presence and possession, while remaining only a failed and damaged outsider. It is also important to note the significant cover of the novel that pictures an apple. This could suggest the connection to the biblical storyline of Adam and Eve, and the woman as being "half-formed" from her very existence, as being formed from the rib of Adam. It also points to the woman as the bearer and initiator of the first sin. The image of womanhood is thus that of a space of sin, as something built upon a rupture of totality.

On the other hand, the novel doesn't portray men as innocent accomplice. One reviewer states that "the men are completely depicted in negative ways" (Wisker 2015: 66) in this plot. Patriarchy lurches at the core of the Girl's family: the father is absent, the grandfather is a tyrant who dominates and accuses, and the uncle is a seductive aggressor. At the funeral of the grandfather, the Girl volunteers to guard the corpse throughout the night and in that strange encounter, she feels in control, she is the possessor: "So Granda. I don't talk to the dead. So now. That's strange to see him here. Dead. I could give him a kick if I liked. But it is not worth the hassle now. I could undo his flies for shame. (…) Poke him. Squeeze out an eye. I'd lift it but. No. Better not to touch." (McBride 2014: 101).

The only woman who seemingly escapes the tyranny of men in this family is the Girl. The religious hypocrisies that restricted all of the other women in her family have no power over her. However, in the end, she also fails to cleanse herself of this patriarchal tradition and eventually chooses suicide. In this perspective, the "half-formed" aspect of womanhood portrayed here is not a given one, but an artificially sustained one. The Girl

remains a half-formed thing because the restrictions of the community and the patriarchal religious society do not allow her to have a "fully formed existence".

The only masculine character in the novel that is not described as an invader of woman space is the brother. As the alter-ego of the narrator, the other half, he is himself also "half-formed". The Girl struggles to grasp her body and through it to control her existence, whereas the brother is blocked of this possibility from the beginning. He is condemned to live in a body that doesn't allow possession. Being terminally ill means that his body allows him less and less control of life: "I touch your hands. I know they are going wrong. They're not doing all what they should ever should. Your eyes. Turned back." (McBride 2014: 166).

4. Being, language, and narrative

Derrida (1997) argues that language is a constant game of exchanges, all of which leave traces endlessly, but none can be pinned down. As such, it cannot be enclosed in a structure heading for either transcendence or any final signifier. Derrida questions the concept of 'direction' itself – there cannot be a forward or backward movement in language that is suspended in a presence-present of de-reconstructed connections (1997: 35-37). He consciously takes away the notion of control by revealing the motion behind each sign and showing language as a space, a locus that allows the constant interchange of signifiers (Derrida 1997). It can be suggested that the right to control and the need for being to be present cannot be denied. The illusion of presence, of a certain control is an almost anthropological necessity. When one uses writing and language there has to be an allowance of assertion. Despite the knowledge that there is no final center or logos, there has to be a decision of an accepted presence, and a grasping of illusory control.

Consistently staying in the fragmented first-person position and a continuous present, McBride's novel allows the reader greater power to assert his/her presence in the fictional world. Through its body-tied language the novel directly admits its readers into the Girl's space of being. It can be suggested that the over usage of the first-person pronoun 'I 'strengthens this ownership taking both for the readers as well as on a meta-level for the protagonist. Through the process of uttering her thoughts and

feelings, the Girl opens up her own body space to relive and examine her life. Using the 'I' repeatedly allows her temporary control over this process. She sometimes self-interrogates this body, looking for tools to inhabit it meaningfully: "Where. I. Hello. Hello. Is he are you there? Ssssss. There? I'm only here in my bones and flesh. Now you've gone away" (McBride 2014: 198). At times it seems that she is trying to get rid of her body. She is seeking to suspend her embodied being by imagining that her true self is a guest in the body that is being abused: "I learned to turn it off, the world that was not my own. Stop up ears and everything" (McBride 2014: 61). There is no escape from the corporeal though, the Girl cannot escape her space of being, unless she confronts death. The readers have more freedom: 'occupying' the body-space of the Girl through reading is a temporary cognitive exercise.

Heidegger (1996: 1) contends that there is no clear direction in language and meaning-construction, yet there is a finality determined as "Being", the ultimate end/signifier that cannot even be addressed with the classical tools of definition. He describes how being became "the most universal and emptiest concept. As such, it resists any attempt of definition. Nor does this universal and thus indefinable concept need any definition." (Heidegger 1996: 2). The possibility of 'being' has to be granted to the human in order to grasp presence and existence. Heidegger (1996) claims that being can be understood and grasped by *Dasein,* by an asserted presence conscious of its own end. This also means that being as an end signifier is intelligible for and from the standpoint of *Dasein,* which is a dynamic experience of living. This *Dasein* is a temporary possession of presence heading towards death. Heidegger doesn't name it human or individual, it is a meaningful existence in the world capable of understanding being. It is suggested though, that humans need presence, even if it is only temporary, conscious of its own end. There is an almost anthropological need for this in our everyday interactions and existence. It is also essential to step into the locus of a seemingly fixed 'being' when reading texts of literature. Even Derrida confirms later on that literature is a play of presence and absence, "a reappropriation of presence" (1997: 144), which is also effaced continuously by every new reader of the text.

Eimear McBride's novel uses a language that can sustain this game of reiterated presence and absence to its maxim capacity. With every reader, there is a new presence and assertion created, thus the flux is maintained. At the same time, since it is a language experimenting with the pre-

verbal utterance, it is closely linked to the body. The Girl's body bears the experiences that manifest themselves through the narrative's gut-reaction type language. McBride creates a written text that doesn't distance itself from the body. By focusing on the experience itself, it bears the signs of the body and its reactions. It also experiments with the readers' capacity of illusory and temporary presence and possession of both a language and a body. The novel locates the reader in this position on an experimental written sign-reading level, paradoxically showing that it also remains irrevocably removed from the experience.

