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Contact, Contamination, Contagion in English Linguistic, Literary and Cultural Communication

Pandemic and Linguistic Contamination in News Reporting: Social and Communicative Aspects

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Abstract
The spread of Coronavirus has contaminated people's vocabulary. The first part of my work aims to analyse the new expressions used in British news reporting. The discussion will thereafter center on the employment of neologisms and new phrases in less formal contexts. I will accordingly dwell on the relationship between the formal and informal registers of the Coronavirus-related vocabulary by taking into account Foucault's (1972: 96-105) theory of repeatable materiality, and Johnstone's (2008: 133-34) theory of indexicality. Finally, I will look into some Coronavirus-related medical lexicon (Thorne 2020). The second part will concentrate on the social aspects of the pandemic on a global scale. It will investigate the concept of space and distance by considering Lotman and Uspenskij's (1975: 155-65) space theories. This discussion will go on to highlight the social inequalities brought about by the pandemic (Tsuda 2013: 445-56), and to ultimately point out how social changes have generated a space-cultural entropy (Shannon 1948: 381-82) and, therefore, social and linguistic chaos.

1. Introduction

The Coronavirus outbreak has abruptly affected our lives since its spillover from China. As the weeks go by, it has forced governments all over the world to face unforeseen challenges and has raised unprecedented problems to deal with. Economy, education, transport and communication have been profoundly hindered by the pandemic (Chomsky 2020: 12-25). In addition to the changes that different aspects of our lives have undergone, people have been compelled to rearrange their own ways of life and have adopted new words in their everyday language. As a result of the information released by TV news and newspapers, people have become more and more familiar with medical expressions, as well as with issues on the risks connected with the spread of the Coronavirus. More specifically, with regards to the British context, the news and reports about the virus have resulted in a surge of contamination of the English language with words and expressions, which have affected people's behaviour and actions. Although as we know, this phenomenon has actually occurred all over the world, due to the introduction of Coronavirus-related vocabulary into different languages, I will presently be considering the British linguistic context. Not only has English been influenced by the language of the pandemic, but verbal and non-verbal language has changed along with social behaviour (Žižek 2020: 5-7).

Briefly turning our attention to the global context, Coronavirus-related expressions have redesigned people's living spaces and their daily relationships. Although some terms have not been translated into different languages and have maintained their English use, like *lockdown* and *clusters*, a great many words, translated into other languages, have somehow influenced people's lives all over the world, including their daily routine and priorities. As a result of TV reports from

healthcare authorities about daily statistics of new infections and victims, people have now become used to thinking of the quality of their own lives in terms of figures and quantities: the fewer the victims and contagion, the better their lives are. The main channels of transmission of medical lexicon and issues were thus represented by the media.

2. Aims

Against this background, the first part of this article aims to examine the new Coronavirus-related English vocabulary employed in British news broadcasting. It will discuss the usage of lexical patterns, collocates and wording in some of the BBC reporting, with the purpose of pinpointing the most frequent lexis which has been recently introduced into English. Besides the formal register of British news broadcasting, the discussion will centre on Coronavirus-related vocabulary employed in informal registers. It will, therefore, dwell on the most frequent expressions used in news broadcasting and on less formal expressions used by networking communities. While there have been a certain number of articles on this matter (De Marco 2020; Kreuz 2020; Russell 2020; Skapinker 2020)[1], insightful investigations into this new vocabulary have been fewer, and often resort to sentence samples, along with general considerations on the coinage of new phrases and words in the English language. The relationship between the formal and informal registers of the Coronavirus-related words and expressions will be analysed by considering Foucault's (1972: 96-105) theory of repeatable materiality, which studies different contexts of a message, and Johnstone's (2008: 133-34) theory of indexicality concerning the social meanings of expressions. After a short illustration of the most common medical lexicon introduced into the British context by the pandemic (Thorne 2020), the work will focus on the connection between certain expressions and the idea of distancing, a paradigmatic concept which permeates the reporters' sentences. The repeated use in English of lexis referring to the pandemic has exerted remarkable influences on socio-cultural aspects as well, especially in the worst hit countries.

Owing to the serious consequences caused by the outbreak in the world, I will, therefore, shift the analysis, after examining the Coronavirus-related vocabulary in the British linguistic context, to a wider scope through a cultural and social perspective, so as to investigate how the language of the pandemic has been influencing proxemics in communication and common social distances. By highlighting the changes brought about by the outbreak in the English language, this study will show how these changes have led, on a more general scale, to mark social and physical distances. In this regard, the discussion will conjure up the image of space, which is being mentioned often and reconceived of in contrast to the spread of the virus. Taking as a starting point the social rule of *noli me tangere* (Žižek 2020: 5-18) and the fear of physical and material contacts it ensues from, the work will take into account Lotman's theories on the relationship between two different cultural spaces (Lotman and Uspenskij 1975: 155-65), in order to examine the extent to which the vocabulary of the pandemic has impacted people's perception of spaces and distances. Another issue that has emerged with the public health emergency is characterised by social inequalities. It appears that the new physical distances, despite being offset by virtual communication, have emphasised social differences. In light of Lotman's theories on the different spaces represented by unequal socio-cultural entities, the work will look into the new boundaries which the pandemic has created, in particular with regard to the opposition between positive and

[1] All online articles cited in this work do not include the indication of page numbers.

negative spaces, good and bad spaces (Wodak 2008: 62). I will thus discuss, on a wider scale, the effects of amplified distances on social differences.

In addition to studying the vocabulary of news broadcasting and reporting to illustrate the influence of linguistic contamination on people's socio-cultural aspects (Tsuda 2013: 445-456), my final and more general aim is to show how such contamination has paved the way, in the international context, for an unpredictable space-cultural entropy in the globalised era. More specifically, I set out to address the issue of how the language introduced by the Coronavirus outbreak has created social division and fragmentation, characterised by the entropy of communication and daily interactions. Entropy, a physical concept which refers to the chaotic state of a system, *e.g.* the universe (Shannon 1948: 381-82), stands for the chaos generated by the pandemic both at a social and a linguistic level. As to the former aspect, it is a fact that governments all over the world have been disoriented and the ever-changing measures adopted to reduce infections have been confusing social behaviour. As to the latter, I will underline that the linguistic entropy has been amplified by the fact that some English Coronavirus-related terms are not being used in the same way by experts and non-experts, scientists and common people, owing to changes in their traditional meanings.

To sum up, this study will firstly examine the linguistic changes generated by the pandemic in the British linguistic context and will then expand on the socio-cultural impact of such changes on a wider scale. By discussing the revised concepts of space, distancing and isolation, it will shift to the entropic dynamics brought into being by language and communication during the Coronavirus outbreak, in order to highlight the state of chaos and uncertainty that the changing meanings of certain Coronavirus-related terms have caused.

3. Coronavirus-related collocations and lexis

The analysis takes the BBC reporting of the first months of 2020 as a starting point, when the risk of Coronavirus spreading in Europe was believed to be low. In the BBC news broadcasting of January 20, 2020, the reporter announces the following:

> China is battling a new and rapidly spreading respiratory virus. The number of people infected has tripled to more than two-hundred and President Jinping says it needs to be resolutely contained. […] The virus first appeared in Wuhan in December. The authorities say it passed to humans from animals […]" (New China Virus, BBC News, 2020)[2].

Prior to the use of the new linguistic expressions associated with the pandemic, the geographical location of the outbreak stands out in most of the first TV news on the Coronavirus; the city of Wuhan is identified as the epicentre of the pandemic. As the weeks went by and the spread of the virus all over the world was thought to be inevitable, the geography of the virus itself became broader and confusing, since certain bordering areas were differently hit by the pandemic. As the geographical location of the virus was expanding, the unnamed virus, the Chinese virus, was known as Coronavirus (*corona* means *crown*, owing to the spikes on its spherical surface, which give it a crown-like shape). From the geography of the Coronavirus, the reporting obviously zeroed in on specific vocabulary which expressed the main issues generated

[2] Due to lack of punctuation in the reporters' comments quoted from the footage, I have punctuated all reporters' quotations in this essay.

by the virus. Shifting to the BBC reporting, the BBC news of 9 March, 2020, announces the spread of the virus in Italy, the first epicentre in Europe:

> […] within the past couple of hours the Italian Prime Minister has announced restrictions on movement across the entire country, in the most drastic response yet to the spread of Coronavirus. The measures include a ban on all public gatherings, and all schools and universities will be closed. […] Italy […] is facing the most dramatic restrictions it has faced in peacetime. Two days since much of the north was quarantined, Coronavirus cases continued to soar and so now the restrictions have been extended to cover the whole of the country (Coronavirus: Italy extends strict measure, BBC News, 2020).

The BBC reporting of March 10, 2020, says:

> […] we start tonight with the unprecedented measures being enforced right across Italy to try to limit the spread of Coronavirus. […] Italy faces growing isolation with thousands of flights cancelled and stringent controls on its borders with Austria and Slovenia. Public gatherings, including sports events, are banned and schools and universities are closed. Italians are being advised simply to stay at home (Coronavirus: Italy in lockdown, BBC News, 2020).

The most frequent collocates and single words used in the BBC reporters' comments quoted above are battling, spreading, infected, tripled, contained (BBC reporting of 20 January 2020); restrictions, drastic response, spread of Coronavirus, measures, ban, public gatherings, dramatic restrictions, quarantined, soar, extended (BBC reporting of 9 March 2020); unprecedented measures, limit, spread of Coronavirus, growing isolation, stringent controls, borders, public gatherings, banned stay at home (BBC reporting of 10 March 2020). The adjectives used in the BBC reporting, as well as the verbs "spread", "limit", "soar", emphasise the tremendous impact of the pandemic on a specific geographical area, Northern Italy. A number of formal expressions consist of single nouns and collocates, the latter composed by the structure adjective + noun. The repetition over time of these expressions in the reporting has made common numerous combinations of words, whose formal register and space-time associations have amplified the perception of the infective power of the virus. The examples of single words and collocates represent the most frequent official vocabulary employed in the news broadcasting of BBC reporters (Montgomery 2017: 27). The formal use of such lexis is also characterised by the presence of Latinisms, like "stringent", "unprecedented", "limit", "extended", "restrictions", "contained".

In addition to the peculiar language used in BBC news broadcasting, the Coronavirus-related words and expressions increase if non-newspaper language is taken into account. Unlike the formal register used by BBC reporters, the informal vocabulary of online sources and social networks, like Facebook and Instagram, often merges words of the linguistic register of technology to form Coronavirus-related neologisms. Some of them are (Lawson 2020) covidiot, covideo party, covexit, WFH, quaranteams, blursday, zoombombing, elbow bump, stockpile, panic buy, hamster, swab. Although the newly-coined words are mainly used by non-experts, such neologisms may be hardly known by certain age groups of people. Looking into the meanings of the terms listed above, Lawson (2020) claims that "covidiot" is "[…] someone ignoring public health device […]", "covideo party" is an online party by means of Zoom or Skype, and "covexit" is "[…] the strategy for exiting lockdown […]". Moreover, the acronym

"WFH" stands for "[…] working from home […]" and "quaranteams" are "[…] online teams created during lockdown […]".

As to time-related terms, "Blursday" is, to concur again with Lawson (2020), an undefined day of the week, as a consequence of the blurring effect of lockdown on people's perception of time, and "zoombombing" means "[…] hijacking a Zoom videocall […]". Moreover, "elbow bump" is an informal way of greeting somebody by having two people bump their elbows (this way of greeting has inevitably been extended to formal contexts too). "Stockpile", "panic buy" and "hamster" refer to people's food hoarding, and "swab", mainly used in medicine, has maintained its literal meaning and is now largely mentioned in everyday surveys and reports to examine the trend of the pandemic curve (*Coronavirus Vocabulary* 2020; *New Coronavirus Oxford English Dictionary Words* 2020). The diffusion of informal Coronavirus-related vocabulary clearly ensued from the media usage of formal words and expressions to describe the pandemic. Although the two lexical categories (formal and informal) belong to two different registers, the informal words and expressions are often semantically and conceptually connected with the more formal ones employed by news reporting. "Quaranteams" is evidently a derivative of "quarantine", and other neologisms indirectly recall some of the words used by BBC reporters, like "covexit", which alludes to the need to work out a strategy to lift "restrictions" and to avoid "growing isolation", and "WFH (working from home)", which implies that people must "stay at home". Many neologisms originated by blending words in specific registers of the British linguistic context. In light of this, the diffusion of specific terms during the pandemic is obviously determined by the daily repetition of such terms through the media.

In his analysis of statements and of the enunciative function, Foucault (1972: 96-105) centres his discourse on the influence that different contextualization exerts on a statement or a message. With respect to this, he explains the concept of repeatable materiality, which

> […] reveals the statement as a specific and paradoxical object, but also as one of those objects that men produce, manipulate, use, transform, exchange, combine, decompose and recompose, and possibly destroy. Instead of being something said once and for all […] the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced (Foucault 1972: 105).

Likewise, the Coronavirus-related neologisms used in informal statements and communication result from the repetition through the media of existing words, which have rapidly entered the everyday linguistic context. The new expressions and collocates introduced into people's informal communication from a formal source, like news broadcasting, have entered different social strata, and have been coined by means of linguistic interferences of the everyday register. The modification of formal lexis has been conditioned by the needs to adapt certain semantic peculiarities to less formal linguistic environments. To concur with Foucault (1972: 105) once again, each expression "[…] circulates, […], serves or resists various interests, […], and becomes a theme of appropriation […]". The audience's appropriation of certain words concerning the pandemic has generated numerous neologisms, which address different contexts through manifold semantic overtones. The need to express specific meanings and contexts has paved the way for new connotative fields in non-newspaper language.

Unlike the words and lexical patterns used in the press register, whose literal meaning makes communication clear and straightforward, the neologisms used by non-experts in informal

contexts have originated from the connotative overtones of the words or compounds they derive from. As a consequence of their multiple semantic value, whose aim is to describe new specific social contexts, the neologisms have resulted from the linguistic needs of such contexts. It is a fact that the meanings of words are often conditioned by social and cultural processes and, therefore, undergo semantic recontextualization. Similarly, by considering the relationship between text and context, Johnstone (2008: 133) defines the concept of indexicality in light of the influences exerted by the environment on the meanings of words. According to her, "An indexical form is a linguistic form or action which, in addition to or instead of contributing to the denotational or 'literal' meaning, points to and sometimes helps establish 'social' meaning". The indexical, figurative use of many expressions during the outbreak accounts for the impact of the public health emergency on everyday language, along with the remarkable influence of technology and of networking communication on the Coronavirus-related lexis. Thus, the non-formal vocabulary is mainly composed by blending words, like "quaranteams" and "Blursday", semantic neologisms, namely existing words with a new metaphorical meaning, like "hamster", and collocates, like "elbow bump" and "panic buy", generating indexical forms, namely social and figurative meanings which are mainly shared by networking communities.

In addition to the formal and informal vocabulary, some words and expressions from medical lexicon have come into use among non-experts (Thorne 2020), like asymptomatic, cluster effect, contact tracing, flatten the curve, furlough(ed), immunity passport, incubation period, intubation, patient zero, PPE (Personal Protective Equipment), R rate, red zone. Among the medical expressions, we find a relatively high number of collocates, often formed by two nouns, as well as numerous Latinisms. As Scott (2020) argues, apart from the medical terms which the pandemic has brought into everyday language, new collocates and lexical patterns have come into being in different fields of the English language:

> […] few of us could have imagined that it [language] would change as fast as it has in the last few weeks. From the coinage of new words (*social distancing, viral load, the shielded*) to the redefinition of existing terms (*selfish, essential*), and the centre-staging of rarely-used ones (*furlough*), change is evident at the lexical level".

The introduction of such scientific words has changed people's perception of their own quality of life. It has made them used to looking at everyday life in terms of quantities and figures. Owing to social restrictions, people tend to consider the quality of their own lives according to the daily figures released by healthcare authorities concerning the infections and the victims over the last twenty-four hours in their own areas[3].

4. Linguistic changes and socio-cultural aspects

On a global scale, the changes in the vocabulary have first and foremost affected social life and people's habits. The invisible enemy was primarily spread from person-to-person through coughing, sneezing or simply speaking, due to droplet transmission. The most immediate feature of this virus consisted, therefore, in the fact that its proliferation multiplied in social spaces, above all indoors, where social distances are reduced and facilitate the transmission of the virus.

[3] In Italy, for example, the figures pertaining to Coronavirus victims and infections have been considered to assess the quality of life in each province ("Qualità della vita" 2020).

Avoiding meetings and all the events that attract crowds became one of the main priorities of governments, starting from China, Italy and South Korea, the first worst-hit countries. The first weapon - to mention one of the war metaphors used during the coronavirus pandemic (Federici 2020: 32; Wallis and Nerlich 2005: 2632-36) - to lessen the spread of the virus was the cancellation of all social events, from concerts, sports matches to private parties and anything that did not allow for a safety distance to be respected. Pictures of empty megalopolises in Asia, apparently uninhabited, represented the dystopian settings of many sci-fi films and books (Federici 2020: 19-23). The narrow and crowded spaces of many city centres turned into empty places, where wandering and curious animals sometimes made their first appearance. Considering that most Coronavirus-related expressions refer to the concept of space, a new reconfiguration of city spaces emerged during lockdown. In this context, new social and linguistic rules have been introduced into city spaces owing to the outbreak, and the dynamics of social and linguistic interactions have changed. Signs like "Sorry, we are closed", "Keep your distance", "Save lives" (*Coronavirus: UK lockdown*, BBC News, 2020) have been posted everywhere, not to mention the numerous warning signs on the threshold of public places, reminding people to wear a mask, keep a safe distance, use hand sanitizers and avoid crowding.

The reconfiguration and the reorganization of spaces represent an important aspect of communication, and the changes in communication have created physical and social borders in the hardest hit areas in the world. Isolation has increased, in many cases, people's fear of physical and material contacts, and such a fear has exacerbated the social rule of *noli me tangere* (Žižek 2020: 5-18), namely *do not touch me*. The separation of spaces and the limitation of physical contacts have paved the way for virtual communication and, at the same time, have increased people's fear of being even approached by others. If the one meter-distance has become a norm to respect in all public places, the social rule of *noli me tangere* has conditioned social behavior. Our idea of spaces has been modified, and, as Žižek (5-18) claims, human reconstruction should start from the ruins left by this pandemic.

With regard to space and its cultural and social organisation, one cannot do without considering the analysis which Lotman and Uspenskij (1975: 155-65) carried out in their studies about cultures. In particular, in their description of the relationships among different cultural spaces, they consider the interaction between the internal space, one's own cultural space, which includes the elements of *my* and/or *our* culture, and the external space, the *others'* cultural space, which includes all that does not belong to one's culture, but only what is foreign, far and unknown. In this distinction, the former stands for order and organisation, whereas the latter represents chaos and disorganization. The opposition between the internal and the external spaces well applies to the context of the pandemic, because the risk of being infected was deemed to be very low, in different parts of the world, at the beginning of 2020, and the Far East was seen as an isolated epicentre. As long as the Coronavirus outbreak existed within the borders of China and other Asian countries, the space representation of the worst hit countries was included in the external space, seen as the symbol of chaos and contamination. China was the *other* space, *their* space, since it was not likely, according to most governments, to be in contact with *our* space. In Wodak's words (2008: 62) who, in the wake of Lotman and Uspenkij's cultural model, studies the socio-cultural spaces and the boundaries generated by different kinds of discrimination, the opposition between *our* space and *their* space has brought to light the stereotype of the "positive self- and negative other-presentation"; it is characterised by the difference between the contaminated countries in the Far East, the negative models, and other countries in the world,

still not affected by the virus and standing, therefore, for positive models. As time went by and the infection reached different parts of the world, the "in- and out- groups" (Wodak 2008: 62) model changed as a consequence of the introduction of further borders within the hit countries. The social pattern represented by the opposition *us* versus *them* has become common even within the borders of many European countries; the chromatic divide between different areas of countries, associated with the figures pertaining to daily contagion, has marked such borders.

Many have underlined the effects of the virus on social inequalities (Coen and Coury 2020). As it was easily predictable, the social and physical distancing imposed by the spread of the virus has deepened social and cultural differences. In spite of globalisation and easier communication among countries, many communities in many parts of the world have been denied the possibility of being provided with correct information about the virus. Starting with the sudden use of certain English loanwords, the language of distance has emphasised social inequalities (Tsuda 2013: 445-456; Sen 2020; Federici 2020: 19-23). It is well-known that lockdown policies implemented by many governments have affected the jobs of economically weaker communities in both developing and wealthy countries, not to mention discriminations in the digital field which, as a result of rapid technological changes, have denied access to many developing countries, where technology is less up-to-date. Furthermore, the growing isolation generated by the spread of the virus has led to an increase in the gender gap, due to the fact that women have often had to take care of housework and children. Another issue connected with economic inequalities is the different access to vaccine from countries, since it is likely to be more easily distributed to European and North-American countries. Last, but not least, education has been remarkably affected by the pandemic, because of many people's lack of technological devices and literacy, as a consequence of the closure of schools and universities.

5. Effects on communication

The lack of social and physical contacts, as a result of the spread of the virus, has led to the fragmentation of communication and to an increase in misunderstanding over the information released by official sources, like the media and newspapers. I have previously argued that the language associated with the Coronavirus, characterised by expressions and words which conjure up the concepts of distance and isolation, has changed people's social behaviour.

Since its supposed origin in China, the virus has brought with it chaos, disorder, fear and confusion. In this regard, the concept of entropy is pertinent to the new reconfiguration of physical and imaginary spaces, given that it is associated with the chaos created by the pandemic. The contamination of countries all over the world by the virus has amplified social and linguistic entropy. Entropy is, as it is already known, a physical concept and represents the chaos of any physical or imaginary system. It increases as different parts, *e.g.* molecules, or two or more elements, come into contact. The interaction of different particles from different physical systems mixes heterogeneous elements, creating confusion and a new chaotic layout of any system. Similarly, the spread of the virus from China into neighbouring countries, and then all over the world, has been the source of social confusion (Natividad 2020) and has raised fear and mutual suspicion among people. The proliferation of the virus and the chaos it has brought with it have affected communication as well, which the concept of entropy applies to. As Shannon (1948: 381-82) claims, the origin of entropy in the field of communication depends on three elements: a source of data, a communication channel, and a receiver. In the pandemic context, all three elements have been distorted by the entropy of contradicting or misleading information. It has

often been claimed that sources of data were manipulated by Chinese authorities at the beginning of the pandemic (Federici 2020: 11-25). However, even the figures that European governments have been releasing are thought to have been tampered with. The news released by communication channels is not often understood by receivers; accordingly, people's wrong and often confused interpretations of the news have added to the entropy of communication, with consequent increased ambiguity of the meaning attributed to certain Coronavirus-related words.

A closer look at the meanings given by *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* (2003) for some Coronavirus-related words and expressions shows that, in many cases, such words have preserved their traditional denotative aspects. However, this does not hold true in other cases. In this regard, I have selected the most common Coronavirus-related medical expressions from the *Glossary on the COVID-19 Pandemic* (2020) and compared their current meanings with the traditional ones given by *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*. "Cluster site", for example, is defined by the *Glossary on the COVID-19 Pandemic* as follows: "A specific site where the number of cases of an infectious disease that occurs over a specific period of time is higher than the expected number", whereas the word cluster is, according to *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, "a group of things or persons close together" (392). The two definitions share the basic meaning; however, the one from the *Glossary on the COVID-19 Pandemic* highlights the connection between the idea of gathering with the higher rate of an infection. Among the collocations, a red zone is, according to Thorne (2020), "a geographical area or location classified as having the highest levels of infected individuals and which should be placed under quarantine". The compound noun "superspreader", which does not appear in *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary*, is, according to the *Glossary on the COVID-19 Pandemic*, "A single contagious person who contaminates a disproportionately large number of people compared to the number of people contaminated by the average contagious person". The word isolation deserves particular attention. According to the *Glossary on the COVID-19 Pandemic*, "isolation" is "[a] preventive measure against the spread of an infectious disease involving the separation of an infected person from non-infected people during the communicable period of the disease. Not to be confused with quarantine and lockdown". *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines it [isolation] as "quarantine" (1013). According to the *Glossary on the COVID-19 Pandemic*, "quarantine" is "[a] measure to prevent the spread of an infectious disease in which a healthy person who may have been in contact with an infected person is isolated during the incubation period of the disease". The current difference between "isolation" and "quarantine" lies, therefore, in the period of the disease when a person is put into isolation: the period of the disease is "communicable" when it refers to isolation, while it is of "incubation" when it refers to quarantine. The word lockdown, mostly untranslated all over the world, lends itself to an attentive analysis as well. *Webster's New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines "lockdown" as "the confining of prisoners to their cells, as following a riot or other disturbance" (1128). In the *Glossary on the COVID-19 Pandemic*, "lockdown" is "[an] emergency protocol intended to limit movements and gatherings in a population for public health or safety reasons". Moreover, the *Glossary* points out that "The word 'confinement' does not have this meaning in English. It is used as a synonym for lockdown under the influence of the French term 'confinement' and should be avoided".

Turning our glance to the most common Coronavirus-related words and collocations, the current meaning of the word "lockdown" has had further connotative meanings during the second wave of the pandemic in some European countries, like Italy and Germany. As Brunelli

(2020) explains in his article about the new measures adopted in Germany, "the part lockdown", or "soft lockdown", eases some restrictions, unlike the hard lockdown, which forbids any movement of people unless for urgent reasons. Some observations should be made with regard to the collocations "social distancing" and "social gatherings". The former means "the practice of keeping a safe distance between yourself and other people in order to prevent the spread of disease" (*Oxford Learner's Dictionary)*; however, as some TV news reporting shows (*Coronavirus: protests in Italy over new pandemic crackdown turn violent*, to mention one), protests against social restrictions have occurred all over Europe, with gatherings lacking social distancing. Social gatherings of more than six people were banned in England in September 2020, as Cooper (2020) writes, while the number was reduced to no more than two people in Italy in March 2021 (Italian Prime Minister's Decree of March 2, 2021: 8). De Marco (2020) has pointed out how certain expressions have switched from a positive connotation to a negative one and vice versa since the beginning of the pandemic. He (2020) has observed, for instance, that being asymptomatic used to be a bliss, as it meant having a disease without showing any symptoms. Today, as he puts it, being asymptomatic could mean being a plague-spreader.

The communicative ambiguities between experts and non-experts have been widened by steady revisions of social rules, anti-Coronavirus measures and decrees, thus making communication less clear. The entropy of communication should be intended as the fragmentation and the ambiguity of the language of news broadcasting, which has frequently turned out to be misleading from the perspective of non-experts. The linguistic fragmentation in the global context is not the only consequence of the outbreak. The geography of the Coronavirus has divided the worst affected countries, like Italy, into chromatic areas, where different colours, ranging from yellow to red through orange, indicate the differences in terms of social restrictions in each region (Giuffrida 2020). The darker the colour of an area is, the higher the contagion rate is. The chromatic symbolism of different regions in countries has increased people's misunderstanding over daily news, characterised by numerous differences in the *dos and don'ts* in each chromatic area. Even the darkest colour, red, which meant categorical prohibition to leave one's house in the first wave of the pandemic, has often been misinterpreted. The entropy of communication has made announcements and recommendations on anti-Coronavirus measures less trustworthy to people. The latter's general perception is that the strictness of the rules during the first wave of the pandemic has been inevitably eased – for economic reasons - and this is proven by the fact that, according to the media, anti-Coronavirus measures are not often being respected as much as they used to be during the first wave of the pandemic (Giordano 2020).

6. Final remarks

The aim of this essay was to investigate linguistic changes in three main contexts of everyday communication in the British area: news broadcasting, networking communities and the medical sphere. The study has then switched to a wider scale to discuss the effects of the Coronavirus-related language on social aspects, in order to fathom the dynamics of the entropy of communication, as an increase in linguistic ambiguity. Through the analysis of the formal vocabulary used in the press register, space and time-related expressions have been brought to light, emphasising their semantic connection with the concept of social distancing and with the uniqueness of such a dramatic event as the pandemic. The list of neologisms used in informal contexts has also shown that a number of terms, coined in networking communities, are often blending words, semantic neologisms and collocates derived from formal expressions. The discussion of the relationship between the formal and informal Coronavirus-related words and

expressions has shown that many neologisms used in informal contexts have resulted from their lexical contextualisation (repeatable materiality) and from the social negotiation of their meanings (indexicality). Ordinary communication has been invaded by medical vocabulary as well, with the introduction of numerous collocates and Latinisms, shaping people's ordinary language.

As to the influence of the pandemic on the rearrangement of physical and imaginary spaces, the second part of the study has focused on the social aspects of the pandemic, on people's fear of physical contacts and on the distinction of social spaces into positive and negative ones, generating inevitable social discriminations, *e.g.* digital, gender and economic discriminations. The analysis of the Coronavirus-related vocabulary and of the rearrangement of social spaces have unearthed the ongoing process of the entropy of communication, characterised by the fragmentation of communication and by the increased ambiguity of formal and ordinary language. Frequent revisions of rules and decrees have augmented communicative ambiguity and misinterpretation, in addition to misleading people who are having to deal with the ever-changing chromatic configuration of their own areas and to adapt to new rules. The entropy of communication and the heterogeneity of TV news have added to misconceptions about social behaviour.

As a result of the discussion of such linguistic and social phenomena, it is the author's intention to continue this project not only by extending the list of Coronavirus-related vocabulary, but also the investigation into the linguistic and social aspects in the worst hit countries in the post-pandemic time. New words and expressions will be coined when vaccine is distributed to countries. At the same time, it is not easy to predict how the social and linguistic context will change, or whether it will change and to what extent people's lives will be the same as they used to be.

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An Ideological Analysis of the Former President Donald Trump's Tweets During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

The aim of the present study is to explore the former US President Donald Trump's representation of "us" and "others" in his tweets related to COVID-19 and how he portrayed the representation of "us" and "others." The sample for this study was made up of tweets issued by former US President Donald Trump between January and May 2020. The ideological framework proposed by Van Dijk (1997) was used to analyze the ideological discourse of former President Donald Trump's tweets during COVID-19 to reveal the underpinning motivations and viewpoints of us-representation and others-representation. According to the results of this study, Donald Trump depicted a favorable us-group and a negative others-group. Furthermore, former President Trump's typical tactics for portraying both groups included argumentation or authority, juxtaposition, recurrence, emphasis, and analogies. It was also discovered that there was inconsistency between the positive attitudes towards the us-group and negative attitudes about the others-group. When the same descriptions were given to both groups, for example, there were adjustments, which may or may not have been consistent with the groups' underlying goals or interests. The research findings may help analyze former President Donald Trump's Twitter discourse, a comparatively new source of political information.

1. Introduction

Twitter has evolved into a strong tool for political communication and interaction, quickly displacing traditional forms of mass media (Tasente 2020). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, state leaders' usage of Twitter considerably impacted the public. About 64.8% of the United Nations state leaders reacted to COVID-19 on Twitter (Haman 2020). According to Shafer (2017), Twitter has become an essential platform in political campaigns because of increased freedom of expression and interaction, resulting in a significant presence of political parties, aspirants, and reporters on Twitter to air their views and ideas about politics.

Former US President Donald Trump is one of the most active users, with the so-called "Trump Effect" of his tweets impacting on society, the economy, and international relations (Bustan & Alakrash 2020). According to a study, Trump's tweets also significantly affected European stocks (Klaus & Koser 2021). As a result, there is much interest in delving into his tweets to see how he employs linguistic elements and what his ideology is. Piksar (2018), for example,

used Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to examine Donald Trump's political discourse on Twitter and found that by employing nomination, argumentation and intensification strategies, Trump positively depicted himself and made himself the victim by criticizing media organizations for providing "fake news" to the audience. This was done to seek sympathy from the public. Furthermore, Bustan and Alakrash (2020) discovered that Donald Trump used a variety of linguistic tactics to portray a positive "Us" and a negative "Others." Other researchers discovered positive self-representation and negative others-representation (Kerbleski 2019; Ott 2017; Rohmah 2018). In particular, sexist ideology was implied in some of his tweets (Darweesh & Abdullah 2016) and anti-Muslim-Islam ideology (Khan *et al.* 2019).

The World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 a worldwide pandemic in March 2020; it was a subject that Donald Trump frequently addressed on Twitter. He played a huge role in social media in terms of the degree of neutrality and information presented in tweets. More crucially, he significantly impacted global news surrounding COVID-19 (Yum 2020). A study conducted by Budhwani and Sun (2020) postulated that there was a considerable increase in the frequency and prevalence of similar words after Donald Trump referred to COVID-19 as a "Chinese virus" and a "China virus." Previous research, such as those by Mena García (2018) and Tasente (2020), has found that Donald Trump's tweets contained ideological messages. However, no studies on the particular ideology expressed in his tweets about COVID-19 have been published. In this light, and because of the enormous number of reported COVID-19 cases, it is vital to look at how the US leadership depicted the problem. Therefore, the present research tries to explore the representation of the 'Us' and 'Others' groups on Twitter by Donald Trump and how both groups are portrayed. The study also investigates how both groups are depicted. More perspectives are integrated through pragmatic studies to uncover the underlying meanings beneath the texts.

2. Literature Review

2.1. A Framework for Critical Discourse Analysis

A critical discourse analysis (CDA) looks at how discourses can be used to create, sustain, and justify social inequities (Wodak 2001). Ideologies can be decoded by a methodical and repeatable examination of written, oral, or visual material (Wodak & Meyer 2009). Whether aware of it or not, CDA believes that our use of language is intentional (Mullet 2018). According to Teguia (2019), politics is the most appropriate field for CDA to engage in regarding social issues. In parliaments and political debates, politicians and presidential candidates struggle over ideologies. Alongside identity studies (such as Kang & Dykema 2017; Leung 2016; Sarani & Kord 2018; Rahimpour *et al*. 2018; Davari & Moini 2016), critical discourse analysis has been integral in several studies about social media discourse (Zahra 2019; Teguia 2019; Ott 2017; Rohma 2018).

Farrelly (2019) suggested that analyzing how policymakers and legislators depicted social actors in writings might provide crucial insights into their understanding of the purposes of governance. According to Martin (2013), politicians applied linguistic techniques to express their thoughts and ideas to deliver their ideology implicitly, which significantly impacted their audience. As a result, the goal of CDA in political discourse is to figure out what politicians mean

when they say they are using language techniques to look at underlying ideologies. This study is based on the framework proposed by Van Dijk (1997).

According to Van Dijk (1997), ideologies are the fundamental principles of the socially shared portrayals of groups about themselves and their relationships with other groups, including membership requirements, activities, objectives, values, and critical group resources (p. 43). Furthermore, the ongoing social battle is depicted as Us Vs Them or Us Vs Others, resulting in polarization. In particular, there is a favorable self-presentation and a negative other-presentation. Van Dijk (1997) has offered a framework for analyzing ideologies to determine what lies beneath them. The analysis of ideologies involved several steps. The first step taken in the present study was the examination of the circumstances of the conversations. Secondly, the study looked at both positive and negative groups, such as *us* and *others*, who were involved in power struggles. Thirdly, both groups' assumptions and implications were examined. The final phase was to investigate all formal structures that either exacerbated or reduced divided group beliefs.

2.2. Analysis of Trump's Tweets

Donald Trump, one of the most active Twitter users, piqued the interest of certain scholars due to his unique take on tweets. Previous research has looked into his tweets in general (Piksar 2018; Tasente 2020) and in specificity (Bustan & Alakrash 2020; Yaqub *et al*. 2017), as well as the ideologies inherent in his Twitter posts (Darweesh & Abdullah 2016; Lockhart 2019; Zahra 2019). Many academics have looked into common expressions, discourse methods, and Trump's and others' representations in Trump's tweets. Tasente (2020) found the most common expressions in his tweets to determine communication orientation, laying the groundwork for future research. Piksar (2018) went on to look at Trump's discourse methods and how he and others are represented in his tweets. According to the findings, Trump aimed to depict himself positively by criticizing others or portraying them negatively through argumentation, nomination, and intensification. Mena García (2018) also noted Trump's use of metaphors to explain his ideas and his unfavorable portrayals of immigrants and bureaucrats. This work also revealed the primary features of Trump's tweets, such as brevity, recurrence, parataxis, and unreliable evidence. Similarly, Rohmah (2018) stated that Trump used repetitions, sarcasm, and pronouns to portray other groups in a negative light purposely and to portray himself positively.

There have been numerous studies on Trump's tweets in relation to specific events. Yaqub et al. (2017) analyzed the attitude and impact of Trump's and Hillary Clinton's tweets during the 2016 US presidential election and found that Trump gave out a more upbeat campaign message. Similarly, Schertzer and Woods (2021) looked at 5,515 tweets sent by Trump throughout the 2016 presidential campaign and discovered that most of them included populist and ethnic-nationalist themes. In addition, a study conducted by Teguia (2019) analyzed forty of Trump's tweets about the border wall and found that Trumpism incentivized individuals because of his animosity and discrimination against Mexicans in his tweets. This was done to establish the ideology that constructing the border wall was a "must." In addition, Trump's tweets were littered with prejudices. Trump's tweets about the California wildfires (Kerbleski, 2019) were also looked at. His tweets, characterized by numerous words, ambiguous agency, and capitalization, reflected a

national identity and authenticity philosophy. Bustan and Alakrash (2020) studied Trump's tweets about Middle Eastern countries and found that he preferred analogies, repetition, exaggeration, and modality in his Twitter posts. Also, the study found that he frequently used "us" to represent the United States' unity.

Furthermore, several of Trump's tweets have shown some distinct ideas. According to Darweesh and Abdullah (2016), he possessed a patriarchal perspective and indirectly exhibited male supremacy over females. Zahra (2019) adds that his tweets were also based on racism, Islamophobic, anti-immigrant, and anti-refugee sentiments. Furthermore, his tweets contained an anti-Muslim sentiment (Khan *et al*. 2019).

Overall, from the studies analyzed above, it is evident that some discourse tactics and numerous ideological perspectives were evidenced in Trump's Twitter posts (Mena García 2018; Tasente 2020; Teguia 2019; Zahra 2019). Trump's statements were usually accompanied by precise goals, which significantly impacted readers. According to Ross and Caldwell (2020), Trump employed negativity as a rhetorical political strategy. He did, however, use an evaluation system to attack and ridicule opponents. COVID-19 became a global pandemic in 2020 and was regularly mentioned on his personal Twitter account. However, few studies show what beliefs were encoded in COVID-19-related tweets. Surprisingly, there was a tenfold spike in the use of specific phrases on Twitter after his tweets referred to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" or "China virus" (Budhwani & Sun 2020).

On this foundation, the current study attempts to incorporate CDA into Trump's COVID-19-related tweets and respond to the following two **research questions**:

1. In his tweets about COVID-19, how does Donald Trump depict "we" and "others"?
2. What does Donald Trump's portrayal of "we" and "them" look like?

3. Methodology

3.1. Data Collection

The data for this study related to the novel coronavirus COVID-19 was collected from Donald Trump's Twitter posts. In particular, a "Trump Twitter Archive" is located at http://www.trumpTwitterarchive.com/. This archive contains all of Donald Trump's tweets on his personal Twitter account @realDonaldTrump (permanently suspended on January 9, 2021). The study focused on data from January 2020 to May 2020. These dates were deemed appropriate as China reported the outbreak of the first case of COVID-19 around the beginning of this period. After first collecting all of the tweets posted on Trump's Twitter account during this period, I then collated the 128 COVID-19-related tweets for the present study. The tweets were numbered in the correct order from T001 to T128. Alongside this, a logbook for every tweet was created, including the number of likes, retweets, words, and comments. This was done to have a clear picture of the impact Donald Trump's tweets had on public opinion.

3.2. Data Analysis

After collecting all the data, a thematic analysis was undertaken using Van Dijk's proposed ideological framework (1997). The context and backdrop of the tweets were collected from the literature to answer the first study question. After that, all the groups, regions, and personalities

engaged, also known as actors, were determined, and all of the content about them was extracted. All of the involved actors were divided into two groups (*us-group* and *others-group)* after reading all of the references. Recurrent themes were discovered within each group, and the relevant contents were grouped to investigate the positive and negative depictions of *Us* and *Others*.
To respond to the second research question, the study analyzed all the contents with specific meanings and implied ideologies. This was explicitly done to reveal the specific intentions and aims of the *us*-representation and *others*-representation. As such, the study succeeded in interpreting the different illustrations and ultimately comparing the study findings with previous similar studies.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Portrayal of "Us" and "Others"

The study collected and analyzed all the tweets. After the analysis, the descriptive statistics indicated that the average number of words in each Twitter post was about 38, while the average number of retweets was about 28,700. In addition, the average number of likes for the tweets was 41,900, while the average number of comments on each tweet was about 89,700. From the insights obtained from these descriptive statistics, it is clear that Donald Trump significantly influenced COVID-19 news (Yum 2020). This is because his tweets impacted the public interest and shaped people's perceptions of COVID-19.

As postulated by Van Dijk's (2006) critical analysis discourse framework, actors can be perceived as individuals or members of a particular group. After an intensive analysis of all the 128 collected tweets that were labelled from T001 to T128, it is evident that about 27 actors were portrayed as "us" while about 16 other actors were depicted as "others." Notably, after all the related descriptions of each actor were grouped, this study found five recurrent themes related to the *us-group.* These themes are:

1. The portrayal of America as a monitor;
2. The portrayal of the United States as a winner;
3. The portrayal of the United States as superior;
4. The portrayal of Donald Trump as a hero;
5. The portrayal of Trump as an authority.

On the other hand, four themes were related to the *others-group.* These were:

1. Blaming of China;
2. Condemnation of the WHO;
3. The portrayal of the Democrats as incompetent;
4. The use of fake news media, as illustrated in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Themes Related to Trump's Tweets	
Categories with examples	Themes
1. United States as a monitor	**Positive *us-group***

- *Engage others*	
- *To monitor the unfolding events*	
- *Support others*	
2. United States as a winner	
- *The pandemic is under control*	
- *Only 5 people* - *Commendable job*	
3. United States as superior	
- *US have the best experts* - *US have the best testing of any other nation.* - *US have set a high standard*	
4. Trump is a hero	
- *Has done a commendable job from the start* - *Has instilled confidence to everyone*	
5. Trump as an authority	
- *He was right about the pandemic* - *There is fake news to be avoided*	
1. China blamed	**Negative *others-group***
- *The virus was referred to as China virus or Chinese virus*	
- *It came from China* - *China is incompetent* - *China is to blame for the mass global killing*	
2. WHO blamed	
- *WHO ignored the pandemic* - *WHO is either inaccurate or misleading*	
3. Democrats are incompetent	
- *The do nothing* - *They just waste time* - *They harm others*	
4. Fake news media *- sources of disinformation* *- Fake news is prevalent* *- fake news goes beyond what factual information warrants*	

4.1.2. The portrayal of the positive us-group

It is evident from Table 1 that Donald Trump's tweets endowed the *us*-group with positive messages. One of the indicators of positive representation is evidenced through the portrayal of the *us*-group as the **monitor**. For example, a tweet extracted from T002 indicated that the United States was "in very close communication with China" and "strongly on watch." This was a clear indication that the us-group was monitoring how China was handling the COVID-19 situation, and that the us-group was watching the COVID-19 cases reported in the United States. In addition, the us-group was checking the pandemic information and kept track of how others were handling the situation. Also, in tweet T003, it was noted that the "*us*-group continues to monitor the ongoing developments." This also revealed the theme of the *us*-group as the monitor.

Another prevalent theme from Trump's tweets is the portrayal of the United States as a **winner**. Most of his tweets revealed that he had a positive attitude towards the pandemic since he believed that he would be able to contain the spread of COVID-19. For instance, Tweet 4, T004 reads, "The coronavirus is very much under control in the USA," and "only five people" have been reported to have contracted the virus. He tweeted this on 30th January, when the pandemic was still new. This probably means that by this time, only five COVID-19 cases had been reported in the United States, and they were all in a stable condition. It is also worthy of note that from the analysis, it is evident that Trump had full confidence that the United States would win the war against the pandemic, given that it had handled the situation excellently. For instance, to show the commendable job that had been done, Trump tweeted that the United States was "getting great marks for the handling of the pandemic," as seen in tweet 108 (T108). Also, Tweet 95 (T095) indicated that the commitment of the US to helping other countries had "saved many lives with our fast action." This implied that the United States had won the war against the pandemic because of its sheer hard work.

The third theme from the tweets depicts the United States as a **superior nation** compared to other nations when it comes to the handling of COVID-19. In particular, Trump's tweets insinuated that the United States had higher quality experts and testing procedures compared to other countries across the globe. This is evidenced in Tweet 3 (T003), which indicated that the United States had "the best experts in the world," while Tweet 101 (T101) said that "our testing is so much better than any other country." Furthermore, Tweet 107 (T107) said that the White House Corona Virus Task Force "had done a commendable job which will set a high standard for others to follow." This implied that the United States has surpassed all the other countries around the globe in terms of the testing process and experts. This indicated that the United States was superior.

In addition, the analysis of Trump's tweets depicts him as a **hero** because of his enormous achievements in handling the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, T059 and T018 are full of praise for the job he had done since the outbreak of the pandemic, including his apt decision to close the borders to China. T105 compared the United States with Mexico and, in particular, argued that California residents were "so lucky" to be ruled by him as their President, which implied that he had done a commendable job compared to the Mexican leadership. Furthermore, Trump showcased his attributes, such as care for others and courage in making decisions. For instance, in T114, Trump praised himself for taking some of the preventive measures despite opposition

from others, and commented that this "made everybody look good" and ultimately saved lives. These findings are consistent with Kerbleski's (2019) study that found that one of the recurring themes in Trump's tweets was that he advocated for cultural heroism. According to American culture, heroes are individuals who are appreciated, respected, brave, and respond quickly in times of danger and tragedy.

Lastly, the analysis of the collected tweets reveals that Trump perceived himself as having the **power and authority** to influence the opinions, thoughts, and behaviors of others. For instance, in T008, he wrote that "I was right," which reveals that he always believed his decision to be correct while his arguments were subjective. Similarly, in T016, Trump's tweet supported his judgement when he stated that "as I say, they are Fake News!". As postulated by Van Dijk (2006), in an argument, the majority of the people tend to refer to the authorities to support their arguments. In this case, the authorities refer to people who have high ranks in party politics or generally people who are experts in a particular area or are moral leaders. In this study, Donald Trump referred to himself as an authority, and thus he had the power to make judgements.

4.1.3. The portrayal of the Negative Others-group

In his tweets, Trump referred to *others* in a negative light. **China is one of the *others-group* blamed** for the outbreak of COVID-19. For instance, from the analyzed tweets, "China virus" and "Chinese virus" appeared nine times. The WHO Best Practices for the Naming of New Human Infectious Diseases, provided in May 2015, postulates that when naming a disease, geographic locations such as regions, continents, cities, and countries should not be included. For instance, names such as Rift Valley fever, Japanese encephalitis, Lyme disease, Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, and Spanish flu should be excluded from the naming of the diseases. Therefore, Trump's reference to COVID-19 as a "Chinese virus" or "China virus" was inappropriate. However, according to Van Dijk (2006), propositions may be used since they are assumed to be true or known. However, not all propositions are true. As such, Trump's naming of COVID-19 reveals racist remarks. This implies that referring to the virus as the "Chinese virus" or the "China virus" presumes that the United States was just a victim of the virus since they had nothing to do with it. Van Dijk (2006) adds that *others,* as used by Trump, tend to be expressed negatively, especially when associated with threats. Therefore, the *us-group* is represented as a victim. Similarly, in Tweet 118, Trump blamed China for being responsible for the global deaths. This was not true. Interestingly, in this tweet, China was represented positively, but it was later represented negatively. One of the underlying reasons for this trend is that the United States had few cases when the pandemic broke initially, but it later turned out to have the largest number of cases across the globe. Therefore, Trump put all the blame on China for the outbreak of COVID-19 and, in this case, insinuated that the United States was the main victim.

Another recurring theme from the tweets towards the negative *others*-groups was **blame for the World Health Organization (WHO)** for the outbreak of the virus. Trump used the "wh"-words such as "why" to blame the WHO for misleading or inaccurate information. For instance, T086 reads, "Why did WHO make several claims about the Corona Virus that are either inaccurate or misleading…?", and T087 reads "Why did the WHO wait as long as it did to take

decisive action?" Trump used these "wh"-words to question the WHO's credibility and accountability in relation to measures taken to mitigate the spread of COVID-19.

It can also be shown that **the Democrats**, as the opposition party to the Republicans, **were described as incompetent**. In the 128 tweets under examination, Trump tweeted "They Do Nothing …" to describe the Democrats 5 times, while the Democrats in total were mentioned 12 times. He chose the nickname "The Do Nothing Democrats" to show them up as incompetent. T018 also showed the Democrats being blamed by him for wasting time on the Immigration Hoax and making trying to make the Republicans look bad. As was known to all, Trump belonged to the Republican Party, which is the "us-group". So in his tweets he described the Democrats as incompetent.

The last theme evident in the negative *others*-group is the presence of **Fake News media.** From the majority of the tweets analyzed, there are several news media that were described as "fake news". According to Trump's view, the fake news exaggerated COVID-19 news and thus made it look worse than it was. For instance, in Tweets 24 and 31, Trump criticized the MSDNC for its poor coverage of the situation; the MSDNC covered "the Corona Virus situation horribly", and this had the ability to "do harm to the incredible and successful efforts being made." In addition, Trump criticized other fake news media for exaggerating the coronavirus situation by arguing that these media organizations provided "far beyond what the facts would warrant." Group-talk is frequently defined by another overall tactic, namely in-group favoring or "positive self-presentation," whether or not it is used in conjunction with out-group denigrations (Chiluwa & Ajiboye 2015; Van Dijk 1997, 2006; Van Holm *et al*. 2020). This may be used to imply that a person is emphasizing the positive attributes of their group, such as their country and party. In the context of Donald Trump's Twitter posts related to COVID-19, his tweets were meant to positively depict himself by emphasizing that he had done credibly well in mitigating the adverse effects of COVID-19. Furthermore, since it is built on the positive self-schema that defines a group's ideology, positive self-portrayal is essentially ideological. As indicated in Van Dijk's (1997) four squares, negative *others*-depiction also serves to accentuate the positive features of the *us*-group. Therefore, from the perception created by Donald Trump in his tweets about the *us-group* and the *others-group,* the negative portrayal of the *others* and positive portrayal of *us* were meant to show his emphasis on the importance of nationalism and, more importantly, cultural heroism, as evidenced in previous research such as Kerbleski (2019).

4.2. Representation Strategies for Us and Others

After collecting and analyzing Donald Trump's tweets related to *us-groups* and *others-groups* after the outbreak of COVID-19, it is evident that he employed different strategies to positively depict the *us-group* and negatively portray the *others-group.* Some of the major strategies employed include comparison, capitalization, analogies, rebuttal, and repetition.

In terms of rebuttals or argumentation, it is important to support the opinions or the ideas brought forward with credible information. According to Van Dijk (2006), opinions should be followed by a series of premises or assertions that make the argument more plausible and credible based on specific rules, attitudes and values. For instance, in Donald Trump's tweets, he used the

"96 per cent approval rating" to argue that he did a commendable job in mitigating the adverse effects of COVID-19. Also, as evidenced in Tweet 21, he added that "our professionals are doing a fantastic job." To support this assertion, he listed the results of the measures taken as reported by the New York Post. He noted that "77 per cent of the US adults have confidence in their government's ability to handle the pandemic" (T021).

Apart from the use of rebuttals or argumentation, comparisons were also heavily used to stress his successful mitigation of the COVID-19 effects. Van Dijk (2006) notes that comparisons are used when a person is comparing an in-group and an out-group. In the case of Trump's tweets, comparisons were used as a means of evaluating the actions and measures taken to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and the measures or actions taken by President Obama's administration when handling different pandemics. In his tweets, evaluation was implied in words such as "good," which features 16 times, and "great," which features 38 times. Other words include successful, perfectly, right, fantastic, and right. On the same note, Trump used negative adjectives to describe the *others-groups*. Some of these words include poor, sad, bad, irresponsibility, stupid, incompetent, and badly. This finding is not unexpected since it is consistent with previous studies where emotional and negative words were prevalently used in Trump's tweets (Clarke & Grieve 2019; Chiluwa & Ajiboye 2015; Yaqub *et al*. 2017).

Further, a study by Taiwo (2007) found that "rhetorical graphological devices" and "emotive vocabularies" are heavily used in social media platforms to pass across a particular message about different people and situations. Baker (2006) adds that the choice of certain words and the pattern of words reveal the speaker's intention or purpose, which can be either intended or unintended. This decision is always significant, especially in light of its ability to influence people's perceptions of societal realities. WordArt.com, an online word cloud builder, was used to create word clouds of the terminology Donald Trump used to represent the *us-group* and the *others-group*, respectively, in order to demonstrate a visual portrayal of such evaluative phrases. Larger typefaces are used to represent more commonly used terms in word clouds. As can be seen in Figure 1, below, Trump used more positive terms to describe the *us-group* but more negative ones to characterize the *others-group,* which is consistent with prior findings (Chiluwa & Ajiboye 2015; Van Dijk 1997, 2006; Van Holm *et al.* 2020).

Figure 1: Some of the vocabularies used to describe the us-group and the others-group

Aside from using specific words for evaluation, Trump compared his decisions and actions taken to mitigate the outbreak of COVID-19 with actions taken by the Democrats. For instance, in T018, Trump argued that "The Do Nothing Democrats were busy wasting time on the Immigration Hoax" while he was busy calling for early border and flight closings which were thought to be the right decision. In particular, Trump emphasized that his quick action and appropriate decisions helped "us" (America) to be ahead in the fight against COVID-19. Similarly, Trump compared the measures taken after the outbreak of swine flu in 2009 with the measures taken after the outbreak of COVID-19. He argued that former President Barack Obama "took six months to declare a national emergency and killed about 12,000 Americans" (T042). On the other hand, since he took swift and early actions, the impact of COVID-19 was not severe since it caused fewer deaths. In this context, Trump intended to convince people that he was successful in handling the pandemic compared to President Obama. However, based on the number of reported cases and deaths, death tolls increased daily and unexpectedly.

In another tactic, Trump used capitalization in his tweets to emphasize the quick and successful measures and actions he had taken to mitigate the adverse effects of COVID-19. For instance, from the 128 tweets analyzed, Trump described the *us-group* with the capitalized adjective GREAT five times, and VERY was also used five times. These findings are consistent with previous studies such as Van Dijk (2006) and Kerbleski (2019), which indicate that capitalization is used when emphasizing a particular subject matter. For instance, the word "GREAT" was used to praise and appreciate what the *us-group* had done, while the "VERY" was used to confirm and strengthen the argument that the early and viable actions to contain the virus were successful.

In addition, Donald Trump used metaphors or analogies to showcase his ideologies and represent his strategy. A metaphor is a linguistic device where a phrase or a word is used in an action or a place where it is not usually applied (Elaf & Hussien 2020; Bustan & Alakrash 2020). For instance, in T127, Trump used the terms "bad gift" and "enemy" to arouse the audience's hatred towards COVID-19 and the *others-group,* which referred to China.

