

# Via Panorâmica



III série. 2012

Revista  
Electrónica  
de Estudos  
Anglo-Americanos

An Electronic  
Journal of  
Anglo-American  
Studies

ISSN 1646-4728

# Via Panorâmica



III série. 2012

Title: Via Panorâmica: Revista de Estudos Anglo-americanos  
E-Journal of Anglo-American Studies

Director: Gualter Cunha

Executive  
Editor: Miguel Ramalhete

Editor: Universidade do Porto, Faculdade de Letras

ISSN: 1646-4728

**Via Panorâmica** é uma revista eletrónica que respeita integralmente os critérios da política do acesso livre à informação.

**Via Panorâmica** is an open access electronic journal that follows all the criteria of OA publishing policy.

# Via Panorâmica

III série. 2012



1

Revista Electrónica de  
Estudios Anglo-Americanos

An Electronic Journal of  
Anglo-American Studies

## Sumário | Contents

---

### **A prefatory note**

*Rui Carvalho Homem*

### **Stage Presentation of Allegorical Characters in J. Skelton's Play *Magnyfycence***

*Olena Lilova*

### **Emily Brontë's Musical Appropriations: From Literary Inspiration to Performative Adaptation**

*Paula Guimarães*

### **Landseer's Highlands: a Place of Fascination with the "Monarchs of Nature"**

*Sara Vicente*

### **A Journey through Time and the European Visual Arts Based on the Novel *Orlando, A Biography* (A Perspective)**

*Cristina Carvalho*

### **A Multimodal Approach to Álvaro Cunqueiro's Journalistic Literature: Faro de Vigo (1961-1981)**

*Elena Domínguez Romero and Rubén Jarazo Álvarez*

### **Cinematic Articulations of the Jungian 'Symbolic' and the Cultivation of Mindfulness in Hypno-Psychotherapy**

*Jan Peters*

**Elizabeth Bowen: Feminist Discourse and the Italian Neorealism**

*Zuzanna Sanches*

**Visuality and Experimentalism: Two Commented Examples in Contemporary Portuguese Poetry**

*Gisele Wolkoff*

**McEwan's and Wright's Flight from Dunkirk**

*Laura Bulger*

**Gothic Presences in *Eating your heart out*, a Collaborative Sculpture of Rui Chafes and Vera Mantero**

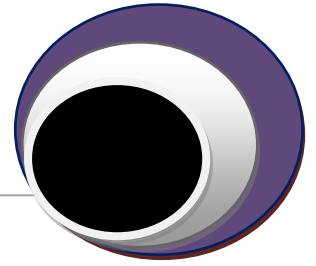
*Maria Antónia Lima*

**Film at the Crossroads of Narrative and Dramatic Genre**

*Maria do Rosário Leitão Lupi Bello*

# A prefatory note

Rui Carvalho Homem | Universidade do Porto



This issue of *Via Panorâmica* offers a selection of papers originally prepared for a conference held in November 2010 at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Universidade do Porto, and organised by the research group *Relational Forms* (based at CETAPS, the Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies). The conference aimed to respond to the intense interest that intermedial designs have obtained in all areas of study pertaining to literature, the arts, and related cultural practices. It catered for contributions focusing on specific instances of intermediality, and on the frameworks of tradition within which they have been read; but it was equally open to studies that queried the barriers between verbal and non-verbal art forms, and interrogated the theoretical and critical tools that have traditionally been applied to the study of intermedial relations.

The articles below reflect, in various ways, this range of concerns. As in so many recent instances of the study of intermediality, the visual looms large as the *other* prevalent medium considered in this brief collection of studies. They combine a generic critical alertness to verbal artefacts with a commitment to extending the conditions for what James A.W. Heffernan has styled “picturacy”, construed as an ability to read visual signs and “speak for pictures”. Explicitly or not, the papers gathered in this issue of *Via Panorâmica* accord a dual value to the verbal: on the one hand, it is the medium (instrumentally, through discourse on the visual or performing arts) for investing pictures, or other visually accessed representations, with meaning; on the other, it is also the medium proper to texts *qua* objects of study (as considered in literary criticism and other modes of inquiry into verbal matter). As also pointed out by Heffernan, the latter practice is a source of enabling analogues for the former: we need “all the help that our experience of reading verbal signs – in language and literature – can give us” in order to broaden the cultural franchise of “picturacy.”\*

For their editorial assistance, our warm thanks to Jorge Bastos da Silva, Márcia Lemos, and Miguel Ramalhete – in the latter case, also for his deftness in overcoming last-minute technical difficulties. A word of grateful acknowledgment is also due to Inês Marques for her copy-editing support.

\* James A.W. Heffernan, *Cultivating Picturacy* (Waco, Tex: Baylor U.P., 2006), *passim*.

# Stage Presentation of Allegorical Characters in J. Skelton's Play *Magnyfycence*



Olena Lilova | Classic Private University, Ukraine

## Abstract

The article deals with the peculiarities of constructing allegorical characters in John Skelton's play *Magnyfycence* (c.1519-1520). Though the allegories of the Vices in this interlude are based on an abstract idea, they are endowed with individual features of real prototypes – certain gentlemen at the court of Henry VIII – rather than with typical traits of generalized allegorical images. The English playwright's treatment of allegories obviously proceeds from the general idea of the play. It is emphasized that the essence of the early Tudor allegorical plays can only be rediscovered through their theatrical performance.

The Early Tudor interlude is considered a fairly important link in the process of the evolution of English Renaissance drama. It is characterised by an amalgamated genre structure that encompassed a number of elements typical of the medieval theatre. As such, in the interludes of the first half of the sixteenth century characters were often created according to the principles of allegorical imagery.

In studies of medieval theatre it is usually emphasized that allegory attained its highest point of artistic realization in medieval morality plays that produced a whole set of allegorical characters, well known to the morality audience. The moment an allegorical character appeared on the stage dressed in a certain way and fitted out with certain objects that revealed its inner essence, it evoked a whole range of associations with the viewers. Sloth, for instance, was usually presented as an untidily dressed, unkempt lazybones in sagging breeches,

**Citação:** Olena Lilova, "Stage Presentation of Allegorical Characters in J. Skelton's Play *Magnyfycence*". *Via Panorâmica: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 5-20. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

with a pillow under his arm to have a rest whenever he wanted. It is noteworthy that character decoding in allegorical theatre was a part of the viewers' aesthetic enjoyment when watching a play. The character's costume and demeanour can consequently be considered a non-verbal means of stage stereotyping. The character's visual dimension was an essential pre-condition for the creation of a dramatic allegory, with every element of its outward appearance making its contribution into conveying an allegorical meaning.

John Skelton's interlude *Magnyfycence*,<sup>1</sup> written presumably in 1519-20, exercises this allegorical type of character presentation to the full extent. Just like in medieval morality drama, in this play negative allegorical figures (Fansy, Folly, Counterfeit Countenance, Crafty Conveyance, Clokyd Colusyon, Courtly Abusyon) and positive ones (Wealthful Felicity, Measure, Perseverance and others) are juxtaposed. The two forces – those of good and of evil – are fighting for the affection of Magnificence – an adolescent prince who is to choose his life priorities. The majority of negative characters in J. Skelton's play are united by the same idea – that of deceit or falsehood. The rogues plot various tricks and intrigues, gang up, set traps for Magnificence – all in all, they do their best to win the young and naïve sovereign's trust and then deceive him by bringing the prince to ruin. In this paper I will focus upon some of the means of creating allegorical characters in John Skelton's play *Magnyfycence*. I will also ponder over the peculiarities of allegorical imagery in early Tudor drama, by taking into account the nature of allegory in sixteenth-century plays, which were particularly apt to reflect social and political events in the country and to take up the political challenges of the day.

It has become a stumbling block in early Tudor drama studies to work out the date at which the interlude *Magnyfycence* was written and performed for the first time at one of London's great halls.<sup>2</sup> Critics usually claim that Skelton's play was really a topical one. They, therefore, feel tempted to draw parallels



between the contents of this piece of drama and those political events that took place in England during King Henry VIII's reign. Some researchers say that the play may be a keen satire on the political activity of Cardinal Thomas Wolsey, an influential statesman of the Machiavellian type that had an unprecedented impact on the King for quite a long period of time (Wilson 13). Others associate the plot of the play with the extravagant but pointless expenses characteristic of Henry VIII's international politics in 1514-1516. In these years the King of England appropriated vast resources to help maintain the military forces of Rome and the Army of the Swiss Cantons that were supposed to fight France on behalf of England.<sup>3</sup>

The contemporary British researcher Greg Walker, in his profound work dedicated to the peculiarities of the development of theatrical practices at the court of Henry VIII, denies both opinions. As this scholar points out, our idea of Wolsey's personality has little in common with the image of those rogues representing the evil forces in the play by J. Skelton. The supposed prototype does not bear much resemblance with the fictitious minions that appear to be passionate Francophiles – their clothes, manners, and speech all being French-styled.

As far as the satire on Henry's political activity is concerned, it is highly unlikely that John Skelton might want to run the risk of spoiling his relations with the monarch by criticizing his policy. Skelton used to be Henry's tutor till 1502 and he obviously had warm feelings for Henry as an adult. Besides, soon after Henry ascended the throne the poet-laureate was granted the post of rector of Diss in Norfolk, so he had to quit the court and his duties of court entertainer that he enjoyed so much. With his interlude he obviously wanted to attract the King's attention and possibly restore his position as court poet. The play, written with such a purpose in mind, was to demonstrate devotion and loyalty for both the King and his policy.

Since there is no denying the fact that the interlude does bear some considerable political implications, G. Walker substantiates another version of which real-life events make up the basis of the play's plot scheme. According to this scholar, the negative characters of the interlude *Magnyfycence* are modelled after the members of the Privy Council which was with much scandal dismissed on a charge of embezzlement in May 1519.<sup>4</sup> The Council's functions were transmitted to another institution, its treasury was reorganized and the councillors themselves were expelled. It is worth mentioning that, while holding this prestigious position at Henry's court, the members of the Council were at the same time English emissaries at the court of the ruler of France (Francis I). Their French attire, etiquette, and habits, together with their arrogance and contempt for other courtiers in England, and their dispraise for English ladies and gentlemen (as the chronicler Edward Hall puts it) (Walker 67) aroused a storm of indignation among Henry's subjects. There was enormous resonance concerning the issue of mean advisors usurping the authority in the country. As a result Henry had to change his attitude towards the Privy Council and its activity. This decision made him the centre of the political scandal known as "the expulsion of the minions of 1519". It had its positive effect too as it demonstrated the King's readiness to correct his own faults and stay faithful to the interests of his people and his country. A similar conclusion is drawn from J. Skelton's interlude *Magnyfycence*, which can be interpreted as a kind of political training<sup>5</sup> given to a young sovereign in order to teach him how to run his own household and thus the state in general.

The main idea of the play can be expressed in the following way: in all his activities (especially those of state significance) a man should be ruled by measure. Immediately after Measure is driven away from Magnyfycence's place and Liberty becomes free of any restrictions or control, the protagonist's life turns into ruin. In the final episodes of the play Magnyfycence is saved by Good

Hope, Redresse, that is summoned to correct the things that are “out of joynte” (Skelton 404, line 2412), Sad Cýrcumspeccyon and Perseverance.

It may be of interest to mention that during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I – that is, in the epoch of highest development in the English Renaissance – English humanists thought magnificence to be the major personal virtue (Jones 189-190). Following Aristotle, they meant under magnificence not just the ability to introduce oneself, or luxurious and glamorous apparel and exquisite etiquette. Elizabethans mainly associated magnificence with spiritual magnanimity, great-heartedness, that is, the best qualities man can be endowed with by nature.

Obviously, this idea of Magnificence as an ethic and moral category got into the focus of active discussions already at the court of Henry VIII, in the intellectual community of English humanists under the leadership of Thomas More. It is, therefore, not accidental that an associate link exists between the King of England and the figure of the prince in J. Skelton’s play – that of Magnyfycence. This metaphoric correspondence charges the interlude with considerable didactic and philosophical meaning.

The interlude *Magnyfycence* is also a vivid example of the stage realization of a number of early Tudor theatre techniques. The play illustrates the thesis about the specific playing strategies provided by the particular spatial organization of the great Tudor hall that was the setting of many interludes in those days. The characters’ status or position at Magnyfycence’s house is emphasized through their location in the hall – farther from or closer to the “high table” at the upper end of the hall, that is the master’s sector. For instance, when Measure falls in the Prince’s disfavour, he dares not approach Magnyfycence or talk to him. Clokyd Colusyon offers his help as a reconciling intermediary between Measure and Magnyfycence but actually vilifies Measure even more, accusing the latter of bribery.

Cloked Colusyon

[To Measure] Stande styll here, and ye shall se

That for your sake I wyll fall on my kne (Skelton 388, lines 1627-28)<sup>6</sup>

[...]

[To Magnyfycence] Yet, syr, reserved your better advysement,

It were better he spake with you or he wente,

That he knowe not but that I have supplied

All I can his matter for to spede.

Magnyfycence

Nowe by your trouthe, gave he you not a brybe?

Cloked Colusyon

Yes, with his hand I made hym to subscribe

A byll of recorde for an annuall rent (Skelton 388-389, lines 1659-1665).

Besides that, the peculiar performance parameters enabled simultaneous acting at different sides of the Hall. In some scenes of the interlude (e.g. when Magnyfycence reads the forged letter – line 325 and further) there are two acting areas, with characters behaving as if they did not see each other or as if one group of actors were unconscious of the other's presence. At the time, the hall was lit with torches at night and one torch gave just enough light to see a small group of actors within its radius. Since the hall was big enough, at least two playing centres could be organized in it. As the authors of the monograph *History of Drama in English*, edited by T. W. Craik, point out, the actors in *Magnyfycence* would go on playing their roles even when they were outside the performance nucleus (Craik 89).

Just like in other interludes written for the Tudor Hall, in *Magnyfycence* players' entrances are announced some seconds before the actors join in with the playing. This is also connected with the spatial organization of the great hall. Ordinary spectators grouped around the screen doors at the low end and had to

back out of the way to let a new character come into the hall. Thus, an active involvement of the audience with the playing area as well as the reflection of a current social and political event in the play is made manifest in J. Skelton's *Magnyfycence*.

The Tudor auditorium treated theatrical presentation as the most powerful means of mass communication. Its role could probably be paralleled with the impact of mass media and the Internet in today's world, though it was mainly located within the confines of one community. Every more or less significant event from the political, economical or cultural spheres of social life came to the playwrights' attention. The audience in the Tudor hall mirrored the English community of that period, with the whole variety of interests and aspirations of the main social groups presented there. Theatrical ventures reflected widely on political and ideological tendencies of the epoch, making topical use of current events and thus drawing links between dramatic presentation and the everyday world. Many of the Tudor interludes can be used as bright illustrations of the strong political involvement of English household drama of the period. Tudor hall performance was an effective means of information exchange in both horizontal and vertical formats, with the highest as well as the lowest levels of the social hierarchy involved in the communication process provided by drama. The high topicality of household staging and its leading role in organizing the communication process in society will be inherited by the later Elizabethan drama.

The use of allegorical characters for the conveyance of topical messages seems to be of great interest in the process of analysing Skelton's interlude. This use of allegory as a means of character stage presentation by authors of early Tudor moralities and interludes (like John Bale,<sup>7</sup> John Rastell, Henry Medwall, Nicolas Udall and others) was not merely occasional. It is not incidental either that negative characters were the most vivid allegorical figures in plays. This

tradition goes back to medieval theatre practices, morality plays in particular, in which the central conflict occurred in the sphere of the ethic and moral beliefs of man. The character named Mankind, Everyone, Humanity, Youth, etc., came out as the protagonist in the play, with the virtues and vices of human nature fighting vigorously for his soul. Every morality viewer was to associate himself with the protagonist during the play and, just like him, was to feel attracted to the vices – Sloth, Sensual Appetite, Pride, Vanity and other tempting and seducing allegories of morality plays. Without this fascination with the vices it would be difficult to induce the viewer to follow the major character of the play on his way to moral fall and the destruction of personality and, in such a way, to attain the principal – didactic – objective of the morality. This was meant to demonstrate what awaited a man who could not resist sins or vices in his life. In the final scenes of a morality play the character's repentance gives him the hope that his soul may be saved, so he applies for help to the virtues that seemed so boring and tedious to him at the beginning.

All negative characters in the interlude *Magnyfycence* are light-hearted, self-confident dandies (to use an anachronism) wearing fashionable clothes and quite sure of their irresistible charm. This is true of Counterfeit Countenance in particular, whose name means "false, pretended look". As this hypocrite declares, "The world is full of my folly" (Skelton 361, line 411). This allegorical figure enters the play with a long monologue in which he says that everyone pretends to be somebody else, which is why our life consists of counterfeits: counterfeit preaching, counterfeit conscience, counterfeit sadness, counterfeit holiness, counterfeit reason, counterfeit wisdom etc.

Counterfet prechyng, and byleve the contrary;

Counterfet conscyence, pevyssse pope holy;

Counterfet sadness, with delyng full madly;

Counterfet holynes is called ypocrysy;  
 Counterfet reason is not worth a flye;  
 Conterfet wysdome and workes of foly;  
 Counterfet Countenance every man dothe occupy (Skelton 362, lines 466-472).

The other rogues are Crafty Conveyaunce, the personification of mean lie, a villain, good at distorting information for his own benefit, and Clokyd Colusyon (Cloaked Collusion) – an intriguer and conspirer, a courtier in gaily garment beneath the priest’s cloak, the disguise he wears throughout the play (“What is this that he wereth? A cope?”) (Skelton 365, line 601). This character uses French words and expressions quite freely in his speech, e.g.: “De que pays estevous?” (Skelton 368, line 748) or “Say vous Chaunter ‘Venter tredawce’” (Skelton 368, line 750). Both Crafty Countenance and Clokyd Colusyon seem to be no less arrogant and haughty than their companion Counterfeit Countenance.

Another specific allegorical figure in the interlude is Courtly Abusyon – the embodiment of courtly abuses. Only Fanny and Folly in this company of rogues appear to be more or less typical characters, familiar to the early Tudor play viewer whatever social stratum he might belong to or however aware of the state policy he might be. Fanny, whose essence is caprice or wilfulness, wears the fool’s costume though he tries to conceal it under a courtier’s gorgeous apparel, disguising himself as Largess. However, as is mentioned in the footnotes, the role was to be played by a dwarf or a boy (Skelton 351). Thus the character’s outward appearance contradicted his ambitious self-naming and left no doubt as to his true nature.

Folly makes no attempt to conceal his true self or his costume of a professional fool. The bauble he holds in his arms also contributes to his image of a jester. In this way, the playwright makes use of the negative characters’

costumes to reveal their inner self and point out to their playing tricks on Magnyfycence.

Due to his insidious counsellors' advice Magnyfycence finds himself on the verge of despair, going bankrupt both in the moral and financial sense. As bright evidence of his viciousness, there is a long monologue which the prince utters after Felycyte, Lyberty and Fansy leave him alone:

[...]

For I am prynce perlesse provyd of port	<i>proved to be peerless, state</i>
Bathyd with blysse, embracyd with comferte.	<i>surrounded by</i>
Syrus, that solemn syar was of Babylon	<i>grand lord</i>
That Israel releysyd of theyr captyvyte,	
For al his pompe, for all his ryalltrone,	
He may not be comparyd unto me	(Skelton 385, lines 1469-1512).

Magnyfycence compares himself with the great men of the past epochs and the heroes of antique myths as well. In his arrogant wilfulness he rates himself higher than Alexander the Great or Julius Cesar, hailing that neither Hercules nor Theseus could compete with him: "My name is Magnyfycence, man most of myght" (Skelton 385, line 1491). This speech appears to be a means of character stereotyping at the moment of his life when he stayed without Measure. In his monologue the Prince sounds similar to Herod, Pilate and other tyrants from mystery cycles.<sup>8</sup>

In this way, J. Skelton's play seems to present a typical medieval plot about the worldly temptations of a governor that is God's deputy on Earth. At the moment of Magnyfycence's fall (not just in the figurative sense of the word), when he is beaten down and robbed of his property and fine clothing, Adversity and Poverty appear in front of him. Poverty offers a hard rag for Magnyfycence to lie on and suggests that the prince should get accustomed to hunger and cold



as well as to wrapping himself in a blanket instead of wearing rich array.<sup>9</sup> Magnyfycence gets his clothes back in the final scenes of the play no sooner than he goes through the purge and redeems his errors.<sup>10</sup>

At the same time one cannot but notice the crucial difference in the nature of the allegory as it makes itself evident in the traditional characters of the medieval morality play and those allegorical vices (at least four of them) in J. Skelton's interlude. In the first case, the means of creating stage allegories, such as clothes and demeanour, manners and language, contribute to the character's stereotyping, making him the bearer of some essential quality through which he is made familiar for the play viewers and easily recognized by them. It is a universalized type. On the other hand, the figures of rogues in the interlude *Magnyfycence* are endowed with personal features that were characteristic of some real prototypes at the court of the king of England.<sup>11</sup> Thus these allegorical figures are quite individualized and can be deciphered to the full extent only by those viewers who are well aware of the political context at the Henrician court.

The allegories of Fanny and Folly turn out to be a kind of matrix for constructing the other four negative characters. In each of the four cases this allegorical content acquires some individual features and so refers not to a generalized bearer of this quality but to a certain individual. In this way, Counterfeit Countenance, Crafty Conveyaunce, Clokyd Colusyon and Courtly Abusyon in the interlude combine the allegorical stereotype with the individual traits of Henry VIII's courtiers.<sup>12</sup> Considering the negative allegorical figures it is worth mentioning that it would be much easier to distinguish the four rogues while watching the interlude than while reading Skelton's text. And this does not happen only because drama is essentially a visual medium or because dramatic characters are given a potent visual dimension only when reinforced by the physical actions of the players. As a matter of fact, the negative characters in *Magnyfycence* no longer say anything about their historical prototypes to us.

As far as the allegorical principle of character representation in medieval morality plays is concerned, *The Allegory of Love* (1936), by C. S. Lewis, remains the most frequently quoted work in this research area. Showing the difference between allegory and symbol, the scholar points out that the first one is founded on giving material shape to immaterial substances – like passions or thoughts –, while symbolic essence is acquired as a result of the opposite operation, that is, of providing the material with some immaterial content. At the same time C. S. Lewis defines symbolism “as a mode of thought, and allegory as a mode of expression” (48).

While developing the concept of this prominent scholar, many of his followers have tried to specify the essence of the medieval allegory. The contemporary American researcher N. Crohn Schmitt, for instance, accentuates the idea that the medieval person did not differentiate clearly between the material and non-material. The phenomena he could not see or touch seemed to him to be no less real than those that surrounded him in his empirical life (Schmitt 306-307). This observation leads N. Crohn Schmitt to the conclusion that, in a medieval viewer’s mind, morality allegories associated with reality to a much greater extent than we can nowadays imagine it (Schmitt 313). This point of view seems rather convincing, as the abstract substance is evidently manifested through its concrete accidents in the material world. In a similar manner, the idea of falsehood and pretence in J. Skelton’s interlude *Magnyfycence* is revealed in the characters of the rogues. As it has been mentioned above, these constructs get filled with vital energy not just as a result of some abstract idea being embodied in the image of a human being but, more than that, in acquiring individual features of real prototypes. And stage devices are of essential significance in bringing these characters to life. No reading or interpretation can replace the dramatic presentation of a piece of drama. The

only way of conceiving the essence of allegorical theatre or of rediscovering its charm and meaningfulness lies in its performance.

In the context of the creative search of early Tudor dramatists, John Skelton's intention of moulding negative allegories on the basis of some moral or philosophical category while, at the same time, taking into account the personal traits of its individual bearers seems rather innovative. This device evidently conforms to the purpose of the play. *Magnyfycence* focuses on the problems of the social and political life of the country rather than on the questions of the moral and ethical choice of an individual. These problems are revealed in terms of a specific household that turns out to be an analogue of the royal court in the play. Consequently, the action in John Skelton's interlude is based on playing out various protocol aspects of the public audience at the sovereign's place, with the morality principle of scenes that alternate virtues and vices left behind. As for the characters of rogues, who are the prince's transient companions in the play, they demonstrate the capacity of the medieval dramatic allegory to mutate in the process of acquiring individual characteristics and distinctly personal traits.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> All quotations of John Skelton's play are from Skelton 351-407.

<sup>2</sup> As Paula Neuss suggests, the play might have been first performed at Northumberland's household or at one of the London guild-halls, such as the livery company the Merchant Taylors' (qtd. in Westfall 120).

<sup>3</sup> For further historical detail, see Walker 62-63.

<sup>4</sup> According to Greg Walker, the members of the Privy Chamber were Edward Neville, Arthur Pole, Nicholas Carew, Francis Bryan, Henry Norris and William Coffin (66).

<sup>5</sup> As far as the genre of *Magnyfycence* is concerned a number of definitions are applied to the play. Charles Whitworth refers it to the sub-genre of political moralities (58). Louis Wright calls *Magnyfycence* a political satire (7). Peter Happé notes that *Magnyfycence* stands at the beginning of such literary and theatrical genres as the political interlude (72).

<sup>6</sup> In *Magnifycence* rhyme royal (ababbcc) is reserved mainly for the Virtues and for Magnificence. For Vice's remarks lighter forms of verse are used, like the 4-stressed couplet or the dancing 2-stressed line. (For more information about the play's poetic language and skeltonics in general see Wilson 13-14; Happé 72-79). Skelton himself characterised his verse in the following way:

For though my ryme be ragged

Tattered and jagged,

Rudely rayne-beaten,

Rusty and mothe-eaten,

Yf Ye take well therwith

It hath in it some pyth. (qtd. in Drabble910)

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Steele Brokaw considers "allegorical-turned-historical figures" in John Bale's history play *King Johan* (334).

<sup>8</sup> This is mentioned in the footnotes by the editor of the play. See Skelton 385.

<sup>9</sup> Ye[a], syr, nowe must ye lerne to lye harde,

That was wonte to lye on fetherbeddes of downe.

Nowe must your fete lye hyer than your crowne.

Where you were wonte to have cawdels for your hede,      *warm drinks*

Now must you monchemamockes and lumpes of brede.      *munch on scraps*

And where you had chaunges of ryche array,

Nowe lap you in a coverlet, full fayne what you may. (Skelton 396, lines 2003-2017)

<sup>10</sup> Nowe shall ye be renewyd with solace:

Take nowe upon you this abylyment,      *garment*

And to that I say gyve good advyement.      *attention* (Skelton 404, lines 2402-2404).

<sup>11</sup> Skelton's allegorical method can also be observed in other works by the early Tudor playwright. See, for instance, *The Bouge of Courte* (1498) where such allegories as Favell, Disdayne, Suspicyon, Ryotte and others come out as the characters of the poem. The means of creating allegorical characters in dramatic and non-dramatic genre forms by the same author can be a topic of an interesting comparative study.

---

<sup>12</sup> Whether or not this was Skelton's intention, it seems almost impossible to clearly relate every Vice character with some real individual belonging to the royal court. Peter Happé defines the allegorical method applied here by Skelton as "the strategy of deliberate indirectness" (79) or "indirect allegorical approach" (90). The scholar claims that this method allows the playwright "to keep the view 'general' rather than particular" with the effect of "raising principles rather than being simply a localized satire" (80).

### Works cited

Brokaw, Katherine Steele. "Music and Religious Compromise in John Bale's Plays." *Comparative Drama* 44.3 (2010): 325-349.

Craik, T. W. General ed. *The Revels. History of Drama in English*. Vol. 2.

London: Methuen, 1980.

Drabble, M., ed. *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

Happé, Peter. "Skelton's Magnyfycence: Theatre, Poetry, Influence." *Ludus. Medieval and Early Renaissance Theatre and Drama.9: Interludes and Early Modern Society. Studies in Gender, Power and Theatricality*. Ed. Peter Happé and Wim Hüsken. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007. 71-94.

Jones, M. "The Court and the Dramatists." *Elizabethan theatre: Stratford-upon Avon studies*, 9. Ed. John Russell and Bernard Harris. London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1966. 169-195.

Lewis, C. S. *The Allegory of Love. A Study in Medieval Tradition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953.

Schmitt, Natalie Crohn. "The Idea of a Person in Medieval Morality Plays." *The Drama of the Middle Ages. Comparative and Critical Essays*. Ed. C. Davidson, C. J. Gianakaris and J. H. Stroupe. New York: AMS Press, 1982. 304-315.

Skelton, John. "Magnyfycence." *Medieval Drama: An Anthology*. Ed. Greg Walker. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000. 351-407.

Walker, Greg. *Plays of Persuasion. Drama and politics at the Court of Henry VIII*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

---

Westfall, Suzanne R. *Patrons and Performance. Early Tudor Household Revels*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

Whitworth, Charles. "Reporting offstage events in early Tudor drama." *Tudor theatre: "Let there be covenants..." Convention et Théâtre Acte de la Table ronde VI*. Bern: Peter Lang SA, 1998. 45-66.

Wilson, F. P. "The earlier Tudor Morality and Interlude." *The Oxford History of English Literature*. Ed. G. K. Hunter. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. 1-46.

Wright, L. B. *Shakespeare's Theatre and the Dramatic Tradition*. Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1958.

# Emily Brontë's Musical Appropriations: From Literary Inspiration to Performative Adaptation



Paula Guimarães | Universidade do Minho

## Abstract

In comparison with the visual arts, the Brontës' interactions with and depictions of music have received little critical attention. Besides their well-known skills in drawing and painting, all the Brontë children were competent and knowledgeable musicians; music played an important part both in their family life and in the Victorian public culture. Emily Brontë, in particular, not only possessed a collection of annotated sheet music but was also a virtuoso pianist, exhibiting a taste in both baroque and romantic styles of composition and a fondness for orchestral works. Her preferred composers included Handel, Mozart, Bach, Gluck, Schubert, Rossini, Mendelssohn and Beethoven. Critics such as Robert Wallace (1986) and Meg Williams (2008) have referred to Brontë's 'musical matrix', not only her music-making but also the influence of musical ideas on her writing. The sounds of music release her imagination and she sees a transformative power in them; the music of the wind in her poems runs like a piece of organ-music between the registers of air and earth. Similarly, *Wuthering Heights's* mesh of repetitions and variations and its overall rhythmic patterning recalls a 'cosmic polyphony'. It is therefore no surprise that Emily Brontë's work has been a source of inspiration for many musicians. As both Patsy Stoneman (1996) and Linda Lister (2008) have documented, Brontë's only novel has inspired two major operatic realizations, several musical-theatre adaptations, and numerous songs settings by composers in the realms of both classical and popular music. The art song or *aria* strives to portray a particular emotional moment and Brontë's intensely focused poetic expression suits it perfectly. On a grander scale, the high dramatic and emotional sense of *Wuthering Heights* and the utterances of its fiercely Romantic characters make the novel suitable for an operatic *libretto*.

**Key terms:** Brontë, Music, Literature, Adaptation, Song, Opera.

**Citação:** Paula Guimarães, "Emily Brontë's Musical Appropriations: From Literary Inspiration to Performative Adaptation". *Via Panorâmica: Revista Electrónica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 21-37. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

*Dust as we are, the immortal spirit grows  
Like harmony in music; there is a dark  
Inscrutable workmanship that reconciles  
Discordant elements, make them cling together  
In one society.*

(William Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, 1850)

In this article, we propose to analyse Brontë's enduring work as an artistic paradigm of double 'appropriation'; that is, to analyse it in the light of both the musical influences and practices (ideas and techniques) present in her poetry and only novel, and the multifaceted influence of her literary texts on modern musical artists (composers and performers), evident in the multiple adaptations to opera, musical drama, art song cycle, pop song and movie soundtrack. We hope that in the course of our exposition, the intertextual/interartistic relations between literature and music, often designated as 'melopoetics' or 'word and music' studies, will help further illuminate and enrich our assessment of Emily Brontë's work.