5. Irish specificity or transnational togetherness?

When asked about how her Irishness features in her novels McBride stated that she does not feel the need to define that aspect as something necessarily distinct: "I'd like to set up my stall as a European writer." (Collard 2014). At the same time the spatial coordinates and certain specific topics point to an Irish context. Authenticity works on a double level in the novel, on the one hand, by connecting to an Irish reality, but at the same time by connecting to universal human experiences. This Girl is a symbolic embodiment of essentially human traumas and her story stands as a frighteningly powerful depiction of contemporary society.

Literary critic, Pieter Vermeulen (2009) points to the power of literary work to create and dismantle a community. He compares and contrasts Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (1983) with Jean Luc Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* (1986), trying to deduce what kind of community literature can sustain. While as he shows, Anderson argues that literature creates and enforces a collective identity and cohesion of a culture/community, Jean Luc Nancy "locates the sense of community not in a given substance or a specific essence (race, language, community) shared by the members of the community, but instead paradoxically in a removal at the heart of proximity and intimacy" (Vermeulen 2009: 96). Vermeulen suggests that literature can do both: "The experience of literature is not an experience of simultaneity and homogeneity, but rather of an interruption of self-presence. This illustrates literature's paradoxical capacity to give a definite shape to our removal from the finitude of the other" (Vermeulen 2009: 110).

Eimear McBride's narrative grasps this dual capacity to its finest, while being 'a neomodernist Irish account of girlhood and history' it both diminishes that identity and community, by stretching the experience to a universal togetherness and presence. It operates a complex system of cultural, narrative, stylistic and linguistic layers. It is a novel that is a product of Celtic-Tiger Ireland, reflecting the need for change and re-evaluation of past hypocrisies. The Girl's traumas and her sense of isolation reflect generational societal burdens that at the end force this protagonist to choose death as the only 'livable' alternative. At the same time, being published in the dynamic Post-Celtic Tiger era, it also stands as an expression of the newly found visibility and strength of female writers. The protagonist is an embodiment of the critique of neoliberal hopes. The Girl of the plot is in a crisis of identity, being involved in a very contemporary quest of finding her place in the material world. The narrative's language is innovative and experimental, applying to all the senses and operating on a reader-challenging rhythm. It constructs exciting new means for the reader to experience the process of reading itself from a body-tied, corporeal position. The roots of this language are nonetheless found in modernist, Joycean styles, questioning and opening up the layers of conscious and subconscious thoughts. This shows that the sharp dichotomies that seek to delineate old and new, traditional and innovative are often built on false distinctions. *A Girl is a Half-formed Thing* (2014) escapes being put into any restrictive niche. McBride invents a form that questions fixities while providing a new authentic mode of understanding trauma, abuse, the disconnectedness of our contemporary communities and the process of reading itself.

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THE VALUE OF INNOCENCE IN TONI MORRISON'S *GOD HELP THE CHILD*

Abstract
The essay examines the value of innocence in Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* with a focus on the representation of childhood. While innocence is generally considered to be inherent in little children, the essay shows that it is all but a fantasy for Morrison's youngest protagonists, who enter the world of adulthood prematurely as they are exposed to racial and sexual abuse. However, while Morrison's earlier works arguably framed the myth of the fall from innocence into experience as a fortunate fall into (self-)knowledge, and refashioned innocence as sin, in *God Help the Child* Morrison appears to have taken a more ambiguous approach. The powerful motif is inverted yet again, but this time Morrison challenges both the moral and the chronological paradigms of the fall as she examines the possibilities of moving in both directions, from innocence to experience and back.

Key words: Toni Morrison, *God Help the Child*, innocence, childhood, parenthood, trauma.

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1. Introduction

An innocent, suffering child is a frequent focal point in Toni Morrison's oeuvre. In this sense, Morrison's last novel, *God Help the Child* (2015), seems almost like a tribute to her previous works, most explicitly *The Bluest Eye* (1970), her debut novel about the effects of toxic parenthood and childhood trauma, and *Beloved* (1987), her seminal novel which explores the unspeakable crime of infanticide, raising the question of the mother's guilt, among others. Commenting on the choice of narrative techniques and elements of magical realism, primarily in the character of Beloved, the ghost of the murdered child who comes back to haunt the living, Morrison explained that the (dead) girl was "the only one who could judge her mother. None of us could." (Oatman 2015).[1] Indeed, the harrowing story about the woman who came to be known as "the modern Medea",[2] a certain Margaret Garner, a 19th c. African-American slave who killed her own daughter to save her from the same fate, makes little sense when it is pieced together from the court archives. Tony Morrison's novel, on the other hand, fleshes out the plight of both the slave mother and the killed daughter lost on historians. Similarly, *The Bluest Eye* also adopts a child's perspective in order to explore, as Toni Morrison explained in a 2007 foreword, "how something as grotesque as the demonization of an entire race could take root inside the most delicate member of society: a child; the most vulnerable member: a female" (qtd. in Hoby 2015). The perspective of a formerly silent – and silenced – young black girl[3] reframes the historical account of racialized child rejection, abuse, and trauma, as it allows the author to juxtapose and re-evaluate the narratives of innocence, virtue and vulnerability on the one hand, with those of experience, corruption and the (im)possibility of resistance on the other.