Furthermore, Donald Trump used repetition in his Twitter posts to positively represent the *us-group* and depict the *others-group* negatively. For instance, Trump used positive words to describe the *us-group.* Some of these words include "we" 51 times, "good" 16 times, "great" 38 times, and first-person pronouns 136 times. On the other hand, he used negative words to refer to the *others-group.* Some of these words include "it" 34 times, "Chinese virus" 8 times, "they" 30 times, "their" 17 times, and third-person pronouns 95 times. The use of repetition is consistent with previous studies such as Bustan and Alakrash (2020), Kreis (2017) and Kerbleski (2019), which found that repetition is used to create emphasis. Therefore, repetition was meant to differentiate between the *us-group* and the *others-group.*

Therefore, Trump's capitalization strategies, analogies, repetition, and argumentation were effective in negatively representing the *others-group* and positively portraying the *us-group* in relation to COVID-19. This supports Van Dijk's (1997) ideological square: (1) stress "our" good attributes/actions, (2) stress "their" bad properties/actions, (3) reduce "our" negative attributes,

and (4) downplay "their" good attributes. As a result, the concept of in-group liking and out-group rejection is used to alter meanings structurally (Chiluwa & Ajiboye, 2015).

The technique of presenting a positive *us-group* is likewise related to Bhatia's (2006) three main strategies: (1) to find common ground or understanding between two ideologically opposed ideologies. The words "us" occurs 51 times, and "together" appears 13 times in tweets; for example, it is a positive depiction of "us" compared to "others." (2) to show gratitude and admiration based on political considerations. For instance, the word "great job" appeared 14 times to praise the *us-group.* (3) to suggest a successful future partnership.

5. Conclusion and Research's Implication

This study adopted a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) methodology to investigate the underlying meaning behind Donald Trump's tweets during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study found that Trump positively described the *us-group* while at the same time negatively depicting the *others-group.* He succeeded in portraying the two groups using strategies such as repetition, metaphor, comparison, capitalization, and argumentation. In this context, the *us-group* referred to America while the *others-group* represented China. For example, he initially used positive language to describe and commend China for its hard effort and excellent response to the COVID-19 outbreak, but then he used many negative expressions to characterize and condemn China for its negligence and mass deaths.

The study's key findings should aid in critical thinking about political discourse. Generally, ideologies are neither correct nor incorrect but more or less effective in advancing a group's interests. The fundamental social purpose of ideologies is the coordination of the social behavior of a group's members to effectively accomplish a social group's goals and protect and advance its interests. This holds for internal groups' social behaviors and interactions with other groups. As a result, when analyzing political speech, we must identify all the people engaged and group the connected descriptions to uncover concealed ideology. Furthermore, the good and negative portrayals of the people should be considered since they paint a distinct picture of "us" and "them." The tactics of *us*-portrayal and *others*-portrayal can help one figure out what is being insinuated.

There are several implications for future research. Firstly, the current analysis solely included posts published by Donald Trump, with retweets from his account being eliminated. Further research should collect all of his COVID-19-related retweets to analyze their contents and purposes and determine what is considered legitimate content in his Twitter posts and what ideologies are implied. Secondly, to acquire a more in-depth discourse analysis of the ideologies at hand, it would be preferable to interview several Twitter users on their opinions of Donald Trump's tweets to explore their ideological effect on the public. Finally, it may be worthwhile to examine the replies to Donald Trump's retweets, as the language in the comments may reveal a significant relationship with the ideas of the original tweets. Therefore, it is essential to examine the influence of Trump's tweets about COVID-19 on the perspectives of Twitter users by analyzing their comments.

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"If I'm contagious, I may infect other people": an anatomy of CONTAGION

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Abstract

Since its first identification in early 2020, the new coronavirus Sars-CoV-2 has quickly spread around the world, and the OMS declared the outbreak of a pandemic in March 2020. Since the early months of the pandemic, the attention of scientists, politicians and citizens has been drawn to the spreading of the virus, thus making the concept of contagion salient in daily news reports. In Italian, expressions such as '*il numero dei contagi*' became popular, as well as preoccupations regarding the number of *contagiati*, i.e., people who contracted the virus. Crucially, a direct translation of this lexical item into English is not possible, as it lacks the verbal lexical item in the semantic domain of *contagion.* Several dictionaries consistently report the verb "to infect" as a translation for It. *contagiare*, but specialised, medical terminology specifies a difference between the two conditions (i.e., an infection is different from a contagion).

1. Introduction

Since its first identification in the region of Wuhan, China, the virus Sars-CoV-2 has quickly spread around the world, and in March 2020 a pandemic was declared. The language of the pandemic has sparked a lot of interest among linguists. Many scholars have devoted their attention to the figurative conceptualisation of e.g., the virus as an *enemy* within the metaphorical frame of WAR[1] (e.g., Bagli 2021, Craig 2020, Sabucedo *et al*. 2020, Wicke and Bolognesi 2020, 2021). In reaction to the widespread usage of this metaphor, the #ReframeCovid project "was born as an open, collaborative and non-prescriptive initiative" (Olza *et al*., 2021) to gather linguistic and pictorial material that showcases alternative metaphorical realisations in any language. Some of the most fruitful and efficient alternative metaphors are the PANDEMIC IS A FIRE (Semino 2021), and at a more general level, the PANDEMIC IS A NATURAL FORCE. Other linguists have focused on Sentiment analysis of tweets, including an investigation of our understanding and response to Covid-19 (e.g., Chen *et al*. 2020, Combei and Luporini 2021, Wolohan 2020). Finally, several contributions have undertaken a more lexicographic approach, by mapping language change through the exploration of new lexical items (e.g., *covidiot, quarantini, blursday*) and the rapid

[1] In keeping with the typographical conventions of cognitive linguistics scholarship, I use SMALL CAPS to refer to concepts, while *italics* is used for lexical items.

acquisition of new meaning by conventional lexical material (e.g., *elbow-bump, front-lines*) (Kranert et al. 2020, Zheng 2020).

The present investigation is an exploratory study nestled in the lexicographic line of inquiry. It explores the realisations of the concept of CONTAGION in English. It aims at answering the following research questions: How does English lexically encode the concept of CONTAGION? What is the grammatical and semantic construal of the lexical items in this domain? What are the differences between the linguistic encoding of the two concepts between English and Italian? To answer these questions, I gathered linguistic data in a usage-based perspective, in keeping with cognitive linguistics commitments. The results of the analysis show a differential preference in the concepts of contagion and infection between the two languages.

The paper proceeds as follows. After this brief introduction, I review the major tenets and main ideas of cognitive linguistics that will shape the reasoning and the interpretation of results in the following sections. Paragraph 3 reviews the Research Questions and Methodology, while Paragraph 4 provides an overview of the data. Paragraph 5 defines the concept of Infection, while Paragraph 6 showcases the preference for the concept of contagion in an Italian corpus of Covid-related news articles (Busso and Tordini 2021). Finally, Paragraph 6 concludes the paper.

2. Theoretical background: Cognitive linguistics

Cognitive linguistics is a multifaceted approach to the scientific study of language that unites several strands of research with different foci. Scientists working in this tradition assume that our ability to produce language relies on more general cognitive skills, that language evolved to convey meaning, and that linguistic knowledge emerges from language use (Croft and Cruse 2004; Dąbrowska and Divjak 2015: 1). According to the first hypothesis, the human ability to produce language relies on fundamental mechanisms of non-linguistic reasoning and cognitive processing that had evolved in our lineage. For instance: memory, categorisation, and judgement (Tomasello 2008), to name but a few. On one hand, the study of human languages may allow us to grasp insights about the inner workings of the human mind; on the other, theories and phenomena observed in non-linguistic tasks are reflected in language. Thus, the lexical elements that emerge in language are understood as representing concepts in our minds, despite ongoing debate on the nature of this relationship (Speed, Vinson, and Vigliocco 2015).

According to the second hypothesis, any linguistic element conveys meaning, from phonological units to syntactic relations. Cognitive linguists agree that meaning is created through construal operations, or conceptualisation processes, and that it is structured by image-schemas, i.e., schematic representations of embodied experiences (Lakoff 1987). The major categories of construal operations identified in literature are Attention and Salience, Comparison, and Perspectivization; the most common image-schemas arise from our perception of space (e.g., up-down, front-back), containment (e.g., in-out, full-empty), force (e.g., balance, compulsion), among others (for a comprehensive list see Croft and Cruse 2004: 45).

The importance of construal is best exemplified when alternative expressions for the same situation are licensed by the same language. For instance, consider (1), adapted from Croft and Cruse (2004: 41):

(1) a. The leave**s** on the tree are beautiful.
b. The foliage-**∅** on the tree is beautiful.

Sentences in (1a-b) describe the same situation, and yet the choice of the grammatical construal is different. In (1a) the noun *leaf* is inflected in its plural form, thus evoking an image of a multitude of individual elements juxtaposed (the leaves). This is an example of the counting construction, which construes the entity as discrete (i.e., bounded) and heterogenous (Croft 2000). The noun *foliage* in (1b) instead is a mass-noun, and in English it cannot be inflected for number: the construal that emerges from this choice is of an unbounded and internally homogenous whole (Croft 2000). The two alternative construals are perhaps more evident when the same nominal stem may support both, as in (2), from Croft and Cruse (2004: 41):

(2) a. We have chocolate-**∅** for dessert.
b. We have chocolate**s** for dessert.

The utterance in (2a) refers to the substance 'chocolate', which in English is a mass-noun. As such, it is construed in its singular, uncountable grammatical form. Sentence (2b) sponsors the same noun inflected for number, therefore referring to discrete, individual objects covered with the same substance, which may or may not be filled with it.
Construal operations represent the basic mechanisms in the creation of meaning, which in turn is structured around even more basic entities in the human mind: i.e., image-schemas, which are defined by Johnson as:

> a recurrent pattern, shape, and regularity in, or of, these ongoing ordering activities. These patterns emerge as meaningful structures for us chiefly at the level of our bodily movements through space, or manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions (Johnson 1987: 29).

The perceptual information mediated by our bodies is abstracted and schematised, and eventually elaborated to structure non-bodily experience and abstract concepts via figurative processes, such as metaphor and metonymy (Johnson 1987; Talmy 1983). Despite arising from experience and bodily experience, image schemas differ from conventional images in two relevant aspects: they lack details, and they do not convey specific knowledge (Lakoff 1987: 453). For instance, consider the sentences in (3):

(3) a. Cherries are *red*.
b. *Red* covered the ice. (from Sandford 2021: 220)

The lexical item *red* in (3a) is construed as an attribute, i.e., a property that characterises a salient feature of an object (cherries in this case). Conversely, in (3b) the lexical item *red* is conceptualised as a substance with concrete physical dimensions and properties, to the extent that it can *cover* another substance (ice in this case), but it is not conceived as being an intrinsic property of that

substance. The two alternative construals of the same lexical item are based on two different image schemas: our understanding in (3a) emerges from the *part-whole* image schema, which structures our understanding of colour as a property (i.e., a part) of an object (i.e., a whole). The semantic interpretation of (3b) instead arises from the object image schema, which imposes a conceptualisation of *red* as a concrete, bounded object (Sandford 2021).

Crucially, there are other mechanisms that intervene in our creation of meaning: metaphor and metonymy. Despite their consideration in previous linguistic literature as literary tropes and "figures of speech", Lakoff and Johnson's milestone "Metaphors We Live By" (1980) has influenced more than a generation of scholars in linguistics, who have proved that conceptual metaphor and metonymy are fundamental mechanisms in our understanding of reality. Conceptual metaphors not only structure our understanding of reality, but they may even influence our behavioural responses to the external world (e.g., Gibbs 2005; Schubert 2005; Casasanto 2017; Winter and Matlock 2017). While most of the scientific production has concentrated on metaphors, research on conceptual metonymy is speedily catching up (e.g., Brdar 2017). The difference between the two mechanisms is perhaps best exemplified with a comparison proposed by Pérez-Sobrino (2017). Metaphors are like bridges that link two otherwise unrelated concepts, whereas metonymies are like icebergs, in which the emerged tip signals there is more just under the surface. That is: conceptual metaphors instantiate a relation of analogy between two concepts, which may be associated on the base of perceived similarity. The relationship between concepts in a metonymy instead is of contiguity: the two concepts are tied together because they belong to the same domain. Thus, while we formulate conceptual metaphors as for instance PANDEMIC IS WARFARE (where the pandemic is target domain B and warfare is source domain A); we formulate conceptual metonymies as providing mental access to a target concept. For instance, the expression *Paris was the first to declare war to the virus*, the item *Paris* is the lexical vehicle that provides access to the target concept *French government*. The most common metonymies may be formulated as CAUSE FOR RESULT or RESULT FOR CAUSE.

Finally, the last assumption in cognitive linguistics suggests that linguistic and grammatical knowledge emerges from its use, both at a diachronic and synchronic level. This implies that any analysis and theories of linguistic phenomena should be based on data observed in their natural occurrence, thus urging for a usage-based approach to the study of language. While the importance of actual data is widely recognized in contemporary research, back in the days of its first discussion this was a rather bold statement, especially if compared to the "armchair" method of previous theoretical frameworks (Dąbrowska and Divjak 2015: 1). Linguists working in cognitive linguistics collect data either from elicited tests or from large collections of texts, such as corpora, that allow for quantitative analysis and generalisations on linguistic patterns.

The analysis proposed in this paper is deeply rooted in a cognitive linguistics prespective to language description. It adopts the methodology of corpus analysis to ascertain the linguistic construal of the concept of CONTAGION, by investigating the syntactic and grammatical configuration of the lexical items in this domain that are available to English speakers. Furthermore, it contrasts the results of the analysis on contagion with numerical information on the frequency of lexical items associated to the domain of INFECTION, both in English and Italian.

The results show a differential preference for the two concepts across the two languages under scrutiny.

3. Research Questions and Methodology

The concept of CONTAGION has become extremely entrenched in the discourse about the Coronavirus.

To verify its linguistic conceptualisation in English, I relied on the Coronavirus Corpus (Davies 2020), an online Corpus specifically dedicated to the collection of linguistic material about Coronavirus. To compare it with the Italian conceptualisation of *contagio*, I relied on the corpus compiled by Busso and Tordini (2021) for Italian, which, despite being smaller, it offers a valuable resource for the study of the language of the pandemic in Italian. The methodology I adopted is that of corpus linguistics: frequency lexical items, collocations and manual analysis of Key Words In Context (KWIC). The research questions that I aim to answer are:

- what is the conceptualisation of contagion in English?
- what are the differences in construal between English and Italian?
- are there different syntactic preferences between the two languages in the encoding of the concept?
- what is the English equivalent of '*il numero dei contagi*'?

4. CONTAGION

The lexical item *contagion* derives from Latin *contangere*, which is a compound of *con* 'together' and *tangere* 'to touch', from PIE root **tag-*. Cognate words are *contact, contaminate, intact, integrate, tact, tactics, tangent,* and *tangible*, among others. The meaning of "communication of a disease" (OED *contagion*, n., 1) had already developed in Latin. The image schema that underlies the concept of contagion is 'touching', which in turn arises from the mundane and deeply embodied experience of two bodies touching each other. The touching of the two bodies allows the transmission of the pathogen, which metonymically grants us access to the entire event of the transmission of a disease.

The definition of *contagion* (n.) in the Oxford English Dictionary (hence, OED) includes several distinct meanings. The first entry reports "The communication of disease from body to body by contact direct or mediate" (OED *contagion* 1.a), thus referring to the actual event of transmission of a pathogen between two bodies. This meaning is extended to refer also to the "contagious quality or influence" (OED *contagion* 1.b). The second entry in the OED defines *contagion* as "a contagious disease or sickness; a plague or pestilence" (OED *contagion* 2). The relationship between meaning 1.a and 2 is metonymic: I will review it in detail in paragraph 4.3. The third meaning reported by the OED is also derived through metonymy: "The substance or principle by which a contagious disease is transmitted" (OED *contagion* 3.a) (see paragraph 4.3). The image schema at the basis of the concept of *contagion* may also be further extended and elaborated through conceptual metaphor: "hurtful, defiling, or corrupting contact; infecting influence" (OED *contagion* 4.a; see example 12), which can also be specific to morality: "contagious or spreading

moral disease; moral corruption" (OED 4.b). Notably, *contagion* does not have necessarily a negative connotation. It may also refer to "the contagious or 'catching' influence or operation of example, sympathy, and the like" (OED 5), thus imposing an emotionally positive semantic construal on the lexical item.

4.1 Lexical items

The lexical items that pertain to contagion and that are present in the Coronavirus corpus are listed in Table 1. I retrieved them by searching the corpus with the wildcard *contag**. In Table 1, the first column refers to the lexical item, POS stands for Part of Speech, and the last column displays Frequency.

item	POS	FREQ.
contagious (also includes *contageous*)	adj.	18228
contagion	n.	12917
contagions	n.	478
contagiousness	n.	407
contagiously	adv.	22

Table 1. Lexical items in the domain of contagion.

Table 1 reports the lexical items retrieved by the search *contag** with their frequencies. The adjective *contagious* is the most frequent (Frequency= 18206). The search also yielded the item *contageous* (F= 22), which represents a spelling mistake of the most common *contagious* and therefore was added to the total Frequency of *contagious* in Table 1. The noun *contagion* (F= 12917) may also be inflected by number (*contagions,* F= 478), which however is dramatically less frequent than the other items. Similarly, the noun *contagiousness* (the status of being *contagious,* F= 407), derived from the adjective and the nominal suffix *-ness*, has a significantly lower frequency in the corpus than other lexical items. Finally, the adverb *contagiously* (F= 22) is rarely used.
Both the adjective *contagious* and the noun *contagion* originated in Latin and entered Middle English via French (OED, *contagious*, adj. and *contagion*, n.); the noun *contagiousness* instead originated in Early Modern English (OED, *contagiousness*, n., first attestation 1530).

4.2. Collocations

The Coronavirus corpus is part of the larger family of English Corpora, which includes COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American), COHA (Corpus of Historical American), and the iWeb corpus, among others. The user-friendly, online interface allows for the research of collocations within the corpus. Table 2 reports the ten most frequent collocations in the corpus for the lexical item *contagious.*

item	Frequency[2]
more	8280
highly	7396
virus	4819
disease	3317
variant	3060
variants	1900
spread	1814
strain	1155
diseases	974
deadly	764

Table 2. Collocations for contagious

The two most frequent collocates of the adjective *contagious* are the adverbs *more* and *highly.* The lexical item *deadly* is the only adjective in the list, and the other items are all nouns: these are *virus*, *disease*, *variant*, *variants*, *spread*, *strain,* and *diseases*. Overall, the list of collocations reflects the most common preoccupations related to the contagion during the ongoing pandemic.
Particularly, the two items *variant* and *variants* refer to the discourse around the mutations of Sars-Cov-2, which keeps evolving into new and different forms, often discussed with reference to their *contagiousness*:

(4) The Delta variant is much more contagious than previous variants we've seen. (31/08/21, Greenwich Time)

The collocations of the item *contagion* are reported in Table 2. The most frequent collocate is *risk*, followed by *spread*, *fear*, *fears*, *prevent*, *deadly*, *avoid*, *contain* and *risks.* The items unanimously reflect the danger represented by the contagion, the *risk* of its *spread*, the *fear* that it evokes in humans, and the need to halt it.

item	FREQ.
risk	871
spread	824
fear	398
fears	304
prevent	285
deadly	234
avoid	232
reduce	203
contain	201
risks	199

Table 3. Collocations of contagion

[2] The figures reported in this paper were extracted from the corpus in Spring 2021. At a later inspection, these have increased significantly, although the lexical items have remained the same. The main difference is the presence of the noun Delta, which identifies a variant of the virus that became prominent in public discourse during Summer 2021.

The contagion may be conceptualised as a substance that covers a specific area, as in (5-6):

(5) **spread** of the deadly/viral/lethal contagion
(6) the contagion **spread** as fast as the fear of death

The lexical item *spread* may be used either as a verb whose subject is *contagion*, or as a deverbal noun. The adjectives that most commonly fill the construction "spread of the ADJ contagion" are exemplified in (5), and they convey the danger of exposure to the virus.
The contagion may also be construed as an external phenomenon with its own propelling force, which needs to be *prevented*, *reduced*, and *contained* (7-9), thus conceptualising it as an opponent that needs to be defeated, and against which one needs to protect themselves.

(7) […] broad restrictions to **prevent** the spread of contagion.
(8) […] measures to **reduce** contagion.
(9) […] widespread lockdowns to **contain** contagion.

These construals are in keeping with the dominant metaphorical frames in the discourse of the current pandemic, namely the PANDEMIC IS WARFARE and the PANDEMIC IS A NATURAL FORCE.
Other collocates convey the feelings of humans towards the contagion, as in (10-11):

(10) […] **fear** of global/Covid-19 contagion
(11) […] **fears** over coronavirus contagion

Notably, the lexical item *fear* may be the object being transmitted through contagion, as opposed to being a reaction to the contagion:

(12) […] the contagion of **fear** infected markets

In (12), *fear* is metaphorically conceptualised as a pathogen that may cause an infection in the specific context of economic finance. The metaphorical understanding of the phrase in (12) is licensed by the figurative meaning of *contagion* (OED, *contagion*, 4.a). Thus, the concept of *contagion* may be successfully employed not only to describe the physical, concrete transmission of an organism between two bodies, but it may also be metaphorically extended to refer to any type of influence of one entity on another.
The verbs that most frequently collocate with *contagion* are reported in Table 4, and they either conceptualise the transmission of the disease as an ongoing process (*spreads*, *spread*, *spreading*, *continues*) or they focus on the initial moment of the event (*came*, *emerged*, *coming*, *became*, *resulting*, *started*).

item	FREQ.
came	51
spreads	41
continues	38
emerged	36
coming	32

spread	23
spreading	22
became	15
resulting	13
started	13

Table 4. Concordance of contagion + VERB

Overall, contagion is not frequently used as a syntactic subject. It is more frequently found as object of the preposition *of* in NPs headed by deverbal nouns such as *the spread of the contagion* (5, 7). The phrases in (13) report an example in which *contagion* is the subject of the verb *to emerge*:

(13) […] the largest daily rise since the contagion **emerged**.

The usage of the verb *to emerge* licenses a conceptualisation of the contagion as a phenomenon beyond human control and agency. The phrase in (13) displays a metonymic conceptualisation of the term *contagion*, which provides access to the entire event of the pandemic via the metonymy CAUSE FOR RESULT. Finally, the expression *daily rise* in (13) refers to the number of new cases of individuals contracting the virus.
Lastly, I checked the collocations for the lexical item *contagions* (Table 5).

item	FREQ.
other	48
spread	30
future	17
against	16
grow	14
prepared	14
wave	14
quickly	14
limit	12
increase	12

Table 5 Collocations of contagions

Despite being less frequent than its singular form (see Table 1), the analysis of the collocations of *contagions* offers relevant insights to the general construal of the concept. The lexical items that most frequently collocate with *contagions* are *other, spread, future, against, grow, prepared, wave, quickly, limit,* and *increase*. The verb *to spread* also collocates with the singular form of the noun (Table 3). The preposition *against* and the verb *to limit* license a construal of *contagions* as an opponent, which is reminiscent of the conceptualisation of the singular form, while the lexical item *wave* suggests a construal of the contagion as a large body of water. The same metaphorical frame has been observed for the pandemic, whose different phases have largely been referred to as *waves* (Semino 2021). A few occurrences suggest a conceptualisation of *contagion* in its second meaning (OED *contagion* 2):

(14) Colds and the flu are viral **contagions** that are spread through aerosols, just like Covid-19

The sentence reported in (14) displays an instance of the noun *contagions* used to refer to an entire epidemic, resulting from a metonymic construal in which the cause of the event (i.e., the contagion) provides mental access to its result (i.e., an epidemic/ illness). Unlike Italian *contagi*, the plural form of the noun in (14) does not refer to the collection of individual cases of disease transmission, rather it conceptualises the event of the contagion as a discrete, internally homogenous process.
There are however other collocates which license a construal of *contagions* as a series of individual transmission:

(15) The country has managed to slow down the spread of coronavirus but should be prepared for **contagions** to **grow** quickly.

The utterance in (15) showcases the conceptualisations of CONTAGION as referring to the transmission between individuals, and its plural form refers to the collection of single individual events. To verify the distribution of the two distinct meanings of the lexical item *contagion*, I analysed manually the occurrences of its plural form. An overview is offered in Table 6.

item	Frequency	disease (%)	individual (%)
other	48	35 (73%)	13 (27%)
spread	30	13 (43%)	17 (57%)
future	17	16 (94%)	1 (6%)
against	16	13 (81%)	3 (19%)
wave	14	0	14 (100%)
limit	12	0	12 (100%)
prepared/ grow/ quickly	9	0	9 (100%)
increase	8	0	8 (100%)
total	154	77 (50%)	77 (50%)

Table 6 The different facets of contagions

Table (6) reports the frequencies of the different facets of *contagions*. Incidentally, the two alternative meanings have the same frequency. The items that most commonly collocate with the "disease" meaning are *other*, *future,* and *against*, while the items that collocate with the "individual" meaning are *wave, limit, prepared/ grow/ quickly, increase*. The lexical item *spread* collocates almost equally with both meanings. The examples in (16) contrast the two distinct meaning, that collocate with the same lexical item:

(16) (a) If you are with **other** people, **contagions** outdoors are also unlikely, especially under sunlight.
(b) these interventions alone did not tame cholera, malaria, and **other contagions** that plagued Western societies.

The two different meanings of the item *contagion* are exemplified in (16a, b), and display different syntactic configuration. In (16b) the item *other* modifies *contagions*, thus imposing a bounded construal in keeping with meaning 2 reported by the OED. Sentence (16a) instead refers to a collection of individual episodes of viral transmission between individuals.

There is a third meaning of the item *contagion* that is registered in the OED, and that is exemplified in (17):

(17) Viruses, bacteria and other **contagions** are a fact of nature and no one is responsible for protecting you from nature.

The meaning reported in (17) corresponds to meaning 3a in the OED, and it is motivated by the metonymic construal RESULT FOR CAUSE, in which the CAUSE of a contagion (viruses and bacteria) are mentally accessed via the RESULT of their transmission (the contagion itself)[3].

4.3 Discussion

The concept of contagion is defined in the OED as having three distinct meanings (see paragraph 3). Its first meaning is modelled on the base of the image schema of 'touching', and it refers to the transmission of either concrete or abstract entities between two individuals. This specific transmitting event is commonly used in reference to pathogen and external agents, that are likely to cause an infection in the affected individual.

The second meaning of the lexical item refers to an entire disease, such as flu, cholera, etc. This meaning is construed as a metonymic elaboration on the concept of contagion, in which the physical act of transmission serves as the linguistic item that provides access to the adjacent domain of disease. The relationship between the two domains is CAUSE-RESULT, in which the *contagion* is the CAUSE of the disease.

Lastly, the third meaning of *contagion* is construed through the reverse metonymy of meaning 2. In this case, the lexical item *contagion* provides mental access to the bacteria, viruses, and other entities that are the CAUSE of the contagion. Thus, we may successfully analyse meaning 3 as the result of EFFECT FOR CAUSE metonymy.

Although the concept of contagion may be used to refer to individual transmission, the occurrences retrieved in the corpus for the noun inflected in the plural are equally split between meaning 1.a (individual transmission of the disease) and meaning 2 (disease). During the pandemic, the concept of contagion has been discussed repeatedly, especially with reference to the rates of individual cases and transmission of the virus. The low frequency figures for the item *contagions* suggest that this is not the preferred concept to convey information about the rates of individual transmissions.

5. Infection

The concept of INFECTION is intimately connected to the concept of CONTAGION, albeit there are some differences. Crucially, English-Italian dictionaries unanimously report the verb *to infect* as equivalent to It. *contagiare*. According to the OED, the verb *to infect* derives from Latin *inficere* 'to dye, to stain, to impregnate, to imbue, to taint, to poison, to affect with disease' (OED, *infect, v.*).

[3] This was the only case of meaning 3a that I retrieved from the corpus, and therefore I considered it within the "disease" category in Table 6.

The difference between the two verbs (and concepts) is subtle, but substantial. According to Merriam-Webster dictionary forum:

> *Contagious diseases are spread by contact, while infectious diseases are spread by infectious agents. Something "contagious" is by default "infectious" because contact exposed you to the infectious agent, but something infectious isn't always contagious. (https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/gesundheit-is-that-cold-contagious-or-infectious, last accessed 4 December 2021).*

There are infections that are not contagious, e.g., food poisoning caused by bacteria in the food ingested, which however do not spread among people by exposure to the infected individual. Notably, the concept conveyed by *to infect* displays two different facets: (a) to transmit a disease and (b) to cause a disease; conversely, *contagion* only describes the transmission of a pathogen through touch, and it implies the development of an infection. Despite there being possible *contagious* agents that do not develop an infection (e.g., *lice* and other parasites, https://www.rchsd.org/health-articles/head-lice/), an informal analysis on COCA suggests that the items lexically related to *contagion* do not frequently collocate with *lice*[4].

I searched the Coronavirus corpus with the query "*infect**" to retrieve the lexical items in the domain of infection. Table 7 reports the part of speech (POS) and Frequencies of the results of the query in the corpus:

item	POS	Frequency
infection	n.	202810
infections	n.	186322
infected	pp./adj.	185517
infectious	adj.	78381
infect(s)	v.	16490

*Table 7 Frequency of lexical item for infect**

As expected, the list encompasses a verbal element *to infect*, which however is not the most frequent item in the domain (F= 16490). The most frequent item instead is the noun *infection* and its plural form *infections*, which together represent 58% of the total occurrences of the lexical items. The comparison of the frequencies of this lexical item with those of *contagion* (Table 1) reveal that the domain of INFECTION is extremely more frequent than CONTAGION in the discourse of the pandemic. A close scrutiny of the occurrences reveal that the concept of INFECTION is indeed the preferred one to describe individual transmission of the pathogen, as exemplified in the utterances in (18-20):

(18) Now you are considered to have had a «close contact» with an **infected individual** if you've spent a cumulative 15 minutes over a 24-hour period.
(19) Every day we report a large number of people newly **infected** with COVID-19 […]
(20) The number of new Covid-19 **infections** has "consistenly increased over the past week"

[4] This claim stems from an informal analysis of the list of collocations of the lexical item *lice* in COCA, in which there is no sign of lexical items related to contagion. Lice however *infest*, *spread*, may be *picked* or *transmitted*.

The utterances in (18) and (19) display the past participle of the verb *to infect* to convey information on individual cases of disease-transmission, thus representing the English equivalent of the Italian *contagiati*. The utterance in (20) instead displays the plural noun *infections* to discuss the daily rise of new cases of Covid-19, and therefore is the equivalent of the Italian *il numero di (nuovi) contagi*. Although the two concepts are not strictly the same in scientific medical terminology, English and Italian systematically select one of the two terms to refer to the same event. In a cognitive linguistic perspective, the lexical choice of English may be successfully analysed as focusing on the *result* of the event, as opposed to the Italian preferred item, which instead focuses on the *cause* of the event. It must be stressed however that the two languages do not exclude alternative realisations.

6. A comparison with Italian

Italian operates different lexical choices in the conceptualisation and discussion of Coronavirus, and it systematically prefers the concept of contagion to talk about the transmission of the virus, while selecting *infection* less frequently. To verify this claim, I turned to the Italian covid corpus, compiled by Busso and Tordini (2021). This corpus was compiled by collecting newspaper magazines in a period between February 24th, 2020, and June 3rd, 2020. The two authors integrated Google searches (both manual and automatic) with the results of the web-scraping software BootCat (Baroni and Bernardini 2005). The Italian corpus is not fully comparable to the Coronavirus corpus, as it contains 362,464 tokens. It was designed avoiding daily reports but including interviews, investigative reports, and authoritative comments (Busso and Tordini 2021: 47-48). Nonetheless, the Italian Covid-corpus is representative of the Italian discourse about Covid-19, especially in the early weeks since the start of the pandemic.

I ran queries on the corpus through the software SketchEngine to retrieve linguistic data in a usage-based perspective. This allows me to avoid personal intuitions and introspection as a native speaker, in keeping with the cognitive linguistics perspective (Dąbrowska 2016). Considering the different nature of the two corpora, and the focus of my research being on English, I use the Italian corpus as a reference to retrieve (mainly) qualitative data and example. I report numerical figures for the frequencies of the lexical items retrieved in Italian: their relative frequencies within the same corpus are indicative of the lexical choices operated by the two languages.

Table 8 reports the frequencies of the lexical items pertaining to the concept of CONTAGIO in Italian. I aggregated the frequencies of inflected adjective, verb, and past participle. I kept the noun *contagio* separated from its plural form *contagi*, in keeping with the previous investigation on English. Furthermore, I considered the past participle form *contagiati* as a distinct form from the verb *contagiare*, on the base of its frequent usage as a nominalised, deverbal adjective, as (22) shows. The list of individual lexical items considered in the lemmas is provided in the footnote[5].

lemma	POS	

[5] The entry *contagiato* includes *contagiata, contagiati, contagiate; contagioso* includes *contagiosa, contagiose, contagiosi; contagiare* includes *contagia, contagiano, contagiando, contagianti*.

contagio	n.	240
contagi	n.	167
contagiato	p. participle	132
contagioso	adj.	21
contagiare	v.	15
contagiosità	n.	6

Table 8 Frequency of lexical items in contagio

From a comparison with the relative Frequency of English lexical items (Table 1), it clearly appears a difference in the POS preferred to talk about the contagion. While the noun *contagio* emerges as the most used in the Italian corpus, English prefers the adjective *contagious*, thus more frequently construing the concept of contagion as a property of an individual as opposed to a process and an event. The preference for these two different parts of speech by the two languages is related to the emergence of the verb *contagiare* in Italian. The grammatical categories of nouns and verbs are strictly connected from a syntactic point of view, to the extent that some linguists have described the Noun-Verb continuum (Simone 2020; Ross 1972).
In keeping with the expectations, the lemma *contagiato* is the most frequent after the noun (both in singular and plural). This lexical item is not represented in English, as it lacks the verbal element referring to the concept of CONTAGION, which despite being infrequent, is also present in the list of lexical items. Finally, the noun *contagiosità* refers to the status of being *contagious* (see *contagiousness*).

(21) […] portando così il numero complessivo dei **contagiati** a 67.366.

The utterance in (21) reports the nominalised, deverbal adjective of the verb *contagiare* in reference to individuals who contracted the virus, thus evoking a construal of the contagion as an individual event. The inflection for number in (21) describes a multitude of individual cases, thus evoking a construal of a bounded, internally heterogenous whole.
A manual analysis of the plural noun *contagi* suggests that this lexical item may also be used to conceptualise the individual event of transmission of the disease (23):

(22) A fronte di 1.116 tamponi, sono quattro i **contagi** scoperti dal sistema sanitario umbro.

The utterance in (22) displays the same usage of the noun inflected for number that was displayed in (16a). Interestingly, while there are no cases in the corpus of usage of the plural noun as in (16b) (i.e.: referring to "disease"), there are examples in which this meaning is realised with the singular noun, as in (23):

(23) Le regole di restrizione per limitare il contagio sono "giustificate" per il 75% degli italiani.

Finally, Table 9 reports the frequency of lexical items in INFEZIONE. In keeping with the organisation of the lexical items in Table 8, I grouped inflected lexical items per lemma, but I kept the nouns and the past participle separated. It emerges that the concept of INFEZIONE in Italian

has lower frequencies in its lexical representation in the corpus under scrutiny, thus suggesting that it is not the preferred concept to communicate the spreading of the virus.

item	POS	Frequency
infezione	n.	54
infettivo	adj.	45
infetto	adj.	40
infettato	p. participle	22
infezioni	n.	17
infettare	v.	14

Table 9 Lexical items of infezione

The lexical items related to the concept of INFEZIONE in Italian display richer morphology, including two different adjectives (*infetto* and *infettivo*) that evoke two distinct construals. The adjective *infetto* (i.e., infected) describes the status of something or someone who has been infected by something or someone, therefore conveying a passive meaning. Whereas the adjective *infettivo* (i.e., infectious) refers to the property of something to infect something or someone, thus conceptualising this adjective as an active property of someone or something. Notably, the status of "being infected" is also lexicalised by the past participle *infettato*, which evokes yet a different construal, in keeping with its syntactic category of verb. The item *infettato* highlights the passive meaning of the concept, suggesting that someone has been *infettato* by something else (as opposed to *infetto*, which instead denotes a more stable and permanent situation of being infected).

7. Conclusions

The present paper has explored the concept of CONTAGION, which has unfortunately become salient during the current pandemic caused by Sars-Cov-2. The lexical items that describe it originated in Latin and spread through the European languages, including English. Despite their common linguistic ancestor, the English and Italian concept display different construals, which in turn are reflected in different syntactic choices on the part of the two languages. Perhaps more strikingly, the two languages also differ in the preferred choice of concept to describe the same event, namely the collection of cases of individual transmissions of the virus. While Italian prefers the concept of CONTAGION, English prefers INFECTION. I argue that the reason for this preference lies in the different lexical items that are available to speakers of the language. While Italian includes the verb *contagiare* in its lexical repertoire, which licenses the passive construal of *contagiato* using the past participle, English lacks such possibility and relies on the verb *to infect* instead. The preference for the two different concepts predicts that the Italian expression *il numero dei contagi* should be translated in English as *the number of infected individuals/people*. Nonetheless, results of the corpus analysis have shown that alternative construals in the two languages are possible, but less common. The English sentence *the number of contagions* is grammatical (and retrieved in corpora), but it is not as frequent as *the number of infections*. These observations call for caution in the translation process and attest to the relevance of usage-based approaches to language description. Furthermore, the results suggest that Frequency of appearance in a corpus,

or lack thereof, is a paramount dimension that should not be underestimated in the description, production, and translation process.

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Shakespeare and the Covid-19 vaccine in the British and European news:

An analysis of partially filled constructions (PFCs)

and snowclones

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of a restricted corpus of British, Italian, and other European news from different media (e.g., newspaper articles, blogs, social media, etc.) about William Shakespeare – an 81-year-old man from Warwickshire with the same name of the well-known Elizabethan playwright – and the Covid-19 vaccine. Mr. Shakespeare was the first man, second only to a 90-year-old Northern Irish woman named Margaret Keenan, to receive a dose of the vaccine in the United Kingdom on 8 December 2020 (he died on 25 May 2021 for reasons unrelated to the vaccine), and both British and Continental communication media did not miss the opportunity to capitalise on this piece of news as an advertising gimmick. Nevertheless, news about Mr. Shakespeare's vaccination offers incredibly fertile ground for a linguistic analysis of puns and wordplay mainly about the titles of and famous quotes from the Bard's plays, such as "The Gentleman of Corona" and "The Taming of the Flu." Also resorting to the Coronavirus corpus, released in May 2020 on english-corpora.org (https://www.english-corpora.org/corona/), this paper argues that such puns and wordplay have a common structure, known in linguistic terms as partially filled constructions (PFCs). A particular kind of PFC, known as snowclones, is introduced and discussed, with special emphasis on the productivity of *Hamlet*'s "To be or not to be," understood as a PFC, with the purpose of demonstrating its high productivity.

1. Introduction: Enter Mr. Shakespeare pursued by a syringe

The UK was one of the first countries worldwide and the first in Europe to start a Covid-19 vaccine campaign. As early as 8 December 2020 (known as V-day), the MHRA (Medicine and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) authorised the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine (i.e., Comirnaty), and the vaccine campaign officially began in the British Isles. Ninety-one-year-old Margaret Keenan from Northern Ireland was the first to receive the first dose of Comirnaty at University Hospital Coventry, immediately followed by an eighty-one-year-old man from

Warwickshire whose name was, believe it or not, William Shakespeare (who died on 25 May 2021 for reasons unrelated to the side effects of the vaccination). Mr. Shakespeare's wife, Joy, when interviewed by the BBC on the day of her husband's death about Bill's reaction to the media coverage that followed his vaccination, declared that

> Bill was so grateful for being offered the opportunity to become one of the first people in the world to be given the vaccine. It was something he was hugely proud of – he loved seeing the media coverage and the positive difference he was able to make to the lives of so many. He often talked to people about it and would always encourage everyone to get their vaccine whenever he could. (*BBC News* 2021: online)

Beginning on 8 December 2020, from tabloids to social media, from radio programmes to TV shows, this news item spread around the world and stimulated the creativity and humour of journalists, presenters, and social media users alike who immediately began to adapt the titles and catchphrases of the renown Bard of Avon, to whom the first vaccinated British man was homonymous.

We do not know if "Bill" Shakespeare's vaccination was an intentional publicity stunt or happened by chance. Some journalists, reporters, and media users from outside the UK deemed his vaccination a clever marketing strategy, so much so that some Italian reporters and media users ironically asked their government to find a Dante Alighieri or a Giovanni Boccaccio to be vaccinated on the Italian V-day[1].

Rather than answer the above-mentioned question, this article examines some British, Italian, and European news items from various media (newspaper articles, blogs, social media, etc.) from a linguistic perspective, thus treating quotations from Shakespeare's canon as peculiar syntactic and lexical structures known as Partially Filled Constructions (hereafter PFCs) and snowclones.

2. Partially Filled Constructions (PFCs) and snowclones

First introduced[2] by Adele E. Goldberg (2006) in her Constructionist theory as Partially Lexically-filled Constructions, thus considering them part of lexical studies, PFCs have been recently investigated in recurring to a continuum-based theory whose extremes are syntax, on the one hand, and lexis, on the other (Simone 2007; 2017; Piunno 2016; 2020). As defined by Valentina Piunno (2020: 145), "Partially Filled Constructions are characterized by the presence of a variable pattern, i.e., a pattern subject to partial lexical variation. In particular, these sequences are composed of a fixed and immutable part and of a part subject to variation." The part subject to variation comprises empty lexical and syntactic slots, blank positions that can be filled according to certain morphosyntactic and lexical predictable rules:

> Blank positions can vary in number and type, depending on the structure. Even if they are flexible (or variable), from the lexical point of view they maintain a certain regularity: in fact, they admit saturation with material of the same morphosyntactic or semantic nature.

[1] See, among others, the Twitter post by Deltacetum, 8 December 2020, https://twitter.com/Deltacetum?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E1336313691189415938%7Ctwgr%5E%7Ctwcon%5Es1_&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.ilmattino.it%2Fprimopiano%2Festeri%2Fwilliam_shakespeare_vaccino_covid_ultime_notizie_oggi_8_dicembre_2020-5633029.html (08/2021) or Gaiaitalia 2020. See also Sky tg24 (2020) where the journalist declares that Mr. Shakespeare was "sicuramente scelto non a caso per essere in prima fila" (Eng. tr.: "certainly not chosen by chance to be in the front raw"). Translations from other European languages are all mine, unless acknowledged otherwise.

[2] Although the label "partially lexically-filled constructions" was formally introduced by Goldberg, PFCs had already been investigated by Fillmore, Kay and O'Connor (1988), who had called them "let alone" constructions.

> Semantically, they can have predictable meaning (even when idiomatic) which derives from the entire construction. Finally, on the basis of the various exemplars that can be derived from them, PFCs show different levels of productivity. (Piunno 2020: 146)

An example of a PFC from Shakespeare's plays is *Hamlet*'s well-known hemistich "to be or not to be" (3.1.57)[3]. As I discuss elsewhere (Ciambella, forthcoming), and as will be seen later in this article, this PFC can be considered one of the most productive in the entire Shakespearean canon, with dozens of examples from advertisements, book titles, article headings, etc. The scheme of this PFC can be represented as follows:

To X_{VERB} or not to X_{VERB}

where the verbalizers "to", the conjunction "or", and the adverb "not" represent the fixed slots of this PFC and the two Xs the slots to be filled with material that, given the high level of morphological predictability that the hemistich has, belongs to, or ends up in the word class of verbs. An example from advertising campaigns is "To dip or not to dip," the slogan used by the American fast food chain Chick-Fil-A to advertise their new honey BBQ sauce in 2019.

One kind of PFC is the snowclone (or snow clone)[4]. Theorised and studied in the syntactic model called Construction Grammar (CxG)[5], a snowclone is "a phrasal template (an expression with one or more open slots and some fixed lexical material) derived from a quote that has gained the status of a funny or clever tagline" (Michaelis 2017: online). Laura A. Michaelis's definition of snowclones is well suited to this study, since all the PFCs analysed herein can be considered snowclones deriving from Shakespearean quotations. To my knowledge, in the field of CxG, snowclones have been investigated almost exclusively from a morphosyntactic, phraseological, and cognitivist point of view (see, among others, Sag, 2010; Kay and Michaelis, 2012; Traugott, 2014), without much attention to translation/adaptation aspects, i.e., to the relationship between what I would call "source (phrasal) template" (borrowing from Michaelis's definition) and "target clone," in order to adapt two methodological frameworks (CxG and translation studies) to the case studies analysed below.

The case studies introduced in the next session are taken from a variety of news items and will be analysed in morphosyntactic, lexical, and translatological terms.

3. Case studies

"Shakespeare gets Covid vaccine: All's well that ends well". This is the title of the first article that the BBC devoted to the vaccination of Mr. Shakespeare from Warwickshire on 8 December 2020. Here no PFC is present, but this title is worth exploring from a pragmatic viewpoint, especially in terms of information structure. In fact, two extended foci are presented in the form of two assertives, the first affirming that a certain Shakespeare was vaccinated and the second declaring that the eighty-one-year-old patient is okay. Both foci present interesting semantic elements. The first assertive rotates around the homonymity between the Bard and the second vaccinated individual in the UK, thus grabbing the attention of British readers who clearly associate the

[3] In this article, all quotations from Shakespeare's plays are taken from *The New Oxford Shakespeare* edition. See references for bibliographical details.

[4] Moving from the premise that in this article I consider snowclones particular types of PFCs, the two terms are used almost interchangeably here.

[5] As defined by Michaelis, in CxG "rules of syntactic combination (descriptions of local trees) are directly associated with interpretive and use conditions, by means of semantic and pragmatic features that attach to the mother or daughter nodes in these descriptions" (Michaelis n.d.: online).

headline to Shakespeare the playwright. In terms of pragmatics, the inference that readers can draw from this focus is strictly dependent on their background knowledge. Such knowledge can be understood as the sum of situational knowledge, i.e., the knowledge of the situational context of a sentence, and world knowledge, i.e., general knowledge due to past experiences. In this case, situational and world knowledge can conflict, or, more precisely, world knowledge can mislead the reader's inference that the Shakespeare in question is the famous playwright if not supported by situational knowledge; that is, readers should be aware that Mr. Shakespeare is an eighty-one-year-old man from Warwickshire living in the twenty-first century. I would argue that this tension between situational and world knowledge is absolutely intended and that it tempts the reader to go on reading the article.

The second focus coincides with the quotation of the title of a Shakespeare play, which is interesting from various perspectives. First of all, it reinforces the connection between the two foci. At the same time, this second sentence highlights the apparent anachronistic absurdity and ambiguity of the first one and contributes to the readers' confusion and curiosity[6]. Nevertheless, one cannot assume out of hand that a native English readership is aware that the second focus is in fact a Shakespeare title, since *All's Well That Ends Well* is not one of the Bard's best known plays. In fact a middlebrow English reader of BBC news might not understand it as a quotation, but simply as an idiom or proverb (which, however, became popular thanks to Shakespeare's play).

It is by reading the article that interesting PFCs emerge. The first snowclone can be found in the following question: "So, if Ms Keenan was patient 1A, was Mr. Shakespeare 'Patient 2B or not 2B'?"[7]. As for phonological aspects, the target clone "2B or not 2B," if taking into account allophonic variations, connected speech, and the alternation of weak and strong forms, sounds quite similar to the original hemistich, thus understanding the abbreviated form 2B as the quasi-homophone of "to be." Both morphologically and semantically, on the other hand, this PFC offers a great deal to think about. In terms of morphology, the full infinitive form "to be" is substituted by its homophone adjectival form "2B," which however requires a noun to which it refers (that is the reason why "Patient" precedes the PFC). However, the meaning of the source phrasal template is completely undermined, since the verb "to be" becomes the numeral 2B, thus indicating that Mr. Shakespeare was the second person to be vaccinated against Covid-19 in Britain, after patient 1A, Margaret Keenan. Of course this pun/wordplay about the PFC "to be or not to be" contributes to the humoristic tone of the entire article at a time when humour, given the gravity of the epidemic, was not that widespread in news reports. The humour in this article clearly mirrors the hopeful message expressed by the BBC journalist regarding the beginning of the UK's vaccine campaign.

The BBC article even reports on the other snowclones populating social media that day, Twitter in first place. "Two doses, both alike in quantity" is built on the (to many, well-known) first line of the Prologue to *Romeo and Juliet* in Q2[8]. In this case, the PFC seems to follow a certain regularity. Considering the prototypical construction "Two X, both alike in Y," with "X" as being

[6] Ambiguity in news headlines has been studied extensively using numerous methodological frameworks, from semantics (Nwala and Umukoro 2017) to psycholinguistics (Khalifa 2018) and Digital Humanities (Liu, Wei and Wan 2018).

[7] The same wordplay can be found, i.a., in an online article by Reuters (2020): "Some asked if Margaret Keenan was patient 1A, then was Shakespeare 'Patient 2B or not 2B'?"; in the American newsletter *The Insider* (Bostock, 2020): "Another popular joke pondered that if Keenan, the first to get the jab, was patient 1A, then did that make Shakespeare 'Patient 2B or not 2B'?"; and in many other newspapers worldwide on 8 December 2020, such as *The Tribune* (2020) and the *Mumbai Mirror* (2020). Actually, the wordplay is a quote from a tweet by the Twitter account VoiceOfTheMysterons who was the first to report the news on Twitter on 8 December 2020, https://twitter.com/Mysteron_Voice/status/1336214188998471680 (08/2021).

[8] For details about the Prologue of *Romeo and Juliet*, see, among others, Roberts 1998: 7; Erne 2007; Bigliazzi 2020: 21.

the disyllabic plural noun "households" and "Y" the trisyllable "dignity" in the Q2 version of the Prologue, the tweet reported by the BBC respects both the syllabification and morphological pattern of the original PFC, thus replacing "X" with the disyllabic plural noun "doses" and "Y" with the trisyllable "quantity." This point is very interesting, since it shows that constructions may respond not only to morphosyntactic (PoS tag) or semantic restrictions, but other kinds of constraint are also possible.

Other tweets show a similar successful productivity of some Shakespearean catchphrases and titles. For instance, Shakespeare's source template *The Taming of the Shrew* becomes the target clone "the taming of the flu," operating a substitution of the noun "shrew" with the noun "flu," which, in addition to the evident semantic adequacy of the situation described, rhymes with the Shakespearean term. A similar mechanism is evident in the adaption of another Shakespearean title, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, which became "the gentleman of Corona" in some tweets. Here the noun phrase "the two gentlemen" is not altered semantically, but only morphologically, from plural to singular, while the prepositional phrase "of Verona" becomes "of Corona," the proper name of the Northern Italian city being transformed into the proper name of the virus which rhymes with it. One last example of this case is "the merchant of virus": once more, the last element of the snowclone is subject to substitution, this time from the proper name of another Northern Italian city, i.e., Venice, to the common noun "virus." The above examples illustrate that, despite other variations, the most common PFCs from the Shakespearean canon tend to move their empty slot(s) to the right, on the last content word. This productivity, I would argue, might be justified in terms of suprasegmental phonology, given that in affirmative statements the last lexical word usually coincides with the sentence stress.

Nevertheless, adaptations of Shakespeare's PFCs proved to be productive not only for phonological reasons or in modifying the last element of a quotation from the Bard's canon. A Twitter user, paraphrasing Mercutio's last curse on Romeo's and Juliet's families (the source phrasal template "A plague on both your houses," 3.1.59), shared the news of Mr. Shakespeare's vaccination by adding the caption "A plague on neither of your houses," this target clone focussing on the distributive determiners instead of on the last content word and establishing a parallelism between contagion by plague in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and by Coronavirus today. Thus s/he nullifies the proleptic curse that the Shakespearean character throws on both Montagues and Capulets, reversing the expressive sentence into an assertive one. Journalist Dan Walker, always on Twitter, simply considered the determiner "the" in *The Winter's Tale* as an empty slot in Shakespeare's title and substituted it with the deictic "this." The caption "This Winter's Tale" clearly contextualises Shakespeare's "sad tale […] best for winter," as Mamillius says in 2.1.25, within the precise chronological framework of the 2020–21 winter, when the vaccine campaign against Covid-19 began.

4. A few examples of Shakespeare's snowclones in Italy and the rest of Europe: A European translation legacy?[9]

To what effect is Shakespeare's work invoked in relation with the tensions inherent in European societies? Can we know whether such invocations aim to encourage reflections on Europe as a social, political and/ or cultural entity? Is it possible to conceptualize

[9] The question of a European and global Shakespeare, decentralised from his Anglophone original chronotope, is a much debated contemporary one. Suffice it to think of such editorial series as 'Shakespeare in European Culture' (edited by Dirk Delabastita and Keith Gregor for John Benjamins) or 'Global Shakespeare Inverted' (edited by Bi-qi Beatrice Lei, David Schalkwyk, and Silvia Bigliazzi for Bloomsbury), devoted entirely to Shakespearean reception in Europe and the world, respectively.

> Shakespearean drama as offering an effective instrument that connects – or not – the voices of the people of Europe? (Fayard 2019: 10)

Fayard's questions help us introduce the second part of my analysis, which deals with Shakespearean snowclones in Continental Europe – Italy in particular – concerning "Bill" Shakespeare's vaccination. This analysis is aimed at demonstrating that both from a linguistic and cultural point of view, Shakespeare's heritage is not simply rooted in English culture, but his legacy is a European one whose long-standing tradition of translations and adaptations contributes, even in this case, to successfully conveying specific meanings in non-anglophone countries, in the optics that "everyone understands Shakespeare" (Yong 2005: 527).

The Italian media were not indifferent to William Shakespeare's vaccination. What is interesting for the purposes of this article is the translational approach adopted in relation to PFCs. Italian journalists and media users seem to distance themselves from the snowclones created by their English colleagues – perhaps also out of respect for mother tongues that were believed "authorized" to quote from their national Bard – and simply translated some PFCs into Italian, sometimes acknowledging the source, sometimes resorting to available Italian translations and ignoring the English source template. For instance, journalist Camilla Lombardi, in her article entitled "Il primo uomo vaccinato nel Regno Unito si chiama William Shakespeare" ("The first vaccinated man in the UK is called William Shakespeare"), dated 9 December 2020 and published in the online magazine wired.it, acknowledges Twitter as her source:

> Com'è ovvio le battute sul caso del signor Shakespeare si sprecano in tutto il mondo (e ci mancherebbe altro). Soprattutto su Twitter si leggono ipotetici stralci dell'*Amleto* dagli echi pandemici come "*Vaccinare o non vaccinare: questo è il problema*", oppure rititolazioni di celebri commedie quali *L'influenza domata* (al posto de *La Bisbetica domata*) o *Iniezione di una notte di mezza estate* (o per meglio dire di metà inverno, in questo caso). (Lombardi 2020: online)[10]

The phrase "[e]specially on Twitter" underlines that the author is self-distancing from what follows, i.e., a series of snowclones she found on Twitter (whose screenshot she attaches below the text) and that she translates from English, resorting to the best-known Italian versions of some Shakespearean catchphrases[11]. The same distancing narrative strategy can be found in other articles at the time. For example, Ida Artiaco reports that "'Vaccinare o non vaccinare: questo è il problema', si legge in un tweet che fa eco direttamente all'Amleto, oppure 'Tutto è bene quel che finisce (non ancora) bene', con riferimento al titolo dell'omonima commedia scritta tra il 1602 e il 1603" (Artiaco 2020: online)[12]. Even newspapers from Italian Switzerland adopted the same strategies, as one can read in *La Regione*, the most widespread newspaper in the Canton of Ticino:

> Il signor Shakespeare ha scatenato gli utenti di Twitter prodottisi in giochi di parole come "The taming of the flu" (titolo originale de "La bisbetica domata", dove "flu" è

[10] Eng. tr.: "Obviously, jokes about Mr. Shakespeare's case spread all over the world (it couldn't be otherwise). Especially on Twitter, one can read alleged excerpts from *Hamlet* with pandemic echoes such as "To vaccinate or not to vaccinate: that is the question", or retitling famous comedies such as *The Taming of the Flu* (instead of *The Taming of the Shrew*) or *A Midsummer Night's Injection* (or rather mid-winter, in this case)."