In the now classic *Music and Literature: A Comparison of the Arts*, Calvin S. Brown stated that "music and literature are intended to be heard" and that their privileged media of presentation is "the audible": "literature is an art presented to the ear rather than to the eye" because when we read we mentally hear sounds (Brown 8-9).<sup>1</sup> Organised sound indeed serves as basic material for both arts, though the respective sound units – word and tone – differ substantially. More recently, melopoetics critics Steven Scher and Walter Bernhart have added that in the traditional classification of the fine arts, music and literature "are viewed as closely akin because they both are auditory, temporal, and dynamic art forms" (Scher and Bernhart 180). They have affinities in structure because both arts require "attentive tracing of a certain movement to be completed in time", they are "activities to be realized (a score to be performed or a book to be read), i.e. processes that still need to be decoded" (Scher and Bernhart 180, our



emphasis). Furthermore, the organising principles of 'repetition' and 'variation' are indispensable to both, as well as those of 'balance' and 'contrast'.<sup>2</sup>

The interartistic parallels between the two arts can be roughly divided into three main categories: 'music and literature', 'literature in music', and 'music in literature' (Scher and Bernhart). In the first category, generally called 'vocal music', literary text and musical composition are inextricably bound and result in a single work; this combination is visible in forms such as the opera or the art song or *lied*.<sup>3</sup> The second category, also called 'programme music', refers to purely musical works that have been inspired in, or suggested by, a specific and paradigmatic literary text; that may be the case of a symphony, a sonata or a fugue.<sup>4</sup> The third and last category refers exclusively to musical themes or references present in literary texts ('verbal music') and acoustic structures or techniques ('word music') used by writers, namely in poetry.<sup>5</sup> Although Emily Brontë's work has notoriously called for a combination of these three different realizations, we will concentrate our analysis mostly on the first and third categories, respectively 'vocal music' and 'word music', making only cursory remarks on the second one.<sup>6</sup>

Ever since 1800, Romantic aesthetics, openly advocating the elimination of boundaries in theory and poetic practice, has had a major impact on the development of the interrelation. Phyllis Weliver refers not only the 'Aeolian harp' as a central image for poetic inspiration but also the Victorian fascination with the figure of the siren, which represents music's seductive effects (Weliver 11, 22). The trend of comparisons culminated in the nineteenth century in the aesthetics of 'melomaniac' Romantics like Ludwig Tieck, Novalis, and E. T. A. Hoffman, who proclaimed the supremacy of music among the arts. The musical aesthetic seems to emanate from the land – its winds, waters and birds, transcending material contingency as it transcends language itself (Byerly 13). Thus, if the *musicalization* of literature (through 'word music' or 'verbal music') is

a quintessentially Romantic notion so, in a certain way, is the *literalization* of music (in the form of 'programme music', the *lied* and the 'literary opera').<sup>7</sup>

English writer Emily Jane Brontë (1818-1848) was not simply *musical*, but a serious student of music, in a way that deeply influenced her artistic and literary development. She possessed a considerable collection of annotated sheet music, in both baroque and romantic styles of composition (Williams 81), and she became eventually a virtuoso pianist, playing duets with her younger sister Anne. According to biographer Stevie Davies, Brontë's German Romantic influences (Schelling, Schlegel, Novalis and Goethe) seem also to have been reinforced by the musical education she received in Belgium around 1842, especially her study of Beethoven (Davies, *Emily Brontë: Heretic* 51). M. Heger, the *Pensionnat's* headmaster, had arranged piano lessons for her with a renowned teacher from the Brussels Conservatory, and even more significantly, allowed her to teach music to his younger pupils (Williams 81).

Robert K. Wallace, in his 1986 work on *Emily Brontë and Beethoven*, traces the evolution in Brontë's taste after her visit to Brussels, and eventually concludes that in the 1830s she had played mainly popular themes by lesser-known composers, designed to display *virtuoso* passagework; but after Brussels she preferred serious and substantial works with the emphasis on instrumental rather than on programme music, showing a distinct preference for transcriptions of Beethoven, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, Bach, Glück, Schubert, Dussek, Weber, Rossini and Mendelssohn (Wallace 160). In Brussels at this time, Beethoven still dominated and she would have had the chance to hear not only his Second Symphony, the *Egmont* and *Leonora* Overtures and the *Eroica* at the *Conservatoire Royal*, but also his Seventh Symphony and a Mendelssohn *oratorio* at a *gala* concert (Davies 1994: 51).

When Emily returned to Haworth in 1843, she bought a new two-pedal, five-and-a-half octave piano and an eight-volume anthology of piano music,

called *The Musical Library* (1844), whose markings in the table of contents register the poet's preference for Beethoven. As Davies observes, she played transcriptions from the Fourth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, as well as *sonatas*; thus, "both the compositional logic and the spiritual passion of Beethoven's language entered into her own language" (52). Davies agrees with Robert Wallace's observations that "In style, texture and vision, her novel has strong affinities with [Beethoven's] music". Davies even uses musical terminology to characterise Brontë's novel *Wuthering Heights*: "from the *appassionata* orchestrations of the theme to the *pianissimo* meditation which carries the reader to the final silence which succeeds 'that quiet earth', with its 'gradual loosening of earthly ties'" (52). And, in fact, Beethoven's Piano Sonata no. 23 in F minor Op. 57 of 1807 (known as *Appassionata*) is the composer's most tempestuous sonata, a brilliantly executed display of emotion and music.

Lawrence Kramer suggests that this Beethovenian effect results from "a persistent tension between expression and form" (Kramer 33). The 'stormy' movement seems to be alive with "unresolved formal ambiguity", giving the musical piece a "symbolic authority" like that of a literary text (35). He detects in Beethoven's time "three topical fields particularly hospitable to tempests" (41): those of "emotional turmoil, revolutionary violence, and the return of Man to a state of nature" (41). These continually overlap, creating unspoken subtexts. Both *Pathétique* and *Appassionata* evoke the sort of primitive encounter and tempestuous atmosphere later present in Brontë's novel.

Charlotte Brontë, in her 'Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell' (1850), had famously defined the originality of Emily's poetry in terms of its "*peculiar music* – wild, melancholy and elevating" (Brontë, "Biographical Note" 319, our emphasis), though it was clear that her sister had absorbed the language of poets such as Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth and Coleridge. As Meg Williams states, writing about Emily's 'musical matrix', she "hears the music above

everything else, puts her trust in it, and follows where it leads” (Williams 82), casting her “anchor of Desire/ Deep in unknown Eternity” (Roper and Chitham, ed. 174).<sup>8</sup> Eternity, Williams reminds us, is the infinite Platonic source of musical ideas, and its messages are brought like soundwaves by the “glorious wind” she so frequently invokes (Williams 82). The “spirit’s sky” is a source of “strange minstrelsy” where “a thousand silvery lyres / Resound far and near” (Roper and Chitham, ed. 149) and Brontë sees a transforming power in music. For Williams, the inspiring wind is “not a purely natural phenomenon but a container for the voices of all those who form part of her emotional legacy and who help to shape its theme-tunes” (Williams 82).<sup>9</sup> Williams traces *Wuthering Heights*’s origins to the very roots of culture and oral/aural traditions and enhances the fact that it is written in dialogue, insisting on “the supremacy of the speaking voice and its volatile rhythm” (84). The figure of Heathcliff brings “dissonance like a clashing chord” while the narrative seems to “progress through consonance and dissonance, stress and release”, in a “symphonic *crescendo*” (87-88).

In her 2008 essay on operatic and song treatments of Emily Brontë’s texts, entitled in short “Music of the Moors”, Linda Lister (assistant professor of voice and director of the Opera Workshop at Shorter College), takes into the realm of adaptation the question of the ‘musical’ quality of Brontë’s writing. Lister’s approach to the musical portrayals of Catherine Earnshaw and of Brontë’s poetic speakers is informed by her experience as a vocalist and composer, as well as a musicologist. She analyses the dramatic and musical portrayals of Catherine in Carlisle Floyd’s and Bernard Herrmann’s respective operatic versions of the novel. But she also comments on Kate Bush’s *Wuthering Heights*-inspired pop song and Lister’s own song settings of Brontë’s texts from her novel and poems.

When looking for poetry to set to music, Lister observes, “composers often look for a text that distils a particular emotional moment, which defines a mood or situation instantly for the reader” (Lister 213). The *aria* or art song tends

precisely to portray a single emotion or event, as well as their different dimensions. With its intense and focused expression and its symmetry, in terms of both structure and sentiment, Brontë's poetry seems to be particularly suited to song setting. The *cantabile* or singable quality of the verse reveals, for Davies, "a musical ear attuned to phrasings and cadences of an expressive but restrained reverie" (Davies, 1998: 44).<sup>10</sup>

On a perhaps grander scale, the high dramatic and emotional sense of *Wuthering Heights* and the histrionic utterances of its fiercely Romantic characters make the novel suitable for an operatic libretto. It has been seen as "a musician's novel", according to Davies, in which Cathy's speeches "resemble aria in opera earthed in recitative" (Davies 47). Wallace not only likened its stormy *expressive* tone to Beethoven's piano sonatas, like *Appassionata* and *Pathétique*, but also to the composer's only opera, *Fidelio, or Conjugal Love* (1814), in terms of an embodied ideal of undying love and fidelity (Wallace 176). For Lister, *Wuthering Heights* "lends itself to opera" not only due to its lyrical and tragic plot of lost love, and its long-suffering emotional characters, but also its dramatic death scene (Lister 214). To this, she adds the novel's "setting on the dark, immense, and mysterious Yorkshire moors", which is in consonance with "opera's long tradition of grandiose, ostentatious sets that match and magnify the large-scale scope of the musical drama" (214). Lister also refers to the way in which Brontë's prose monologues and dialogues "translate exceptionally well into operatic settings" (214).

One of these has been Bernard Herrmann's four-act opera adaptation, *Wuthering Heights*, completed in 1951. This pre-eminent American composer of film music began his version in 1941 upon the libretto of Lucille Fletcher, which incorporated some of Brontë's poetry and text directly from the novel.<sup>11</sup> He was mainly attracted to the work's theme of obsession, a recurrent motive in many of the films on which he collaborated.<sup>12</sup> Herrmann, who was described as

'brooding and portentous' like Heathcliff, was also drawn to complex dichotomies of reality/fantasy, attraction/repulsion and obsession/detachment.

. . . the oneness of the characters with their environment, and also the mood and colours of the day attracted Herrmann. . . . His evocation of the moors – magnificent, oppressive, and violent – creates a powerful sense of place, enforcing the landscape's role in Cathy's and Heathcliff's lives, even its control of their emotions (Smith 112).

Herrmann's setting of Brontë's poetry, with its musical meter and sharp imagery, is affecting throughout.<sup>13</sup> More controversial are Herrmann's changes in Heathcliff, transformed from "an imp of satan" into a misunderstood tragic figure, in *arias* like "I am the only being whose doom no tongue would ask". Scored by Alfred Newman, and inspired in William Wyler's 1939 film adaptation, the opera possesses a symphonic and cinematic nature. Unfortunately, Herrmann did not live to see it completely performed onstage, which only happened in Portland (Oregon), in November 1982.

In *Brontë Transformations* (1996), Patsy Stoneman likened its neo-Romantic musical style to those of Wagner, Puccini, Strauss and Sibelius, amongst others (168). As Lister observes, it is a type of vocal writing, "a lyrical *parlando*" which "strives for a naturalistic imitation of speech patterns" and which has been compared with Benjamin Britten (Lister 215). But Herrmann's Cathy becomes a ghostly presence: she is "ethereal, rendered somewhat more passive by her romantic dreams and her ailing" and does not resemble Brontë's more "uncontrollable, chimerical creature" (Lister 215). The composer's musical characterisation of Cathy relies, for Stoneman, on "languishing and expressive music . . . accompanied by dreamy strings" (Stoneman 173). Conceived for large symphony orchestra, the score included no chorus, which Herrmann felt was unsuited to the intimate subject-matter, but concentrated on eight vocal parts.

Especially beautiful is Yves Saelens, as Edgar Linton, singing “Now art thou dear my golden June” and haunting is the *finale* from Act 2 with Cathy calling Heathcliff in the song “Oh, Heathcliff, come back!”<sup>14</sup>

Another operatic setting of *Wuthering Heights* was American composer Carlisle Floyd's, a name of greater notoriety in the classical musical world. Although his chronology (containing a prologue and three acts) is closer than Herrmann's to Brontë's own, it actually ends with Cathy's death like most dramatic adaptations, including Herrmann's. Floyd also composes a passionate final love duet (“There is no death in heaven”) for Cathy and Heathcliff, and Cathy's dramatic *aria* entitled “I have dreamt”. But, as Lister notes, “while Herrmann's ending has a harmonium accompanying ghostly Cathy offstage, Floyd's highly tragic finale . . . observes Cathy's death with a grand pause (two bars of silence)” (Lister 218). She thus becomes a great tragic heroine, ‘stealing’ all the attention and import from Heathcliff, and proving “an exciting, challenging and powerful role with great dramatic and vocal opportunities” (Lister 218) for the soprano interpreter.<sup>15</sup>

The character of Cathy would take centre stage again, though in a different sense, in the widely known pop song “Wuthering Heights”, written and recorded by 1980s British pop artist Kate Bush for her 1978 album *The Kick Inside*. Since popular music generally deals with contemporary subjects and idioms, the heroine of a Victorian novel was indeed an unusual choice as the subject for a pop song. Bush, in her turn, seemed an equally unlikely candidate for a pop star, having trained as a mime, dancer and organist. Still, her Cathy-voiced song, suggestive of an ‘eerie spectre’, became not only a star-making debut but also probably Bush's most enduring work. A beautifully tender, yet haunting, musical setting of Emily Brontë's classic love story, “Wuthering Heights” wrapped swelling keyboards, strings and guitars around a lead vocal delivered in a sustained, almost child-like soprano.

The live rhythm section that Jon Kelly recorded consisted of Bush playing a grand piano, Stuart Elliott on drums, Andrew Powell on bass and Ian Bairnson on a six-string acoustic.<sup>16</sup> One collaborator commented on Bush's performance: "She was imitating this witch, the mad lady from the Yorkshire Moors, and she was very theatrical about it. She was such a mesmerising performer — she threw her heart and soul into everything she did" (Lister 216). One of Kate Bush's best-loved songs, 'Wuthering Heights' was accorded a new vocal when included in her 1986 greatest hits compilation, *The Whole Story*.

In the realm of musical theatre, Brontë's novel, and again Cathy, has more recently interested composers. Bernard J. Taylor's *Wuthering Heights: The Musical* began as a 'concept album' in 1991 and was well received in its theatrical premiere in the Netherlands in 1994, but a West End production did not occur.<sup>17</sup> Taylor's versatile music adaptation, which features an excellent cast, including the Yorkshire-born diva Lesley Garrett, was described as having 'breath' and 'sweep', a 'romantic intensity'; but, as Lister points out, its "orchestral accompaniment evokes mostly cinematic music of a highly derivative nature" (219). It contained several appealing melodies, particularly the impassioned "I Belong to the Earth", but one of the best songs is Garrett's interpretation of Cathy's theme "He's gone".<sup>18</sup>

In 1992, the Japanese film composer of sweeping and romantic works, Ryuichi Sakamoto, produced the original soundtrack for the feature film adaptation *Emily Brontë's Wuthering Heights* of Paramount Pictures.<sup>19</sup> Sakamoto's powerfully beautiful and dramatic creation, which greatly enhances the film's plot and scenery, is imitative or reminiscent of Herrmann's symphonic style. It is also a reminder that as musical medium, film positions music and musicality as parts of a fictional world, not just creating mood and atmosphere but engaging with image, narrative and context. Music as cinematic representation, as Daniel Goldmark observes, "becomes thickly textured . . . it



resonates with intertextual polyphony, including meaning, agency and identity” (Goldmark 6-7), precisely those categories usually denied to pure music.

The first rock musical adaptation,<sup>20</sup> a genre hardly congruent with Victorian Yorkshire, sent a fifty-six-year old Cliff Richard on digression in 1996-7 and, as its title suggests, *Heathcliff* centres on its title character rather than Cathy. Richard asked Tim Rice to help him write a show based on Brontë's novel, but that focused on the dark romantic hero instead. Although the show greatly minimizes the importance of Cathy's character (a part sung by Helen Hobson) and Rice employs some of the same rhymes used by Taylor, the work seems to communicate more fully the intense and complex nature of Cathy's sentiments. Cathy sings a number of duets with Heathcliff but she has only one solo, called “The Madness of Cathy”, paraphrasing her ‘mad scene’ from chapter twelve of the novel. Its refrain is in rhyming couplets and the song reveals Cathy's conflicted nature as she questions and rails against her fate, with her “heart ever hounded” and “spirit confounded”. “The intensity contributed by *Heathcliff*'s rock instrumentation”, as Lister shows, is in fact “quite appropriate to the tempestuous romance of Cathy and Heathcliff” (Lister 221).

In the genre of the *lied* or art song,<sup>21</sup> composer John Woods Duke (1899-1984) has created several song cycles inspired in British and American poets, including at least six poems by Brontë. Most evocative of *Wuthering Heights* in terms of both text and mood is the third song of Duke's cycle, entitled “On the Moors”, which adapts the poem “High Waving Heather”. He conveys the movement of the wind-swept heather through flowing triplets in the piano part, while the vocal line captures with increasing drama the effects of extreme weather alternations. With its wide compass and unpredictable intervals, the vocal line suggests a chimerical personality comparable to that of Cathy.

The young Canadian composer Nick Peros, fluent in symphonic, orchestral, choral, vocal and chamber genres, released a Compact Disk entitled *Songs* in

November 2000, which featured thirty-one songs for *solo voice & piano*, with texts by Emily Dickinson, Housman, Wordsworth, Stevenson, Blake and, most notably, Emily Brontë. Seventeen of the songs on the CD are settings of Brontë's poetry, with some songs being the first time that her poems have been set to music. Peros has sensitively adapted Brontë's deeply personal texts, which are brought to life in the committed performance of Heidi Klann and Alayne Hall. Song number twelve, Brontë's *Sleep Brings No Joy To Me*, is particularly haunting, while *The Soft Unclouded Blue Of Air* is full of energy and vitality. Peros' style is characterised by great expressiveness, original tonality and harmonic invention, and continues to receive extensive international performance.<sup>22</sup>

Linda Lister's interest, as a musicologist, in the Brontë sisters' lives and writings materialised in the creation of a chamber opera in 2002, which she significantly entitled *How Clear She Shines!*, after Emily's poem. In Lister's opera, the character of Charlotte Brontë narrates a reflection on Anne and Emily's lives, poems and early deaths; thus, the libretto includes poems by all the sisters, excerpts from *Wuthering Heights* and a part of Charlotte's "Biographical Notice". Lister portrays Emily as a passionate and chimerical character, much like Cathy, by using numerous metrical shifts in the opening *aria*, which is a setting of the poem "Stars". She "seeks to portray the duality of Emily's nature by alternating between two *tempo* markings: a serene, proud pulse contrasted with a more ecstatic *tempo*" (Lister 227). In the opera's later duet, the characters of Charlotte and Emily sing in a responsive manner, taking turns and echoing each other's sentiments musically.

Also in 2002, the Australian writer Terry Fisk has created a song cycle libretto entitled *Wuthering Heights*.<sup>23</sup> His creation portrays no less than the entire story of the novel through a careful selection of fifty-two poems by Emily Brontë. Each poem is sung by one of the main characters in the novel, thus

stressing the inherent and organic connection between her poetry and novel, and outlining a distinct musical language in the process. This very original creation has the character of 'Catherine' singing haunting poems such as "I'll come when thou art saddest" and "I see around me tombstones grey", and the one of Heathcliff memorable compositions such as "Cold in the earth" and "Stars".<sup>24</sup> Through each song and corresponding poem, both the personality and the specific circumstances of each character are unveiled to the listener, thus creating an effect of unity between content and form.

By the end of 2008, the well-known British actor and musical artist Mark Ryan wrote and produced *Wuthering Heights. A Musical Adaptation*, featuring six original songs and narration by Ray Winstone, all inspired by Brontë's work.<sup>25</sup> Both the music and the lyrics are created by Ryan and the musical performances are also by him (as Heathcliff), Jenn Korbee (as Cathy), Jessica Keenan Wynn (as Nelly) and Katie Boeck (as Isabella). These three female artists also participate in Ryan's additional short video, entitled "Women", filmed especially for the website. Ryan's original idea was to write a dramatic concept album with eighteen songs based on the story, beginning with *Heathcliff's Prayer*.<sup>26</sup>

Whether of more erudite or more popular extraction, song settings of Emily Brontë's poems and musical adaptations of *Wuthering Heights*, namely musical dramas, have continually emerged in Britain and in the United States, in the last few years, and can be seen and appreciated on several media (including the Internet), thus proving the intemporal and unending fascination that the Brontëan *oeuvre* has exerted on modern artists and creators, from composers to performers.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Charles Avison was the first critic to stress the emotive aspect of music and convincingly challenge the primacy of the traditional mimetic principle in his *An Essay on Musical Expression*

---

(London, 1752). Hearing has traditionally been seen as the medium of experience, intuition, intensity, and immediacy. It has also been associated, rightly or wrongly, with “everything that predates and even threatens the rational, reflective subject: the oral, the infantile, the archaic, the instinctive, the irrational” (Connor, 1997: 2).

<sup>2</sup> These organising principles “pervade both musical and literary textures; and the straightforward way they usually function in the respective arts yields many points of contact for legitimate comparison.” (Scher and Bernhart 9).

<sup>3</sup> Operatic masterpieces and outstanding examples of the *lied* have also been created from existing literary works, such as Verdi's *Macbeth* and Schubert's settings of Goethe's poems. Combinations of text and music in a single work include also a host of other familiar forms from past centuries of European musical and theatrical history, such as oratorios, cantatas, motets, madrigals, a *capella* choruses, ballads, the English masque and the German *singspiel*.

<sup>4</sup> In this category we might include some of Beethoven's symphonies and sonatas.

<sup>5</sup> Affinity in material, rhythm, stress, pitch and timbre are all applicable in literature, more or less effectively, to create music like textures.

<sup>6</sup> It is important to clarify that, strictly speaking, these musico-literary phenomena, although obviously interconnected, belong to different disciplines: ‘literature in music’ is usually studied in musicology, ‘music in literature’ is mainly treated in literary studies; the only truly hybrid or double category is ‘music and literature’ because “they constitute a symbiotic construct that qualifies as a full-fledged work of art” (Scher and Bernhart 8). For a long time, opera criticism and *lied* scholarship have been practised almost exclusively by musicologists.

<sup>7</sup> In the form of programme music, one would find Beethoven, Berlioz and Liszt; in the *lied* genre, the names of Schubert, Schumann, Brahms and Wolf; and in the literary opera, Wagner's music dramas.

<sup>8</sup> Williams will focus on the way Brontë's musicality relates to the aesthetic evolution of emotionality in the novel, linking this to some psychoanalytic and philosophical ideas about symbol formation.

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed and extensive analysis of the use and function of ‘voice’ in both Emily and Anne Brontë's poetry see our article entitled “Exchanging voices, questioning voices ...: Dissent and Dialogue in the Poetry of Early Victorian Women” (Guimarães).

<sup>10</sup> Early in 1937, Benjamin Britten composed a setting of lines from Emily Brontë's poem “A Day Dream” for tenor and strings, which appeared in *The Company of Heaven* broadcast by BBC. It was the very first vocal that he composed with the voice of Peter Pears in mind.

<sup>11</sup> Fletcher used only words and dialogue from the first part of the novel. For certain lyrical arias requiring extended poetry she went to the poems that Emily dedicated to her imaginary world of Gondal.

---

<sup>12</sup> These were over fifty cinematic scores, namely of *Citizen Kane*, *The Day the Earth Stood Still*, *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, *Psycho*, *Vertigo*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much* and *Taxi Driver*, including a participation in Orson Welles' infamous *War of the Worlds* broadcast.

<sup>13</sup> As Steven Smith states in his biography of the composer, "Herrmann's research on the novel was exhaustive . . . No English-language opera was more obsessively researched . . . His experience in setting poetry and prose to music dated to his teens, and his radio and film scores had made dramatic composition second nature" (Smith 112).

<sup>14</sup> Herrmann would significantly write that "Each act is a landscape tone poem which envelops the performers" (qtd. in Smith 112).

<sup>15</sup> The opera premiered at the Santa Fé Opera in July 1958, in a production directed by Irving Guttman. A revised version of the work was performed at the New York City Opera in 1959 with a cast that included Phyllis Curtin.

<sup>16</sup> This was the first time that a self-written song by a female artist topped the UK singles chart. Kate Bush was only nineteen years old.

<sup>17</sup> A 'concept album' is an album that is unified by a theme, which can be instrumental, compositional, narrative, or lyrical, with all songs contributing to a single overall theme or unified story.

<sup>18</sup> The show has since been translated into six languages from the original English and has been extensively staged in the UK, USA, the Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Australia. The adaptation had the support of the Brontë Society at Haworth in Yorkshire.

<sup>19</sup> Directed by Peter Kosminski, the film featured Ralph Fiennes as the tortured Heathcliff and Juliette Binoche as the free-spirited Catherine, and is one of the most popular cinematic adaptations of the novel.

<sup>20</sup> A rock musical is a musical theatre work with rock music. The genre of rock musical may overlap somewhat with album musicals, concept albums and song cycles, as they sometimes tell a story through rock music, and some album musicals and concept albums become rock musicals.

<sup>21</sup> *Lieder* are European romantic songs, also known as art songs. The term is usually used to describe songs composed to a German poem of reasonably high literary aspirations, especially during the nineteenth century. The poetry forming the basis for *Lieder* often centers upon pastoral themes, or themes of romantic love. Typically, *Lieder* are arranged for a single singer and piano. Some of the most famous examples of *Lieder* are Schubert's *Der Tod und Das Mädchen* (Death and the Maiden).

<sup>22</sup> The year 2001 saw the composition of Claude-Michel Schönberg's first ballet score, "Wuthering Heights". This production was performed by the United Kingdom's Northern Ballet Theatre in September 2002. A 2-CD soundtrack was released under the First Night label in 2004.

<sup>23</sup> A song cycle is a group of songs by a single poet, usually for solo voice and piano, constituting a literary and musical unit. This form is usually associated with the nineteenth-century *lied*.

---

<sup>24</sup> These poems serve to represent the respective circumstances of the novel's characters at a given moment of the narrative, irrespective of the fact that most of them are originally spoken by a woman and not a man (as is the case of Heathcliff's both poems here).

<sup>25</sup> Growing up amongst the hauntingly romantic landscapes of Yorkshire, Ryan developed an emotional connection to the story of *Wuthering Heights*. The six songs available for single purchase or as an EP in iTunes include "Heathcliff's Prayer", "I Love the Wind", "Kiss the Moon", "Women", "Dark Passion" and "I Am the Man".

<sup>26</sup> Ryan, with a burgeoning film and television career ("Beowulf" and "Sexy Beast"), is currently working on a screenplay for theatrical release.

### Works Cited

Brontë, Charlotte. "Biographical Notice of Ellis and Acton Bell." *Emily Brontë. Wuthering Heights*, Ed. Ian Jack. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995: 319-324.

Brontë, Emily. *Wuthering Heights*, Ed. Ian Jack. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.

Brown, Calvin S., *Music and Literature. A Comparison of the Arts*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1948.

Byerly, Alison. "The Picturesque Aesthetic and the Natural Art of Song." *Realism, Representation, and the Arts in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Literature*. Cambridge Studies in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century Literature and Culture, vol. 12. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 14-49.

Davies, Stevie. *Emily Brontë. Writers and Their Work Series*. Plymouth: Northcote House, 1998.

Davies, Stevie. *Emily Brontë: Heretic*. London: The Women's Press, 1994.

Goldmark, Daniel et al. *Beyond the Soundtrack: Representing Music in Cinema*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2007.

Guimarães, Paula Alexandra. "Exchanging voices, questioning voices ...: Dissent and Dialogue in The Poetry of Early Victorian Women." *Exchanging Voices, Expanding Boundaries*. Eds. Carla Ferreira de Castro and Luís Guerra. Évora: Publicações da Universidade de Évora: 123-148.

---

Kramer, Lawrence. "Primitive Encounters: Beethoven's 'Tempest' Sonatas, Musical Meaning, and Enlightenment Anthropology." *Beethoven Forum*. Ed. by Lewis Lockwood, vol. 6 (1998): University of Nebraska Press: 31-66.

Lister, Lind. "Music of the Moors: The Voices of Emily Brontë and Cathy in Opera and Song." *The Brontës in the World of the Arts*. Ed. Sandra Hagan and Juliette Wells. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008: 213-236.

Roper, Derek and Edward Chitham, eds. *The Poems of Emily Brontë*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1995.

Scher, Steven P. and Walter Bernhart. "Literature and Music (1982)." *Essays on Literature and Music (1967-2004)*, vol. 5 of Word and Music Studies. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004: 173-201.

Smith, Steven. *A Heart at Fire's Center. The Life and Music of Bernard Herrmann*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002.

Stoneman, Patsy. *Brontë Transformations: The Cultural Dissemination of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights*. Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1995.

Wallace, Robert K., *Emily Brontë and Beethoven: Romantic Equilibrium in Fiction and Music*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986.

Weliver, Phyllis. *The Figure of Music in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry*. Series Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005.

Williams, Meg Harris. "The Hieroglyphics of Catherine: Emily Brontë and the Musical Matrix." *The Brontës in the World of the Arts*. Ed. Sandra Hagan and Juliette Wells. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2008.

# Landseer's Highlands: a Place of Fascination with the "Monarchs of Nature"



Sara Vicente | Universidade Nova de Lisboa, CETAPS

## Abstract

The English animal painter Sir Edwin Landseer (1802-1873) first visited the Highlands in 1824 and, from that moment on, his artistic career was to be unavoidably marked by his profound fascination with the romantic sights he encountered there.

The artist's empathy with the wild animals that inhabited the Scottish landscape functioned as a pretext for him to travel to the Highlands annually along with his friend Charles Leslie (1794-1859), also a renowned painter, who introduced Landseer to one of his favourite writers, Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), whose home at Abbotsford the artist began visiting regularly. Despite their growing attractiveness, these journeys also served a practical purpose. They contributed to developing methods for the accurate observation of animals *in loco* in order to capture their body language at particular moments of joy (*Highland Music*, 1829) and suffering (*Highland Nurses*, 1856), thereby demonstrating that their feelings and expressions are akin to ours. These empiricist observations also allowed Landseer to depict the struggle for survival of many species in danger of extinction through his studies of dead game and sporting scenes. Among these are some of his best known works such as *The Hunting of Chevy Chase* (1825-1826), *Stag at Bay* (1846) and *The Monarch of the Glen* (1851). We must highlight that during these visits to Scotland, the artist increased his circle of future clients among a new class of entrepreneurial collectors. Due to his reputation as the foremost animal painter of his time, Landseer soon became one of Queen Victoria's favourite artists. The Queen was captivated by his art and commissioned him to paint the royal family and their beloved pets on several occasions.

Thus, Edwin Landseer's finely detailed portrayals of Scottish culture show us a place of contrasts, where visual images of tragedy and death are entwined with those of a peaceful life in the fascinating Highlands.

**Key-Words:** Edwin Landseer, Walter Scott, Animal Painting, Highlands, Scotland, Fascination, Hunting.

**Citação:** Sara Vicente, "Landseer's Highlands: a Place of Fascination with the 'Monarchs of Nature'". *Via Panorâmica: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 38-58. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.



## Introduction

The aim of this paper is to analyse Sir Edwin Landseer's (1802-1873) fascination with life in the Highlands and the denizens of the wilds – Highlanders and fauna – which this Victorian animal painter portrayed in many of his works from the 1820s to the 1860s.

This fascination appears as the result of the influence of the romantic imagery of Scottish culture conveyed in Sir Walter Scott's (1771-1832) writing, which remained in the minds of 19<sup>th</sup>-century British society. Therefore, the intrinsic relationship between the artist's interest in the Highlands and the influence of Scott's literary works, as a mediator of this romantic image of Scotland as a place of spiritual tranquillity, functioned as the core impulses to Landseer's inspiration for his animal paintings.

Edwin Landseer started visiting the Highlands regularly in 1824. During these visits, the artist increased his circle of future clients among a new class of entrepreneurial collectors. Due to his reputation as the foremost animal painter of his time, Landseer soon became one of Queen Victoria's favourite artists. The Queen was captivated by his art and commissioned him to paint the Royal Family and their beloved pets on several occasions.