To a certain extent, this part of Morrison's foreword to *The Bluest Eye* could apply to *God Help the Child*, which also addresses the suffering of abused children – notably, but not exclusively, young black girls – and their anger. Indeed, the original title for the novel was *The Wrath of Children*,

[1] See also Morrison, 2019.

[2] Refers to the painting "The Modern Medea" (Thomas Satterwhite Noble, 1867), which was based on Margaret Garner's story.

[3] As Toni Morrison explains elsewhere, the silence was "enforced or chosen", as young black girls were "profoundly absent" not only from historical texts, but also from works of fiction (Morrison, 2019).

preferred by Toni Morrison but dismissed by her editors (Chen 2016). According to Morrison, however, the book is precisely about children's wrath – "about what adults have done to them and how they tried to get through it and over it and around it and how it affected them" (*Ibid.*) – or, as we learn early in *God Help the Child*, "What you do to children matters. And they might never forget." (*GHTC,* 43). While the quote speaks about the possibility of endless perpetuation of childhood trauma, it also implies the inability of traumatized children to unburden themselves of such accumulated fury and frustration in their future life. In the novel we encounter a little girl called Rain, who was routinely coerced into sexual activity by her mother's clients, and who says she would "chop her [mother's] head off" were she to meet her again (*GHTC,* 102). Another girl imagines ripping her mother's blue-and-white wallpaper and returning her slaps (*GHTC*, 77). While expressions of fury may take different forms, the sheer abundance of such emotional outbursts supports Morrison's claim that children's wrath is one of the main themes in the novel. Thoughts of betrayal, humiliation and revenge gnaw at their hearts, as these children are prematurely ushered into the world of adulthood. However, since the persistence of unsettled grievances and resentment are closely connected to the abilities not commonly associated with children, principally (self-) awareness, knowledge and agency, the reluctance to include the theme of children's wrath in the title itself possibly reveals a degree of cultural resistance to this topic. The narrative of vulnerability, helplessness and innocence, reflected in the chosen title, appears to be more acceptable and attractive, however ironic the phrase.

Importantly enough, though, unlike in *The Bluest Eye*, the children in *God Help the Child* do not withdraw into Pecola's "perpetual innocence of insanity" (Otten 1989: 9) but leave the Edenic state of innocence by taking an early plunge into the experience of fury. In other words, the realm of experience, rather than that of innocence appears to be the natural habitat for Morrison's youngest protagonists in this novel. There are little girls and boys praying for beauty, recognition and love in the face of neglect, disregard and abuse. The level of violence awareness, however, differs as the youngest protagonists are alternately empowered and disempowered by their author, displaying a varying degree of self-regard, agency and rage.

For example, the protagonist in *God Help the Child*, one Lula Ann Bridewell, who reinvents herself as Bride, is yet another unloved daughter in Morrison's oeuvre whose childhood trauma leaves her unable to form

meaningful and rewarding relationships in her adult life. Unfortunately, as we learn at the very beginning of the novel, her story of rejection due to her dark skin color seems to be paradigmatic of the experiences of the black community in the U.S., rather than an isolated example. Lula Ann's grandmother was also an unwanted child, abandoned by her mother because of her darker skin color, so that the mother would continue to enjoy "white privileges" – "Almost all mulatto types and quadroons did that back in the day" (*GHTC*, 4). Like her grandmother, Lula Ann was born to "high yellow" parents, and her misfortune started only a couple of hours after birth, when her skin rapidly changed from white to "[m]idnight black. Sudanese black" (*GHTC*, 3). Accusing his wife of infidelity, Lula Ann's father abandoned the family soon enough, leaving the mother to cope with the strange situation herself, stranger still given that the mother was white and the daughter black – "I could have been the babysitter if our colors were reversed" (*GHTC*, 6), the mother intimates, unwittingly revealing the enduring racist stereotypes still deeply rooted in modern society. The mother's response to the birth of her little black girl is hysterical. She even contemplates murder, "I know I went crazy for a minute because once – just for a few seconds – I held a blanket over her face and pressed", and only moments later she has thoughts of giving her daughter "away to an orphanage someplace" (*GHTC*, 5). She is acutely aware that her daughter is bound to be doubly disenfranchised – based on both her race and sex, and that both her child and herself are likely to experience tremendous suffering in the process.

In order to detach herself from her own daughter and save some of the inherited "white privileges," she asks to be called "'Sweetness' instead of 'Mother' or 'Mama'" (*GHTC*, 6), symbolically cancelling her role as a mother, though she continues to perform it in a toxic manner. Lula Ann grows up in a loveless environment, with a mother filled with disgust,

> I always knew she didn't like touching me. I could tell. Distaste was all over her face when I was little and she had to bathe me. Rinse me, actually, after a halfhearted rub with a soapy washcloth. I used to pray she would slap my face or spank me just to feel her touch. (*GHTC*, 32)

Memories of a broken childhood, of neglect and abuse are scattered throughout the novel in the form of flashbacks, and it is not surprising that literary critics have mostly approached *God Help the Child* from the

perspective of psychoanalysis and trauma studies. In a recently published monograph, *New Critical Essays on Toni Morrison's God Help the Child: Race, Culture, and History*, edited by Knox Eaton et al. (2020), half of the volume is dedicated to trauma and healing in the novel, which remain favorite topics among Morrison scholars. This paper, however, examines another important topic, or rather a theme, which appears to shape both the novel's story and discourse to a great extent – that of childhood innocence.