[11] As an informative article addressed to general readers, the text could not use more refined Italian translations, also because one cannot take for granted that the author herself knows other Italian versions which are not part of the Italian cultural heritage. For instance, Montale's translation of Hamlet's catchphrase with "Essere… o non essere. È il problema" (Mondadori) or Lombardo's version "Essere o non essere – questa è la domanda" (Feltrinelli) are generally known by scholars familiar with the topic.

[12] Eng. tr.: "'To vaccinate or not to vaccinate: that is the question', reads a tweet that echoes *Hamlet* directly, or 'All's well that ends (not yet) well', referring to the title of the homonymous comedy written between 1602 and 1603."

> influenza) oppure "The Two Gentlemen of Corona" (già "Verona"). Qualcuno si chiede che se Margaret Keenan, la prima vaccinata in Inghilterra, è paziente A1, allora Shakespeare sia "paziente 2B or not 2B". (*La Regione* 2020: online)[13]

In the above examples, distancing narrative strategies help the authors acknowledge that they are reporting someone else's words. Yet, the first two examples[14], by reporting PFCs directly in translation for the Italian general reader, without expressly acknowledging whether the source phrasal template is in English, journalists give the impression that an Italian Twitter user could have written those target clones and that translations were actually by those users instead of their own. By generally acknowledging that some Twitter users started creating fun snowclones, without specifying their nationality or native language, the journalists are hypothetically recognising that "everyone understands Shakespeare", that he is universal in whatever language his best-known titles and catchphrases are quoted and/or manipulated, as in the case of the PFCs cited above.

In order to confirm this hypothesis, snowclones whose source phrasal template is Hamlet's well-known catchphrase "To be or not be"[15] are reported in the table below, which contains PFCs from other European languages (in alphabetical order) referring to Mr. Shakespeare's vaccination:

Target clone[16]	**English translation**
Dutch	
Vaccineren of niet vaccineren? Dat is de vraag[17]	To be vaccinated or not to be vaccinated? That is the question
French	
Se vacciner ou ne pas se vacciner? Telle est la question[18]	To get vaccinated or not to get vaccinated? That is the question
German	
Impfen oder nicht Impfen – das ist hier die Frage[19]	To vaccinate or not to vaccinate – That is the question
Polish	

[13] Eng. tr.: "Mr. Shakespeare has unleashed Twitter users who have produced puns such as *The Taming of the Flu* (original title: *The Taming of the Shrew*, where 'flu' stands for *influenza*) or *The Two Gentlemen of Corona* (original: *Verona*). Some wonder that if Margaret Keenan, the first vaccinated person in England, is patient A1, then Shakespeare is 'patient 2B or not 2B'."

[14] The third journalist seems to prefer avoiding Italian translations, assuming perhaps that the inhabitants of Ticino understand English or are somehow familiar with it.

[15] This catchphrase was chosen as a case study because it has been adopted as a source template for snowclones related to Shakespeare's vaccination in all major European languages. While not all European languages have been selected, those considered as samples, belonging from different families (mainly German, Romance, and Slavic languages), all show the same PCF translational pattern.

[16] As examples of snowclones from the web reported in a table, no bibliographical reference is provided in the specific section, but rather in the footnotes below.

[17] Scheper, S., "Hoe een kwetsbare oudere een selfie maakt tijdens het vaccineren in Oldenzaal. En heimwee naar die oude plakzuilen in De Lutte", *AD*, 12 March 2021, https://www.ad.nl/oldenzaal/hoe-een-kwetsbare-oudere-een-selfie-maakt-tijdens-het-vaccineren-in-oldenzaal-en-heimwee-naar-die-oude-plakzuilen-in-de-lutte~a3fe1743/?referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F (08/2021).

[18] Tweet by Wiesel, T., 8 December 2020, https://mobile.twitter.com/wieselt/status/1336297240621625344 (08/2021).

[19] Podcast by prof. Lenzen, D., "Impfen oder nicht Impfen – das ist hier die Frage", University of Hamburg, 8 December 2020, https://www.uni-hamburg.de/newsroom/podcast/wie-jetzt-13.html (08/2021).

Przyjąć szczepionkę Pfizera albo nie przyjąć[20]	To take the Pfizer vaccine or not to take
Portuguese	
Ser ou não ser (vacinado), eis a questão[21]	To be or not to be (vaccinated), That is the question
Romanian	
A fi sau a nu fi… vaccinat, aceasta-i întrebarea![22]	To be or not to be… vaccinated, That is the question!
Russian	
Быть или не быть вакцинированным[23] (Byt' ili ne byt' vaktsinirovannym)	To be or not to be vaccinated
Spanish	
Ponérmela o no ponérmela, esa es la cuestión[24]	To take it or not to take it, That is the question

Table 1 – Examples of some target clones from European languages (source template: "To be or not to be").

Although space limitations preclude highlighting issues of linguistic typology, the examples reported in the above table, all taken from various media, illustrate the astonishing productivity of the Shakespearean PFC "To be or not to be" in the European languages examined[25]. As noted earlier, what must be noticed from a structural point of view is the fact that, on the one hand, some snowclones show that the infinitive "to be" is the empty slot to be filled with material of the same grammatical class, yet is semantically different (i.e., Dutch, French, German, Polish, and Spanish), while, on the other hand, examples from other languages – i.e., Portuguese, Romanian, and Russian – are literal translations from the original catchphrase and add the past participle "vaccinated" (respectively "vacinado," "vaccinat" and "vaktsinirovannym") that transforms the predicative "be" into an auxiliary to create passive forms or a copula. Both mechanisms, however, highlight the impressive productivity of this Shakespearean catchphrase, one that can be easily and successfully adapted in basically any European language to convey the same message: the vaccination campaign began on 8 December in the UK, the first European country to do so, and it is now the right time to decide whether to be vaccinated or not.

Lastly, two interesting cases to be considered are the Polish and Spanish ones. The Polish snowclone, found in the majority of the Polish media consulted, shows formal irregularity and disequilibrium consisting in avoiding the repetition of the NP+PP ("szczepionkę Pfizera," Eng. tr.: "Pfizer's vaccine"). Thus, the PFC's two empty slots are not filled with the same lexical items, perhaps because the object(s) of the verb "przyjąć" are implied for reasons of readability in the second slot. The Spanish Twitter user, meanwhile, opted for a similar strategy of object

[20] MK and KF, "Szok na Wyspach. Shakespeare drugą osobą zaszczepioną w kraju", *TVP Info*, 8 December 2020, https://www.tvp.info/51230836/koronawirus-william-shakespeare-81-lat-druga-osoba-na-swiecie-zaszczepiona-preparatem-pfizera-szok-w-wielkiej-brytanii (08/2021).

[21] Blog post by Ernani, F., 8 December 2020, https://www.tenhomaisdiscosqueamigos.com/2020/12/09/william-shakespeare-vacina-covid-19/ (08/ 2021).

[22] Blog post by ProLider, 8 December 2020, https://www.prolider.ro/2021/01/08/a-fi-sau-a-nu-fi-vaccinat/ (08/2021).

[23] RIA (Russian Information Agency) Novisti, "Вторым британцем, привитым от COVID-19, стал 80-летний Уильям Шекспир" ("Vtorym britancem, privitym ot COVID-19, stal 80-letnij Uil'jam Shekspir"), 8 December 2020, https://ria.ru/20201208/vaktsinatsiya-1588221769.html (08/2021).

[24] Tweet by Er Primo Pedro, 8 December 2020, https://twitter.com/ErPrimoPedro/status/1336295702239080454 (08/2021).

[25] The table also shows that the second part of *Hamlet*'s line, i.e., the second hemistich "that is the question", cannot be considered a PFC, since no translation seems to change it with lexical items belonging to other semantic fields and/or. Quotations from Polish and Russian media also show that the second hemistich is not necessary to the aim of the message conveyed.

implication, this time substituting the verb "vacunarse" (Eng. tr.: "to get vaccinated") with its semantically equivalent light verb construction "ponerse la vacuna" (Eng. tr.: "to take the vaccine") and substituting the direct object with the third person singular clitic "-la". This way the Spanish Twitter user is pragmatically resorting to situational knowledge, both shared by him and his followers, assuming that everybody understands the context in which the snowclone is inserted.

5. Conclusion

By analysing a restricted corpus of news from British and European (mainly Italian) newspapers and social media, this article has tried to demonstrate that, from a linguistic point of view, one of the most successful and productive structures adopted to convey information about the anti-Covid vaccination of William Shakespeare from Warwickshire on 8 December 2020 were the so-called Partially Filled Constructions, in particular the subcategory of snowclones. Most of the PFCs and snowclones explored are taken from the Bard's canon and readapt his titles and most famous catchphrases – as in the case of *Hamlet*'s "To be or not to be" – in order to catch the reader's attention through humour while at the same time establishing a connection between the 81-year-old vaccinated man and the early modern English playwright. Although a broader and more varied corpus – in terms of textual genres and quantitative data – is needed, all the examples examined above illustrate the high level of morphosyntactic and lexicosemantic productivity of certain Shakespearean catchphrases and titles if considered as PFCs.

Ultimately, although more significant quantitative studies are needed, the analysis conducted on examples from languages other than English may demonstrate the existence of a Shakespearean European legacy, which, mainly resorting to consolidated translation practices of Shakespeare's canon (see, among others, Cetera-Włodarczyk *et. al.* 2019), contributes to the high level of productivity and adaptability of some Shakespearean catchphrases in other Continental languages, thus creating the image of a pan-European, de-anglicised Bard, also – or, better yet, above all – in pandemic times.

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When Contagion Sounds Hilarious: Word-for-Word Translation as a Means for Fun

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Abstract
Contact between languages has always occurred. There is a location where the contact mainly takes place: translation. More specifically, the translator's mind. When the source text is not re-elaborated in the translator's mind, when the source language's elements are not separated from those of the target language, contagion takes place. Contagion is an effect of contact, as the Covid-19 pandemic has been teaching us over the past two years. Bodies need to be kept separate in order to avoid contagion. Devices shall be used to prevent contamination. This is supposed to work in case of physical contact and subsequent contagion. What happens in the translator's mind? The present essay aims at analyzing the "expressionary" designed by "Rome is More," a linguo-cultural experiment carried out and promoted mainly on social media to bring English speakers into contact with linguo-cultural elements of the Roman dialect.

1. Introduction

Debate has been going on for a while on whether translation can actually be considered and labelled as a creative process. Lately scholars have been dealing with "trans-creation" as an additional way to refer to "creative translation." In February 2021, TRADAC was officially launched. The acronym refers to the name of the Italian association promoting the study of AVT and accessibility. F. Chaume closed the event with a presentation which raised interesting and thought-provoking questions such as: do we really need a new or an additional term for AVT and, more generally, for translation? Is not translation creative in its own right? Word-for-word translation is definitely non-creative, but can it actually be considered translation at all?

Translation is the process of re-creating a text. It should be conceived from this perspective. A text is born the moment its author creates it. Translating a text implies giving it a new life, in other words, it implies re-creating it. When the re-creation does not occur, when translating means producing a copy of the original, when word-for-word translation replaces the process of trans-creation, the result is a third language, the product of a source language contaminating the target language. The hybrid has been labelled *translationese* (Osimo 2004), an artificial language showing the symptoms and effects of contamination. This is more apparent in some languages

than in others. In the case of Italian, A. Castellani (1987) referred to it as a *Morbus Anglicus*, as if the English language were a virus infecting Italian not only at a superficial level (namely, the level of vocabulary), but also at deeper levels of the language (as proved by scholars through the past decades: see Rossi 1999; Alfieri-Contarino-Motta 2003; Motta 2008; Sileo 2018, among others).

2. On Contagion (in Translation)

As G. Toury pointed out, "in translation, phenomena pertaining to the make-up of the source text tend to force themselves on the translators and be transferred to the target text" (1995: 310-311). These phenomena may turn out to be either positive or negative transfer. The former refers to the increased use of some elements which already existed in the target language's organism. Consequently, other equivalent structures are less and less used, thus levelling out any form of language variation and producing a flat and dull language. This is similar to a positive transfer of Covid-19, where no medical symptoms occur because the average speaker of the target language generally does not realize that an interference has taken place and continues to spread the word and virus. Negative transfer, on the contrary, is when a new exogenous element invades the target language and at times even breaks some of its rules. This type of transfer is more visible to the average speaker and clearly shows the symptoms of infection caused by the inattentive meeting and merging of two languages. This is particularly evident in the Italian language – as mentioned above – but also in others: in other words, some bodies are lacking antibodies to protect them from such invasion or contagion.

Since Roman antiquity, scholars have argued about the mode to be followed while translating, whether proceeding word-for-word or sense-for-sense. Horace and Cicero maintained that a word-for-word translation only provides the "weight" of the original text, but not its sense. This, however, did not apply to Bible translation, a specific case in which the original text is endowed with and surrounded by such an aura of sacredness that a sense-for-sense rendering into some other language is and was unthinkable (Bassnett 2002). In his letter to Pammachius dated 395 AD, St Jerome makes a clear distinction between the two translation methods, each pertaining to a certain type of text.

> For I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word. […] It is difficult in following lines laid down by others not sometimes to diverge from them, and it is hard to preserve in a translation the charm of expressions which in another language are most felicitous. […] If I render word for word, the result will sound uncouth, and if compelled by necessity I alter anything in the order or wording, I shall seem to have departed from the function of a translator.
> https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001057.htm

Word-for-word translation is the cause of the translator's visibility. It renders the signs of contagion visible. Translation works when the process of re-creation is not visible to the target (text's) user.

2.1 A Short Detour to Invisibility…

Translators' bodies are visibly marked by the side effects of their work. See, for example, the repetitive strain injury on muscles and tendons from repeated scrolling and clicking on files or web pages. Eyesight related issues are also worth mentioning. In spite of these perfectly and physically visible marks, translators are mostly invisible workers. Remote translators are even more so: they do not leave the house to get to work; their neighbors are not aware they have an actual job. They are invisible workers.

The concept of "translator's invisibility" has long been debated on, starting from L. Venuti's renowned work, whose underpinning idea essentially referred to the role of translators as invisible facilitators or means by which the source language author is known to the target language reader: "the more fluent the translation, the more invisible the translator, and, presumably, the more visible the writer or meaning of the foreign text" (1995: 2). Translators' invisibility is fundamental for readers to maintain what has been called "suspension of linguistic disbelief" (Romero-Fresco 2009) and to avoid being distracted from what they are reading to focus on how it has been written – namely, translated. From this perspective, invisibility is desirable outcome in the product of translation. Unfortunately, invisibility has long haunted its producer, as well. If authorship equates with property, "the translator's activity has been related to evil and blasphemy, to indecency and transgression" (Arrojo 1995: 21). Translators have often been "underpaid, anonymous parasites, at their best […], like an imaginary window-pane, they are invisible and least noticed" (Newmark 1989: 23).

On the one hand, the efforts of translators have been aimed at acquiring and maintaining visibility on their products: some publishers – at least, in Italy – are giving emphasis to translators' names on the covers of their translated book, although there is no national agreement for literary translation, whereas a CCNL for audiovisual translation was achieved in January 2008 and updated in February 2017. Unfortunately, it is not universally complied with and the market is full of more or less qualified professionals who are willing to work at lowest rates, to the detriment of others and leading clients to underestimate translation as a work of art.

Additional 'threat' to translators is represented by automated competitors: the so-called "mechanic dream" was based on the belief that it might be possible to construct a machine that could replace human translators. The aim remains the same: to save money, and save time (which is synonymous with saving money). Although recent developments in science and technology have produced increasingly efficient machine translators, the word-for-word method is still applied in numerous cases, often with unsatisfactory outcome (see Sileo 2022, in press).

2.2 …and back

Contact carries risks. When it comes to language contact, the risks essentially depend on the distance between languages and/or their relatedness. E. Nida (2004: 130) lists three different types of linguo-cultural relatedness/distance and identifies the risks implied in each of them.

- Type 1: comparatively closely related linguo-cultures – e.g., Hebrew and Arabic – run the risk of producing false friends; for example, English "virtue" and Latin *virtus*.
- Type 2: parallel cultures, but unrelated languages – e.g., German and Hungarian, an Indo-European language and a Finno-Ugrian one, respectively – may produce numerous formal shifts.

- Type 3: linguo-cultural distance – between English and Zulu, as an instance – is said to entail severe complications, mainly due to cultural differences.

Language contact has always existed. Often the result has been language interference: in other words, a target language showing signs or symptoms of contagion because the rules for language distancing have been poorly managed or not observed. Once contagion has occurred, there comes a stage when the target language antibodies start fighting against the source language virus. Their strength depends on the stability of the target language norms. Especially in unstable areas of a language, those less structured, contagion passes into contamination, which is the final phase of the process.

Contact > Contagion > Contamination

The phenomenon has been the subject of much academic study, focusing mainly – though not exclusively – on contact-contagion-contamination from English into Italian, which falls under Type 1 of Nida's framework (see above). The phenomenon of false friends shared by the two languages is quite relevant and renowned; however, false friends do not represent the sole risk or outcome of contact. Studies have also analyzed risks pertaining to deeper levels of Italian, to 'grey' areas of the language, whose 'legal order' cannot be clearly interpreted or even leaves the choice to the speaker. One of these is related to the expression or production of more or less redundant possessive adjectives:

> le traduzioni troppo meccaniche, che tendono a ricalcare fedelmente il modello, diffondono brutture stilistiche, quali le ripetizioni martellanti dei pronomi *tu* e *tuo* («condividi le tue foto e i tuoi video con i tuoi amici grazie al tuo telefono cellulare»), dipendenti certamente dalla struttura dell'inglese, ma anche, nel caso di testi pubblicitari, dalla volontà di sottolineare la personalizzazione del messaggio, orientandolo sul cliente[1] (Giovanardi-Gualdo-Coco 2008: 87).

However, in the redundancy of Italian possessive adjectives, I. Klajn retrieves some influence from French, more than from English:

> l'uso superfluo […] in frasi come *ho bevuto il mio tè, dopo il vostro caffè, pulite i vostri denti* […], del resto meno frequente di quanto si potrebbe dedurre dall'abbondanza di avvertimenti in contrario, ricalca soprattutto il francese, ma talvolta forse anche l'inglese, in cui l'uso dei possessivi è ancora più largo. Come anglicismo lo interpretano ALFARO (s.v. *Posesivo*) nello spagnolo e WEINREICH (39) nello yiddish[2] (Klajn 2012: 190).

[1] "Overly mechanical translations, which tend to faithfully follow the source, spread stylistic blots, such as the hammering repetition of the pronouns *tu* and *tuo* («condividi le tue foto e i tuoi video con i tuoi amici grazie al tuo telefono cellulare»), which certainly depend on the structure of the English language, but also, in the case of advertising, on the desire to emphasise the customization of the message, targeting the customer" [my translation].

[2] "The superfluous use [...] in sentences such as *ho bevuto il mio tè, dopo il vostro caffè, pulite i vostri denti* [...], which is less frequent than one might deduce from the abundance of warnings in the opposite direction, mainly follows French, but sometimes perhaps also English, where the use of possessives is even more extensive. It is interpreted as an Anglicism by ALFARO (see *Posesivo*) in Spanish and WEINREICH (39) in Yiddish" [my translation].

And even before that, Fanfani-Arlia reported about the "weird" usage by some speakers of *Percosse il mio capo*, *Diede una stretta alla mia mano*, etcetera, instead of *Mi percosse il capo*, *Mi diede una stretta alla mano* (Fanfani-Arlia 1877: 265-266), with a certain French flavour (p. 409). L. Serianni (2006: 271-72) underlines that in Italian possessive adjectives should be omitted when the reference is unambiguous; omission is mandatory when the main verb includes an atonic pronoun with an affective-intensive function.[3]

To mention one more instance of grey areas: in Italian, the position of the qualifying adjective is not necessarily fixed. Since this language almost always admits both orders, the resulting sequences are not necessarily a-grammatical, but often anomalous from a semantic point of view (Cardinaletti-Garzone 2005: 13). There are, however, differences between the two orders that affect several levels of analysis (Dardano-Trifone 1995: 517):

- a semantic difference, which implies greater objectivity of the NA order and equally great subjectivity of the inverse AN order (as also argued by Klajn);
- a difference in function, which is either restrictive or descriptive;
- a difference of attitude in the speaker: the AN sequence denotes greater emotional involvement;
- a difference in register, with the AN order often signifying an attempt to elaborate the message stylistically.

According to Klajn (2012: 186), the N + Adj sequence is much more often obligatory in French than in Italian, where the placement of the adjective has been extremely free for centuries, not only in poetry. Then, certainly due to some French influence, the post-nominal position began to stabilize, but without becoming exclusive. Today, the tendency to restore the pre-nominal order is supposedly being restored (pun intended).

Some interferences, including those analyzed above, usually go unnoticed by the average Italian speaker, especially by the average audience of TV or movie products, who generally do not recognize them as they mainly – though not always– subtly violate the rules of the target language. They may be compared to some internal virus whose symptoms are barely visible on the skin surface of the target language's body: this does not mean, however, that its mortality rate is lower than that of, say, some more visible and more easily recognizable infection. When the symptoms are more visible, one immediately takes remedial actions and the cure is presumably more successful. And, even before that, when encountering an infected body showing manifest symptoms of contagion, one immediately recognizes them and avoids contact.

3. "Rome is More"

Language contagion basically has only one outcome: a sense of estrangement, the feeling that something must be wrong, the subsequent suspension of the unquestioning attitude which may be defined as "linguistic belief." However, estrangement and resulting disbelief at times leave ground for hilarity. A linguo-cultural experiment has been launched on social media to

[3] Including: indicating body parts, thus expressing 'somatological belonging' (*lavarsi le mani*) or (psycho)biological actions of the organism (*asciugarsi le lacrime*), but also referring to clothing names (*togliersi il cappello*) (Serianni 2006: 250).

transfer the dialect spoken in Rome into English. "Rome is More" is a Facebook page whose aim is to make Roman ways, culture, philosophy, and proverbs available to English speakers. Its creators have also opened a store in the center of the city, selling merchandise (T-shirts, pins, bags, mugs and so on). Phrases, proverbs, sentences, forms of salutation are printed on them. On its website, "Rome is More" is presented as an "expressionary" (a dictionary of expressions) that is meant for English speakers to survive in Rome and among Romans. It has been conceived as a means by which spreading the Roman culture and language throughout the world.

What is interesting from a linguistic and translational point of view is that the translations into English are overtly word-for-word renderings, mainly structural calques from Roman into English produced by calquing or reproducing the word order of the source language while using elements of the target language. This is aimed at making people laugh. Contagion is a source of laughter. It sounds hilarious. To whom?

To English native speakers, who are the overt addressees of the experiment – whereas the covert ones are more or less fluent in the Roman dialect. Among them, further selection is made as only those who speak English, or at least understand it fairly well, can be aware of the fun, grasp the irony, and realize that such renderings will not work in the target language. That is where the laughter comes from.

Formal equivalence[4] (Nida 2004) is a source of laughter.

The phrase or sentence, followed by its phonetic transcription and syntactic function, is first accompanied by a literal translation – in other words, its formal or "structural" equivalent – and an attempt to provide an equivalent – a dynamic one – which in English may work or be "functional" – meant as effective, usable, as opposed to malfunctioning – as in *Pora stella* – which "means something like 'poor thing'" – or just an explanation, as in *Bella de casa* – which is presented as a "roman (*sic*) loving nickname" –.

Finally, as if it were an actual dictionary entry, an example is provided.[5]

Figure 1

The word-for-word translations are not always so accurate: see, as an instance, *Se lallero* – an ironic and indirect way to say "forget about it" or that there is "no way" you are going to do what

[4] In the following pages, the distinction theorized by E. Nida between formal and dynamic equivalence (source-oriented *vs* target-oriented) will be referred to while analyzing the *corpus* as a starting point to develop the dichotomy *structural vs functional equivalence*.

[5] Examples are in italics, whereas the headword is in both italics and bold.

they have asked you to –, where *se* in the Roman dialect serves as an alternative to "yes" but is ironically translated as "if," whereas *lallero* remains the same.[6]

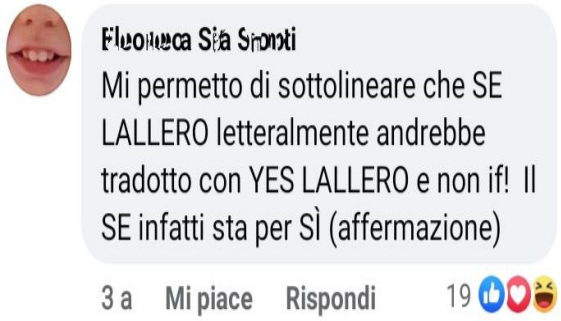

Figure 2

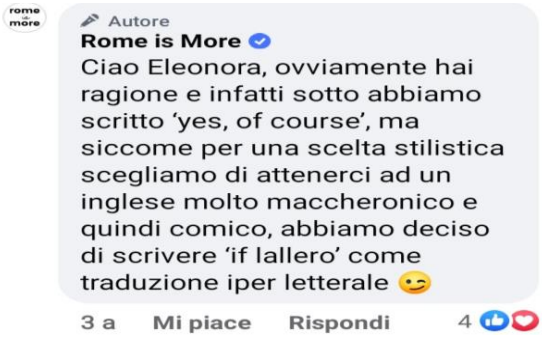

Figure 3

The ambiguity may be due to the lack of a comma between *se* and *lallero*. The explanation under the literary translation says: "means 'yes, of course' in an ironic sense." *Lallero* is a variation of *lallera*, a pre-1936 interjection used to tune some melody or sing a song to oneself, a song whose lyrics one does not recall very well. As an interjection, it conveys indifference, distance or disregard (https://dizionario.internazionale.it/parola/lallera).

Bella pe' te – also read as a single word *bellapetté*[7] –, a Roman phrase whose equivalent is – literally – "beautiful for you," and whose more functional though less fun(ny) rendering is "good for you," as in "I compliment/congratulate you on something." Vocabolario Romanesco Contemporaneo (from now on, VRC) also defines this as a salutation suitable for both greeting and parting, generally followed by the name of the person one is greeting or parting from. A variation is *bello de casa*, a "roman (*sic*) loving nickname" whose literal equivalent is "beautiful of house," and which – according to VRC – is reportedly used as a term of endearment, especially in reference to children. A more functional equivalent in English has not been proposed by "Rome is More" and one may wonder why "house" and not "home." A variant is *bellazì*, still a form of salutation, an interjection used mainly by young speakers for banter: deriving from *bella, zì(o)*, the second element being a vocative, as it usually happens in the Roman dialect, it has undergone apocope of post-tonic syllables – thus, *zio* > *zì* (VRC). The appellation is used in the language variety spoken by the Roman youth to address any person to whom one is close or feels close (ibid.). The literal translation provided by "Rome is More" is "beautiful uncle" (no comma) and the example proves quite suited:

When you're walking by the street and you see a friend, you say ***bella zì***!"

[6] A follower of the "Rome is More" Facebook page commented under the post (see Figure 1) that, in his opinion, it should have been translated into "yes lallero" (*sic*); some other user underlines the same supposed mistake (Figure 2). However, the page administrator replied that the mistake was intentionally made as a stylistic choice, since the aim of "Rome is More" is to opt for some macaronic or broken/hybrid English version precisely to arouse hilarity by offering a "hyper-literal rendering" (Figure 3).

[7] This is a typical way of Roman pronunciation, that of doubling consonants at the beginning of a word which is preceded by a conjunction or a preposition; this is not the case with articles, although the *b* sound seems to be always doubled: see *la barca* > *la bbarca* (http://roma.andreapollett.com/S8/dialect3.htm).

Daje is presented as an interjection, a Roman way of saying "come on" – at times, it can also function as a "very convinced 'yes.'" VRC defines it as a discourse marker, a case of re-lexicalization by means of trans-categorization from a different part of speech with a possible grammaticalization recently studied for the Roman dialect by D'Achille-Thornton 2020 (as in *ammazza! / ammappa!*) and Giovanardi 2019 (as in *avoja!*), among others (D'Achille-Giovanardi-Faraoni-Loporcaro 2021: 354). It represents a pro-complementary form[8] of the Italian verb *dare*: it has given rise to a group of pro-complementary forms which have been lemmatized since they are endowed with particular meanings compared to the base verb (p. 351). It is mainly preceded by an *e-* as in *eddaje* to signal disappointment, impatience or intolerance when something unpleasant occurs. Its secondary meaning, as registered in VRC, refers to an expression of incitement to spur someone to undertake or perform some action. VRC also records its holophrastic usage as a positive signal of confirmation or acceptance of a proposal or invitation. *Eddajempò* is a variation of this, composed of *e* + *dai* + *un* + *po'* – in other words, "and *daje* a little" as literally translated by "Rome is More," leaving *daje* untranslated (*daje* = "come on") and explained as a Roman way to put someone under pressure. Similarly, the interjection *ennamo* – *e* + *andiamo* > *e* + (*a*)*nnamo*, where *-nd-* > *-nn-* and *a-* is apheresized (VRC) – literally "and come on" as translated by "Rome is More," after which this exclamation can be used for "hurry up", but also for "yayyy." Also followed by *su*, it is used as an incitement (VRC). One may wonder why the translation of *daje* and all its derivatives has not taken into account its original form *dare* = "to give": since the concept behind "Rome is More" is to produce fun(ny) renderings in English by translating literally, "give him/her" would have been more hilarious.

Eccallà – in VRC, *eccaallà* as an interjection whose equivalent in standard Italian is "eccola là, qui ti volevo," used to comment – ironically or with some disappointment – on other people's statements; sometimes it is also used to refer to something which is about to happen. "Rome is More" provides a literal rendering – "there it is" – as a Roman equivalent of "indeed, exactly," which does not collide with VRC. The example provided

When happens something (sic) you could have predicted – mostly an unlucky event, you say ***eccallà****!*

only refers to a part of the several and diverse meanings listed by VRC.

Becca(re)[9] has multiple meanings, ranging from "ottenere, ricevere, cogliere" to "incontrare" (VRC): the latter meaning is the one proposed by "Rome is More," in its reflexive form *beccarsi* as in *se beccamo* which has been literally translated as "let's beak each other," in other words "roman (*sic*) way to say 'let's hang out' or 'see you.'" The imperative form included in both the literal rendering and the rephrasing does not collide with the reflexive form of the original version. The actual equivalent of "Let's beak each other" is *beccamose*, whereas *se beccamo* is "we'll beak each other." In the example given, one more variant is offered by "Rome is More" in the interrogative form:

[8] The term refers to lemmatized forms composed of verb forms which have fused themselves with clitic pronouns into the so-called "pro-complementary forms" (D'Achille-Giovanardi-Faraoni-Loporcaro 2021: 351).
[9] It derives from *becco* = "beak", its meaning is *prendere qualcosa con il becco* = "to take/grab something with the beak" (VRC).

When your friend comes back in town from summer holidays, you ask ***se beccamo****?*

The appropriate form to make a proposal should be "shall we beak each other?": in this case, the grammatical shift between imperative and future tense – as well as between an assertive/affirmative sentence and a question – determines a lack of formal equivalence and also implies different speech acts, ranging from imposing to suggesting a future meeting.

Imbruttire, as a transitive verb generally used among the youth, equals "provocare, irritare, far stizzire" (i.e., provoking, annoying, irritating) as a parasynthetic verb deriving from *brutto* = "ugly" (VRC); its usage has apparently changed into an intransitive mode, as in "to give someone a stern look." Literally – and erroneously – translated by "Rome is More" as "to make ugly," a Roman way to say "to take a sour expression": when you find someone annoying, you give them a stern look and take on an 'ugly' face, but you do not make/render them ugly. It is quite the opposite. So, in this case, we may detect a lack of equivalence in the verb meaning, turning the source text verb usage into a transitive one in the target text.

When you are at an open bar party and you ask to the barman a Coke, he probably ***te imbruttisce****.*

"You make me ugly" is not the same as "you make ugly to me": the meaning is different; the hilariousness is the same. In other words, "Rome is More" has failed to provide a correct structural or formal equivalent.

Presabbene, defined as a "status mind" (*sic*) or – rather – a mind status, proves an interesting example as the formal or structural equivalent provided by "Rome is More" includes a wrong choice in the verb tense, as a Past Simple ("took") is used instead of a Past Participle ("taken") and also a noteworthy use of preposition "at" which generally translates the Italian preposition *a* as well as "to." This one represents an additional case of inequivalence also in the shift from an adverb – *bene* = "well" – to an adjective – *buono* = "good" –:

"taken at/to well" = *presa a bene* > "took at good" = *prese a buono*.

Finally, *Maddeché*, an interjection which means "what the hell are you saying?": translated as "but of what," a perfectly structural or structurally perfect equivalent which provokes laughter.

Table 1 provides a synthesis of the analysis carried out so far, displaying the source language versions and the word-for-word renderings proposed by "Rome is More," followed by their sense-for-sense equivalents (when provided) and by an explanation or definition to better understand the meaning and usage of each phrase or expression. Column "Remarks" shows possible translation problems or remarkable observations on each case.

Source Language	Structural Equivalent	Functional Equivalent	Explanation/ Definition	Remarks
Pora stella	Poor star	Poor thing	Phrase, also used in an ironic sense	
Bello/a de casa	Beautiful of house	[not provided]	Roman loving nickname	Why not "Beautiful of home"?

Bella pe' te / bellapetté	Beautiful for you	Good for you	A way to congratulate on something	
Bella, zi(o) / bellazì	Beautiful, uncle	[not provided]	Form of salutation	Possible equivalent[10]: "Hey, man"
(Ed)daje(mpò)	(And) daje (a little)	(1) Come on! (2) Yes!	Interjection, also a way to put someone under pressure	Left non-translated: missed chance at hilariousness
Ennamo (su)	And come on	(1) Hurry up! (2) Yay!	Exclamation	
Eccallà	There it is	Indeed / Exactly	(Ironical/disappointed) comment on some (expected) event	VRC provides a wider range of meanings
Se beccamo	*Let's beak each other	(1) Let's hang out (2) See you	Used to propose a meeting	Grammatical shift > different speech act
Imbrutti'	*To make ugly	To take a sour expression	When you give someone a stern look	Shift in the verb voice (intransitive > transitive)
Presabbene	*Took at good	[not provided]	Used to describe an enjoyable situation	Wrong verb tense; noteworthy choice of preposition; adverb > adjective shift
Maddeché	But of what?	What the hell[11] are you saying?	Interjection	Lower register of the functional equivalent

Table 1. Overview of the cases under analysis[12]

4. Final remarks

The examples provided show that there is some covert agenda in the experiment by "Rome is More": it aims at making readers laugh, but only if they have sufficient knowledge of and proficiency in the English language, only if they are aware that word-for-word translation does not work.

The structural or formal equivalents provided by "Rome is More" are clear examples of overt translations, as defined by J. House (2014), and as such they make no attempt to hide the fact that they actually are a translation (ibid.). In spite of some more or less evident translation issues, the experiment proves successful.

[10] Although functionally equivalent in English, one should underline a non-exact coincidence in terms of diatopic variation, as the English equivalent is not as diatopically marked as the Roman form of salutation.

[11] However, one should underline that, by adding "the hell," the general register becomes lower and sort of vulgar, whereas the original version is more neutral.

[12] * signals cases of inequivalence, which also include grammatical shifts (verb tense and/or voice) and class shifts (adverb > adjective).

To conclude, language contact produces interference or contagion, and turns into more or less permanent contamination when the average speaker is not aware of it, when contagion has occurred unnoticed, and when the target language shows no clear signs or symptoms of contamination. When it comes to linguistic expressions, which are so imbued with culture and cultural references, it is often impossible to find an equivalent in another linguo-cultural system. Speakers who are aware of it burst into laughter. Those who are not believe what they read or hear and start spreading the word and the virus.

Awareness is the key. Knowledge is the key. The key to healthy laughter.

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"Crime is disease":

Contamination of Media in BBC *Sherlock*

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Abstract

This paper takes as its starting point the conceptual metaphor "crime is disease" as suggested by George Lakoff in order to advance a new reading of the BBC crime drama television series *Sherlock* (2010-2017) based on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes detective stories. Among over 200 film versions of Sherlock Holmes, the 2010 Masterpiece version, created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, remediated the Victorian detective stories visualising Sherlock's deductive reasoning on screen. Defined as "flagrantly unfaithful to the original in some respects" and "wonderfully loyal to [the original]" (Sutcliffe 2010), *Sherlock* appears to be the perfect depiction of Holmes for our times. I intend to track through these references and look at the issues – the remediation of Victorian crime from page to screen, the metamorphosis of Holmes's character, adapting techniques in crime scenes, etc – which they raise. But my central purpose will be to re-read *Sherlock* from a subtitling perspective. I will analyse the linguistics of subtitling and text-reduction shifts from a cognitive perspective in order to demonstrate that crime may be conceptualised in subtitling and that Doyle's detective stories are reproduced faithfully by audio-visual media. Through dialogues, I suggest, subtitling may be considered as a form of deduction in audio-visual crime fiction.

1. Introduction

"[A] man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose" (Doyle 2011: 11). By projecting the conceptual metaphor THE BRAIN IS AN ATTIC[1], Sir Arthur Conan Doyle tries to explain how to be a master of deduction and to select information from the knowledge stored in our brains. The difference between ordinary people and extraordinary people lies in the stuff with

[1] Conceptual metaphors are always written in small capitals.

which they fill their own brains. Unnecessary furniture/data tend to pile up and make it impossible to get at the stuff that matters.

Sherlock Holmes, the fictional private detective created by Arthur Conan Doyle, the most famous of all detectives holding the record for the most-portrayed fictional character in movies, does incarnate the pioneer of forensic science and criminal investigation. Not only is he able to analyse physical evidence to link a suspect to a crime but he is also able to make brilliant deductions in order to solve the most bewildering cases by paying attention to all the details because you can't connect the dots if you don't collect the dots. Deductive reasoning can be summarised with this notorious quote from "A Scandal in Bohemia" (1891): "'You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear" (Doyle 2011: 54). The more information you can gather, the more accurate your deductions are going to be. From this perspective, you have to pay attention to anything, you have to tune to the surrounding reality and ask to yourself "What do you see? Smell? Hear? Now think a little deeper". If you embrace your senses your awareness will increase and, in time, you will know who people really are, what they feel and even what they are thinking.

Deduction and translation[2] are driven by similar cognitive processes influencing judgment and decision-making. Following Douglas Robinson's theory (1991) according to which translation is a largely intuitive process, and postulates that we have somatic responses to words on an unconscious level, it is possible to argue that adaptation and subtitling strategies applied in BBC *Sherlock* do take into account the psychological construct of intuition.

Among over 200 film versions of Sherlock Holmes, the 2010 Masterpiece version, created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, remediated Doyle's Victorian detective stories "without ever undercutting the flair and dazzle of the original" (Sutcliffe 2010). Defined as "flagrantly unfaithful to the original in some respects" and "wonderfully loyal to [the original]" (Sutcliffe 2010), *Sherlock* appears to be the perfect depiction of Holmes for our times. I intend to track through these references and look at the issues – the remediation of Victorian crime from page to screen, the metamorphosis of Holmes's character, adapting techniques in crime scenes, etc. – which they raise.

But my central purpose will be to re-read *Sherlock* from a subtitling perspective. I will analyse the linguistics of subtitling and text-reduction shifts from a cognitive perspective in order to demonstrate that crime may be conceptualised in subtitling and that Doyle's detective stories are reproduced faithfully by audio-visual media. Through dialogues, I suggest, subtitling may be considered as a form of deduction in audio-visual crime fiction.

[2] On cognitive psychology and translation see Dane and Pratt (2009), Evans (2010), Hammond (2010), and Myers (2010).

2. From *A Study in Scarlet* to "A Study in Pink": Contamination of Media

John Harrington, in his book *Film And/As Literature* (1977: 117) estimated that a third of all films ever made have been adapted from novels, and, if you include other literary forms, such as drama or short stories, that estimate might well be 65 percent or more. For example, there are over 200 film versions of Sherlock Holmes, from a silent film made in 1916 by William Gillette to the reimagined 2010 version starring Benedict Cumberbatch which boasted 7.3 million viewers in the United Kingdom. According to Alan Burton and Steve Chibnall "Doyle's enduring creation now coexists in period and contemporary form and perhaps is more popular than any time since the day of his first appearances in the *Strand Magazine*" (Burton and Chibnall 2013: 221). More recently, Benjamin Poore claimed that the fictional character of Sherlock Holmes has been widely adapted across media because it "was present and popular on the cultural landscape at the birth of many of the key elements of modern mass media" (Poore 2017: 2). In the battle of remediation between media in order to achieve immediacy, the audio-visual medium best represents the dynamism of Sherlock's deductive reasoning by involving the viewer into crime analysis.

As a form of remediation from page to screen, The TV series *Sherlock* appears to be more a *commentary* than *analogy*[3] according to Geoffrey Wagner's categories of adaptation (*transposition*[4]; *commentary* and *analogy*) since there are more similarities than differences from the murder mystery genre perspective. As Wagner explains a *commentary* is: "when an original is taken and either purposely or inadvertently altered in some respect. . . when there has been a different intention on the part of the film-maker, rather than infidelity or outright violation" (Wagner 1975: 29). A paramount example of this kind of adaptation is the first episode of series one entitled "A Study in Pink" which is based on the novel *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) along with allusions to other Doyle's tales. The title of the television episode is called "A Study in Pink" because the story focuses on the mysterious death of a woman dressed entirely in pink. In addition to this, Sherlock deduced the victim's past through the patterning of her pink outfit and the information obtained from her pink luggage, which lead him to further discover important clues of the mystery. The word "Scarlet" in the title of the book represents the colour red, which in this case refers to the mysterious presence of blood found in the criminal scenes as aptly summarised by Doyle himself in *A Study in Scarlet*:

> "[…] a study in scarlet, eh? Why shouldn't we use a little art jargon. There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colorless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it" (Doyle 2011: 18).

[3] "[*analogy*] represents a fairly considerable departure for the sake of making another work of art" (Wagner 1975: 226).

[4] "in [*transposition*] a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of interference" (Wagner 1975: 224).

Significant variances between the stories concern the crime itself. The murderer in the book, Jefferson Hope, an aged cabby who is dying of aneurism, seeks for revenge by murdering. The killer targeted the ex-Mormon man who twenty years ago forced the killer's fiancée to become one of his wives in Utah. Whereas, the cabbie in the television, Jeff Hope, kills people for monetary reasons. He is paid by an unseen master mind called Moriarty to carry out these murders. He has a unique way of killing people: he holds them up by gunpoint (actually a lighter not a real gun) and has two pills (one poisonous and the other benign), forcing the person to choose one to swallow as it occurs in *Princess Bride*. This perverted way in which the murderer approaches his victims seems to project the conceptual metaphor "crime is disease" affecting the criminals' minds and the only way of addressing epidemics of violence is to put or hold people in isolation (in jail) to prevent the spread of disease.

Cardinal functions, as Roland Barthes calls them (1977), referring to the functionality of doing (i.e., to actions and events) are preserved in the remediation from page to screen in order to avoid critical outrage and popular disaffection. Such cardinal functions as Watson's military background, Sherlock's intelligence in solving mysterious crimes, how they meet each other, the conversations they have, the killer, and so forth are faithfully adapted from the novel. However, cardinal functions are deformed by varying the catalysers which denote small actions, enriching the texture of the cardinal functions.

The most interesting metamorphoses concern integrational functions, also called functionality of being, that is to say those operations embracing psychological information, data regarding the identity, notations of atmosphere, and representations of place. Such informants are data with immediate signification, ready-made knowledge such as names, ages, professions and details of the physical setting.

It is not by chance that the kill list is much longer in the television series: there are 4 victims in the television episode but only 2 in the original book. There were small changes to the mystery and the reasons why Jefferson Hope was murdering. Instead of a dead man it is a woman's body they find. And kids discovered the body instead of a police sergeant. In the book, they carved "Rache" ("revenge" in German), not "Rachel"; while in the television adaptation it is the word "Rachel" that the victim is carving because it is the password to her phone. Instead of the clue to solving the case revolving around a missing ring (the engagement ring Jefferson gave to Lucy) it revolves around the woman in pink's missing suitcase. And the BBC ending recalls the scene from Doyle's *Princess Bride* where Sherlock Holmes has to choose the pill not poisoned rather than Jefferson just explaining why he did it and accepting his fate.

On the micro-level, the major opposition through alterations is between literary and cinematic spaces of London and the crime-ridden streets of the West End. Notoriously, the city and the views of key London landmarks such as Buckingham Palace, Piccadilly Circus, Big Ben and others contribute to the narrative space for Sherlock's world. As Ann K. McClellan explains, "The city becomes part of a larger framework that shapes the cultural values and overall milieu of the show and its

characters, and it seeps into every aspect of the world and its extensions" (McClellan 2018: 40). From this perspective, the stories do not take place anymore in Victorian London but in a modern-day city with arial shots of the skyline and multimodal visual representations of London's map. A case in point is the chasing taxi scene in which Sherlock accesses his mental map while pursuing a taxi across the rooftops together with Watson who is unexpectedly jumping and running despite his psychosomatic limp.

Thanks to his exact knowledge of streets and houses, Sherlock is able to trace the fastest route in his mind map in the same way as Google Maps plans the shortest way to reach a destination. Digital map iconography is used to visualise Sherlock's cognitive map along with dynamic writing indicating the street names appearing on screen as the main directions of the entire chase. From a cognitive perspective, Sherlock and Watson are trajectors following a path in order to reach their landmark (the taxi transporting the murderer). We build up the ACROSS[5] image schema in our mind projected by Sherlock and Watson moving across the roofs and streets of London. On the basis of their local bodily interactions with the onscreen space of the city, they share particular image schemas with the community of their audience: chase, map, across, through, up/down, along and others.

Despite this contemporary technological mode of representation which is updated for today's audience, BBC adaptation of London to modern times keeps true to the original Arthur Conan Doyle stories. As Steven Moffat explains: "Conan Doyle's stories were never about frock coats and gas light; they're about brilliant detection, dreadful villains and blood-curdling crimes – and frankly, to hell with the crinoline. Other detectives have cases, Sherlock Holmes has adventures, and that's what matters" (Qt. in Tribes 2014: 30). In the remediation from page to screen, digitalized technology has replaced Victorian technology without losing the adventurous flavour of Doyle's stories. Multimodality is the trademark of "A Study in Pink" and in more general terms of the world of BBC *Sherlock* in which viewers fully immerse themselves thanks to the emphasis on sensory experiences which becomes essential in order to pursue realism and verisimilitude.

3. Subtitling "A Study in Pink": Contacts Between Language and Image

From an intralingual subtitling perspective, "A Study in Pink" applies interesting multimodal strategies as well as the so-called text reduction shifts, a term coined by John Catford (1965) to designate any such departures from formal correspondence in the process of going from source language to target language. If it is true that subtitles should never anticipate, or be ahead of visual narration on screen, then it is equally true that *Sherlock* is characterised by an approximate synchrony between image and subtitle.

[5] Image schemas are conventionally written in small capitals. According to Peter Stockwell's definition image schemas are: "mental pictures that we use as basic templates for understanding situations that occur commonly. […] Locative expressions, […], are expressed with prepositions that can be understood as image schemas" (2002: 16).

This is mainly due to the characterisation of tv Sherlock as a serious, logical, constantly thinking consulting detective who exhibits at times a strange behaviour as he is rambunctious, more active, moving so fast he fails to finish his thought. Sherlock's tv genius is altered in the way it is portrayed (instead of smoking a pipe and doing opium, he is now on nicotine patches and smokes pot). Unlike Doyle's Sherlock, a calm character showing no particularly reaction to the new criminal case that was yet to be unravelled, tv Sherlock has a completely opposite approach towards the cases: he was overjoyed with the situation and he couldn't wait to solve them. The following excerpts clarify the totally different reactions of Doyle's Sherlock and BBC Sherlock when a new crime is announced:

> I was amazed at the calm way in which he rippled on. "Surely there is not a moment to be lost," I cried, "shall I go and order you a cab?" "I'm not sure about whether I shall go. I am the most incurably lazy devil that ever stood in shoe leather—that is, when the fit is on me, for I can be spry enough at times" (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet*, 2011: 22)

> "Brilliant! Yes! Ah, four serial suicides, and now a note! Oh, it's Christmas!" – (Sherlock Holmes, BBC "A Study in Pink", Timecode 00: 15: 20)

By comparing the original script of this particular scene from "A Study in Pink" with its subtitles, it is all the more evident how Sherlock's fast speaking is conveyed in subtitles with accurate text-reduction strategies.

Script	**Subtitles (Timecode 00: 15: 20)**
And I thought it was going to be a boring evening. Serial suicides, and now a note - oh, it's Christmas!	Four serial suicides and now a note.
Mrs. Hudson, I'll be late - might need some food.	Oh, it's Christmas. Mrs Hudson, I'll be late. Might need some food.

In this subtitled text, there is an omission at sentence level since the first sentence is completely omitted and replaced with number "four". According to Irena Kovačič (1996), there is a three-level hierarchy of discourse elements in subtitling: the indispensable elements (that must be translated, all the plot-carrying elements of a film; they carry experiential meaning without which the viewers would not be able to follow the action); the partly dispensable elements (that can be condensed) and the dispensable elements (that can be omitted); they are linguistic elements that many subtitlers would omit even if the spatial-temporal constraints of subtitling such as repetitions, names in appellative constructions, false starts and ungrammatical constructions, internationally known words, such as 'yes,' 'no,' 'ok,' exclamations, such as 'oh,' 'ah,' 'wow,' which are commonly deleted because they can be recovered from the soundtrack. Furthermore,

the subtitler merges two sentences into one two-line subtitle changing punctuation since the job of the subtitler is to facilitate this reading exercise for the viewers, and in so doing he/she has to revisit some of the standard punctuation rules and give them a new twist. In attempt to rationalise the space, the subtitler eliminates dashes which, though having more specific function than in standard written language and being used to indicate that the text appearing in one subtitle belongs to two different people, distract the viewer's attention. As explained by Clara Cerón "Whenever movie and TV viewers are watching a subtitled film, they are deciphering a whole set of codes. They may be unaware of it, but they will react immediately to a departure from the norm" (Cerón 2001: 173).

BBC Sherlock speaks so fast in deduction scenes that synchronous delivery is obtained through two-line subtitles (two liners) violating the aesthetic rules of subtitling according to which one-line subtitles are easier to read since they "elicit proportionally less viewing time" (Díaz Cintas and Remael 2007: 87). The use of 43 two-liners out of 54 subtitles in the cab dialogue with John Watson while reaching the crime scene confirms Brondeel's conviction that two-line subtitles are preferable to two successive one-liners since the overall reading time in two-liners seems to offer the viewer more reading comfort.

However, 28 two-liners out of 54 subtitles seem to follow the aesthetic recommendation to keep the top line shorter in order not to pollute the image. Not only are they aesthetically more pleasing but this means the eye has to cover less of a distance. Sense blocks and readability ought to be the most influential aspects in subtitles positioning. In the remaining two-liners, the first line is longer than the second, which could not be avoided due to the way the utterance is structured syntactically.

But more often than not, segmentation in BBC *Sherlock* renders speech in writing by taking some of the meaningful features of spoken language into account (hesitations and pauses). Examples of good rhetorical segmentation help convey surprise, suspense, irony, hesitation, and reflect some of the dialogue's dynamics in Sherlock and Watson's conversation.

Script	Subtitles	Timecode
Your haircut and the way you hold yourself says military - but your conversation […]	*Your haircut, the way you hold yourself says military. But your conversation...*	(00: 18: 34)
Your limp is really bad when you walk, but you don't ask for a chair when you stand, […]	*Your limp's bad when you walk, but you don't ask for a chair when you stand*	(00: 18: 50)

That says the circumstances of the original injury were traumatising - wounded in action then.	*That says the original circumstances of the injury were traumatic.*	(00: 18: 57)
Wounded in action, a suntan. Afghanistan or Iraq? […]	Wounded in action, then. Wounded in action, suntan - Afghanistan or Iraq.	(00: 18: 59)
The man in front of me wouldn't treat his one luxury item like this, […]	You wouldn't treat your one luxury item like this,	(00: 19: 22)
could be a cousin, but you're a war hero who can't find a place to live – […]	Could be a cousin, but you're a war hero who can't find a place to live.	(00: 19: 36)
Now Clara, who's Clara – three kisses says it's a romantic attachment. […]	Now, who's Clara? Three kisses says it's a romantic attachment.	(00: 19: 45)
How can you possibly know about the drinking? […]	How can you possibly know about drinking?	(00: 20: 12)
He plugs it in every night to recharge, but his hands are shaking.	Every night he plugs it in to charge, but his hands are shaking.	(00: 20: 21)

See, for example, two-line subtitles at timecodes 00: 18: 34; 00: 18:50 and 00: 19:45, each one consisting of a sentence breaking grammatical rules since noun phrases and verb phrases are split (*the way you hold yourself* / *says military*; *but you* / *don't ask for a chair*) and distributed into two different lines. Likewise, the subtitler, who applies rhetorical segmentation, seems to segment sentences trying to force the brain to pause its linguistic processes for a while, until the eyes trace the next piece of linguistic information. This strategy is particularly evident in subtitles at timecodes 00: 18: 57; 00: 18: 59; 00: 20: 12; 00: 20: 21 whose segmentation is arranged to separate noun phrases and prepositional phrases (*the original circumstances* / *of the injury*; "Wounded / in action,"; "you possibly know / about drinking?") as if to create a suspension bridge and keep the viewer's attention. The same occurs at timecodes 00: 19: 22 and 00: 19: 36 in which the subtitler tends to secure line-breaks violating the logic of the sentence (verb phrase and noun phrase are split; the relative clause is segmented ungrammatically) giving priority to rhetorical segmentation. From this view, subtitling in BBC Sherlock seems not to respect grammatical cohesion but at the same is able to reproduce the genius' speech flow and the rhythm of his thoughts.

The stressful experience of following Sherlock's deductions by listening to his super-fast voice is relieved by the presence of subtitles − for those viewers who set up

them − which condense information keeping a certain degree of suspense thereby stimulating the viewers' intuition by rhetorical segmentation. Following Robinson (1991), our bodies send us signals regarding what we know and how we should react. Convinced that "we are guided much more powerfully […] by those autonomic responses called 'intuition' or 'gut reactions'" (Robinson 1991: x), he defines translation as a largely intuitive process and that we have somatic responses to words on an unconscious level. The same happens to the viewers of Sherlock's deductive scenes whose understanding is fostered by the use of such subtitling strategies as rhetorical segmentation and italics whose aim is to prioritize information and facilitate reading and comprehension. The idea that subtitling strategies will provoke a reaction in the viewers, a feeling that a suspended word at the end of the first subtitle may activate intuition before they are consciously aware of what Sherlock is saying, hints at the powerful influence of intuition in reading subtitles.