This paper will also focus on the practical purpose of these journeys as they contributed to the development of methods for the accurate observation of animals *in loco* in order to capture their body language at specific moments of suffering and their struggle for survival, demonstrating that their feelings and expressions are akin to ours.

## 1. Sir Walter Scott's Romantic Imagery of the Highlands and his Influence on Landseer's Artistic Works

In 1824 Edwin Landseer visited Scotland with his friend Charles Leslie (1794-1859), who introduced him to one of his favourite writers, Sir Walter Scott. The romantic imagery conveyed in his historical novels attracted most members of the upper classes as well as many artists in England and encouraged them to visit the Highlands, searching for the romantic way of life portrayed in Scott's writing.

The novelist showed his deep admiration for Landseer's paintings on several occasions, and soon the artist became a regular visitor at Abbotsford, his home. As a sign of their mutual appreciation, Edwin Landseer painted a portrait of Walter Scott, which is said to have been painted during that very first journey in 1824 before the latter's financial adversities.

The Scottish author felt a profound esteem for his beloved pets, which made him fear to lose them when he started having serious financial worries. During one of his regular visits to the Highlands, Edwin Landseer portrayed Sir Walter Scott's favourite dog, Maida, in *A Scene at Abbotsford* (1827). The painter observed Maida very closely in order to capture its expression in his mind and later depict it with the precision and similitude for which he was acknowledged. The dog was extremely ill at the time Landseer finished the painting, which touched the Scottish novelist's sensitivity even more.

In many of Scott's novels and poems the virtues of the dog are highlighted and the animal is described as a loyal character and very attached to its owner. These qualities are embodied in the figure of the dog who is, most of the time, the only companion of the Highlander or the ghillie in the immense solitary landscapes of Scotland. Landseer also drew an initial scene from *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1818), one of Walter Scott's most famous novels. The illustration, with the same title as the novel, shows Lucy Ashton and her father, Sir William Ashton, after having suffered an attack by a wild bull. Behind them, one sees the brave Master of Ravenswood, who shot the bull to save his lover, Lucy. The

animal's attention was apparently caught by the scarlet mantle described in detail in the book.

The painter's fascination with wild cattle made him immediately choose this scene when the Scottish novelist asked him for an illustration for the engraved frontispiece to the Waverley edition of his works in forty-eight volumes.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the three characters are essential to this picture, the dead bull is cleverly depicted to avoid a more shocking image of death. Here, the animal functions both as a tragic element and as the main cause of the romantic encounter that allowed Lucy's father to regard the Master of Ravenswood with gratitude.

The romantic spirit of life in the country, where the malice of actions could easily be forgotten or even pass unnoticed, permeated not only all of Scott's novels and poems but also other authors' works. The "Ballad of Chevy Chase" published by Thomas Percy in *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) from a medieval manuscript inspired Edwin Landseer to paint two of his most renowned historical works: *The Hunting of Chevy Chase* (1825-1826) and its sequel, *The Battle of Chevy Chase* (1825-1826).

Both pictures illustrate the battle between two families, one English and one Scottish, as represented by their leaders, the Earl of Northumberland and the Earl Douglas, respectively. According to this ballad, the "Earl of Northumberland [...] intended to hunt across land claimed by Douglas" (Ormond, 2009: 64). The former was ambushed on the border between England and Scotland and in the ensuing battle both leaders and their men were killed. Once again, this painting depicted the romantic imagery of Sir Walter Scott's novels, and even though the historic figures are extremely important in this scene, it is the animals which are the artist's central focus in this composition. The body language, making it look as if the dogs and stags are in motion, reflects Landseer's accurate anatomical

knowledge at such an early age. Although later critics were vaguer as regards *The Hunting of Chevy Chase*, the periodicals in the 19<sup>th</sup> century commented on it with profound interest and passion. For example, *The Examiner* described it as “an approximation to perfection” (Ormond 68).

As far as *The Battle of Chevy Chase* is concerned, this picture illustrates the last stanzas of the same ballad that describe the moments after the conflict when the almost static widow grieves for her husband and relatives killed during the battle: “Next day did many widows come,/ Their husbands to bewail;/ They washed their wounds in brinish tears,/ But all would not prevail./ Their bodies, bathed in purple blood,/ They bore with them away:/ They kissed them dead a thousand times,/ Ere they were clad in clay” (Ormond 68).

These two scenes of the ballad represent contrasting emotions towards this combat. The first painting embodies the life and vigour of its characters in the middle of a battle while the second symbolises death and the sorrow associated with the end of an armed conflict.

## **2. Landseer's journeys to Scotland: Hunting and Looking at Interiors**

Landseer was frequently invited to visit many of the richest houses in Scotland as he was often commissioned to portray these new entrepreneurs, who soon became regular clients and admirers of his animal paintings.

His almost annual journeys also contributed to him having an inside view not only of the countryside, which he had read so much about in Scott's works, but also and more importantly of the natural habitats he wished to discover and where he was certain to find very different and unique animal species that could not be observed in such a cosmopolitan and modern city as London was during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

*Sketch in the Highlands* (1837) (Picture 1) and *Tethered Rams* (1839) (Picture 2) are two representations of a tradition that belonged to the romantic

imagery of this locale. The former depicts the calm surrounding the shepherd, who watches over his flock of sheep attentively, with the dog reflecting the same concern as his master.



**Picture 1** - Edwin Landseer, *Sketch in the Highlands*, oil on millboard, 26.1 x 35.6 cm, 1837, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

As regards the second painting, the two dogs show their dutiful attitude towards the flock as if they are prepared to chase after a sheep that may distance itself from the rest at any moment. One of the dogs is lying down and it is curious to notice that both stay near the tethered rams possibly because they feel these two animals are the most valuable within the flock and so must be constantly protected. In addition, the position of the ears highlights the watchful attitude of the two guards, as they have to watch the flock and also their master.

The couple is left to a secondary level because, in this case, the artist was in fact more interested in studying the behaviour and attitudes of the animals in loco, albeit the importance of the human characters to interact with them and convey the bond between men and animals cannot be ignored.

The scenery mirrors the quietness and immensity of the landscape. The water is very still and one cannot see where the hills end even if one tries to look further. The animal painter's aim was to depict the romantic Highlands that fascinated him so profoundly.



**Picture 2** - Edwin Landseer, *Tethered Rams*, oil on panel, 45.7 x 58.4 cm, 1839, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Apart from being a hunter and sporting man, Landseer was fascinated with the simplicity of life in the country. Moreover, during the second half of the 1820s, the Duchess of Bedford ordered several huts to be built in the valley of Glenfeshie, one of the painter's favourite locations to stay in communion with nature, and reserved one of them for his use. Despite its humble conditions and

extremely precarious nature, it was placed very close to other shelters belonging to renowned sportsmen, who were also his personal friends. The artist welcomed the idea of staying closer to nature with profound enthusiasm as it allowed him to observe the animals and the environments where he would then hunt along with the other sportsmen.

One of the most prominent sportsmen was the Earl of Aberdeen, who was depicted by Sir Edwin Landseer in *The Otter Speared, Portrait of the Earl of Aberdeen*, also called *The Otter Hunt* (1844).

Despite the brutality of otter spearing, this practice was still quite common in Scotland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The landscape is most probably Aberdeenshire and it represents the exact moment before the otter's carcass is thrown to the hounds, who are eagerly waiting for it. The hunter poses heroically, lifting up the otter that has been twisted with the spear to guarantee it is impaled. Nowadays, the violence associated with spearing otters still causes controversy and this painting has been chosen on several occasions to illustrate the cruelty implied in such sporting scenes.<sup>2</sup>

## 2.1. Royal Hunters

The Royal Family shared a profound curiosity about and enthusiasm for life in the country, and from the 1840s on the Queen and her family started visiting the Highlands to hunt and to feel the tranquillity in the wilderness. For the Victorian mentality, Prince Albert was the archetype of the educated British gentleman and sportsman and even though he was often absent on stag and deer hunts, the great pride felt by the Queen and their children was visible whenever he returned.

In the autumn of 1847, the Royal Family was invited by the Marquess and Marchioness of Abercorn to stay for a few days with them at Ardvreike Lodge on Loch Laggan. Shortly afterwards, the Queen requested Sir Edwin Landseer's

presence and on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1847 the painter arrived at Ardvreike. On this occasion, the artist was commissioned to paint Queen Victoria and her two eldest children, the Princess Royal and the Prince of Wales, accompanied by one of their many beloved dogs in a picture called *Queen Victoria Sketching at Loch Laggan* (1847).

Notwithstanding Prince Albert's absence, who was deliberately not painted in this scene, the Prince of Wales points at his father in profound joy. Landseer's aim was to illustrate the image of a united and close Victorian family in which the admiration for the father's virtues and the recognition of the mother's affection and devotion to her family function also as a symbol of a cohesive and strong country.

In addition, the ghillie with his dog and the pony bearing a dead stag, probably shot by Prince Albert, convey a message of Queen Victoria's attachment to the Highlanders, in particular, and to Scotland in general, by her allowing her children to have direct contact with poorer ways of life and encouraging this proximity with Scottish denizens.

Another important painting was *Royal Sports on Hill and Loch* (1850-72). This picture took more than twenty years to complete due to the constant inclusion of more animals and more picturesque characters to inhabit the scene in which the surroundings also became tamer.

In this picture, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert (holding her hand) are the central figures although the monarch's intention is to capture the spirit of the Highlands. Once again, the action takes place after the hunt, as shown by the dead stags shot by the Prince and laid at the Queen's feet as trophies. It is interesting to highlight the attentive and compassionate expression in the pony's eyes, looking at the anguished faces of the dead game, as if animals and men were endowed with identical emotions.



## 2.2. Looking at Interiors

Edwin Landseer bore in mind the imagery of simplicity described by Walter Scott on his journeys to Scotland, and his fascination with what he saw steadily grew as he entered the Highlanders' homes and learnt more about the lives they lead, their activities and the need to find resources (some illicit) to survive in these severe conditions.

As we shall analyse below, Sir Edwin depicted this romantic way of life and the places he used to read about in Scott's novels and poems but which in fact corresponded to the environments he visited during his regular journeys through the Highlands.

Despite the coming of the railways and the increase in tourism, Scotland suffered considerable changes in the daily routines and occupations of its inhabitants. Many Highlanders were forced to seek illegal means of earning their livelihood and whisky distilling and poaching soon flourished within Scottish society which regarded these illicit activities with sympathetic indulgence.

In Diana Donald's words, the Victorian painter had certainly witnessed "the depopulation of the Highlands caused by the clearances and enforced emigration, and by the subsequent tendency for deer forests to replace sheep farming, which could have left the old man isolated" (Donald 337). As a result of this awareness, Sir Edwin Landseer sketched several interior scenes in order to illustrate the contrasting ways of life, symbolised in the pictures of these modest crofts, between a modern and industrial England and a romantic yet extremely deprived Scotland.

Although Sir Edwin stayed in many of the richest lodges in Scotland and sketched many of them, the artist was also interested in depicting the conditions of the poorest families he came across during these journeys.

Most of these paintings illustrate some of the traditions associated to the Highlands as in *Highland Music* (1829). The painter shows us a bagpiper along

with his dogs who listen very attentively to him playing. Three of the four dogs are looking at their master. The spectator is offered the opportunity to take a look at this particular moment as if it were caught in time, and thus Landseer invites us to create a certain narrative around this episode.

One of Landseer's most famous interior scenes is *A Highland Breakfast* (1834) (Picture 3), where a mother breastfeeds her child while the dogs gather around a large wooden tub to eat their breakfast as well. We notice that one of the dogs is also feeding her puppies in perfect similitude with her mistress. As in the previous painting, this interior shows us very simple and humble conditions where there is only the necessary furniture and almost no accessories on the walls.



**Picture 3** - Edwin Landseer, *A Highland Breakfast*, oil on panel, 50.8 x 66 cm, 1834, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

We must point out that in both paintings there are several dogs depicted to show the deep affection Highlanders felt for their pets. In these interior scenes the dogs are portrayed in harmony with each other and with their masters. Despite the small size of these bothies, it is curious to notice that the Highlanders always found space to have a generous wooden tub to feed their pets.

The dogs depicted in both these interior scenes are full of character and show Landseer's deep sympathy for these creatures who were closely associated to the subject so as to cause an emotional effect. In other words, Sir Edwin's aim was to highlight the bond between man and animals, expressing the true affection of the Highlanders for their pets and the loyalty and gratefulness of the animals towards their masters. At the same time, these poor, harsh interiors show us the difficult conditions in which this local population lived in contrast to the opulent lives of the upper classes who travelled to Scotland almost every autumn to go deer or stag hunting and to escape the rush of their sophisticated lives in England.

### **3. Edwin Landseer's Fascination with the "Monarchs of Nature"**

Landseer studied animal anatomy and performed numerous anatomical dissections to acquire more accurate knowledge of animals, both inside and out. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, many painters felt the urge to combine their artistic studies with scientific ones due to the fact that most of them depicted animals in their canvasses and so the muscles, skeleton and texture of fur and feathers had to be extremely precise.

Moreover, the Victorian painter wanted to endow the animals with quasi-human emotions and sensibilities. Landseer's aim was to transmit the idea, accepted in 19<sup>th</sup>-century scientific circles, that men and animals have very similar

responses in extreme circumstances. In order to accomplish this purpose, he created narrative situations for his animal subjects.

Although Sir Walter Scott played an important role in giving Landseer a true image of the romantic Highlands, his subsequent journeys to Scotland allowed him not only to study the wild animals *in loco* but also to leave this important influence behind and follow his own path to explore and analyse the emotions and expressions of various domestic species in the imminence of death, such as dogs which were often associated with a primitive virtue and integrity.

*Attachment* (1829) and *The Faithful Hound* (1830) are two examples of the bond created between dogs and their masters which remains even in the latter's death. The first picture reflects the dog's incomprehension of death, albeit he feels the certainty that something is lost forever. The collie rests its paws on the dead body of the chieftain as if it is trying to see an expression of life in the man's face, or simply to understand what has happened to him.

The second painting's title is quite meaningful as the artist directs one's attention to the core figure: the faithful hound. In this case, the expression of the dog howling in deep sorrow at the death of his master and his horse while raising its head to the sky is almost like a cry for help from the solitary animal in the immense landscape of the Highlands.

The theme of death was also depicted in two other famous paintings, *The Shepherd's Grave* (1829) and *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner* (1837) (Picture 4), with the particular detail that in both cases the masters are absent, contrary to the previous pictures, and here the dogs are the only mourners left.

The former depicts another loyal companion, probably the only one, standing beside his master's grave. The unfinished inscription on the tombstone might be connected to the absence of other relatives or friends apart from the

shepherd's dog. Its body language is once again noteworthy, particularly the lowered tail and the ears in the attentive pose of a vigilant watcher.

*The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner* (Picture 4) shows us the interior of a Highland bothy where the collie guards the coffin and rests his head on it, perhaps in the same position as he once would have remained in when his master was still alive.



**Picture 4** - Edwin Landseer, *The Old Shepherd's Chief Mourner*, oil on canvas, 45.7 x 61 cm, 1837, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Apart from his studies of the emotions of domestic animals, Landseer's aim with these regular journeys to Scotland was to learn more about the species he could not find in London such as some birds and, more importantly, stags and deer.

As far as birds are concerned, the artist's fascination with ptarmigans is reflected in the various sporting pictures he painted after his expedition in

September 1833 from Doune to Glenfeshie where ptarmigans could be frequently seen.

It is interesting to note that Landseer's fascination with this particular species was due to the variations in the colour of its plumage, which turns white in winter but which is normally brown throughout summer and spring. This is indubitably related to the overriding need for camouflage to hide themselves from all the menaces these birds might encounter during the harsh snowy Scottish winter.

*Ptarmigan* (1833) and *The Ptarmigan Hill* (1869) are two examples of his interest in this most eye-catching species of game bird. The first painting portrays the majesty of the bird that guards its nest despite its mate's injuries, which were probably caused by the unexpected attack of some animal. The grandeur of the wounded protagonist, accentuated by its head twisted in agony and at the same time the white plumage, contrasts with the harshness of the rocky hilltops.

The scenery in the second picture is very similar to that in the previous example. Again, the alert male ptarmigan stands by its nest guarding it not only against the two Gordon Setters but, above all, against the approaching threatening eagle.

The menace this predator represents to such beautiful and apparently harmless birds is highlighted in another series of studies of the struggle for survival in the Highlands.

*The Swannery Invaded by Eagles* (1869) illustrates a brutal attack in which the swans did not give in without fighting. Landseer divided the scene into four smaller fights in different perspectives and on different scales, not forgetting a mourner bird that rests its head on the neck of another swan, perhaps the mother, who was incapable of resisting any longer. One must highlight the accuracy of the portrayal of the eagles' beaks in an aggressive position, ready to

attack the undulating necks of the swans, the main defensive part of their bodies.

The romantic fascination with these predators was further conveyed in an 1833 painting entitled *The Eagle's Nest* (Picture 5), where the dark, high, rocky mountains shelter the nest and the baby eagles. The vigilant and threatening mother emits an intimidating cry into the grey Highland skies, addressing other eagles that might try to attack them. As the father moves away in the sky, the vulnerable mother is aware of her duty as the guardian of the nest.



**Picture 5** - Edwin Landseer, *The Eagle's Nest*, oil on millboard, 25.4 x 35.6 cm, 1833, Victoria & Albert Museum, London © V. & A. Images, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Another subject related to birds is the sport of hunting with hawks or falcons, very common in Scotland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. *Hawking* (1832) represents this practice in a violent way, with the heron and the falcon fighting for survival. The artist endowed this scene with such complexity that the spectator needs to

look very carefully in order to be able to distinguish the two birds in the central entwinement on the picture.

On the whole, the falcon seems to be much more aggressive with its talons hooked into the splendid though delicate heron. The hunter, probably a nobleman, watches the violent scene, waiting for the prey to be captured at last by the dominant falcon.

Landseer's fascination with birds comes from the popularity of Ornithology from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century onwards. Many renowned painters such as Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) and Joseph Mallord William Turner (1775-1881) dedicated themselves to the study of birds and considerably changed the way scientific illustrations were presented during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Turner, for instance, demonstrated the need to represent the natural habitats of the animal species he made illustrations of. It became quite common to make collages and include real feathers left by the birds when they died or whenever they flew in these scientific illustrations.

As regards Sir Edwin Landseer's stag and deer studies, one must divide them into three main themes: the struggle for survival, death and the supremacy of these creatures in the Highlands.

The examples of the first are the following: *None but the Brave Deserve the Fair* (1838) and *Stag at Bay* (1846). The title of the 1838 painting was taken from the chorus of "Alexander's Feast" (1697),<sup>3</sup> a poem by John Dryden, also entitled "Alexander's Feast; Or, the Power of Music": "The lovely Thais, by this side,/ Sate like a blooming Eastern bride/ In flow'r of youth and beauty's pride./ Happy, happy, happy pair!/ None but the brave,/ None but the brave,/ None but the brave deserves the fair" (Ormond 169). The artist's aim is to show another characteristic of the stag because here they are presented as the hunters and not the prey of sportsmen. These animals fight among themselves in order to survive and assume a position of control in their own territories.



*Stag at Bay* portrays a victorious animal that has successfully defended its territory from those who wanted to hunt him for their own sporting zest. Despite its dominant figure, the stag looks exhausted owing to the constant and unexpected threats which always surround it, and one sees an eagle approaching in the sky.

The nobility of these wild creatures is also highlighted in the second theme: the death scenes. *A Random Shot* (1848) and *Highland Nurses* (1856) convey the pathos of death as symbolised by the mourners gathered around the wounded or dead animals. Moreover, the former represents the stag as a victim of human enthusiasm for hunting and unjustified violence. The deafening silence the spectator can feel in such a moment of desolation is echoed by the snowy mountaintop while at the same time the fawn effortlessly searches for nourishment.

*Highland Nurses*<sup>4</sup> also emphasises the woe of the fawns that remain by the adult stag while the ptarmigans have found a safe haven in this place. The large body contrasts with the fragility of the younger animals, foreseeing their lack of hope of survival. It is not very clear whether the adult animal was shot or not despite the obvious look of hopelessness in all the fawns' inconsolable eyes.

The third theme concerning the stag and deer studies - the supremacy of these denizens of the Highlands - was illustrated in two of Landseer's most famous paintings: *The Monarch of the Glen* (1851) and *The Sanctuary* (1842).

*The Monarch of the Glen* represents the same attitude of the majestic stag, the indubitable monarch as is described in the title, endowed with a mystic power that fascinates the other animal species as well as educated sportsmen and Highlanders in general. Its communion with the untamed wilderness is virtually unshakable and sacred. As regards the scenery, the forests of Glenorchay belonging to the Marquess of Breadalbane, Richard Ormond reminds us that

when the painting was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1851, the catalogue entry was accompanied by a poem identified as "Legends of Glenorchay": "When first the day-star's clear cool light,/ Chasing night's shadow grey,/ With silver touched each rocky height/ That girded wild Glen-Strae/ Uprose the Monarch of the Glen/ Majestic from his lair,/ Surveyed the scene with piercing ken,/ And snuffed the fragrant air" (Ormond 174).

The spirit of the Highlands and the artist's fascination with these wild animals are perfectly captured in *The Sanctuary*,<sup>5</sup> whose title embodies the notion of a paradise associated with this locale. The poetic image of the stag, owner of this famous lake (Loch Maree), harmonises with the group of ducks that flies overhead almost drawing a rainbow in the golden skies. In general, this picture represents the serenity Sir Edwin Landseer looked for in every journey to the fascinating Highlands.

### **Brief Conclusions**

His regular visits to Scotland, escaping the rush of his life in London, were extremely profitable for Sir Edwin Landseer as he soon became well-known among the aristocratic families living or spending their holidays in the Highlands. This new entrepreneurial class of sportsmen, fascinated with these romantic landscapes, brought hunting enthusiasm to threaten untamed nature.

This Victorian artist spent many years studying the animals in loco with an immense passion which is conveyed in his many scenes of life in the country, and he portrayed its denizens with accurate exactitude and authenticity in which they could see themselves mirrored.

In his Highlands paintings, Sir Edwin Landseer showed his divided feelings as a hunter and as an artist, but in all of them he captured the sense of infinite freedom and tranquillity associated with this fascinating place.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> This edition was quite important to help Scott pay his debts and, in this case, the illustrations were regarded as essential to publicise the edition and, eventually, sell it. For this purpose, the novelist requested contributions from various renowned painters, who were also some of his closest friends, including Edwin Landseer, David Wilkie (1785-1841), Clarkson Stanfield (1793-1867), Charles Robert Leslie and Richard Parkes Bonington (1802-1828). As for Landseer's contribution, he illustrated four frontispieces and three vignettes in total. The artists were asked to choose the novels and the scenes they wished to illustrate, leaving the choices to be discussed between themselves and the publisher, Robert Cadell.

<sup>2</sup> This painting was recently chosen to go on display as the centrepiece of an exhibition at *The Bowes Museum* in Durham, England. The main subject of the exhibition was the celebration of hunting and sport. The curators thought long and hard about whether they should include a note warning visitors about the violence portrayed in this picture, but in the end they decided against doing so.

<sup>3</sup> This Ode was written to celebrate St. Cecilia's Day, the patron saint of all musicians and poets.

<sup>4</sup> Edwin Landseer chose this title for the painting as a dedication to Florence Nightingale.

<sup>5</sup> This painting was commissioned by Queen Victoria as one of her many surprise gifts for Prince Albert.

## Works Cited

Bowron, Edgar Peters, et al. Org. *Best in Show. The Dog Art from the Renaissance to Today*. New Haven e London: Yale University Press/The Museum of Fine Arts in Houston/Bruce Museum, 2006.

Donald, Diana. *Picturing Animals in Britain 1750-1850*. New Haven/London: The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2007.

Ford, Boris, ed. *The Cambridge Cultural History of Britain. Victorian Britain*, 7 vols. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Herrmann, Luke. *Nineteenth Century British Painting*. London: Giles de la Maré Publishers Limited, 2000.

Hutchison, Sidney C. *The History of Royal Academy 1768-1968*. London: Chapman & Hall, 1968.

Lambourne, Lionel. *Victorian Painting*. London: Phaidon Press, 1999.

Lennie, Champbell. *Landseer. The Victorian Paragon*. London: Hamish Hamilton, 1976.

---

Ormond, Richard. *Edwin Landseer. The Private Drawings*. Norwich: Unicorn Press, 2009.

---. (with contributions by Joseph Rishel and Robin Hamlyn). *Sir Edwin Landseer*. Philadelphia/London: Philadelphia Museum of Art/The Tate Gallery, 1982.

Scott, McDougall. *Sir Edwin Landseer R.A.* London: George Bell & Sons, 1903.

Ternas, Gabriela Gândara. "Diversidade de Olhares sobre a Pintura de Landseer nos Periódicos Portugueses (1865-1890): Visões Românticas e Interpretações Positivistas." *Actas do Congresso Internacional de Estudos Anglo-Portugueses 6-8 Maio 2001*. Lisboa: CEAP/FCSH, 2001: 183-195.

Treuhertz, Julian. *Victorian Painting*. London: Thames & Hudson, 1997.

# A Journey through Time and the European Visual Arts Based on the Novel *Orlando, A Biography* (A Perspective)



Cristina Carvalho | Escola Superior de Hotelaria e Turismo do Estoril

## Abstract

The goal of this analysis is to establish a parallel between Virginia Woolf's novel *Orlando, A Biography*, the 1992 film directed by Sally Potter, and a few examples of European canvases that may have inspired both artists. Woolf broke the shackles that still dominated British literature in the 1920s by writing a storyline that encompasses four centuries of a nation's life and of mixed emotions for the novel's leading character: Orlando was/is his/her name. Both the book published in 1928 and the film directed in 1992 start by presenting Orlando as an Elizabethan nobleman. As the plot unfolds, much like a caterpillar Orlando will evolve from a shy teenage boy into a confident adult woman. However, Woolf and Potter's distinctive timelines and perceptions of the world explain the different paths offered by each author to Orlando in the last stages of their works. Focusing on this text's purpose, its writer shall start by reflecting over some recurrent elements of the book written in 1928 as a means to praise the outstanding cultural background of Virginia Woolf at the time of its production. The following step will be to present canvases produced by painters like George Gower, Claude Monet, Gustav Klimt or even Marcel Duchamp that can be associated both to some excerpts of the novel and/or to scenes from the movie.

The current paper aims at establishing a parallel between specific moments of Virginia Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando, A Biography*, visual examples of European canvases, and scenes taken from the 1992 movie directed by Sally Potter. Transgression was the *leitmotif* of the 1920s and Woolf managed to weave a storyline that stretches itself for a period of about 400 years in a single character's life. Orlando is introduced to both reader and audience as a privileged teenage boy living during Elizabeth I's reign, only to fall asleep and wake up a few pages later as a young adult woman, a stranger in a foreign land

**Citação:** Cristina Carvalho, "A Journey through Time and the European Visual Arts Based on the Novel *Orlando, A Biography* (A Perspective)". *Via Panorâmica: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 59-74. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

doomed to face gender prejudice, until finally reaching the liberating 1920s of Woolf's moment of writing, already as a confident and independent being.

Besides references to Greek mythology, medieval literature, natural symbols and psychic duplicity, the historical textual account shall be visualised according to specific paintings such as Gower's *Armada Portrait*, and Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase Nr.2*, among other masterpieces. In between, the author's wit and social criticism shall also be taken into account, alongside the safe haven portrayed by the ancestral oak tree at Orlando's timeless estate. Well aware of his/her earthly Home, Orlando's real quest is the quest for the Self.

Born in 1882, Virginia Woolf led a life of nervous breakdowns in-between outbursts of creativity; regardless of any clinical analysis, she found peace on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March of 1941 when committing suicide by drowning in the River Ouse, on a sort of ritualistic purification act. In spite of her marriage to Leonard Woolf, a lot has been disputed on her friendship to Vita Sackville-West, a bisexual aristocratic writer whose intimacy to Woolf was reinforced after 1925, to such an extent that in 1928 the latter dedicated *Orlando, A Biography* to her. The novel is somewhat exotic in the fact that the main character experiences a lifespan of four centuries which does not end with the closing of the narrative, not to mention the curious remarks Orlando goes on presenting, first as a man and afterwards as a woman.

The author based her book on Knole Castle, Vita's family estate, and on Vita's family and personal history. Woolf aimed at producing a novel that would allow her to explore the inner Self of the main character and the social conflicts he/she faces along the way.<sup>1</sup> According to Monique Nathan, this literally resulted in the making of an androgynous character<sup>2</sup> Woolf would later develop in *A Room of One's Own*. Besides, "androgyny in female fashion in the 1920s was related to (young) women's increased nobility and freedom to occupy public spaces" (Peach 151); still today one of the trademarks of that period is the

*garçon* look. According to Linden Peach, *Orlando* mocks “the familiar triptych of Englishness, empire and gender identity” (Peach 137), meaning the Victorian *status quo*, not only for the peculiar physical transformation of Orlando, but mostly for the affection the English Lord reveals for a Russian «barbarian»<sup>3</sup> and his night habit of mingling *incognito* with the commoners of London and of Constantinople, and sometimes even cross-dressing to better fit in.

The description of space respects the visual and spiritual worlds of the main character as well, since there are references to both rural and urbanscapes, besides approaches to a powerful topic of discussion during Woolf’s lifetime: Freud’s theory on the existence of multiple selves<sup>4</sup> within each person. Lady Orlando reflects on the matter stating that she has “a Great variety of selves to call upon [... because] a person may well have as many as thousand” (Woolf 213). Woolf had previously written that Lord Orlando’s brain “was a roomy one” (Woolf 13), in order to prepare the reader for the duality between a daytime aristocrat and a nighttime wanderer, the conflict of Conscious vs. Unconscious minds. The matter of human duplicity actually started as a recurrent topic in late 19th-century literature: one may mention masterpieces such as *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*<sup>5</sup> and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*<sup>6</sup>, among other works. The core of those books was the latent fight of rational behaviour *versus* primitive urges each individual encloses in oneself, as if alluding to Darwin’s evolutionist principle, a scientific background which would be creatively exploited by literature. Besides, such contrast was also perceived in Victorian society itself, mainly on the gap between the middle classes (living in their comfortable suburbia residences/manor houses) and the working mob (surviving in urban slums, mainly at the East End). Symbolism is another detail worth mentioning, three elements being quite often repeated along the novel:

- 1) the oaktree;
- 2) the goose;

3) the number 7.

On a brief analysis one must state that the oak tree usually recalls the landed aristocracy, which Orlando is a part of. It is also his sole emotional stability core, for it is under the oak tree that Orlando writes, it is after this earthly element that Orlando sets the title for his/her literary masterpiece, and it is also under its roots that Orlando buries the manuscript at the closing chapter of the novel. In the dictionary of symbols we have consulted the oak tree is also referred to as a messenger between Heaven and Earth, besides recalling its importance on Ancient Greek legends like those of Ulysses and of the Golden Fleece.<sup>7</sup>

Tom O'Meara (15) recalls the mighty oak tree to be understood as the national tree of England and its presence in the country's History can take us on a time travel from the days of Celtic worship to the material used in the structures of Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, and Lord Nelson's boats. O'Meara also reminds us that it is the tree connected to Robin Hood and his Merry Men at Sherwood Forest, and to Charles II's survival after the defeat at the Battle of Worcester, in 1651. The movie itself begins with Orlando wandering under the shadow of a magnificent oak tree while reading.