2. Reframing innocence

Loss of innocence is doubtlessly a common theme in American literature, and in the works of Toni Morrison it is typically linked with racial and sexual oppression. Interestingly enough, John N. Duvall has traced it back to *The Sound and the Fury* (1929), arguing that the theme of the "inevitable fall from childhood innocence into the knowledge of racial and sexual difference", which continues to be explored in postmodern and contemporary American literature, is primarily Faulknerian (Duvall 2008: 95).[4] It is important to note that the "fall", as Duvall's argument goes, cannot be prevented – the children in these narratives are *inevitably* deprived of innocence, or childhood itself.

For Terry Otten, the myth of the fall from innocence into experience is a unifying theme in the works which Toni Morrison published in the 70's and 80's (he analyzes five novels – *The Bluest Eye, Sula, Song of Solomon, Tar Baby* and *Beloved*). In his study *The Crime of Innocence in the Fiction of Toni Morrison* (1989), Otten recognizes the author's ability to blend the racial and the universal, the African heritage and the Bible. Otten borrows the phrase "the crime of innocence" from Morrison's *Tar Baby* (1981), where one of the protagonists, Valerian Street, comes to a sudden realization that he is "guilty" of innocence, or rather of lack of knowledge, interest and ultimately of the courage to face the truth – his wife's abuse of their only son Michael. "Was there anything as loathsome as a willfully innocent man?

[4] Duvall famously argued that the first black Nobel Laureate in America was not Toni Morrison but William Faulkner, in the sense that Faulkner, possibly unwittingly, deconstructed the southern stereotypes of blackness in his fiction (2008: x). Even though Morrison denied that Faulkner had had any impact on her work, she was a Faulkner scholar who close-read his writing as she did her MA thesis on Woolf's and Faulkner's treatment of alienation.

Hardly. An innocent man is a sin before God." (*TB*, 217–218), he muses, inverting the Christian paradigm of innocence and experience. Otten notes that Morrison deconstructs the motif of the fall, creating worlds of moral ambiguity, with "gardens that oppress, sins that redeem", and argues that "[i]n all her novels the fall from innocence becomes a necessary gesture of freedom and a profound act of self-awareness." (Otten 1989: 3–5). It is rather clear that Otten's study interprets innocence as (self-)ignorance, and experience as knowledge and (self-)awareness, detecting in Morrison's early fiction elements of the romantic idea of a fortunate fall as the quest for the self. But Morrison's novels often explore the value of innocence in various stages of a person's development, including childhood, which complicates the idea of "innocence as guilt" and the fall into experience as a necessary and fortunate identity quest.

The meaning and value of innocence remain rather abstract and elusive, though. In a series of papers on the child figure[5] and her book *The Importance of Being Innocent: Why we worry about children* (2011), Joanne Faulkner examines and re-evaluates the idea of childhood innocence. Faulkner starts with etymology, noting that "'innocence' derives from the Latin *innocere*: 'to do no harm'", and wonders about the power of such a negative definition in the Western imagination: "How could this negatively defined, insipid concept occupy such a prominent place in the hierarchy of value? And what must a culture have suffered or have feared suffering – what vulnerability must it feel – to so esteem the condition of doing no harm?" (Faulkner 2011: 7). In another study, she explains that the concept stems from the belief in the "natural innocence" of little children, which in turn arises from a "*deficit* of experience" (Faulkner 2013: 127-8; italics J.F.). What is more, as Joanne Faulkner elaborates, childhood innocence has come to be synonymous with childhood, and as such is often fetishized in Western society (2013: 128).

Toni Morrison's fiction, however, resists such presumptions of childhood innocence, primarily due to the stark contrast between what is considered a "typical", or "Western" perception of childhood, and the black experience. Whereas the privileged part of society attempts to shelter and "overprotect" the young, the underprivileged are ushered into the world

[5] See, for example: Faulkner, Joanne. "The Innocence Fetish: The commodification and sexualisation of children in the media and popular culture" (2010: 106-17) and "Vulnerability of 'Virtual' Subjects: Childhood, Memory, and Crisis in the Cultural Value of Innocence." (2013: 127-147).

of "experience" early in life – through poverty, child labor, racism, sexual abuse, etc. The young protagonists in Morrison's novels do not conform to the traditional discourses of childhood innocence for the very same reason, and as the paper will show, it hardly comes as "natural" for them in either sense of the term as a lack of experience, or "doing no harm."

In fact, the reader learns that the sufferings of little Lula Ann are not without consequences – or, as Jasmin Wilson has argued, she is "both victim and victimizer" (Wilson 2020: 30), in that she both endures abuse, and causes a significant amount of suffering in others. In order to get Sweetness to be "kind of motherlike" (*GHTC*, 32), Lula Ann wrongly accuses one Sofia Huxley, a twenty-year-old schoolteacher, of child molestation. While Lula Ann wins her mother's smile, and gets to hold her hand on this account (*GHTC*, 30-32), Sofia is given a twenty-five-to-life sentence, denounced by society as "the lady monster" (*GHTC*, 14), and abandoned by her own parents as "the filthy freak" (*GHTC*, 16). As she later remembers, "[i]n their world of God and Devil no innocent person is sentenced to prison." (*GHTC*, 68). Sofia, however, is unjustly sent to Decagon Women's Correctional Center, the prison which holds "evil women", the "sinful women committing bloody female crimes" (*GHTC*, 13), as it is sarcastically described by Morrison, whose vocal support of women's rights and deep distrust of the formal justice system was well-known.[6]