But the most intriguing subtitling strategy is what Hartmut Stöckl refers to as "the language-image-link" (2004: 9) that is to say that in audio-visual texts, visual and verbal elements are bound together, they contaminate each other activating intuition resulting in gut-feelings and implicit, spontaneous thoughts. Once at the crime scene, a dark room, with peeling wallpaper and in the centre a slash of pink, Sherlock silences everyone and starts inspecting the corpse with his unique mode of investigation. From timecode 00: 24: 36 to timecode 00: 25: 46, there is a dynamic use of the language mode: words pulse across the screen - just appear, float and fade in order to visualise Sherlock's deductive reasoning. For example, the words MARRIED, LEFT-HANDED, RACHE, WET, CLEAN, DIRTY, UNHAPPILY MARRIED, 10 + YEARS, DIRTY/CLEAN, REGURALRY REMOVED, SERIAL ADULTURER pulse across the screen and disappear very fast like a glancing thought. Verbal and visual elements cohere by building inter-modal sense relations and add to a common mental image that facilitates the viewer's comprehension of the multimodal artefact. Particularly significant is the word RACHE superimposed on the word "RACHE, German (n.), revenge" carved on the floor with the victim's fingernails beside her corpse. Far from being a form of redundancy or what is commonly known as *function de redondance*, i.e., words and images communicate more or less the same information, the use of dynamic writing does no more than expand on Sherlock's deductive reasoning, rendering it more explicit. From this perspective, animated writing can influence the audience's engagement with and immersion in the multimodal text breaking down the willing suspension of disbelief that occurs when watching a film and become a living part of it.

Among the ways of showing Sherlock's mind working there are labels flashing onto people's clothing to reveal the methods by which he deduces history and character. Likewise pin patterns are painted on the screen as he tried to break into a phone and numbers float across his face as he cracks a code. It is all the more evident that *Sherlock* 's creators have opted to transgress the conventions of narrative framing through "narrative metalepsis" (Genette 1983 [1980], quoted in O'Sullivan 2011: 161).

In other words, information that would have normally remained confined to the diegetic (Sherlock's reflections while inspecting the body) is made available to the audience through the use of what Pérez-González calls "authorial titling" (2013: 15-16). In order to represent Sherlock's intuitions, "double layeredness" of filmic communication (Vanoye 1985: 99) is employed by prioritizing the vertical level of interpersonal communication, that is to say between the filmmakers and the audience, at the expense of its horizontal counterpart (i.e., communication between the film characters). Ironically, Watson remains oblivious to the working of Sherlock's logic, while viewers have been provided with the information required to appreciate Holmes' brilliance.

The use of authorial titling and diegetic silence are aimed at making audiences more aware that they are watching a fiction. The viewers' attention is inevitably attracted by the superimposed titles on screen which are offered as cues that may help uncover solutions to problems. Much in the same way as translators are involved in finding translation strategies, viewers are trained to become more in tune to the outcomes of their intuition. As a specific task to be accomplished, authorial titling enables intuition processing to be activated in a shared space of affinity between Sherlock and the viewers who are able to understand the detective's deductive reasoning with the help of subtitles projecting his actions and mental processes. From this perspective, experimental and authorial titling promote what Grillo and Kawin call "parataxic reading experiences" (1981). Viewers appear to be experiencing the whole film in an "additive way, by combining the various elements consciously" (Naficy 2004: 147). Images, dialogues, titles and subtitles do interact sending us signals regarding Sherlock's mind and how we should read it.

This contact between visual and verbal signs can also be explained with the term "mindscreen" first used by Bruce Kawin who defined it as "belong[ing] to, or manifest[ing] the workings of specific minds" (1978: 12). When Sherlock experiences his moments of deduction, the viewer is presented with mental images of his cogitating mind. Such a cinematic way of rendering the character's thoughts is a paramount example of how media can interact in order to train the viewer's mind to activate intuition. The multimodality of BBC *Sherlock* appears to be the sole solution to follow Sherlock's intuition which is extremely quick and works in parallel with conscious analysis.

To conclude, Sherlock Holmes and Dr John Watson's adventures in 21st Century London is a thrilling, funny, fast-paced contemporary reimagining of the Arthur Conan Doyle classic. The universal and timeless appeal of Sherlock Holmes is mainly due to its sexy logic. It is only Holmes who ravishes our minds and remains a great marketing commodity and a timeless archetype, adaptable to any era. Despite his admission to be a "high-functioning sociopath" (Timecode 00: 57: 37), we are all "Sherlocked" by such a bewildering character whose genius challenges our way of interacting with the audio-visual medium. As attested to by Betsch and Glockner (2010: 290) intuition can be

improved in multimodal situations stimulating our minds in decision-making as a vital component of individuals' effectiveness for resolving problems.

In BBC *Sherlock* both criminals and detectives are characterised by mental disorders which are often considered to be connected to creativity and genius. Their cognitive processes and their unusual behaviours are portrayed in such a multimodal way that the viewer is completely overwhelmed by Sherlock's unusual capacities trying hard to compete with the brilliance of his deductions. Cognition, multimodality and intuition are mixed together into an audio-visual product employing all the potentialities of visual, verbal, and acoustic media who appear to be cooperating in order to achieve immediacy of representation.

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Contamination between Stylistics and Cognitive Poetics: an analysis of *Lord Randal*

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Abstract

The present essay focuses on the contamination of methodologies in the field of literary analysis. More specifically, a model of analysis resulting from the encounter of stylistics and cognitive poetics will be presented in order to demonstrate that the application of hybrid methodologies can lead to a deeper and more far-reaching understanding of literary works; pivotal works by Geoffrey Leech and Mick Short (*Style in Fiction: A Linguistic Introduction to English Fictional Prose*, 1981) and Peter Stockwell (*Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, 2002) will constitute the basis of the model at issue. After briefly illustrating the model itself, an example of quantitative and qualitative analysis will be provided; the object of study will be *Lord Randal*, a traditional ballad that can be defined as endemic across Europe. In fact, attestations can be found in many European languages, although the plot often presents minor differences. The final part of the essay will briefly discuss the mechanisms behind empathy in the above-mentioned ballad.

1. Lord Randal

Lord Randal is a popular ballad in dialogic form that narrates the story of a young man poisoned by his lover. The poem displays a dialogue that takes place between a "handsome young man" and his mother. Despite the situation being extremely moving (Lord Randal is indeed confirming to his mother that he has been poisoned), feelings and emotions are never described clearly. In fact, as Göller (1988: 213) affirms, the ballad is characterised by a detached tone and indirectness; however, "emotions are […] evoked on the part of the reader" (Göller 1988: 213) and, I suggest, this happens because of the emphatic processes realised through language, which will be here investigated. The poem, composed by an anonymous author who divided it into 10 stanzas of 4 lines each, has a rich history: not only are there versions dating back to the 13th century, but there are also versions in many European languages [among them: Italian, Hungarian, German, Danish and Swedish (Taylor 1931: 105)]. The best-known and most studied version of *Lord Randal* is the A variant, that is the English one, dating back to 1710, and extensively analysed by Taylor in 1931. However, the above-mentioned variant is not

the earliest. In fact, at the beginning of the 20th century, MacSweeney (1918) provided a detailed editorial history of the Scottish ballad object of study, affirming that:

> [t]he ballad is first referred to in a quodlibet printed on a broadside containing the repertoire of a singer called Camillo, who, judging by the date on the sheet, sang it at Verona in 1629. Later in 1656 the ballad was referred to in the Crusca by Canon Lorenzo Panciatichi[6] who together with the academicians present was tempted to commit the error of trying to 'improve' the ballad (MacSweeney 1918: 326).

Thus, the first attestations of the ballad seem to be in Italian territory.

The name of the protagonist is widely debated; in fact, several versions display different names (among them: Terencè, Teronto, Tyranty, Tyranna, Tyranting, Tar(r)anty, Durango and Dorendo). However, the literary Lord Randall seems to have been inspired by the story of the Ranulf family (Bronson 2015: 191). "The historical Ranulf, or Randall III, sixth Earl of Chester, who died in 1232, was divorced and left no heir, but was succeeded by his nephew John, whose wife was supposed to have tried to poison her husband" (Bronson 2015: 191).

As regards its intended audience, the ballad is not restricted to a specific age group. Indeed, despite the fact that *Lord Randal* narrates a terrifying event, it was adapted for different audiences: throughout the centuries it was addressed to adults, young people and also pre-school children (Göller 1988: 216). For instance, in a German version called *Großmutter als Schlangenköchin* ('Grandmother as a Snake Cook'), the protagonists are a little girl and her grandmother, not a man and his lover as in the most famous version, which is undeniably unsuitable for the youngest audiences (Göller 1988: 216). However, when comparing different variants of the ballad, it becomes clear that the *Randal nucleus* is always retained and only some details vary (Göller 1988: 212).

Furthermore, Taylor (1931) has widely discussed the elements of the A text (1710) that are the result of contamination as well as the correct order of the stanzas. According to the scholar, the order of the stanzas of the A text is incongruous (Taylor 1931: 105); in fact, "it seems scarcely probable that the hero should have met his true love while he was hunting and have dined with her", and, as it emerges from an attentive analysis of the B and G texts, the hero had probably been courting or wooing (Taylor 1931: 105). The presence of the dogs seems nonsensical and it appears that the presence of the "greenwood" is born from a contamination process; in fact, the texts that are not related to the A text never refer to the "greenwood", a peculiar element of English ballads, which, for this reason, could have been absorbed by *Lord Randal* (Taylor 1931: 106).

However, the philology of the texts is still debated; thus, the A text, which is the most famous and studied version, will be analysed as it has been transmitted to us since "ballads come into existence through and after oral transmission. It is therefore no use to search for archetypes or originals" (Göller 1988: 212). Concisely, *Lord Randal* has been both contaminated and contaminating, as is common in the ballad genre. Surely the

[6] On September 24th, 1656, a canon named Lorenzo Panciatichi read a paper in the Crusca on *Cicalata in lode delta Padella e della Frittura* ('A Cricket's song on the frying pan and on fried food') and quoted parts of *Lord Randa*l. From this quotation it has been concluded that the ballad originated during the 16th century at the latest (Göller 1988: 210).

paths of these processes are difficult - if not impossible - to trace, but the observation of the empathic processes in any of the variants might be riveting.

2. Methodology

The theme of contamination is strictly bound both to the nature of the literary work object of study - as underlined in the previous paragraph - and to the methodology. In fact, the aim of the present paper is to emphasise how the hybrid methodology resulting from the encounter between stylistics and cognitive poetics can lead to a deeper and more far-reaching understanding of the mechanisms behind empathy and literary works in general.

Empathy is central in the present study since it is relatively unexplored both in psychology and literary critique. Studies in the philosophy of empathy distinguish between two main types of empathy: cognitive and affective empathy. The latter, which is not the focus of the present essay, involves both a cognitive and an affective process: as a matter of fact, its fundamental characteristic is "affect on the part of the empathizer" (Maibom 2017: 2). On the other hand, the first "denotes the ability to ascribe mental states to others, such as beliefs, intentions, or emotions. This may be done by reflecting on how events, behavior, and psychological states co-vary, or by putting oneself in the position of the other to 'see' what one would think, feel, etc." (Maibom 2017: 1)[7].

Most genres of literary fiction (novels, poetry and so on) create possibilities of experience using language as a medium: they are able to "produce a complex layering or interrelation of experiential perspectives" (John 2017: 306), which can be compared; and, thus, they are strictly bound to empathy since they can be considered as attempts to experience other lives. As a matter of fact, the majority of readers don't concentrate on the author's experiential perspective, which is manifested by the language used, but on the literary work itself (John 2017: 307) and on the possibility of walking in the shoes of the characters[8]. However, this process needs to be completed by the reader because it is "not fully under the control of the [literary] work"[9] (John 2017: 312).

I argue that the mechanisms behind empathy can be successfully investigated thanks to the hybridisation of methodologies. In the present essay the possibility to unite the tools of traditional stylistic analysis[10] and the ones of cognitive poetics is considered and, thus, the statement that cognitive poetics is a mere evolution of stylistics is refuted[11]. The model here presented tries to address the criticisms around

[7] Cognitive empathy may involve affect; however, it is not necessary (Maibom 2017: 2).

[8] It is fundamental to emphasise the possibility to identify/empathise with any character, even though, as readers, we do not share their desires or opinions (John 2017: 309). This is a matter strictly bound to cognitive phenomena, style and awareness of the non-existence of the fictional dimension, which leads readers to "a relaxation of the self 's control of perspective" (John 2017: 315).

[9] Cognitive poetics tries to understand what happens in the mind of non-professional readers and the reasons behind the popularity of certain literary works, which are aspects that have been widely neglected in the academy (Stockwell 2007: 145-146).

[10] With the term *traditional stylistic analysis* is intended the stylistic analysis as described by Leech and Short (1981/2007).

[11] Concerning the debate, see Stockwell, 2007.

cognitive poetics, which state that it neglects "the stylistic texture of the literary work" (Stockwell 2007: 146).

Data were collected using the model Leech and Short proposed for the analysis of prose (1981/2007), which involves the examination of lexical and grammatical categories, context and cohesion, figures of speech and "features which are foregrounded by virtue of departing in some way from general norms of communication by means of the language code" (Leech and Short 2007: 61-64). However, the interpretation of the data, partially gathered using #LancsBox, needs to rely on other approaches that recognise the importance of the literary context. Thus, the methodology will involve the analysis of the above-mentioned features as well as various elements from cognitive poetics.

Since this study is aimed at understanding the mechanisms behind empathy[12], the cognitive analysis will focus only on the following features: foregrounding[13] (Stockwell 2005: 14), deixis[14] (Stockwell 2005: 43), roles within the reading process [*i.e.*, real author, extrafictional voice, implied author, narrator(s), character(s), narratee(s), implied

[12] In the last few decades, the process undergone by the reader to be able to walk in any character's shoes has been an object of attention; however, any study that tried to deal with this issue has underlined its trickiness (John 2017: 312).

[13] "Foregrounding" is strictly bound to the aspects of literary works that are considered more important than others. As a matter of fact, it "can be achieved by a variety of devices, such as repetition, unusual naming, innovative descriptions, creative syntactic ordering, puns, rhyme, alliteration, metrical emphasis, the use of creative metaphor, and so on" (Stockwell 2005: 14). In other words, foregrounding is realised through deviations from "the expected or ordinary use of language" (Stockwell 2005: 14).

[14] The term deixis derives from the Greek δείκνυμι ("pointing", "showing") and it refers to the elements of language that help the recipient of any message to orientate (among them: demonstratives, personal pronouns, adverbs of time) (Wales 2001: 99). When discussing deixis, understanding the concept of "origo" is fundamental; the origo, also called the "deictic-centre" or "zero-point", indicates who is producing the utterance, when and where. Concisely, the origo helps the reader to orientate within the text, understanding "the uses of words in context" (Stockwell 2005: 46). When discussing literature, six categories of deixis can be outlined: perceptual deixis, indicating the perceptive participants in the text through personal pronouns, demonstratives, definite articles and so on; spatial deixis, indicating where the deictic centre lies through spatial adverbs, locatives, verbs of motion and so on; temporal deixis, "locating the deictic centre in time" (Stockwell 2005: 46) mainly through temporal adverbs and locatives concerning time; relational deixis, indicating any relationship among "authors, narrators, characters and readers" (Stockwell 2005: 46); textual deixis, including any reference to paratextual elements; and compositional deixis, indicating "aspects of the text that manifest the generic type or literary conventions available to readers with the appropriate literary competence" (Stockwell 2005: 46).

reader, idealised reader and real reader (Stockwell 2005: 42)] [15], deictic shift theory[16] (Stockwell 2005: 46) and text world theory[17] (Stockwell 2005: 136). Furthermore, when needed for the interpretation, the methodological framework will be enriched by concepts from Searle's model[18] (1969; 1975).

3. Analysis

Lord Randal is characterised by an extremely simple and informal language, in which evaluative terms are almost absent. In fact, the only term completely classifiable as evaluative is the adjective "handsome", often uttered by the mother. Despite the above-mentioned absence, the ballad is emotionally intense, as the terms "true-love", "sick", "son", "mother", "died", "poisoned" and "hell and fire" suggest. Furthermore, the collocations "make my bed" and "gat your leavins", which are often used in the colloquial language, underline the strong relationship between mother and son (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23). As shown even by the listed collocations, the ballad is characterised by archaic terms, which were certainly of common usage when the ballad was written.

[15] The real author is the flesh-and-blood person who wrote the literary work; the extrafictional voice is constituted by the information and the impressions that the reader has about the author, mostly derived from the author's writing, literary criticism and historical accounts about them; the implied author is "a TEXTUAL construct, created by the real author to be the (ideal?) image of him- or herself, and also created anew by the reader; and who may or may not intrusively address the reader directly; and whose opinions and POINT OF VIEW as NARRATOR may or may not coincide with those of the author" (Wales 2011: 204); the narrator is whoever tells the story; and, characters are the persons in the literary work (Stockwell 2005: 42). The real reader is the person who reads the literary work; the idealised reader includes all the possible readings of the literary work; the implied reader "is rather a complex concept, hovering between the real reader of the text at any one moment of time, and the image of an IDEAL READER (q.v.), who would properly and completely understand the meaning and significances of a text. The implied reader is basically what the textual RHETORIC itself implicates or involves" (Wales 2011: 204); and, the narratee is the addressee of the narrator(s) (Stockwell 2005: 43).

[16] Deictic shift theory (DST) affirms the possibility of the reader to (metaphorically) enter the literary work and take a cognitive stance: readers can see things from the perspective of the narrator or the character: "[t]his imaginative capacity is a deictic shift which allows the reader to understand projected deictic expressions relative to the shifted deictic centre" (Stockwell 2005: 47). DST is strictly bound to the roles within the reading process, among which the reader moves through motions called *PUSHes* and *POPs;* in other words, a deictic shift occurs every time we immerse in a plane of the world of the text (**PUSH**), and every time we emerge (*i.e.*, **pop** out) from a plane of the world of the text (Stockwell 2005: 47).

[17] Text world theory is characterised by an astonishing complexity; however, for the present analysis, only its key terms (discourse world, text world and sub-worlds) are relevant. Discourse worlds involve "face-to-face" interaction among two or more discourse participants (such as, author and reader or two speakers in a conversation); the text is used by participants to create the text world "which consists of world-building elements and function-advancing propositions. World-building elements constitute the background against which the foreground events of the text will take place" (Stockwell 2005: 137). Sub-worlds, instead, are flashbacks, flashforwards, predictions, beliefs, views of the characters and so on. For a categorisation of sub-worlds, see Stockwell 2005: 140-141.

[18] Searle (1975: 354-361) proposes a taxonomy of illocutionary acts; he distinguishes between five categories: assertives (*e.g.*, statements, descriptions, and predictions), directives (*e.g.*, orders, requests, and direction giving), commissives (*e.g.*, promises, oaths, and bets), expressives (*e.g.*, greetings, congratulations, and thanks), and declarations (e.g., excommunications, hirings, and declarations of war).

1 'O where ha you been, Lord Randal, my son?
And where ha you been, my handsome young man?'
'I ha been at the greenwood; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi hunting, and fain wad lie down.'

2 'An wha met ye there, Lord Randal, my son?
An wha met you there, my handsome young man?'
'O I met wi my true-love; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'im wearied wi huntin, an fain wad lie down.'

3 'And what did she give you, Lord Randal, my son?
And what did she give you, my handsome young man?'
'Eels fried in a pan; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi huntin, and fain wad lie down.'

4 'And wha gat your leavins, Lord Randal, my son?
And wha gat your leavins, my handsome young man?'
'My hawks and my hounds; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi hunting, and fain wad lie down.'

5 'And what becam of them, Lord Randal, my son?
And what becam of them, my handsome young man?'
'They stretched their legs out an died; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm wearied wi huntin, and fain wad lie down.'

6 'O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son!
I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man'
'O yes, I am poisoned; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

7 'What d' ye leave to your mother, Lord Randal, my son?
What d'ye leave to your mother, my handsome young man?'
'Four and twenty milk kye; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

8 'What d'ye leave to your sister, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your sister, my handsome young man?'
'My gold and my silver; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, an I fain wad lie down.'

9 ' What d' ye leave to your brother, Lord Randal, my son?
What d'ye leave to your brother, my handsome young man?'
'My houses and my lands; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

10 'What d'ye leave to your true-love, Lord Randal, my son?
What d' ye leave to your true-love, my handsome young man?'
'I leave her hell and fire; mother, mak my bed soon,
For I 'm sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'

(English and Scottish Popular Ballads 1904: 22-23)

The most relevant semantic fields, which are formed by a few elements because of the restricted lexical diversity, are those of animals ("milk kye", "hawks", "hounds", "eels"), wealth ("milk kye", "gold", "silver", "houses", "lands") and domestic hearth ("son", "mother", "pan", "sister", "brother"). Nouns, including the proper ones, represent about 22% of the tokens. The majority of them are concrete; the only proper noun is "Randal", which is always pronounced by the mother of the protagonist and preceded by the honorific "Lord". Only two substantives can be specifically classified as negative, that is "hell" and "fire".

Adjectives represent about 20% of the tokens[19]. The majority of them are classifiable as possessive adjectives: "my" (37), "their" (1) and "your" (10). Every adjective, except for "four and twenty milk [kye]" and "fried", is repeated at least twice. The adjectives "young" and "handsome", indicating physical qualities of the protagonist, are regularly present every four lines. It is also relevant to mention that the majority of adjectives are referred to the protagonist of the ballad ("my", "handsome", "young", "wearied", "poisoned" and "sick"). Comparatives as well as superlatives are absent and there is a marked preponderance of attributive adjectives; in fact, there are only 13 predicative adjectives ["wearied" (5), "poisoned" (3) and "sick" (5)] and they all have a negative connotation.

Verbs are around 19% of the tokens and many of them are recurrent because of the repetition of some lines.

Verb phrase	Tense	Occurrences
"Have been"	Present perfect	3 (l. 1, 2, 3)
"Mak"	Imperative	10 (l. 3, 7, 11, 15, 19, 23, 27,31, 35, 39)
"Am/'m"	Present simple	11 (l. 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 23, 24, 28, 32, 36, 40)
"Wad lie down"	Present conditional	10 (l. 4, 8, 12, 16, 20, 24, 28, 32, 36, 40)
"Met"	Past simple	3 (l. 5, 6, 7)
"Did (she) give"	Past simple	2 (l. 9, 10)
"Gat"	Past simple	2 (l. 13, 14)
"Becam"	Past simple	2 (l. 17, 18)

[19] The term "token" is often considered a synonym of "word". Nevertheless, this simplification may induce a belief that tokenisation is an absolute concept and that there is one and one only tokenisation possible. Instead, depending on the decisions, the results vary. A token can be defined as "an instance of a sequence of characters in some particular document that are grouped together as a useful semantic unit for processing" (Manning *et al.* 2008: 22).

"Stretched out"	Past simple	1 (l. 19)
"Died"	Past simple	1 (l. 19)
"Fear"	Present simple	2 (l. 21, 22)
"D' (ye) leave / leave"	Present simple	9 (l. 25, 26, 29, 30, 33, 34, 37, 38, 39)

The most-used verb is "to be" (14), followed by "to make" (10), "to lie down" (10) and "to leave"[20] (9). The verbs in the past simple are the ones with the least number of occurrences (11).

Adverbs are rare in *Lord Randal* (around 5%) and can be classified as follows:

Adverb	Type	Occurrences
"Where"	Adverb of place	2
"Soon"	Adverb of time	10
"Fain"	Adverb of manner	10
"There"	Adverb of place	2

Every stanza, except for the sixth, contains a repartee between mother and son. More specifically, the first two lines contain an interrogation addressed from the mother to Lord Randal: the question is repeated, but the epithet used by the woman varies. The first two lines of each stanza aim at obtaining information from the addressee. However, in the sixth stanza, the first two lines (l. 21, 22) provide relevant information about the feelings of Lord Randal's mother and, thus, are classifiable as expressive speech acts according to Searle's model (1969; 1975): "'O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal, my son! / I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man'" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23).

Also, the last line of every stanza contains information about Lord Randal's state of mind; however, no performative verb introduces the statement. It is also worth mentioning that while stanzas one to five share the same conclusive line, that is "For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23), stanzas six to ten contain the variant "For I'm sick at the heart and I fain wad lie down" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23). Furthermore, in the ballad, sentences without verbs are present: they are uttered by Lord Randal as answers to his mother's questions (l. 11, 15, 27, 31, 35).

Sentences are brief and straightforward, and their medium length is 10.8 tokens. Coordination is preponderant; in fact, only one causal preposition is present and it is repeated in two variants at the end of each stanza: "mother, mak my bed soon, / For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down", "mother, mak my bed soon, / For I'm sick at the heart and I fain wad lie down" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23).

[20] While the verb *to leave* is present in the stanzas between the seventh to the tenth, the verbs *to make* and *to lie down* occur one time per stanza.

The most recurrent complex noun phrases are "Lord Randal my son" and "my handsome young man": they are repeated throughout the text and have a vocative function; only one other complex noun phrase is present and it contains multiple adjectives: "four and twenty milk kye". It should also be noticed that Lord Randal uses the noun "mother" as a vocative, while his mother uses the above-mentioned noun phrase ("Lord Randal my son"), containing the term of address "Lord", which may seem inappropriate in a moving private situation such as the one delineated in the poem.

In the ballad only six determinative articles and one indeterminate article are present ("in *a* pan"). The first determinative article precedes the noun "greenwood" and is located in the third line. The other instances of "the" always precede the substantive "heart", which is repeated five times from the sixth stanza on.

The only conjunction present within the ballad is "and" (25 instances); four interjections ["o" (3) and "yes" (1)] are also present and they are always located at the beginning of the line. Negations are absent, while pronouns are widely used. In fact, they represent about 14% of tokens. Personal pronouns can be classified as follows: 3 third person feminine pronouns (two subject and one object); 16 singular second person pronouns (9 in the form "ye" and 7 in the form "you"), 21 first person singular pronouns (subject) and 3 third person plural pronouns (1 subject and 2 object). Furthermore, there are 16 interrogative pronouns: 12 instances of the interrogative pronoun "what" and 4 instances of the interrogative pronoun "wha", which corresponds to the modern *who* (OED Online 2021). The following auxiliary verbs are also present: "to do" occurs 10 times and it is always used to ask questions ["d'" (8), "did" (2)]; "to have" occurs 3 times in the form "ha"; and "will" occurs 10 times in the archaic form of "would" ["wad"] and is used to express the present conditional.

The ballad is rich in repetitions; in fact, the noun phrases "Lord Randal my son" and "my handsome young man" are present in every stanza. Furthermore, the final line of each stanza, which is present in two different variants ["For I'm wearied wi' huntin' an' fain wad lie down", "For I'm sick at the heart an' I fain wad lie down" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23)], is also repeated. Thus, every stanza varies from the previous and the following ones only in some details, that is the question of the first and second line and the first part of the third line, where Lord Randal briefly answers his mother. In the following stanzas the recurring elements, which constitute a refrain (Aviram 1994: 253), are displayed in italics.

'An' wha met ye there, *Lord Randal my son?*
An' wha met you there; *my handsome young man?'*
'O I met wi my true-love; *mother, mak my bed soon,*
For I'm wearied wi' huntin' an' fain wad lie down'.

'And what did she give you, *Lord Randal my son?*
And what did she give you, *my handsome young man'?*
'Eels fried in a pan; *mother, mak my bed soon,*
For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down'
(*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23).

Particularly interesting is also the repetition of the noun "true-love", which is firstly used by Lord Randal (l. 7) and, then, after the shocking revelation about the poisoning, by his mother (l. 38). The adjective "poisoned" is meaningfully repeated 3 times in the sixth stanza, which differs remarkably from the others:

> 'O I fear you are *poisoned*, Lord Randal, my son!
> I fear you are *poisoned*, my handsome young man.'
> 'O yes, I am *poisoned*; mother, mak my bed soon,
> For I' m sick at the heart, and I fain wad lie down.'
> (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23).

Furthermore, two climaxes are present: the first one in the transition between Lord Randal's tiredness and his sickness of heart ("For I'm wearied wi' huntin' an' fain wad lie down"; "For I'm sick at the heart an' I fain wad lie down"); and the second in his bequeath[21], where his goods are listed from the least to the most valuable ("four and twenty milk kye", "my gold and my silver", "my houses and my lands").

Among the metaphors, "eels fried in a pan" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23) is particularly relevant; in fact, according to Aviram (1994: 254), eels can be considered a phallic symbol and their being in a container would confirm this reading since the pan can be considered a symbol of the female reproductive system. Göller (1988: 214), however, formulates another widely discussed hypothesis, whereby the eels are seen as similar to snakes, can be considered an evil symbol and, thus, could be associated with both the devil and poison. In this case, eels would be part of the terms that have a negative connotation (*i.e.*, "sick", "died", "poisoned", "hell and fire", "wearied"). Furthermore, the alliteration of the sounds "m" and "w" is also present ("*m*other, *m*ak *m*y bed soon, / For I'm *w*earied *w*i' huntin' and fain *w*ad lie do*w*n" (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 23)).

As previously discussed, the ballad is rich in coordinative conjunctions, including 25 occurrences of the conjunction "and", a fact that will be further discussed in the data interpretation section. It is also in the dialogic form; however, direct speeches are not introduced by declarative verbs since no narrator is present. In fact, Lord Randal's words can be distinguished by the ones of his mother only thanks to the repetition of the already discussed noun phrases with the function of the vocative ("Lord Randal my son", "my handsome young man", "mother").

4. Data interpretation and cognitive analysis

The poem is characterised by a simple vocabulary that should not be seen as denotating insignificance. In fact, such simplicity can be the result of a considerable effort, and it is particularly apt for the narration of an event within a poem (Aviram 1994: 247). One of

[21] The nuncupative testament is considered a relevant feature of the ballad genre. Other peculiarities of the genre are the simple rhymes, the obligatory epithets, the reliance on dialogue, and the dramatic nature of the narrative; their aim was to make the ballad easier to remember: as it is well known, ballads were transmitted orally, were accompanied by music and were a form of entertainment particularly appreciated by the lower social classes (Bold 2018).

the peculiarities of the ballad is that it "has held with extraordinary tenacity to its stanzaic pattern: the first half of the stanza is a question repeated with only a change of address; the second half an answer, addressed to the questioner, and a premonitory assertion of desperate illness" (Bronson 2015: 46). Thus, when the regularity, peculiar of the ballad genre in general, is abruptly interrupted, the phenomenon strikes the reader vehemently:

> 'O I fear you are poisoned, Lord Randal my son,
> I fear you are poisoned, my handsome young man.'
> 'O yes, I am poisoned; mother, mak my bed soon,
> For I am sick at the heart and I fain wad lie down'
> (*English and Scottish Popular Ballads* 1904: 22-23)

Here, regularity is interrupted by the interjection of the first line (*i.e.*, "O") that indicates the involvement of emotions. Indeed, the presence of the above-mentioned interjection united with the repetition of the verb *to fear* and the adjective "poisoned" leads the anxiety to a growth that began when the reader learned about the destiny of the "hawks and hounds." Furthermore, the interjections "O yes" in the following line shock the reader because they confirm that Lord Randal has been poisoned but, at the same time, the reasons are not made explicit. Furthermore, in the same stanza, the reader notices a climax; in line 24, Lord Randal does not say he is tired because he has been hunting, as he asserted in the previous stanzas, but he states he is tired because he is "sick at the heart" (Göller 1988: 213). Thus, it is possible to affirm that the poisoning that leads Lord Randal to his death is the emotional focus of the ballad because it is the only moment in which the feelings of the "handsome young man" and his mother emerge, albeit indirectly. As a matter of fact, the poisoning is foregrounded not only thanks to the above-mentioned features (*i.e.*, interruption of regularity, presence and repetition of the verb *to fear* and of the adjective "poisoned", the death of the "hawks and hounds" and the presence of the interjections "O yes"), but also thanks to the fact that the lines "mother, mak my bed soon, For I'm wearied wi' huntin' and fain wad lie down'" were repeated (and thus, foregrounded) in the whole ballad[22]. It should also be noticed that the two protagonists always exercise self-control, despite the tragic events taking place. In fact, the protagonists of the dialogue never directly reveal the killer's name, to whom they refer using the third person singular pronoun and with the substantive "true-love", which has an extremely positive connotation.

Furthermore, the dialogue has both an aesthetic and a logical function. In fact:

> [t]he mother grows suspicious at the young man's remarks on his rendezvous. She asks leading questions and her suspicions become certainty: her son has been poisoned. The innuendo of the first lines is thus not simply explained or correlated by further facts; rather the hearer takes part in a process of recognition through the medium of the mother (Göller 1988: 212).

[22] As Bold (2018) affirms, ballads are characterised by the so-called incremental repetition: generally, the stanza is repeated but information is progressively added.

In other words, the mother investigates the facts, firstly helping the readers to imagine what happened and then letting them really understand.

Lord Randal's answers are incredibly brief and often do not contain a verb; thus, they can be considered a sign of the will of the young man to communicate as little as possible to his mother. The poem, being a ballad, is characterised by the insistent repetition of some lines, which helps for memorising (Aviram 1994: 248). Among the repeated terms, the most evident are "lord" and "my son", where the honorific "lord" indicates a distancing while the possessive adjective "my" emphasises the emotional involvement (Göller 1988:213). Thus, the above-mentioned terms can be considered in contrast with each other. Since the question-answer model is repeated and each question is similar to the related answer, they can also be considered an example of parallelism (Göller 1988:231).

Another noteworthy climax is constituted by the items that Lord Randal will bequeath to his relatives. They are ordered from the least to the most valuable and each one presents a hidden meaning: "Four and twenty milk kye" to his mother, a symbol of maternity, gold and silver to his sister, which could be given as a dowry, his houses and his lands to his brother, in order to make him a member of the aristocracy, and "hell and fire" to his true love (Donahue 2008; Palmer 1984). Interestingly, only the answer about his bequeath to his lover entails the subject and the verb; these could be denotative of his anger with his killer.

Particularly relevant is the repetition of the coordinative conjunction "and" that gives a specific rhythmic pattern to the ballad. In fact, it is present both in the lines pronounced by Lord Randal and in those uttered by his mother. However, even in this case, regularity is interrupted in the sixth stanza – which constitutes a turning point in the poem. Indeed, from the seventh stanza onward, namely the stanzas containing the bequest of Lord Randal, the conjunction "and" is substituted by the interrogative pronoun "what." In other words, the foregrounded element changes: firstly, it corresponds to the coordinative conjunction "and", then to "I fear", which is present only in the sixth stanza, and finally to the interrogative pronoun "what".

Also particularly interesting is the use of personal pronouns. In fact, the dialogue is rich in first singular pronouns with the role of subject (none of them has the function of object). Only three third singular feminine pronouns are present, two functioning as subject of the verb "to give", which presents the second person singular pronoun as object, indicating that the action has its effect on Lord Randal. Instead, in line 39, the subject indicates Lord Randal and the object is his true-love: "I leave her hell and fire." Thus, Lord Randal will bequeath her a terrible inheritance, punishing her but continuing to consider her his "true love", as the sobriquet suggests. Instead, the third person plural pronoun is referred to the hounds and hawks of the Lord, who have met his same fate.

The second person singular pronoun is used 16 times by the mother: thus, it can be considered another element that gives rhythm to the ballad. It should also be noticed that the second person singular pronoun is always referred to Lord Randal, who - being brief and not asking questions of his mother - can thus be considered reluctant to provide more information. The third person singular masculine pronoun is never used.

Another element that scholars have widely discussed is the presence of eels, which can be considered as a metaphor for the male genitalia (Aviram 1994: 258) or evil (Göller 1988: 214). Depending on the reading, some elements within the ballad change their meaning. Among them, the most salient element is the phrasal verb "to lie down" that acquires the meaning of "to die" in the reading by Göller (1988) but, in the reading by Aviram (1994: 258), acquires - together with "hell and fire" - a peculiar meaning that is strictly bound to the English Renaissance; in this case, "hell and fire" would indicate passion and lust and the verb "to lie down" would acquire a sexual connotation.

The acquired data can be further interpreted by examining them through cognitive poetics, which enables us to understand why the reader takes the side of a specific character. The title of the ballad draws the reader's attention to the main character, Lord Randal, who, using a metaphor from cognitive psychology, is perceived as being under the spotlight. Thus, the reader immediately looks for Lord Randal when approaching the text and instantly finds him in the first line. In fact, his role as a figure[23] is immediately evident. The attention drawn to the character from the title that the ballad has acquired stays on it until a new character, his mother, is presented. Introduced through a vocative, she gets the spotlight and the reader's attention only for a few seconds, since her character has not been developed by the author. The same process takes place for Lord Randal's sister and brother, who are introduced in the second half of the poem, where he makes his will. Despite only getting the spotlight for a few moments, his mother has a crucial role in the poem: she asks questions to her son, allowing the description of the events. Furthermore, it is relevant that the eels get the role of a figure; in fact, they are foregrounded within the eleventh line and have the function of being a trajector while the pan is the landmark[24]. Lastly, in the conclusion of the ballad, his "true-love" gets for the attention of the reader, also thanks to the repetition of the above-mentioned noun phrase, which is also present in the first part of the ballad.

When considering the roles within the reading process, the situation is atypical. In fact, being an anonymous ballad and having only information about possible "sources", we cannot consider other literary works written by the author or observe the different extrafictional voice(s). However, the peculiarity of the ballad is the continuous variation of the roles of the narrator and narratee. In fact, the first two lines of every stanza are pronounced by Lord Randal's mother and he is the narratee, while the third and fourth line present the opposite situation (thus, there is a "personal" deictic shift within every stanza). It is also interesting to point out that, in the first part of the ballad, the stanzas between the first and the fifth, both characters are collocated in their present; still, they discuss past events except for the last part of the fourth line of every stanza, which is said by Lord Randal and refers to their present. Instead, there is a

[23] Gestalt psychologists were the first to introduce the notions of *figure* and *ground* at the beginning of the twentieth century. Basically, "[i]n most narrative fiction, […] characters are figures against the ground of their settings" (Stockwell 2005: 15); and, focusing on the above-mentioned notions, it is possible to understand the importance of each character (concerning figure and ground, see Stockwell 2005: 12-26).

[24] If considered within the image schema, "the element that is the figure is called the trajector and the element it has a grounded relationship with is called the landmark" (Stockwell 2006: 16).

preponderance of verbs in the present simple in the stanzas between the sixth and the tenth. To summarise, from the first to the fifth stanza, there is a continuous temporal deictic shift: in every stanza, the reader submerges in Lord Randal's past (so there is a PUSH) but, in the second half of the third line, the reader emerges from it and is brought to the present (so there is a POP). However, the POP of the fifth stanza is final because, from that moment on, the reader does not enter new worlds but stays in the current text world (*i.e.*, in the narrative level of the story), that is, in the moment in which the conversation between Lord Randal and his mother takes place.

Relational deixis can be labeled as atypical if the close relationship between the characters is considered; in fact, the presence of the noun "mother" and of the noun phrases "my son" and "my handsome young man" indicates a close relationship between the characters. On the contrary, the noun phrase "Lord Randal" contrasts with the above-mentioned elements and denies the presence of such a strong relationship. As a matter of fact, as stated previously, the term of address "Lord" may seem inappropriate in a moving private situation such as the one delineated in the ballad. Furthermore, within the text, there are deictic elements that denote the degree of emotional involvement of the characters. One of them is surely the possessive adjective "my", which is present in the words of Lord Randal's mother, or, more precisely, in the noun phrases that have the function of vocative and are repeated in the first two lines of every stanza. In fact, the above-mentioned possessive adjective clearly shows a very high level of affection by the mother, who suffers with her son. Despite the fact that readers don't focus much on her suffering in their first reading of the poem, a closer reading finds her pain as a relevant element of the ballad. Thus, we can affirm that the mother's suffering has an effect on the reader who sees the reflection of Lord Randal's great pain on his mother. In fact, the reader perceives Lord Randal as the most suffering person because the events affect him and the reader finds relief only when the protagonist bequeaths "hell and fire" to his true-love: this seems a fairly obvious point, however - from a linguistic point of view - it is the result of foregrounding.

In conclusion, the reader is likely to empathise with both Lord Randal and his mother, but more with Lord Randal for the following reasons:

- both characters occupy the role of speaker; however, the mother is not the subject of the sentences she pronounces (except for the ones in the sixth stanza).
- Both are deictic centres to the same extent (20 lines are pronounced by Lord Randal and 20 lines by his mother). However, the questions are posed to Lord Randal, who continuously reiterates the need to lie down, helping the reader to understand that a tragic event is about to happen.
- Lord Randal and his hounds and hawks are the patients of the negative action of his "true-love", who has the role of agent, antagonist and sole organiser of the deceit of which Lord Randal is a victim.
- The temporal deictic shift concerns an event in Lord Randal's past (and not in his mother's).
- The mother's language shows overall a strong relationship with her son.

For the combination of the above-mentioned circumstances, it is possible to affirm that while the reader could unconsciously decide to empathise more with Lord Randal, they could empathise too also with his mother, who is inevitably afflicted by the events.

The present essay tries to present a close reading of *Lord Randal*, a ballad endemic across Europe, as a *case in point* in methodological contamination. The traditional stylistic analysis (as defined in Leech and Short, 2007) allows the collection of a large amount of (mostly) quantitative data with the scientific method, which correctness can be verified by other researchers analysing the same dataset. Its interpretation can be enriched by cognitive poetics, a relatively young branch of linguistics, born in the 1980s, which involves the interaction between literary studies and cognitive sciences[25] (Boezio 2011: 19). In other words, the hybridisation of methodologies gives a solid scientific basis to the interpretation of the literary work object of study, including both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis.

The issues concerning the methodologies united in the present essay are mainly related to human errors and differences among categorisations. As a matter of fact, it is possible to mechanise only some processes (*e.g.*, counting any part of speech, individuating sematic fields[26], calculating the medium length of sentences and phrases and thus their complexity etc.), while some observations depend on the knowledge of the scholar analysing the literary work object of study. For example, Leech and Short (2007: 61) only list eight kinds of attributes concerning adjectives (physical, psychological, visual, auditory, colour, referential, emotive, and evaluative), thus, providing a partial list, which may be difficult to complete both for native and non-native speakers[27]; furthermore, some rhetorical figures may be complex to individuate and the effectiveness of the whole cognitive poetic analysis depends closely both on the knowledge and the punctiliousness of the interpreter.

In conclusion, the hybridisation between traditional stylistic analysis and cognitive poetics may be a further step towards a "scientific" interpretation of literary texts and of the mechanisms behind empathy; however, despite the help of the new technologies, humans make mistakes, thus, it is possible to affirm that the hybrid methodology here presented can surely help to investigate literary works and the empathic processes but it would strongly benefit from the development of new software and tools.

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[25] *Cognitive sciences* (OED Online n.a.) are a group of disciplines that aim to study human and artificial cognitive processes; among these are neurosciences, artificial intelligence, psycholinguistics, anthropology, cognitive psychology.

[26] The UCREL Semantic Analysis System (USAS) is a software developed for the automatic semantic analysis of text [concerning the application of USAS, see Deegan, Short, Archer, Baker, McEnery, Rayson (2004)].

[27] The same issue can be found concerning the analysis of nouns, verbs and adverbs within Leech and Short's seminal work (2007: 61-62).

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A Pragmatic Analysis of Cont(r)acts in Congreve's *The Way of the World*

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Abstract

The present essay analyses selected dialogues drawn from William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700) from a pragmatic perspective. By focusing on the utterances spoken by the main characters, Mirabell and Millamant, I intend to demonstrate that emotions affect language and irreversibly shape both the reputation and the relationships of the individuals. The essay is organised into two sections: the former illustrates Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, Leech's maxims and Culpeper's super-strategies; the latter analyses the speech exchanges of the lovers throughout the comedy. In the final remarks, I argue that Congreve's masterpiece can be considered as a mirroring representation of the social and cultural background of late seventeenth-century England.

Introduction

The hypothesis underpinning the research is that face can be affected by internal factors – namely the ones that depend on the speakers' choices, such as the recurs to im/politeness – and/or external factors that can be inferred by the context – for instance, the social and cultural background in which the language is used *in situ*.

The essay is organised as follows: Section 1 illustrates the methodology and focuses on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, Leech's maxims and Culpeper's Impoliteness Theory; Section 2 presents a qualitative analysis of the linguistic peculiarities displayed by Millamant and Mirabell, the protagonists of William Congreve's *The Way of the World* (1700). Indeed, the gorgeous heiress and the rake employ conflictive language since the beginning of the comedy – to hide their mutual feelings from the others, according to the coeval social manners – reaching an *apex* in the so-called *proviso* scene (4.1.160-234)[1].

In the conclusions, I remark that the pragmatic elements explored in the present study may be influenced by the social rules, the ethical conventions as well as the economic and

[1] All quotes from Congreve's *The Way of the World* are drawn from the 2020 Methuen edition by Roberts. The line numbers are provided between parentheses after quotes in the text.

dramatical background of late Restoration England.

Methodology

Managing social interactions can be considered a key area of pragmatics, with several studies exploring the 'what,' the 'who' and, above all, the 'why' of relations (see Spencer-Oatey 2011: 3566-3567). From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, the speech exchanges have often been studied in light of Erving Goffman's concept of "face" (1967: 5), later refined in Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, arguably considered "the work which most effectively established the field" (Bousfield 2018: 288-289; see also Locher, Graham 2010: 5). In their pivotal work, *Politeness: some universals in language usage* ([1978]1987), the scholars distinguished a "positive face," mainly related to the desire to be accepted by the others, from a "negative face," which covered the desire to exert one's freedom without impediments (see Brown, Levinson 1978: 61); furthermore, they argued that, overwhelmingly, people engaged in a conversation "maintain each other's face" (Brown, Levinson 1978: 60). Nevertheless, interactions might be undermined by the so-called Face-Threatening-Acts (hereafter FTAs), that is, "those acts that by their nature run contrary to the face wants of the addressee and/or of the speaker" (Brown, Levinson 1978: 65).

In order to avoid the risk of damaging (or losing) face, Brown and Levinson theorised a series of strategies based on politeness, according to which the performer of an FTA could either deliver the attack on- or off-record; whether the message was intended to be conveyed on-record, the speaker might have spoken baldly or, conversely, employed a "redressive" strategy, namely an action "that [attempted] to counteract the potential face damage of the FTA by doing it in such a way, or with such modifications or additions, that [indicated] clearly that no such face threat [was] intended or desired" (Brown, Levinson 1978: 69-70)[2]. Moreover, considering politeness as a socially constructed phenomenon, the scholars introduced the following variables: 1) social distance between S and H: "the degree of familiarity and solidarity they share;" 2) relative power of S and H: "the degree to which the speaker can impose their will on the hearer;" 3) ranking of imposition attached to the speech act in the culture: "the degree of expenditure of goods and services by the hearer; the right of the speaker to perform the act; and the degree to which the hearer welcomes the imposition" (Brown, Levinson 1978: 74).

Analogously, politeness was at the base of Leech's studies; in 1983, he theorised six maxims of interaction in the conviction that they would facilitate conversation:

(I) TACT MAXIM
(a) Minimise cost to other [(b) Maximise benefit to other]
(II) GENEROSITY MAXIM
(a) Minimise benefit to self [(b) Maximise cost to self]
(III) APPROBATION MAXIM
(a) Minimise dispraise of other [(b) Maximise praise of other]
(IV) MODESTY MAXIM
(a) Minimise praise of self [(b) Maximise dispraise of self]
(V) AGREEMENT MAXIM

[2] The redressive strategies aimed to preserve both S and H's claim for membership were labelled as Positive Politeness; those employed to protect the interactants' freedom of action were related to Negative Politeness (see Brown, Levinson 1978: 70; 101-129).

(a) Minimise disagreement between self and other
[(b) Maximise agreement between self and other]
(VI) SYMPATHY MAXIM
(a) Minimise antipathy between self and other
[(b) Maximise sympathy between self and other] (Leech 1983: 132).

Based on four parameters – cost/benefit, optionality, indirectness, authority/social distance – the Politeness Principle so conceived helped interlocutors manage their potential conflictive face wants with sociality rights. More specifically, tact and generosity maxims enabled the speaker to omit the cost of offers, requests, invitations, promises and other commissives/impositives; approbation and modesty maxims helped the speaker limit criticism or contempt towards the hearer, performing self-dispraise if needed; lastly, agreement and sympathy maxims could reduce antipathy and disagreement between the interlocutors.

In time, the politeness models illustrated above faced numerous criticisms, mainly on the ground that they both seemed arranged around an *a priori* system which "[forced] researchers to ignore what may be the central face-concerns for the individual interactions" (Tracy, Baratz 1994: 291; see also, among others, Spencer-Oatey 2009: 137; Culpeper, Haugh and Kádár 2017: 20; Grainger 2018: 4-5) and neglected conflictive interactions. On this matter, Jonathan Culpeper's studies about Impoliteness marked a turning point in the linguistic domain.

Conversely to Brown and Levinson, he argued that, occasionally, people use language to offend deliberately, with no regard for the others' faces (see Culpeper 1996a: 23). To explore such phenomenon in depth, he theorised a series of super-strategies centred upon conflictive utterances to shed light on *how* things are said rather than *what* is said:

1. BALD ON-RECORD IMPOLITENESS: "the FTA is performed in a direct, clear, unambiguous and concise way in circumstances where face is not irrelevant or minimised;"
2. POSITIVE IMPOLITENESS: "the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's positive face wants;"
3. NEGATIVE IMPOLITENESS: "the use of strategies designed to damage the addressee's negative face wants;"
4. OFF-RECORD IMPOLITENESS: "the FTA is performed by means of an implicature but in such a way that one attributable intention clearly outweighs any others;"
5. WITHHOLD POLITENESS: "the absence of politeness work where it would be expected" (Culpeper 1996b: 352).

In the following section, the principles of politeness and impoliteness as presented above will be employed to analyse selected excerpts of Congreve's *The Way of the World*.

Analysis

Mirabell is a reformed rake[3], now desperately in love with Millamant, the most beautiful nubile woman in London. Arguably, they are the most relevant characters of *The Way of the World*, as they are the so-called "gay couple" whose marriage concludes the comedy and seals the happy ending.

[3] "his [Mirabell] relations with Mrs. Fainall have quite clearly been conducted in the rakish style, but in the pursuit of marriage Mirabell has reformed himself into a more orthodox, if also lucid, gallant suitor, which is not incompatible with his widely remarked status of *honnête homme*" (MacKenzie 2014: 264; see also Turner 1987: 66-67).

Their relationship is immediately addressed in the opening act by Fainall – the male deuteragonist of the play – who, by invading the protagonist's privacy (NI3), utters: "Something has put out of humour. […] Confess. Millamant and you quarrelled last night after I left you. My fair cousin has some humours that would temp the patience of a stoic" (1.1.11; 14-16). The gentleman refers to the night before, when Mirabell had to reluctantly leave a public house so that his beloved and her friends may initiate the so-called "cabal-night" – a very exclusive social event where people aimed at "[sitting] upon the murdered reputations of the week" (1.1.46-47). Indeed, the cold-heartedness displayed by the young lady "joining in the Argument" (1.1.30) vexed Mirabell ("I withdrew without expecting her reply", 1.1.33-34); despite that, he still has feelings for her and informs Fainall of that:

> […] I like her with her faults – nay, *like her for her faults* [P2]. Her follies are so natural, or so artful, that they become her [P2]; and those affectations which in another woman would be odious, *serve but to make her more agreeable* [P2]. I'll tell thee, Fainall, she once used me with that insolence that in revenge I took her to pieces, sifted her and separated her failings […]. The catalogue was so large that I was not without hopes one day or other to hate her heartily; to which end I so used myself to think of 'em that at length, contrary to my design and expectation, […] *they are grown as familiar to me as my own frailties*, and in all probability in a little time longer I shall like 'em as well (1.1.133-138; 139-142; 144-146; my emphasis).

Leech's maxims qualify as efficient pragmatic tools to analyse Mirabell's speech: by employing the approbation and the modesty one, he maximises praise for a woman that he loves despite her faults ("I like her with her faults – nay, *like her for her faults*"; "those affectations […] *serve but to make her more agreeable*"), while admitting his deficiency at the same time ("*they are grown as familiar to me as my own frailties*"). Moreover, the complimentary words he addresses to Millamant exemplify his exaggerated interest in her.

Nevertheless, the utterances the lovers direct towards each other when they first meet on the stage – in Act II – are characterised by an offensive, conflictive and rancorous tone:

Table 1: Act 2, Scene 1, vv. 275-277; 280-282; 285 (my emphasis)

275	MIRABELL: Here she comes, I'faith, full sail, with her *fan spread* and her	**[OFF-R]**
276	*streamers out*, and a *shoal* of fools for tenders. Ha, no, I cry her	
277	mercy. […]	
280	**You seem to be unattended**, madam. **You used to have the *beau**	
281	***monde* throng after you, and a flock of gay fine perukes hovering**	
282	**round you**. […]	
285	MILLAMANT: Oh, **I have denied myself airs to-day**.	**[NI2]**

Millamant's appearance on the stage is preceded by Mirabell's harsh comment: an offence conveyed off-record, intended to underline the frivolity and opulence peculiar of the young lady *in absentia*[4]. Shaming can be detected in Mirabell's lines, "You seem to be unattended, madam.

[4] The evocation recalled by Mirabell exploits a powerful literary cross-reference: indeed, as Sestito (2002: 44) and Papetti (1995: 15; 22) remark, the terms related to the nautical domain contained in the lines "Here she comes […] with her *fan spread* and *streamers out*, and a *shoal* of fool for tenders" remind of Cleopatra, the Shakespearean character who met Mark Antony's eyes for the first time while she was on board of her luxurious

You used to have the *beau monde* throng after you, and a flock of gay fine perukes hovering around you," aimed at putting the stress on Millamant's outsized personality. However, the girl sagaciously counterattacks: by uttering "I have denied myself airs to-day," she performs Leech's modesty maxim to minimise the praise of herself. However, the utterance can also be considered a refined NI2 strategy meant to ridicule Mirabell's statement – for being incorrect – and remark her relative power[5]; as Al-Ghalith (2011: 283; 285-286; see also Gill 1996) argues, she is an independent woman who does not need to be surrounded by people to be considered worthy:

> She is a far cry from the simple character types who preceded her. She is fully aware of her own precarious position and is staunchly determined to define her role and gain control of her life in a libertine and skeptical world much like our own […] Congreve creates a woman character who is highly educated, yet she is not made the object of satire. She is assertive in her insistence on a marriage ideal, yet she is never wicked.