As for the flying goose it is at first an allegory of the quest of the Self and at last an allusion to the wings of freedom Lady Orlando feels flapping in her soul in 1928; this bird is usually perceived as a(nother) messenger between Heaven and Earth, announcing the coming of changes. In general terms, the number 7 is associated to the days of the week, the colours of the rainbow, the seas, the deadly sins, the virtues, but mostly it is the sum of the Holy Trinity with the four Elements of Nature, representing the Cosmos's Unity. In numerical tarot decks number 3 is the Empress/female principle, number 4 is the Emperor/male principle, while number 7 is the chariot, whose symbolism is connected to victory, the taming of both horses of intuition and reason, that is, of Oneself. Still according to the dictionary of symbols, 7 are the Heavens, the spheres, and the



years comprising each cycle of life, but this number also represents the androgynous being.<sup>8</sup>

In Woolf's novel, 7 was the number of days Orlando slept after his heartbreak over Sasha; he was then reborn with only selected memories, for he "appeared to have an imperfect recollection of his past life...some change...must have taken place in the chambers of his brain" (Woolf 47-48). Already in Turkey another mystical sleep occurs, this time leading to a physical change, followed by a return by sea to England (as a means of final purification of her former Self) and the literary glory acknowledged by Lady Orlando and proved by the seven editions of her poem, *The Oak Tree*.

The writer also innovated by breaking the rules of Time through Orlando's ceaseless, timeless and universal quest: happiness (through Unity). The novel's narrator rejects the formalities of chronology by offering meagre details to the reader, such as the visit of the 16-year-old Orlando to an already aging Elizabeth I. Afterwards, there will only be mere references to the rulers he lived under, as a means to guide the reader, and a reference to the fact that Orlando changed gender at the age of 30. Even on the last pages, when Woolf situates the reader on the 11th of October of 1928, her wit is revealed in the sentence "it was the present moment" (Woolf 206); the verb To Be is pronounced in the past tense and the noun is adjectivised using the word «present». Indeed, Woolf decides to unsettle the reader's peace of mind straight at the novel's opening line when one reads: "He – for there could be no doubt about his sex" (Woolf 11). Trouble was surely on her mind.

The innovations in this narrative are also connected to the reader's awareness of Orlando's deepest thoughts, to the modernist taste for breaking the shackles of Victorian sexual conventionalism, and in the ellipses, which allow the reader to have a social perception of the ages without too much concern towards a rigid timeline. As for the all-knowing narrator, (s)he is not part of the

story, but does not sway from teasing and communicating with the reader either, much like Woolf, using her wit during social and intellectual events whenever her health would allow her to attend them.

Another important trend in this book is the recurrent presence of episodes, which bring to mind European and English literary traditions. The Greek heritage can be perceived through the oak tree's symbolism and the name of Orlando's *fiancée*, Euphrosyne, named after one of the Three Graces, daughters of Zeus and goddesses of beauty and creativity that Botticelli painted in his *Spring* canvas, and Milton printed in the *L'Allegro* poem, during the 16th and 17th centuries, respectively. The influence of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance are understood in Orlando's name, because of the parallel one may draw to the *Chanson de Roland*, a *chanson de geste* or medieval epic of the 11th and 12th centuries, as well as to *Orlando Innamorato* and to *Orlando Furioso*, both written during the Italian *Cinquecento* (the 1500s). This name would also recall a character in Shakespeare's play *As You Like It*.

In Virginia Woolf's novel one may also pinpoint two aspects recalling 19<sup>th</sup>-century literature:

- 1) facing his wife's death, Dante Rossetti, the leader of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, buried his poems by Lizzie's coffin side; in Woolf's book Orlando buries the manuscript of his/her masterpiece under a centuries-old oak tree;
- 2) the matter of duality was not only a key-factor in the late-1800s literature, as Woolf was also influenced in her writings by contemporary authors like T. S. Eliot and Sigmund Freud, the latter mainly on studies over individual fragmentation.

Bearing in mind the Modernist aesthetics depicted in Woolf's text, I would like to build a bridge between the narrative progression, Orlando's personal development and a canvas by Marcel Duchamp called *Nude Descending a*

*Staircase Nr.2.*<sup>9</sup> That painting drives us to the early photograms used in cinema, for each step taken by the figure combines dynamic lines between departure/arrival, and leads to its unity in the arrival point, much like Orlando did when finding her real Self in 1928. And if Woolf's novel shocked London at the time of its publishing, Duchamp's piece also stunned New York when it was displayed at the Armory Show of art.<sup>10</sup>

After this approach to some of the novel's most interesting allegories and cultural foundations, one shall dwell for a while on Sally Potter's 1992 movie inspired by Virginia Woolf's book. During her teenage years Potter got interested in cinema and dancing, later embracing other artistic fields such as theatre and music; it explains why she worked with David Motion in the original soundtrack of *Orlando*, besides directing the film after writing the screenplay herself. These were the reasons why critics such as Joseph Hooper defended that "she has used all of her talents to bring Orlando to life – composer, choreographer, writer, director" (Hooper). The scope of both effort and courage required to adapt this specific novel was also admired by Mira Stout, who claimed "anyone who has read Woolf's idiosyncratic novel can understand why [it took courage]: much of its interior life seems unfilmable" (Stout).

Respecting the predominance of the number 7, the director divided the different ages of the book in equal topics. As follows:

- 1) Death;
- 2) Love;
- 3) Poetry;
- 4) Politics;
- 5) Society;
- 6) Sex;
- 7) Birth.

Potter thus built a life cycle and kept the novel's preference for the numerical symbolism. On the other hand, while most of the movie respects the spirit of the 1928 book, the last minutes of the 1992 production already make way for the director's late-20th century vision, as a means of surprising and/or updating the viewer.

Plunging into the book's early pages and into the 16th century, Orlando is to be found playing in the attic of the family's house, hitting a Moor's head hanging from the ceiling with his sword. The severed head is described as having "the colour of an old football, and... the shape of one" (Woolf 11). Indeed, colour and shape are the basic elements for any canvas's appeal. Woolf proceeds her visual composition when writing about the coat-of-arms painted at the stained-glass window of that same attic, for while pushing the window wide open, Orlando's hand "was instantly coloured red, blue and yellow like a butterfly's wing" (Woolf 11). Following the initial data granted on the early pages, the reader creates the mental image of Orlando as a 16-year-old Elizabethan aristocrat who spends his time writing, and whose family paid the queen regular visits; Orlando is, thus, "the very image of a noble gentleman" (Woolf 18). In the reader's and the viewer's minds the connection between this description and Sir Philip Sidney's portrait<sup>11</sup> hanging at the National Portrait Gallery is almost an immediate one; especially for the viewer due to a specific poise young Orlando offers him. Sidney was one of the most outstanding Elizabethan courtiers. As a man of the Renaissance, he excelled in the mastering of words, not only as a diplomat but also as a poet. His artistic and literary skills were so great that according to Roy Strong "Sir Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetrie*, published in 1595 after his death, bills poetry along with painting in the classical canons as being sisters arts" (Strong 177).

George Gower's *Armada Portrait*<sup>12</sup> is another painting the reader may mentally visualise while reading Woolf's description that Elizabeth I was "an old

body...caparisoned in all sorts of brocades and gems...and the Queen's eyes were yellow [...for] the sound of Canon was always in her ears [...and] as she sat at the table she listened; she heard the guns in the Channel" (Woolf 16-17). Although the painting was actually produced in 1588-1589 while the monarch was still young, the book's excerpt presents a ruler haunted by the ghosts of days gone by. On the other hand, the canvas exhibits two windows with the perspectives of the fate of the Spanish Armada before and during the naval conflict, hence Woolf's reference to that glorious moment of *Gloriana's* rule. While art historian Roy Strong mentions that the art produced for the State during the renaissance intended "to establish the mythology of a new society" (Strong 176), director Sally Potter offers the viewer a hint of her wit and of the book's transgressive gist when having Elizabeth's role performed in a rather amusing tone by Quentin Crisp, a male actor. As movie critic Joseph Hooper indicates, "The English have always gone in for a gender bender, whether of the old-fashioned music-hall variety (Benny Hill in a tutu) or something more with-it (the Kinks song "Lola")" (Hooper).

Skipping into the 17th century one cannot overlook Linden Peach's words, which state that *Orlando, A Biography* and *The Waves* share "an exploration in the interconnection of space, political history and the imaginary through a range of cryptic reference's to Britain's cultural climate in the 1920s and to specific political events" (Peach 137). Indeed, during the reign of James I the reader is confronted with the *Great Frost* of 1608 that froze the Thames, which was promptly used by the court as a sort of playground, while the rest of the nation had to bear the horrors of Winter. Woolf even resorted to hyperboles such as "birds froze in mid air and fell like stones to the ground" (Woolf 24); Peach believes that was an analogy between the specific ages of the chapter and of the novel's writing. As one may read:

The Great Frost of the seventeenth century may be seen as analogous to the Great War of the twentieth century. The emphasis in the account of the Frost upon the enormous mortality, the suddenness of death and the frozen corpses clearly bring the front lines of the Great War to mind (Peach 143).

Later came the defrosting and the emotional blow when Sasha forsook Orlando, taking advantage of the river's restored vitality, in order to sail home to Russia. The word «defrosting» can be visually associated to Claude Monet's impressionist canvas, *The Break up of the Ice*<sup>13</sup>, in which a frozen landscape slowly melts down as the river bed reveals itself amidst floating ice fragments; gazing the sky, the mist is also being replaced by shades of light blue. Monet's personal experience while painting this canvas witnessed the cyclical sequence of natural life changing from hibernation into renovation.<sup>14</sup> In Orlando's case, the defrosting of the Thames and Sasha's departure was like a rite of passage into adulthood: she represented the challenge of overcoming love's growing pains. Indeed, Orlando was about to face a deeper renovation.

Still in the 17th century Orlando requested King Charles II to be sent as an ambassador to Turkey, where a radical physical change would take place. In the novel, this is how such surprising moment is described:

we are...now...in the room with the sleeping Orlando and the trumpeters... [and they] blow a terrific blast

THE TRUTH!

At which Orlando woke... He rose. He stood upright in the complete nakedness before us and... we had no choice but confess – he was a woman (Woolf 97).

Bearing in mind such naked truth, the reader may recall Klimt's *Nuda Veritas*,<sup>15</sup> where a slender naked woman faces the observer, while she gazes herself at the mirror she holds. At the feet of the red-haired *femme fatale*<sup>16</sup> one beholds a

snake, a Christian symbol of temptation. However, while Klimt depicted a defying eroticism that Woolf did not refer, Potter copied it to her movie on the scene in which Orlando thoroughly contemplates her nudity over a big standing mirror, only after proudly showing herself to the viewer. Pretty soon reality hits her hard through an awareness of the social shortcomings of her new gender when Lady Orlando finds her way out of Turkey in the company of a caravan of gypsies, as if she were an outcast and not an aristocrat. After all, the reader would expect Orlando, as a former English ambassador, to travel home in a more dignified manner.

As the leading character moves on, so this analysis shall proceed into another timeline. Surprisingly, the 18th century will possibly be the easiest Age for the viewer to establish a parallel between the movie scenes and a canvas by Thomas Gainsborough entitled *Portrait of a Lady in Blue*.<sup>17</sup> Potter shot Orlando in a beautiful light blue dress of fine cloth, much like the gentle and ethereal figure of the portrait, with the simple adaptation of the wig to Queen Anne's period, because the painter lived in the 1770s when the Rococo taste imposed larger and heavier hair sets. And if the refined lady of the canvas uses her fragile right hand to hold the dress falling off her left shoulder, Woolf's text also recalls the reader that in the 1700s while "the man had his hand free to seize his sword, the woman must use hers to keep the satins from slipping her shoulders" (Woolf 132).

The progression of the storyline into the 19th century is woven with a dreadful description of the turn of the century, a metaphor of the social uselessness of women during the Victorian age. Ironically, that historic period has been officially named after a woman who was not only Queen of England, but also Empress of India. As one may read: "The great cloud which hung, not only over London, but over the whole of the British Isles on the first day of the

nineteenth century stayed... Men felt the chill in their hearts; the damp was in their minds. The sexes drew further and further apart” (Woolf 157-158).

In the movie the ellipsis was displayed during a momentary disorientation, when Lady Orlando receives news of the precariousness of her existence accordingly to the ages’ law and abruptly runs inside a maze. She enters the labyrinth wearing a light blue dress, runs like the wind from the social and legal constraints imposed on her, gets caught by a heavy fog of misunderstanding, only to leave the maze in a dark blue dress of emotional turbulence. This actually turns out to be a very interesting chromatic metaphor of the gender repression the Victorian period imposed on women.

The last stage of this analysis will focus on the 20th century. However, one should not overlook the fact that Potter’s movie slightly differs from Woolf’s novel from the 19th century onwards. A good example of that is the topic «Sex», when Orlando meets Shel and the viewer is offered a nudity scene that was not included on Woolf’s text; in turn, Woolf’s reference to their marriage was overlooked by Potter, a late-20th century female director. Informed of the final verdict over her estate and further assets, the viewer witnesses the departure of Shel and a new passage of time is perceived when a (very) pregnant Orlando stumbles amidst the First World War bombings on a battlefield.

The movie’s last topic, «Birth», reveals the character’s lifestyle as if reflecting the 1990s, for Orlando is now an independent woman on the same grounds as the four friends of the *Sex & The City*<sup>18</sup> TV series. Orlando lives off the success of her literary accomplishments, drives a motorcycle with sidecar, wears comfortable trousers, is a single mother (for Potter did not construe her as married) and maintains a healthy connection with her daughter. In the final scene she is writing under the ageless oak tree, while her child toys around with a video camera and an angel<sup>19</sup> appears in the sky singing the glory of Orlando’s androgynous soul.



As for Woolf's book, one believes that by including Vita Sackville-West's photograph the author meant to assist the reader in visualising 20th-century Orlando, resorting to one of the most recent arts of its early decades: Photography. Orlando only finds happiness when being a woman in a timeline when technological and social developments permitted her to enjoy life (and cars, and trousers, and cigarettes, and elevators) without prejudice. The last pages take the reader back to the Roaring Twenties and to the mental image of independent women wearing large pearl necklaces and the *garçonne* hairstyle, much like Vita's photograph inserted on the printed novel's last pages shows.

It is never easy to assess Virginia Woolf's problematic genius regardless of the perspective one may follow. Indeed, that difficulty springs from the author's deep cultural background, from her complex space/time insertion, besides her shifting personality, deriving from a complex clinical frame. On the other hand, it is hard to resist the subversive appeal of a novel such as *Orlando, A Biography*, mainly because of the leading character's lifespan of four centuries, which will continue after the book is closed, and its gender change. Across these lines the present analysis of the 1928 book and the 1992 film intended to offer one visual perspective of the artistic and cultural complexity of both Woolf and Potter's works, all in the name of their fondness for such a unique character: Orlando.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> The Victorian conduct outlived the queen who passed away in 1901, and Virginia Woolf and her intellectual circle, the Bloomsbury Group, would react against the maintenance of the bigotry of that time. From 1910 to 1918 she also joined the Women's Suffrage, whose demand for the women's right to vote would be reached after the 1st World War and the general acknowledgement of the gender's role during wartime.

<sup>2</sup> Original text: "um ser espiritualmente andrógino." (Nathan 57).

<sup>3</sup> Criticising England's vision of other cultures.

---

<sup>4</sup> One must add that the Hogarth House owned by Virginia and Leonard Woolf was the first to publish Sigmund Freud's books in England.

<sup>5</sup> Published by Robert Louis Stevenson in 1886.

<sup>6</sup> Written by Oscar Wilde back in 1890.

<sup>7</sup> Original text: “[Um] instrumento de comunicação entre o Céu e a Terra...na Odisseia, Ulisses vem consultar...a *folhagem divina do grande carvalho de Zeus*...[e] o Velo de Ouro...estava suspenso num carvalho: este tinha um valor de tempo.” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 165).

<sup>8</sup> Original text: “Sete, número dos Céus, é também, segundo Dante, o das esferas planetárias...Sete indica o sentido de uma mudança depois de um ciclo...e de uma renovação positiva...o Sete, número do homem...perfeitamente realizado...é...o número do andrógino hermético, como o é em África o dos Gémeos míticos” (Chevalier and Gheerbrant 603-606).

<sup>9</sup> Painted in 1912, the canvas can be admired at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, in the United States. Online image available at <[www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51449.html](http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51449.html)>.

<sup>10</sup> Janson 691.

<sup>11</sup> An unknown artist probably painted the portrait of the Elizabethan scholar and courtier in 1576. It hangs at the National Portrait Gallery, in London. Online image available at <[www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw07877/Sir-Philip-Sidney](http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw07877/Sir-Philip-Sidney)>.

<sup>12</sup> Painted c.1588-1589, the canvas is to be found at Woburn Abbey, in Bedfordshire. Online image available at <[www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/armada\\_gallery\\_02.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/armada_gallery_02.shtml)>.

<sup>13</sup> The 1880 creation can be admired at the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, in Lisboa. Online image available at <[www.artres.com/c/htm/CSearchZ.aspx?o=&Total=186&FP=7959520&E=22SIJM5MZFIQJ&SID=JMGEJNB5BJOSB](http://www.artres.com/c/htm/CSearchZ.aspx?o=&Total=186&FP=7959520&E=22SIJM5MZFIQJ&SID=JMGEJNB5BJOSB)>.

<sup>14</sup> Wildenstein 152-154.

<sup>15</sup> Painted in 1899, it can be found at the *Theatersammlung der Nationalbibliothek*, in Vienna, Austria. Online image available at <[art.mygalerie.com/les%20maitres/klimt5.html](http://art.mygalerie.com/les%20maitres/klimt5.html)>.

<sup>16</sup> Fliedl 49.

<sup>17</sup> The 1770s masterpiece now hangs at the State Hermitage Museum, in Saint Petersburg, Russia. Online image available at <[www.hermitagemuseum.org/html\\_En/03/hm3\\_3\\_1\\_6a.html](http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/03/hm3_3_1_6a.html)>.

<sup>18</sup> Created by Darren Star, it was a success from 1998 to 2003, later continuing its path through two films released in 2008 and 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Played by the 1980s pop artist Jimmy Somerville, lead singer of Bronski Beat and later of the Communards.

---

### Works Cited

Bouquins, Robert Laffont. *Dictionnaire des Personnages*. Paris: Laffont-Bompiani, 1986.

Chevalier, Jean, and Alain Gheerbrant. *Dicionário de Símbolos*. Trans. Cristina Rodriguez and Artur Guerra. Lisboa: Editorial Teorema, 1994.

Fliedl, Gottfried. *Gustav Klimt 1862-1918: O Mundo da Aparência Feminina*. Trans. Casa das Línguas, Lda.. Lisboa: Taschen, 2006.

Janson, H.W., *História da Arte*. Trans. J.A. Ferreira de Almeida and Maria Manuela Rocheta Santos. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1998.

Marcus, Laura. *Virginia Woolf*. Plymouth: Northcote House Publishers, 1997.

Nathan, Monique. *Virginia Woolf*, Trans. Miguel Serras Pereira and Maria Teresa Sá. Lisboa: Relógio D'Água Editores, 1984.

O'Meara, Tom. *A Miscellany of Britain*. London: Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2007.

Peach, Linden. *Virginia Woolf*. London: MacMillan Press, 2000.

Sena, Jorge de. *A Literatura Inglesa*. Lisboa: Edições Cotovia, 1989.

Strong, Roy. *The Spirit of Britain – A Narrative History of the Arts*. London: Oman Productions Ltd, 1999.

Wildenstein, Daniel. *Monet ou o Triunfo do Impressionismo*. Trans. Maria Filomena Duarte. Lisboa: Taschen, 2000.

Woolf, Virginia. *Orlando, A Biography*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1993.

### Online Resources

Joseph Hooper. "Boys will be Girls." *Esquire*, June 1993. Web 11 Feb 2004. <[www.geocities.com/Paris/Parc/8797/article/esquire.html](http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Parc/8797/article/esquire.html)>.

Mira Stout. "Raising Orlando." *Vogue*, July 1993. Web 11 Feb 2004. <[www.geocities.com/Paris/Parc/8797/article/vogue.html](http://www.geocities.com/Paris/Parc/8797/article/vogue.html)>.

---

“Sally Potter”. *Sony Music Entertainment* (2003). Web 11th February 2004.  
<[www.sonnyclassical.com/artists/potter/bio.html](http://www.sonnyclassical.com/artists/potter/bio.html)>.

### Other Sources – Film

Potter, Sally. dir. *Orlando*. Star. Tilda Swinton, Billy Zane, John Wood and Jimmy Sommerville. Atalanta Filmes, 1994.

### Other Sources – Painting

George Gower. *Armada Portrait*, Woburn Abbey (Bedfordshire), c.1588-1589.  
Online image available at  
<[www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/armada\\_gallery\\_02.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/armada_gallery_02.shtml)>

Marcel Duchamp. *Nude Descending a Staircase Nr.2*, Philadelphia Museum of Art (Philadelphia), 1912. Online image available at  
<[www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51449.html](http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/51449.html)>

Claude Monet. *The Break up of the Ice*, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Lisboa), 1880. Online image available at  
<[www.artres.com/c/htm/CSearchZ.aspx?o=&Total=186&FP=7959520&E=22SIJM5MZFIQJ&SID=JMGEJNB5BJOSB](http://www.artres.com/c/htm/CSearchZ.aspx?o=&Total=186&FP=7959520&E=22SIJM5MZFIQJ&SID=JMGEJNB5BJOSB)>

Gustav Klimt. *Nude Veritas*, Theatersammlung der Nationalbibliothek (Vienna), 1899. Online image available at <[art.mygalerie.com/les%20maitres/klimt5.html](http://art.mygalerie.com/les%20maitres/klimt5.html)>

Thomas Gainsborough. *Portrait of a Lady in Blue*, State Hermitage Museum (Saint Petersburg), 1770s. Online image available at  
<[www.hermitagemuseum.org/html\\_En/03/hm3\\_3\\_1\\_6a.html](http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/03/hm3_3_1_6a.html)>

Unknown Artist. *Sir Philip Sidney*, National Portrait Gallery (London), 1576.  
Online image available at  
<[www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw07877/Sir-Philip-Sidney](http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait/mw07877/Sir-Philip-Sidney)>

# A Multimodal Approach to Álvaro Cunqueiro's Journalistic Literature: *Faro de Vigo* (1961-1981)



Elena Domínguez Romero | Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Rubén Jarazo Álvarez | Universidade da Coruña

## Abstract

An analysis of the Spanish Press during the fifties and sixties allows us to approach the Spanish society of the time, which inevitably reflects the social, political and ideological situation of the Spanish state after the Civil war. In the following pages, we will basically decipher the role of images and captions in the literary column 'El Envés' [The Other side (of news)], published by Álvaro Cunqueiro over twenty years in the *Faro de Vigo*, as well as the importance of these images in the regeneration of Galician culture during Francoism. In order to do so, we will analyse the role of these images in the whole communicative process in the journal under a very specific perspective: the multimodal approach.

The historical evolution of Galician culture has been determined by the negation of its own tradition and language within the Spanish state, which only accepted the existence of one of the many languages spoken in the territory. Whereas Spanish literature benefited from the protection of the state, Galician, Basque and Catalan literatures were prosecuted, banned and even subject to a degree of state repression. Peripheral languages and their literatures in Spain were not present at school, college, or media. Even in Galicia, powerful institutions, such as the Roman Catholic Church, were against its use. Galician-Portuguese literature, which developed in the Middle Ages with literary works of enormous importance, was not to be re-discovered until well into the nineteenth century. From this point onwards, the Galician literary

**Citação:** Elena Domínguez Romero and Rubén Jarazo Álvarez, "A Multimodal Approach to Álvaro Cunqueiro's journalistic literature: *Faro de Vigo* (1961-1981)". *Via Panorâmica: Revista Electrónica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 75-95. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

revival—*Rexurdimento*—as well as later intellectual movements gave place to a process of cultural normalization which is similar, in many aspects, to the linguistic policy established in countries which felt the influence of romanticism. This culminated in the early twentieth century with the work of a number of influential intellectuals, and thus Galicia sought to place itself at the same level of other European nations. Unfortunately, this process was to be dramatically frustrated by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War.



**Picture 1** - Medieval zummara players.



**Picture 2** - Symphonia de Cantiga 160, Cantigas de Sta. María de Alfonso X El Sabio, Códice de El Escorial (1221-1284).

As a consequence of the war, the inexistence of local mechanisms for systematic editing and printing until the second half of the twentieth century affected the editorial tradition in Galicia severely. Publishing Houses such as Galaxia, Xerais or magazine *Grial* would be, however, essential in the process of reconstruction. But these specific publications had something else in common: the pictorial representations that quite frequently appeared scattered throughout their editions. Following this tendency, we will analyse how several artists and scholars used 'pictures' in order to bring the readership's attention to the main issues and problems that haunted the Galician illiterate society of the time. One of the followers of this tradition is Álvaro Cunqueiro, who uses the empowering force of images in his journalistic corpus to facilitate reading

comprehension on the one hand, and to play with reality and fiction on the other. Yet before going through Cunqueiro, we shall comment on the works by two of the most representative graphic Galician writers of the twentieth century: Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao (1886-1950) and Luis Seoane (1910-1979). This has been probably the most prolific century in visual arts in Galicia since the Galician-Portuguese Medieval literary tradition.

Alfonso Daniel Rodríguez Castelao (1886-1950), most commonly known as Castelao, was a Galician writer in the Galician language and one of the main symbols of Galician nationalism. As a politician, caricaturist, painter, and writer, he is one of the leading figures of Galician identity and culture, and one of the main names behind the cultural movement *Xeración Nós*. After the war, exile gave place to a cultural Galician space beyond the borders of the actual Galician territory – a space that would indeed have been an impossibility, at the time, within its borders. For this generation and its predecessors, hence, constructing a Galician identity under Celtic origins was an essential means to self-differentiation from the Mediterranean influence of the Spanish State. They established cultural and literary connections with Ireland as much as with other Celtic nations such as Cornwall, Brittany, Wales or Scotland, while the United States of America and the United Kingdom were also considered relevant sources of information. Within the limits of this spatial creation, Ireland became the main object of affection of Celtic followers such as *Xeración Nós* (*We generation – Sinn Féin*) and *Irmandades da Fala* (*The Language Brotherhood*). A varied range of periodicals such as *A Nosa Terra* and *Nós* would accentuate the relationship between Galicia and Ireland during these initial years. Even *A Nosa Terra* published a series on Irish history from the twelfth century to the present day, paying special attention to the hunger strike of the nationalist Lord Mayor of Cork, Terence MacSwiney (1879-1920). McKevitt explains that this interest could

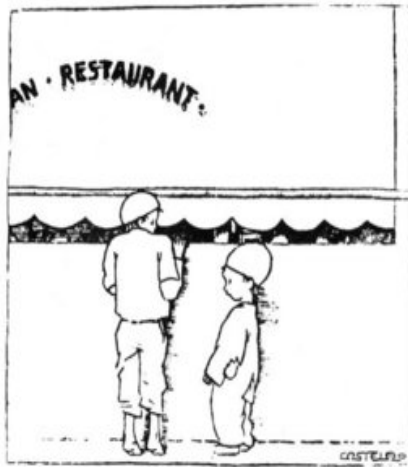
be based on the Irish magnificent culture, but also on the political struggle and final independence of the present Republic:

*For Irmandades da Fala and Xeración Nós, the parallels between Ireland and Galicia were significant. They included the colonization and repression by a neighboring country, the precarious status of the mother language, the revival of interest in culture and the need for its preservation, the loss of natives due to emigration, a common faith in Catholicism, and struggle for independence. The Galician intellectuals identified with the Irish who, like themselves, were a peripheral European culture struggling for their own cultural and national identity. Consequently, the subject of Ireland and the Irish became an obligatory and ideologically imperative reference (Mckevitt 10).*

This cultural nexus between Galicia and Ireland is first a direct consequence of the coming of romantic values to the peninsula and also, more recently, of a new cultural and anthropological trend intended to bring the Galician peripheral culture closer to other peripheral cultures in contact with the common links of the Atlantic Ocean and the Celtic sphere. The result is an Atlantic cultural and mythic space which would be in permanent conflict with a Mediterranean space of culture symbolising the Castillian dominance (Risco 13).

Amongst Castelao's most famous works are *Un ollo de vidro* (1922), *Cousas* (1926, 1929), *Retrincos* (1934), or *Sempre en Galiza* (1944). However, he became extremely famous for his ironic perspective and social realistic caricatures of the Galician society of his time. His texts and images criticise the Galician society at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth. Emigration, poverty, starvation, politics and diglossia are some of the key features in Castelao's narratives and pictures as can be appreciated in the two examples below:





— ¿Qué miras?  
— Como comen.

**Picture 3**

- What are you looking at?
- The way they eat.



— Era muchacho dicen que sabe castellano.  
— Si; pero tiene un acento tan gallego!..

**Picture 4**

- Everyone says that boy is so clever.
- Yes, but he has such a strong Galician accent!

Luis Seoane (1910-1979), on the contrary, was a lithographer and artist born in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in a family of Galician immigrants. After spending his childhood and youth in Galicia, where his first exhibition was held in 1929, he returned to Argentina in order to escape from the Falangists at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War (1936). Following Expressionism and Picasso's influence, Seoane became then one of the most representative figures of the Galician culture in exile, where he was responsible for the creation of paintings denouncing Galicia's siege under Franco's dictatorship as well as the living conditions of Galician citizens in exile:

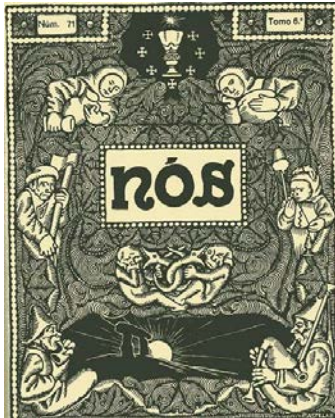


Picture 5 - 'Emigrante' (1967)



Picture 6 - '13 estampas para la traición' (1937)

In this sense, it can be said that the Galician intelligentsia at the beginning of the twentieth century was perfectly aware of the power of image and illustration. Magazine *Nós* (1920-1936)—co-edited by Castelao and Vicente Risco, father of Galician nationalism—can be probably considered as the first publication in twentieth century Galicia where the pictorial mode appears to be as relevant as the written texts, commonly dealing with literature, linguistics, arts, anthropology and philosophy. But the outbreak of the Civil War in Spain obviously breaks with the Galician literary and cultural revival as well. Only after the first and most difficult years of the Post-civil war, Galician painters such as Seoane, from exile, and writers like Álvaro Cunqueiro in his periodical articles, would resort again to this visual enhancement between image and text in the Galician literary tradition.



Picture 7 - *Nós* cover (Number 71, Volume 6)

Álvaro Cunqueiro (Mondoñedo, 1911-1981) should probably be considered as the writer who most contributed to offer an original personal view of Galician myths during Francoism. His major achievements are to be found in novels such as *Merlin and Company* (1955) or plays like *The uncertain Lord Don Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (1958). The role of myths, though, and especially the myth of Prince Hamlet, can only be explained if we consider myths as a revealing energy that exceeds the boundaries of censorship and repression of the totalitarian Francoist regime. This is manifested by Cunqueiro when he answers the following question in an interview during his last years:

“Topics such as ancient Greek and Latin literature are often the subject of your books, why do you like classic literature so much?”

“- [...] I experienced the Civil War and subsequent years and I had an intellectual and moral concern about the futility of vengeance. This is what "A man who looked like Orestes" is about. I am a reader of Shakespeare since I was a child and they are all in it. One day I was surprised that "Hamlet" did not fit within his work. There was a missing piece. I came to realise that this great drama of human maturity was the Oedipus complex. In other words, the murderer of his father, who married his mother, was his true father. Then everything fits and the mother wants to marry his son to avoid revenge. After I wrote my Hamlet, other writers would come to this discovery. Clearly,

eternal human passions are all the same since the creation of classic myths. Human beings, since then, had no new passions. Everything is condensed in the Greeks. It is curious, but during the German occupation of France, a Frenchman translated Homer. During Francoism, Segarra, in Catalonia, translated Shakespeare [...]. I know that censorship was ferocious against a few paragraphs in Segarra's translation, as Shakespeare was often a political opinion. Thus, the classics are sometimes the way a man has to say issues that are not allowed to say in a situation without much freedom of speech" (Outeiriño 12).

Nevertheless, it is also quite possible that the publication of any Cunqueirian work can be summed up as a provincial voice that the author wants to highlight and, after reconstructing the whole myth, he builds up again a universal story. Ultimately, the expression of purely local experience is the approach to universal localism or universalism. As we can imagine, the local, the universal, and the myths are essential in order to understand Cunqueiro's cosmogony. In his own words: "I believe in myths—Merlin, Hamlet, Ulysses—and I know that they have a revealing energy which lights our way through this bizarre cosmos every day. There is nothing more powerful than myths nowadays. They are always breaking news" (Outeiriño 25).