Indeed, the justice system in *God Help the Child* is deeply flawed, especially in its failure to protect the youngest and most vulnerable members of the population. While innocent Sofia is doing her time in Decagon, a real child predator, Mr. Humboldt, also known as "the nicest man in the world" (*GHTC*, 118) is at large, sexually abusing, maiming, and killing young boys in the neighborhood. He is not alone as we also encounter many others, such as Mr. Leigh, the landlord Lula Ann catches forcing himself on a young boy, and whom Sweetness refuses to report on, for fear of eviction. One character (Brooklyn) manages to escape her uncle's abuse, while yet another (Hannah) is unable to escape the sexual advances of her own father. Rain, the girl molested by her mother's customers, is rescued by a hippie couple, Evelyn and Steve, but Molly, a disabled daughter with "the loveliest blue eyes in the world" (*GHTC*, 67) is smothered by her mother Julie, Sofia's cellmate. Child abusers with and without names lurk

[6] What we also learn in the novel is that the prison is primarily perceived as a private business, providing work for the locals, "Lucky for the state, crime does pay" (*GHTC,* 13).

everywhere in the novel, and Mar Gallego has rightly noticed that "[t]he abundance of pedophilic episodes serves to highlight how contemporary society, far from protecting its young people, especially but not exclusively black girls and boys, exposes them to damage and corruption from a very early age." (Gallego 2020: 54). The reader reaches the conclusion early on that there is hardly anything "innate" about childhood innocence in *God Help the Child*. Toni Morrison reframes the discourse of childhood purity, representing corruption as "natural", and innocence as a site of longing.

3. Corruption of innocence

From the absence of touch and severe neglect to the touch of a pedophile, infanticide and murder, Morrison's novel explores the endemic corruption of innocence both literally and symbolically. On the one hand, stolen innocence is an important topic in a book populated with child molesters and abusers, but at the same time it is also a powerful symbol of the corruption of the innocence of a nation. The problems, however, begin on the level of the nuclear family, as Morrison clearly shows in her novel. As the author noted in an interview for *Mother Jones*, "Even when you think you've had a wonderful childhood, I suspect there's always some little drop of poison – that you can get rid of, but sometimes it just trails in the blood and it determines how you react to other people and how you think." (Oatman 2015). While the "drops of poison" in *God Help the Child* are by no means little, causing major childhood traumas, Lula Ann describes her problematic childhood and the corruption of innocence using precisely the same metaphor, "So I let the name-calling, the bullying travel like poison, like lethal viruses through my veins, with no antibiotic available." (*GHTC*, 57). There is no antibiotic for Lula Ann, and a number of other little black girls, we are to infer, simply because it has not been provided by the family and the community in general. On the contrary, Lula Ann learns from her parents – the absent father and the disinterested mother – that she is worthless, so obedience becomes her "only survival choice" (*GHTC*, 32). "And I was good at it. I behaved and behaved and behaved." (*GHTC*, 32), Lula Ann remembers, revealing the gradual but steady process of the internalization of the poisonous racist rhetoric and behavior.

There are numerous other examples in the novel where Toni Morrison illustrates how racism plants its roots in children as the most fragile members of society. Scattered all over the novel are Sweetness's monologues in which she unwittingly explains the mechanism behind the corruption of innocence, primarily among young children:

> I had to be strict, very strict. Lula Ann needed to learn how to behave, how to keep her head down and not to make trouble. I don't care how many times she changes her name. Her color is a cross she will always carry. But it's not my fault. It's not my fault. It's not. (*GHTC*, 7)

Or,

> See if I hadn't trained Lula Ann properly she wouldn't have known to always cross the street and avoid white boys. But the lessons I taught her paid off because in the end she made me proud as a peacock. (*GHTC*, 41–42)

The two quotes reveal a series of processes through which a child is drawn into a downward spiral of low self-esteem, usually as the result of a very strict training routine. Unsurprisingly, the practice of teaching and acquiring self-hatred appears to be largely unconscious, as Sweetness is hardly aware of the effects of her "poisonous" behavior on her dutiful daughter. While she maintains that she is not to blame for giving birth to (yet another) *black* child – and almost apologizes for it (because Lula Ann will carry her "cross" forever) – Sweetness remains oblivious of her own role in her daughter's resulting traumas. To justify her parenting methods, Sweetness further explains that she had to withhold her love and tenderness in order to "protect" her daughter, who "didn't know the world", and prepare her for "a world where you could be sent to a juvenile lockup for talking back or fighting in school, a world where you'd be the last one hired and the first one fired" (*GHTC*, 41). In other words, Sweetness implies that the guilt she (sometimes) feels is shared, that it is communal rather than individual. Interestingly enough, the novel itself supports her point in more ways than one. From chapter to chapter, Morrison addresses the systematic and endemic nature of the corruption of the young through the sexist and racist language and behavior of the community. Thus, Mr. Leigh, the rapist, calls the six-year-old Lula Ann a "nigger cunt", words she had never heard before, "but the hate and revulsion in them didn't need

definition", as the girl later remembers (*GHTC*, 55–56). Similarly, when in a parallel story in the novel a black boy called Adam goes missing one day, the police first search the parents' house and check if the father has a police record, then drop the search. In what appears to be a tribute to the "Black Lives Matter" movement, the narrator says ironically, "Another black boy gone. So?" (*GHTC*, 114). Adam's brothers and sisters learn that to the authorities their lives may not be as important as those of some other, more privileged children. Finally, Toni Morrison herself explained in an interview that, "unlovely as she is [...] there is truth in all of what Sweetness says", since "there is a hierarchy of good and bad and who gets to belong and have worth and who doesn't" (Chen 2016). Seen in this light, Sweetness's parental advice appears almost like a set of survival strategies.