In point of fact, banter characterises most of her discourses with Mirabell: this latter performs primarily negative impoliteness to hurt his beloved's face so as to defend his reputation and hide his true feelings; on the other hand, Millamant fiercely argues with her suitor to test his love, demand respect and esteem. Their remarks are meticulous and witty, as the following excerpt demonstrates:

Table 2: Act 2, Scene 1, vv. 328-344

328	MIRABELL: […] **your true**	**[NI5]**
329	**vanity is in the power of pleasing.**	
330	MILLAMANT: Oh, **I ask your pardon for that**. One's cruelty is one's power, and	**[PI7]**
331	when one parts with one's cruelty, one parts with one's power;	
332	and when one has parted with that, I fancy one's old and ugly.	
333	MIRABELL: Ay, ay; **suffer your cruelty to ruin the object of your power, to**	**[NI2]**
334	**destroy your lover**--and then how vain, how lost a thing you'll	
335	be! Nay, '**tis true; you are no longer handsome when you've lost**	
336	**your lover: your beauty dies upon the instant. For beauty is the**	**[NI5]**

galley afloat the Cydnus – as poetically described by Enobarbus (*AC*, 2.2.200-228). Furthermore, the correlation between Millamant and the Egyptian queen portrayed by the Bard finds confirmation in the final part of Act I of *The Way of the World*, specifically in Witwould's lines: "'Tis what she will hardly allow anybody else. Now demme, I should hate that, if she were as handsome as Cleopatra. Mirabell is not so sure of her as he thinks for" (1.1.396-398). Other subtler references to the erratic personality displayed by both the Old Serpent of the Nile and Lady Wishfort's niece can be retraced in Mirabell's words: "[…] To think of a whirlwind, though 'twere in a whirlwind, were a case of more steady contemplation, a very tranquility of mind and mansion. A fellow that lives in a windmill has not a more whimsical dwelling than the heart of a man that is lodged in a woman. There is no point of the compass to which they cannot turn, and by which they are not turned, and by one as well as another; for motion, not method, is their occupation" (2.1.419-426), which recalls Mark Antony's desperate "But that your royalty / Holds idleness your subject, I should take you / For idleness itself" (*AC*, 1.3.94-96) as well as Enobarbus' comment "We cannot call her winds and waters sighs and tears; they are greater storms and tempests than almanacs can report" (*AC*, 1.2.154-156). Such elements can be interpreted as Congreve's attempt to embellish the comedy of manners by drawing from the English early modern repertoire. Moreover, it is worth remembering that, being John Dryden's pupil, Congreve collaborated with his mentor on the staging of the former's famous *All for Love* (1668), therefore he was familiar with the tragic story of Antony and Cleopatra.

[5] "The scene in which the two meet at St. James's Park demonstrates the control that Millamant has in courtship. Here, she not only mocks Mirabell for his exclusion from the cabal the previous night – an exclusion that she, in large part, contributed to – but she also takes pains to explain this 'cruelty'" (Bender 2013: 12).

337	**lover's gift:** 'tis he bestows your charms: - your glass is all a cheat.	
338	The ugly and the old, whom the looking-glass mortifies, yet	
339	after commendation can be flattered by it, and discover beauties	
340	in it: for that reflects our praises rather than your face.	
341	MILLAMANT: Oh, the vanity of these men! Fainall, d'ye hear him? If they did	
342	not commend us, we were not handsome! **Now you must know**	**[PI7]**
343	**they could not commend one if one was not handsome. Beauty**	
344	**the lover's gift!**	

Mirabell's privileged impoliteness output strategy is NI5, "put the other's indebtedness on record," which metaphorically serves to underline the fact that Millamant's peculiarities – her beauty and fame, for instance – depend on men's wooing. Furthermore, He does not treat the young lady seriously, as in lines 333-334. Conversely, she strongly disagrees with her beau in lines 330 and 342-344, for instance, as she does not intend to be objectified by men. Thus, she opts for a PI7 strategy, "seek disagreement," to deny what her lover says and revendicate her independence. Furthermore, differently from Mirabell who, in Act I, employed Leech's maxims to celebrate Millamant despite her faults (1.1.133-136), she subverts the Politeness Principle by attacking him:

> Mirabell, if you persist in this offensive freedom *you'll displease me* [BR]. I think I must resolve after all not to have you. We shan't agree. […] And yet you distemper in all likelihood will be the same, for we shall be sick of one another. I shan't endure to be reprimanded nor instructed. 'Tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one's faults – *I can't bear it* [BR]. Well, *I won't have you*, Mirabell (2.1.383-385; 386-391; my emphasis).

Her language is explicit ("you'll displease me"; "I can't bear it"); indeed, she performs bald on-record impoliteness and exploits social distance to set boundaries and protect her negative face, therefore her freedom to act without impediments ("I shan't endure to be reprimanded nor instructed. 'Tis so dull to act always by advice, and so tedious to be told of one's faults"). Moreover, throughout the dialogue, she maximises disagreement between her and Mirabell and emphasises the cost that such relationship has to herself. Hence, she is resolved to cease the intercourse: "I won't have you, Mirabell." Nonetheless, as the plot unravels, the lovers' speeches showcase their progressive falling in love (see Caldwell 2015: 197; Thomas 1992: 25-26): the sharp language and the relative power displayed in Act I and II is gradually dimmed in the final part of the comedy, in favour of a more complaisant attitude.

In Act IV, the couple tries to set controversies apart and reach a compromise in the famous *proviso* scene. The privacy of a room in Lady Wishfort's house lets them straightforwardly discuss the terms of a hypothetical marriage. The initial part of the dialogue presents a courageous Millamant, defender of her "will and pleasure" (4.1.150):

Table 3: Act 4, Scene 1, vv. 157-190 (my emphasis)

157	MILLAMANT: […] Positively, Mirabell, **I'll**	**[PI1]**
158	**lie a-bed in a morning as long as I please**.	
160-162	[…] And d'ye hear, I won't be called names after I'm married; positively **I won't be called names**.	**[PI5]**
163	MIRABELL: Names?	

164	MILLAMANT: Ay, as wife, spouse, my dear, joy, jewel, love, sweet-heart, and the	
165	rest of that nauseous cant, in which men and their wives are so	
166	fulsomely familiar--I shall never bear that. Good Mirabell, **don't**	**[PI3]**
167	**let us be familiar or fond**, **nor kiss before folks**, like my Lady Fadler	
168	and Sir Francis; **nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in**	**[PI3]**
169	**a new chariot**, to provoke eyes and whispers, and then never to be	
170	seen there together again, as if we were proud of one another the	
171	first week, and ashamed of one another ever after. **Let us never**	**[PI3]**
172	**visit together**, **nor go to a play together**, but let us be very strange	
173	and well-bred. Let us be as strange as if we had been married a	
174	great while, and as well-bred as if we were not married at all.	
175	MIRABELL: Have you any more conditions to offer? Hitherto your demands are pretty	
176	reasonable.	
177	MILLAMANT: Trifles; as **liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I**	**[PI2]**
178	**please; to write and receive letters, without interrogatories or**	
179	**wry faces on your part; to wear what I please, and choose**	
180	**conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation**	**[PI2]**
181	**upon me to converse with wits that I don't like**, because	
182	they are your acquaintance, **or to be intimate with fools**, because	**[PI3]**
183	they may be your relations. **Come to dinner when I please, dine**	**[PI1]**
184	**in my dressing room when I'm out of humour, without giving a**	
185	**reason**. **To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea**	**[PI2]**
186	**table, which you must never presume to approach without first**	**[PI2]**
187	**asking leave**. And lastly, wherever I am, **you shall always knock**	**[PI1]**
188	**at the door before you come in**. These articles subscribed, if I	
189	continue to endure you a little longer, *I may by degrees dwindle*	
190	*into a wife.*	

The main strategy emerging from the "articles subscribed" is positive impoliteness. The authoritative and detailed clauses that she recites aim to limit or neutralise Mirabell's relative power ("I'll lie a-bed in a morning as long as I please"); be unconcerned and unsympathetic ("I won't be called names"), especially when in public ("don't let us be familiar or fond, nor kiss before folks"); dissociate from him, particularly during public events ("nor go to Hyde Park together the first Sunday in a new chariot"; "Let us never visit together, nor go to a play together"); exclude her future husband from selected leisure activities ("liberty to pay and receive visits to and from whom I please; to write and receive letters […]; to wear what I please, and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me to converse with wits that I don't like […] or to be intimate with fools"); and forbid any interjection ("Come to dinner when I please, dine in my dressing room when I'm out of humour, without giving a reason"; "To have my closet inviolate; to be sole empress of my tea-table, which you must never presume to approach without first asking leave. […] you shall always knock at the door before you come in")[6].

Millamant covers some relevant aspects of marital life, from public to private matters. Her goal is to claim that she neither intends to change nor renounce her freedom because of marriage: if Mirabell is willing to accept such a condition, she will consider his offer ("*I may by degrees*

[6] "Millamant wished primarily to preserve her own liberty and an identity separate from her husband's. In 1700 it could not be a legal identity, affording her control of property; marriage took that possibility away from the single woman. Congreve, recognizing the extent to which Millamant's legal status will 'dwindle' once she marries (IV.i.226-27), gives her courtship the form of a legal document" (Bacon 1991: 431).

dwindle into a wife"). The male party consents, provided that she accepts the following rules:

Table 4: Act 4, Scene 1, vv. 196-204; 207-215; 219-234 (my emphasis)

196	***Imprimis***, then, **I covenant that your acquaintance**	**[NI3] [NI5]**
197	**be general; that you admit no sworn confidant or intimate of**	
198	**your own sex**; no she friend to screen her affairs under your	
199	countenance, and tempt you to make trial of a mutual secrecy.	
200	No decoy-duck to wheedle you a fop-scrambling to the play in	
201	a mask, then bring you home in a pretended fright, when you	
202	think you shall be found out, and rail at me for missing the play	
203	and disappointing the frolic which you had to pick me up and	
204	prove my constancy. […]	
206	*Item*, **I article, that you continue to like your own face as long as**	**[NI3]**
207	**I shall, and while it passes current with me, that you endeavour**	
208	**not to new coin it**. To which end, together with all vizards	
209	for the day, **I prohibit all masks for the night**, made of oiled skins	**[NI3]**
210	and I know not what—hog's bones, hare's gall, pig water, and	
211	the marrow of a roasted cat. In short, **I forbid all commerce**	**[NI3]**
212	**with the gentlewomen in what-d'ye-call-it court**. *Item*, **I shut**	**[NI3]**
213	**my doors against all bawds** with baskets, and pennyworths	
214	of muslin, china, fans, atlases, etc. *Item*, when you shall be	
215	breeding - […]	
219	**I denounce against all strait lacing, squeezing for a shape**, till	**[NI3]**
220	you mould my boy's head like a sugar-loaf, and instead of a	
221	man-child, make me father to a crooked billet. Lastly, to the	
222	dominion of the tea-table **I submit; but with *proviso*, that you**	**[NI5]**
223	**exceed not in your province**, but restrain yourself to native and	
224	simple tea-table drinks, as tea, chocolate, and coffee. As likewise	
225	to genuine and authorised tea-table talk, such as mending of	
226	fashions, spoiling reputations, railing at absent friends, and so	
227	forth - but that **on no account you encroach upon the men's**	**[NI3]**
228	**prerogative, and presume to drink healths, or toast fellows**; for	
229	prevention of which, **I banish all foreign forces, all auxiliaries to**	**[NI3]**
230	**the tea-table**, as orange-brandy, all aniseed, cinnamon, citron,	
231	and Barbados waters, together with ratafia and the most	
232	noble spirit of clary. But for cowslip-wine, poppy-water, and all	
233	dormitives, those I allow. These *provisos* admitted, *in other*	
234	*things I may prove a tractable and complying husband*.	

Conversely to his beloved, Mirabell's privileged strategy is negative impoliteness, as his goal is to impose his will and authority upon the future bride. To claim his suppositions with an inflexible tone, the suitor exploits legal terminology and Latinism such as *Imprimis*, *item*, *proviso(s)* (see Davis 2011: 520). Considering that the clauses can be interpreted as a series of limitations on Millamant, so that she can behave accordingly[7], it is fair to assume that he invades her personal space and often associates her with negative aspects by explicitly using the pronouns "I" and "you" – both occurring 12 times. In this respect, the recurs to the singular first- and second-person pronoun significantly departs from Millamant's linguistic choices. As a matter of fact, with the sole exception of the last clause ("you shall always knock at the door before you come in"), she

[7] Some examples: "I covenant that your acquaintance be general; that you admit no sworn confidant or intimate of your own sex"; "I covenant that your acquaintance be general; that you admit no sworn confidant or intimate of your own sex"; "I article, that you continue to like your own face as long as I shall" "I prohibit all masks for the night"; "I forbid all commerce with the gentlewomen in what-d'ye-call-it court"; "I shut my doors against all bawds"; "I denounce against all strait lacing"; "I banish all foreign forces"; "I submit; but with proviso, that you exceed not in your province".

never uses the pronoun "you" but opts for "I" (13 occurrences), "us" (4 occurrences), "we" (3 occurrences) or avoids pronouns by using the infinitive[8]. On the contrary, Mirabell straightforwardly directs his FTAs towards the target – as in the utterances introduced by the verbs to covenant, to article, to prohibit, for instance – so to emphasise the power he will exert upon his spouse soon.

Furthermore, Mirabell too addresses attention to both public and private life, but differently: while Millamant worries about her public face once she will be married – as the reference to Hyde Park demonstrates –, and her individuality when she lives with her husband – she mentions her dressing room, her closet and tea table, to provide some examples –, Mirabell's provisions aim to cherish the intimacy of the couple, protect the familiar nucleus from dangerous interferences such as erratic friends, inappropriate clothes, exceeding in alcohol; administer the domestic economy ("I shut my doors against all bawds with baskets, and pennyworths of muslin, china, fans, atlases") and consider the possibility to have children ("when you shall be breeding"). The 'contract' recited in the *proviso* scene is then sealed with a party kissing the other's hand and the lovers' confessions: "I am all Obedience" (4.1.259), says Mirabell to his beloved; "If Mirabell shou'd not make a good Husband, I am a lost thing; for I find I love him violently" (4.1.265-266), admits Millamant when talking with Mrs Fainall. Love is no longer off-record; the union is finally officialized in Act V, when Lady Wishfort – Millamant's tutoress – provides her consent:

> LADY WISHFORT:
> Well, sir, take her, and with all the joy I can give you.
> MILLAMANT:
> Why does not the man take me? Would you have me give myself to you over again?
> MIRABELL:
> Ay, and over and over again, *(kisses her hand)* for I would have you as often as possibly I can. Well, heaven grant I love you not too well, that's all my fear (5.1.516-522).

Conclusive Remarks

The present study has analysed the speech exchanges between Mirabell and Millamant in William Congreve's *The Way of the World*; special attention has been devoted to the *proviso* scene. The results of the qualitative investigation have demonstrated that the lover's utterances are predominantly impolite; the witty characters attack each other's face, being they entangled in an uncanny yet intriguing "hateful love," until the final acts of the play, when they display a more complaisant attitude and publicly confess their mutual feelings.

Nonetheless, the *topoi* here discussed comply with both the social rules and the economic background that were proper of England during the reign of William of Orange and Mary II Stuart (see Van Voris 1965; Braverman 1985; Kroll 1986; Snider 1989: 378; Rosowski 2001: 388; 406). In his masterpiece, Congreve arranged the amorous relationship under the influence of John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) – which emphasised the notions of "contract" and

[8] As in the following lines: "to write and receive letters"; "to wear what I please, and choose conversation with regard only to my own taste; to have no obligation upon me"; "to be intimate with fools"; "Come to dinner"; "dine in my dressing room"; "To have my closet inviolate"; "to be sole empress of my tea table".

"consent"[9] – and significant economic events that occurred in late seventeenth-century London, such as "the Glorious Revolution in 1688, the establishment of the Bank of England and the National Debt in 1694, and the recoinage in 1696" (Bender 2013: 2); indeed, the raising emphasis on property and its (adverse) effects upon both peoples' sense of self and their relationships with the others are *de facto* epitomized by the gay couple, whose "courtship takes the form of negotiation over the forms of courtship, performed in the figural, but taxonomically accurate, vocabularies of both pre-mercantile gallantry *and* mercantile economics" (Mackenzie 2014: 263, italics as in the original; see also Myers 1972: 88). Furthermore, the lovers' witty bargain satisfied the 1690s audience's expectations – being it composed of merchants and traders with a solid Puritan background who despised immodesty in favour of moderated libertinage, feminine independence and equity of the sexes[10] – and it seemed to lay the foundation for the 'sentimental' plays proper of the eighteenth-century literature (see, among others, Neri 1961: 16).

In conclusion the coeval context and the dramatical tendencies ineluctably impinged on Congreve's style and inspired him to stage a sophisticated yet realistic portrait of the English elitist society, configuring *The Way of the World* as a literary landmark that marked the apex as well as the beginning of the decline of late early modern theatre.

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[9] David (1992: 34-35) argues: "his [Locke's] exposition of the importance of contract in political society was to have a profound effect on many of his contemporaries, including Congreve. Congreve shared Locke's view that although the world was an imperfect place, it could nevertheless be made habitable with the help of binding contracts. *The Way of the World*, for instance, presents an unvarnished image of society. […] Without property and without contract, there would be no social relationships and hence no civil society." On this matter, see also Macpherson's seminal work (1962).

[10] As Bush remarks (1962: 160-162), late-Restoration theatregoers were significantly influenced by eminent moralists – such as Richard Blackmore and Jeremy Collier – and writers – Mary Astell, for instance. On the matter, see also Hume (1976, particularly pertinent are pages 380-431).

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List of Abbreviations

BR	Bald-On Record
FTA	Face-Threatening-Act
H	Hearer
OFF-R	Off-Record
NI2	Condescend, scorn, ridicule
NI3	Invade the other's space
NI5	Put the other's indebtedness on record
P2	Exaggerate (interest, approval, sympathy with H)
PI1	Ignore, snub the other
PI2	Exclude the other from activity
PI3	Dissociate from the others
PI5	Use inappropriate identity markers
PI7	Seek disagreement
S	Speaker

Contagions.

The Sleeping Beauty *topos* in *The Monk* and *Dracula*

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Abstract

A hundred years separate two of the most successful masterpieces of English Gothic Fiction: *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker. The significance of this circumstance goes beyond mere chronological coincidence and is revealing of a closer connection between the two texts. Such a connection, made up of a network of allusions, echoes, anticipations and cross-references, derives from a specific set of narrative situations that *The Monk* presents and that *Dracula* redefines in order to reflect new and different axiologies. These situations focus on the motif of the Sleeping Beauty and its variations, a narrative *topos* whose morbid connotations both novels emphasize in a typically Gothic manner. The analysis of the ways in which Lewis and Stoker make up this motif sheds light on the dialectical relationship connecting the two texts. With specific reference to *Dracula*, it provides as well a new interpretative perspective based on a metaliterary reading of Stoker's novel, of the dark desires and evil pleasures it evokes one hundred years after Lewis's *The Monk*.

A web of references, echoes and shared themes creates a non-occasional connection between two of the most popular Gothic masterpieces of English literature: *The Monk* (1796) by Matthew Gregory Lewis and *Dracula* (1897) by Bram Stoker[1]. This affinity allows us to reconsider the paths opened and followed by the English Gothic from the late eighteenth and throughout the nineteenth century. While we can agree with Punter's statement (2012: 1) that "the notion of what constitutes Gothic writing is a contested site," an initial clarification might come from making a clear distinction between the presence of Gothic elements within heterogeneous narrative texts (they are copious, for example, already in some works by Dickens or by the Brontës) and the Gothic as a genre, as *the* genre capable of giving formal literary voice to a collective fear occasioned by the tension between the stability of the modern/present situation and an otherness apparently capable of undermining and destroying that stability. This otherness was long identified with the re-emergence of a culturally and socially backward past; during the nineteenth century, however, it was redefined above all in terms of a force that was the outcome and

[1] All references to the texts of *The Monk* and *Dracula* are to the editions by Anderson (Lewis 1998) and Hindle (Stoker 1993). Quotations are followed by page numbers in the body of the text, in brackets.

expression of the contemporary world, of a modernity perceived as "excessive" and therefore dangerous, of a technological and scientific progress that appeared uncontrolled and uncontrollable in its processes and that, from a certain point on, challenged at its core the fundamental nature of the human and the rational, establishing a destabilizing relationship between evolution and degeneration (Milbank 2002: 146-149; Moretti 2005: 104-105.; Ridenhour 2012: 4).

If we accept this point of view, we cannot fail to note that the novels of Lewis and Stoker mark the start and end points respectively of that form of the Gothic Novel that expresses the immanence of the threat by magnifying the power of a supernatural imbued with superstition, legends and centuries-old traditions. Within this form, during the nineteenth century, by stages but with ever increasing conviction through the works of Mary Shelley, Maturin, Le Fanu, Stevenson and Wilde, the Gothic also seeks to move from the past to the contemporary world; from a distant place that is variously identified (but always spatially and chronologically remote) to the heart of the nation-state and the city *par excellence*: London. London's central role in this form of the Gothic that slowly reconfigures itself as "urban" is unsurprising in light of "its cultural, financial, and physical presence on the world stage." More importantly, "the conflicting aspects of the British capital – wealth, culture, and industry interwoven with filth, poverty, and crime – serve as a ready-made symbol for the tension between perceptions of the modern and the primitive" (Ridenhour 2012: 1; 4)[2].

Within this framework, on a more circumscribed level, it is interesting to note that there is also a close intertextual relationship between *The Monk* and *Dracula*, as mentioned at the beginning, that unfolds from a core set of situations presented by *The Monk* and repurposed by *Dracula*, though redefined to reflect new or changed value systems. All these situations have at their root a specific motif: the reworking of the *topos* of the Sleeping Beauty, whose morbid subtext is made explicit by the Gothic, with its variants, to a greater extent than by other genres. Outside the realm of the fairy tale (Perrault's version, the most famous, dates to 1697), the "sleeping beauty" lies in a state of abandonment such as to suggest a liminal state between life and death, drawing upon herself – within the confines of a room – a desiring glance that scrutinizes that body, whose helpless immobility ignites fantasies of sexual violation (see Vitale 2013: 169)[3].

[2] A passage mediated by at least one other "hybrid" genre, the sensation novel, which, in the late nineteenth century, with Wilkie Collins or Elizabeth Braddon, blended "the exotic horrors of Gothic [...] and the daily life of readers" (Ascari 2002: 305). As Kathleen Spencer (1992: 201) clarifies: "The change from Gothic to Urban Gothic allows writers to call on the powers of what Henry James, in a review of the sensation novels of Mary Elizabeth Braddon, called 'those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors'. As James observed, the innovation of bringing the terror next door gave an entirely new direction to horror literature: 'The new strategy was fatal to the authority of Mrs. Radcliffe and her everlasting castle in the Apennines. What are the Apennines to us, or we to the Apennines? Instead of the terrors of 'Udolpho', we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country house and the busy London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely more terrible'".

[3] Starting with the observations dedicated by Cixous (1975: 120-121) to "La Belle au bois dormant," this *topos* has been thoroughly studied by feminist critics, who have identified its central role in the cultural creation of power relations between the sexes. On the nineteenth-century artistic, visual and narrative representation of the dying beauty, of the sick, bloodless or dead female body and its cultural and

The analysis of Lewis and Stoker's treatment of this motif thus provides information of help in clarifying some of the interpretations of the contagion of evil, understood both literally and metaphorically, that they codify. As concerns *Dracula* alone, it also provides a starting point for the formulation of a further interpretative hypothesis based on some distinctive features of both the vampire and the women who are the objects of his desire, as well as of the genre that hosts them.

Representative in Lewis of a specific manifestation of voluptuous evil, in Stoker the *topos* of the Sleeping Beauty is complicated by the more ambiguous and less clear-cut relationship between victim and persecutor. The vampire and his victims: a bond and a metaphor that have been subjected to a multiplicity of interpretations variously relating to the spheres of sexual perversity, the conflict between gendered socio-cultural and behavioural norms, the fear triggered by national and identity-related boundaries seen as overly porous and unclear. A wide range of meanings, with respect to which, however, we can still make room for a reading that is at least partly different, a reading in a meta-literary key of the wants, drives and evil pleasures at play in *Dracula*, evoking *The Monk* a hundred years later.

1. A Literature of Monsters

Some of the comments made about *The Monk* on its publication leave no doubt as to the unease and alarm provoked by this novel (see Blakemore 1998: 521-539)[4]. In his notice for *The Critical Review*, Coleridge (1797: 197) branded it "a romance, which if a parent saw in the hands of a son or a daughter, he could reasonably turn pale"; harsher still is the judgment of *The British Critic* (1796: 677; Art. 28), according to which "good talents have been misapplied in the production of [a] monster," a literary "monster" packed with "[l]ust, murder, incest, and every atrocity that can disgrace human nature, [...] without the apology of probability, or even possibility, for their introduction." In *The Flapper* (1796: 1-4), the defence of morality and plausibility takes the form of a letter written by a fictional "most devout novel-reader" who signs himself Aurelius. Ultimately repenting and emerging, thanks to the discovery of the Bible, from his condition of "inert imbecility," Aurelius warns Irish readers against perusing *The Monk*. The blasphemy and obscenity on display in a totally improbable story made it inadvisable even to touch such an immoral and unrealistic book.

Essentially, Lewis's masterpiece has two characteristic traits. The first, relating to the content, is its brutal staging of the inseparable union of evil and pleasure: from the sadistic cruelty of the Abbess to the blind lasciviousness of Ambrosio, the monk, who in a paroxysmic crescendo of lust and blood first kills his mother and then rapes and murders

philosophical implications, Dijkstra's study (1986) remains fundamental. Interesting ideas are also in Bronfen (1992).

[4] Also interesting is the study by Agnieszka Łowczanin (2016: 17), in which "Lewis's own way of representing the female body – clothed and unclothed, revered and defiled, beautified and mutilated" is explained within the context of such politically-engaged texts as Edmund Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790) and Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790).

the object of his unwittingly incestuous passion, that Antonia whom he will discover at the end, from the words of the devil, to be his sister. Pleasure *as* evil, according to an isotopy recurrent in the Gothic from the outset, combined with the pervasive deployment of a supernatural realm capable of taking on disparate appearances, none of which – going against the line suggested by Ann Radcliffe – can be rationally explained. There is thus room for the ghost of the "Bleeding Nun," the Wandering Jew, infernal temptation embodied by the splendid and sensual Matilda, Satan himself in his dual role: the literary, Miltonian and later Romantic role of the fallen angel, and the "popular" role of Satan as monstrous creature (see Carter 1987; McWhir 1989: 29-47; Greary 1992: 59-69; Drury 2016: 217-233). *The Monk* gives this supernatural world the dangerous charm of a desire that principally takes the form of an irrepressible sexual impulse, capable – if not weakened and harnessed – of corrupting and perverting those who fall prey to it and of disrupting any type of social and above all family relationship[5].

The second trait is formal in nature and relates to the structure of the text. In *The Monk*, the plot, constructed around the intersection and juxtaposition of the stories of three legitimate and "illegitimate" couples (Lorenzo and Antonia, and on her death Virginia, Raimondo and Agnese, Ambrosio and Matilda), proceeds by interruptions and resumptions, breaking off and recommencing. The narrative fabric is thus stressed and expanded both by the inclusion of heterogeneous materials (letters, poems, songs, prophecies) and by the interpolation of secondary stories (in prose or in ballad form) that take the technique of the *tale within the tale* to its extreme, as in the case of the *History of Raymond, Marquis de Las Cisternas*, whose similarly discontinuous development takes up almost a quarter of the book. Lewis's novel is not unitary, linear, teleologically directed but rather composite, digressive, polyphonic, despite the presence of an omniscient, extra-diegetic narrator. With these characteristics, *The Monk* marks a beginning, creates a model for the Gothic Novel that later finds in *Melmoth the Wanderer* (1820), by Charles Maturin, its most radical development and in *Dracula*, by the Victorian Bram Stoker, the formulation of a compromise revelatory of an ongoing change[6].

[5] In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Edmund Burke attempts to draw a distinction, though not always coherent and linear, between *Love* and *Lust*. *Lust*, associated in the Burkian aesthetic with the sublime, is a primordial and animalistic impulse. Essential for triggering the desire needed for the propagation of the species, if left free to act it inevitably leads to promiscuity, degrading man to a brute. *Love*, on the other hand, belongs to beauty, and therefore to balance and order: it is a sort of "socialization" of lust, representing its channelling into forms compatible with society and morality. In a word, love is a sublimation – resulting from a repression – of libido. Transfigured by eros into sentiment, love, now devoid of any desire for possession, resolves into contemplation. In this way, on the one hand, aesthetics takes the place of eroticism, on the other, love, as tenderness and affection, comes close to the "sympathy" that is the social passion par excellence (see Sertoli 1985: 24-26). Clearly, in Gothic literature "evil" functions as an activator of that repressed and dangerous desire. The pleasure of evil, the sublime delight of terror here also has much to do with the distance-closeness to death and therefore with the very survival of the subject, with his self-preservation. Just as terror stops short of death and thus allows for the preservation of man as a physical subject, love likewise stops short of eros and thus allows for the survival of man as a social, *ethical* subject (see Sertoli 1985: 26).

[6] An examination of the Gothic Novel as a destabilizing, anti-national and cosmopolitan genre is in Pepe (2012).

2. The Temptation of the Serpent

In *The Monk*, Ambrosio epitomizes the blend of sensualism and Gothicism that unfolds in the novel. His inner weakness and the torment of thoughts and dreams populated with images of sin and blasphemy lead him to yield to the temptations of evil, which takes on the caressing and intoxicating features of Rosario/Matilda[7]. The integrity of a man who appears to be a saint in the eyes of the people – transforming him into a rapacious villain – is shattered by the spectacle of Matilda's white skin and perfectly round bare breasts, but the true entry of evil into Ambrosio's microcosm, the contagion that irredeemably infects his soul, takes place through the bite of a snake – an all too explicit symbol – and the subsequent act of "vampirism" that it induces. To save the life of the object of her demonic passion, Matilda sucks the poisoned blood from Ambrosio's wounded arm, thus establishing an indissoluble bond with him. Faced with a gesture of such devotion, maddened by desire and a sense of guilt, the monk lets himself be overcome and seduced: from this moment on, having broken the banks of will and determined sublimation, he is unable to combat the power of a sexual desire that, triggered by Matilda, soon turns obsessively to another objective: the possession of Antonia's immaculate beauty[8]. Overcome by his boundless pride and voracious lust, Ambrosio is damned, fully deserving the long agony and atrocious death for which he is destined by Satan: an end meticulously described in the concluding chapter, which constitutes a second exemplary ending to the story, alongside the canonically "happy" ending – after trials and tribulations – reserved for the young lovers.

The motif of the sleeping beauty violated by the gaze is certainly referenced in Ambrosio's first (unsuccessful) attempt to rape Antonia. The long scene is to be constructed around a series of contrasts – purity/corruption, innocence/lust, beauty/beastliness – and is emblematic in its development:

> He now ventured to cast a glance upon the sleeping beauty. A single lamp, burning before the Statue of St. Rubella [*sic*], shed a faint light through the room, and allowed him to examine all the charms of the lovely Object before him. The heat of the weather had forced her to throw off part of the Bed-cloathes: Those which still covered her, Ambrosio's insolent hand hastened to remove. She lay with her check reclining upon one ivory arm; The Other rested on the side of the Bed with graceful indolence. A few tresses of her hair had escaped from beneath the Muslin which confined the rest, and fell carelessly over her bosom, as it weighted with slow and regular suspiration. The warm air had spread her cheek with higher color than usual. A smile inexpressibly sweet played round her ripe and coral lips, from which every now and then escaped a gentle sigh or an half-pronounced sentence [*sic*]. An air of enchanting innocence and candour pervaded her whole form; and there was a sort of modesty in her very nakedness, which added fresh stings to the desires of the lustful Monk. He remained for some moments devouring those charms with his eyes, which were soon to be subjected to his ill-regulated passions. Her mouth half-opened seemed to solicit a kiss: He bent over her; he

[7] On the liminality of Matilda, see Brewer (2004: 192-193; 197-201).

[8] An interesting reading of Ambrosio's verbalization of desire is provided by Doyle (2000: 61-69); for an analysis of the beauty of the female figures closely connected to Ambrosio, largely derived from the models of classical statuary, see Ferguson (2018: 29-38); but, also, from a broader and more critical perspective, Kosofsky Sedgwick (1981: 255-270).

joined his lips to them, and drew in the fragrance of her breath with rapture. This momentary pleasure increased his longing for still greater (300).

In truth, the same situation had already appeared in the novel, many pages earlier, in a variant in which the positions are tellingly reversed, confirming the Gothic propensity to problematize gender asymmetries. Ambrosio and Matilda are the protagonists:

"He sleeps!" said She at length in a low voice, but whose accents the Abbot distinguished perfectly; "Now then I may gaze upon him without offence! I may mix my breath with his; I may doat upon his features, and He cannot suspect me of impurity and deceit! − He fears my seducing him to the violation of his vows! Oh! the Unjust! Were it my wish to excite desire, should I conceal my features from him so carefully? Those features, of which I daily hear him". […] As She said this, her voice was choaked by weeping. While She bent over Ambrosio, a tear fell upon his cheek. "Ah! I have disturbed him!" cried Matilda, and retreated hastily. Her alarm was ungrounded. None sleep so profoundly, as those who are determined not to wake. The Friar was in this predicament: He still seemed buried in a repose, which every succeeding minute rendered him less capable of enjoying. The burning tear had communicated its warmth to his heart […].

"I was left alone with you: You slept; I loosened the bandage from your hand; I kissed the wound, and drew out the poison with my lips. The effect has been more sudden than I expected. I feel death at my heart; Yet an hour, and I shall be in a better world" (78-79; 88).

In this case it is the woman who, betraying an ardour initially concealed and restrained, contemplates the man's body, almost overcome by the poison and therefore immersed in a torpor akin to death. When Matilda's lips later rest on Ambrosio's flesh to suck his blood, evil definitively binds the spirit of that long-desired victim to itself with its touch.

The dual presentation of the sleeping beauty motif reflects the two ways in which the contagion of evil is expressed in *The Monk*. The first is based on antithesis, an antithesis of emotional impulses and values: on the one hand innocence, virtue, sublimation; on the other depravity, vice, the temptation of the flesh. The only way to resolve this split, this duality that cannot be reduced to unity, is subjugation. The persecuted girl and the values she embodies can only be subdued by an act of violence perpetrated by the villain (following on from the lust of the gaze) against a heroine powerless to react or reduced to a state of unconsciousness, natural or unnatural (see Nadler 2016: 18-35). The second, more ambiguous and though-provoking, is built on the oxymoron, on the coexistence of opposites. This is the process by which evil creeps in, attracts and draws people to itself, liberates and intensifies energies already present in the "victim" and, through contagion, assimilates him or her. In one case, evil and its pleasures find an outcome in the sensual satisfaction of the persecutor and, almost always, in the death of the victim; in the other, evil imposes itself as a pervasive force that the desiring subject discovers within themselves and manifests, rendering the distance between victim and persecutor imperceptible.

The latter is the prevailing dynamic in *Dracula*.

3. "Both thrilling and repulsive." The Law of Desire

The situation of the Sleeping Beauty, with its intertwining of pleasure and evil, appears in three different versions in *Dracula*. The first staging takes place at the beginning of the

novel, in the Carpathian mountains, inside the Castle of the Count. Reworking the reversed pattern already prefigured in *The Monk*, here it is the young Jonathan Harker, in the torpor of a paralyzing half-sleep, who suffers the attack[9]. He is assaulted and subjugated by three women, the expression of an aggressive and impulsive femininity, three vampires driven by an irrepressible animal will that is "both thrilling and repulsive" to the male subject, passive and impotent. A pleasure to which the man abandons himself, "in a state of fascinated and morbid dread," (Roth 1977: 114) prey to "a languorous ecstasy" that soon becomes conflicting as he waits for contact with their sharp and brilliant teeth and red and carnal lips:

> I suppose I must have fallen asleep; I hope so, but I fear, for all that followed was startlingly real […]. In the moonlight opposite me were three young women, ladies by their dress and manner. I thought at the time that I must be dreaming when I saw them, for, though the moonlight was behind them, they threw no shadow on the floor. They came close to me and looked at me for some time, and then whispered together. […] All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. […] I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation. The fair girl advanced and bent over me till I could feel the movement of her breath upon me. […] There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal, till I could see in the moonlight the moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth. Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck. Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one's flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer − nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I close my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited − waited with beating heart (52-53).

Jonathan, therefore, awaits an erotic satisfaction that, in the terms in which it is described, "entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes," which denied any mobility and fluidity to sexual desire, assigning exclusively "to the more active male the right and responsibility of vigorous appetite, while requiring the more passive female, to suffer and be still"[10]. A manifestation of weakness and passivity that the novel will eventually seek – as we will see – to compensate for and redeem.

The second transposition, with even more explicit sexual implications, features the young Lucy Westenra. After a series of nocturnal meetings during which Dracula's gaze and mouth rest on the body of the sleeping beauty, meetings of which, however, we are not offered the detailed description that we might have expected, Lucy becomes a vampire. One night, after several attempts at ambush and a close-run hunt, in the tomb where she has found refuge and repose, Lucy is caught by her fiancé, Arthur, and by Van

[9] On "the ambiguous eroticism of Harker's exchanges with both Dracula and the vampiric women," see Kuzmanovic (2009: 414-417).

[10] "This moment, constituting the text's most direct and explicit representation of a male's desire to be penetrated, is governed by a double deflection: first, the agent penetration is nominally and anatomically […] female; and second, this dangerous moment, fusing the maximum of desire and the maximum of anxiety, is posed precisely at the brink of penetration" (Craft 1984: 108).

Helsing, Quincey Morris and Dr Seward[11]. The latter are to accomplish a task that is specific and atrocious: they must kill that creature which is no longer human following an age-old ritual, so as to preserve her immortal soul. The only character to manifest the symptoms of a sexual energy held in check with difficulty, Lucy appears – like Ambrosio and unlike her friend Mina – vulnerable to the fascination of evil and this seals her fate: death will come to her at the hands of her betrothed, on what, based on the dates, was to have been their wedding night[12]. The scene has the syncopated and mounting cadence of sexual intercourse and, in paradoxical respect for the canonical roles of victim and persecutor, reverses both the nature and purpose of the aggression. The maiden, long in sight of her pursuers, is pierced by Arthur with a stake through her heart. Lucy is indeed brutalized, but here the violence exercised by the man – effectively a metaphorized rape – technically takes the form of a "therapeutic" and almost merciful act of liberation that serves to give the heroine back her lost peace, to restore her to that social respectability and decorum from which Dracula's infection had removed her. In death, Lucy again becomes "the angel she had been in life; she also becomes a bond between three rivals, where in life she could only have been a source of division" (Spencer 1992: 212). That only death can heal Lucy's "guilt," her insubordination, her carnal exuberance, is certainly a painful condemnation, painful but not devoid of an undeniable pleasure for those called upon to enact it:

> Arthur took the Stake and the hammer, and when once his mind was set on action his hands never trembled nor even quivered. Van Helsing opened his missal and began to read, and Quincey and I followed as well as we could. Arthur placed the point over the heart, and as I looked I could see its dint in the white flesh. Then he struck with all his might. The Thing in the coffin writhed; and a hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam.
>
> But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. His face was set, and high duty seemed to shine through it; the sight of it gave us courage, so that our voices seemed to ring through the little vault.
>
> And then the writhing and quivering of the body became less, and the teeth ceased to champ, and the face to quiver. Finally it lay still. The terrible task was over (277-278)[13].

[11] With the exception of Van Helsing, in the early chapters all the male characters had competed to win her hand. Consciously (with a form of flirtation and self-gratification) or unconsciously, Lucy with her hesitations and her availability had turned those men into rivals and divided them, thus facilitating Dracula's plans.

[12] On the "virgin/whore dichotomy," repeatedly adopted and developed by critics "to show how Mina and Lucy are juxtaposed in terms of their femininity, with Mina representing the virgin and Lucy representing the whore," but also on their "intimate friendship" problematized by that dichotomy, see Demetrakopoulos (1977: 104-113); Macaluso (2020: 19-36).

[13] "The murderous phallicism of this passage clearly punishes Lucy for her transgression […], as she finally receives a penetration adequate to ensure her future quiescence. Violence against the sexual woman here is intense […] ferocious in its detail" (Craft 1985: 122). As also noted by Prescott and Giorgio (2005: 488): "Lucy's descent into vampirism as well as Mina's desperate attempts to disavow her own vampiric affinities reveal not only the coercive power of Victorian femininity but also the possibility of a cultural space in which to perform a radically different female agency." The woman's alleged, implicit desire to be raped, the Victorian man's desire to subjugate woman and to dispose of her at will and, finally, violence as a tool for the male to reaffirm his role and his superiority over the late-Victorian "new woman" are analysed in Dijkstra (1986: 156-183).

The third version of the Sleeping Beauty *topos* is perhaps the most well-known and replete with implications. The protagonist this time is Mina Murray, the place of the attack is her bedroom. This is certainly one of the novel's crucial turning points, marking on the one hand the end of Dracula's long pursuit of Mina, and on the other the beginning of the final hunt for the vampire.

The scene encapsulates and elaborates upon the different Gothic variations on the sleeping beauty motif. All the relevant characters are present: the victim, Mina; the aggressor, Dracula; the victim's husband, Jonathan. As in the first case discussed, we see Jonathan asleep; when Van Helsing and the other members of the group rush into the room much has already happened: with a longing look the vampire has been able to caress – we must presume – the body of the persecuted young woman undisturbed before leaning over her and sinking – or trying to sink – his sharp teeth into her pulsating neck. However, something must have intervened because the girl is shown in an attitude that is far from passive. Kneeling on the edge of the bed, grasped by the nape of the neck in the bony hand of Dracula, who holds her close to him like "a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk", Mina, almost in a "symbolic act of enforced fellation" (Bentley 1972: 30), presses her face and mouth against the Count's wounded chest, sucking and licking the thin red stream trickling down it[14]. The drops of blood staining her white nightgown also seem to suggest that she has just consummated a sort of "wedding night," with Dracula fatefully appearing to her to claim his feudal rights over the woman's body:

> On the bed beside the window lay Jonathan Harker, his face flushed and breathing heavily as though in a stupor. Kneeling on the near edge of the bed facing outwards was the white-clad figure of his wife. By her side stood a tall, thin man, clad in black. His face was turned from us, but the instant we saw we all recognized the Count […]. With his left hand he held both Mrs Harker's hands, keeping them away with her arms at full tension; his right hand gripped her by the back of the neck, forcing her face down on his bosom. Her white nightdress was smeared with blood, and a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast which was shown by his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink. As we burst into the room, the Count turned his face, and the hellish look that I had heard described seemed to leap into it. His eyes flamed red with devilish passion; the great nostrils of the white aquiline nose opened wide and quivered at the edge; and the white sharp teeth, behind the full lips of the blood-dripping mouth, champed together like those of a wild beast. (363)

Surprisingly, "the vampiric sex scene between Mina and Dracula shows us not penetration of the neck as we expect, but rather Mina sucking on the breast of the Count,

[14] As Craft (1985: 125) indicates and expands upon, "this scene of fellation is thoroughly displaced. We are at the Count breast, encouraged once again to substitute white for red, as blood becomes milk […] Such fluidity of substitution and displacement entails a confusion of Dracula's sexual identity, or an interfusion of masculine and feminine functions, as Dracula here becomes a lurid mother offering not a breast but an open and bleeding wound. But if the Count's sexuality is double, then the open wound may be yet another displacement […] and we have the suggestion of a bleeding vagina." In this crucial scene, therefore, "the confluence of blood, milk, and semen forcefully erase the demarcation separating the masculine and the feminine."

thus acting as a manifestation of the unfixing of gender boundaries" (Prescott, Giorgio 2005: 503-504).

It is no coincidence that, with regard to this and the other two scenes, when analysing the relational dynamics between the characters involved, critics have principally emphasized the explicit and implicit aspects of evil intertwined with pleasure, the power of a desiring sexuality, imbued with homoeroticism, and the definitive shift – already prefigured in *The Monk* – from a yielding, albeit tempting, femininity to one that by contrast is aggressive and emasculating. As Tota (2021: 1) remarks: "Stoker presents the 19th century concept of the sexually liberated and vocationally autonomous 'New Woman' as inherently vampiric, because to be a vampire is to transgress gender boundaries. Thus, when Dracula turns Mina and Lucy into vampires, it is because, as 'New Woman' characters, they were already vampiric"[15].

4. The War of the Genders

The rapport between the energy (partly – but not exclusively – sexual) of the vampire and the limitations imposed by conventions of various types and natures, the relationship between liberty and appropriateness, interpreted on various levels, constitutes one of the novel's fundamental isotopies. Remaining within its confines but changing point of view, we could try to ask ourselves what this text could still tell us if we favoured an interpretative line that examined the victim-persecutor relationship not in the socio-cultural key of the persistence or pervasiveness of a patriarchal model and of gender boundaries, but in terms of genre, of the dialectics between narrative genres, on the threshold of the twentieth century. In other words, if we take the figure of Dracula – whose ability to camouflage himself and whose threatening, but also hybrid, changing, multiform nature are repeatedly emphasized – as an incarnation of the Gothic and the drives here associated with the genre, what meaning could we read into his attack on Lucy and his constant quest for contact with Mina, the vampire's only two genuine victims? Of which literary genres would the two female characters in turn be the metaphorical expression? And, in terms of the profound structure of the text, what interpretation might we then give to the role reversal staged in the revisitation of the *topos* of the sleeping beauty?

If *The Monk* has a double ending, *Dracula* has a double beginning. The first beginning takes us to the Carpathians, to a contemporary world that is not contemporary, a pre-technological world replete with traditions and superstitions. Within this distant and backward geographical setting, the story is confined as quickly as possible to the

[15] Indeed, the issue of Stoker's *Dracula* and its relation to the New Woman has received extensive critical attention, but it remains an open question, subject to conflicting views, summarized in the position expressed by Senf in a fundamental article on the New Woman in *Dracula*. Senf (1982: 33-49; 45-46) admits that Mina exhibits "the independence and intelligence often associated with the New Woman," but these traits are combined "with traditional femininity." Thus, the fact that she is not a New Woman is evident "in […] her choice of profession, […] her decision to marry and her subsequent relationship with her husband, her desire to nurture and protect children, and – most clearly – her response to Dracula himself." On these aspects, see also Johnson (1984: 20-39).

crumbling and sinister manor of a mysterious and fallen aristocrat. This is a fully Gothic setting, just as the nature of the villain, the suspense, the sublime terror of the events will turn out typical of the Gothic, with the one significant difference that in this case the object of the "persecution" is a promising but not particularly attractive young man, Jonathan Harker.

After Jonathan's improbable escape from Dracula's castle, the novel begins again in chapter five: in England, this time, and with an exchange of letters between two friends, Lucy Westenra and Mina Murray, who write of their hopes, of fiancés and admirers, of forthcoming weddings. *Dracula* starts again, then, in the forms of the *sentimental novel*, with at its centre the family and marriage, with their accompaniments of respectability, dedication, sense of duty, social stability or advancement.[16] This specific genre is represented principally by Lucy. Lucy appears endowed with the honest charms of a good Victorian girl – good nature ("sweet and sensitive", 116) and a respectable family; however, she also reveals a restless character that leads her into frivolous actions and less conventional desires. Absorbed by the game of courtship, for example, she is excited at the thought of having three suitors and clearly annoyed by having to choose only one ("Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?", 81). In the end, albeit reluctantly, a decision will be made and the choice – she is already wealthy – will fall to the best candidate, the aristocrat Arthur Holmwood. She will be the vampire's first female victim on English soil. And this is no accident.

One striking fact in the complex structure of the novel, to which we will return later, is that the vampire, Count Dracula, never takes on the role of narrator, we are never given his point of view on events; he is the object of speech but never the subject of the narrative. Similarly, in the dialogues, the character Dracula is granted very few lines and those only in his world, inside his castle, or, once in England, during and after the meeting with Mina. The vampire is effectively condemned to silence, is mute (see Stein 1972: 87-99; Campra 1992: 223-226). From the point of view of gender relations, then, Dracula's decision to leave a distant time and place, his wish to move to modern England, could be interpreted as the Gothic attempt to finally and stably occupy a contemporary space and time. To revitalize itself, the Gothic needed to conquer a new world, a new word, a new authorship.

None of these things belong to the universe represented by Lucy who, in a sense, also belongs to the past and not coincidentally dies. Sentimental plots had always formed part of Gothic horror, constituting one of the mechanisms of activation: the temptation, the pleasure of subjugation, the persecution of the beautiful and defenceless young woman. This explains why Lucy is easily approached by Dracula, who makes her his own without particular difficulty. The Gothic vampirizes the *novel of sensibility*, not to destroy it but to incorporate and resurrect it – from the beginning – in a recognizable but

[16] If on the one hand "the two genres seem to struggle for control of the plot and for the attention of the reader," on the other "they both narrate, in turn, the same story [...], the story of how individual erotic desire is transformed into legitimate and socially productive structures" (McCrea 2010: 254). Case (1993: 223-243) focuses on this specific aspect.

"monstrous" form, of wicked enjoyment, of fatal attraction to flesh and blood. The vampire does not kill, he assimilates; the Gothic does not exclude, it hybridizes[17].

At the end of his journey to the west, it is thus no surprise that Dracula's first step after arriving in England, at Whitby, is in the direction of what is familiar to him; initially he moves within known confines and for this reason his choice falls on Lucy. But this is just a temporary resting place. The true objectives are others: in the first place London, to which the vampire moves, occupying the two parts of the city variously (and for a long time separately) recounted by the Victorian novel: first the most squalid suburbs; shortly afterwards Piccadilly, the West End, the centre. And then Mina, the key figure of the novel and of the reading that we wish to propose here.

In *Dracula*, unlike *The Monk*, there is no omniscient narrator, but only individual and separate points of view, at least in the first part of the novel. Indeed, as in *Frankenstein* and to an even greater extent in *Melmoth the Wanderer*, one of the characteristic features of *Dracula* is the singular interweaving and multiplicity of the narrators. With a specific and peculiar feature, that is to say that, as mentioned earlier, in the sequence of letters, diaries, notes, telegrams, notices, recordings, articles, logs, shorthand notes, the description and ordering of events that constitutes the narrative function proper, is denied to Dracula. The viewpoint of evil is missing and is revealed in the novel only through its effects: the liberation of impulses, transgression and the reaction that all of this provokes.

The story unfolds exclusively under the aegis of mainstream Victorian English culture, which ultimately also translates into a homogeneity of vision, achieved through the systematic integration of different points of view. In the second part of the novel, that of the search for the vampire, more than of distinct narrators, we can speak – as does Moretti (1987: 122) – of a "collective" narrator. There are no longer different and therefore partial and inexact versions of the same episode as at the beginning: from a certain point onwards the story proceeds by collation and the narrator always expresses the general point of view, the version of events "approved by all." The person who thematically and chronologically rearranges the notes, the testimonies, the diary pages (in essence, the narrator), is Mina Murray Harker, it is she who "[as] transcriber, typist, compiler, and writer in her own right, […] most consistently and devotedly facilitates the circulation of texts that produces the knowledge so helpful in fighting the vampire" (Pope 1990: 211). Soon after returning from Budapest, where she had joined and married her fiancé Jonathan, who was very ill, and where she had learned the news of the death of her dear friend, Lucy, Mina offers to copy in full the testimonies, written or recorded by phonograph, of the mysterious and dramatic events that were unfolding, to offer everyone an organized and complete documentation of them. And it is important to stress that this copy is the only text to survive, after Dracula destroys the original materials. In fact, therefore, the novel is the reconstruction of events as assembled and arranged by Mina, as editor: it is the story of Dracula seen through her eyes. She is the main speaker; it is who constantly restores the narrative balance, thus giving intelligible form and meaning to a

[17] "Dracula represents the [Gothic] novel as a parasitic and appropriating genre and offers vampirism as a model" (Pope 1990: 199).

fairly obscure tale. This function clarifies why Dracula *principally* tries to reach her: Dracula wishes to take possession of the world of words represented by Mina, to appropriate her authorial nature.

However, Mina Harker has two other fundamental distinguishing features: first of all, she is devoid of any flirtatiousness, full of culturally and socially correct values, a reflection of a conscious, mature Englishness by virtue of which she has taken duty as the inspiring principle of her conduct and founded her union with Jonathan on sharing, on the common project of building, through work, of social stability[18]: "I want to see you [Lucy] now, and with the eyes of a very happy wife, whither duty has led me; so that in your own married life you too may be all happy as I am" (74). But Mina is also a modern woman, a woman who is in no way passive, fully bent on bettering herself and capable of skilfully mastering new technologies: "I have been working very hard lately, because I want to keep up with Jonathan's studies, and I have been practicing shorthand very assiduously. When we are married I shall be able to be useful to Jonathan, and if I can stenograph well enough I can take down what he wants to say in this way and write it out for him on the typewriter" (74).

In addition, endowed with an open and perceptive mind, she knows how to apply a rigorous deductive scheme, proceeds with lucid care to analyse the clues and reconstruct a well-founded and persuasive chronological and causal account of the events. And, in the final phase of the vampire hunt, her contribution, thanks precisely to these qualities, is crucial: "Ground of Inquiry – Count Dracula's problem is to get back to his own place. He must be brought back by someone […] How is to be taken? 1. *By Road* […] 2. *By Rail* […] 3. *By Water* We know from the record that he was on the water; so what we have to do is to ascertain *what* water. Firstly. We must differentiate […] Secondly, We must see" (451-453).

Once, thanks in part to her, the veil of mystery enveloping the vampire has been torn, logic and reason bring order to the hitherto enigmatic course of events. Significantly, the novel changes its mode and purpose: the fear generated by a sense of indecipherable danger is replaced by the anxiety of incoherence, the frantic cadence of flight and pursuit, the study of clues, the enlightened deciphering of detail. *Dracula* transforms once again: from a novel of terror, interwoven with sentimentality, it becomes a sort of crime and adventure novel, with heated pursuits, strategies to be devised, duels to be fought, with a tendentially paratactic narrative order and a timing that privileges the present. Almost the confirmation of a destiny and the admission of a failure.

[18] "Because her own self-representation is often annoyingly self-effacing, it is not surprising that Mina's multifaceted agency is frequently downplayed in the criticism of the novel" (Prescott, Giorgio 2005: 488). For instance, Sally Ledger (1995: 30) presents Mina as "a stereotypically 'good' little Victorian Miss") and, again, as "a woman who, firmly rooted in the maternal paradigm, settles for the 'ideal' of middle-class Victorian womanhood." By remodelling herself into a "modernised version of the 'angel in the house," Mina "inscribe[s] herself within the paradigm of ideal Victorian womanhood by acting as a moral guardian of society" (Ledger 1997: 105-106).

5. The Future Behind the Neck

At the end of the nineteenth century, fear and a certain timorous enjoyment of evil were increasingly seeking refuge in different types of plots: for example in those of detective fiction, of whose protagonists Mina, to the same or greater extent than Van Helsing, encapsulates the distinctive traits. These plots often drew inspiration from news stories of crimes and misdemeanours. The Victorian public had already long been drawn to these gruesome topics (reaching peaks of morbid fascination as in the case, for example, of the murders of "Jack the Ripper," of 1888) and increasingly began to demand from literature too stories cathartically played out on the solution of atrocious mysteries, compelling and above all "hot off the press." And so the detective story, based on the solution of "cases" through the analysis of the tiniest clues, difficult to grasp, gradually gained greater space until it took over the literary market starting from the last decade of the century − coinciding with the appearance on the scene of Sherlock Holmes −, first invading, then enveloping and reducing to silence many of the potentially competing forms, including the Gothic[19].

Indeed, in the encounter-clash with Mina – enterprising, rational, detective-like – and with the world of which she is the expression, the vampire's defeat seems complete: on a snowy day at the beginning of November Dracula dies, his lovers are destroyed; but Mina manages to break the bond of death in life and thus to reaffirm her autonomy and identity. From many points of view – at least in literature – *Dracula* truly symbolizes the defeat of the Gothic on the threshold of the new century. To regain force, the genre would need a long time and a long convalescence in the territories of other forms of expression, especially cinema. There remained, at the time, the anxieties, the collective fears to which the Gothic – from a certain point on – had given literary form. There was still a content in search of a form[20].