Cunqueiro's journalistic career, dispersed throughout newspapers and magazines all over the world for over three decades, should also be approached in this sense, namely his literary column 'El envés' [Inversum], published in the *Faro de Vigo* during the sixties, seventies and eighties. As a prolific writer—narrative, theatre, poetry, essay and journalism—the author is also keen on combining text and image in his works. In this way, the relationship between the verbal and the pictorial modes in any of his works should therefore be considered to be quite common in his production. This is especially relevant in the example of his journalistic production. Other main journalistic skills revealed by the writer in his columns are his close proximity to his readership—sharing

with his readers even the content of his own private letters for 20 years, the blending of fictional and real events and characters, and a narrative style linked to oral tradition—local vs. universal. He usually provides his readers too with very specific, even gossiping at times, information about characters, places, dates, or books.

Mar Fontcuberta (161) points to the existence of two different types of news: direct news, specially designed for providing information to the audience, and (re)creational news—somehow also crossing the boundary between history and myth, fiction and reality—aiming at entertaining the reader, complementing the direct news and creating new narrative styles and languages. In the following lines, we will analyse how Cunqueiro tries to complement this second technique with images and headings in the literary column 'El envés' in the Galician newspaper *Faro de Vigo*. Thus the first example shows that the reader, who is usually addressed by the author in a very direct style—'You should try it. It's impossible' (Cunqueiro, "La Flauta de Arenhim" 10) is appealed by means of attention being caught to an 'arrow' pointing to a window in Ashby. Cunqueiro frequently enhances visual objects to portray a specific event in an article. Images are therefore a key element in the message of his articles. Yet further than that, also, as we will see in the following examples, images and texts are always linked so that multimodality becomes an essential part of the story that Álvaro Cunqueiro is telling the readers.

### Example 1.

Beside, on the same page, there is a photo of Ashby, one of the current castles, of course, built on the ruins of the medieval abbey, a rich and powerful Benedictine abbey, famous in the days of Chaucer, and even before, during the times of Crusades, which was closely related to...<sup>1</sup>



The arrow indicates the window of Castle Ashby, stately home of the Marquis of Northamptonshire, which entered the thieves who stole jewelry valued at more than a million and a half pesetas ... In Ashby, as the whole British castle boasts, there is a night ghost. He is perhaps the thief, who stole with increases in the secret of the foundation and fabulous ancient treasure. (Cunqueiro, “Los Abades de Ashby” 16)

Yet images are not the only elements that create the atmosphere that Cunqueiro depicts in his columns. As it has been already mentioned, the Galician writer complements his stories at times by adding very specific information on characters, places, or dates to the column: “jewelry valued at more than a million and a half pesetas”. And this is combined with a mixture of fiction—the ghost is probably the thief—and reality. In the second article below, for example, the author instructs the reader on tribal traditions while recreating far and exotic traditions and crossing the line separating fiction from reality:

Example 2.



In this photograph, which comes from Nairobi, and shows us some Indian girls who are about to leave Kenya for fear of racist attacks by the Burning Spear police, and Kikuyu gaka becoming Prime Minister, saying goodbye to their relatives who remain in the British country so far. You can see them kissing with their noses, so common of several Hindu tribes, so widely detailed in the 'Amarusataka' or 'Century of Amaru', written in an undetermined time, maybe 1500 years ago, by a guru named Sankara who, through magic arts, managed to get into the body of King Amaru of Kashmir, who married a hundred women (Cunqueiro, "Las acariciadoras de narices" 20).

Fiction and reality are not only intertwined in each article individually, though, but in almost every article Cunqueiro publishes. The author creates a network of articles every time he publishes 'El envés'. In fact, in the following example, he goes back to events that have been previously mentioned in his literary columns: "Last Sunday we published a photo on the last page of beautiful Swedish actress Hathalie Tippi".

Example 3.



Last Sunday we published a photo on the last page of beautiful Swedish Hathalie (sic) Tippi, who starred in Alfred Hitchcock film entitled 'The Birds.' Hawks, crows, swans, wild lights, mergansers, hawks, larks, and sparrows, flying around the gothic blonde and the *oenax* hawk prosaically called *lagarteiro* in our country and the crow of Scania, solemn visitor of cereal lands of genuine Vandals, land on her bare shoulder, gently curved like the moon. And I then remembered I had read something about a beautiful woman living among Vikings who also had a strange friendship with birds (Cunqueiro, "Las aves de Hallenberga" 16).

Example 4 below shows the photograph of actress Nathalie Tippi Hedren which, as mentioned in Example 3, had been already published the previous Sunday by Álvaro Cunqueiro. Again, portrayal of real events such as the premiere of Alfred Hitchcock's 'The Birds' or the information on Tippi Hedren's professional career are intertwined with fiction, or in this case, with Irish mythology (e.g. Deirdre). Once again, the gossiping nature of the article—"Nathalie Tippi Hedren, Swedish-born American, divorced mother of a 5-year-old girl, used to work as a model and usually appear on television advertising"—the profusion of detail favouring the easy combination of fiction and reality—"... in which we will see 8,000 winged characters, including hawks, crows, magpies, sparrows and larks ... Nathalie has behaved valiantly during the filming of the movie, and has come to make friends with some of the crows that gently perched on her shoulder"—as well as the passage from the universal to the local and vice versa to round off the article with a touch of mythology help to give an idea of Cunqueiro's journalistic style—"Hawks, crows, swans, wild lights, mergansers, hawks, larks, and sparrows, flying around the gothic blonde and the *oenax* hawk prosaically called *lagarteiro* in our country and the crow of Scania, solemn visitor of cereal lands of genuine Vandals, land on her bare shoulder, gently curved like the moon. And I then remembered I had read something about a beautiful woman living among Vikings who also had a strange friendship with birds".

### Example 4.



Nathalie Tippi Hedren, Swedish-born American, divorced mother of a 5-year-old girl, used to work as a model and usually appear on television advertising. Alfred Hitchcock chose her for his film 'The Birds', in which we will see 8,000 winged characters, including hawks, crows, magpies, sparrows and larks. [...] Nathalie has behaved



valiantly during the filming of the movie, and has come to make friends with some of the crows that gently perched on her shoulder. [...] Blonde as Deirdre, secret goddess, Nathalie reigns among birds (Cunqueiro, "Nathalie Tippi Hedren" 24).

Cunqueiro's blending of fiction and reality has been studied in detail by Galician scholars (Martínez Torrón 1980, Tarrío 1989, and González-Millán 1991). However, it has been mentioned earlier in the present article that his journalistic corpus, especially those articles published in *Faro de Vigo*, are accompanied by another element in the equation: image. Images in every article, as we have seen, play a relevant role in the configuration of the message that Cunqueiro sends to his readers every week. Indeed, they convey essential information in the articles by the Galician writer. However, not many scholars have paid enough attention to the key role of images until Kress and Van Leeuwen's revolutionary publication *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*, which opened a whole new approach to discourse and text in 1996.

Generally speaking, it is now widely accepted that multimodality has a crucial say in meaning-making (Martin and Rose 2003, Thibault 2004, Unsworth 2001; Ventola et al 2004, among others). Kress has pointed out indeed that 'it is now impossible to make sense of texts, even of their linguistic parts alone, without having a clear idea of what these other features might be contributing to the meaning of a text' (Kress and Leeuwen 337). In the case of printed media, though, it is possible to say that, still nowadays, average recipients will normally become only dimly aware of the fact that they are processing information encoded in different modes when 'reading' a multimodal text. In textual practice, modes can shift and blend into one another. A theory of multimodal communication has to meticulously dissect an apparently homogeneous and holistic impression. It has to sensitise us for the essential differences of the modes involved (Stöckl 16). There are two basic ways in which the linguistic and the pictorial mode can come together in a text:

- A verbal text can itself acquire image qualities by means of typography and layout. In this case a peripheral mode (typography) of a medial variant (writing/language) is employed for a partial transfer from one core mode (language) to another (image). Here, the carrier of the linguistic mode emulates the pictorial.
- A verbal text is combined with an image. The two core modes are semantically and formally integrated so that each mode strategically employs its range of sub-modes thus unfolding the specific semiotic potential of each mode and contributing to an overall communicative gestalt. (Stöckl 16).

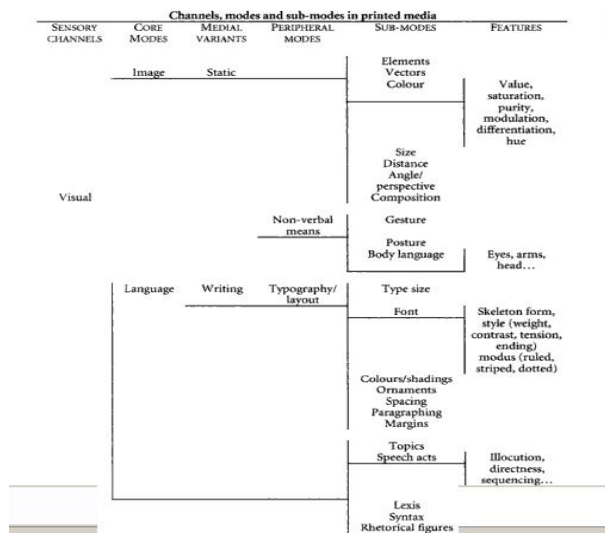


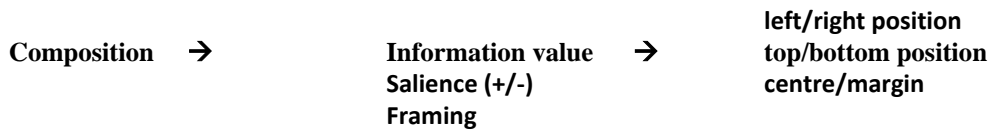
Fig.1. Network of modes, submodes and features in printed media (Stöckl 12).

In this sense, the following lines analyse the use of multimodality that Cunqueiro made already in his recreational news published in the literary column 'El envés', published in the Galician paper *Faro de Vigo* and always in the light of Franco's dictatorship and the living and cultural conditions of the period. Galician people living under the outstanding contrasts originated during Franco's dictatorship saw that the beginning of Francoism meant the death of Galician culture as well as the silent, clandestine fight for a new democratic era against an ancient power

which faced the interests of democratic generations. And secrecy itself involves deep conflicts, incongruity, nonsense, isolation and even death in an unequal fight for change. Escaping Francoism and censorship at that time was indeed more difficult than we can imagine. A good example of repression is the need for pseudonyms as a means to avoid political and social castration. This phenomenon is quite noticeable in Álvaro Cunqueiro's literary and journalistic production. The most important of the Galician writer's pseudonyms is Álvaro Labrada. He started to use it from the beginning of the 1940s until his passing and published two books under this alias: *Saint Gonzalo* (1945) and *Baladas de las damas del tiempo pasado* (1945). But it will be as Editor-in-Chief of *Faro de Vigo* (1961-1981) newspaper when Cunqueiro starts to broaden his range of pseudonyms. We should cite: Manuel María Seoane, MMS, Al Farish Ibn laqhim al Galizi, A.L., Mark Tapley, and many others. Many of his translations and reviews from international poetic compositions will be published under an alias too. Thus the reason for recreational news, the permanent combination of myth and reality, local and universal, and the need to reach a wide readership, mostly illiterate, which could follow the author's articles thanks to the pictures he adds to his written texts.

Our analysis of the visual composition of four examples is guided by Kress and Van Leeuwen's (1996) work in reading images, paying special attention to the composition of the message; that is, where image and text are placed and how they interact. Composition rests upon three main principles: (i) information value, (ii) salience, and (iii) framing. Information value works along two axes: left to right and top to bottom where the horizontal axis (left to right in case of Western culture) refers to the linguistic notion of given versus new information whereas the vertical axis divides information into ideal (placed at the top) and real (at the bottom). Within information value, it can also be distinguished a third contrast: centre as opposed to margins, with more relevant information

occupying a more central position. Salience and framing, on the other hand, are closely related and refer to the different perception of the elements composing the message. In other words, some of these elements are perceived before others in the same message because of their colour, bigger size and the presence of frames—e.g. the use of boxes to frame a relevant element (adapted from Kress and Van Leeuwen 210):



Example 1.



'Variaciones' FV, 20-IV-77, p. 28.

This first sample shows an example with no semantic relation between the modes: the verbal and the image texts. The meaning conveyed in the written text is not repeated or paralleled in the pictorial mode. It is not even complemented, negated, contradicted or reinterpreted since the written part does not refer at all to the visual one and vice versa. Salience, on the other hand, can be seen in the big size of the picture, calling the readers' attention as an important independent unit able to equal the written part. The picture, already important thanks to its size, appears framed at the end of the two written





'El Envés' FV, 21-VIII-79, p. 40.

This time, also, salience plays a very important role in Cunqueiro's article. The big size of the picture, in central position and covering the space of the two columns, does not only catch the readers' eyes but also highlights the importance of the pictorial mode. Besides, the picture appears at the bottom of the page, as *realia*: the article praises typical Galician grilled sardines. Association is favoured by the picture so that the meaning of the written text is complemented by the meaning conveyed by the picture. Once again, there is no need to read the written text in detail in order to know what the article is about.

Example 4.



'Sin falar de Magos' FV, 05-I-77, p. 28.

The Three Wise Men Figurines in Cunqueiro's home reproduction of the stable at Bethlehem are depicted in the article in the fourth example. The image appears on the right, as new information, top of the page, representing the ideal world. Saliency comes given by the big size of the picture catching the readers' eyes. Association is favoured by the picture so that the meaning of the written text is complemented by the meaning conveyed by the picture.

All in all, Cunqueiro's wide use of images and captions in combination is a good means for the author not only to get closer to his readers but also to reach a wider readership. Given the illiteracy of Galician people at the time, pictures do commonly make the comprehension of the articles easier, with virtually no need to read the verbal text at times. Besides, the two modes—pictorial and verbal—interact in 'El Envés' and hence favour the reception of Cunqueiro's articles as '(re)creational news', aiming at entertaining the reader, complementing the direct news, and creating new narrative styles and languages. Needless is to say at this point that re-creational news, at the same time, were also intended for wider audiences, given their lower level of complexity.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Cunqueiro's journalistic articles are word-for-word translations intended to convey Cunqueiro's original journalistic style.

## Works Cited

Cunqueiro, Álvaro. "La Flauta de Arenhim." *Faro de Vigo* 18 Jan. 1962: 10.

---. "Nathalie Tippi Hedren." *Faro de Vigo* 14 Apr. 1963: 24.

---. "Las aves de Hallenberga." *Faro de Vigo* 16 Apr. 1963: 16.

---. "Las acariciadoras de narices." *Faro de Vigo* 23 Nov. 1963: 20.

---. "Los Abades de Ashby." *Faro de Vigo* 20 Nov. 1964: 16.

---. "Sin falar de Magos." *Faro de Vigo* 05 Jan. 1977: 28.

---. "Variaciones." *Faro de Vigo* 20 Apr. 1977: 28.

---. "Bodas de plata con el albariño." *Faro de Vigo* 05 Aug. 1977: 40.

---. "El Envés." *Faro de Vigo* 21 Aug. 1979: 40.

Fontecuberta, Mar. *Estructura de la noticia periodística*. Barcelona: ATE, 1980.

González-Millán, Xoán. *Álvaro Cunqueiro: Os artificios da fabulación*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Vigo: Galaxia, 1991.

Kress, Gunther, and T. Van Leeuwen. *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design*. London: Routledge, 2006.

McKevitt, Kerry. "Mythologizing Identity and History: A Look at the Celtic Past of Galicia." *E-Keltoi* 6 (2006): 651-673.

Martin, J.R. and D. Rose. *Working with Discourse. Meaning beyond the clause*. London: Continuum, 2003.

Martínez Torrón, Diego. *La fantasía lúdica de Álvaro Cunqueiro*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. A Coruña: Edicións do Castro, 1980.

Outeiriño, Maribel. "Soy un antimarxista visceral." *Región* 8 July 1979.

Risco, Vicente. "El sentimiento de la tierra en la raza gallega." *Leria* 1961: 13.

Stöckl, H. "Language and Image in Printed Media." *Perspectives on Multimodality*. Ed. Eija Ventola, Charles Cassily, and Martin Kaltenbacher. US: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004: 9-30.

Tarrío, Anxo. *Álvaro Cunqueiro ou os disfraces da melancolía*. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. Vigo: Galaxia, 1989.

Thibault, P. *Discourse: Agency and Consciousness in Discourse*. London: Continuum, 2004.



Unsworth, L. *Teaching Multiliteracies Across the Curriculum. Changing Contexts of text and image in classroom practice*. Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001.

---

# Cinematic Articulations of the Jungian 'Symbolic' and the Cultivation of Mindfulness in Hypno-Psychotherapy



Jan Peters | Universit d'Orl ans

## Abstract

Focussing primarily on Bergman's *Persona* (1966) and Herzog's *Heart of Glass* (1976), this essay examines how cinematic articulations of the Jungian *Symbolic* dovetail with hypno-psychotherapeutic modalities aimed at cultivating the 'mindful' awareness of the 'groundlessness of being'. Mindfulness involves renouncing conceptions of who or what we are, so that we can dwell within an authentic 'ground of being' that is truly 'groundless'. Likewise, Jung's conception of the *Symbolic* refers to those numinous, unknowable aspects of the psyche that defy conceptualization.

*Heart of Glass* documents the devastating consequences of a society that has sundered its vital connection to the *Symbolic*. In this connection, I suggest that the ability of trance states to set meanings adrift from their conventional moorings may provide the beleaguered villagers in *Heart of Glass* with the means by which they can restore the sundered link with this *Symbolic* realm. *Persona*, while ostensibly touching upon core Jungian concerns, exemplifies the pivotal theme in this essay, namely the assumption that Jung's *Symbolic* resembles Lacan's *Register of the Real*. Yet, the Lacanian *Real* is absolute plenitude, and thus is infinitely full and over-determined. For life, movement and individuated consciousness to exist, a 'space', 'void', or 'gap' needs to be breached. I contend that Bergman's cinematic articulation of the Jungian *Symbolic* effectively performs this task, and that hypnosis likewise seeks to create a clearing among the overgrown thickets of mental constructs that constitute a 'false' plenitude, or sense of self.

## Introduction

Focussing primarily on Bergman's *Persona* (1966) and Herzog's *Heart of Glass* (1976), this essay examines how cinematic articulations of the Jungian *Symbolic*

**Cita o:** Jan Peters, "Cinematic Articulations of the Jungian 'Symbolic' and the Cultivation of Mindfulness in Hypno-Psychotherapy". *Via Panor mica: Revista Eletr nica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 96-113. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

dovetail with hypno-psychotherapeutic modalities aimed at cultivating the 'mindful' awareness of the 'groundlessness of being'. As our mental biases are conceptual maps that ultimately fail to fully represent the bewildering, complex territory of reality, mindfulness involves renouncing conceptions of who or what we are, so that we can dwell within an authentic 'ground of being' that is truly 'groundless'. Likewise, Jung's conception of the *Symbolic* refers to those numinous, unknowable aspects of the psyche that defy conceptualization. As such, the Symbolic is intimately connected with 'primordial images', the 'collective unconscious' and 'archetypes'. According to Jung:

[The symbol] attempts to elucidate, by means of analogy, something that still belongs entirely to the domain of the unknown or something that is yet to be. Imagination reveals to us, in the form of a more or less striking analogy, what is in the process of becoming. If we reduce this by analysis to something else universally known, we destroy the authentic value of the symbol (Jung, *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology* 299).

More importantly, with regard to 'primordial images' and the archetypal realm, Jung asserts:

archetypes are not determined as regards their content, but only as regards their form and then only to a very limited degree. A primordial image is determined as to its content only when it has become conscious and is therefore filled out with the material of conscious experience (Jung, *CW 9:I*: para. 155).

Evidence of film-makers attesting to the power of the Jungian *Symbolic* in these terms include this remark by Buñuel: "A film is like an involuntary imitation of a dream ... On the screen, as within the human being, the nocturnal voyage into the unconscious begins ... The cinema seems to have been invented to express the life of the subconscious, the roots of which penetrate poetry so deeply" (qtd.

in Kyrou 109-111). Commenting on the meaning of *Persona*, Bergman laconically remarks: "On many points I am uncertain and on one point I know nothing at all" (Bergman 21).

I begin with an analysis of Werner Herzog's 1976 feature, *Heart of Glass*. In addition to the paradoxical role of hypnosis in the film (Herzog famously placed most of the cast under hypnosis), *Heart of Glass* documents the devastating consequences of a society that has sundered or lost its vital connection to primordial images. At first sight, *Heart of Glass* appears to validate many of the misconceptions about hypnosis, and indeed a number of critical responses to the role of hypnosis in the film choose to focus on the aura of passivity, resignation and fatefulness that accompanies the collective trance state depicted in the film. A closer inspection, however, reveals the pivotal role played by hypnosis in governing the film's dialectical relationships between the real and the ideal, subjectivity and objectivity, and rationality and mysticism. In this connection, I suggest that *Heart of Glass's* close metaphorical and metaphysical kinship with certain central concerns within German Romanticism regarding the nature of human perception can shed light on the troublesome ontological status of hypnotic trance. By the same token, the ability of trance states to set meanings adrift from their conventional moorings may provide the beleaguered villagers in *Heart of Glass* with the means by which they can restore the sundered link with the realm of primordial images.

Hypnosis potentially enacts a process of deconstruction through challenging, reframing and transforming obsolete, self-limiting beliefs and thought patterns. In this regard, the villagers' zombie-like 'trance' state may actually serve to parody their largely unconscious, automated responses to the existential predicament they find themselves in. I conclude my analysis of *Heart of Glass* with a quote from an interview with Werner Herzog, in which the director highlights the importance of hypnosis in promoting a sense of fluidity

and movement in the film, a vital concern shared with the aims of Bergman's cinematography.

I then move on to Bergman's 1966 masterpiece, *Persona*. While *Persona* ostensibly touches upon such core Jungian concerns as the dialectic between persona and shadow, and how the process of individuation can become thwarted, the film – not least, Bergman's cinematography – exemplifies a number of pivotal themes in this essay.

Perhaps the most prominent of these is the assumption (mistaken or otherwise) that Jung's *Symbolic* resembles Lacan's *Register of the Real (Réel)*, or that which lies beyond the representation or the apprehension of both the *Imaginary* (the realm of internal objects) and *the Symbolic* (as opposed to the Jungian 'Symbolic', Lacan's formulation refers to 'consensual' reality, cultural or linguistic norms, the Law of the Father, or that which can be said).

For Lacan, the child is born into the *Register of the Real*, a state preceding the formation of the ego and the organization of the drives, a state characterized by pure plenitude and symbiotic unity with the mother<sup>1</sup>. At this stage, the child is incapable of recognizing the mother's (or the breast's) absence. As the child matures, recognition of this absence, the primary acknowledgement of loss and lack, sets the scene for the crucial *Mirror Stage (stade du miroir)*:

Only at this moment does it become capable of distinguishing itself from the 'outside' world, and thus of locating itself *in* the world ... its recognition of itself as a (potential) totality is correlative with its recognition that the world as a whole is not *its* own ... The 'fullness', the completeness that the child experiences through the maternal supplementation of its needs is interrupted by lack ... From this time on, lack, gap, splitting will be its mode of being. It will attempt to fill its (impossible, unfillable) lack. Its recognition of lack signals an ontological rift with nature or the Real. This gap will propel it into seeking an identificatory image of its own stability and permanence (the imaginary), and eventually language (the symbolic) by which it hopes to fill the lack. The child loses the 'pure plenitude' of the Real and is now constituted within the

imaginary (i.e. the order of images, representations, doubles and others) in its specular identifications (Grosz 35).

This initial sundering of the primal syncretic unity with the mother is the prelude to a whole range of conceptual oppositions that will henceforth characterize the child's perception of the world through to adulthood, such as the separation of inside and outside, and the distinction between self and other. For Freudian analyst James Grotstein (1998), Lacan's *Real* equates with the ineffable nature of the Tao, because "psychologically [they] represent that incomprehensible, inconceivable, unimaginable and unsymbolizable experience which can only be understood as numinous" (48). In relation to Lacan's Register of the Real, Grotstein states that "Real is a domain without an object ... It is what Freud did not realize that the unconscious consisted of when he chose the drives to be its privileged signified elements in lieu of being merely signifiers of the ineffable and infinity of the unconscious" (Grotstein 49, italics mine).

Yet the Real is absolute plenitude, and thus lacks nothing; and because it so infinitely full and over-determined, it resembles an absolutely sterile void. For life, movement and individuated consciousness to exist, a 'space', 'void', or 'gap' needs to be breached in the Real. In this sense, the Real resembles 'the uncarved block' mentioned in the *Tao Te Ching*, in its ineffable and unfathomable nature, which only becomes useful when 'voids', 'gaps' or 'spaces' are hewn out of it: "The Way is for ever nameless. Though the uncarved block is small, no one in the world dare claim its allegiance. Only when it is cut are there names. As soon as there are names, one ought to know that is time to stop" (Lau 91).

I contend that Bergman's cinematic articulation of the Jungian *Symbolic* effectively performs this task of 'hewing' out gaps or voids. On the more mundane level of personal consciousness, I suggest that hypnosis likewise seeks to create a clearing or space among the overgrown thickets of mental constructs

and neurotic attachments that constitute a 'false', over determined plenitude or sense of 'self'.

### ***Why Hypnosis?***

I choose to focus on hypnosis because, for psychoanalysis, hypnotic trance represents a 'dark family secret'. Indeed, had it not been for Freud's acquaintance with Charcot's use of hypnosis as a method for investigating hysteria, psychoanalysis as we know it might not have evolved. The Freud who entered the service of neurologist Jean Martin Charcot (1835-1893) at the Salpêtrière Institute in 1885 was convinced that all mental illness had a neuro-physiological cause, that all pathology could be attributed to cerebral or neurological lesions. The Freud who returned to Vienna in 1886 had witnessed Charcot's use of hypnosis to induce and reverse paralysis, and was therefore compelled to search for the psychological rather than physiological factors driving such phenomena.

In this respect, Freud's case represents an uncanny repetition of the outcome of the 1784 French Royal Commission aimed at investigating Mesmer's animal magnetism, in that psychological explanations (Mesmer's manipulation of his subjects' imagination) came to displace physiological ones. Though initially a providential find for Freud, hypnosis yielded varied and uneven responses from patients, while the results produced by symptom removal and abreaction proved to be short-lived. Alternative methods devised by Freud, such as free-association and transference, soon displaced hypnosis as the preferred modes of therapeutic intervention with various psychoanalytic schools. However, by 1937 Freud acknowledged that the therapeutic efficacy of the psychoanalytic cure was neither reliable nor predictable, and that analytical methods confronted the same difficulties as those hypnotic techniques he abandoned forty years previously. In particular, Freud deemed transference insufficient for the task of

breaking down the patient's resistance to the insights elicited by analysis. Sandor Ferenczi, Freud's anointed successor, who was long regarded as the official interpretative authority on Freud's theories, even went as far as suggesting that Freud's cherished method of free-association was itself a powerful tool for inducing hypnotic states. Moreover, Ferenczi publicly acknowledged that as an analyst, he accepted and even encouraged trance states among his patients.

Hypnosis thus haunts psychoanalysis as its shadow, the receptacle of those unacceptable, repressed or unacknowledged aspects of its constitution that are at odds with its self-image as a rational, 'scientific' method aimed at promoting insight and consciousness of the hidden forces that drive human behaviour (Chertok, 1979; Chertok & Stengers, 1989). On this account, hypnosis comes to inhabit the realm of the numinous and unknowable that is the focal point of the Jungian *Symbolic*. For many orthodox strands of psychoanalysis, hypnosis embodies a kind of menacing, 'irrational' placebo effect, the unintended, 'parasitical' phenomenon that accompanies the genuine explanation for clinical efficacy (Chertok & Stengers, 1989). As such, hypnosis is viewed as a throwback to an earlier, pre-Enlightenment era of obscurantism, of divine or demonic possession, in which individual human reason and conscience becomes infantilized in its slavish devotion to charismatic religious authorities. Kovel's dismissive attitude towards hypnosis is typical: "...the hypnotic subject is being directed to assume a state of mind in which mature discriminations are excluded and childish dependence upon the hypnotist is encouraged" (Kovel 273).

### ***Heart of Glass***

A cursory glance at *Heart of Glass* seems to confirm this prejudice. Depicting a society's catastrophic inability to negotiate the treacherous transition from the pre-modern and pre-industrial to the Enlightenment values of instrumental rationality and technology, the film takes place in an eighteenth-century



Bavarian village dependent on, and famous for its production of ruby-red glass. The chief manufacturer of this glass dies, taking the secret of its production with him to the grave. The industrialist, terrified at the village's imminent economic collapse, searches desperately for a solution, turning the glassmaker's home upside down and enlisting the help of clairvoyant shepherd Hias, who only proffers disturbing, allegorical visions. As a last, desperate measure, the industrialist sacrifices his maidservant, Ludmilla, in the hope of divining the secret of the ruby-red glass through the addition of human blood. When this fails, he sets fire to the glassworks.

Herzog's decision to hypnotize most of the cast has led critics, such as Wickham (1989), to describe the atmosphere of *Heart of Glass* as one of "brooding inevitability, enhanced by a monotony of ponderous action, slow speech and slow-tempo music" (Wickham 116). Aufderheide (1978), whose perspective on the film reflects a conventional view of hypnosis, contends that the zombie-like state of the cast "deepen[s] the notion that immobilization and passivity are inevitable, that we cannot avoid our fate" (McCormick and Aufderheide 34). She notes further that:

Advertisers and supermarket managers are already well aware of the advantages of hypnotic suggestion ... Herzog's hypnotic magic, as impressive certainly as any seductive Christmas display, offers no critique of its subject ... in fact, Herzog's new film participates in the problem.

Although Herzog appears to elicit a mode of reception in which the spectator is 'mesmerized' to the extent that rational engagement is precluded, critics such as Theobaldy (1979) assert that Herzog's work moves us closer to the realm of primordial images, of myth and dream, thereby highlighting the discrepancy between the real and the ideal. Indeed, it is the film's very irrationality – the unresolved mysteries, the unanswered questions and its implicit critique of

Enlightenment rationalism – that appears to give rise to a whole host of rational responses.

McCormick (1978) echoes Theobaldy's perspective when seeking to underline the film's divide between rationalism and mysticism as a key to its title. To begin with, the industrialist has a 'heart of glass', which is no longer 'human' or 'organic', but rather an embodiment of the village's chief source of capital. McCormick states that "the owner represents instrumental rationality, technology gone mad in the service of profit and privilege, despite the fact that he equates his survival with the common good" (McCormick 33).

As regards the dialectic of mysticism and rationalism, it is worth noting that coloured glass plays a prominent metaphorical role in German Romanticism (particularly in the works of Franz Brentano and Heinrich von Kleist) as the subjective lens, or the habitual mental apparatus through which we perceive the world and which prevents us from seeing reality as it truly is. Indeed, in *The Beggarwoman of Locarno* (Kleist, 1988), Kleist speculates on the status and nature of human perception if green glass were substituted for human eyes. He concludes that humans would be incapable of determining whether their 'eyes' were conveying reality as it truly is, or if they were merely expressing properties inherent in the 'eyes' themselves.

A similar conundrum seems to bedevil the ontological status of hypnotic trance, and this may account for its 'pariah' status within the realm of 'orthodox' psychoanalysis. There appears to be no dependable protocol for determining whether a given hypnotic phenomenon is a genuine manifestation of hypnosis, or simply a product of skilful simulation. Indeed, any protocol designed specifically for the purpose of isolating, objectifying and measuring hypnotic phenomena invariably contributes an unpredictable, random element to the production of such phenomena. The hypnotized subject realizes that he or she is

the object of an experiment, and this realization inevitably influences his or her behaviour (Chertok & Stengers, 1989).