Laying the blame elsewhere – on society, her ancestors, her husband, and the school –Sweetness opens and closes the novel with her self-justifying monologues. In fact, the novel begins with the words, "It's not my fault", and Sweetness will repeat this sentence *ad nauseam* in various formulations (as many as four times within the space of the first three pages). Despite maintaining her blamelessness, Sweetness can hardly be exonerated as she is clearly guilty of the "crime of innocence" as understood by Terry Otten. Hers is the case of the psychological mechanism of denial, which the reader will witness, to a certain extent, in almost all adult characters in the novel. As they give their testimonies one after another, they repeatedly try to justify their choices, unable to prevent the "little drop of poison" from spreading through their system, incapable of leaving the vicious circle of toxic behavior. In this sense we could safely say that the novel is also about the illusions of innocence – of particular characters, as well as of the whole nation. The novel, however, shows that awareness of guilt rather than insistence on blamelessness is the first step towards reclaiming both the personal and the national identity, and that the discourse of innocence can be rather limiting in this respect, though not always criminalized, as it will be argued in this essay.

4. From innocence to experience and back

Equipped with no tools whatsoever for building a sense of self-esteem, Lula Ann needs to seek what Morrison famously termed the "source of self-regard" elsewhere – primarily in women's magazines, as the novel shows. Refusing to repeat the mistakes made by her fictional predecessor Pecola, Lula Ann decides to fight her childhood demons, and upon coming of age she reinvents – and redesigns herself. After changing her name from Lula Ann Bridewell to the memorable monosyllabic Bride, she hires a "total person designer" who teaches her to celebrate the color of her skin with mottos such as, "Black is the new black" and "Black sells" (*GHTC*, 36). To accentuate her blackness further, Bride is to wear only white clothes, and no makeup or jewelry, apart from the little pearl earrings. In short, the new fashion industry teaches her to love the skin her mother hated and dreaded, so that at the time the novel begins the sight of Bride makes people think of "Something classy. Bonbons. Hand-dipped", and she looks "like a panther in snow" to the excitement of men, who come to adore her (*GHTC*, 33, 36).

Fumbling through the world of experience, Bride embraces the hookup culture, enjoying casual encounters with random men, until she starts to "go steady" with one of them, Booker Starbern. When he leaves her after six months saying, "You not the woman I want", she is determined to find him and discover the reasons – not only for his decision, but also for her "sassy" answer, "Neither am I" (*GHTC*, 8). She embarks on a six-week-long journey, which proves to be a quest for self-discovery. The journey itself is filled with the most improbable episodes, which have been described by Morrison scholars alternately as elements of magical realism and Bride's hallucinations.

As soon as Bride sets off on her journey, her Jaguar crashes into "what must have been the world's first and biggest tree" (*GHTC*, 82), leaving her in the middle of the woods to be tended by a hippie couple, Steve and Evelyn, and their informally adopted daughter Rain, an unfortunate little girl of undetermined age and race. During her stay, Bride feels that her body is shrinking in size and that she is gradually reverting to a little girl, possibly Rain, whose jeans she gets to wear at one point. What is more, after breaking an ankle in a car accident, Bride is confined to bed, so Steve and Evelyn have to take care of her like a baby. The first in a series of inexplicable bodily transformations occurs immediately after Booker

leaves her. As Bride is preparing to go to a party, she notices that her ears are no longer pierced. Instead, she now has "virgin earlobes [...] smooth as a baby's thumb" (*GHTC*, 51). Soon after discovering her altered earlobes, she notices the absence of her armpit and pubic hair. Around the same time, she feels that her body has shrunk from size 4 to size 2, she notices that her chest is flat and that her menstrual periods have stopped. This is the point when Bride starts to believe that "the body changes began not simply after [Booker] left, but because he left" (*GHTC*, 94). She proves to be right in the end, to a certain extent. In a fairy-tale ending Bride learns that she is pregnant with Booker's child, which explains some of the bodily transformations, like the absence of menstruation:

> A child. New life. Immune to evil or illness, protected from kidnap, beatings, rape, racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing, abandonment. Error-free. All goodness. Minus wrath.
> So they believe. (*GHTC*, 175)

In short, in the end Bride and Booker are granted the opportunity to heal old wounds and renew their relationship – through a child – a symbol of purity and unconditional love which is the only possible answer to trauma in Morrison's oeuvre.[7] In general, a child is typically perceived as "innocent of error and blame" (Faulkner 2013: 137), or "error-free" and "all goodness", in the words of Morrison's narrator, given that the child is nurtured in a safe environment which fosters healthy growth and feelings of confidence and security. Toni Morrison, however, makes sure to emphasize that this is only a fantasy as she closes the novel with Sweetness's sarcastic comment about "how the world is, how it works and how it changes when you are a parent" (*GHTC*, 178). Raising a child in the contemporary world is a serious challenge, and even more so if the child is black, or a girl, or both, in which case she is likely to experience "racism, insult, hurt, self-loathing", if not all of the above, possibly in her earliest youth. Among other issues, Morrison thoroughly questions the concept of childhood innocence through comments made by both the narrator and Sweetness: Does it come naturally or is it a construct? *Whose* childhood is immune to corruption and abuse? Can resistance be (un)built? Where does the childhood innocence narrative come from and what is its impact? What is its value?

[7] See, for example, Wyatt 2017: 171–87.