Stoker's novel ends with a note by Jonathan Harker informing the reader of the fate of the protagonists seven years after the events recounted. Specifically, it reveals that his union with Mina has been blessed by the birth of a son. Evidently this postscript serves to "redeem" Jonathan "for his assumption at castle Dracula of a 'feminine' passivity, [announcing] the text's last efficacious penetration." The birth of a son, Little Quincey,

[19] The detective story takes its first steps in the English-speaking world as early as the 1840s (with Auguste Dupin by Edgar Allan Poe). Further significant developments take place from the 1860s (among the plots of sensation novels), but it is between 1887 and 1893, with the first novels and stories by Conan Doyle starring Sherlock Holmes, that the genre becomes established on a grand scale. During the 1890s the *Strand* published as many as one hundred and eight detective stories, in addition to those of Sherlock Holmes, almost one per month, almost all forgotten today. See Šklovskij (1976: 161); Priestman (2002: 1-6); Moretti (2005: 90-93) and, on the importance, but also on the unreliability of crime-reporting, Bertoni (2012: 87-101).

[20] In this sense, *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* can be seen as a "case" of attempted mediation with crime fiction, starting from the structures of the Gothic, and a sign, albeit ambivalent and contradictory, of a tension, if not of an imminent shift, in the power relations between the two genres. Certainly, Stevenson's text is "very close formally to the classic novel of mystery and detection," yet, "the gothic epistemology of [the] book" still threatens "the very method of detection and puts in question the effectiveness of the new idealized type of ratiocinative detective who will debut in 1887, one year after *Jekyll and Hyde*" (Hirsch, 1987: 228).

"represents the restoration of 'natural' order and especially the rectification of conventional gender roles" (Craft 1985: 129).

In truth, considering the premises, were it not clear that the child's birthday falls on the same day as the death of Quincey, the only one of the group to be killed (he too a vampire, if we accept Moretti's seductive hypothesis – 1987: 119-120), more than one reader could be induced to think him the son of Dracula. Even without wishing to go so far, however, "since Dracula's blood runs through Mina's – and perhaps Harker's – veins, Dracula is inside the boy as well"; that child would, therefore, be a hybrid, the initiator of a new race, *the coming race* (see Kuzmanovic 2009: 422).

In the light of this final element, continuing to think in terms of gender relations, we could ask ourselves if something of the profound and archetypical nature of the Gothic does not also survive, beyond the persistence in much contemporary and later narrative fiction of typical features of its setting or characterization. Perhaps, but this is a mere hypothesis, some of its genetic characteristics do indeed re-emerge, combining with more specific requirements, in the late nineteenth-century dystopias that later filter into the twentieth century, imposing themselves as a very popular and widespread form.

The sense of an immanent, collective and inescapable threat induced by a disturbing pseudo-alterity emanates, for example, from many of the worlds constructed by that dystopian literature in the first three decades of the twentieth century: frighteningly perfect worlds, regulated and planned according to rational – and often scientifically-based – principles of optimization, uniformity and control[21]. Worlds of alienation teeming with new "undead" and "unliving" beings, once again able to arouse in the reader a feeling "both thrilling and repulsive," the mysterious negative pleasure of terror, the irrepressible attraction and contagion of evil, shown here under the false guise of a chilling perfection. Human machines, devoid of energy (sexual or otherwise), probably unaware of pleasure and indifferent to good and evil.

If the sleep of reason produces monsters, its awakening − almost always − sees them triumph.

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[21] Suffice it to think of Forster, Zamjatin or Huxley, to mention only the best-known.

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La deumanizzazione del corpo nero: mostruosità e contagio in *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* di Frances Trollope e *The Monster* di Stephen Crane

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Abstract

Questo studio intende prendere in esame due opere prodotte in contesti storico-culturali differenti, ma aventi quale stesso oggetto la schiavitù negli Stati Uniti: *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836), di Frances Trollope, e *The Monster* (1898), di Stephen Crane. In entrambi i testi, come si vedrà, la condanna della condizione aberrante in cui versavano gli afroamericani (anche in tempi posteriori alla loro emancipazione) conduce gli scrittori a soffermarsi sul processo di deumanizzazione del corpo nero, demonizzato a tal punto da essere percepito come contaminato e mostruoso.

The Dehumanisation of the Black Body: Monstrosity and Contagion in The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw by Frances Trollope and The Monster by Stephen Crane

This paper sets out to investigate the provocative way two nineteenth-century writers, namely Frances Trollope and Stephen Crane, delved into the interlaced issues of American slavery (depicted as a dehumanizing institution) and blackness, perceived by the characters as if it were a contagious disease, threatening the health of the white nation. After exploring the context of both works, the analysis will focus on Trollope's *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836) and *The Monster* (1898), a controversial novella in which Stephen Crane examined the *effacing* effect of racism in contemporary America.

1. Introduzione

Scopo di questo studio è indagare il modo in cui due autori del diciannovesimo secolo, Frances Trollope e Stephen Crane, hanno affrontato nei loro scritti i temi congiunti della schiavitù negli Stati Uniti d'America e la deumanizzazione del corpo nero, percepito come deviante, mostruoso, se non addirittura infetto, capace di minare integrità e stabilità di una nazione che ancora oggi fatica a riconoscere nella diversità un valore aggiunto. Dopo aver tratteggiato il differente contesto che fa da cornice alle due opere prese in esame, si procederà all'analisi testuale di *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* (1836) di Frances Trollope (il primo romanzo pubblicato in Inghilterra avente per oggetto la questione afroamericana) e della controversa novella di Stephen Crane intitolata *The Monster* (1898), che interpreta il razzismo diffuso nella società americana coeva allo scrittore come una forza cieca, che tende a sfigurare e cancellare (non soltanto in senso metaforico) soggettività non normative[1].

2. Frances Trollope e il suo soggiorno negli Stati Uniti

La fama di Frances Milton Trollope (1779-1863) pare oggi affidata al solo ruolo di madre del celeberrimo romanziere Anthony Trollope, tanto che difficilmente il suo nome viene citato nelle antologie o nelle storie letterarie[2]. Lungi dall'essere una figura meramente ancillare, tuttavia, godette in vita di una discreta notorietà e si distinse per la sua vasta e articolata produzione: romanzi, componimenti, racconti e resoconti di viaggio, che testimoniano, oltre alla versatilità del suo talento letterario, anche un impegno costante per la tutela della dignità umana e della giustizia sociale.

La famiglia Trollope versava da tempo in una situazione economica disagiata, né si prospettava alcuna possibilità di cambiamento in tempi brevi[3]. I lunghi mesi di tensione domestica trovarono una conclusione inaspettata quando Frances Wright[4], scrittrice e abolizionista scozzese, fornì a Frances Trollope il pretesto per un allontanamento, seppur temporaneo, da una quotidianità ormai insostenibile. Il 4 novembre 1827, infatti, Frances salpò alla volta del Nuovo Continente, assieme a tre dei suoi figli e ad Auguste Hervieu, giovane e promettente pittore francese, oltre che suo pupillo. Scopo dell'impresa oltremare era coadiuvare Wright nella gestione della 'Nashoba Community', la comunità utopistica da lei fondata a Nashoba (Tennessee) nel 1825, avente quale obiettivo finale quello di affrancare l'America dalla piaga della schiavitù, fungendo da modello da emulare. Per mettere in atto il suo esperimento, Wright aveva acquistato una piantagione e un buon numero di schiavi che, con i frutti del loro

[1] Una mia analisi più dettagliata del romanzo di Trollope sarà pubblicata su *La Questione Romantica*, verosimilmente nel 2022 ("Frances Trollope and the African American Question"); per un approfondimento su *The Monster*, letto come una riscrittura di *Frankenstein* di Mary Shelley, si consulti il mio saggio dal titolo "*Frankenstein* and Its American Progeny".

[2] La presenza di "the 'other' Trollope" (Wagner 2011: 159) – così è stata definita − nel panorama letterario vittoriano è, infatti, limitata a qualche breve notazione a margine della narrativa dominante.

[3] Alla notoria incapacità nella gestione degli affari da parte di Thomas Trollope, marito di Frances, si era di recente unita la delusione derivante da un'eredità mancata da parte di uno zio facoltoso che, in età avanzata, si era risposato. Di conseguenza, la famiglia Trollope era ridotta quasi sul lastrico e la mancanza di armonia tra i coniugi era a dir poco evidente (Michie 2011: 242n).

[4] Wright (1795-1852) era famosa per i suoi atteggiamenti anticonformisti e trasgressivi: era solita indossare abiti maschili e non disdegnava l'amicizia di persone provenienti dagli strati più bassi della società. Veniva spesso etichettata con appellativi infamanti, come "female monster" e "bold lady-man" (Roberts 1994: 67).

lavoro nei campi, l'avrebbero ripagata dell'investimento iniziale, guadagnando, al contempo, la somma necessaria alla propria liberazione. Una volta emancipati dallo stato di cattività e opportunamente istruiti, sarebbero stati deportati in Liberia o ad Haiti, territori considerati più consoni alla loro cultura (Bederman 2005: 446-448): una eventuale permanenza sul suolo americano non era mai stata ritenuta un'opzione praticabile[5].

Il progetto di Wright sarebbe naufragato di lì a qualche anno, nel 1829; tuttavia, Trollope e i suoi compagni di viaggio non rimasero che pochi giorni a Nashoba, per timore delle condizioni igieniche precarie nell'insediamento e del caos che vi regnava incontrastato[6]. Dopo vari spostamenti, il gruppo si stabilì a Cincinnati, dove Frances diede vita a un'impresa ambiziosa: aprire un bazar che potesse anche fungere da luogo di ritrovo per artisti e intellettuali. Gli sforzi da lei profusi non vennero ricompensati con il successo sperato; la cittadinanza si mostrò ostile a una donna sin troppo indipendente, incapace di adattarsi a qualsiasi norma o convenzione sociale. Dopo appena sei mesi di attività, il bazar fu costretto a chiudere per bancarotta; il rimpatrio, nell'agosto del 1831, segnò l'ultimo atto della sua esperienza americana (Heineman 1983: 187).

Nonostante la delusione e le aspettative frustrate, Frances Trollope riuscì a trasformare il fallimento apparente in una occasione singolare per sanare le finanze familiari, oramai severamente compromesse. Superati da tempo i cinquant'anni, iniziò così la sua prolifica carriera di scrittrice, rielaborando le copiose note e riflessioni che aveva accumulato durante i mesi trascorsi negli Stati Uniti. Il primo volume a vedere luce può essere ascritto al genere della letteratura di viaggio: *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), testo nel quale viene offerto un ritratto disincantato e poco lusinghiero della 'terra delle opportunità' e dei suoi abitanti. Ad esso fece seguito il romanzo dal titolo *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw*, pubblicato quattro anni dopo, quando la pratica della schiavitù era stata ormai abolita nei possedimenti britannici (1833).

3. *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw*

La trama è incentrata sulla figura di Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw, lo spietato sorvegliante di una piantagione in Louisiana − Paradise Plantation[7] −, dove lavorano circa cinquecento schiavi di proprietà del Colonnello Dart. La storia del protagonista eponimo, un uomo capace di ogni sorta di abuso e perversione, si intreccia con il destino degli altri interpreti principali dell'opera: gli Steinmark (una famiglia tedesca che ha acquistato un ampio appezzamento di terreno negli Stati Uniti, ma non desidera adeguarsi al sistema schiavista), Edward e Lucy Blight (due fratelli del Kentucky, che si adoperano per diffondere il Verbo tra le genti di ogni etnia), Phoebe e Caesar (promessi sposi che appartenevano ai Blight, prima che fossero costretti a cederli assieme al resto

[5] Gli ovvi limiti del progetto di Wright sono stati posti in rilevo da Gail Bederman, secondo la quale l'unica utopia che, di fatto, l'abolizionista si sarebbe proposta di realizzare era quella di un'America *senza* afroamericani (Bederman 2005: 447).

[6] Si aggiunga anche che la malaria era endemica nella zona e gli approvvigionamenti scarsi. Il figlio di Frances Trollope, Henry, e Hervieu avrebbero dovuto rivestire la dignità di insegnanti a Nashoba.

[7] Non sfugga l'ironia nel nome della piantagione che, per definizione, è un luogo lontano dal concetto di Eden.

dei loro possedimenti) e Juno[8], la vera eroina della narrazione. Quest'ultima è una donna ormai anziana, dal corpo deforme e l'anima gravata dalle crudeltà e le violazioni subite nel corso di una vita consumata al servizio di troppi padroni. È a lei che Trollope affida il ruolo di vendicatrice degli oppressi, sovvertendo in questa maniera ogni asimmetria − di genere, razza, e persino di età − consacrata dalla tradizione.

Sin dalla scelta del nome per il suo protagonista, l'autrice pare voler mettere in rilievo i paradossi e le dissonanze di un paese che ha sempre inneggiato alla libertà, pur non tutelando i diritti primari delle cosiddette minoranze di cui la popolazione in larga parte si compone. Stando alla spiegazione offerta da Marilyn D. Button, infatti, il nome Jonathan sembrerebbe ispirato al personaggio di 'brother Jonathan', incarnazione perfetta del carattere nazionale americano − arrogante ed egocentrico, ma anche inevitabilmente rozzo e ignorante −, resa celebre dalle vignette satiriche pubblicate sui giornali britannici nel diciannovesimo secolo (Button 1994: 74). 'Jefferson' è un chiaro riferimento al terzo presidente degli Stati Uniti, Thomas Jefferson, uno dei padri fondatori della nuova identità politica e culturale post-indipendenza, nonché strenuo sostenitore dell'uguaglianza tra tutti gli esseri umani, malgrado continuasse a reputare intellettualmente inferiori gli afroamericani, sottoposti a ritmi di lavoro estenuanti nella sua tenuta[9]. Quanto al cognome, Whitlaw potrebbe essere un richiamo a quella *white law* (la legge che sancisce la supremazia bianca) della quale il sorvegliante si sente depositario e difensore; secondo Ann-Barbara Graff, al contrario, suggerisce "someone who does not care a whit about the law" (Graff 2002: 105), qualcuno che sente di poter piegare ogni regola esistente al proprio arbitrio.

Più che assomigliare a un'utopia di pace e rigenerazione, gli Stati Uniti dipinti da Frances Trollope nel suo romanzo sono una landa desolata, popolata da aguzzini e derelitti. La Louisiana è vista come "[the] land of white man's sin and black man's suffering" (Trollope 1836: 240), mentre a New Orleans abbondano le bische clandestine e i locali malfamati, dove avventori occasionali si associano ai clienti abituali nella ricerca condivisa di un rimedio, pur passeggero, alla solitudine che pare devastarli. Il rigoglioso giardino dell'Eden immaginato oltre l'Atlantico da tanti migranti e coloni europei si rivela, pertanto, null'altro che una selva oscura, un luogo denso di insidie per lo spirito così come per il corpo. A dispetto della natura lussureggiante e in apparenza generosa, malattie e pericoli dominano infatti il territorio: con il suo "poisonous breath" (*ivi*: 181), la malaria si insinua persino nelle costituzioni più robuste; le acque limacciose del Mississippi occultano gli alligatori che le infestano, mentre nel folto dei boschetti ombrosi

[8] Nomi mitologici e altisonanti (Caesar, Phoebe, Juno, per indicarne alcuni) erano spesso usati per gli schiavi al solo scopo di deriderli e mortificarli, creando un contrasto stridente con il loro stato di prostrazione e servitù (Montero 2012: 264).

[9] La figura di Jefferson risulta particolarmente ambigua; come M. Andrew Holowchack ha recentemente osservato, infatti, anche il presidente condivideva con la maggior parte dei suoi compatrioti WASP (*white Anglo-Saxon Protestant*) la paura della commistione di sangue. Inoltre, sembra accertato che la sua condanna dell'istituto della schiavitù non fosse motivata dalla pietà nei confronti degli afroamericani, trattati in modo brutale e ingiusto, ma dall'effetto degradante che l'adozione di tale sistema avrebbe determinato sul comportamento della popolazione bianca, peraltro costantemente minacciata da possibili ribellioni. Simile in questo a Frances Wright, anche Jefferson sosteneva la deportazione verso l'Africa o le Indie Occidentali quale possibile soluzione a un problema divenuto oramai stringente. Nel volume di Holowchack viene anche affrontata la questione, ampiamente dibattuta, del legame di Jefferson con la schiava Sally Hemings (forse generata dallo stesso padre di sua moglie) con cui avrebbe avuto numerosi figli illegittimi (Holowchack 2020: 145-163).

trovano riparo non soltanto i viandanti stremati per la fatica del viaggio, ma anche gli orsi, in attesa di una nuova preda da sbranare (*ivi*: 2).

In questo contesto deleterio, corrotto e malsano, non sorprende che gli schiavi vengano spogliati di quanto li renderebbe umani e ridotti a una condizione quasi ferina. In più di un passo della narrazione, sono assimilati agli esseri più abietti e detestati del creato, accomunati ad essi dal colore che li contraddistingue: nei commenti colmi di disprezzo dei loro proprietari e sorveglianti, sono di fatto paragonati a "black beetles" (*ivi*: 309, 327), "black viper[s]" (*ivi*: 279) o, ancora, "black toad[s]" (*ivi*: 79). Oltre alla presunta mostruosità del corpo nero (lontano da quel candore che, secondo il canone estetico occidentale, si fa sinonimo di grazia e innocenza), Trollope pone in risalto come gli afroamericani vengano spesso considerati alla stessa stregua di meri beni materiali, da comprare e sfruttare a piacimento, per poi disfarsene, una volta divenuti superflui oppure inadeguati alla loro funzione o alle aspettative dell'acquirente. Nell'abitazione sontuosa di un'affascinante dama creola, la servitù è "fantastically dressed" (*ivi*: 211), abbigliata nelle fogge più curiose e stravaganti, ed esibita come parte del mobilio; un giovane schiavo − "[a] little automaton" (*ivi*: 212) privo di emozioni, nelle parole dell'autrice – assolve al solo compito di sostenere i piedi minuti e delicati della sua padrona, fungendo da sgabello, "[a] living but apparently immovable footstool" (*ivi*: 211). Che alle diverse tonalità dell'incarnato corrispondano livelli differenti di tutela e fruizione dei diritti è evidente osservando il trattamento riservato ai *quadroon* – cittadini subalterni, dal sangue ritenuto impuro[10] −, che la legge consente di schernire e dileggiare impunemente. Senza mai interrogarsi sulla correttezza delle proprie azioni né sulla loro effettiva moralità, Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw pregusta la soddisfazione che proverà nello scagliarsi, con epiteti volgari e irriverenti, contro un gruppo di ragazze *quadroon*, la cui unica colpa è appartenere a quella "race whom all men are permitted to insult" (*ivi*: 97).

Il processo di deumanizzazione degli schiavi raggiunge l'acme quando la loro stessa individualità viene messa in discussione, trasformando i corpi in un semplice assemblaggio di parti, alcune tra le quali dotate di una quotazione maggiore rispetto alle altre sul mercato; così i negrieri non commerciano in uomini o donne ma "in the muscles and sinews of the poor negroes" (*ivi*: 54), il cui prezzo aumenta o diminuisce in proporzione alla forza-lavoro della quale sono capaci. In maniera analoga, le sole braccia ben tornite di Phoebe attraggono lo sguardo feticistico di Whitlaw, suscitando i suoi istinti più bassi e rapaci (*ivi*: 57). In tutta l'opera, gli afroamericani vengono equiparati a macchine da produzione; persino la maternità cessa di essere una scelta privata, per tramutarsi in una procedura finalizzata all'acquisizione di profitti sempre nuovi o di manodopera gratuita. Al pari di un giovane capo di bestiame ingrassato per l'occasione[11], ogni neonato è infatti destinato a essere venduto al miglior offerente, o a faticare nei campi accanto ai propri genitori. Alle madri, impiegate come autentiche incubatrici viventi e identificate con i loro organi riproduttivi, viene proibito di mostrare qualsiasi forma di attaccamento naturale alla prole: come Trollope sottolinea, "beyond the mere animal functions of giving life and nourishment, [they] cannot show that [they are] mother[s]» (*ivi*: 71). Di conseguenza, non stupisce

[10] Per *quadroon* si intende una persona con un quarto di sangue africano.

[11] Trollope indulge in un ritratto quasi cannibalistico dei bambini venduti al mercato degli schiavi: "well fattened and fed" (*ivi*: 174), come se fossero "young swine" (*ibidem*), saranno consumati fino alla morte da chi li acquisterà.

che, per salvaguardare i propri interessi economici, sia Whitlaw sia il Colonnello Dart calcolino con cautela il numero massimo di frustate da poter infliggere alle schiave senza rischiare di compromettere le loro facoltà generative, "without permanent injury to [themselves] or [their] future progeny" (*ivi*: 148).

Anche Juno, "[a] wretched relic of a life of labour and woe" (*ivi*: 80), partecipa inizialmente dello stesso destino infausto, prima di diventare un'icona di protezione, la vera paladina di giustizia e libertà nel romanzo. La scrittrice dedica un capitolo intero alle vicissitudini della sua vita, partendo dalla giovinezza, quando diviene l'amante del suo padrone, un colono inglese che, notando la vivacità del suo intelletto, si diletta a istruirla più di quanto non sia consentito a una serva, per giunta nera. Data alla luce una bambina, Juno viene abbandonata e ceduta a un altro uomo, mentre il padre di sua figlia, "a little yellow girl" (*ivi*: 119) di nome Selina, decide di tornare con la piccola in Europa, desideroso di allevarla nel più raffinato dei modi. Questo episodio doloroso segna l'inizio della metamorfosi della donna che, passando da un proprietario dispotico all'altro fino a giungere a Paradise Plantation, inizia a prendere le fattezze di una "well-regulated machine" (*ibidem*) preposta alla procreazione, uno dei suoi molteplici doveri. Trollope si sofferma sulla progressiva perdita di affettività di Juno nei confronti di quelle creature cui dona la vita (condannandole, pur non volendo, a un'esistenza grama), solo per separarsene a pochi mesi dal parto. "The unnatural state of torpidity" (*ivi*: 120), quello stato di indifferenza che le ottunde sensi e coscienza, si interrompe solo quando la schiava fantastica sulla sua prima figlia e sulla gioia che proverà non appena potrà finalmente ricongiungersi a lei, dopo essersi affrancata dai vincoli che la opprimono. Inutile aggiungere che i suoi sogni finiranno per infrangersi.

Al personaggio di Juno, tuttavia, l'autrice affida una missione fondamentale: far emergere – con l'intento di sconfessarli − quei preconcetti inveterati, quegli stereotipi odiosi che hanno legittimato per troppo tempo la posizione socialmente subordinata degli afroamericani. Juno è, infatti, presentata come una persona colta e consapevole di sé, in grado di manipolare persino chi tenta di prevaricarla attraverso un uso sagace del linguaggio. Con estrema agilità, passa da "the negro gibberish usually spoken by her race" (*ivi*: 125) – la lingua che ci si aspetta che parli – all'inglese più sofisticato, denso di echi shakespeariani, che utilizza nel momento in cui vuole indirizzare le azioni di Whitlaw verso il perseguimento di fini che non gli appartengono, fingendo di farsi tramite di profezie divine. Rovesciando il pregiudizio della credulità e dell'ignoranza degli afroamericani, convince agevolmente il supervisore a seguire le sue indicazioni, approfittando della sua indole superstiziosa e irrazionale, dimostrando così che il colore della pelle non ha legame alcuno con perspicacia e ingegno. Trollope smentisce anche l'opinione diffusa secondo la quale gli schiavi tenderebbero alla barbarie e alla bestialità, se lasciati privi di controllo. Caesar e Phoebe sono, di fatto, i personaggi più miti della storia, ansiosi solo di seguire gli insegnamenti del Dio cristiano al quale Edward Blight li ha convertiti. Quest'ultimo, invece, attira le ire di una folla senza volto né nome, "[a] savage mob" (*ivi*: 345), che vede nei suoi sermoni sull'uguaglianza e sull'amore universale una minaccia all'egemonia dei bianchi. Il predicatore viene pertanto trucidato, "with the most unneedful violence" (*ibidem*), da una moltitudine di suoi compatrioti che agiscono in branco come fiere assetate di sangue, facilitati da un insieme di leggi che garantiscono l'impunità agli artefici di linciaggio. L'autrice sembra suggerire che l'istituto della schiavitù conduca a un abbrutimento inevitabile e assoluto, che coinvolge anche coloro che,

scientemente, optano per questo sistema economico-sociale. Simili alle vittime dell'oppressione − mutate in macchine, in animali viscidi e striscianti o in bestie da soma −, anche i bianchi paiono perdere sensibilità e connotati umani: non più individui ma una massa rabbiosa e informe, gli aggressori vengono paragonati a un "tremendous animal" (*ivi*: 301) dal corpo smisurato e mostruoso, dotato di un'infinità di "murderous hands" (*ivi*: 344), pronte a scagliarsi contro "the gentle and unresisting martyr" *(ivi*: 345).

L'ultimo incubo collettivo che Frances Trollope affronta e dissipa in *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* è il terrore della contaminazione razziale, percepita quasi fosse un morbo contagioso dal quale doversi proteggere. A partire dagli anni '70 dell'Ottocento, tale paura avrebbe condotto all'emanazione di una serie di norme (le famigerate 'Jim Crow Laws') ispirate al principio della segregazione[12], condizione reputata necessaria alla sopravvivenza e alla stabilità di una nazione che, contro ogni evidenza, rivendicava ancora una maggioranza WASP (Tischauser 2012: 1-8). Anche in questo caso, è Juno a gettare luce sulle contraddizioni che si celano dietro la divisione rigida (almeno in superficie) tra etnie diverse. Considerato l'incarnato roseo di sua figlia, l'anziana donna è infatti descritta come "the progenitor of a white and beautiful free race in England" (Trollope 1836: 161), una frase in cui si annullano due dicotomie di importanza nodale negli Stati Uniti dell'epoca: la distinzione tra bianco e nero, e quella tra libero e servo. In modo decisamente più esplicito, il concetto è ulteriormente ribadito in un altro luogo del romanzo, mediante il commento di un personaggio secondario: "It will be for certain, Miss Juno, a pleasure for you to see such a lily-white posterity. Arnt the whites unaccountable, Mis Juno, that cant see how easy it is for black blood to turn white? 'Tis plain enough, that Goda'mighty has no objection whatsumever to it, at any rate" (*ivi*: 244). L'ammirazione per la carnagione candida di Selina nasconde una riflessione più profonda su quell'affinità indiscussa tra le creature di Dio che, nel messaggio cristiano dell'autrice, riesce a colmare felicemente ogni divario apparente.

4. Stephen Crane e *The Monster*

Come David Greven ha osservato, la novella venne composta da Stephen Crane (1871-1900) "in the chaotic atmosphere of post-Reconstruction America" (Greven 2017: 54), un momento cruciale e delicato, caratterizzato dalle 'Jim Crow Laws' (abolite solo nel 1965) e dai linciaggi frequenti di quegli afroamericani che osavano varcare barriere invisibili, ma non per questo meno spesse ed evidenti. Elaine Marshall sostiene che sull'immaginazione dello scrittore abbia influito il resoconto di suo fratello William, che nel 1892 fu testimone oculare del massacro di Robert Lewis[13], un nero accusato di aver stuprato una donna bianca e per questo punito con la morte (Marshall 1996: 207). Una ulteriore fonte di ispirazione fu, con tutta probabilità, anche l'insieme di provvedimenti volti a limitare la libertà di disabili, vagabondi e mutilati − passati alla storia

[12] Anche se il tredicesimo emendamento (18 dicembre 1865) aveva, di fatto, decretato l'abolizione della schiavitù, vigeva comunque la dottrina del 'separate but equal', secondo la quale l'uguaglianza dei diritti era comunque condizionata alla mutua separazione tra le razze.

[13] William Crane aveva tentato di impedire il linciaggio, riuscendo temporaneamente a mettere in salvo Lewis; la folla inferocita era tuttavia riuscita a riappropriarsi del corpo già martoriato, procedendo a un'esecuzione sommaria per impiccagione (Asma 2009: 232).

come 'ugly laws'[14] –, messi variamente in atto (e successivamente ritirati) tra la fine della Guerra Civile e gli anni '70 del Novecento; 'colpevoli' della loro deformità, questi individui erano soggetti a forti restrizioni nelle aree pubbliche, la cui violazione comportava il pagamento di ingenti sanzioni o, addirittura, in casi estremi, la detenzione. Come Susan M. Schweick ha posto in rilievo, due anni prima della pubblicazione di *The Monster*, Charles Kellogg aveva proposto (pur senza successo) l'introduzione di un'ordinanza, a New York, che impediva ad "any person who [was] diseased, maimed, or deformed in any way, so as to be an unsightly or disgusting object" (Schweick 2008: 221) di mostrarsi in luoghi frequentati. Lo scalpore suscitato da un simile disegno di legge deve aver colpito intimamente Stephen Crane, la cui produzione risente di un interesse forte per la marginalità e le classi subalterne.

Ambientata in un sobborgo d'invenzione (Whilomville), la trama si concentra su l'afroamericano Henry Johnson, un cocchiere impiegato presso la famiglia del Dott. Trescott. Pur di salvare Jimmie, il figlio del suo padrone, dall'incendio divampato nella loro casa, Henry non esita a gettarsi tra le fiamme, rimanendo però orribilmente ustionato in viso. Ignorando i consigli di quanti lo spingevano a disfarsi di quel 'mostro' (l'odioso appellativo con il quale era oramai noto), il dottore decide di prendersi cura di lui, ricambiando l'abnegazione del suo servitore con altrettanta generosità. La novella si conclude con un finale penoso e crudele, con l'ostracismo di cui l'intera famiglia Trescott diviene oggetto, per quell'unico atto di compassione che l'America bianca non può perdonare.

Nei confronti degli afroamericani, l'autore si pone in modo a prima vista ambiguo. Nel caratterizzare Henry, cede di fatto alla tentazione di farlo regredire a uno stadio quasi infantile, evidenziando la sua mancanza di acume e spirito critico; intellettualmente è pari al bambino di cui diviene compagno di giochi, come traspare dal seguente commento: "[Henry] grinned fraternally when he saw Jimmie coming. These two were pals. In regard to almost everything in life they seemed to have minds precisely alike" (Crane 1899: 6). Un certo disagio nei confronti degli schiavi liberati, inclini a un'imitazione ridicola e servile dei loro antichi padroni e del loro contegno, è palpabile nella descrizione di Henry. Con uno spiccato gusto macchiettistico, viene dipinto con indosso i suoi eleganti "lavander trousers" (*ivi*: 8), dismessi da un abitante del villaggio che, vedendo nell'afroamericano una copia mal riuscita dell'originale, non manca per questo di dileggiarlo. Ampio spazio è poi riservato alle sue maniere eccessivamente cerimoniose, anch'esse illustrate da Stephen Crane con dovizia di particolari risibili[15]. Tuttavia, la critica nei confronti di una società che vorrebbe sopprimere, ad ogni costo, qualsiasi tipo di diversità pare farsi più caustica con il dipanarsi dell'intreccio. Come Elizabeth Young ha sottolineato, il luogo nel quale il volto di Henry rimane sfigurato – il laboratorio del Dott. Trescott, dove la combustione ha inizio – può esser letto come "a metaphor for the environment in which racism

[14] Marcia Pearce Burgdorf e Robert Burgdorf Jr. definiscono le 'ugly laws' (denominazione da loro coniata) come "one collection of strange provisions which discriminate against physically handicapped persons" (Burgdorfm Burgdorf 1975: 863). Il collegamento con le teorie eugenetiche in voga nel periodo è evidente.

[15] Ad esempio, quando Henry fa visita alla sua amata, Belle, e alla madre di lei, i tre personaggi si profondono in complimenti accompagnati da numerosi inchini, che li fanno apparire bizzarri e grotteschi, simili a scimmiette ammaestrate in un circo: "They bowed and smiled and ignored and imitated until a late hour, and if they had been the occupants of the most gorgeous salon in the world they could not have been more like three monkeys" (Crane 1899: 12).

is forged, as well as a metonymic reference to the role of medicine in eugenics and other forms of racist pseudoscience" (Young 2008: 86). Come già notato per il testo di Frances Trollope, anche nella novella di Crane il corpo nero finisce per essere tragicamente privato della propria umanità; in questo caso, a innescare un processo irreversibile di svilimento sono quegli agenti chimici che, paradossalmente, sembrano più vitali e riconducibili a forme organiche di quanto lui stesso non appaia. I fumi dell'incendio prendono così la forma di una "fairy lady" (Crane 1899: 30) color zaffiro, mentre le fiamme che gli lambiscono gli abiti lo aggrediscono "like a panther" (*ibidem*), senza concedergli alcuna possibilità di scampo; la pozione che, in ultimo, gli corrode il viso fino a cancellarlo è assimilata a un serpente (*ivi*: 31), che intacca le sue carni con un veleno letale. Henry è quindi ridotto al rango inferiore di oggetto, sospeso in una posizione liminale tra la vita e la morte, con le membra già scure ulteriormente annerite dal fuoco che l'ha consumato. Nel corso della narrazione, vari personaggi − rigorosamente bianchi − incoraggiano il Dott. Trescott a sbarazzarsi di quel residuo ripugnante e contagioso che, con la sua sola presenza, rischia di rendere vulnerabile, inviso al resto della società, un cittadino un tempo rispettabile e stimato da tutti. Alla creatura deforme viene rivolto impunemente ogni epiteto vile e offensivo, senza che gli sia data l'opportunità di ribattere o difendersi: non più un individuo, è ora "[a] dark figure" (*ivi*: 48) priva di contorni, e ancora "[a] dim form" (*ibidem*), "[a] silent shape" (*ivi*: 50), "a devil" (*ivi*: 56), "the most terrible thing in the world" (*ivi*: 60-61), "a spectre" (*ivi*: 65), "a corpse or a phantom" (*ivi*: 66), "a thing, a dreadful thing" (*ivi*: 72) e, in ultimo, semplicemente "a monster" (*ivi*: 72). Nelle ultime pagine della storia, il 'mostro' diventa quasi un fenomeno da baraccone, liberamente beffeggiato dagli amichetti di Jimmie che, lungi dal provare gratitudine verso il suo salvatore, è il primo a umiliarlo.

5. Conclusione

Come questo saggio ha tentato di dimostrare, pur provenendo da contesti culturali differenti, sia Frances Trollope sia Stephen Crane si sono ugualmente concentrati sugli effetti deleteri e deumanizzanti della schiavitù negli Stati Uniti, con un'attenzione particolare a come il corpo nero è stato manipolato da stereotipi e consuetudini razziste sino a deformarlo. Attraverso opere come *The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw* e *The Monster*, i due autori hanno infatti rivelato i meccanismi subdoli sottesi alla discriminazione, esplorandone gli esiti funesti mediante strategie complesse e articolate, fondate sul paradosso e sul rovesciamento dei ruoli, e miranti a suscitare sensazioni di profonda empatia nel lettore. Entrambi hanno posto la società americana di fronte a uno specchio, invitandola a prendere coscienza dell'incubo nascosto dietro la facciata seducente e impeccabile del sogno americano. In un momento storico come il presente, in cui diritti umani ormai consolidati sono stati pericolosamente messi in discussione, tali testi rivelano tutta la loro drammatica attualità meritando, quindi, una nuova e partecipe lettura.

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Neo-Victorian Contaminations: The Hybrid and Virulent Nature of Female Gothic in Penny Dreadful Women Characters

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Abstract

Penny Dreadful is a popular horror television drama whose title clearly refers to a genre of nineteenth century popular fiction characterized by sensational and terrifying plots. The series stages an inventory of characters mainly drawn from Gothic and Victorian literature: Victor Frankenstein, Dorian Gray, Dracula, Dr Jekyll and the werewolf form a league against evil forces bent on infecting the world with a deathly plague.

Among them, the two leading female characters, Vanessa Ives, a sensual, devil-possessed young woman, and Lily, Frankenstein's female creature, epitomize the Gothic subversive heroine whose "monstrous" status and behaviour are perceived as a threat to the stability of traditional culture and society. They appear in a narration infested with images of contagion and in a "Female Gothic" literary mode which is adaptive, mutant and resistant to categorizations, thus in many ways resembling infective agents like viruses and bacteria. Significantly, the hybrid, virulent nature of these characters mirrors the traits of (Female) Gothic fiction and is analysed in the light of Discourse and Gender Studies.

An example of contemporary fiction disguised under the mask of Neo-Victorianism, *Penny Dreadful* interprets female transgression as a vehicle of infective disruption, portraying two "pestiferous" women whose nonconformist attitude is treated medically by isolation and sanitization in order to prevent the spread of infection in a fictional world that is a frightful metaphor of our present world.

1. *Penny Dreadful* and Female Gothic

Penny Dreadful (Showtime/Sky 2014-16) is a horror-drama television series set in late-Victorian gothicized London. It takes its title from the derogatory term given to lurid, sensational, and mostly pulp, nineteenth-century British serial fiction. This narrative niche was extremely popular when the rapid expansion of periodicals met the tastes of a large working-class readership, the one described by Wilkie Collins as the "Unknown Public; a public to be counted by millions; the mysterious, the unfathomable, the universal public of the penny-novel Journals" (Collins 1858: 221), also notoriously – and significantly – labelled as a "monster audience" (Collins 1858: 221). Patently unpretentious in terms of originality, the 'penny dreadfuls' were a mash of plagiarized storylines and narrative stereotypes of thrill and fright, mainly derived from traditional repertoires and popular characters, the Gothic genre being in this sense a source to draw on liberally.

Thus, with this choice John Logan, screenwriter and producer of *Penny Dreadful*, explicitly marks his contiguity with the complex interlocking of cheap popular culture and

'classic' Gothic inheritance which often permeates neo-Victorian fiction. Significantly, the series evokes numerous precursor texts from nineteenth-century Gothic, adapting its themes, characters and discourses, and displaying the same narrative hybridity strategy of its precursor *fin-de-siècle* serial novelettes. Indeed, the series features an inventory of characters taken mainly from Gothic and Victorian literature: Victor Frankenstein and his creature from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Dorian Gray from Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Mina Harker and Count Dracula from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Dr. Jekyll from R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, as well as others based on cinematic adaptations of Gothic ascendency, such as Lily, inspired by James Whale's *The Bride of Frankenstein* (1935), and Ethan Chandler, the werewolf modelled on George Waggner's *The Wolf Man* (1941). This "motley crew" is completed by some original characters, all endowed with some sort of supernatural power, together forming a league engaged in a battle royal against uncanny evil forces and acting in the *demi-monde* of a dirty, foggy, nocturnal London.

In this discussion, the emphasis is on the two leading female characters: Vanessa Ives, the heroine of the story, a sensual devil-possessed brunette, burdened with a very dark past, and the aforementioned Lily, Frankenstein's creature – (nick)named after the mythological female demon Lilith and after Elizabeth in Mary Shelley's novel – who was created by Victor from the dead body of a young streetwalker. Previous scholarship has duly underlined how the women in *Penny Dreadful* portray "transformative female identity through a Gothic redefinition of the late Victorian New Woman" (Green 2017: 1) as their female 'monstrosity' attempts to disrupt the established social order. As de Bruin-Molé remarks:

> *Penny Dreadful* attempts to become a metaphor for the monstrous power of patriarchal society through its engagement with various historical images of the monstrous feminine. It is through the characters of Vanessa and Lily, and through the parallels to Dracula and Frankenstein they embody, that the show is most effectively able to illustrate how certain kinds of historical monstrosity have been co-opted by twenty-first-century popular culture (de Bruin-Molé 2020: 76).

Nevertheless, in her further elaboration of the assumption, de Bruin-Molé, along with several other (female) scholars in the field of neo-Victorian and Gothic Studies, has shifted the attention to what she considers a poor valorization of gender and gender roles in favour of a clichéd and simulated pseudo-feminism in *Penny Dreadful*. Marie Louise Kohlke argues that "rather than deconstructing [...] pejorative stereotypes, the series disingenuously sets out to 'brand' the women as monsters through what I take to be a parodic re-enactment of present-day feminist activism" (Kohlke 2018: 8), a phenomenon not limited to this series and recurrent in mass-market neo-Victorian and Gothic-inspired film and TV series (Louttit-Louttit 2018). In the same light, in consideration of the neo-Victorian series *Ripper Street* (2012-16), *Copper* (2012-13) and *Murdoch Mysteries* (2008-present), Claire Meldrum argues that these fictions are undermined by a general ideology which is "far from progressive", lacking respect in dealing with women's bodies and betraying "overt and troubling misogyny", albeit hidden behind a screen of female "otherness". Women's alterity, rather than marking emancipation and/or empowerment, is a substantial *pinkwashing* exercise, while

> feminine agency and influence are marginalized and consistent disparities between the presentation of gender-male and gender-female bodies occur. This othering oscillates between a scopophilic and fetishistic presentation of the inert female body as an object of sexual display and/or sexual violence or a paternalistic chivalry that seeks to "protect" the female (Meldrum 2015: 202).

Here I do not intend to dispute these outcomes or focus primarily on the issue of marginality *and* empowerment. Although according to contemporary feminist standards, the narrative arc of Vanessa and Lily fails to achieve true liberated status, the two characters still function as metaphors of female monstrosity in connection with relevant issues of political and cultural discomfort. They may not be epitomes of successful weaponized social monstrosity, and yet their storyline is perhaps *more realistic* in being perceived as a threat to the stability of traditional culture and society, because of their monstrosity, and is then punished or annihilated. Their significance lies in their being epitomes of deviant disruption, destabilizing figures perceived as a menace to be stopped and marginalized. My point of view is that a positive result of their struggle would not adequately represent their condition of fin-de-siècle 'new women' – often judged as 'improper women', dangerous vehicles of social deconstruction – a timeless stigma that contemporary women still experience, and that in this sense represents a bond between past and present generations.

Vanessa Ives and Lily "Frankenstein" are the protagonists of *Penny Dreadful*, and yet their leading parts, and – definitely illusory – positions of influence in the storyline do not shield them from being sharply condemned for their disturbing femininity, represented by their sexual independence and appetite, their resistance to patriarchal subjugation and at least in the case of Vanessa, even their linguistic power. As is often the case with neo-Gothic heroines on screen, portraits of strong, creative women recurrently foreshadow a punishment pattern, consisting of seclusion, exclusion, rejection and eventually an unfulfilled life plan. Heteronormativity permeates contemporary Gothic tv-series and films and "even when marriage or the relationship between a woman and a man is absent […] the heroines can still be seen to be subject to specifically male power and control" (Jeffers McDonald-Kamm 2019: 5).

Nor do I wish to disqualify crucial works on the "ideological import of a male and white privilege that continues to dominate the film and TV industry" (Jeffers McDonald-Kamm 2019: 5). Rather, I attempt to explore how the Gothic mode reflects a complicated and articulated image of women not relegated to the classical Gothic pattern of domestic incarceration, sexual violence, haunted mansions and uncanny presences. As stressed by several critics (e.g. Smith-Wallace 2004, D. Fitzgerald 2009, Murphy 2016, Wallace 2017, Ledoux 2017), the richness of contemporary (neo) Female Gothic characters and narrations lies, as in the cases here examined, in conflicting women who live through times of transition and evolution, often succumbing to the united and opposing forces of change and conservatism they fall prey to. Not surprisingly, the two characters from *Penny Dreadful* appear in a narration infested with images of contagion, significantly parallel to the Female Gothic literary mode where heroines are constantly polarized "through patterns of antithesis such as good/bad, saint/sinner and virgin/whore; a continued use of stereotypes; and the pathologization of women who fail to conform to traditional expectations" (Horner and Zlosnik 2016: 1).

Thus, the metaphor of contamination and contagion appears particularly appropriate in this narrative category – and in fact episodes of infection are disseminated throughout the series: the cholera epidemic in the underground city, vampire contagion, and above all the fact that the protagonist Vanessa Ives is responsible for unleashing a pandemic which could annihilate mankind. Pursued throughout her life by a powerful evil ancient being, she resists, aware that acceptance of her true nature as "Queen of Hell" would mean no less than an Armageddon, triggered by the fatal contagion that her union with a daemonic "Master" entails.

On her part, Lily is a creature generated from the reanimated corpse of Brona Croft, an Irish prostitute who was dying of consumption and whose passing is accelerated by Victor Frankenstein, who wants to create a companion for his enraged male creature. She had a gloomy sordid past of sexual and emotional abuse, even suffering the death of her baby daughter as a

consequence of the violent life endured. As a diseased, contagious social outcast, in her first life she is granted but a short-lived romance, which is as intense as it is brief, and has no continuation in her second life.

The trope of contagion/contamination goes hand in hand with that of monstrosity (not limited to female characters) as a rhetoric disguise for dysfunctional aspects of society and its members. This conceptual framework finds its natural narrative harbour in Gothic realms whose scenarios and inhabitants "mould themselves to, and are moulded by, cultural fears, anxieties and priorities" (Punter 2016: 3): ghosts, vampires, demons, werewolves and all the assorted monster population of Gothic landscapes are the actors of a "traditional" narrative pattern where a dark, powerful, spreading evil, meant to disrupt physical and social integrity, comes from an unfathomable outside. Predictably, plagues and infections are often represented *per se* or disguised as rampant vampirism or zombie invasions, outbreaks of which are always fought to preserve the symbolic integrity of the social group. The role of female characters is undoubtedly crucial: from Ellen Moers' *Female Gothic* "Radcliffean" plot, with heroines pursued, threatened and imprisoned in dark houses or castles by despotic men (Moers 1976), to the *Male* Gothic plot, where women undergo every kind of ordeal due to male transgression – rape, taboo infractions, murders and bloodshed – their function has become more and more complex in contemporary Gothic fiction.

As is often the case with Neo-Gothic and Neo-Victorian fiction, the apparently unpretentious setting of a dirty, foggy, nocturnal London, haunted by supernatural forces, hides a complex mixture of social, cultural, political and economic issues, as well as a sophisticated inventory of psychologically multifaceted characters. A microcosm, witness to the end of an old world and already tainted by the future, in many respects a reflection of our brutal contemporaneity – a contemporaneity affected by dread for an impending apocalypse, as was that at the turn of the nineteenth century. The hyper-gothicized London of *Penny Dreadful,* with its virulent women, is the perfect scenario for a *mise en abyme* of a past and present world that has lost its centre and is experiencing fearful and cogent issues of war, calamities, health and environmental disasters[1].

Besides, the Gothic pattern is in itself pervasive and ductile; it dodges definitions and borders and is a category characteristically transcending traditional genres and extending beyond literature, so that it can only be classified as a mode[2]. Oddly enough, and despite its antiquity, it is a lively wide-ranging fictional area that continues to inspire contemporary authors for its capacity to reveal unconscious links with the primitive, the barbaric, the tabooed, and all that provokes situations of terror[3]. Employment of the omnipresent supernatural element is an enduring form of reaction/relation to specific traumatic historical transitions: a path of continuity can be traced through the late eighteenth-century writers, those of the Gothic Revival

[1] "Logan uses the monstrous acts of his characters as manifestations not only of the horror accompanying Victorians' transition to the Modern Age but as signs and symbols that the contemporary world is in the process of a similarly frightening transition" (Logsdon 2018: 26).

[2] "The diffusion of Gothic forms and figures over more than two centuries makes the definition of a homogeneous generic category exceptionally difficult. Changing features, emphases and meanings disclose Gothic writing as a mode that exceeds genre and categories, restricted neither to a literary school nor to a historical period. The diffusion of Gothic features across texts and historical periods distinguishes the Gothic as a hybrid form, incorporating and transforming other literary forms as well as developing and changing its own conventions in relation to newer modes of writing" (Gotting 1996:9).

[3] "A particular attitude towards the recapture of history; a particular kind of literary style; a version of self-conscious un-realism; mode of revealing the unconscious; connections with the primitive, the barbaric, the tabooed – all of these meanings have attached themselves in one way or another to the idea of Gothic fiction, and our present apprehension of the term is usually an uneasy concatenation of them, in which there is a complicated interplay of direct historical connections and ever variable metaphor" (Punter 1996: 4).

at the end of the nineteenth century and contemporary neo-Gothic authors. They all share disquiet at being between old and new systems: worried about the present and increasingly anxious about the future. The overreaching representation of fear and terror as an artistic diversion from the real to the weird and eerie is employed to elicit a catharsis from psychological distress – this means handling the dangerous and poisonous, focusing and dealing resiliently with the edges of the human. As David Punter argues: "[In the Gothic mode] we are allowed – even encouraged – to see things we might prefer not to have seen […] to examine death and the possible transgressions of death" (Punter 2016: 8). In many respects, the diffusive attitude of the Gothic mode strongly resembles the adaptivity and mutability of viruses: to quote Francis Ford Coppola's well-known film *Dracula*, having "crossed oceans of time", from the late Georgian era to present time, it certainly shows remarkable persistence and contagiousness.

Female Gothic has endured a similar destiny, nowadays being a much broader term than the one coined by Ellen Moers, which was limited to female authorship and readership in literary fiction. Like its superordinate classifier, Female Gothic is intended as a fluid category that encompasses a multitude of authors, themes, characters and ideologies in an effort to render the complexity and difficulty of female experience in the male power structure. Since Gothic is an extensive category that navigates time and space to contaminate the present, the slippery notion of Female Gothic "offers opportunities for reflecting and/or resisting 'women's lot' across a diverse range of media and sociocultural contexts" (Quigley 2019: 185). In this sense, my point here is that in the Gothic mode, female authors and/or characters find a host organism to inhabit, where their function is again as diffusive, adaptive and mutant as that of a virus.

Especially in screen narratives, as in the case here examined, conventional characters and Gothic themes have been largely *reused* and *reinvented* in every possible variation: there is lively, wide-ranging research and debate on the issue, but much regarding the shifting role of women remains to be investigated in this fictional context. It seems generally agreed that no single theoretical basis or common trait is distinctive of the contemporary Gothic heroine in films or TV series, and apart from a general cluster of areas in which Female Gothic scholars are particularly interested, such as national identity, sexuality, language, race and history, the question remains elusive and characterized by multiple contaminations (Wallace-Smith 2009).

Whether interpreted in conservative or subversive frameworks, the role of women in Gothic fiction epitomizes virulent disruption. It is no coincidence, then, that the series researched here hosts an "infective" female protagonist whose function is multifaceted, since she is both victim and offender, in continuous oxymoronic hybridization between the two roles. The discursive core of these female portraits thus pivots on the exclusion imposed on the leading female figures featured in the series, rather than on their possible liberation. As I endeavour to demonstrate, their marginalization, resulting from their intentional defiance of a reassuring conformist feminine model, is enacted at several levels.

1. Contaminating the Feminine Code: Vanessa and Lily

Vanessa and Lily are two non-standard women expelled from regular domestic and urban spaces, and relegated to out-groups to safeguard the "sanity" of the social realm. In sociological terms, an *out-group* is a group with which most individuals do not identify. It differs from the *in-group*, the one with which most people identify and to which they want to belong. Specific cognitive mechanisms – like symbolic representations – lead individuals to manifest positive feelings and grant privileged treatment to members of the *in-group,* and conversely to manifest negative feelings and deal out unfair treatment to members of the *out-group*. The concept of *othering* or branding of the unconventional is linked to the concepts of in- and out-groups and

defines a phenomenon by which certain individuals or groups are branded as not fitting the norms of a social group. *Othering* influences the way those considered to belong to the *in-group* or the *out-group* are perceived and treated. The term was originally coined by Gayatri Spivak in post-colonial studies to describe "the process by which imperialism creates its 'others' [and] the various ways in which colonial discourse produces its subjects" and by which it enacts its policies of exclusion and marginalization (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin 2000: 156).

Exploiting the past to elaborate on the present, Neo-Victorian Gothic fiction sets its stories in nineteenth-century landscapes to disguise our preoccupation with contemporaneity: as already mentioned, there are striking analogies between the Victorians and ourselves in our perception of living in a transition period where things are precarious and uncertain, and where we are threatened by obscure agents and rampant forces from inside and outside society. There is the sensation of a social world on the verge of disintegration and collapse of its most consolidated and venerated principles, where one certitude concerned women's roles: significantly, our two female figures display a rebellious spirit and outstanding intellectual and discursive capacity.

2.1 Vanessa Ives

Penny Dreadful is set in London in the last years of the 1800s, where Vanessa Ives, a sensuous young brunette, lives with Sir Malcolm Murray, the father of her best friend Mina, who was kidnapped years earlier by a gang of unidentified ogres. To save the girl, the two assemble a crew of "good guys" with extraordinary abilities, helped by Sembene, a mysterious African servant (perhaps a sorcerer), and are later joined by an American sharpshooter, Ethan Chandler, who is a werewolf. Together, the team defeats waves of dark heralds holding Mina hostage, but who are in fact on the hunt for Vanessa, who it turns out is a reincarnation of the primordial Egyptian goddess Amunet – i.e. "the hidden one". She has been separated for millennia from her evil spouse, Amun, who now resurfaces in the robes of Dracula, reclaiming her. Their match must be attained by Vanessa's voluntary reunion with this infernal consort, an act that entails the inception of eternal darkness and the end of the world. She has lived her life haunted by maleficent presences that strive to win her back, thus making the story mainly about her quest to (re)acknowledge her dark side, take control and eventually destroy it. After the initial focus on Mina, the whole plot revolves around Vanessa, her mysterious (even to herself) past, her spiritualistic talents, the mixing of her religious faith with morbid eroticism, and above all her pseudo-hysteria intertwined with supernatural manifestations.

The series depicts Vanessa as being in the balance between a true unearthly monster and a woman having a severe mental breakdown (one should remember that in the Victorian age, cases of "possession by the devil" began to be considered and treated as psychic phenomena derived from sexual dysfunction). Some of the most impressive episodes are those of her confinement in an asylum where she is subjected to the violent treatments of the period for mental and behavioural deviance, especially female deviance.

Like her contemporaries, victim of a dying world, filled with more things between heaven and earth than modern philosophy can dream of, Vanessa is a hybrid, unidentifiable, unstable being *and* the carrier of potentially catastrophic pandemics. The materialistic interpretation of her derangement and her witchlike depiction makes her the perfect representative of a society entering a frightening transition that presages disorder and cataclysm. The author of the series describes this malaise of cultural disintegration as a bond linking the late Victorian world and our present culture. In the words of John Logan: "There's something in the Victorian Era that reminds me of right now. They were on the cusp of a modern world […] I think we are on the cusp of the same thing now, and it's frightening and there's dissonance and there's excitement about uncharted waters" (Radish 2014). Significantly,

Vanessa's tremendous "spellcraft" is enacted via the *"Verbis Diablo"* (approximately, "Words of the Devil" in Latin), defined in the series as a corrupted version of the language spoken in the Garden of Eden before mankind was banished. She learned its secrets from Joan Clayton, her mentor witch who had the task of transmitting the language that confers mastery to female outcasts. There is a manifest association with the archetypical pattern of transgression, punishment and exclusion: linguistic expression is the forbidden fruit stolen from the tree of knowledge, causing the fall of humankind through a woman.

The mark of the original sin is innate in Vanessa, who could speak the daemonic idiom even before she was taught by the old witch. Asked about the incomprehensible expressions she used during a battle against evil forces, Vanessa replies: "I don't remember much. The words came to me blindly, like an animal instinct. I don't even know what I said" (PD, S2, E1, "Fresh Hell").[4] She will be warned later by Joan Clayton, in a significant act of feminine sharing of exclusion practices, that use of *Verbis Diablo* entails irreversible de-humanization and a fall from grace, a symbolic process of capital sin and rebellion that leads to repudiation and isolation.