In recent times, French psychoanalyst François Roustang (1994) has characterized hypnotic trance as 'paradoxical wakefulness' (*veille paradoxale*), which serves as a springboard into an overarching concept of *veille généralisée* ('general' or 'broad' wakefulness), a kind of expanded, non-discriminatory mindful state in contrast to the *veille restreinte* ('limited wakefulness') of our habitual consciousness.

By utilizing mental habits such as absorption, fantasy proneness and dissociation, hypnosis effects a process of 'defamiliarization' or 'alienation' aimed at revealing the inherent strangeness or uncanny nature of those aspects of our thinking regarded as commonplace fixtures of our everyday mental furniture. The meanings and interpretations assigned to both external and internal stimuli are set adrift from their conventional moorings, and rigid binary oppositions may give way to an appreciation and inclusion of paradox.

To this end, hypnosis may also be said to enact an important process of deconstruction in its ability to challenge, reframe and transform entrenched, outmoded, rigid and dogmatic belief systems or behavioural patterns. Paradoxically, the villagers' collective, zombie-like hypnotic trance may serve as a parody of their unhealthy, pathological attachment to such behaviours and beliefs, as their habitual responses to the existential crisis that besets them rely on largely unconscious, automated patterns and protocols.

In this connection, it is apposite to note that the film's seer, Hias, possesses a heart of glass, by virtue of his clear visions. At the beginning of the film, a crazed villager tells Hias that he has had a vision of a giant, with eyes like millstones. Paradoxically (or perhaps not), Hias as the mystical seer provides a rational explanation: there are no giants – the giant was merely the shadow of a

dwarf. For Herzog, the trope of the seer bears a certain kinship with the clarity of expression exhibited by the actors under hypnosis. According to Herzog:

I wanted actors with fluid, almost floating movements, which means the film would seem to depart from known behaviour and gestures and would have an atmosphere of hallucination, prophecy and collective delirium that intensifies towards the end ... Maybe the title *Heart of Glass* makes more sense in this light. It seems to mean for me an extremely sensitive and fragile inner state, with a kind of transparent glacial quality to it (qtd. in Cronin 127).

### **Persona**

Fluidity, movement and floating, or drifting qualities are also of key significance to the narrative progression and message of Bergman's *Persona*. Elisabet (Liv Ullmann) is a famous actress suddenly rendered mute by what appears to be a psychosomatic illness. During her convalescence she is cared for by nurse Alma (Bibi Andersson), who does most of the talking for both of them. Over the course of time, an insidious blurring of the boundaries of the two women's identities occurs and their personalities eventually merge. According to philosopher and Bergman's intellectual biographer, Irving Singer, "the dynamic core of the film resides in the concept of merging, and its manifestation in the fusion of the faces of Alma and Elisabet" (Singer 163-164). He adds:

Before they merge at the climax of the film, they are both systematically divided into black and white segments as if in a carnival mask that hides as much as it shows. Or, better yet, as if there were in each of the women an inner region that is not available to observation as the illuminated portion is ... But [the merging] cannot reveal the persona of a human being, particularly the complex personality of either Alma or Elisabet. Remaining separate in their personhood, they are inherently different ... and the totality that now appears consists only of jumbled components (Singer 163-164).

Thus, the incomplete process of merging possesses a fluid, elusive and indeterminate quality that mirrors the complex, constantly shifting dialectic of 'figure' and 'ground' found in Gestalt psychology. On this account, it is impossible to discern a discrete cut-off point between the person as a psychological entity and the physical and social world they inhabit. As such, the individual always exists in relation, as one pole within a constantly shifting 'field' encompassing both the individual and the wider determinants of their existence. According to Gestalt psychology, whenever a novel need or demand emerges, the entire perceptual field undergoes reorganization, with the matter at hand becoming more *figural*, and other competing concerns receding into the background as dimmer, vaguer features of the *ground*.<sup>2</sup>

For Roustang (2004), hypnotic trance shares with Gestalt sensibilities precisely this shifting, ambiguous and, more importantly, indeterminate property. Indeed, he asserts that when the method of fixation on a particular object is employed to induce trance, the "object itself eventually recedes from perception: the process of concentration continues, but it floats in a state of indeterminacy [*il flotte dans l'indétermination*]" (Roustang 70 – translation mine). Hypnotic trance is an indeterminate state, precisely because it causes the subject to dwell at the liminal, interstitial midpoint, as well as to float between the figure and background. As a consequence, the hypnotic trance state potentially enables the subject to engage fully and mindfully in the fluidity and vividness of moment-to-moment lived experience.

This floating indeterminacy also informs Bergman's cinematographic articulation of the Jungian Symbolic, to the extent that potentially over determined symbolic meanings attributed to certain key images are effectively 'evacuated', 'voided' to ensure the movement and momentum of the narrative. Thus, according to:

Bergman's cinematography in *Persona* is arresting ... because it is usually *a component of the narrative* rather than a mere vehicle to it. Without the use of symbols or hidden meanings, whether Freudian or Jungian or any other, his effort as a filmmaker thereby focuses our imagination on some development in the plot that he has devised. [Consider] the moment just before the end when Elisabet walks out of the cottage ... She passes a primitive-looking statuette on a pedestal ... [a] work of art [that] consists of an upward-oriented human head, abstract and very dramatic, the interior hollow, the front somewhat fragmented, the mouth open as if in a declamation of pain or agony. The next shot shows Elisabet's face heavily made up for the role in *Electra* that walked out of at the beginning ... Neither the statue nor the movie camera nor the actress's histrionic facial appearance has symbolic meaning. Instead they each function as active and transitional elements in the presentation of the story (*italics in the original*) (Singer 169-170).

This evacuation of over determined symbolic meaning is of greater importance when applied to the film's core theme of 'merging', a trope that resonates with both Jungian conceptions of the 'archetype' and Lacan's 'register of the Real'. According to Singer, Bergman demonstrates that 'merging' - whether with another human being, or with the 'cosmos', 'divine' or 'numinous' - is "an impossible goal ... [and] that is the principal thrust of Bergman's mythic work" (Singer 171).

Likewise, for Jung, while individuation is directed towards the complex wholeness of the individual through the assimilation of elements from the personal and collective unconscious, this process may encourage the individual to become fused with the Mana<sup>3</sup>-like properties of these elements, resulting in pathological ego inflation. In this condition, the individuated psyche is indistinguishable from the hypertrophied ego defence of extreme introversion, in which narcissism and self-aggrandizement conspire to keep the individual aloof from interpersonal relations. Jarrett (1988) cites Jung's analysis of Nietzsche's identification with the Mana personality in the form of the semi-legendary

Persian prophet Zarathustra as a fitting example of the kind of misguided individuation that perhaps contributed to Nietzsche's eventual insanity.

Similarly, for Lacan, once the subject is inscribed in the symbolic order, access to the Register of the Real is effectively barred. As I mentioned at the start of this essay, 'spaces', 'voids', or 'gaps' need to be breached in the Real for life, movement and individuated consciousness to exist. The most pragmatic attempt at addressing the transformative potential of 'voids', 'gaps' and 'interstices' yet to emerge in Western psychotherapy is the Gestalt notion of *withdrawal*: a state that represents the *interstice, gap or liminal space* between Gestalt destruction and formation. For Clarkson (1989), *withdrawal* signifies

... a pause and a pulling away of psychic energy from a previous preoccupation to a state of void or nothingness from which a new need/figure can emerge... It is very important for the counsellor to support and encourage the acceptance and exploration of the withdrawal and isolation which is a necessary part of the transition process ... Frequently people want to short-circuit or flee the uncomfortable process of being 'in between'. Yet the quality, attention and intentional awareness functional at this time can make the difference between whether this void or emptiness is experienced as futile or fertile (Clarkson 133).

In both Gestalt terms, and in the hypnotherapeutic cultivation of mindfulness, familiarity with voids or empty spaces allows "sensation to emerge as a figure from a ground which is at the same time both empty and overflowing with possibilities and potentials" (Clarkson 132).

Once this insight is applied to Lacan's notion that our psychic life resembles a constantly shifting chain of signifiers, we see that opening up 'voids' or 'gaps' is necessary for the continuous evacuation of meaning that allows this chain to keep moving. According to Grosz (1990), this opening up of a 'void', 'gap' or 'space' occurs each time "the signifier moves out of its concrete relations, its

syntagmatic bonds in a given speech act, back into the signifying chain” (Grosz 95). Grosz further states that:

This signals a constitutive lack at the core of language, a lack which marks the absence of a fixed anchoring point, the absence of a solid core of meaning for any term – its necessarily open, ambiguous potential. This sliding of the signifier over the signified is only momentarily arrested in specific contexts. This lack of a founding sign – a signifier tied firmly to a given signified – means that if each term is founded on pure difference and thus already requires another term to be understood, all terms can only be understood relative to language as a whole (Grosz 95, italics in original).

However, the continuous and indefinite sliding and ‘voiding’ of meaning, which enables the life of the psyche to maintain its movement and momentum, is arrested, once psychic disturbance becomes manifested as a symptom. In common with the notion of frozen or fixed *Gestalten* (which, in Gestalt therapy, often represent obsolete, limiting and maladaptive ways of responding gracefully and creatively to the ever-changing demands of the present), disturbance in Lacanian terms produces ‘stuck’ or ‘congealed’ signs, which hinder signifiers from forming other connections or meanings (Lacan 1966/1977).

In a similar vein, hypno-psychotherapy, with its ability to suspend and deactivate incessant ruminative patterns, as well as its capacity for revealing the inherent ‘emptiness’ and ‘indeterminacy’ of symbolic meaning and mental concepts, perhaps provides the key for effecting the continuous evacuation of meaning necessary for the psyche to maintain its grace and fluidity.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> “[The child] has no experience of corporeal or psychical unity or of occupying a stable position within a corporeally delimited space. Sensory/perceptual impingements, which may animate certain organs and bodily parts, cannot be attributed to a continuous, homogenous subjectivity” (Grosz 34).



---

<sup>2</sup> Stressing the integrity of the personality and couching healthy ego consciousness in here-and-now awareness, Gestalt therapy rejects the traditional psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious as a permanently inaccessible domain in favour of the shifting figure/ground found in the concept of awareness: "And, therefore, rather than talking of the unconscious, we prefer to talk about the at-this-moment-unaware. This term is much broader and wider than the term 'unconscious'. This unawareness contains not only repressed material, but material which never came into awareness, and material which had faded or has been assimilated or has been built into larger gestalts. The unaware includes skills, patterns of behaviour, motoric and verbal habits, blind spots, etc." (Perls 54).

<sup>3</sup> Derived from animistic practices in Melanesia and Polynesia, the term *Mana* refers to impersonal forces or properties existing in both animate and inanimate entities, and is analogous to the concept of magic in various cultures. As a concept, *Mana* is widely used in anthropology and archetypal/transpersonal psychology. See Casement (2001) and Keesing (1984).

### Works Cited

*CW* refers to *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Bergman, Ingmar. *Persona and Shame*. New York: Grossman, 1972.

Casement, Ann. *Carl Gustav Jung*. London: Sage, 2001.

Chertok, Léon. *Le non-savoir des psys, L'hypnose entre la psychanalyse et la biologie*. Paris: Payot, 1979.

Chertok, Léon, and I. Stengers. *Le cœur et la raison. L'hypnose en question de Lavoisier à Lacan*. Paris: Payot, 1989.

---. *L'hypnose, blessure narcissique*. Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1990.

Clarkson, Petruska. "Gestalt Therapy – an Update." *Self and Society* 16 (2), (1988): 74-9.

Clarkson, Petruska. *Gestalt Counselling in Action*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London: Sage, 1989.

Cronin, P. ed. *Herzog on Herzog*. London: Faber and Faber, 2002.

Freud, Sigmund. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud. Volume 23. Moses and Monotheism, An Outline of*

---

*Psychoanalysis, Analysis Terminable and Interminable, and other works.* Trans. Strachey, J. London: Hogarth Press, 1968.

Grosz, Elizabeth. *Jacques Lacan: A Feminist Introduction.* London: Routledge, 1990.

Grotstein, James. "The numinous and immanent nature of the psychoanalytic subject." *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 43 (1) (1998): 41-68.

Jarrett, L., ed. "Nietzsche's Zarathustra: notes of the seminar given in 1934-39 by C.G. Jung." *Bolingen Series XCIX.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988.

Jung, Carl G. *Two Essays in Analytical Psychology.* Cleveland, OH: World, 1953.

Jung, Carl G., *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1959/1968.

Keesing, R. "Rethinking Mana." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 40 (1984): 137-156.

Kleist, Heinrich v. "The Beggarwoman of Lorcaro." *German Romantic Stories.* R.M. Browning (trans.). New York: Continuum, 1988.

Kovel, J. *A Complete Guide to Therapy.* London: Pelican, 1976.

Kyrou, A. *Luis Buñuel: An Introduction.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963.

Lacan, Jacques. *Écrits.* Paris: Seuil, 1966.

Lacan, Jacques. *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis.* London: Hogarth Press, 1977.

Lau, D.C. (trans.). *Tao Te Ching.* Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963.

McCormick, R. and P. Aufderheide. "Werner Herzog's 'Heart of Glass': Pro & Con." *Cineaste*, 8 (4) (1978): 32-34.

Perls, Friedrich S. *The Gestalt Approach & Eye Witness to Therapy.* New York: Bantam Press, 1976.

Roustang, François. *Qu'est-ce que l'hypnose?* Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1994.

---

Rudnytsky, P. L. *Ferenczi's Turn in Psychoanalysis*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.

Singer, Irving. *Ingmar Bergman, Cinematic Philosopher: Reflections on His Creativity*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.

Theobaldy, J. "Fahrten ins Ungeheure, Werner Herzog." *Reihe Film* 22 (1979): 7-58.

Wickham, C. "Heart and Hole: Achternbusch, Herzog and the Concept of 'Heimat'." *The Germanic Review*, 44 (3) (1989): 112-120.

# Elizabeth Bowen: Feminist Discourse and the Italian Neorealism



Zuzanna Sanches | Universidade de Lisboa

## Abstract

This paper will analyze the relationship between Elizabeth Bowen's *Eva Trout* and the theoretical tenets of Italian neorealist cinematography. The exchange between the novel and neorealism can be found in the concept of time-image that builds upon an evolution from doer to seer, and in the use of so far marginalised figures, namely that of a child and of a woman. Bodily movement does not lead towards a conclusion, but rather a multiplication within the mental range of subjective, somewhat tiresome narratives. As such, there is another time within the subject which constitutes a kind of propelling power to delineate reality. The character must labour to comprehend the images/visions, and these very endeavours or 'concatenations' become the embedding time-space. Time is indeterminate and multiple as the subject upon which it hinges.

The fluid and constant intertwining of life and art always fascinated Elizabeth Bowen's imagination. To her, the language of aesthetic creation merged with the witchcraft and magic of film, creating fictions not confined to gender limitations and free from rigid cultural entanglements. In such realizations of art, Bowen could concede the subject a greater participation in the process of creation (from a feminist perspective, by opening onto the affective powers of otherness and agency). By the same token, it was at the crossroads of cinema and literature that she, I believe, found her definition of a female new voice.

The fluid and constant intertwining of life and art always fascinated Elizabeth Bowen's imagination, to whom the language of aesthetic creation merged with witchcraft and magic. Illusions, to Bowen, were art, and she believed that the feeling person only managed to live through art. What is more, one was bound to appreciate the value of illusion, since it succeeded in containing a dynamic and sparkling content beneath the cracking identitarian surface. Experiencing aesthetic creation was the sole emotion one remained faithful to as it unfolded

**Citação:** Zuzanna Sanches, "Elizabeth Bowen: Feminist Discourse and the Italian Neorealism". *Via Panorâmica: Revista Electrónica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 114-130. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

through the multiple experiences of selfhood and otherness. In the ability to translate signs given to one in somebody else's point of view lay a way of "deciphering ... meaning" (Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur* 1) of life in general. The "shortest route to the self [happened] through the other (...)" (Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur* 2), and through the other's work. Thus, the self "return[ed] to itself after numerous hermeneutic detours through the language of others to find itself enlarged and enriched by the journey."<sup>1</sup> (Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur* 2). Art and illusions were undeniable parts of human existence ready to be found everywhere in the immediate involvement with reality and with oneself. As the great advocate of art, Virginia Woolf wrote to her artist sister Vanessa Bell: "One should be a painter. As a writer, I feel the beauty, which is almost entirely colour, very subtle, very changeable, running over my pen, as if you poured a jug of champagne over a hairpin" (qtd. in Goldman 233-234). Writers, according to Woolf, did not attend art exhibitions to understand the problems of the painter's art. They were after "something that may be helpful to themselves" (qtd. in Goldman 139) in the translation from visual to verbal semiotic signs.

Elizabeth Bowen also saw the possibility of an undeniably enriching dialogue between the visual and verbal arts. To her, genius and truth could be encoded in many vehicles, one of them being the cinematographic art that she considered an "interesting study for the novelist" (Bowen, *Preface to The Demon Lover* 42). Cinema could tell the truth because it was both, as Byatt would put it, "encumbered by either time or conventions" (Byatt 11) as well as fit for attesting to the veracity of facts. It possessed a certain childlike quality, when

all susceptibility belong[ed] to the age of magic, the Eden where fact and fiction were the same; the imaginative writer was the imaginative child (...) It could lead to madness to look back and back for the true primary impression and sensation. (Bowen, "Out of a book" 53)

Film was full of beautiful trickery and “any trick [was] justified if it add[ed] a statement” (Bowen, “Notes on writing a novel” 54), admitted Bowen right after the Second World War had ended, and around the time when Italian neorealism was gaining force. She referred in these terms to cinema, which to her had the capacity to dig deep into the subject’s cracking self. She described films as wonderfully versatile artifacts that possessed vocabulary enough to see the subject in its multiplicity: in her “Notes on Writing a Novel”, Bowen said that, “in a good film, the camera’s movement, angle and distance have all worked towards one thing, the fullest possible realization of the director’s idea, the completest possible surrounding of the subject” (Bowen, “Notes on writing a novel” 43). The big screen was thought to offer a new gaze upon the construction of the self, thanks to its time-image technique. The camera eye observed the subject in his/her geographic reality, and characters partook in a narrative adventure that forced complex time and space perceptions into them, and excavated their subjectivity. Characters experienced their temporality, and the process led to a painful reflexive awareness of bodies and their ties to a universe in which time, allied to the materiality of the immanent world, reigned supreme in all its unpredictability. Hence, the body is construed as the developer of time, containing in the same instant ‘the before’ and ‘the after’. In a screen presentation, action-image, signifying both movement and perception, is intricately conjoined into an organic unity. In time-image, the part and the whole become dispersive but more productive, insofar as the character must labour to comprehend the image, and this very event of labour becomes the embedding time-space. Further, in time-image the character cannot absorb the situation or synthesize a total understanding of it, but rather experience a laborious continuity of being without reaching a climax or conclusion, but rather a constant becoming. This, however, offers a womb-like, *choraic* peacefulness, as in Bowen’s last novel *Eva Trout*,

Did this make her traitorous to the years with Jeremy? – the inaudible years? His and her cinematographic existence, with no sound-track, in successive American cities made still more similar by their continuous manner of being in them, had had a sufficiency which was perfect. Sublimated monotony had cocooned the two of them, making them near as twins in a womb. (Bowen, *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes* 188)

Usually not conforming to the norms, Bowen was not afraid to ask blunt questions about the (en)gendered nature of the camera eye (questions that could also reflect her intellectual steadfastness, and her somewhat arrogant assumption of authority). “Where is the camera eye to be located?”, she asked herself, “was it in the breast or brow of the succession of characters?”. Bowen agreed that the focalizing authority knew no gender divisions and belonged to the female and the male eyes equally. The division, if it ever existed, was made between the seen and the unseen that combine in the diversity and span of the androgynous eye. What is more, the seen and the unseen were not divided by gender, as the fixation of the camera lens did not depend on the breast (female) or the brow (male). Rather, the division fell upon the concept of performativity, whereby both the agent and object of the gaze needed to be aware of narrative reciprocity and *jouissance* – “becom[ing] a witness ... lean[ing] sideways, to see from another angle” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 185). The camera eye was just enough to confer power to the one that wielded it.

If cinema recreated space for the dialectic of the gaze and the power it produced, then Italian neorealism enhanced the subject’s participation in the process of creation and reception of the body’s affects that are like “eternity ...walking beside” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 181). In Bowen, the perceptions it afforded tied together her undeniable feminist thinking with an acute depiction of reality and agency, “cast[ing] away everything” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 185) that was seen through the eyes of the subject that knew no division between male and female.

After all, mind, according to Bowen, was wonderfully just and kaleidoscopic. She wrote that “time, inside Eva’s mind lay about like various pieces of a fragmented picture” (Bowen *Eva Trout* 46) – she saw and remembered “disjunctedly” (46). In Deleuzian kaleidoscopic time, the world was “no longer a motor extension which is established” (Deleuze 4) between subject and reality, “but rather a dreamlike connection through the intermediary of the liberated sense organs. It is as if action floated in the situation, rather than bringing it to a conclusion or strengthening it” (4). Mental processing – “this pattern-arriving-at” (Bowen *Eva Trout* 47) – is both “absorbing, as in a kindergarten game” (47), and has “a predominant colour”, which makes thinking a distinctively ocular and phenomenological experience. In every instance, it is of a circular character: “a dividing going-and-coming adown the aisle” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 125), punctuated by a time-image silence of latent comprehension. If the visuality of neorealism seemed predicated on an internal structure of endlessly flowing particles – “particles of transience” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 181) – such particles could be attached to a female focalizer, “fixedly looking ahead” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 180). Bowen’s feminism and neorealism went hand in hand with regard to attesting to the new dynamics of femininity, and acknowledging the non-exclusive nature of gender identities.

The post-war period produced a reality to which no one knew how to react; as Bowen liked to write, populations became dislocated in a more profound way than human geography might suggest. In the aftermath of the war, the body, rather than undergoing movement, seems to become a ‘developer’ of a time that shows through in tiredness, loneliness and waitings – “a string of shudders – fatigue, rage, frustration, nervous despair” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 97). It becomes a developer and the filter of the new time images, a machine compensating for life’s lost vivacity and dynamics. Tiredness and waiting with “great, anti-climactic yawns” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 255), even despair,



are now the idioms of the body. There is to be no method: the interior is told through nonsensical behaviour, and no longer the experience of a categorically ordered reality. The narrative depicts “what remained of past experiences” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 124) and “what came afterwards, when everything had been said” (123), drawing on the multiple attitudes and postures of the body. However the new illusions were not the product of a madman, nor a madwoman for that matter, but seemed rather to assimilate a slackening of sensory-motor connections towards a “nullity of speed, the nullity of height” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 125) of “the no-hour” (125). The external world was filtered through the subject, accumulated in disjointed images and then purged out again – as if one “had vomited” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 97). As such, it produced another kind of movement which resisted the phallogentric and linear emplotment. One was prey to a vision; one recorded rather than reacted, as if hooked upon odd memories and fantasies in an “airborne” ‘interim’: “an unreal torpor of the pressurized air, when bodies abandon themselves to daylight slumber in contorted attitudes of death” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 125).

Neorealism formed a network of resistant points, the evolution of which centred on a transition<sup>2</sup> from the *doer* to the *seer*. Deleuze discusses how Italian neorealism, understood as the proponent of an epistemologically impoverished but very open gaze, became both directed outwards upon the world and internalized, as characters attempted to reconcile the difficult thoughts just generated with the tired emotional investments of their bodies. The deserted space from which the characters had been emptied (as in the metaphor of deaf and dumb Jeremy who lives outside the world) referred back to the lost gaze of somebody absent from the world as much as from himself or herself. That somebody was also a by-product of the forces alienating her from the ‘terrible onus’, while working on life’s precarious nature, prohibiting the characters “to ever go[ne] out for ... no one.” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 180). Simply witnessing others

at play, as in Eva's seeing Jeremy and Henry playing cat's cradle inside a swerving taxi, was unbearable to her in its reality, especially because she was only able to see and experience the world from the outside. The world existed in Eva's mind only as an image of "fiery particles of transience" (181). As long as Eva managed to maintain this vision "Nothing [is] at an end, so nothing stand[s] still." (181).

The narrative time-image itself became a system of relationships between its elements, "a set of relationships of time from which the variable present only fl[ew]" (Deleuze xii). It made apparent the multiple relations of time underlying it that could not be seen in the present whereas "the eternity was the more real" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 180). In such an image, the real was no longer represented but aimed at, and said to be elliptical, wavering, dispersive, and ambiguous – "bridges the punt slid under, raindrops spattering the Cam with vanishing circles shivered reflections echoes evaporating, shadows metamorphosizing at a whim of the sun" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 181). When deciphered it produced an additional reality, an extension to the dominant forms of an equally heterogeneous subject, a "living eternity" (181). That subject's multiplicity stemmed from the internal conflicts rather than the external scenarios, all in all becoming its subjective *kairos* "roll[ing] like some blind indefectible" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 179) planet, now swamped inside Eva's mind by her "isolating misery of the savage" (181).

Henceforth, if we continue taking Elizabeth Bowen's last novel *Eva Trout* as an example, we can see how neorealist tools make room for the production of a new kind of fiction. In *Eva Trout* moving is subordinated to the book's eponymous character; it is like film watching – "this further movie. At this hour, it exhausted the resources of Technicolor, and exceeded them" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 204). With the new concept of time-image – "pictures'. Images" (Bowen, 1999c, 195) there appears another time within the subject, constituting a kind of propelling power to delineate reality between the androgynous margin and the centre. Time is indeterminate and multiple as the subject upon which it hinges; it

does “not seem to disconnect” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 201) from oneself like words. Hamlet could have been the hero of this *other* time; like him, Eva Trout is all of us. Time is out of ‘joint’<sup>3</sup> – the linear joints becoming overtly subjective. If *Eva Trout’s* feminist time-image ends in death there is another time that will propel itself forward; a time that does not end with demise, but rather continues with the laughter of a death’s head, or “a cavernous, groaning yawn” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 97) distending the “rib-cage to cracking-point” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 109).

Even though *Eva Trout* is neither politically committed nor bears witness to the desiccation of reality after the Second World War, it can be seen to support an argument for a possible transference of features proper to Italian neorealism onto its text, along with intersections of the verbal, non-verbal and visual. *Eva Trout* was published long after the heyday of neorealism, not having accompanied its rise as much as, for instance, Bowen’s war-time novel *The Heat of the Day* – published in 1949, only a year after Vittorio de Sica’s famous *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). *Bicycle Thieves* was a film that gained de Sica instant critical acclaim and worldwide recognition by introducing a full palette of neorealist inflections into current film practices, ranging from the idea of the new time-imagery, an involvement of the liminal, the passive, the sensory and the child’s point of view. Again, as Deleuze wrote in his *Cinema 2*, in the new neorealist art

Time ceases to be derived from the movement, it appears in itself and itself gives rise to false movements. Hence the importance of false continuity in modern cinema: the images are no longer linked by rational cuts and continuity, but are relinked by means of false continuity and irrational cuts. Even the body is no longer exactly what moves; subject of movement or the instrument of action, it becomes rather the developer (révélateur) of time, it shows time through its tirednesses and waitings (Deleuze xi).

In light of this, there seem to be some uncanny resemblances to neorealist art in cinema and the narrative of *Eva Trout*. The figure that belongs to the

liminal – *Eva Trout* as an extra/non- and intra-diagetic experience – is capable, like Ricci in *Bicycle Thieves*, of bringing different worlds together into her hermaphroditical, intersectional form, belonging “in some other category. “Girl” never fitted Eva.” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 243). She welds together the world of men and women, and lives with her son Jeremy through a “cinematographic existence, with no sound-track” (188). Away from the “ghostly give-off from civilization” (82), Eva is an outcast, a monster, “cycling zigzag head-on”, drinking “gulps of water straight from the tap”, from whom even the “mesh bags, empty, lightheartedly” (83) flow away. She moves constantly from stability to instability. She stays out of ordinary routines every day, until an intriguing moment when she, herself, ‘obtains’ a bicycle that enables her to visit different spaces and places, different cities, houses and hotels.

It may be said that the plot presents two feminist ideas: the first involves the search for language, meaning, the child and the mother; the second, an escape from the father, the guardian, the mother, and the possible snatcher of Eva’s adoptive son, Jeremy. However, much of the change seems overtly passive in character, taking Eva from one liminal space to another, from one hotel to another, from one white telephone conversation to another. Even Eva’s grasp of memories and time is ‘disjuncted’, possibly linear but lacking many pieces. Like the neorealist paratactic text, it is impoverished but not essentially disordered and illogical. Time is, at times, a discordant experience and the narrative becomes a polyphony of voices not necessarily in connection with one another, and yet giving agency to the subject: “They were their own. Wasted civilization extended round them as might acres of cannibalized cars. Only they moved. They were within a story to which they imparted the only sense” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 189).

Time is, therefore, derived simultaneously from a strange motion and the lack of it, a connection and disconnection between sender and receiver. One comes to “distinguish little between what [goes] on inside and what [goes] on

outside the diurnal movies.” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 189). At the end of the novel, Eva moves from being a passive observer to playing the role of an agent and dies, which in Italian neorealism is metaphorical of the futility of life and of wasted time. If life itself is meaningless in Italian neorealism, it is utopian in Theodor Adorno’s understanding. Despite the absence of a felicitous resolution, *Eva Trout* provides a manifesto for the process undergone by a female subject towards a fulfilment of her life. Eva’s narrative, even though ending in her death, retains the idea of open-endedness, which invites the readers to a more active participation. Kristeva writes about the utopian herethics – a feminine discourse: “Herethics, is perhaps no more than that which in life makes bonds, thoughts, and therefore the thought of death, bearable: herethics is undeath (a-mort), love” (Kristeva 185).

Even if on Eva’s death the utopia ceases to be utopian, it proves the pre-existence of a female discourse to which we have to respond now with adequate and meaningful mourning. After all, the overt emphasis in neorealism on the depth of focus is also a means of mourning for the specters of pre-wartime history. Here, feminism, and then more narrowly utopian feminism, suggests alternative truths, realities and values even though, as in neorealist cinema, it resists the idea of perfection. As Drucilla Cornell writes in *Beyond Accomodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law*, “The necessary utopian moment in feminism lies precisely in our opening up to the possible through the metaphoric transformation” (Cornell 168). To Cornell, “utopian thinking demonstrates the continual exploration and re-exploration of the possible and yet also the unrepresentable” (Cornell 169). Thanks to utopian thinking, feminism manages to avoid “ensnar[ing] in the system of gender identity that devalues the feminine” (Cornell 169). Attestation of difference comes with evocation of what can be found beyond the margins.

Eva herself is a common person, an untrained actor, as would be the case in Italian neorealism, which avoids the intricate and complex. In fact, she is an untrained speaker of the father's *parole* and a subject from the periphery of discourse – a woman. As a somewhat hybrid being, Eva is not only, and if partially, female but she is also a child: a Deleuzian little girl. Entrapped in this infantile stage, she can be as especially adequate for an equation with neorealism, that portrays the contemporary condition of life as well as the simplicity and unembellishment of the particular being. In neorealism the child unwraps itself from visual and sound nakedness. However, its sensory-motor schemata remain unestablished and non-automatic, contrary to the world of adults. The imagery that the child constructs includes the sensory-motor descriptions now controlled by the optical and sound ones, even if almost undecipherable through its unmoulded discursive capacities. Deleuze writes in his *Cinema 2* about the child and its place within such discourses:

In neorealism the sensory-motor connections are now valid only by virtue of the upsets that affect, loosen, unbalance, or uncouple them: the crisis of an action-image. No longer being induces by an action, any more than it is extended into one, the optical and sound situation is, therefore, neither an index nor a synsign. ... And clearly these new signs refer to very varied images – sometimes everyday banality, sometimes exceptional or limit-circumstances – but, above all, subjective images, memories of childhood, sound and visual dreams or fantasies, .... (Deleuze 6).

As in the plots of Italian neorealism, which obviously are difficult to transfer onto other semiotic signs, the story of the literary text here continues to germinate into the unconscious of its audience. The story/the telling in *Eva Trout* seems concluded, yet what is told is not resolved – the proposed problems lack any form of resolution. Similarly to the finitude of life expressed by St Augustine and Heidegger, Eva's narrative has a clear-cut beginning and an end, and yet the

message of the text, the battle between the hegemonic and the revolutionary remains unresolved – it is distended into others' narratives.