The novel makes it rather obvious that the innocence narrative excludes a large portion of the black community. As a black author, Toni Morrison is possibly arguing that a black child is everything but resistant to "evil or illness" and, contrary to the narrator's ironic remark, full of wrath. The novel itself can be understood as an outlet for the sound and the fury of the traumatized: it is no wonder the protagonists, Bride and Booker, shout, scream and hit each other toward the end of the novel (*GHTC*, 151–154).

Viewed in this light, childhood innocence can indeed be seen as a construct, as suggested by Joanne Faulkner (2013: 130),[8] or a master narrative, as Toni Morrison might have defined it. In contemporary society it certainly is a fantasy for the vast majority of children who live in dire circumstances, and one whose origin should be explored in order to understand its meaning and impact. In this sense it may be worth noting that Morrison's fairy-tale narrative with elements of myth[9] which analyzes the corruption of "all goodness" is in fact framed by the biblical story about the innocence and humility of little children. The novel opens with a New Testament epigraph about children, announcing one of the novel's main themes:

> Suffer little children to come unto me,
> And forbid them not (Luke 18: 16)

Or, as rendered in the 4th edition of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version*, "Let the little children come to me, and do not

[8] Faulkner argues that "[t]he rise of the figure of the innocent child as a premium marker of cultural value – and reification of adults' pasts – thus mirrors a growing uneasiness about cultural memory" (2013: 132).

[9] The novel also lends itself to analysis according to the Jungian archetypes of child hero and child God, which share the central narrative of "miraculous birth and the adversities of early childhood." As Jung further explains, "The god is by nature wholly supernatural; the hero's nature is human but raised to the limit of the supernatural – he is 'semi-divine.'" (Jung 1980: 165). The character of Lula Ann/Bride approaches these archetypes – for Sweetness the rapid change of her daughter's skin color at birth is inexplicable, almost supernatural, and Bride does not understand the transformation of her body until the very end of the novel. Furthermore, all the stories about suffering children in *God Help the Child* can be interpreted as a metaphor for the process of individuation, in line with Jung's argument that "the various 'child'-fates may be regarded as illustrating the kind of psychic events that occur in the entelechy or genesis of the 'self.'" (Jung 1980: 166).

stop them."[10] Since the word "suffer", which here means "let", "allow", has assumed a wholly different meaning over the centuries, Morrison's epigraph sets a dismal tone to the novel. Indeed, *God Help the Child* is a novel populated by little children who endure agony because of severe neglect, rejection and racial and sexual abuse, while only few of them manage to heal their wounds and overcome their childhood trauma. The promise of the Kingdom of God, which according to the Bible belongs to children, seems far-fetched and unattainable for most of Morrison's characters. It is as early as in the opening chapter that we learn that the real world, unlike the Bible, operates with double standards, and that the underprivileged are likely to remain so. In an attempt to justify her choice to distance Lula Ann from herself, Sweetness tells her mother's story of two Bibles – strangely enough, on their wedding day, her mother and father "had to put their hands on the one reserved for Negroes". "The Bible! Can you beat it?" (*GHTC*, 4), Sweetness exclaims.

Furthermore, the epigraph also serves as a reminder of the general idea of children and childhood in The New Testament, as the reader may remember the continuation of Morrison's epigraph, which is of equal interest for this topic. Below are the two variations, from the Gospels of Luke, Mark and Matthew respectively:

> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God *as a little child* will never enter it. (*New Oxford Annotated Bible,* Luke: 18: 17; Mark 10:15; my italics)

Or:

> Truly I tell you, unless you change and *become like children*, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (*New Oxford Annotated Bible,* Matthew 18:3; my italics)

Even though Bible scholars agree that this excerpt from the gospels is "[n]ot an idealization of childhood", but that it "contrasts humility with self-righteousness and self-satisfaction" (Coogan 2010: 1810, 1865), Christ's warning that one should take the position of the child, assume a child's perspective, or, according to Matthew, "change and become like children" in order to enter the kingdom of heaven is generally understood in the

[10] All subsequent quotes from the New Testament will be given from the same edition of *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*.

sense of opening and purifying one's mind and heart in order to achieve a state of innocence which comes naturally to children, as the story goes.

The message is, however, taken quite literally in the novel. In her quest for selfhood, Bride first has to become a little girl – both psychologically, and – as she believes – somatically, undergoing the already mentioned series of bodily transformations.[11] The first occurs early on, when Bride is given a severe beating by Sofia Huxley on parole, leaving her with a swollen, disfigured face. This is probably the first instance of Bride's return to the "ugly" black girl with "the skin [her mother] hated" (*GHTC*, 32). Then come the inexplicable changes: the altered earlobes, loss of armpit and pubic hair, flat chest and the general shrinkage from a size 4 to a size 2. In fact, it is at the moment Bride notices her "virgin earlobes" (*GHTC*, 51) that she returns to the age of innocence, the time before she "testified against the Monster" (*GHTC*, 50) and wrongfully accused Sofia of child molestation. As a reward for her court performance, Sweetness has Lula Ann's ears pierced and buys her a pair of (fake) gold hoops. As already mentioned, the reverse bodily transformation from a woman to a little girl is completed when she breaks her ankle, which renders her immobile and vulnerable like a baby that needs to be taken care of. The accident itself bears a Biblical resonance – Bride's car crashes into "the world's first and biggest tree", which is a direct allusion to the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – a symbol of rebirth as well as that of original sin and loss of innocence.[12]

Approached from this angle, Toni Morrison's *God Help the Child* can be viewed as a novel about desired innocence. Bride's efforts to apologise to Sofia reveal precisely this longing for the age of innocence, the time before she gave false testimony against her teacher. Guilt-ridden, Bride plans her trip to Decagon Correctional Center for a whole year, saves the hefty sum

[11] While Jean Wyatt claims that "Bride's transformation into the body of a little black girl (is) a corporeal representation of her temptation to remain the child victim of trauma" (Wyatt 2017: 184), Justine Tally argues that "it may not be "corporeal" at all in that Bride is the only one who notices the changes in her body" (Tally 2020: 133). Moreover, as Tally reminds us, Toni Morrison herself mentioned in an interview that Bride is returning "to that despised little black girl her mother didn't even like" "in her brain" (qtd. in Tally 2020: 133).