> Verbis Diablo ... But you must remember such incantations are dangerous and you must never speak the Devil's language idly. And such things as this I teach you are only for your protection. Let this language not become easy in your mouth or soon it will no longer be your mouth, but his. And it will tell only lies […] If you believe in God, better you pray with all you got in you. Only if all else fails, you speak the Devil's tongue. But mark, girl: it's a seduction and before you blink twice it's all you can speak. (PD, S2, E3, "The Nightcomers")

A perfect interpreter of the natural Gothic propensity for transgression, Vanessa embodies all the subversive roles that violate long-standing social codes. She is alternately a clairvoyant, a witch, an assistant to a cut-wife, a murderer, an (incestuous) adulteress, but first and foremost she carries the burden of destroying a glorious age, which succumbed to its own inner anxieties and contradictions, as did the Victorian age.

Vanessa is eventually deserted by the God she invoked all her life, and loses all hope of regaining the status of a legitimate member of society. She then embraces her monstrosity, surrendering to its male counterpart, Dracula. The price of this reunion is the release of her evil power, which casts a spell of everlasting darkness and pestilence on the world.

> And then all light will end and the world will live in darkness. The very air will be pestilence to mankind. And our brethren, the Night Creatures, will emerge and feed. Such is our power, such is our kingdom, such is my kiss. (PD, S3, E8, "Perpetual Night")

The fatal disease of darkness is the metaphoric outcome of her marriage: the monstrous infective delivery of an oxymoronic cadaverous newborn, by which she finally meets Barbara Creed's criteria for the monstrous feminine:[5] the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire, the possessed woman. She is now fully and literally "pestiferous", an adjective derived from the Latin "pestifer" and composed of "pestis" (i.e. pestilence) and "fer"

[4] Quotations from Penny Dreadful are followed by reference to the series (PD), season (S) number, episode (E) number and title of the episode in quotation marks.

[5] In relation to Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject and the maternal, Barbara Creed elaborates a series of "faces" of women represented as monsters: "These faces are: the archaic mother, the monstrous womb, the witch, the vampire and the possessed woman" (Creed 1993: 7).

(from the verb "ferre" i.e. to bring), while the images of contagion are reinforced by the rampant vampirism engulfing the city, with legions of bloodsuckers, rats and toads issuing in waves from the sewers.

She is destined to lose the final battle of inner conflict and to surrender to her fate, asking to be killed by the only man she has truly loved, Ethan Chandler, her companion of misfortune cursed with lycanthropy. Since a love fully consummated as an act of physical intimacy would have ghastly consequences, with a gesture of extreme self-sacrifice, Vanessa pushes him away. In so doing she seals her exclusion from womanhood by renouncing physical pleasure in connection with love. She warns him: "We are dangerous" (PD, S2, E7, "Little Scorpion"). In this culmination of the art of disruption, Vanessa seems to identify with a virus clinging to a dying body – a metaphor for the departing "old" world. She knows she is doomed to the life cycle of any lethal infective agent and that she will die with her host organism. This realisation comes from an unexpected act of redemption and awareness: in giving up the fight and asking Ethan to sacrifice her, Vanessa realizes that her end will mean regeneration and re-birth:

> They will hunt me 'til the end of days […] This is what I am and this is what I've done, brought this terrible darkness into the world […] My battle must end. You know that or there will never be peace on Earth. Let it end […] Please Ethan, let it end (PD, S3, E9, "The Blessed Dark").

The new age arises from the completion of this process. The infective woman dies in her second tragic labour and delivery, this time giving birth to an orphaned creature, deprived, troubled, displaced and full of fear, as befits one born from an act of violence.

2.2 Lily 'Frankenstein'

The second character I examine is Lily, the creature generated from the reanimated corpse of Brona Croft, an Irish prostitute who died of consumption and whose passing was accelerated by Victor Frankenstein to provide a mate for his enraged male creature. Unlike her precursors, this Frankenstein 'bride' is not the living result of stitched body parts, but is made from the whole body of a woman and is the scientist's most advanced product. In this perspective she is "portrayed as a new product of industrial manufacture" (Green 2017: 3) and re-framed as an instance of industrial Gothic, reflecting "the theme of unnatural disorder produced by mechanical technology", as suggested by Martin Parker who recognizes in nineteenth-century Gothic texts the "massive tension they produce between their 'realism', being credible stories about modern people, and the eruption of horrific fantasy into the everyday. Of particular relevance here is the scientist or professional as a modern type who produces (Frankenstein)" (Parker 2005: 156).

Lily is initially portrayed as a shy, sweet, insecure woman who fits the role of the ideal Victorian woman, polite and gracious, soon to reveal a dark, manipulative and fiercely violent character. Born with no memory of her past, she is taught good manners and appropriate dress (corsets and high heels) by her maker, in order to be matched with Victor's roughly assembled human male creature. However, Lily gradually becomes conscious of the violence and brutality of her past life, growing resentful about how society and especially men mistreat and disregard women. Eventually rejecting the creature and her manufacturer as sexual partners, she becomes aware of her extraordinary strength and immortality. She releases her fury and gives rein to her monstrous new powers. With her incredible sexual appetite and reckless desire to dominate men, she overpowers and kills them by the dozen, going so far as to enlist an army of female outcasts to retaliate against the men who have abused them.

She is definitely a terrifying embodiment of the *overpowering feminine* often associated with Female Gothic. She and her monstrous party of women are a rampant pack, intent on destabilizing, subverting and infecting society with the same violence they endured. Her seeking to bring in a new age led by immortals is strikingly similar to that of the vampire invasion affecting the foggy, nocturnal London portrayed in the series. In a horrific city and society on the verge of losing its most consolidated principles, women's traditional roles were a precarious certainty. This "new woman" is assertive, demanding and independent. She breaks onto the social scene and dismantles the "angel or monster" duality, reconfiguring "the fin-de-siècle persona of the proto-modern New Women to embody the far more forceful Gothic New Woman and become the harbinger of a world without men" (Green 2017: 4).

Lily does not want equality, she is not looking for redemption: she wants mastery and destruction. Her feminism is disruptive and monstrous in its ferocity:

> We are not women who crawl. We are not women who kneel. And for this we will be branded radicals. Revolutionists. Women who are strong, and refuse to be degraded, and choose to protect themselves, are called monsters. That is the world's crime, not ours. (PD S3, E6, "No Beast So Fierce.")

Acknowledging her empowerment, she despises any association of her battle against society with the Victorian feminist movement. Seeing a group of suffragists being arrested by the police she comments scornfully on their vain efforts:

> They are all so awfully clamorous. All this marching around in public and waving placards. That's not it. How do you accomplish anything in this life? By craft. By stealth. By poison. By the throat quietly slit in the dead of the night. By the careful and silent accumulation of power." (PD, S3, E3, "Good and Evil Braided Be")

Significantly, she is soon re-captured and interned in an asylum to be neutralised by Victor Frankenstein and Henry Jekyll and treated with a serum intended to transform social deviants into model citizens. She eventually escapes but her plan is aborted and her narrative arc ends in defeat.

Vanessa Ives, a solitary misfit, an oxymoronic upper-class outcast, and Lily Frankenstein, the rejected white trash reborn as a posh socialite, are therefore both hybrid transitional subversives, whose role is interpreted as monstrous because of their non-conformity with traditional female roles. They are both victims and offenders, and this double nature grants them a legitimate space in the realm of Gothic fiction, a place they somehow inhabit as infective carriers of contamination. Unfit for their present, they are in-between figures who frustrate any clear definition of women's identity by their defiance of the social conventions and cultural system they were born into.

An example of contemporary screen fiction disguised by the mask of Neo-Victorianism, *Penny Dreadful* portrays two "pestiferous" women whose nonconformist attitudes are disinfected medically and eliminated to prevent the risk of an epidemic in a fictional world which is a frightful metaphor for our present world.

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"One writes of scars healed, a loose parallel to the pathology of the skin, but there is no such thing in the life of an individual": The question of psychoanalysis in *Tender Is the Night* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald

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Abstract

This paper will focus on the question of psychoanalysis in *Tender Is the Night* by Francis Scott Fitzgerald. In particular, this analysis wants to demonstrate how this novel acutely penetrates the historical contest of the roaring twenties and the changes happened in this period about psychoanalysis. During the Roaring twenties mental disorders were paid close attention: the new science of psychiatry was emerging and new therapies were being tested, including hypnosis, psychoanalysis, "ergo-therapy" and treatment with electroshock, the "reeducation" therapy, the post-traumatic stress of "repetition", all of which treated less or more critically in *Tender Is the Night*. Moreover, the content of the novel is linked to Zelda Fitzgerald's mental illness and her admission to a Swiss psychiatric clinic in 1930. For this autobiographical reason, Fitzgerald became knowledgeable enough to follow her treatment and a certain amount of what he learned appears in *Tender is the Night*. Additionally, this paper will explore Fitzgerald's use of nascent Freudianism and it will evaluate the weight and significance of the discourse and the psychiatric and psychoanalytic concepts utilized in the novel. Lastly, the fundamental theme of the incest in the novel can be evaluated as a contagious disease which expresses a possible metaphor for the decline of western civilization: in particular, the disappearance of the traditional sexual gender as it becomes more fluid after the Great War.

"One writes of scars healed, a loose parallel to the pathology of the skin, but there is no such thing in the life of an individual": La questione della psicoanalisi in *Tender Is the Night* di Francis Scott Fitzgerald

Abstract

L'articolo si concentrerà sulla questione della psicoanalisi in *Tender Is the Night* di Francis Scott Fitzgerald. In particolare, questa analisi vuole dimostrare come questo romanzo abbia uno speciale significato per analizzare il contesto storico del primo Novecento e i cambiamenti avvenuti nella psicoanalisi. Durante i ruggenti anni Venti si prestava molta attenzione ai disturbi psichici: emergeva la nuova scienza della psichiatria e si sperimentavano nuove terapie, tra cui l'ipnosi, la psicoanalisi, l'"ergoterapia" e la cura con l'elettroshock, la terapia della "rieducazione", lo stress post-traumatico del meccanismo della "ripetizione", tutto questo e molto di più è presente in *Tender*. Inoltre, il contenuto del romanzo è legato alla malattia mentale di Zelda Fitzgerald e al suo ricovero in una clinica psichiatrica svizzera nel 1930. Per questo motivo autobiografico, Fitzgerald diviene abbastanza informato da seguire il suo trattamento e una parte di ciò che ha appreso appare nel romanzo. Questo articolo esplorerà l'uso da parte di Fitzgerald del nascente freudismo e valuterà il peso e il significato del discorso e dei concetti psichiatrici utilizzati nel romanzo. Infine, il tema fondamentale dell'incesto nel romanzo può essere valutato come una malattia contagiosa che esprime una possibile metafora del declino della civiltà occidentale: in particolare, il discorso dell'ambiguità dei generi sessuali tradizionali, che divengono sempre più fluidi dopo la fine della Grande Guerra.

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1. Premessa

Francis Scott Fitzgerald è uno scrittore indissolubilmente legato all'epoca in cui è vissuto; nessun altro può essere considerato parimenti rappresentativo della *Jazz Age*. Dal momento del suo matrimonio con Zelda Sayre nel 1920, la coppia si è impressa nella coscienza pubblica come l'immagine ideale e scintillante di quel particolare periodo storico che furono i *Roaring Twenties*, e con i suoi scritti l'autore ha contribuito a riprodurne tutte le variegate raffigurazioni.

Eppure, dopo la pubblicazione nel 1925 del suo romanzo più famoso, *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald è cambiato dal suo lontano esordio, decide di progettare un nuovo romanzo, con una maggiore introspezione psicologica e una struttura narrativa completamente diversa dalle opere precedenti: ambisce a seguire la scia dei grandi autori modernisti. Infatti, in una lettera al suo editore Maxwell Perkins descrive così il nuovo testo: "Something really NEW in form, idea, structure – the model for the age that Joyce and Stien are searching for, that Conrad didn't find" (Anderson 2010: 143).

Tuttavia, tale impresa di realizzare un romanzo che potesse rappresentare "the model for the age" si rivelerà essere un percorso irto di difficoltà: il testo avrà una gestazione lunghissima e macchinosa della durata di nove anni, l'autore produrrà ben sei versioni differenti e concepirà tre cambi di trama e, anche dopo la sua pubblicazione nel 1934, lo continuerà a rimaneggiare fino alla sua morte; il romanzo al quale così faticosamente darà alla luce è *Tender Is the Night*.

Nella sua versione definitiva, la storia è ambientata sulla Costa Azzurra alla fine degli anni '20 del Novecento, e racconta la vicenda della giovane attrice Rosemary Hoyt che incontra la coppia americana Dick e Nicole Diver. Al di sotto della patina scintillante che circonda i Diver si cela un passato oscuro: in una clinica psichiatrica di Zurigo, Dick, brillante psichiatra, aveva incontrato la sedicenne Nicole, un'ereditiera di Chicago, ricoverata con la diagnosi di schizofrenia, causata da una relazione incestuosa con il padre. Dick diventa oltre che il medico, anche il marito di Nicole: dopo il matrimonio si trasferiscono sulla Riviera francese, ma la loro vita comincia lentamente a deteriorarsi. Dick a Roma ha una relazione con Rosemary; Nicole, sempre più frustrata dal comportamento del marito, inizia a frequentare Tommy Barban. Alla fine del romanzo, dopo l'inevitabile divorzio, Nicole si sposa con Tommy, mentre Dick torna in America per vivere un'esistenza alquanto infruttuosa in una piccola città vicino a New York.

2. Il motivo dell'incesto

Tra le varie tematiche affrontate nel romanzo, quella centrale e di sicuro più inusuale per uno scrittore come Fitzgerald risulta la scelta dell'inserimento dell'incesto. Tale presenza tematica può essere spiegata in diversi modi nel romanzo: in primo luogo, potrebbe essere stato suggerito, anche se indirettamente, dalla biografia stessa di Fitzgerald: in particolare, dai suoi atteggiamenti ambivalenti nei confronti della madre e della figlia. Durante il corso della sua vita, infatti, vacillò tra il vergognarsi di sua madre ad esserne completamente devoto, uno dei primi titoli di *Tender Is the Night* era "The Boy Who Killed His Mother". Secondo i biografi, con la figlia Scottie, Fitzgerald era alternativamente "the severe father, the difficult alcoholic, and the man who loved his child intensely" (Bloom 2013). In opposizione a questa spiegazione, va però rimarcato il fatto che l'incesto non sia menzionato nelle sue altre opere, e che solo *Babylon Revisited*[1] e *The Baby Party* riguardano l'amore di un padre per la figlia.

Inoltre, non va dimenticato che il personaggio di Nicole è ispirato dalla figura di Zelda: lo stesso Fitzgerald nel suo "General Plan" per il romanzo afferma che Nicole è costruita sul "Portrait of Zelda—that is, a part of Zelda". Gli stessi dettagli del suo caso clinico sono basati sulla malattia psichiatrica di Zelda[2], in particolare, in seguito al suo crollo nervoso, avvenuto il 23 aprile 1930 (Grogan 2016: 30) e il suo conseguente ricovero alla clinica Les Rives de Prangins a

[1] In questo racconto è però presente un dialogo tra padre e figlia accusato dai critici di essere inconfondibilmente incestuoso (Berman 2015: 36).

[2] "Zelda Fitzgerald's tragedy contributed more than factual background to *Tender*: it provided the emotional focus of the novel. Dick's response to Nicole's predicament, the very heart of the novel, derives from Fitzgerald's feelings about his own wife" (Bruccoli 1982).

Nyon, che servirà come modello per quella dove lavorano Dick Diver e il suo collega, il Dott. Franz Gregorovius (Anderson 2010: 144). Sebbene molti critici abbiano discusso il ruolo giocato dalla malattia di Zelda nella scrittura del marito e si abbiano numerose informazioni riguardo ai suoi ricoveri negli istituti psichiatrici, pochi hanno indagato le cause reali della sua patologia[3] (Berman 2015: 61).

In una lettera dell'aprile del 1934, quando ormai il romanzo era già stato divulgato in puntate sullo *Scribner's Magazine* e stava per essere pubblicato in volume, Zelda raccomanda al marito "to revert to the money-triangle as you can't possibly use the incest" (Bryer, Barks 2002: 189), ma nella stessa non fornisce delucidazioni sul perché Fitzgerald non avrebbe dovuto usare il tema dell'incesto. Lo stesso Fitzgerald scriverà una lettera alla moglie, nella quale le consiglierà di non rileggere il romanzo in quanto la trama era legata al suo tragico vissuto personale: "I feel very stringly about your re-reading it. It represents certain phase of life that now over" (Bruccoli 1994: 257).

Nancy Milford, biografa di Zelda, sottolinea il fatto che il motivo dell'incesto sia presente in due suoi racconti, ma rimarca anche come non sussistano prove che sia stata vittima di incesto da parte del padre (Milford 1970: 31). Linda Wagner-Martin afferma che l'utilizzo del tema dell'incesto come origine dei problemi psichiatrici di Nicole costituisca una scelta irresponsabile da parte di Fitzgerald e che gli stessi amici di Zelda fossero risentiti dalla scelta del "most horrific plotline he could imagine" (Wagner-Martin 2004: 177): il personaggio di Nicole era chiaramente modellato sulla vita di Zelda, quindi la deduzione ultima che se ne poteva ricavare è che anche lei avesse vissuto un trauma simile. Per di più, con la scelta di tale argomento Fitzgerald aveva diffamato permanentemente il padre di Zelda, il giudice Sayre, al quale tra l'altro la figlia si riferiva con il soprannome di "Old Dick", la versione abbreviata del suo secondo nome, Dickinson. Dopo aver letto il romanzo, Zelda ricade in un'ulteriore crisi nervosa: non poteva fare a meno di identificarsi con il personaggio di Nicole, in quanto condividevano così tante

[3] Dal primo ricovero nel 1930 alla sua morte avvenuta nel 1948 per un incendio all'Highland Hospital di Asheville, in North Carolina, Zelda entra ed esce dagli ospedali psichiatrici. Riguardo alla sua diagnosi, i medici la dichiarano schizofrenica, sebbene altri pareri fossero più propensi per una differente. Per esempio, in una lettera a Nancy Milford del 1966, il Dott. Forel scrive: "The more I saw Zelda, the more I thought at the time: she is neither a pure neurosis (meaning psychogenic) nor a real psychosis–considered her a constitutional, emotionally unbalanced psychopath—she may improve, never completely recover" (Berman 2015: 6-7).

esperienze biografiche[4], ma pare che non si riferì mai direttamente alla questione dell'incesto, per il quale tra l'altro non esistevano prove, ma solo una serie di illazioni[5] (Cline 2002: 338-339).

Se appare plausibile che Fitzgerald abbia deliberatamente inventato questo dettaglio, perché allora il tema dell'incesto esercitava un'attrazione così potente nella composizione di questo particolare romanzo su uno scrittore il cui trattamento degli argomenti sessuali era stato finora caratterizzato da una diffidenza piuttosto romantica. La presenza di tale tematica potrebbe non essere legata ad un'ispirazione biografica, ma potrebbe rappresentare la metafora più convincente a disposizione di Fitzgerald per dimostrare la perdita dei valori nella società a lui contemporanea, rappresentato dalla rottura radicale della relazione tra genitori e figli (Murphy 1973: 320). Di conseguenza, il romanzo assume un valore speciale per comprendere sia il contesto storico, sia i cambiamenti avvenuti nel trattamento medico in quel particolare momento.

Da un primo punto di vista, la storia di Nicole appare connotata da elementi di passività e vittimizzazione e risulterebbe essenzialmente una questione di violenza patriarcale: naturalmente, non tutti gli uomini o tutti i padri di *Tender Is the Night* sono molestatori, ma Fitzgerald sembra puntare il dito accusatore contro queste figure paterne, contro coloro di cui i figli si fidano per guarire, ma che invece abusano della loro autorità (Nowlin 1998: 59).

Nel romanzo la perversione sessuale e la degenerazione morale prendono dunque forma simbolicamente nell'incesto e nella conseguente separazione tra padri malvagi e padri onesti: nella prima categoria rientra ovviamente il padre di Nicole, Devereux Warren, ma anche la figura di Señor Pardo y Ciudad Real, anche lui come Warren caratterizzato da "all the appurtenances of wealth and power" (*TITN*: 272). Pardo è il padre di un ragazzo omosessuale cileno ricoverato nella clinica di Dick, che dichiara senza mezzi termini: "My son is corrupt. [...] Finally last week in this very room, rather in that bathroom—[...] I made Francisco strip to the waist and lashed him with a whip—" (*TITN*: 272). Tra l'altro i due padri, Warren e Pardo, vengono anche messi in parallelo nel romanzo, perché risiedono nella stessa pensione:

> The suite in which Devereux Warren was gracefully weakening and sinking was of the same size as that of the Señor Pardo y Cuidad Real—throughout this hotel there were many chambers wherein rich ruins, fugitives from justice, claimants to the thrones of mediatized principalities, lived on the derivatives of opium or barbitol listening eternally as

[4] Esiste, per esempio, un grafico sul quale Fitzgerald aveva attentamente confrontato le crisi nevrotiche di Zelda e Nicole (Murphy 1973: 320).

[5] Negli anni successivi pare che la madre di Zelda, Minnie Sayre abbia confidato di aver chiuso fuori dalla loro camera da letto il giudice Sayre: alcuni hanno preso questo come prova che il giudice avrebbe potuto rivolgersi a una delle sue figlie, dato che sua moglie lo rifiutava. Questo, insieme alla creazione da parte di Fitzgerald di un'eroina basata in parte su Zelda che viene violentata da suo padre, spiega una raffica di voci sull'incesto. Ma non esistono prove a sostegno di questa accusa e molti intervistati a Montgomery hanno confutato l'idea (Cline 2002: 339).

> to an inescapable radio, to the coarse melodies of old sins. This corner of Europe does not so much draw people as accept them without inconvenient questions. Routes cross here—people bound for private sanitariums or tuberculosis resorts in the mountains, people who are no longer persona gratis in France or Italy (*TITN*: 277).

È un luogo malsano, dove alloggiano persone non più gradite alla società, proprio a simboleggiare l'estromissione dei due uomini a causa dei peccati commessi. Un'altra figura paterna negativa è l'ipocrita australiano, Mr. Morris, che sceglie di portare via suo figlio dalla clinica di Dick, in quanto ha percepito odore di alcol nel medico, nonostante quest'ultimo gli faccia notare che il figlio sia ricoverato per cleptomania e non per alcolismo. In definitiva, questo genere di padri esercita il potere e utilizza le proprie ricchezze con lo scopo di piegare la volontà dei figli e costringerli all'obbedienza. Nella seconda categoria, quella dei padri onesti, rientra invece il padre di Dick, Mr. Diver, che insegna al figlio il valore del decoro e provvede alla sua educazione morale, incitandolo a compiere buone azioni (Pelzer 2000: 128). Dick lo definisce la sua guida, una guida che però muore nel corso del romanzo e la cui esistenza rimane solo nei ricordi del figlio: questo lutto decreta emblematicamente la fine di un'intera era, quella delle maniere gentili, dei valori etici della decenza e della cortesia.

Eppure, le figure paterne non sono le uniche responsabili della confusione morale della giovane generazione. Anche se Rosemary considera sua madre, la signora Elsie Speers, come la sua più stretta confidente, alcune delle indicazioni della madre alla figlia appaiono discutibili e riflettono la competizione aggressiva con il genere maschile che già il suo nome fallico anticipava (Prigozy 2002: 190). A giudicare dallo stesso parere espresso da Fitzgerald a sua figlia Scottie in molte delle sue lettere, probabilmente trovava stimolante che Rosemary fosse concentrata maggiormente sul lavoro, invece che sul matrimonio, e fosse, secondo sua madre, "economically... a boy, not a girl" (*TITN*: 49). Rimane comunque l'ambiguità del perché sua madre avrebbe incoraggiato Rosemary a corteggiare un uomo sposato (Sanderson 2002: 160). Infatti, nella prima stesura del romanzo, la figura corrispondente a Rosemary era un giovane inquieto, Francis Melarky, che nelle intenzioni dello scrittore avrebbe poi dovuto commettere l'estremo atto di uccidere sua madre. Judith Fetterley sostiene che l'intento matricida esista ancora nel romanzo finale (Fetterley 1984: 140): questo prenderebbe forma in una sorta di elogio dell'estinzione della maternità nei termini tradizionali e nell'implicita approvazione del potere patriarcale.

In ultima istanza, sia il fallimento delle figure genitoriali che il disordine sociale che ne consegue non sono quindi amputabili ad un'autorità patriarcale indiscriminata, bensì sono attribuibili a un potere femminile indisciplinato, sotto forma di donne-bambine seducenti

(Nicole) o donne con connotati maschili (Rosemary) (Sanderson 2002: 160), che prende il sopravvento e distrugge la già precaria virilità degli uomini.

Dalla prospettiva psicoanalitica la relazione incestuosa tra Nicole e suo padre è il più ovvio esempio di complesso di Edipo e di Elettra, dopo la morte della madre infatti Nicole diventa la "Daddy's girl"[6]: condivide il letto con il padre, gli canta le canzoni, lo tiene per mano, e convivono nell'amore e nell'adulazione reciproca fino al momento in cui Nicole e il padre non diventano amanti effettivi (Pelzer 2000: 127). L'unico personaggio che descrive cosa è accaduto a Nicole è proprio Warren stesso, dimostrando anche verbalmente di essere l'unico a poter raccontare "the awful story", la vittima non ne ha la forza, o persino, la facoltà:

> "It just happened," he said hoarsely. "I don't know—I don't know.
> "After her mother died when she was little she used to come into my bed every morning, sometimes she'd sleep in my bed. I was sorry for the little thing. Oh, after that, whenever we went places in an automobile or a train we used to hold hands. She used to sing to me. We used to say, 'Now let's not pay any attention to anybody else this afternoon—let's just have each other—for this morning you're mine.'" A broken sarcasm came into his voice. "People used to say what a wonderful father and daughter we were—they used to wipe their eyes. We were just like lovers—and then all at once we were lovers—and ten minutes after it happened I could have shot myself—except I guess I'm such a Goddamned degenerate I didn't have the nerve to do it."
> "Then what?" said Doctor Dohmler, thinking again of Chicago and of a mild pale gentleman with a pince-nez who had looked him over in Zurich thirty years before. "Did this thing go on?"
> "Oh, no! She almost—she seemed to freeze up right away. She'd just say, 'Never mind, never mind, Daddy. It doesn't matter. Never mind.'"
> "There were no consequences?"
> "No." He gave one short convulsive sob and blew his nose several times. "Except now there're plenty of consequences" (*TITN*: 147)

Freud stesso afferma che il legame tra padre e figlia include un elemento naturale di amore erotico e di desiderio sessuale: inizialmente, questi sentimenti sono positivi, perché il bambino poi crescendo sopprime la propria attrazione fisica per il genitore del sesso opposto, ma la violazione da parte di Devereux Warren nei confronti di sua figlia costituisce una deviazione innaturale a questo, che ovviamente porta a disturbi psicologici nell'età adulta come nel caso di Nicole (Pelzer 2000: 127).

Per di più, molti motivi del tema dell'incesto vengono complicati logicamente dalla relazione di Dick con Nicole: all'inizio, quando lei gli scrive, è in un momento della sua vita nel quale non si fida più degli uomini e gli parla della loro "attitude base and criminal and not even

[6] *Daddy's Girl* è il titolo del film, nel quale recita come protagonista Rosemary.

faintly what I had been taught to associate with the role of gentleman" (*TITN*: 138). Nel romanzo poi Dick prenderà il posto del padre per Nicole e diverrà il centro della sua fiducia e sicurezza: come psichiatra ovviamente Dick è conscio del valore psicologico di questo *transfer*[7] e aspira che Nicole costruisca il suo proprio mondo e non lo faccia ruotare intorno a delle figure maschili e paterni, lui le ricorda: "You can help yourself most" (*TITN*: 214). Dick, almeno inizialmente, si rifiuta di assumere quel ruolo paterno che lei vuole forzatamente assegnargli, ma questo rifiuto costerà non poche difficoltà e non porterà sempre a un risultato positivo (Bloom 2013). In primo luogo, Dick ama Nicole e tale sentimento lo coinvolge attivamente anche nei suoi problemi psichici; inoltre, la sua stessa natura che lo spinge costantemente a essere uno "spole priest" lo ha trasformato in una sorta di figura paterna per il circolo dei suoi amici e di conseguenza anche per sua moglie. In definitiva, lui stesso ha creato intorno a sé un universo morale distorto, il quale, però, si oppone fortemente alla natura della sua professione.

La scelta da parte di Dick nei confronti di Nicole è anche dettata dal voler deliberatamente imitare suo padre che tanto ammira; il suo coinvolgimento in questa specie di ulteriore incesto emblematico può essere interpretato come un'estensione coerente del ruolo del padre nei termini della logica del sogno dell'inconscio. Tale situazione viene poi ripetuta quando Dick inizia una relazione con Rosemary: abbastanza grande per esserne il padre, Dick è pienamente consapevole che l'amore di Rosemary per lui è semplicemente un'infatuazione infantile, diverse volte esprime commenti sulla sua giovane età: "She's an infant"; "There's a persistent aroma of the nursery" (*TITN*: 188-189). Eppure, nonostante questa consapevolezza, non è immune al suo fascino, ed è lusingato dai suoi sforzi di seduzione (Pelzer 2000: 128).

Questo vuol dire che può essere visto come la manifestazione di quella ostilità edipica a lunga repressa: in altri termini, il bambino che ammira e imita la cortese gentilezza di suo padre è contemporaneamente consapevole della sessualità nascosta di quel padre. Così, quando nella vita adulta il bambino assume lui stesso il ruolo del padre nella forma dell'incesto, espone, nel modo più odioso concepibile per lui, l'ipocrisia del padre.

Il dramma di una rottura della relazione padre-figlio che esprime la disfunzione psichica dei personaggi è centrale in *Tender*: se i critici tradizionalmente si sono lamentati della difficoltà di assegnare una causa adeguata al collasso di Dick Diver, è perché Fitzgerald non rende possibile vedere immediatamente e ovviamente comprendere questa azione sotterranea: "Though it pervades the book, it does so in an oblique and appropriately 'unconscious' way, and this is an

[7] Tra l'altro, lo stesso Gregorovious incoraggia la relazione tra i due, dice a Dick: "It was the best thing that could have ever happened to her […] a transference of the most fortuitous kind" (*TITN*: 137).

important, if not fatal, lapse of Fitzgerald's craft. It is, however, an understandable lapse" (Murphy 1973: 321).

Fitzgerald, dunque, traduce in termini letterari la teoria psicoanalitica di Freud relativa all'incesto, causando non poco disappunto tra i critici contemporanei; in una lettera, il suo amico John Peale Bishop gli confessa che proprio il tema dell'incesto era la parte che meno lo convinceva del romanzo: "The one point in the book which stuck for me was the incest. I couldn't quite believe it. Nor do I think it was necessary. But it's done, and is being forgotten" (Grogan 2016: 339). Il critico letterario Milton Hindus supera l'affermazione di Bishop, affermando: "Ignores the novel's stated facts, and goes so far as to assume that Nicole was never raped by Daddy, that it was all in her mind, and that Dick was a sexually stupid psychiatrist foolish enough to believe her" (Grogan 2016: 27).

Molti critici seguono la teoria di Hindus sostenendo che Fitzgerald avesse utilizzato l'incesto solamente come metafora del declino della civiltà occidentale, una lettura questa proposta per primo da Robert Stanton nel 1958 in "'Daddy's Girl': Symbol and Theme in *Tender is the Night*", il quale ritiene abbia un significato maggiormente culturale, soprattutto in relazione al fatto che Dick successivamente nel romanzo ha una relazione extraconiugale con la giovane Rosemary: in tal caso, lo stesso Dick sarebbe il simbolo di un'America che indulge sempre più nella dissipazione e nella anarchia morale (Stanton 1985: 140). Il film di Rosemary Hoyt *Daddy's Girl* con il tema delle incestuose relazioni padre-figlia fornisce una metafora centrale, come dimostra Ruth Prigozy, per il declino di una civiltà che, dopo una guerra sanguinosa, segnala l'ascesa di una cultura popolare che idealizza la gioventù e l'edonismo e il declino della genitorialità e di altre autorità tradizionali (Sanderson 2002: 190).

Inoltre, le radici del disturbo di Nicole possono essere ricondotte a un atto di incesto che si verifica contemporaneamente allo scoppio della guerra. David Ullrich scorge un parallelo rivelatore tra il tradimento del padre di Nicole e quello collettivo dei giovani idealisti mandati sul campo di battaglia dalla generazione più anziana. Il fatto che il padre di Nicole la porti in Europa su un veicolo militare collega anche la violenza psicologica dell'incesto con quella collettiva della guerra; la sua stessa guarigione iniziale è collegata all'armistizio: in questo senso, Fitzgerald combina drammi interpersonali e politici; l'atto della violenza sessuale nella sua forma più oscura, l'incesto, equivale a quella politica nel suo aspetto più disumano: la guerra (Roy 2018: 186).

3. La critica alla psicoanalisi

Durante il periodo della composizione del romanzo, la nuova scienza della psichiatria stava emergendo e si sperimentavano nuove terapie, tra cui l'ipnosi, la psicoanalisi, la ergoterapia e il trattamento con l'elettroshock. Uno dei temi più influenti era quello relativo alla "reeducation", anch'esso menzionato in *Tender*, e confermava l'inquietante ipotesi che la comunità medica agisse per subordinare le donne all'interno di una società sessista (Grogan 2016: 27): lo scopo ultimo della terapia non era necessariamente il recupero delle memorie traumatiche dall'amnesia in cui il paziente le aveva confinate, ma raggiungere un'alterazione fondamentale nell'adattamento cosciente delle pazienti al mondo esterno; in particolare, nel romanzo Nicole Warren non deve comprendere e guarire da quello che le è successo, ma fondamentalmente deve imparare ad affidarsi nuovamente agli uomini (Fetterley 1984: 140).

Per questo motivo, il romanzo presenta una sottile critica del campo della psichiatria, in particolare Fitzgerald sottolineerebbe il rapporto tra psichiatri di sesso maschile con pazienti donne[8] e il fatto che tale professione potrebbe essere stata usata come metodo per recuperare la virilità che pensavano di aver perso durante la Grande Guerra.

Nel caso specifico di Dick, le sue motivazioni per divenire psichiatra non sono nobili, in quanto, come molti altri psichiatri dei suoi tempi, viola il rapporto dottore-paziente in varie occasioni, soprattutto con quelle giovani e affascinanti. Dick rivela al Dr. Franz Gregorovius, che "he had 'bent' for going into the field of psychiatry – 'there was a girl at St. Hilda's in Oxford that went to the same lectures'" (*TITN*: 156-157). Inoltre, viene riferito che Dick era stato accusato di aver sedotto la figlia di un paziente: lui aveva ammesso di averla baciata, ma che non aveva interesse nello sviluppare ulteriormente la relazione (Grogan 2016: 32).

Un'altra critica posta implicitamente da Fitzgerald alla professione degli psichiatri riguarda la loro responsabilità etica nei confronti dei pazienti, in particolare che nella clinica di Gregorovius si dia maggiore attenzione non a chi ha bisogno realmente di aiuto, ma ai pazienti più agiati economicamente. Baby Warren, la sorella di Nicole, sembra confermare questo quando contempla di comprare un dottore per Nicole in quanto "what could be better in her condition than if she fell in love with some good doctor" (*TITN*: 172). In seguito, i Warren finanziano Dick

[8] Sembra che le relazioni tra psichiatri uomini e pazienti donne abbiano avuto una parte importante nei primi anni della psicoanalisi: il biografo di Freud, Ernest Jones fu implicato in varie relazioni con le sue pazienti; Sàndor Ferenczi, uno psichiatra ungherese molto vicino a Freud, è conosciuto per essere molto intimo con le sue pazienti e con la figlia di sua moglie; anche Carl Jung sembra aver violato l'etica professionale avendo una relazione con una sua studentessa, Sabina Spielrein, e non sappiamo se Fitzgerald fosse a conoscenza di questo, ma sappiamo che aveva letto Jung e che in varie occasioni aveva considerato il fatto di chiedergli di essere il medico di Zelda (Grogan 2016: 47).

e Franz per comprare la clinica di Braun in Zugersee per duecentoventimila dollari, un prezzo che sono disposti a pagare per curare la sorella.

Lo stesso atto incestuoso di Devereux Warren è legato all'elemento corrosivo del denaro: Warren può permettersi le spese di sanatori svizzeri e brillanti psichiatri, può persino acquistare una sorta di auto-assoluzione ed evitare la punizione: dopotutto, ha fornito a Nicole le migliori cure per guarire la sua psiche ferita (Pelzer 2000: 120).

Fitzgerald, il quale scambiava con gli psichiatri di Zelda lunghe lettere che diagnosticavano il suo caso, si considerava un esperto amatoriale delle malattie mentali (Sanderson 2002: 159), infatti, alcuni critici hanno elogiato la sua caratterizzazione di Nicole e per la sua evidente comprensione della vulnerabilità di una vittima di incesto (Fryer 1988: 159). Tra l'altro, sembra che Fitzgerald non fosse molto interessato a tracciare un modello coerente di un'entità psichiatrica definita in Nicole: nel suo personaggio mescola caratteristiche di ansia, isteria, malattia maniaco depressiva, schizofrenia e disturbo di personalità, ma d'altronde lo scrittore conviveva con tutto questo (Surawicz, Jacobson 2009: 113):

> In these two cases [Zelda and Nicole] surrendered control of critical parts of their psyches by projecting onto the apparent Dick and the real Scott their struggles. But neither Dick or Scott was capable of accepting these projections; Nicole and Zelda had to attempt to refocus upon themselves. […] Neither of them was strong enough to be the man that Zelda/Nicole needed (Applebaum 2016: 23).

Eppure, risulta utile evidenziare che lo scrittore dedica al personaggio di Nicole uno speciale trattamento all'interno del romanzo: lei è l'unica a narrare una parte della sua storia in prima persona, e la sola ad avere una sezione epistolare: sono presenti, infatti, alcune delle lettere che ha scritto a Dick, ma nessuna delle lettere di quest'ultimo a lei. Le lettere presentano Nicole come una persona estremamente intelligente, istruita e complicata, in lotta contro qualcosa di molto oscuro e doloroso. In particolare, le stesse rivelano la sua condizione patologica e suggeriscono anche che abbia compreso la sua malattia molto di più rispetto a quanto gli psichiatri della clinica vogliano ammettere; anzi, continuando a negarle la verità sulla sua condizione e sul suo vissuto traumatico, sono colpevoli di vittimizzarla nuovamente (Grogan 2016: 38). In due lettere nel romanzo, Nicole menziona suo padre: "Unless they will let me write my father, whom I loved dearly" (*TITN*: 139); l'uso della forma passata del verbo "love" suggerisce che ormai non ama più suo padre, ma la definizione della natura di questo amore non è chiara. In un'altra, Nicole rivela a Dick di aver scritto a suo padre per farlo venire alla clinica e portarla via; infine, in un'ulteriore lettera, esprime tutta la sua frustrazione per l'essere tenuta all'oscuro della vera origine del suo trauma:

> Here I am in what appears to be a semi-insane-asylum, all because nobody saw fit to tell me the truth about anything. If I had only known what was going on like I know now I could have stood it I guess for I am pretty strong, but those should have, did not see fit to enlighten me (*TITN*: 140)

Nicole con questa lettera non solo attacca l'istituzione della psichiatria per non averla chiaramente informata riguardo alla sua malattia, ma mostra anche una grande consapevolezza nel sapere di essere una vittima di un incesto. Nicole arriva a capire che i suoi problemi non derivino tanto dallo stupro in sé ma dal silenzio e dalle bugie che coprono l'accaduto e di cui Dick è in primo luogo colpevole. Nicole sembra quasi consapevole che questa cospirazione del silenzio sia attuata per impedirle di metabolizzare e guarire dal trauma. La terapia della "reeducation" viene dunque mostrata come una sorta di lavaggio del cervello implicato in questioni di genere sessuale.

La schizofrenia di Nicole, esplicitamente collegata da Fitzgerald all'evento specifico dell'incesto, offre inoltre un esempio di uno dei molti tipi di traumi nel testo (Joseph 2003: 67). Una caratteristica centrale del trauma e del disturbo da stress post-traumatico è la "repetition", che risulta peculiare nella malattia mentale di Nicole. Tale ripetizione è il tentativo della vittima di rivendicare la propria sopravvivenza; è un ciclo determinato dalla sua incapacità di assimilare o comprendere l'evento traumatico originale (Caruth 1997). Questa ripetizione traumatica, o rievocazione storica, sicuramente descrive la relazione e il matrimonio di Nicole con Dick. Come medico, Dick assume un ruolo paterno; è sia figura paterna che amante di Nicole. Attraverso l'incarnazione di Dick nella posizione paterna/protettiva del padre/amante, Dick e Nicole rievocano la relazione incestuosa che ha istigato la malattia di lei.

> The father, according to the incest taboo, must release his daughter into marriage, outside the family. Warren's greed is such that he fails in this exchange; he keeps his daughter for himself. The logic of accumulation transgresses the incest taboo, and Dick is hired to make good that transgression. The word 'cure' would be inappropriate. Dick as the good father supplants the bad father, restoring Nicole to integrity […] restoration involves blocking the trauma. Nicole is denied access to her father's offence. Secret keys proliferate on Dick's person: plainly he is the key to the case […] He holds the key to her case and keeps the door locked (Godden 2001).

Più tardi, Nicole rievoca l'evento originale ancora una volta nella relazione e più avanti con il matrimonio con Tommy Barban: in conclusione, Nicole non guarisce, non elabora le cause della nevrosi originaria, ma semplicemente cambia carnefice, nella speranza che il nuovo uomo sia una figura più forte rispetto a quella paterna che ha abusato di lei (Burton 1985: 138). Fitzgerald illustra simbolicamente l'assunzione da parte di Tommy del ruolo di Dick, quando Tommy indossa i suoi vestiti dopo aver trascorso la notte alla villa dei Diver. In un'ultima dimostrazione

della sua regressione, Nicole preferisce il guerriero Tommy Barban, simbolo della mascolinità primitiva nel testo, al sensibile ma debole padre-psichiatra (Sanderson 2002: 159):

> The structure of Nicole's love relationships to the three men in her life —father, husband, lover—reveals an element of aggression directed toward the previous man, from whom the successful rival promises to free her. Dick offers to rescue her from the mental illness triggered off by her father's incestuous advances. Barban promises to liberate her from her husband's incurable alcoholism. Love thus represents to Nicole an escape from an unhappy situation engendered by the abandonment of an earlier man in her life. She is astonishingly successful as a survivor. What we rarely see in *Tender Is the Night* is the full-blown marital warfare that inevitably accompanies the subtle betrayal of love. The rage and painful recriminations found in the Fitzgerald correspondence are largely absent from the novel. That part of the story may have been too terrible for Fitzgerald to write (Berman 2015: 44).

Certamente la vita di Nicole è vissuta sotto la direzione maschile; le decisioni sulla sua vita tendono a essere fatte dagli uomini con cui si trova a interagire: i suoi medici, i suoi amanti, i suoi amici. Gli uomini definiscono l'esistenza stessa di Nicole, di conseguenza con risultati tragici (Joseph 2003: 68). Eppure, emerge nel romanzo un'ulteriore lettura, seppure inquietante, quella che implica la colpevolezza della bambina/figlia Nicole nell'incesto commesso dal padre, in parte, in linea con il romanzo stesso, che è molte volte, come si è visto, esplicitamente ostile alle donne e incolpa Nicole della propria malattia e dello stupro incestuoso. Franz Gregorovius, collega di Dick alla clinica svizzera, spiega a Dick che all'inizio del suo ricovero Nicole percepiva complicità nell'incesto e che solo in seguito aveva cambiato la sua convinzione scivolando in una sorta di "phantom world" (*TITN*: 149), nel quale tutti gli uomini sono malvagi. Il mondo fantasma che sottintende Franz è quello in cui Nicole non ha complicità nell'incesto (Fetterley 1984: 226). Ammesso che tale complicità esista, pur non giustificando il disonesto comportamento del padre nei confronti di una giovane donna sensibile alle adulazioni, Dick contribuisce a peggiorare la sua malattia, continuando a proteggerla dalla verità: non arriva mai a capire che potrebbe essere abbastanza forte da comprendere il suo lato più oscuro, che quegli stessi impulsi primitivi e perversi possano far parte della natura umana.

Fitzgerald, quindi, mostra il modo in cui questo trauma è ciclico e autoreplicante. Il trauma è qualcosa che viene rivissuto, riattualizzato, un fatto che diventa evidente con molti altri personaggi traumatizzati nel romanzo. Come psichiatra, Dick assume un ruolo paterno di fiducia; tuttavia, quando diventa amante e marito di Nicole, viola l'etica professionale, rispondendo al *transfer* amoroso del suo paziente con un "countertransference", una mossa trasgressiva come l'incesto (Sanderson 2002: 159). Lo stesso rapporto incestuoso con Rosemary lo lega e lo pone in confronto con Devereux Warren, e rivela il suo fallimento come padre responsabile (Sanderson

2002: 68). La morte del padre di Dick poco prima che questi consumi la sua relazione con Rosemary simbolicamente lo mette in parallelo con la propria personale perdita di autorità e autodisciplina. In ultima istanza, anche la caduta di Dick simboleggia più in generale il fallimento della società patriarcale.

4. La questione della *gender ideology*

Attraverso l'uso della metafora dell'incesto e della malattia psichiatrica, Fitzgerald pare dunque aver voluto esprimere il suo disagio per la femminilizzazione della cultura americana e per la minaccia di evirazione che seguì gli eventi della Grande Guerra (Sanderson 2002: 161). Durante il periodo post-bellico, la questione del *gender* acquista grande rilevanza: mentre gli uomini sono al fronte a combattere, le donne iniziano ad assumere ruoli che fino ad allora erano stati loro sempre negati, come prendere decisioni per la gestione anche economica delle questioni domestiche. Inoltre, le suffragiste iniziano a lottare per avere una rappresentanza politica, altre ancora sostituiscono come operaie nelle industrie gli uomini che sono al fronte, o si arruolano loro stesse come infermiere e viaggiano attraverso l'Europa (Joseph 2003: 64).

Nel romanzo, tale fluidità di genere è ampiamente dimostrata: Nicole, infatti, si identifica con le responsabilità maschili convenzionali, anzi, con la mascolinità stessa. Non solo ha designato il marito a essere una governante e un'infermiera, ma evita anche il ruolo di madre. Quando comunica, immagina se stessa come "masculine":

> "Talk is men. When I talk I say to myself that I am probably Dick. Already I have been my own son, remembering how wise and slow he is. Sometimes I am Doctor Dohmler and one time I may even be an aspect of you, Tommy Barban" (*TITN*: 183).

In un certo senso, Nicole sembra percepire un mondo in cui il genere può essere scardinato e non fissato: può assumere le funzioni di un uomo quando la situazione lo richiede. Ma il "talk" non può ancora essere immaginato come qualcosa di accettabile all'interno della femminilità, inoltre, imitando gli uomini, Nicole ricorda anche quelle figure paterne che hanno partecipato al suo trauma (Washington 1995: 61):

> Gender roles are completely switched; women control the family finances while Dick controls the social sphere, arranges dinner parties, and "takes care" of other people. […] Baby and Nicole determine what style of living the Divers will maintain; Dick's "job" is to make that life as pleasant as possible. […] here it is women who determine the family's social standing, who dictate lifestyle to men (Herndl 1993: 204).

Il personaggio di Nicole Diver è usato in modo analogo nell'intero romanzo come mezzo per rappresentare la colpa, la follia e lo sviluppo del decadimento che permea tutte le scene principali.

Nel dipingerla, Fitzgerald è riuscito a superare la tentazione di presentare semplicemente una versione unidimensionale della sua vita con Zelda. La schizofrenia di Nicole è la chiave per interpretare i vari gradi di tensione psicologica impressi sull'azione narrativa del romanzo. Il suo crollo alla conclusione del primo libro e la sua cura verso la fine del terzo libro comprendono i due maggiori *climax* strutturali di *Tender*. La sua precarietà psicologica, aberrata dal trauma vissuto, la spingono a un matrimonio infelice e corrotto: capisce che per liberarsi deve prima rielaborare tutto il suo passato (Stevens 1961: 100):

> Where she had played planet to Dick's sun […] she knew last the number on the dreadful door of fantasy, the threshold to the escape that was no escape; she knew that for her the greatest sin now and in the future was to delude herself. It had been a long lesson, but she had learned it. Either you think – or else others have to think for you, and take power over you, pervert and discipline your natural tastes, civilize and sterilize you (*TITN*: 321).

Nicole diverrà sempre più forte, e sarà lei questa volta a compatire il marito che sta diventando una vittima dell'alcolismo e di un'esistenza senza scopo: ora è giunto il suo momento di aiutarlo e proteggerlo, ma a ruoli invertiti lei non ha nessuna intenzione di sostenere Dick e salvarlo dall'inerzia (Surawicz, Jacobson 2009: 114). Dick ha finalmente smesso di esercitare il controllo su di lei: è divenuto inutile e superfluo, e alla fine del romanzo Nicole scappa via con i figli e con il suo nuovo amante più giovane e più forte.

Per quanto riguarda Dick, come psichiatra è ben consapevole delle implicazioni psicologiche del trauma post-bellico[9] e, quando ironicamente si autodiagnostica un "non-combatant's shell shock" (*TITN*: 202), sa di non poter ripristinare l'ordine patriarcale in un mondo nel quale il genere è divenuto così fluido, eppure con il matrimonio con Nicole tenta di riaffermare la propria mascolinità e rivendicare lo *status* di eroe di guerra (Joseph 2003: 71). Nel romanzo Dick mostra diversi connotati femminili: appare in scena "clad in trasparent black lace drawers" (*TITN*: 29), mentre Nicole chiede esplicitamente al marito "Are you a sissy?" (*TITN*: 138). In questo senso, con questo trattamento ambiguo del genere dei suoi due protagonisti, Fitzgerald sta effettivamente rappresentando la cronaca veritiera degli effetti della guerra su di un'intera generazione.

Fitzgerald credeva che uomini e donne avessero una natura complementare e temeva che un allentamento delle distinzioni binarie di genere incoraggiasse semplicemente le parti ad adottare le peggiori caratteristiche dell'altro sesso (Pennington, Gibbens 1994: 35). Nei suoi scritti

[9] Il trauma post-bellico è un trauma di genere in virtù della sua stretta e interdipendente connessione con i concetti di mascolinità e femminilità, infatti gli uomini che hanno sofferto di trauma post-bellico sono stati frequentemente stigmatizzati come non virili (Bourke 1999).

spesso la rottura delle identità sessuali è segno della rottura delle certezze morali della società (Stern 2002: 41). Pertanto, spesso esprime la paura del suo periodo che la femminilizzazione culturale fosse un sintomo di un disordine più ampio: il declino dell'Occidente. In questo senso, mediante la metafora dell'incesto e la critica alla psicoanalisi, *Tender is the Night* rivela anche l'inadeguatezza delle risposte maschili alla femminilizzazione culturale che procedeva al termine della Prima guerra Mondiale (Sanderson 2002: 161).

Ciononostante, il romanzo di Fitzgerald ci ricorda che la psichiatria, un nuovo campo di competenza maschile, ebbe un ruolo strumentale nell'enorme contraccolpo che mise in dubbio l'emancipazione delle donne e reinscrisse le differenze di genere tra uomini e donne che le tendenze moderne minacciavano di cancellare (Sanderson 2002: 161). L'uso originale da parte di Fitzgerald del nascente freudismo e delle sue intuizioni sulla patologia individuale e culturale rappresenta una vivida metafora delle convenzioni societarie, di quell'idealismo americano che si rifiuta di vedere che il mondo sta cambiando ed è cambiato (DiBattista 1977: 36): lo stesso ordine rappresentato dalla ricchezza (i padri di *TITN*), è divenuto solo un costrutto artificiale, in questo nuovo mondo il logico risultato rimane solo il caos imperante (amoralità, egoismo, incesto, eccetera) (Pitcher 1981: 87):

> But madness and incest are not what the novel is about. It is about a world in transition, when established values crumble, when human society's ideas of goodness, stability, and moral purpose are lost in corruption, and when the emerging society has not yet discovered a reason or a way to regain them. *Tender is the Night* is about the moral chaos attendant upon violent, if inevitable, change in the Western world in the twentieth century – and perhaps in all human worlds in all places and times. The tale of a dying fall is told in the story of one good man ruined in that process of change and, in his way, representative of it, in all its sad and tremendous history (Stern 2002: 116).

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"O Rose thou art sick": unravelling social implications of body and mind's sickness in William Blake's poems of Experience

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Abstract

William Blake lived through an intense period of historical, economic and social changes that was evolving under the machines and factories of the Industrial Revolution. By living in London his whole life, he became a witness of the transformation of the city and of what E. P. Thompson (1966: 446) defines as "the violent technological differentiation between work and life." Indeed, he witnessed the consequences of the lack of social plans or social reforms leading to unemployment, poverty, child mortality, exploitation, wild urbanisation, precarious health conditions and the spread of diseases, STDs included (see Stevenson 2012: 229-253). Moreover, Blake used his works of art to condemn the institutions of power, which mostly acted in line with their own personal interests and forgot human needs, according to what Claudia Corti (2000: 18) describes as a radical and prophetic debate against the institutionalised churches and revealed religions. By looking closely at the poem, *The Sick Rose*, which will be compared with the last stanza of the poem *London*, this paper aims at investigating the symbolical meaning of the works with reference to the spreading of venereal diseases in 1790s London. By proceeding with a close textual analysis, and the study of the icono-texts, the paper will show that Blake's extended metaphors, symbols and images can be read and interpreted on two different levels: the former condemns STDs, seen as a social plague and as a result of a somewhat cruel tendency of both religious and governmental institutions. The latter unravels the implications of bodily contagious infections within humankind's capacity to interpret and live the world.

William Blake lived in London all of his life from 1757 until 1820 (apart from three years he spent by the seaside, in Felpham, in West Sussex). Therefore, he can be defined as the product of a country and of a city that was changing its aspect and organisation, which was paving the way to the modern city it is still today and which was transforming into an industrial centre, being already a commercial one. According to Porter Coy, who outlines a complete picture of the English metropolis in his study *London. A social history*, the city "became a wonder city" and it "became a European marvel too" (Porter 2000: 157). Population increased enormously, new markets opened, trade flourished and the manufacturing industry developed. The city in which Blake had all of his experiences had become "the greatest manufacturing centre of the nation," as Jerry White clearly states (2012: 202) in his "biography" of the city. Consequence of the tremendous industrial, demographic, economic and urban growth of the English capital was that

"people were sucked into London. And those who remained in the country increasingly had their lives shaped by the demands of the metropolis" (Porter 2000: 160).

Those workers who moved to the city, which soon started to become overcrowded, were arriving from all over the country looking for jobs and, hopefully, better lives. However, what they found was often not what they were looking for, as London, despite its modernisation, had not yet enough or adequate infrastructures to accommodate them, nor to offer them a decent life. Social differences and urban inequality began to increase throughout the century. Jerry White (2012: 106) in his book, reports the words of an American soldier who was living in London at the end of the century and whose comment on the many paradoxes that the city seemed to embrace is enlightening. He claimed that "there is not perhaps another city of its size in the whole world, the streets of which display a greater contrast in the wealth and misery, the honesty and knavery, of its inhabitants than the city of London."

Blake would walk through London and see how life and work were transforming, he would observe and feel poverty and he would understand that an entire world was trying to make a living among those streets. The city he experienced "was at once a city of dramatic improvements […] and a city of great, and increasing, difficulty for many […] of its inhabitants" (Makdisi 2019: 278).