It must be said that in Bowen we feel time. Although her characters are often inarticulate, and her discourse an awkward attempt at expressing existential disquiet, the bodies in Bowen's fiction speak out loud. Through their relation to their environment, and under the camera's relentless gaze, the subject's real powerlessness is shown. The viewer must now *read* the body as positioned in space, seeking to think through its movements and ponder what kind of thought might be running through it. Could anything be exterior to the body – “and could anything be so and yet exist?” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 189).

In Bowen, the female body gives in to its perceptuality and newly attained motility. She gives herself to the flux of appearances. Embodiment and subjectification give the subject transcendence because he or she is able to transcend any given situation or perceptual presentation, this being a futural aspect of transcendence. I am able to live toward the future in such a way that the world remains an open projection of significance. Time-image is, by definition, perceptual; should the audience fail to name it, one resorts to thinking it anew. The omnitemporality of the thinking consciousness has no absolute linear existence, hence the time it creates through phenomenological experience is disrupted, random but circular too – “society revolv[ing] at a distance from them like a ferris wheel” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 189).

Equally, in feminism, time hinges on the female subject constructing female agency; as in the time-image, a hermeneutical circle of experiences – the phenomenological movement of reflection. Through juggling of the kaleidoscopic imaging one may, to a certain extent, rework the power distribution between the feminine and the masculine. From the ‘ruins of representation’ – a failure of Cartesian *mimesis*, - from the ruins of hierarchically ordered time and space, a more fluid ontology can be created. The female body, here, becomes the only

viable site and temporal frame of identification. Crucial to understanding Bowen's fiction is the idea of a 'transtemporal subjectivity' assimilating itself to a destabilized I that exists in "a fluid realm comprised simultaneously of past (memory), present (experience) and future (expectation)" (Birrer 2008): "The future, as we know, will resemble the past in being the result, largely, of a concatenation of circumstances" (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 268). Women in their plurality can strive towards a more complete construction of identity. According to Bowen, the novelist must allot "psychological space" to his or her characters (Bowen, "Notes on Writing a Novel" 38). Otherwise, the character becomes passive and 'flat' – "What E.M. Forster has called the flat character has no alternatives at all" (38). The subject is entitled to multiplicity and, as such, to "the portrayal of ... alternatives, to time and space" (38). It is a new female gaze through the omnipresent temporality of the body. The bodily chronotope changes into the Bowenesque "burgeoning discourse" as already used in literature (Backus 49). Bowen's novels problematize a "repression of crude material techniques of surveillance and physical coercion" which "correspond to Foucault's earlier emphasis on discipline and punish" (Backus 49). Almost like Richardsonian characters, Bowen's characters experience suffering which commences with unusual "decrease of the power of acting, experienced as a decrease of the effort of existing" (Ricoeur 320). And in corporeality it is through the body that passivity of existence is transformed into active participation in the world, a new (however subjective and relational) feminine agency.

Bowenesque female time revolves around themes that were equally important for neorealism. This highlights the significance of the subjective roving eye that encounters and watches the other. The very incident of active watching commences in the phenomenological experience of suffering that brings time back to the subject. This new subjective time begins with disappointment, as Simon Critchley writes: "philosophy begins with these experiences of



disappointment: a disappointment at the level of what I would think of as “meaning” (Critchley 2003). Critchley argues for a cultivation of the low, the common and the near – the everyday, as in neorealism – Bowen chooses to write about cultivation of the material – the house, the furniture, as well as the personal. Childhood and the child focalizer, who encompasses the present, may be taken as neorealist tools. Also narcissism is a means of boundary-crossing between the self and the other in a constant search for an ego-ideal. Instead of being tantamount to a withdrawal from reality, it becomes a driving force (*Eros/Thanatos*) behind a pursuit for the mother or a succession of substitutes that can take her place. Caught up in their narcissism, as Italian neorealism would have it, and staring into their own reflections the characters see not only their own image but the image of the other as well. Moreover, through the dynamics of narrative identity, where identity unfolds as the plot unfolds, we may see a cinema-like presentation of how minds are shaped. As film narrative, identity becomes a hybrid of elements moulded in accordance with the seer and the seen through a palimpsest of unadorned techniques and a naturalistic view of life.

In both Bowen’s fiction and Italian neorealism a subjective understanding of time stabilizes the subject’s ability to master space through the observational rather than transformative capacities of the self – through the “encircling will of a monster” (92). There is no peaceful gender or other normative transcendence, since subjectivity and the new gaze are a field of ambivalence and infelicity.

This idea can capture tension and a deeply felt tragedy of the self who interacts with both the quotidian and the material. If post-war Italian neorealism is based on an epistemologically impoverished but very open gaze, in literature it highlights the richness of the subjective vision, bearing on the very interior and exterior ‘reality’ the subject inhabits. Suggesting the existence of deserted spaces from which characters have been emptied, it also posits that these spaces need

to repopulated, or rather, reinhabited by other personal narratives, new though parallel discourses. If gender operations undo and redo us through various discursive practices, we need to see how and in what way we remain resistant to them. It is of utmost importance to understand the mutual dependence and the operations of power between selfhood and otherness. “It is unlikely that any vision or aspiration is sustained in isolation from others” (Sperry 2005). We may argue after Birrer that “Bowen’s psychological realism and representations of transtemporal subjectivity comprise a vision of the human subject that, though not necessarily comfortable, offers increased scope for human agency in a radically destabilised social world” (Birrer 2008).

The *I* is not lost in Bowen’s fiction, and the “I-saving strategies” (Bowen, *Preface to The Demon Lover* 98) are imprinted on the material, germinating into unedited “received impressions of happening things; impressions that stored themselves up and acquired force without being analyzed and considered” (Bowen, *Preface to The Demon Lover* 99). If the subject is understood as absent from the world as much as from himself/herself, the possibility is now of reintroducing the broader horizon of interpretation, even if that should mean female literary witchcraft of rooms “coming alight ... angry gas-cooker[s]” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 82-83), or the “impulsive movements of fantasy” (Bowen, *Preface to The Demon Lover* 98) and “abysmal contentment” (Bowen, *Eva Trout* 82).

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> As Ricoeur writes in his *De l'Interprétation: essai sur Freud*, “expressivity of the world comes to language through the symbol as double meaning” (Ricoeur, 1965 in Kearney, 1998, 151). There, “language produces composite signs where the meaning, not content to designate something directly, points to another meaning which can only be reached (indirectly) by means of this

---

designation" (Ricoeur, 1965 in Richard Kearney *Poetic of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern. Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*. (New York: Fordham University Press, 1998), 151)

<sup>2</sup> According to Deleuze in *Cinema 2: The Time Image* the Italian neorealism introduces the time-image cinema innovative in its social context and cinematic language. Italian neorealism makes unstable the distinction between the subject and the object of the narrative field. The mental and physical spaces overlay one another rather than merely correspond to one another. (Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (1989). London: Continuum, 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Here I paraphrase the famous quote from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "Time is out of joint – O cursed spite" (Shakespeare 186–190).

## Works Cited

Augustine, St. *Confessions*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961.

Birrer, Doryjane A. "Time, Memory, and the Uncertain I: Transtemporal Subjectivity in Elizabeth Bowen's Fiction." *PSYART*. FindArticles.com (2008) <[http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/journal/2008\\_birrer01.shtml](http://www.clas.ufl.edu/ipsa/journal/2008_birrer01.shtml)> [accessed 27 January 2009].

Bowen, Elizabeth. *The Death of the Heart*. London and Sydney: Vintage, 1998.

---. Preface to *The Demon Lover. The Mulberry Tree*. Ed. Hermione Lee, London: Virago, 1999.

---. "Out of a Book." *The Mulberry Tree*. Ed. Hermione Lee. London: Virago, 1999.

---. *Eva Trout, or Changing Scenes*. London and Sydney: Vintage, 1999.

---. "Notes on Writing a Novel." *The Mulberry Tree*. Ed. Hermione Lee. London: Virago, 1999.

Byatt, A.S. "Introduction" to *The House in Paris. The House in Paris*. London and New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

Cornell, Drucilla. *Beyond Accommodation: Ethical Feminism, Deconstruction and the Law*. London: Routledge, 1991.

---

Critchley, Simon. "Interview with Simon Critchley." *The Believer* (2003). August <[www.believermag.com/issues/200308/?read=interview\\_critchley](http://www.believermag.com/issues/200308/?read=interview_critchley)> [retrieved August 13, 2008].

Deleuze, Gilles. *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (1989). London: Continuum, 2004.

Goldman, Jane. *The Feminist Aesthetics of Virginia Woolf: Modernism, Post-Impressionism and the Politics of the Visual*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time* (1927). Trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2008.

Kearney, Richard. *Poetic of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern. Perspectives in Continental Philosophy*. New York: Fordham University Press, 1998.

---. *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva*. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004.

Kristeva, Julia. *Tales of Love*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press, 1987.

Lee, Hermione, ed. *The Mulberry Tree*. London: Virago, 1999.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Oneself as Another*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1992.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Ed. G. R. Hibbard. Oxford: University Oxford Press, 1987.

Sperry, Elizabeth. "Foucauldian Power, Relational Autonomy, and Resisting through Friendship." ISUD (2005) <<http://isud.org/Sperry.DOC>> [retrieved March 13, 2007].

# Visuality and Experimentalism: Two Commented Examples in Contemporary Portuguese Poetry



---

Gisele Wolkoff | Universidade de Coimbra

## Abstract

While looking into the ways in which two contemporary Portuguese poets have helped bring visibility to visuality and experimentalism, this paper addresses two main issues: the public and the private present in poetic representations. It also points out to the location of feminine voices from and through experimentalism both as an aesthetic movement and as a tool towards the search for voice and belonging. My aim is to question the current validity of experimental poetry as a political practice.

A study of Ana Hatherly's and Conceição Riachos' poetry focusing on how they form visuality in a beyond-the-page dynamics also leads us to examine the aesthetic means by which these poets make public their specific private worlds of feeling, their ways of seeing their surroundings – in a process that Carlos Mendes De Sousa and Eunice Ribeiro Ribeiro (in their *Antologia Da Poesia Experimental Portuguesa* - 52) styled *performance* and *happening*. Sousa and Ribeiro's understanding of these coincides with RoseLee Goldberg's (1988), in whose work performance and happening imply the political and psychological aspects of representation, together with the act of improvisation; and this is arguably also found in Richard Schechner (2006), as well as in current notions of

**Citação:** Gisele Wolkoff, "Visuality and Experimentalism: Two Commented Examples in Contemporary Portuguese Poetry". *Via Panorâmica: Revista Eletrônica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 131-145. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

body art, of how performance is weaved along theatrical instances, and of how presence is unstable and always under construction.

According to Juliana de Almeida Ferrari Rosa, in *Estudos da Performance, Ética e Pedagogia: Desconstruindo a Lei do Pai* (2008), each performance writing, signs are open and the writing moment is constantly reviewed. While rediscovering Judith Butler's works, Ferrari Rosa signals the capacity performance has to allow for subjective expression, as public discourse (Rosa 27, 129) to which most of experimentalism as an aesthetic movement objects.

Regarding the context in and from which the chosen poets here mentioned write, one must notice that under the dictatorship years (and even beyond those days) Portuguese society faced censorship, repression, conservatism and isolationism. This created the perfect environment for experimental poets to transpose to art the political and cultural situation encountered in order to transgress it by opposing it to mainstream, accepted or traditional artistic discourse. This was achieved by means of a mixture of different types of media and communicative devices for and in the creation of poems, as well as the breaking of rules related to rhyme and metre. Moreover, while Experimentalism spread in many parts of the world at the same epoch, one of the suggested ways out of Salazar's nationalist project was the elaboration of a resistance that combined with an attention to internationalism in art. In fact, universalism does play a fundamental role in Experimental poetry, along with the concept of lack of authorship put into practice: art unveils itself every time it is appreciated and diversely reappropriated.

In fact, Experimentalism attempted to connect Art to Democracy, relate the sense of expression to audience and social meaning. In order to accomplish this, experimental poetry flourishes in visual, verbal and vocal possibilities that can be characterized as *performance* poetry. They happen as moving and moveable spaces of transgression, where political resistance is translated into

cultural rupture. In the Portuguese literary scene, the decades from the 1950s to the 1980s established different associations between rupture in art and social and political belonging. Even though poetic practice moved from the oriental influence of ideogramatic calligraphy and the haikai also present in the Brazilian and Swiss-German inspirations, it created a visual syntax that aimed at the translation of the industrial culture of economy in Concretism to the assimilation of other poetic traditions and tendencies that continuously reported to both Brazil and Anglo-Saxon experimentalism. This gave rise to a national Portuguese Experimentalism officially recognized with the publication of the POEX texts and Ana Hatherly's poems and exhibitions, along with other important figures such as Salette Tavares, Eugenio M. de Melo e Castro, António Aragão, Alberto Pimenta, Alexandre O'Neill among others.

In *Antologia da Poesia Experimental Portuguesa*, out of the twenty representative names chosen for the outline of the history of Experimental Poetry in Portugal, there are only three women: Luisa Neto Jorge, Salette Tavares and Ana Hatherly (the latter is regarded as the great leader of the movement). Two foundational anthologies were published in 1973 and 1985: *Antologia da poesia concreta em Portugal* and *Poemografias: Perspectivas da Poesia Visual Portuguesa*.<sup>1</sup> Exhibitions, catalogues, newspapers and magazines have also been highly relevant for the dissemination of experimentalism, namely the *Poesia Experimental* journal organized by Ana Hatherly and Eugenio M. de Melo Castro. Together they published theoretical texts and documents of Experimental Portuguese Poetry called POEX (1981) that allowed them to declare communication occurs in a "semiotic forest" – which, in other words, entails viewing verbal-vocal-visual-gestural communication as inevitable components of poetic happenings known as *performances*. The challenge is made present in the social and aesthetic spheres – the latter a metonym of the former. It is with Ana Hatherly that poetry goes out to the streets and acquires the shape of protests in

installations and exhibitions such as the 1977 episode called “rotura” at the Fundação Luso-Americana in Lisbon. In the wake of this, visualizing the word goes far beyond its sociopolitical status, it becomes itself a *happening* and, as such, it is very much public in its depiction of social themes as privately interpreted by the poets/public/coauthors: the image/poems “rotura” (“rupture”) and “Variação V” and “Variação XV”.

Such a reconfiguration of spaces and silences creates some disturbing live images the status of which as poetry might be doubted – were it not for the dialogue they enter with the past and tradition; the silence that rises from tearing apart the past and, at the same time, the joyful and jokey game of words by Salete Tavares entitled “O Bule” (“the teapot”) which includes a direct allusion to Sophia de Mello Breyner Andresen in the middle of “the teapot teapot teapot teapot...”. Through such exemplary references to a mother-figure of feminine poetry, together with the performative tearing up of conventions in the “rotura” (rupture) moment, Experimentalism is able to pay tribute to the past.

Although the impression one gets is that resistance was achieved in broader terms than those that were specifically women-related, it also focused on the position of women in society. There is an episode, for example, in which Hatherly elaborates on “The woman invaded by time (a homage to Henry Moore)”. It is a poem about a critique of the reproduction of the submissive role of women in the sculptor’s work. We may therefore argue that Ana Hatherly’s production recovers the deconstructive work of the so-called three Marias (Maria Velho da Costa, Maria Isabel Barreno and Maria Teresa Horta), censored in 1972 for their *Novas Cartas Portuguesas*, a revolutionary epistolary and poetic text that harked back to Mariana Alcoforado’s *Portuguese Letters*, and is widely seen as one of the most historically relevant poetic texts written by women in Portugal. In fact, the *three Marias* brought a new visibility to women poets as these three poets crossed the bridge of silence in humour, hybridity (of literary



genres and language) and as they spoke about themselves in a much freer way than previous women writers. There, experimentalism had a very specific and innovative role: that of deterritorializing patriarchalism and reterritorializing women's voices in art, by means of what the poet Eavan Boland calls the "place of imagination" and "the rhetoric of imagery" (Boland 128). The imagination cannot occur outside subjectivity and the "rhetoric of imagery" implies going back to the past, recovering it, in order to go beyond its many faults, mainly, the absence of women's voices and visibilities.

If one were to go further into the issue of womanhood and poetry, one might have to ask how visuality is constructed differently by men and women. To start with, one can think of poetry's public spaces as built by the common (initially, private) themes that help create images and that are presented by women poets, such as the relationships between mothers and daughters, motherhood, the body, the diverse forms of silence in society that are oppressive, the challenges of breaking stereotypes recognized by public institutions (the state, religion and education, amongst others). Yet, how can one adapt the discussion around the issue of impersonality in poetry and the peculiarity of subjectivity and women in experimentalism, as it was first approached by John Keats' "negative capability" and, later, by T. S. Eliot's "objective correlative"? Women writers and feminists argue that women have long been silenced and have had more than enough "negative capability" for too long. The fact that experimentalism is far more explicitly political, when compared to other poetic movements, creates a deeper need for women to make room for their own voices and visibilities (in the visuality of happenings and performances) than ever before in the history of Portuguese poetry.

Together with all the experimentalism that Hatherly's poetics involve (revealed in the ways the speech forms overlap), it also questions sexual and national frontiers, as in the previously mentioned Variation (Variação) poems.

Therefore, in Hatherly's work the period following the 1974 revolution tended to foreground the performance poem, as a way of showing that language is constructed and not imposed. Examples of this attitude included her participation in *Alternativa Zero*, a 1977 exhibition organized by Ernesto de Sousa, and the 1989 launching of the *Claro-Escuro* magazine, dedicated to baroque themes in the arts as well as to the Brazil-Portugal and Portugal-Spain relations (explored as additional manifestations of resistance based on the paradigm of silence as also on centre-margin dynamics in national arts). For Ana Hatherly, "concrete Poetry and Experimentalism, which followed it, among other aspects, have contributed to the expansion of the concept of the poem as written object, emphasising visual representation as a simultaneously synthetic and polissemic possibility" (Hatherly, *Poesia do Mundo 2* 197).<sup>2</sup>

In this sense, visual poetry resignifies and communicates that which was so new in the space of plurality. If experimental poetry questions traditional form and reception, it also creates a space for the reinsertion of women's voices in the poetic world. It presents a subversion of the muse's order, that is, the inversion of the muse's place from the object to the subject of her own community's history – an element that proves common to other countries' poetics, Ireland being a case in point. In fact, little has been written about Experimental poetry in the Irish literary context, with the exception of Catherine Walsh, Aodán McCardle, Maurice Scully and a few others. Again, the presence of women is as scarce as in the PO.EX project of Experimental Portuguese poetry<sup>3</sup>, which displays a total of twenty-five poems, out of which only three are by women (and precisely the same that appear in Sousa and Ribeiro's anthology).

Further, Hatherly's work points to the various possible levels of poetic experimentalism from a woman's voice. If language is a universe and transforming it implies the use of multiple resources that lead into performance, speaking for the country, while subverting the order and rules of syntax, Hatherly

breaks the female silence as subject – which had already happened in rather private terms in the poetry of Breyner Andresen, for example, and which will appear in Hatherly's later volumes of poetry. The poet also records the experience of reinscribing the woman's body in an infinity of possibilities, through endless name attributions and in humourous word games, for example.

Nevertheless, this brief problematization of issues concerning experimentalism in Portugal also aims at questioning the possibilities surrounding experimental poetry and the depiction of subjectivity and the private. In this sense, one must notice that as the voices of women turned to public affairs, it is both apparently and increasingly more difficult to deal with rather private matters and to display a more intimate hue, in concrete and experimental poetry, unless the authors involved in such actions return to pen and paper and stick to experimentalism on the page: we can see this in Hatherly's *A Idade da Escrita* (1998), *Itinerários* and *O Pavão Negro* (both from 2003). How much can private visual (yet, written) poetry be compared to performance poetry?

This question could work as a metonym to an earlier elaboration by Perfecto Cuadrado Fernandez<sup>4</sup> on Portuguese poetic productions in the framework of what is commonly described as ideological and artistic avant-gardes. While referring to the history of Experimental poetry in Portugal, Fernandez returns to Ana Hatherly's synthesis on the aims of experimentalism and on its political implications and aesthetic consequences: the influence of visuality in a possibly social opposition to neocapitalist values and consumerism. Fernandez concludes that an art of intervention (name it experimental, performative or visual) can no longer work as such. This assertion, however, seems to disregard both Ana Hatherly's own current claims on the effects of Experimental poetry today, as well as any further consideration on the issue of visuality, the private and the public. The present essay does not provide

definitive answers on these issues, but, while paralleling the poetry of Hatherly's and Riachos', it attempts to delineate their power and market distribution, therefore questioning the unstable positions of margin and centre as well as the need for voicing the private values of (and established by) women nowadays.

The author of six volumes of poetry and works in anthologies published both in Portugal and in Brazil, Conceição Riachos' concerns vary in theme and style. The main preoccupations of her poetry include the desire for and the understanding of writing as social practice, literary and national belonging (usually dealt with humour), linguistic awareness, and dislocation as experienced by a woman out there. Even though there are considerable changes in the way Riachos approaches language in space and on the page, in the course of her works she allows for a more complex reading of the themes presented. Visuality is a constant, as is the lyrical-aspect of subjectivism and the fragmentary disposition of words along lines within which visual representations work as metonyms of fragmentation regarding both the self and society. One of the most relevant aspects in the highly lyrical discourse found in Riachos' works is the level of privacy with which it becomes public. The best example of this is the poem "Expição" in the 1998 volume *Ritos de Passagem (Rites of Passage)*:

<i>Expição</i>	<i>Atonement</i>
Pendurei a alma	I hung the soul
num estendal	on line
ao sabor do vento	to the wind
e da maresia	and the sea air
Apanhei-a ao fim	I caught it in the end
da tarde	of the afternoon
Era branca	It was white
seca	dry
e fria	and cold

This brings the immediate image of the clothesline, itself a Portuguese icon of the intermingling of the public and the private spaces of social and personal discourses. Clotheslines in Portugal are public spaces of the private, with clothes to be dried exposed outside windows for public appreciation, as if they were countering an apparent lack of attention to them. That which is almost invisible (for it pertains to the private world) is made present for public and anonymous eyes, as are the images that flourish from the visuality constructed along Riachos' verses: from the excessively dramatic verses that appear in the poem "Lar" ("Home") in *Olhares* (1998), in which the lyric-I asserts

Debaixo	Below
de um céu	a leafy
frondoso	sky
erguerei	I shall rise
a minha casa	my house
é lá	up there
que vou guardar	where I shall keep
a nuvem do desencanto	the cloud of disenchantment

to the more elaborate visuality present in the metalanguage of

<i>Temporal VI</i>	<i>Storm VI</i>
Presa ao corpo efémero	Stuck to the ephemeral body
da escrita	of writing
a poesia é luz perene	poetry is perennial infinite
infinita	Light

or the visuality of the poem entitled "eros" in the book *instantes* (2002), illustrated with photographs by Maria João Baginha. In this work, the poetic *instants* enter a dialogue with the photographs that in limitless ways translate an

incapacity to communicate, so as to fully address ideas and feelings. Such is the case of *modos de ver (ways of seeing)*, in which the image of the seagull flying across the sky metonymically appears as one of the many diverse ways with which the reader interprets the scene:

Fixa	Point to
a essência vital do objeto	the object's vital essence
a textura de um velho tronco de árvore	a tree's old trunk
a folha amarela a cair	the yellow leaf falling
uma rosa a abrir	a rose opening itself
um pio de ave no ar	a bird's peep in the air
a nuvem a passar	a cloud crossing

(Riachos, *Instantes* 68)

One might here question the autonomy of the intersemiotic translation from image to word and word to image, thus consolidating the value of visuality as a tool that re-presents private matters publicly, which seems to occur in a slightly different manner with(in) *A Silhueta Branda Das Veias* (2005):

*Na curva do vento*

quando a manhã persistente enche sem tréguas  
ancoramos o limite do corpo

*Within the wind's curve*

when the persistent morning trucelessly fulfills  
we anchor the body's limit

(Riachos, *A Silhueta Branda das Veias* 34)

Here the poet reaches a deeper sense of the magical world of language and linguistic experimentalism and lets flow all its silence onto the page's blank spaces, as well as through the visuality created in the strange effect of awkward words gathered in verses such as the above d. The "body's limit", a performance-metonym of visuality's effect of words on the page is reached in the 2010 *Fios na roda dos passos*, Riachos's latest volume of poems, the reading possibilities of which are even broader:

XXXV

When language is a petal  
in the vertical breathing of breeze wires  
in trembling hands  
the sentenced light night after night  
moving itself like sand.

Establishing itself as transgression, by means of several figures of speech, such as sound repetitions, personifications and metaphors, it proves that the breaking of discourse's linearity definitely inserts her poetics in the universe of experimentalism. Here, the woman's womb goes public, outside the operating room where most women give birth:

XXXIII

	No	
ventre pirotécnico	do	discurso
	onde	
palavras caem	sem	eco
fluindo	a	origem obscura
		em
fantasia	sem	rasto
	a	
grafia converge	o	granito
transparente		
	do	percurso

XXXIII

In the

pyrotechnic      womb  
    where  
words fall      echo    less  
flowing the obscure origin  
    in  
fantasy    trace    less  
the  
graphics    converge    the root's  
    transparent  
    granite

If, on the one hand, Ana Hatherly has gained critical approval for her public participation in Portuguese experimentalism, yet leaving much room to be inhabited by other women poets in visuality and visual experimentalism, Conceição Riachos has clearly transformed the space of visibility by extending the relevance of marginal poetry; and this coincides with the process of voicing women through art by deconstructing the values of centre and margin, in a display of sociopolitical and subjective identity.

To conclude, in spite of the diverging social spaces of visibility provided to the poets by criticism and the media, in both Ana Hatherly and Conceição Riachos audience and readers converge in the multiplicity of meanings that are left for construction, as in *works in (perpetual) progress* that deconstruct possible linearities regarding notions of the public and the private spheres of life. In both cases, through the confluence of disrupted verse forms and spatial and graphic effects applied to words on the page and outside it, intermedial and international dialogues weaved along the poems abound; and these become formal elements deployed in an effort to endow women with a growing voice and visibility, an attempt to rethink language and communication in the constant



reconfiguration of the dynamics between centre and margin in the periphery of Portuguese poetic discourses.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Both appeared in Lisbon and were edited by José Alberto Marques, Eugenio M.de Melo e Castro, Fernando Aguiar and Silvestre Pestana.

<sup>2</sup> In the original, “A Poesia Concreta e o Experimentalismo, que se lhe seguiu, entre outros aspectos, contribuíram para expandir o conceito de poema como objeto escrito, acentuando a representação visual como uma possibilidade simultaneamente sintética e polissêmica...” (Hatherly, *Poesia do Mundo 2* 197).

<sup>3</sup> This Project is available at: <[www.po-ex.net/](http://www.po-ex.net/)> (accessed on the 20<sup>th</sup> /02/2011).

<sup>4</sup> <[www.consispro.com/relipes/Pdf/AC\\_Texto35.pdf](http://www.consispro.com/relipes/Pdf/AC_Texto35.pdf)>.

## Works Cited

Amaral, Ana Luísa, org. *Novas cartas portuguesas*. Alfragide: D. Quixote, 2010.

Boland, Eavan. *Object Lessons. The Life Of The Woman And The Poet In Our Time*. U.S.A.: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995.

Cuadrado, Perfecto E. <[http://www.consispro.com/relipes/Pdf/AC\\_Texto35.pdf](http://www.consispro.com/relipes/Pdf/AC_Texto35.pdf)> (visto em 20/02/2011).

Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Art – From Futurism to the Present*. Yugoslavia: Time Mirror Books, 1988.

Hatherly, Ana. *Fibrilações*. Portugal: Quimera Editores, 2005.

Hatherly, Ana. *O Pavão Negro*. Lisboa: Assirio & Alvim, 2003.

Hatherly, Ana. *Poesia Incurável. Aspectos da Sensibilidade Barroca*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 2003.

Hatherly, Ana. *Itinerários*. Vila Nova de Famalicão: Quase Edições, 2003.

Hatherly, Ana. *A Idade da Escrita*. Lisboa: Edições Tema, 1998.

---

Hatherly, Ana. *A Casa Das Musas uma releitura crítica da tradição*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, s/d.

Hatherly, Ana. "7 Tisanas Inéditas"/"7 Unpublished Tisanes". *Poesia do Mundo 2*. Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 1995: 2, 26.

Hatherly, Ana. *A Casa Das Musas. Uma releitura crítica da tradição*. Lisboa: Editorial Estampa, 1995.

Marques, José Alberto. *Antologia da poesia concreta em Portugal*. Lisboa: Assírio & Alvim, 1973.

Pimenta, Alberto et al. *Poemografias. Perspectivas da Poesia Visual Portuguesa*. Lisboa: Ulmeiro, 1985.

Riachos, Conceição. *Fios na Roda dos Passos*. Coimbra: Temas Originais, 2010.

Riachos, Conceição. *I Coletânea Scriptus – Balaio de Idéias*. Brasil: Editora Novitas, 2009: 35-38.

Riachos, Conceição. *A silhueta branda das veias*. Coimbra: Pé de Página Editores, 2005.

Riachos, Conceição. *Instantes*. Coimbra: Pé de Página Editores, 2002.

--. *Coletânea de Poesia*. Coimbra: Pé de Página Editores, 2001: 20-30.

--. *Peregrinação*. Coimbra: Pé de Página Editores, 2000.

--. *Ritos de passagem*. Coimbra: Pé de Página Editores, 1998.

--. *Olhares*. Coimbra: Pé de Página Editores, 1998.

Rosa, Juliana De Almeida Ferrari. *Estudos da Performance, Ética e Pedagogia: Desconstruindo a Lei do Pai* (dissertação de mestrado. Salvador, Brasil: Universidade Federal da Bahia). Disponível em: <[www.bibliotecadigital.ufba.br/tde\\_busca/arquivo.php?codArquivo=1675](http://www.bibliotecadigital.ufba.br/tde_busca/arquivo.php?codArquivo=1675)> (acessado em 20/02/2011).

Schechner, Richard. *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. New York and London: Routledge, 2006.

---

Sousa, Carlos Mendes, and Ribeiro, Eunice, org., *Antologia Da Poesia Experimental Portuguesa Anos 60-Anos 80*. Coimbra: Angelus Novus Editora, 2004.

# McEwan's and Wright's *Flight from Dunkirk*



Laura Bulger | Universidade de Trás-os-Montes e Alto Douro

## Abstract

Such elusive concepts as Englishness and Britishness are reinvented in moments of national crisis, when patriotism demands a collective sense of unity and sacrifice to fight the enemy, as in the epic of the British at War, namely in World War II, during the evacuation of the British troops from the Dunkirk beaches, in June 1940. The reconstruction of such a critical moment of British history through fiction is part of a self-conscious attempt not only to question the official historical narrative, but also to reinvent a British identity in a post war post-imperial Britain. The purpose of our paper is to examine how Ian McEwan's rendition of the Dunkirk retreat, in Part II of *Atonement* (2002), was adapted to the screen by British film director Joe Wright, taking into account the technical aspects inherent in the transference to a different medium as well as the ideological implications in it. The war section, both in the novel and in the movie, enlarges the personal drama of the protagonist, accused of a crime he did not commit, and rescued from prison to fight in the World War II against his will. The section raises questions about traditional concepts of patriotism, national identity and ultimately about Englishness and Britishness.

And each in the cell of himself is almost convinced of his freedom  
A few thousand will think of this day  
As one thinks of a day when one did something slightly unusual  
W. H. Auden, "In Memory of W. B. Yeats" (d. Jan. 1939)

The *spirit of Dunkirk* still leaves British people lost in nostalgia. However, the evacuation of the troops from the beaches, in June 1940, was anything but Britain's *finest hour*, Winston Churchill's famous words during the speech delivered to the House of Commons. Despite the soldiers' endurance, heroism in certain cases, they were a defeated army. Military experts blamed the ill-equipped, poorly trained British Expeditionary Force and the RAF, the latter for not showing up in time to prevent the losses caused by the German air raids. The mutual recriminations, even among the Allies, only underlined their impotence to stop the mighty Luftwaffe. Looking further back, historians would blame

London's dithering policies in between wars before taking a stand against the rise of Nazism in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

Britain's aloofness, or isolationism, in the interwar years was partly the consequence of her lost status as a superpower, no longer capable to protect either her former worldwide empire, or, as it was later demonstrated, her own shores. In *Modernism and World War II*, Marina MacKay comments on the ironically pitiful commemorations of Britain's "national vulnerability": "Such nostalgia magnets as 'the Blitz' and 'Dunkirk' commemorate nothing more than the pathos of passive defence and a horrifically outnumbered retreat. This is the war as scripted by modernism: post-imperial, anti-heroic and totally unwanted" (MacKay 2).