[12] According to Joanne Faulkner, the biblical story about the loss of innocence "defines human being". As she explains in *The Importance of Being Innocent*, "In Western mythology, life begins innocent and wants to return to innocence, which thereby summarises all that is culturally valuable." (Faulkner 2011: 7).

of five thousand dollars and buys a three-thousand-dollar Continental Airlines gift certificate, "all of which could take her anywhere. Comfort her, anyway;" (*GHTC*, 12). However, Sofia's violent response to Bride's attempt to make amends, and Booker's decision to leave her for forgiving someone he perceives as a pedophile, like the predator who murdered his brother, make Bride's efforts to regain some of the lost innocence all the more difficult.

The novel, however, shows that while it is impossible to retrieve childhood innocence, attempts can be made to build the coveted "immun[ity] to evil or illness" by striving for a higher state of innocence and purity of mind, or innocence with a difference. After all, as Toni Morrison concluded in one of her last interviews for *The Guardian*, "I just think goodness is more interesting" (Chen 2016). Goodness is also more demanding, as, according to Morrison, "[y]ou have to be an adult to consciously, deliberately be good – and that's complicated." (*Ibid.*).[13] In this sense, Bride's return to childhood is not only physical and psychological, but also symbolic. When Booker tells Bride that she is "[n]ot the woman" he wants, and she clumsily answers "Neither am I", she may be implying that she is still the little Lula Ann, unable to take full responsibility for her own actions, but that she might feel ready to try to make substantial changes in her life, rather than merely cosmetic ones. In this sense, her journey is not only that of self-discovery, but also a quest for a different woman, the one she would rather be. It is clear from the novel, however, that the process of discovering a better self may begin only after all illusions of innocence and self-justification have been dismissed, such as "I wasn't the only witness" or "I was only eight years old" (*GHTC*, 30). It is only when Bride exclaims, "I lied! I lied! I lied! She was innocent. I helped convict her but she didn't do any of that." (*GHTC*, 153) that she possibly defeats her childhood demons. As she later muses, "Having confessed Lula Ann's sins she felt newly born. No longer forced to relive, no, outlive the disdain of her mother and the abandonment of her father" (*GHTC*, 162). Even though her childhood traumas are by no means healed, Bride's confession, through which she appears to be absolved from the "crime of innocence", marks the beginning of the recovery process.

[13] Indeed, Jung pointed to the symbolic meaning of the archetypal narratives about suffering children, which "try to show how precarious is the psychic possibility of wholeness" and reveal "the enormous difficulties to be met in attaining this "highest good" (Jung 1980: 166).

Like in her earlier novels, Morrison is careful to point to the potentially damaging and limiting effects of the discourse of (childhood) innocence. Even though Bride and Booker manage to renew their relationship once they have acknowledged their past mistakes and embraced humility and honesty, Booker's aunt Queen has her own doubts about the future of their relationship,

> They will blow it, she thought. Each will cling to a sad little story of hurt and sorrow – some long-ago trouble and pain life dumped on their pure and innocent selves. And each one will rewrite that story forever, knowing the plot, guessing the theme, inventing its meaning and dismissing its origin. (*GHTC*, 158)

Queen's comments, just like those made by Sweetness, ironize the discourse of innocence, and prevent the novel from slipping into sentimentality. These two unlikeable but rather experienced women are not only saying that the idealization and oversentimentalization of one's childhood as the age of innocence have little basis in everyday black experience, but also that the innocence narrative is possibly confining, as it cancels agency and, as a result, a sense of responsibility. Neither Bride nor Booker are able to continue and possibly complete the process of individuation until they have acknowledged their past mistakes, as illusions of innocence perpetuate both the trauma and the accumulated anger.

5. Conclusion

It is probably no coincidence that Toni Morrison's first and last novel tackle the primordial image of the child, as "both beginning and end, an initial and a terminal creature" (Jung 1980: 178), and in *God Help the Child*, for the first time, there is a possibility that the suffering child will eventually come out triumphant. Indeed, as Morrison re-negotiates the cultural value of childhood innocence on the thematic, rhetorical and symbolic level of the novel, revealing its constructed and potentially limiting character, she invests her most vulnerable characters with power and agency. While the Bible underlines the humility of little children, Morrison's novel shifts the focus onto children's rage and resilience. In this novel about the abject neglect of the young and various forms of child abuse, systematically

performed by their parents, mentors and the community as a whole, childhood innocence appears to be all but a fantasy product. Rather than suffering from a "deficit", Morrison's youngest characters are confronted with a certain surplus of experience, which they are ill-equipped to handle. Yet, the right question is not whether innocence is natural or sustainable (the novel clearly shows that it is not), but whether it should be pursued. Innocence is overvalued, Morrison's children seem to yell at the reader – building immunity to corruption and abuse in earliest childhood appears to be a more important task.

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