In his contribution about "Blake's London," Saree Makdisi (2019: 279) refers to Henry Mayhew's journalistic work *London's Labour and the London Poor* that was published in the 1850s. In this survey and documentation of the working people in the early Victorian London, Mayhew makes a list of several professions that people of the time would have chosen or entered and that Makdisi assumes would not be so different from those that Blake could have recorded and had to deal with during his own times. Besides others, there would have been costermongers, street performers, street artisans, chimneysweepers, working pedlars, crossing-sweepers, lamp-lighters, tinkers, dusters, street musicians, street scavengers and finders, pickers, cigar-end finders, coal finders and, obviously, prostitutes (Makdisi 2019: 280).

Everything the English poet observed, reflected upon, experienced and lived would successively come alive in his works. As a matter of fact, *London* is truly the name of the poem that condenses, in a few perfect lines, the artist's personal depiction of the city and in which, according to J. D. Michael (2006: 71) Blake "transforms the commonplace notion of London's superficial dirtiness into signs of deeper corruption, a corruption that threatens the same social institutions that perpetuate it." *London* represents, therefore, also the poet's contempt and condemnation for those institutions that he considered responsible for the limitations of man's original and truest nature: the State and the Church, which Blake often used to consider as a sole body that he called "State Religion" (E618).

In his annotations (where we can find the abovementioned expression) to the letters that compose *An Apology for the Bible,* written by the bishop of Llandaff Richard Watson as an answer to the radical ideas of Thomas Paine concerning religion, Blake compares the judicial system to the Old Testament laws, perpetrating further violence in the name of God.

> Penal Laws court Transgression & therefore are cruelty & Murder
> The laws of the Jews were (both ceremonial & real) the basest & most
> oppressive of human codes. & being like all other codes given under pretence

> of divine command were what Christ pronouncd them The Abomination that maketh desolate, i.e State Religion which is the Source of all Cruelty
> (*Annotations to An Apology for the Bible*, E618)

Laws, restrictions (including the Ten Commandments and the way they had been and continued to be used - which Blake often defines as "Moral Law") and the fear of God embody what Blake refers to as the "Fall" of humanity. The "Fall," to the English artist, implies the loss of liberties, of infinity and that of the imaginative creative power, which had been part of the primeval humanity's identity and that, he thought, had gone lost. The "Moral Law" is the result of the humankind's behaviour and decisions throughout history and it is mostly to consider the act of those very same aforementioned institutions of power, which over the times purposefully made use of the Bible as an instrument of coercion rather than a work of prophetic vision.
Saree Makdisi clarifies the function of the moral codes to the English poet as follows:

> By directing our individual actions and seeking to make us adhere to certain moral codes conveyed to us in the act of reading itself, particularly reading the Bible (…), these moral codes serve as the very backbone of state religion, and hence of the power of the state. Or in other words, the state depends for the exercise of its power not simply on armies or police forces but above all on our regulation as morally instructed individuals (Makdisi 2015: 91).

In the streets of London, William Blake, was able to see where the State Religion's actions could lead to and this is clearly exemplified in the famous poem that bears the name of the city:

> I wander thro' each charter'd street,
> Near where the charter'd Thames does flow.
> And mark in every face I meet
> Marks of weakness, marks of woe
>
> In every cry of every Man,
> In every Infants cry of fear,
> In every voice: in every ban,
> The mind-forg'd manacles I hear
>
> How the Chimney-sweepers cry
> Every blackning Church appalls,
> And the hapless Soldiers sigh
> Runs in blood down Palace walls
>
> But most thro' midnight streets I hear
> How the youthful Harlots curse
> Blasts the new-born Infants tear
> And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse
> (*London*, E25-26)

We will therefore agree that the poem condenses Blake's denounce of the exploitation and submission of humanity, in a city, whose streets embody a whole world (which is the modern world of the 18th century but whose decay traces back to the times of old in which mankind had fallen), that is entrapped in the grip of the famous "mind-forged manacles." The consequences

of the "bans," orders and commands imposed by the economic, political and religious institutions affected the people in their entirety. Correspondingly, the "marks" of the tyranny and violence inflicted by the State and the Church became tangible and altered Londoners' bodies, voices and actions.

The last stanza of the poem is of particular interest as it depicts a distinctive picture of the time in which Blake was living and paves the way for a reflection on the theme of contagion seen as a result of political and social issues, which were real when Blake was writing, but which can also be interpreted in a more general and universal perspective.
The famous lines, which sound as follows:

> But most thro' midnight streets I hear
> How the youthful Harlots curse
> Blasts the new-born Infants tear
> And blights with plagues the Marriage hearse
> (*London,* 13-16, E26).

have been often analysed by the critics as the description of a precise social condition, whose results are more than clear. Also, the stanza contains a further condemnation of those same institutions appearing in the previous stanzas, which eventually seem to be absent and unable to find any solution to the appalling situations which are affecting the city of London.

The focus of the stanza seems to lie primarily in the figure of the "Harlot." More specifically, according to Roti and Kent (1977: 19), whose article that appeared on the *Blake Quarterly* explicitly concentrated on the last lines of the poem, the meaning of the stanza is to be found in the way – the "how" – the "Harlot's curse blasts" and "blights" both the infant and the marriage. As a matter of fact, the curse coming from the woman, which ruined the life of the child and the future of the marriage, would stand for an unspecified venereal disease and, most importantly, for what it meant to contract such an infection at that time.
In the 18th century prostitutes were widely associated with venereal disease. Most of the times they were also believed to be the source of the infection.
Jerry White (2012: 370) in his "documentary" of 18th century London, reports the verses of an English MP, Mr Charles Hanbury Williams, who used to "spend time with" prostitutes and write

> : Down each Street the Bunters flow,
> Picking Pockets as they go
> Gently they each Corner call,
> Sultry Urine scorching all […].
> All alone, yet in Her Lap,
> The Temple Beau may get a Clap,
> Where, Pox'd, & Poxing, they shall own,
> The Pains of Love, are Pains alone[1].

[1] Ch.H. Williams, MSS 69, f. 72, 'Parody of His own Song in Comus' in White (2012: 370).

In addition to this White argues that «venereal disease was more common in London than elsewhere in the country» and that Mr Hanbury Williams

> «spoke from experience. The symptoms of venereal disease were so painful and so potentially dangerous, treatment with surgery and other mechanical intervention so agonising, 'salivation' with mercury so tiring and debilitating to mind and body, it is a wonder that the power of the prostitute was sufficient to obliterate these risks from the minds of those tempted to engage with her». (White, 2012: 370).

Eventually the English politician died of syphilis complications after accusing his wife of having infected him.

As Noelle Gallagher (2018) clearly maintains in her study on the representation of venereal disease, the "poxy whore" was also a well-represented type in both art and literature, invoked as an object of ridicule, a symbol of vice, a cautionary figure and much else besides" (Gallagher 2018: 62). There exist multiple examples of these kind of women, which include, for instance, Fielding's main character of the novel *Amelia* (1752) and the numerous engravings by Hogarth (*A Harlot's Progress*, 1732). The latter, for instance, depict the story of Molly Hackabout – a lady who became a prostitute after arriving in London – and consider the consequences of getting venereal infections.

In 18th century literature, as Noelle Gallagher again has shown in her monograph, the representation of an infected prostitute had multiple associations, meanings and features. Some writers would depict prostitutes as inhuman, the embodiment of evil; some others used them as the "target to implicate wider moral or social evils" (Gallagher 2018: 63). Also, they were used as a symbol of "self-selling" and, sometimes, as an extended metaphor of the consequences of capitalism, as symbol of corruption or, more simply, they ended up representing "the other" (Gallagher 2018: 122).

Furthermore, syphilis, in the London of the 18th century, had reached the numbers of an epidemic. A recent study shows that in the 1770s "individual—of either sex—who lived in the metropolis throughout the age range 15–34 years (…) would have had above a 20 per cent chance of having submitted themselves to the ardours of residential treatment for the pox" (Szreter, Siena 2020: 3). This means that the disease had widely spread among the whole population. According to the same study an entire hospital, which had been destined only to the treatment of venereal disease (the Lock Hospital), had opened in London in 1748. Plus, three other hospitals had "foul wards" in which doctors dedicated themselves to the cure of the infections, while the workhouses' infirmaries were always full of patients who needed to be treated (Szreter, Siena 2020: 2-4).

In addition to that, a diffuse state of fear lingered all over the country since "infection seemed to be lurking around every corner" (Gallagher 2018: 1). Everybody was afraid to catch the "taint" or "the French Disease" or "Morbus Gallicus" or the "Pox", as the disease was called by many, because it was extremely widespread among all classes, genders and ages. It definitely was a "plague" that affected the whole society.

In *London*, all the characters mentioned, such as the Infant, the Chimney Sweeper, the Soldier, the chartered Thames even and, most importantly, the Prostitute (who is here, as it has

been already mentioned, defined as the "Harlot" in order to give a sense of doom by choosing a biblical term) are affected by the "plagues" of the society. In fact, they are intended as the products of the "mind-forged manacles", imposed by the capitalistic, limiting, hypocritically morally-focused society in which the English population was living in the 18th century.

However, it is the actions of the Harlot, whose curse is the protagonist of the last lines, that need to be considered as having a certain peculiarity here and need further investigation. Linked by an alliteration and almost parallel in subsequent lines, the verbs "blast" and "blight" stand out in these last lines and seem to carry with them the intrinsic meaning of the whole stanza. Therefore, it seems pertinent here to follow the path chosen by Roti and Kent (1977) again in their article, who pay considerable attention to the analysis of the meaning of the two verbs and who start by exploring their etymological significations, that can be found in the Oxford English Dictionary. Namely, according to the same dictionary, the verb "to blast" refers to "a sudden infection destructive of vegetable or animal life"; or to "a blasted bud or blossom" and, also, it seems to be synonymous of the following actions: "to wither, shrivel or arrest vegetation, to blight". Hence, the meaning of the verb substantially implies the action of destroying a plant through a disease.

As regards the verb "to blight", it would essentially present the same meaning explored so far, as it mostly refers to "any baleful of atmospheric or invisible origin that suddenly blasts, nips, or destroy plants, affects them with disease, arrest their growths, or prevents their blossoms from setting".

It seems clear that the extended meaning of both verbs, which alludes to the botanic discourse, is very important and it will be given the right space for analysis further in the study. As for now, it is necessary to take into consideration the more general signification of the verbs, that is to say, that concerning the spreading of a disease and, by extension, of a venereal disease. The disease implied in the verbs "to blast" and "to blight" carries with it the power to destroy, and in *London*, it results in destroying both the infant's eyes and the marriage.

As concerns the condition of the Infant, Blake is here probably referring to what we call today congenital syphilis, an affliction which allowed the disease to be passed over from the mother to the children and whose one of the most common symptoms would be ocular discharge, which would eventually lead to blindness.

As far as the marriage is concerned instead, here the reference to the disease is even more explicit since the verb "to blight" is used together with the term "plagues". The Prostitute, in this London society, would destroy the sacred union by insinuating, i.e., infecting, the "marriage". This would be possible as the husband, the one who had "enjoyed the favours" of the infected woman, would pass the disease to his unaware wife (and consequently, or possibly, to their children).

The miserable union between a man and a woman, which is described by Blake with the famous oxymoron "Marriage hearse", seems, apparently, to be one of the victims of the Harlot's infectious curse. However, if one pays more attention to the line, it will be clear that this syntagma's meaning does not describe the results of the infected prostitute's actions on the doomed couple, but it describes an endemic condition of the marriage itself; a disease which permanently characterises the union despite the infection. The marriage, as the poem presents it, is already "ruined" before receiving the plagues from the Prostitute. Consequently, the latter cannot be held accountable for ruining it, as she is not the cause but the result of an ill society.

Prostitution and the social consequences of venereal disease are to be considered, therefore, the outcome of the limits and the moral constrictions imposed by the institutions among which marriage is to be included. Saree Makdisi, in his studies on Blake, compares marriage to other governmental institutions such as the "institutions of commerce, state religion, and state power" (Makdisi 2015: 80). Such institutions have barred humanity into a spiral of limits, exploitation and loss of conscience and sight, which resulted in the appalling conditions that the whole society was suffering in the times of Blake.

Under these circumstances, marriage cannot but be compared to a carriage leading to a funeral because, primarily, to get married deprives human beings of their liberties. In the 18th century, as everyone knows, most of the times marriage didn't epitomize a matter of love, but it resulted into an act that was almost always conditioned by economic and social pressure. Moreover, marriage can definitely be compared to a "hearse" also because, representing an institution of power, it could lead humankind straight to what Blake called the "Eternal Death". With these two words Blake would represent the fallen state of Man; a state in which humanity had lost its imaginative conscience. Consequently, marriage in the corrupted, hypocritical and constrictive society of the 18th century, seems to only lead towards that final state of the human consciousness, as well as other institutions of power do.

Accordingly, marriage, in this appalling and infected society, and the same act of reproduction, which should have been the natural result of the life of a couple, can only be seen, as Saree Makdisi clearly points out, as "just another form of labor, just as entrapping, just as exploitative, as other forms of exploitation that sustain the wider economy of extraction and abuse of power that is ruled over by kings and priests in their castles and high spires" (Makdisi 2015: 80). Therefore, the "Infant's tear" and the "Harlot's curse" turn up to be not the source of the infection but the outcome and almost the product of the society.

However, society, to Blake, is not only a historical concept. The society he usually refers to in his poems is both modern and ancient at the same time. What the English poet would like his readers to realise is that humanity is experiencing a fallen society that had forgotten its origin and that had lost conscience of its divinity and its creative powers. The fallen society in which humanity has been living since the moment it has lost its grip on imagination, it is the same in which Albion (Blake's mythological character embodying the whole mankind) would declare "here will I build my Laws of Moral Virtue! / Humanity shall be no more: but war & princedom & victory"! (*Jerusalem*, 1:31-32, E147), meaning that society is doomed to be subjected to an infectious tyranny until it decides to act and change.

What infection represents, the way it spreads and is able to ruin something which is as natural as the human being, is the theme of another very famous poem by Blake: *The Sick Rose*.

O Rose thou art sick.
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm:

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy:
And his dark secret love

> Does thy life destroy
> (*The Sick Rose*, E23)

This poem has been interpreted in so many ways over the centuries, but what this study will try to demonstrate is that the meaning of *The Sick Rose* can also pertain to Blake's enlarged reflection on the consequences of venereal disease. Also, it will be shown that this new understanding of the poem is tightly bound to and somehow moves from the last stanza of the poem *London* that has just been analysed. Furthermore, the following analysis would try to show that there is a strong intratextual and icono-textual dialogue between the two poems (Heidmann: 2015, 2017); through words and images the two writings clearly communicate.

To begin with, it is fundamental to remember that, Blake's copies of *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, in which both poems are inscribed, are all different from one another. Blake changed the order of the poems and each one of the copies the artist personally composed and engraved is to be considered as an original. Nonetheless, there is the copy A of the volume, stored at the British Museum, dated 1795, in which the poem *London* and the *The Sick Rose* come one after the other. We can therefore assume that Blake had in mind, and in those years, a certain sequentiality as regards the two poems.

Many of the interpretations of *The Sick Rose* tend to give to the symbol of the rose and the worm the meaning of "Life" and "Death," or "Innocence and Experience," seeing the action of the worm as the "cruder deceptions of Experience," as Harold Bloom (1963: 135) defines it. Most of the same interpretations also agree on the sexual symbolism, reading the two images more specifically as the equivalent male and female genitalia or the embodiment of a more general feeling such as love being destroyed by selfishness. However, by looking at the two poems synoptically, the symbolism could also be read as the representation of the causes and consequences of a venereal disease infection together with a more general depiction of what it means to be infected in the world of Experience; i.e. to be part of the "fallen world" of Eternal Death and Moral Law which has been dealt with earlier in this study.

In order to do that, the verbs "blight" and "blast," as they appeared in the poem *London*, will be here analysed further, taking into account their extended meaning, that is to say, the one highlighting the effect of the verbs as describing an infection ruining vegetation and, mainly, the bud of a flower. I would argue that through an intratextual and icono-textual dialogue (Heidmann 2015; 2017), the meaning of these verbs, appearing in the poem *London*, has been transferred into a new "scenography," which is that of the images – developing into both words and images - building up the structure of *The Sick Rose*.

In the *The Sick Rose*, the action of "blighting" is taken over by the worm that, as the symbol of infection and destruction – which happens concretely through male genitalia and ideally through an "invisible" force – insinuates into the core of a rose and destroys its life. Consequently, the rose is to be interpreted as the infected partner, as well as "Life" itself. From the poem *London* we assist to a sort of an overturning of the sexual forces which take part into this infectious cycle. While in *London* the infection was ignited by the "Harlot" (though the Harlot is not to be considered guilty for that), here it is perpetrated by the worm, which clearly indicates a male force. I would argue, therefore, that infection, to Blake, is something that involves everybody indistinctively. Moreover, the social plague concerning STDs is clearly an issue whose solution

lies not with the hunt of the "plague spreader," but with the awareness of the social, political, economic and cultural reasons of the contagion.

Another linguistic element that indicates the connection with the venereal disease discourse in *The Sick Rose* is the adjective "secret" in the line mentioning the "dark secret love." What gets the rose sick is a "dark secret love," indeed.

In the 18th century, it was common to define syphilis as the "secret malady" because, even though the features and the consequences of the disease started to be publicly debated (in newspapers, novels, medical treatises etc), the contraction of the illness was still considered a dishonour. To suffer from syphilis was believed to be a disgrace, above all among women, as the whole issue was linked to the sexual life of a person. What's more, becoming infected with syphilis was also a shame as the supposed reasons of contagion totally overturned the standards of prudery and morality which society demanded.

Secrecy, in the poem, is the cause of destruction; notably, of the destruction of "Life," which is epitomized by "the crimson Joy" of the rose.

To Blake, "joy" is another extremely important term. Joy represents the ultimate state in Blake's poetic and thought, it embodies the state of total awareness of the human being's divinity and infinity; the state which recognises unity into multiplicity and difference, a condition which is achieved through "an expansive flourishing of being and desire" (Makdisi 2015: 71). Therefore, joy is infinite energy, even sexual energy, which cannot be restricted or limited. Also, joy is the force that allows humanity to go beyond the restrictions of the five senses and enable them to see there is no difference between the world of imagination and the phenomenological world or, as this case epitomizes, between the world of nature and the human world. Nevertheless, joy can be destroyed if the system is infected.

However, there is a way, according to Blake, to awake in the humankind the awareness of what joy really is and represents. To the English poet the only path accessible to get back to joy is to create and enjoy art. In other words, this is possible by way of the very poems that Blake is offering to his readers. Namely, it is through the juxtaposition of abstract and concrete terms, which represents the core of his writings, that Blake manages to reconfigure the capacity of seeing unity into multiplicity (as is the case of the rose's joy here or the worm's flying in the storm, or the worm's love). In other words, what interests Blake more and what guides his reader through his poems, is the discovery and the consequent analysis of mental associations and analogies (D'Agata D'Ottavi 2001: 57) existing between the objects he describes and depicts.

The same juxtaposition is reflected into the double language of Blake's art, which is figurative and literary at the same time: a "composite art," like Mitchell (1978) has notoriously defined it.

Blake's art can be seen as the poet's own linguistic and concrete attempt to materialise what he called his "double vision" and to give a voice to his inward eye[2], which is the manifestation of the human imagination.

In *The Sick Rose* the juxtaposition as the only path to essence and complexity is achieved through the dialogue existing between text and images, because even though the story of the

[2] "For double the vision my Eyes do see / And a double vision is always with me / With my inward Eye 'tis an old Man grey / With my outward a Thistle across my way" (Letter to Thomas Butt, 27-30; E721).

infected rose is that of a destruction, the drawing in which the poem is inscribed tells the readers and the viewers another story.

It has been argued so far that contagion as a form of restricted liberty – and venereal disease as the modern societal manifestation of it – was an issue that affected a society which had substituted "Imagination" and "Vision" with "Moral Law" and which had not recovered them yet. Such society is for Blake part of the past and the present of humanity, as humans, who have lost their grip on imagination and creativity as a form of knowledge, are doomed to experience the "Fall" at every stage of their lives (and that's also the reason why past and present often overlap and fuse into one another in Blake's writings).

In addition to that, however, Blake considered the limits (the world of "Experience," the "Error" of mankind and, in other words, the "Fall") not as something totally negative, but as the point of departure for a renewal that should have, hopefully, been the apocalyptic event of an indeterminate future. Blake believed the world of "Experience" to be a bundle of energy that would have eventually reached out and embraced the world of Innocence. This process leading to change should have involved the hermeneutic skills of an active audience. Consequently, Blake engraved his poems with images and texts that create on the page a material and manifested world, which will eventually guide the readers and the viewers to imagine and recover that same condition that humankind had lost and from which it had fallen. This would happen because readers and viewers need to activate their creative powers in order to give a sense to what they are dealing with.

In *The Sick Rose* the icono-textual dynamic, that is to say the dialogue between the text and the image, is what triggers the audience's imaginative and creative powers. Specifically, the drawing in which the text of the poem is inscribed, doesn't only depict the bud of the rose in which a worm is insinuating and from which the figure of a woman is getting out with her arms stretched in the air. It shows much more.

The whole page is framed by thorny stems coming from the same infected rose plant, which, as Jessica Schwartz (2012) has demonstrated in her study on the worm trope in Blake's works, accommodate other forms of life. For instance, on the vines there is another worm, which looks like a caterpillar, and two other figures, which seem in-between the world of nature and the human world, coming out from their cocoons. These creatures basically make "the site of decay in the poem also that of generation" (Schwartz 2012: 137) and, one could add, renewal.

The dialogue between the text and the images, therefore, helps the readers construct and give way to their own "double vision" regarding the idea of contagion in general (and of the venereal disease as its most evident and societal consequence). On the one hand, contagion will eventually be seen as a human condition following mankind's deviation from its original being and identity, its departing from its own imaginative nature and its embracing of the hypocritical vision of the Moral Law that corrupted and swallowed any kind of social, political and economic construction. On the other hand, the destruction happening in this world of Experience, is to be interpreted as the basest point from which man cannot but start reflecting and acquiring new awareness of the world and of what it has become. Yet, the new form of knowledge acquired by people, as well as the energy originating from the discontent and the dissatisfaction of the human condition, can be

used by people themselves to move on and act in order to bring about change, just as a caterpillar's natural metamorphosis into a butterfly shows.
Furthermore, the image of the transforming worm, or the worm that brings about renewal and regeneration, will continue to translate Blake's hope for change as we can read from another extract belonging to a later long narrative poem: *Vala or the Four Zoas*

> For every thing that lives is holy for the source of life
> Descends to be a weeping babe
> For the Earthworm renews the moisture of the sandy plain
> (FZ, 2, 34 ll. 28-82 E324)

To conclude therefore, Blake's depiction of contagion and disease is not to be considered only as something negative, catastrophic or accusatory but, on the contrary, as something whose knowledge and comprehension can bring about awareness, action and, eventually, change.

This attitude might even be more important today in a world that is living through and hopefully overcoming a pandemic of such considerable dimensions. We should bear in mind that it is fundamental to start from the "Experience" (in a literal sense) we have had of a phenomenon to embed it in our conscience and, successively, use the knowledge acquired by dealing and coping with it, in order to start a change, which should always be for the better, and should set as an objective the well-being and protection of every single living being on earth.

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In the paper the abbreviation "E" is used for citations of works by Blake. It stands for *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, D. V. Erdman (edited by), New York, Anchor Books, 1988 and is followed by the number of the page of the volume in which Blake's work/poem can be found. (i.e. E25).

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Contact and Contamination Modes: An Analysis of Intertextual and Paratextual Elements in Alasdair Gray's *Poor Things* (1992)

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Abstract

The delineation of Scottish National identity has been largely investigated in literature together with the issue of the language: writing in English has been conceived for long by most Scottish authors as writing "in a 'foreign' language that does not adequately convey the Scottish way of thinking and thereby undermines Scotland's sense of identity" (Kaczvinsky 2001). This is particularly true for Scottish authors of prose fiction since the post-Act of Union cultural revival involved almost entirely poetry production. A sort of in-betweenness derived from the contact – and contrast – of two opposing cultures and languages emerges in many postmodernist Scottish authors whose works are permeated by that 'contrair spirit' that G. Gregory Smith first called "Caledonian Antisyzygy" (1919). In this connection, the proposed paper focuses on Alasdair Gray's novel *Poor Things* (1992) where split, divided selves distinguish most of its characters: Bella Baxter – a Frankenstein-like creature – ends up in personifying both Scotland and England in a "patchwork-like" construction of her opposing selves (Kirsten Stirling 2008). The same can be said about the whole novel in which intertextual and paratextual intrusions intertwine in a surprisingly new work of art. In particular, the paper aims at showing how overt and covert textual allusions operate as contaminating agents in a journey across a multitude of texts, genres, and voices. At the same time, several illustrations – the result of a reproduction by the author/artist – represent an opportunity of contamination across modes, the latter acquiring even more relevance in the author's self-adaptation for the screen where artistic hints are wisely integrated in the scene set to convey specific meanings.

1. Introduction

As early as 1919, in *Scottish Literature. Character & Influence* G. Gregory Smith strives to outline what in his words is "the character or habit of Scottish Literature" (1919: V) in a critical attempt to confute the stereotypical features associated with Scottish culture and then extended to Scottish literature. As a matter of fact, according to Alan Riach, after the Jacobite risings in the first half of the eighteenth century, bagpipes, kilt, and Gaelic became symbols of an oppressed culture, as

well as clichés of Scottish identity that endured in the collective imagination even in the following centuries (Riach 2009: 5-6).

The struggle for the re-affirmation of a distinctive culture and literature has represented a starting point for the twentieth-century 'Scottish Renaissance' of which Smith's *Scottish Literature. Character & Influence* forms its "prologue" (Craig 2007: 42): in his work, Smith deals with two main 'moods' resulting, from a thorough analysis, in the antithetical features of cohesion and division leading him to affirm that "the literature is remarkably varied, and that it becomes, under the stress of foreign influence and native division and reaction, almost a zigzag of contradictions" (Smith 1919: 4).

In such wise, Smith introduces the concept of 'Caledonian Antisyzygy', namely the idea of a 'contrair spirit' that permeates the works of most post-modernist Scottish authors and that generates a kind of in-betweenness derived from the contact – and contrast – of two opposing cultures and languages. In other words, fragmentation, contradiction, and duality are all expressions of the complicated construction of Scottish national identity soundly affected by the persistent controversial relationship with England perceived as a colonising power.

The 1707 union between England and Scotland is generally acknowledged as being a watershed that shaped modern Scotland both culturally and politically; however, the way in which it affected the delineation of Scottish national identity remains an ongoing debate predominantly focused on whether it had beneficial or adverse cultural effects (Manning 2007: 45). According to Kaczvinsky, the 1707 union was a political, economic, and cultural 'wedding' that generated "the crisis of national identity that is played out thematically in Scottish literature" (Kaczvinsky 2001: 781). Consequently, in the eighteenth century, Scottish writers felt somehow uncomfortable in using dialects in prose fiction, and "Scottish novelists would either write in an adopted English or write works using Scottish dialects in dialogue and Standard English for the rest of the narrative" (Kaczvinsky 2001: 782). In other words, "The major problem facing Scottish writers is that they must write in a 'foreign' language that does not adequately convey the Scottish way of thinking and thereby undermines Scotland's sense of identity" (Kaczvinsky 2001: 782).

The contact – or maybe contrast – between these two cultures and their languages generated contradictory feelings and standpoints that emerged vividly in twentieth-century Scottish writers such as Hugh MacDiarmid and Edwin Muir: while the former claims the need to write in Scots in order to revitalise Scottish literature, the latter is a strong supporter of the adoption of English as the most suitable language to revive Scottish national literature (Craig 2007: 42). MacDiarmid's perspective catalysed the so-called Scottish Literary Renaissance in the 1920s and his ideals regained ground in the last two decades of the twentieth century, when a new generation of Scottish writers tried to recover in Riach's words the ideal of self-determination (Riach 2009: 15).

Alasdair Gray is considered one amongst these new-generation writers whose works are permeated with a strong sense of nationalism: even though the author has always shown a certain reluctance in labelling himself as a postmodernist, his novel *Lanark* (1981) is generally acknowledged as being remarkably postmodern[1]. Anyway, if we agree with the assumption that

[1] In "(Scottish) Critic Fodder: On Why Alasdair Gray's Lanark isn't a Nationalist or a Postmodernist Text, Mostly" (2019) G.W. Churchman goes against the grain and proposes an alternative interpretation of Gray's novel in an attempt to invert a "critical habit". She does not deny the postmodern and nationalist reading of Gray's *Lanark*, but she underlines the need to broaden the critical approach to this work: in her words, "[I] propose an alternative Gray – a Gray who is both far more equivocal about Scottish nationalism, and far more closely aligned with a socialist humanist understanding of selfhood than previous readings have acknowledged. […] However, as Gray himself has pointed out (often in a somewhat exasperated fashion), to read his work solely in this vein pointedly ignores many of what I argue here are the most important aspects of

heterogeneity and indeterminacy are primary features of postmodernist writing (Polopoli 2014: 664), we cannot but consider Gray's works as deeply postmodernist.

According to Polopoli, one of the most strikingly postmodernist features of *Lanark* is its 'ontological heterogeneity', that is "the theoretical description of a plurality of universes or worlds which are placed in conflict, violating their boundaries" (Polopoli 2014: 664). The ideas of 'plurality of worlds' and 'violation of boundaries' acquire new shape in *Poor Things* (1992), a novel about the creation of a female Frankenstein-like creature in search of a personal identity who ends up in personifying both Scotland and England in a "patchwork-like" construction of her opposing selves (Kirsten Stirling 2008). The devising of a complex narrative frame, as well as the use of different levels of narration and standpoints, result in a series of parallelisms – and antiparallelisms – where many voices partake in a narrative constantly in-between facts and fantasy, past and present, words and pictures. The purpose of the present paper is to evidence how, in this eclectic literary rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), Alasdair Gray uses intertextual and paratextual connections as key features in order to invite the reader on a journey across a multitude of texts, genres, and voices following the process of construction of the protagonist's self. The narrative develops both textually and visually: the written text intertwines with the illustrations made – or rather reproduced – by the author/artist himself accounting for a deep 'contamination' across modes that often acquires a parodic dimension. Moreover, a television script of *Poor Things* – obviously written by Gray – followed the novel and appeared in a collection of writings published in 2009: this process of self-rewriting, or more properly of self-adaptation, contributes to extending once more the 'lives' of a text that emerges as a multimodal product where 'creation' becomes, to some extent, a synonym for 'duplication' and 'imitation', which occur at different levels and modes.

2. *Poor Things*: intergenerational intertextuality and paratextuality

Poor Things was first published in 1992 and immediately received noteworthy reviews: while Mick Imlah (*Independent)* defined it as Gray's first "historical fiction" referring especially to the accurate depiction of the nineteenth-century society[2], Geoff Ryman (*New York Times*) underlined the somehow contrasting nature of the book affirming that "*Poor Things* is a political book. It is also witty and delightfully written […]. Attention to Victorian Glasgow with its civic fountains, domestic interiors and medical schools gives the book texture. It is the characters, and strangely enough its phantasmagoria, that gives it life[3]." We also read that "A master of pastiche and collage in words and pictures, Gray has found a way to perfectly evoke a cracked, slightly out-of-balance sense of our reality[4]." The diverse standpoints towards this novel mirror its versatile nature: this brilliant rewriting of Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) showcases the potential of artistic contamination through a web of intertwining verbal and visual texts that contribute to create blurred boundaries among literary genres and modes.

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his work, in particular his ambivalence regarding the nature of creativity, and his representation of how this is linked with the desire for political power" (Churchman 2019: 76).

[2] Imlah M., BOOK REVIEW / Anatomy of versatile grotesques: 'Poor Things' - Alasdair Gray (29 August 1992). *The Independent*, available at https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/book-review-anatomy-of-versatile-grotesques-poor-things-alasdair-gray-bloomsbury-14-99-pounds-1543359.html, last accessed 6 September 2021.

[3] Ryman G., And Godwin Created Woman (28 March 1993). *The New York Times*, available at https://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/28/books/and-godwin-created-woman.html, last accessed 3 September 2021.

[4] A Victorian Highland Fling (21 March 1993). *Newsweek*, available at https://www.newsweek.com/victorian-highland-fling-190852, last accessed 6 September 2021.

The novel is set in Victorian Glasgow and deals with the story of a university research assistant, Godwin Baxter, who revives a pregnant woman who drowned herself. In February 1881 at 18 Park Circus, Glasgow, a woman was fished out of the River Clyde and brought successfully back to life thanks to an unusual surgical experiment: the transplant of the brain of her nine-months foetus. The new-born creature— called after her creator Bella Baxter—is kind of a 'wee bairn' in the body of a 25-year-old woman with no memory of her past. Consequently, she must learn everything from the beginning and the reader follows her in a quite unconventional *Bildungsroman*.

The plot unwinds in an elaborate narrative frame illustrated by Gray himself in the introduction to the novel. Michael Donnelly[5], the assistant to the curator of People's Palace, finds a small volume on a pavement in the city centre of Glasgow entitled *Episodes from the Early Life of a Scottish Public Health Officer*: the book is, seemingly, an autobiography written by Archibald McCandless narrating the story of his friendship with an eccentric surgeon, Godwin Baxter. Michael Donnelly pockets the volume and delivers it to Alasdair Gray to have it arranged for publishing. Alasdair Gray features as the editor of the whole work: in the introduction to the final volume, he confesses that he had made but a few changes to the original text, such as renaming "the lengthy chapter headings with snappier titles of my own" (Gray 2002: XIII), adding an introduction, an epilogue, and the *Notes Critical and Historical* concluding section. Remarkably, the epilogue consists in a letter dated 1914 written by Victoria McCandless, the author's wife, who strongly denies the events narrated in the book accusing her deceased husband of having created a fictional work brimming with lies and nonsense. The woman is none other than Bella Baxter, the Frankenstein-like creature whose 'adventures' the reader is minutely informed of through the novel. The *Notes Critical and Historical* section following the epilogue, instead, is a declared attempt by the editor to prove through material evidence that the story is "a complete tissue of facts" (Gray 2002: XIV): as a consequence, readers waver between certainty and uncertainty in a narration where real characters merge with fictional ones, and facts intertwine with fantasy. Therefore, the text can be seen in different ways depending on each 'character's' point of view: a "cunning lie" for the woman, a "blackly humorous fiction" (Gray 2002: XIII) for Donnely, and "a loving portrait" (Gray 2002: XIII) for the editor.

Apparently, the plot has little to share with its pre-text: the only manifest point of contact with Shelley's *Frankenstein* appears to be the "skilfully manipulated resurrection" (Gray 2002: 27) operated by Godwin Baxter. The circumstances are, indeed, nothing alike: the surgical experiment, a brain transplant from a nearly born baby to his/her mother, preannounces a grotesque scenario and, simultaneously, paves the way to a dystopian interpretation of the events that follow. According to Gray, the allusion to the brain transplant did not entice him at first but he could not find any other possible solution: "It was Bernard [MacLaverty] who suggested my heroine be revived by receiving the brain of her own unborn baby: I at once rejected this creepy idea, before seeing it was the only new brain she could logically receive" (Gray 2009: 229).

Alasdair Gray openly declares some details of his creative process in the colophon of the novel where he includes acknowledgments to "friends and books from whom [he] got ideas or words" (Gray 2019). Further confessions are either disseminated across his work or included in *A Gray Playbook* (2009), a collection of plays acted between 1956 and 2009 that also comprises a film script of *Poor Things*. The author presents a brief account of the 'moment of creation' in his short two-pages introduction to the script:

[5] Michael Donnelly was assistant curator of the People's Palace Museum in Glasgow from 1972 to 1990. He is one of the historical 'characters' Gray includes in his novel – rather in the narrative frame – probably in order to enhance the parallelism between fictional and real in an attempt to instill a sense of verisimilitude.

> Sometimes an original idea was suggested by something I read or heard about or dreamed. […] I woke one morning remembering a dream. In a dim back room of a Glasgow tenement I watched a young woman who sat before a window, staring out at children playing in a back green. Someone beside me said, "She won't be able to think until she remembers enough things to think with." And I knew the young woman had the brain of a newly-born baby. (Gray 2009: 228)

Whether it is the genuine disclosure of artistic creation, or a clever fictional device played out years after the publishing of the novel, this evocative confession recalls a familiar episode, namely the one narrated by Mary Shelley in her preface to the 1831 edition of *Frankenstein* where she illustrates the first 'encounter' with her creature. In Shelley's revelation it is indeed a nightmare awakening her and giving birth to a frightening tale: Gray's dream, instead, announces more of a wonder than a series of terrifying events. Wherever the truth lies, the parallelism – or rather antiparallelism – is remarkable and it might be functionally constructed to enhance the blurring effect between real and fantastic, historical and fictional that surrounds Gray's novel. As a matter of fact, the 'confession' contained in the collection published in 2009 represents what Gerard Genette has defined as 'paratext' (Genette 1979) and it is part of and contributes to the process of meaning-making in the main text.

The list of acknowledgements in *Poor Things* colophon functions like a series of clues in the investigation of the many intertextual references the novel has been built upon. An excerpt follows beneath:

> THE AUTHOR THANKS BERNARD MacLaverty for hearing the book as it was written and giving ideas that helped it grow; and Scott Pearson for typing and research into period detail; and Dr. Bruce Charlton for correcting the medical parts; and Angela Mullane for correcting the legal parts; […] and Michael Roschlau for the gift of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* (published in 1894 by MacLehose & Son, Glasgow, for the translator William Jacks, illustrated with etchings by William Strang), which suggested the form (not content) of the McCandless volume; […] Other ideas were got from *Ariel Like a Harpy*, Christopher Small's study of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, and from Liz Lochhead's *Blood and Ice*, a play on the same subject. (Gray 2002: IV)

The first lines prove Gray's endeavours in providing the reader with some accurate account of historical, medical, and legal aspects of the Glaswegian society in the Victorian Age in a novel the author admits being his "only attempt at a historical tale" (Gray 2019). More interestingly, Alasdair Gray mentions Lessing's *Nathan the Wise* to which *Poor Things* is likely to owe "the form (not content)" (Gray 2002): the 'form' presumably refers to the etchings by the Scottish artist William Strang (1859-1921) included in Lessing's work. William Strang was a printmaker, a portraitist, and a painter: he practiced as a printmaker during the first twenty years of his career and worked predominantly in etching producing many narrative illustrations and portraits. His subjects ranged from the real to the fantastic and he was also known for being the illustrator of Rudyard Kipling's works, as well as for having realized portraits of various literary sitters such as Thomas Hardy and Robert Louis Stevenson[6]. Just as Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*, the volume fictionally published by McCandless contains some etchings openly credited – in the introduction of the novel – to William Strang, but in fact realised and revisited by Alasdair Gray. The use of artistic cross-references implies a contact between the literary form and the artistic form,

[6] All the historical information about William Strang is taken from the website of the National Gallery of Scotland. Supplementary details are available at https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/features/william-strang, last accessed 16 September 2021.

constituting, at the same time, a means by which reality contaminates fiction. As a matter of fact, from the second half of the nineteenth century on to the first half of the twentieth, the form of etching in printmaking took on new life launching the so-called 'etching revival': it was adopted as the main form of literary illustration thus defining connections and interchanges between artists and writers. By recreating this 'relationship' in his novel – McCandless's volume reflects the common practice of the writers of his times by including some etchings – Alasdair Gray both emphasises the 'hybridity' of his work and seeks to corroborate the trustworthiness of the narrated events and the presumed reliability of the fictional author.

Concerning the intertextual connections suggested by Gray's acknowledgements, some 'etched' portraits in *Poor Things* represent a means of intermedial rewriting: among them, the one depicting Duncan Wedderburn (2002: 76) strikingly resembles Strang's portrait of Alec Jaffray, an etching on paper realised in 1883[7]. The book illustration is densely covered with horizontal black lines in the background as if mimicking and recalling the etching effect: at the bottom-right, the initials "W.S." fictionally credit the authorship of the picture to William Strang. This 'rewriting' of a paratextual element may correspond to a process of de-construction and re-construction that intensifies the dual nature of both the narrative and the characters. As a matter of fact, duality and hybridity are key features connoting all the characters in the novel, being, sometimes, peculiarities the characters become aware of and confess in the course of the narrative, as in Duncan Wedderburn's case who discloses his sensations in a letter:

> *Did you see the great Henry Irving's production of Goethe's* Faust *at the Glasgow Theatre Royal? I did. I was deeply moved.* ***I recognized myself in that tormented hero****, that respectable member of the professional middle class who enlists the King of Hell to help him seduce a woman of the servant class. Yes, Goethe and Irving knew that Modern Man—that Duncan Wedderburn—is essentially* ***double****: a noble soul fully instructed in what is wise and lawful, yet also a fiend who loves beauty only to drag it down and degrade it.*[8] (Gray 2002: 77)

By comparing his own life, mostly spent in seducing beautiful young women belonging to the servant class, to Goethe's *Faust*, Duncan Wedderburn establishes a parallelism that reveals his 'double' nature and makes him feel "a kind of monster" (Gray 2002: 79).

Similarly, the book cover of McCandless's volume, which is supposed to represent Bella Baxter, is likely to be a revisited version of Strang's etching *Grotesque*, whose title might be intended as a suggestion about how to read the "construction" of Bella's identity. Starting from Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque body and its socially subversive power, Christie March analyses the way Gray plays with this concept in his novel underlining that grotesque bodies "offer new avenues for identity making" (March 2002: 324). Bakhtin defines the grotesque body as "a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body" (Bakhtin 1984:317), a definition that implies some sort of metamorphosis and that somehow mirrors Bella's in-betweenness across the whole novel. Bella's hybridity involves both her body and her self: she has the brain of a 'bairn' and the body of a twenty-five-year-old woman; Duncan Wedderburn defines her not only as a "gorgeous monster" but even as a "Houri[9]", "a lemur, vampire, succubus and thing unclean" (Gray 2002: 89); she is

[7] A digital reproduction of Strang's etching is displayed on the official website of the National Gallery of Scotland at the following URL: https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/32322/alec-jaffray, last accessed 20 August 2021.

[8] The quote derives from Duncan Wedderburn's letter that is completely written in italics in the novel. The bold, instead, is mine.

[9] According to the online etymology dictionary a 'houri' is "a nymph of Muslim paradise, […] from Arabic *haura*" "to be beautifully dark-eyed, like a gazelle". Online Etymology Dictionary, available at https://www.etymonline.com/search?q=houri, last accessed 22 September 2021.

good-looking and seductive, but her unrestrained behaviour makes her some sort of an aberration compared to other Victorian women. This 'unconventional being' might be related to the subversive nature of her grotesque body as stated by C. March:

> […] Gray's 1992 novel, *Poor Things*, introduces and centers […] on a female character who most embodies the socially resistant power of the grotesque. By virtue of her unique physiology and the consequences it has on her development, Bella Baxter circumvents the stifling culturally constructed confines of her "proper" Victorian comportment. Her body becomes the site for a grotesque interplay between bodily and social conventions that unsettles the cultural perceptions of those men with whom she interacts and who have come to expect and rely on naive and socially nonresistant women. (March 2002: 338)

Bella's grotesque nature results in a "gender-role reversal" that materializes in the relationship she establishes with Duncan Wedderburn during their elopement: she refuses to conform to social rules that expected her to marry him and, instead, she treats Wedderburn as her sexual object (March 2002: 340). This sort of 'crisis' of identity manifests as well in Bella's resistance to Godwin's desires. In a conversation with Archibald McCandless, Godwin explains the reason why he decided to revive Bella instead of trying to save her baby, which is the need for a companion completely devoted to him: "I needed to admire a woman who needed and admired me" (Gray 2002: 39). Ironically, even though she is perfectly aware of Godwin's love for her, she confesses she cannot satisfy his "appetites": she eventually marries McCandless and becomes the respectable Victoria McCandless. Such metamorphosis of the self denotes the connection between the creator and his unbridled creature, and, at the same time, it might parallel the controversial process of union between England and Scotland. As a matter of fact, Gray includes a portrait of Bella Baxter in his novel with a caption beneath reading 'Bella Caledonia', the name of a female figure used to represent the Scottish Nation. Thus, the inscription invites us to consider Bella Baxter as a metaphor for the nation by recalling the traditional "romantic woman-as-nation figure" (Stirling 2008: 88). Moreover, in dealing with the theme of Scottish national identity in *Poor Things*, Kaczvinsky illustrates the metaphor of the political wedding between Scotland and England observing that: "[…] The wedding of the two nations was an arranged marriage, out of political convenience rather than any genuine love or affection. But England found Scotland an unruly and rebellious partner, who refused to accept the strictures and restraints imposed by her spouse" (Kaczvinsky 2001: 786). The "unruly" and "rebellious" partner of this political union resembles Bella even in her decision to marry McCandless given in the moment of their engagement: "I am marrying Candle because I can treat him how I like" (Gray 2002: 53).

As far as what we might define as 'literary loans' are concerned, another relevant source is Christopher Small's *Ariel like a Harpy: Shelley, Mary and Frankenstein* (1972). Chapter five of Small's study contains an analysis of the analogies between Victor Frankenstein and Percy Bysshe Shelley, thus between a fictional character and an existing person on whom the first is likely to have been modelled (Small, 1972: 102). Proceeding from the premise that Gray's novel is a rewriting of Shelley's *Frankenstein*, Small's comparison may help us establish some connections among the characters in the two novels. Small states that "Shelley, like Victor Frankenstein, had an early passion to learn 'the secrets of heaven and earth'" (Small 1972: 104) and for what at those times were considered as occult sciences. He then adds: "when Frankenstein describes his compulsion to penetrate the secrets both of the material and immaterial world […] it might be Shelley speaking" (Small 1972: 104). This fascination with the supernatural risen in Victor Frankenstein's and Shelley's youth is echoed in Godwin Baxter's words when telling the truth about the 'making' of Bella, his "resurrection" story: "My childhood hopes, and boyhood dreams, my education and adult researches had prepared me for this moment" (Gray 2002: 33). This

sentence may account for an intertextual allusion and, at the same time, positions Gray's novel within a clear literary heritage. Similarly, when Baxter confesses the outcome of his research to McCandless, his words recall Victor's in the very moment his creature comes into being, as shown in the following sentences:

> For years I had been planning to take a discarded body and discarded brain from our social midden heap and unite them in a new life. (Gray 2002: 34)

> I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. (Shelley 2018: 71)

The presumptive 'legacy' among fictional characters and historical ones may sound far more plausible when considering Baxter's complete name, which is to say Godwin Bysshe Baxter. As Kirsten Stirling points out, "[it] not only has the convenient abbreviation 'God', but is also stitched together from parts of William Godwin, [Mary Shelley's] father, Percy Bysshe Shelley, her husband, and William Baxter (less obviously perhaps), the father of the family in Dundee with whom Mary Shelley was sent to stay at the age of fifteen" (Stirling 2008: 92). Moreover, since Christopher Small in *Ariel Like a Harpy* mentions William Baxter as the addressee of a letter by William Godwin and the work is a declared inspirational source for Gray's novel, we may agree with Stirling and attest the intergenerational bond that positions *Poor Things* as a monstrous progeny somehow preannounced by Victor Frankenstein in his farewell to Walton: "Farewell, Walton! Seek happiness in tranquillity, and avoid ambition, even if it be only the apparently innocent one of distinguishing yourself in science and discoveries. Yet why do I say this? I have myself been blasted in these hopes, *yet another may succeed*[10]" (Shelley 2018: 326).

Besides the overt contaminations shortly discussed above, in the last part of Gray's novel Victoria McCandless insinuates some less obvious 'contaminations' in her *Letter to Posterity*; she not only affirms that "*to my nostrils, the book stinks of Victorianism*" but she also defines it as a "*sham-gothic*" product (Gray 2002: 275). Moreover, describing the work written by her deceased husband, she states further: "*He has made a sufficiently strange story stranger still by stirring into it episodes and phrases to be found in Hogg's Suicide's Grave with additional* ***ghouleries*** *from the works of Mary Shelley and Edgar Allan Poe. What morbid Victorian fantasy has he NOT filched from?*[11]" (Gray 2002: 272-273). Interestingly, according to the Etymology Dictionary[12], the word *ghouleries* derives from the Arabic *ghul*, which was first used in 1786 in the English translation of William Beckford's novel *Vathek*. A *ghul* in the Arabic tradition is an evil spirit that steals from graves and feeds on corpses: meaningfully, Victoria McCandless uses the term alluding to the way her husband had 'created' his biography and, at the same time, the reader can easily establish a parallelism with her own 'creation.' As a matter of fact, her dead body was fished from the Clyde and then secretly and illegally revived by the implantation of the brain of her foetus; such a dynamic intertextually links *Poor Things* to its hypotext – namely to the genesis of Victor Frankenstein's creature – accounting for a subtle contamination.

3. Contamination across modes

In his collection of works *A Gray Playbook* published in 2009, Alasdair Gray confesses that:

[10] The italic is mine.

[11] The quote derives from Victoria McCandless's letter that is completely written in italics in the novel. The bold, instead, is mine.

[12] Douglas Harper, Online Etymology Dictionary, available at https://www.etymonline.com/, last accessed 25 September 2021.

> When writing *Poor Things* I was SURE this story would start my career as a big screen film writer. Weird gothic and Frankenstein films had been popular before soundtracks were invented and grown more popular since. So had films with lavish 19th century settings and costumes. When sending the finished manuscript to Bloomsbury Publishing I […] sent copies to Iain Brown and Sandy Johnson. […] Iain at once paid me for the film rights and paid Sandy and me to write a shooting script. (Gray 2009: 229)

It is apparent that in the mind of its 'creator' the novel was potentially destined to live beyond the pages of a printed book, just like it had already happened to Shelley's creature.

The television script represents a brilliant exercise of self-rewriting as well as a further opportunity to analyse some of the mechanisms that were enacted by the author and that reinforce the intergenerational bond with Shelley's novel. After deciding the way 'his creature' should be revived, Alasdair Gray links his own 'act of creation' to its 'predecessor':

> I decided that the surgeon who achieved this miracle should live before the end of the 19th century, halfway between the publication of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in 1818 and my birth in 1934. He must be a medical genius so obscure that his discoveries were even now unknown to science, and it would be easiest to introduce him through reminiscences of a friend as obscure as himself. (Gray 2009: 228-229)

Broadly speaking, the television script is rather faithful to the novel, except for few features. The most meaningful one is the replacement of Duncan Wedderburn's letter with a visit of Godwin Baxter and Archibald McCandless to the lunatic asylum where Wedderburn had been admitted once he came back home. In the novel Godwin receives Wedderburn's letter which consists in a minute narration of what happened from the night of his elopement with Bella to the last days he spent with her in Paris (2002: 77-98). The tone of the letter makes it more like a delirium of a deranged man accusing Godwin of being an Antichrist, calling him "Mephisto Baxter" (2002: 79) and announcing his intention to make vow of chastity and withdraw in a cloister (Gray 2002: 98). On the other hand, in the television script the letter is replaced by a telegram from the superintendent of Glasgow Royal Lunatic Asylum to Godwin asking him for medical advice on a new inmate, Duncan Wedderburn. Subsequently, Godwin and McCandless decide to go to the asylum where Wedderburn recounts the events – mostly as a narrating voice over – from his private room (scenes 60 to 89).

An analysis of scene 62 is key to illustrate how art – appearing as props on the set – has been used as a means of contamination across modes and, at the same time, as a functional device with the intentional purpose of conveying specific meanings through symbolism. According to the description line in the screenplay, Alasdair Gray decided to place "a framed reproduction of Holman Hunt's *Scapegoat*[13]" (Gray 2009: 245) on Wedderburn's private room wall in the Victorian asylum. The original painting, exhibited in the Lady Lever Art Gallery in Port Sunlight (Liverpool), displays scriptural texts upon the frame:

> Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. (Isaiah 53:4)

> And the Goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a Land not inhabited. (Leviticus 16:22)

[13] A reproduction of Hunt's painting is available at https://victorianweb.org/painting/whh/replete/scapegoat.html, last accessed 22 September 2021.

In *Replete with meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (1979), G.P. Landow explains that Hunt started to add "appended texts" to his paintings inspired by the Scriptures in order to better inform the observers about their intended meaning; moreover, since that showed not to be enough, he began to accompany them by key-plates and commentaries (Landow 2015: 44). According to Landow, the quote from Isaiah is conventionally acknowledged as a prophecy referring to Christ. By pairing the quote from Isaiah with the mention of the scapegoat in the Leviticus, Hunt suggests that the scapegoat may represent both Christ's suffering to redeem mankind – namely expiation – and the ritual sacrifice needed for the Day of Atonement described in the Leviticus (Landow 2015: 104).

As far as the Scapegoat is concerned, Landow further clarifies that Hunt decided to include a long explanation of its meaning to the ancient Judaism:

> After pointing out that he had painted the picture 'at Osdoom, on the margin of the salt-encrusted shallows of the Dead Sea', [W.H. Hunt] explained that two goats were chosen as part of the old Levitical ritual for the Day of Atonement. One was offered to God as a propitiation for men's sins. […] The red fillet which he depicted bound about the animal's horns was placed there, he adds, because of the belief that if God accepted the propitiation 'the scarlet would become white (in accordance with the promise in Isaiah: "Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow: though they be red as crimson, they shall be as wool")' This description of the ritual expiation makes quite clear the elaborate parallels between the prophecy in Isaiah and the levitical type - just as it also makes clear the way this ritual tormenting of the goat prefigures the Passion. (Landow 2015: 105)

Alasdair Gray recreated the parallelism by simply placing a painting on the wall: by doing so, he suggests that Wedderburn's sufferings are a means of expiation for a life spent in seducing women and treating them as objects. As a matter of fact, he confesses his sins in his letter to Godwin Baxter by depicting himself as a "villain of the blackest dye" and a "a guilty reckless libertine who had ravished a beautiful young woman from her respectable home and loving guardian" (Gray 2002: 77), but, at the same time, he realises the gender-role reversal operated by Bella Baxter for which he blames Godwin "Mephisto Baxter" (Gray 2002: 79). Such mechanism of reversal becomes functional to instilling the doubt that Wedderburn is paying for someone else's sins – or rather unrestrained behaviour – thus taking on himself the role of the tragic hero.

4. Conclusion

Alasdair Gray masterfully displays the potential and power of artistic contamination, which operates in his novel through intertextual and paratextual connections. A contamination that acts both across modes and genres. *Poor Things* can be considered as a patchwork of 'voices' gathering many different themes and genres: it is a pastiche, in the sense that it intentionally merges various genres; it's a gothic novel offering glimpses of the uncanny and the double through most of its characters; it's a fantastic novel in Todorov's definition of a genre oscillating between certain and uncertain; it's a representation of the grotesque body in Bella's construction of her self; as many critics have already underlined, it's a political satire dealing with the crucial issue of Scottish national identity. The illustrations realised by Gray himself may also represent a point of contact between factual and fictional and, together with other historical references the author includes in the novel, they help us understand Gray's statement according to which *Poor Things* "[was his] only attempt at a historical tale" (Gray; 2014). Moreover, it's certainly a rewriting and a celebration of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and, in the film script, an adaptation as well.

Thus, Gray's *Poor Things* can be considered as a novel in-between: in between familiar and unfamiliar, factual and fictional, artistic and literary, resulting in an amazing hybridization of

genres and modes. Its being a completely new work of art and, at the same time, a rewriting and adaptation of a literary milestone accounts for a successful intergenerational contagion offering the possibility to explore genres, themes, and literary works by enhancing their ability to develop and survive over time.

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