Nonetheless, those soldiers who survived the ordeal and crossed the seas off Dunkirk, frequently in the famous *little ships*, were greeted, on their arrival, by the WVS women with a proud *well done*, a bun and tea, all in keeping with a patriotic stiff-upper lip.

Rather than patriotism, survival runs as the main theme in Part Two of Ian McEwan's *Atonement* (2001), where the British writer reconstructs the *horrors* lived by the troops while waiting for embarkation. *Atonement* can be read as a whodunit and love story with the World War II as a setting. But McEwan's novel is much more than that. It is, above all, the author's self-reflexivity on the process of fiction making, a view shared by most critics.

In 2007, film director Joe Wright adapted the book to the cinema, based on a screenplay by playwright Christopher Hampton.<sup>2</sup> Theirs was certainly an ambitious undertaking, considering that McEwan's novel, retrospectively narrated, is built on internal and external focalizations, *analeptic* and *proleptic* segments (Genette 82), different writing techniques and discursive registers that range from a highly refined prose to a journalistic, colloquial style.<sup>3</sup> Alistair Cormarc describes Part One, the longest in the book, as a "virtuoso display of

modernism” (Cormarc 74). On the other hand, certain reviewers insist on reading *Atonement* as an “essentially realist novel that at the end inappropriately resorts to a modish self-referentiality”, equivalent to a “postmodern gimmickry” (Finney 69, 70).

Actually, *Atonement* is not a *modernist* novel, nor is it a *realist*, or a *postmodernist* one. It does borrow, though, formal and thematic traits from them all. The novel’s many literary connections, among them, with Austen, James, Forster, Woolf, Lawrence, Lehmann, Bowen, Leavis, named as the “touchstones” by Dominic Head (156), and frequent textual allusions to other great authors, demonstrates that, rather than a *realist* novel, *Atonement* is a real “literary artifact” (Finney 74). The upshot of a such a heterogeneous intertextuality is an aesthetic *fusion* demanding special attention from the reader who, caught by various narrative entanglements, misses, at least on a first reading, the premonitory hints spread along the text, which, like in a puzzle, help “to piece the correct picture together” (Head 163). For the late Frank Kermode, *Atonement* was Ian McEwan’s “finest” novel (Kermode 8), and, one might add, the most unsettling one so far. Our paper will focus on the *flight from Dunkirk*, as told by McEwan in Part Two of *Atonement*, later shown in Joe Wright’s filmic reinterpretation of it.

To transmute such a piece of self-reflexive writing to a medium like cinema was no easy task, aggravated by budget restrictions, as explained in Christopher Hampton’s “Introduction” to the screenplay.<sup>4</sup> To do it in such a way as to meet the expectations of large film audiences, going generally for the *story*, would be risky forcing the change, even the elimination, of novelistic strategies regarded as non-adaptable, or difficult to adapt to film, like time shifts, important, however, for the understanding of the *plot*, or *plots*, in McEwan’s book. Besides, to make a profit should not be a filmmaker’s sole preoccupation, nor should it be a “high-minded respect” for the writer’s words, either extreme compromising

their translation into pictures (McFarlane 384). As with most British literary texts, the filmic adaptation of *Atonement* and its reception, particularly by American viewers, were a gamble from the start, the chances of becoming a blockbuster like J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*, far-fetched.

As to the Second World War theme, once considered to be "a money-spinning staple of the British cinema industry" (Mackenzie 1), it had to be handled tactfully not to bruise susceptibilities particularly among those who, still alive, had fought the war.

Film critics' opinions diverged. While Roger Ebert considered Wright's version of *Dunkirk* to be "more of a bloody mess than legend would have us believe" (*Chicago Sun Times*, Dec. 7, 2007), A. O. Scott wrote that the war sequences had "an empty, arty virtuosity" (*NYT*, Dec. 7, 2007), and Liza Schwartzbaum used her wry humour to say that Wright settled for "a disconnected wow, bloody awesome camera work" (*Entertainment Weekly*, Dec. 2007).

Some reader-viewers thought that Joe Wright oversimplified McEwan's reconstruction of the Dunkirk retreat, turning it into an emotionally detached, spectacular long shot. The *fidelity issue*, as Brian McFarlane calls it, would inevitably come up, as it often does with film adaptations from literary texts. The bias, explains McFarlane, is "no doubt ascribable in part to the novel's coming first, in part to the ingrained sense of literature's greater respectability in traditional critical circles" (McFarlane 386). One can always argue that film "appropriations" (Andrew 373) of literary texts, cannot, and should not, be mere copies of the original and, more to the point, that the *spirit of Dunkirk* was rekindled in either *Atonement*, with a different allure, though, by the odyssey of Robbie Turner and his fellow soldiers trudging back to the beaches.

Before starting off to Dunkirk, it might be useful to retrieve some of the events narrated in the novel prior to Robbie Turner's arrest, on the grounds of

the Tallis's *ugly* country-house. Part One ended with Robbie handcuffed and shoved into the back seat of a car while Cecilia Tallis and Grace Turner watched him being driven away in the Humber for police interrogation, the latter shouting at the constables: "Liars! Liars! Liars!" (A 186-67).<sup>5</sup> Cecilia, the Tallis's eldest daughter, was Robbie's lover, Grace Turner, a servant in the Tallis's household, his mother.

Class helps to understand the social atmosphere depicted in Part One, set in Britain's interwar years. Fatherless Robbie Turner was raised together with the Tallis children, Leo, Cecilia and Briony. Jack Tallis, their father, a high civil servant, had paid for Robbie's education at Cambridge, where he read English Literature. Mr. Tallis was prepared to continue supporting him through medical school against the family's opposition, particularly his wife's. Emily Tallis would rather have the charwoman's son tend their gardens.

Regardless of the Tallis's pride and prejudice, Robbie and Cecilia fell for each other making the circumstances leading to his arrest so much more dramatic. Thirteen-year old Briony, Cecilia's younger sister, had accused the gardener of having raped her cousin, Lola, slightly older than herself. Actually Briony never saw the rapist's face. It was pitch-black and the *vertical* figure she confused with a bush *faded* into the darkness leaving a "darker patch on the ground" (A 164). The *patch* turned out to be Lola who, like the true rapist, whose identity is disclosed only in Part Three, became Briony's accomplice. But it was Briony who accused Robbie Turner by repeatedly telling the police inspector "it was him, I saw him" (A 186-87).

Briony is portrayed, both in the book and in the movie, in her pre-adolescence (Saoirse Ronan), early adulthood (Romola Garai) and old age (Vanessa Redgrave). Unlike Joyce's, McEwan's Briony is the *artist as a penitent*, following the development in the *Kunstlerroman*. In Part One, a series of erotically charged misunderstandings and misreadings were made to happen,



perhaps too forcefully, so that a naïve otherwise precocious Briony was led to imagine Robbie as a *sex maniac*. As Catherine Morland, in Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, Briony is a victim of too much fiction reading, the quote, in the beginning of the novel, a hint for the reader about what was coming. Briony's rich imagination, or *deluded perception*, as a would-be-writer is eventually to blame for her lie, or crime, the thesis put forward along the novel. The reader cannot help questioning McEwan's motivations to use a thirteen-year-old as a sort of literary pawn. The blame on the girl's creative imagination becomes a rather devious way of exposing the evil side of fiction, and so call attention to the "novelist's predicament", an ethical/aesthetical matter too difficult to be translated into filmic language. Despite Ms Redgrave's outstanding performance in the role of old Briony Tallis, the writing persona about to free herself from her guilt-ridden conscience, ironically through fiction, or the close-ups of the actor's still beautiful sensitive face while delivering her long soliloquy, the novel's "ethical dilemma", as Domenic Head puts it (171), is diluted, if not lost, in Wright's *Atonement*.

Returning to Part Two, purportedly five years after Briony's accusation, we find out that her lie had thrown young Robbie into prison, from where he was later released to fight, whether he wanted to or not, in World War II, his dreams of becoming a medical doctor and marrying Cecilia Tallis further shattered.

In the first sequences of Wright's Dunkirk section, a haggard Robbie Turner, in uniform, tells his hosts, in French, about the Panzer attacks that separated him and his army companions from their unit, the doomed BEF, while they headed for the coast in the hope to be evacuated with the other troops, and sent back home. Turner, played by actor James McAvoy, omits having been seriously wounded, as the viewer is about to see. With him, but shadowed in the back, are corporals Nettle and Mace who, impressed by Turner's manners and fluency in French, ask him why "a toff" like him ended up "a private". Turner,

who denies being an upper class, also tells them not to be “eligible for officer training” due to his criminal record. His past does not seem to bother the two soldiers, who, “with increased respect”, address him as *Guv'nor*.

Later, amidst cries of *Vive l'Angleterre!*, and *Vive la France!*, the three *Anglais* are fed and wined by the hospitable Frenchmen, who regret not having crushed the Germans in the first war to avoid having them, once more, occupying their country. Turner promises to return one day to chase out their common enemy. “On va revenir. On va les chasser”, he says, not that convincingly, though.

In the movie, the politically correct rendition of the Anglo-French comradeship overlooks the view, held among the British troops, about the French unwillingness “to fight for their country”. In addition, scenes where the soldiers’ mutual antipathy is verbally expressed are avoided, as in this instance: “... the tommies swore, and taunted their allies with shots of ‘Maginot!’”. For their part, the poilus must have heard rumour of an evacuation. And here they were, being sent to cover the rear. ‘Cowards! To the boats! Go shit in your pants!’” (A 234). Should old wounds be forgotten and never brought to mind? They should, at least, be left off the screen, or so it appears in Wright’s version of Dunkirk.

A cut back in time brings the viewer to the Joe Lyons tea house, where Robbie and Cecilia had briefly met before his being sent to France. They had not seen each other since their torrid encounter at the Tallis’s library, followed by Robbie’s arrest that same dark night. In a sequence of beautifully shot close-ups of Cecilia and Robbie, her facial expressions change from bewilderment to happiness, his, from awkwardness to pain almost. Both Keira Knightley, as Cecilia, and James McAvoy, as Robbie, were given the difficult job of making their characters’ *thoughts readable on their faces*, writes Hampton, each conveying, rather persuasively, the wide range of emotions required from their respective

parts. Their uneasiness is further reinforced by the elliptical dialogue exchanged between them, at the table, against an Ivory/Merchant type of setting. Cecilia, who had become a war nurse, tells Robbie of having cut herself off from her snobbish family. They had refused to support his innocence. The two lovers plan on meeting again at a cottage in Wiltshire, the picture of which becomes a leitmotif in the love story, together with the playback of Cecilia's softly whispered words, *I'll wait for you. Come back to me*, and the slow tracking shot of herself in the dark green evening gown watching him been driven away from her.

The London scene is suddenly interrupted to show Robbie, back at the French barn, lying awake at night, watched by an ominous owl, while composing, in his thoughts, a letter to Cecilia, their correspondence a sort of epistolary lovemaking. Next, another cut brings the two back to London. The place is Whitehall and they are shown kissing passionately before Cecilia boards the Balham bus. This time, it is Robbie who watches her being driven away from him. Unable to catch the following bus to join her, he is left, as if lost, in the middle of the street.

The back and forth cuts, allowing for the alternation between flashes of Robbie's selected past experiences and images of his equally selected experienced present, was the technique found by the filmmakers to capture the inner time fluidity rendered in Part Two where, through Robbie's consciousness, the reader is shown segments of his past life, in alternation with his thoughts, feelings and perceptions of his present in a burning Dunkirk.

They also selected the episodes more relevant in terms of plot development, Briony, a key to the action in the novel, central in them. After all, it was her lie that triggered the whole process of crime and punishment. In addition, a character like Briony would certainly move "the story and engage the audience" (Seeger 148). The dramatic episode by the river provides Robbie with a

plausible motivation for her grudge against him. Briony, then a precocious ten-year-old, risked drowning in order to be rescued by Robbie, on whom she had a crush. Three years later, the girl would have felt betrayed, once she realized that he was in love with her sister. According to Robbie's theory, *rancour* was behind Briony's odious lie, or crime. His feelings towards her, a mixture of resentment and pity, are further exploited in the movie by having him cry at the sight of the corpses of the girls, each a thirteen-year old Briony look-alike.

In the novel, it is the gory sight of a child's leg hanging from a tree that will haunt Turner throughout the Dunkirk section, the leg becoming a leitmotiv in the war story. The *limb*, evidence of the war brutality, belonged to the corpse of a boy whose *vanished life* Turner compares to his own. Already sliding into a hallucinatory state of mind, Turner wants the remains of what was once a "nice-looking kid" to have a "decent burial" (A 263). The macabre image of the "disembodied leg" also appears in other parts of the novel, notices Domenic Head, as one of the "subtle literary devices" pointing to Briony's "process of self-laceration" (165).

Wright's compressed "visual transliteration" (McFarlane 385) of McEwan's Dunkirk culminates in the one-take, over-five-minute Steadicam shot. It brings to the screen, filled with troops, ghastly torn masts, battle ships ablaze and piles of wreckage, the "phantasmagorical landscape" of the war, writes Christopher Hampton in the "Introduction" to the screenplay. Barely missed by German bombs and Stuka machinegun fire, Turner and his companions stagger along looking for a place to rest amidst the chaos and carnage, the whole scene enhanced by the equally arresting film soundtrack. Dario Marinelli's elegiac score with the choir of soldiers, gathered on the bandstand, fading in and out in a stirring rendition of *Dear Lord Father of Mankind*, is followed by the jolly sing along of the troops, in the bar, and the melancholic humming of *The White Cliffs of Dover*, the hymn and the wartime songs striking sentimental patriotic chords.<sup>6</sup>

The nostalgic evocation finishes off with the sight of the poppies, this time in a French field, in remembrance of the soldiers dead in the Great War.<sup>7</sup> The epic tableau shown on the screen, brushed here and there with patriotic strokes, fails to convey the cynical embittered portrait of Dunkirk, drawn in the literary text. Either “purposely or inadvertently”, Wright’s “commentary” (McFarlane 388), one of the strategies open to filmmakers, enhances, instead, the soldiers’ undaunted Britishness, as in the official script.

McEwan’s novel is a self-conscious meditation not only on the devious process of fiction writing but also, to quote Natasha Alden, on what “fiction *can* do with history that history *cannot*” (59). And what postmodernist fiction *can* do, and has been doing for some time, is to “unmask fictional constructions of the past” by defying the conventions of historical narrative.<sup>8</sup> The highly metafictional Part Two, curiously the most spontaneously written section in terms of sources and style, throws some doubt into the view of Dunkirk as a patriotic landmark of British history.<sup>9</sup>

Following closely Robbie Turner’s inner thoughts while on the way to the beaches, one realizes that there was also plenty to be atoned for, from unmotivated bored soldiers “with nothing to do for hours on end” (A: 211), and to whom the purpose of the war was never explained, a shortage of “heavy weaponry”, mutual recriminations among the troops, vented through shouts of “Where’s the RAF?”, to complaints about the Allies’ cowardice. Ashamed of it all, Turner thinks of “the full ignominy of the retreat” (A 201), and, in a premonitory insight, interprets it as a symptom of a civilization “about to fall” (A 202), or already “dead”, referring to the European civilization. Violent imagery and decadence are also present in Auden’s poem, written on the death of W. B. Yates, January 1939. Cecilia had enclosed it in one of her letters, and Robbie evokes Auden’s poignant verses: “In the nightmare of the dark/All the dogs of Europe bark, /And the living nations wait, /Each sequestered in its hate.”

Robbie Turner is no war hero, as made to appear through the filmmakers' lens. For Turner, the war, alternative to his wasted time in prison, is also a "collective experience" that ruined his life and "everybody else's" (A 217), the "private-public link" running through the novel signalled by critics such as Head (157), Marcus (84) and Finney (77).

Turner's only desire is to survive, return to England and, once cleared from a crime he did not commit, "find Cecilia and love her, marry her, and live without shame" (A 228). He has given up dwelling on notions such as guilt and innocence. His own trial, in England, as well as the war made him understand that everyone was guilty and, as he puts it, "no one was" (A 361). Faded the idealism learnt at Cambridge, where poets' "free, unruly spirits" were revered, Turner questions: "But what did poets know about survival?" (A 264). He has come to realize that literature and experienced life are after all two separate things. Disillusioned, as much as disturbed by the *horrors* he witnesses, Robbie Turner conveys what Dunkirk is about, and so does his author by showing to the reader what goes through his character's mind. After the reverie on the *secret* shared with Cecilia, that is, their physical intimacy at the Tallis's library, a delirious Turner promises not to speak, or *think*, another *word* ever again, Part Two stopping right there.

With the final Part of the novel, "London 1999", comes the shocking discovery that the Dunkirk episode was not told from Turner's perspective, the reader duped, like the viewer, in the movie. A seventy-seven-year-old Briony, by then a renowned fiction writer about to lose her memory due to dementia, reveals that the war section, as everything else, was the last draft of *Two Figures by a Fountain*, a novel-within-the-novel signed, at the end of Part Three, by BT, Briony Tallis's initials. It had been rewritten several times not only to atone for a crime committed sixty-four years before, but also to comply with Cyril Connolly's suggestions. Both the real life editor and the real life author Elizabeth Bowen thought that Briony's novel lacked "the backbone of a story" (A 314), and "owed

a little too much to the techniques of Mrs. Woolf" (A 312), a criticism of the *Woolfian* modernism in Part One of *Atonement*, where style and experimentation were given priority over moral issues.

As if Briony's disclosure about herself as a fiction-maker were not enough to jolt anyone, her next revelation about Robbie and Cecilia, who were never reunited, leaves the reader dumbfounded. They were already dead before the war was over, explains Briony:

All the preceding drafts were pitiless. But now I can no longer think what purpose would be served if, say, I tried to persuade my reader, by direct or indirect means, that Robbie Turner died of septicaemia at Bray Dunes on 1 June 1940, or that Cecilia was killed in September of the same year by the bomb that destroyed Balham Underground station (A 370).

She had made up the happy ending in the love story, where the two lovers, whom she had separated, were finally brought together. Their fictive happiness might have appeased Briony's conscience as well as her creator's, McEwan, whose ethical concerns over fiction writing prompt a further interpretation by Alistair Cormac. In the critic's opinion, McEwan does not exactly condemn a creative imagination, but warns against the dangers of a morally disengaged literary aesthetics, referring obviously to a certain modernism and postmodernism. Cormac believes that, with *Atonement*, McEwan returned to the "Leavisite aesthetics", that is, to "the heart of the 'Great Tradition' of English novelists" (Cormac 79). If so, Briony's, or, rather, McEwan's final *twist*, as James Wood calls the turnabout in the last Part, conforms to the moralistic bent in the English novelistic tradition. On the other hand, the idea of a postmodern *twist*, or *gimmickry*, should not be discarded, despite a few critics' "realist expectations" (Finney 70). Briony's *tidy finish* looks more like a prank played on the reader, who

feels disappointed, if not cheated, when told of herself as the putative narrator, and the lovers' deaths.

Briony's final self-serving "act of kindness" (A 371) also brings attention to the despicable power of fiction to change life, or death, as it sees fit, truth and veracity, the raw materials for a *realist* writing, therefore, out of question. For instance, no one can be sure of how much was made up either by Briony, represented all along as a very unreliable witness and narrator, or by "old Mr. Nettle", whose "dozen long letters" about Dunkirk she claims to have used as her source (A 353, 359), together with the lovers' correspondence, supposedly in her possession, before entrusted to the Imperial War Museum library.

In a novel like *Atonement*, built on a psychologically dense characterization, different focalizations and layers of narrative levels, truth is impossible to grasp. Historical truth is also baffled, if anyone can speak of historical truth these days, postmodernism cautioning not to. Regarding Part Two properly, it does cast a doubt on the Dunkirk retreat as a grandiose epic carried out for the love of *king and country*, or for the sake of a free Europe, ironically, to be rescued from *the nightmare of the dark* only with the help of remote European descendants.

We return briefly to Joe Wright's *Atonement* to say that no matter how faithfully, or inaccurately, it may capture McEwan's own *spirit of Dunkirk*, it will always carry the original author's *aura* with it, to paraphrase Linda Hutcheon (*A Theory of Adaptation* 4), or, rather, Walter Benjamin himself, from whom Hutcheon borrows the *aural* originality. To moviegoers in general, our advice is to see what McEwan's novel really looks like.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> For a military perspective on the evacuation from the Dunkirk beaches, we used Julian Thompson, *Dunkirk, Retreat to Victory* (London: Pan Books, 2008); and Joshua Levine, *Forgotten Voices of Dunkirk*, in Association with the Imperial War Museum, Introduction by Peter Snow (London: Ebury Press, 2010).



<sup>2</sup> Cast: James McAvoy/Robbie Turner; Keira Knightley/Cecilia Tallis; Saoirse Ronan/Briony Tallis, age 13; Romola Garai/Briony Tallis, age 18; Vanessa Redgrave/Briony, age 77; Julia West/Betty; Brenda Blethyn/Grace Turner; /Danny Hardman; Harriet Walter/Emily Tallis; Juno Temple/Lola Quincey; Felix von Simson/Pierrot; Charlie von Simon/Jackson; Patrick Kennedy/Leon Tallis; Benedict Cumberbatch/Paul Marshall. Ian McEwan himself was one of the executive producers.

<sup>3</sup> Brian Finney details here the different discursive registers used in *Atonement*: "In the long Part One, McEwan chose to write in 'a slightly mannered prose, slightly held in, a little formal, a tiny bit archaic' with which he 'could evoke the period best.' In Part Two, writing about Dunkirk, he chose 'to write in a choppy prose with shorter, simpler sentences,' a style that is reminiscent of Hemingway. As he explained, 'on the battlefield the subordinate clause has no place.' In the final coda, he employs a contemporary voice, one that is acutely self-conscious and aware of its own act of narration. For instance: 'I've always liked to make a tidy finish,' says the elderly Briony, simultaneously referring to her life and her life's work'. "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, 27.3 (Winter 2004) 68-82: 74.

<sup>4</sup> "A word, finally, about the passage we always referred to as 'the Dunkirk section'. Formally troublesome in itself, it was also the most serious victim of the budget restrictions that had, quite sensibly, been applied to this adventurous project. There were to be no columns of refugees strafed by German Stukas, no Panzers rolling northwards, no carpet-bombing of the retreat armies. Instead, illustrating another old adage about the creativity unleashed by imposing limits, there would be three soldiers tramping north through a phantasmagorical landscape of literal death and dreams and memories of many other kinds of death". "Introduction." *Atonement*. London/New York: Faber and Faber, 2007: vii.

<sup>5</sup> All references in the text are to the following edition of *Atonement*. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2002. Page numbers will be bracketed.

<sup>6</sup> Dario Marianelli was the winner of Best Original Score at the 80<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards, Best Original Score at the Golden Globe Awards, and Best Music at BAFTA.

<sup>7</sup> John McCrae, a Canadian soldier who fought in World War I, immortalized the poppies in the poem *In Flanders Fields*, written in 1915.

<sup>8</sup> See Elisabeth Wesseling. "Postmodernism and History." *Writing History as a Prophet, Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991: 1-15; and Linda Hutcheon. "Historiographic Metafiction: 'the pastime of past time'." *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction*. New York/London: Routledge, 1988: 105-123.

<sup>9</sup> See Elisabeth Wesseling. "Postmodernism and History." *Writing History as a Prophet, Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991: 1-15; and Linda Hutcheon. "Historiographic Metafiction: 'the pastime of past time'." *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction*. New York/London: Routledge, 1988: 105-123.

---

**Works Cited**

Alden, Natasha. "Words of War, War of Words: *Atonement* and the Question of Plagiarism." *Ian McEwan, Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. by Sebastian Groes, preface by Matt Ridley. London/New York: Continuum International Publishing Book, 2009: 57-69.

Andrew, Dudley. "From Concepts in Film Theory, Adaptation." *Film Theory & Criticism, Introductory Readings*. Ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohn. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009: 372-380.

Cormack, Alistair. "Postmodernism and the Ethics in *Atonement*." *Ian McEwan, Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. by Sebastian Groes, preface by Matt Ridley. London/New York: Continuum International Publishing Book, 2009: 70-82.

Finney, Brian. "Briony's Stand Against Oblivion: The Making of Fiction in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*." *Journal of Modern Literature*, 27.3 (Winter 2004): 68-82.

Genette, Gérard. *Figures III*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1972.

Hampton, Christopher. *Atonement*. London/New York: Faber and Faber, 2007.

Head, Dominic. *Ian McEwan*. Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press, 2007.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Theory of Adaptation*. New York/London: Routledge, 2006.

Hutcheon, Linda. "Historiographic Metafiction: 'the pastime of past time'." *A Poetics of Postmodernism, History, Theory, Fiction*. New York/London: Routledge, 1988: 105-123.

Kermode, Frank. "Point of View." *London Review of Books*, 23:19, (4 October 2001): 8-9.

Levine, Joshua. *Forgotten Voices of Dunkirk*, in Association with the Imperial War Museum, Introduction by Peter Snow. London: Ebury Press, 2010.

MacKay, Marina. *Modernism and World War II*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Mackenzie, S. P. *The Battle of Britain on Screen, 'The Few' in British Film and Television Drama*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007.

---

McFarlane, Brian. "From Novel to Film, Backgrounds." *Film Theory & Criticism, Introductory Readings*. Ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohn. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009: 381-389.

Marcus, Laura. "Ian McEwan's Modernist Time: *Atonement* and *Saturday*." *Ian McEwan, Contemporary Critical Perspectives*. Ed. by Sebastian Groes, preface by Matt Ridley. London/New York: Continuum International Publishing Book, 2009: 83-98.

McEwan, Ian. *Atonement*. Toronto: Vintage, 2002.

McFarlane, Brian. "From Novel to Film, Backgrounds." *Film Theory & Criticism, Introductory Readings*. Ed. by Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohn. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009: 381-389.

Seger, Linda. *The Art of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Film, How to Transform Novels, Plays, and True-Life Stories into Screen Plays*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1992.

Thompson, Julian, *Dunkirk, Retreat to Victory*. London: Pan McMillan Ltd., 2009.

Wesseling, Elisabeth. "Postmodernism and History." *Writing History as a Prophet, Postmodernist Innovations of the Historical Novel*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1991: 1-14.

Wood, James. "The Trick of the Truth." *The New Republic On Line* (21 March 2002) <[www.tnr.com/article/books-and-arts/the-trick-truth](http://www.tnr.com/article/books-and-arts/the-trick-truth)>.

# Gothic Presences in *Eating your heart out*, a Collaborative Sculpture of Rui Chafes and Vera Mantero



Maria Antónia Lima | Universidade de Évora

## Abstract

*Eating your heart out*, an installation that represented Portugal at the 26<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial, has a metaphoric title that expresses the savagery of a negative desire which surpasses all the civilized limits to express the difficult presence of a body through some relational forms created by sculptor Rui Chafes and dancer/choreographer Vera Mantero. The relations between an iron sculpture and a living body produce a tension between the absolute closure of Chafes's sculpture and the infinite movement of Mantero's choreographies. The duplicity of this relation, which combines repression and freedom, limitation and transcendence, conformity and subversion, savagery and poetry, violence and beauty, originates an endless dialectic confrontation that leads to many contradictory possibilities, which increase the difficulties to solve the enigma of the encounter of these two Portuguese artists. Its mystery and strangeness can be understood through the presence of certain paradoxes of gothic sublimity present in works so determined by the condition of unrepresentability. This condition developed in Chafes and Mantero a fascination with the negative pleasures of an art that creates secrets instead of their resolution and that produces exhaustion and disquiet instead of order and stability. Consequently, their works can be very close to a gothic aesthetics usually interested in primitive emotions and mysteries that have the power to disturb and resist reason like a dancer's naked body full of arborescent motifs on her skin, in a suspended iron chair 5 metres above the ground.

*Eating your heart out*, an installation that represented Portugal at the 26<sup>th</sup> São Paulo Biennial, has a metaphoric title that expresses the savagery of a negative desire which surpasses all the civilized limits to express the difficult presence of a body through some relational forms created by sculptor Rui Chafes and dancer/choreographer Vera Mantero, who seem to establish a parallel with the encounters between Isamu Noguchi and Martha Graham (*Phaedra* 1960), or Robert Morris and Lucinda Childs (*Waterman Switch* 1965). The way these artists relate to each other and to their previous works not only shows some

**Citação:** Maria Antónia Lima, "Gothic Presences in *Eating your heart out*, a Collaborative Sculpture of Rui Chafes and Vera Mantero". *Via Panorâmica: Revista Eletrónica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 162-174. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

convergences and complementary facets between their creative universes, but it also reveals meaningful divergences objectified in the relations between an iron sculpture and a living body, which produce a tension between the absolute closure of Chafes's sculpture and the infinite movement of Mantero's choreographies. The duplicity of this relation, which combines repression and freedom, limitation and transcendence, conformity and subversion, savagery and poetry, violence and beauty, originates an endless dialectic confrontation that leads to many contradictory possibilities, which increase the difficulties to solve the enigma of the encounter of these two Portuguese artists. Its mystery and strangeness can be understood through the presence of certain paradoxes of gothic sublimity present in their works so determined by the condition of unrepresentability. This condition developed in Chafes and Mantero a fascination with the negative pleasures of an art that creates secrets instead of their resolution and that produces exhaustion and disquiet instead of order and stability. Consequently, their works can be very close to a gothic aesthetics usually interested in primitive emotions and mysteries that have the power to disturb and resist reason like a dancer's naked body full of arborescent motifs on her skin, in a suspended iron chair 5 metres above the ground.

In a recent work entitled *New Gothic Art*, Francesca Gavin considers that it is incorrect to describe some artists as purely gothic, but she concludes that "there is a thread of dark imagery or ideas that runs through much contemporary art" (Gavin 7). It is the presence of this thread that one can perceive in the works of Vera Mantero and Rui Chafes, especially in *Eating Your Heart Out*, as in many different art forms that are directly associated with the Gothic, and which create an aesthetic universe where we can find monsters, the grotesque, violated or mutant bodies, the divided self, ghosts, dolls, masks, skulls, disgust and the abject. In contemporary art, "Gothic" can be considered a partial term which is used to identify a peculiar, dark sensitivity, being a

borrowed term that Gilda Williams considered to be “applied liberally to artworks centering on death, deviance, the erotic macabre, psychologically charged sites, disembodied voices and fragmented bodies” (Williams 12). As in Literature, gothic contemporary art is principally Anglo-Saxon with some good examples from continental Europe, and this fact is also relevant to the works of Vera Mantero, who studied in London under Rudolf von Laben and in New York in Marce Cunningham’s studio. This is somehow similar to what happened with Rui Chafes, who was very much influenced by German literature, an influence that has allowed his works to establish surprising connections between art and literature. Chafes was even very explicit about his artistic tastes, when he directly expressed his admiration for gothic art confessing that: “Without any doubt I think the art that moves me most is the late Gothic. That is my passion. I studied it together with modern art” (Chafes 257). As it happens with the majority of contemporary artists, Vera Mantero and Rui Chafes never defined themselves as “gothic” and their works were never directly associated with gothic sources, as it occurred with the works of Douglas Gordon, Stan Douglas, Banks Violette or with the disturbing pieces of the most gothic of artists, Damien Hirst. However, as it happened in Martha Graham’s choreographies and in Louise Bourgeois’s sculptures, these two Portuguese artists set the scene of their art, like gothic novels do, in an unfamiliar and frightening place, approaching the gothic themes of death, transgression, monstrosity, torture, anguish, confinement, etc.

Like some gothic artists, Vera Mantero and Rui Chafes also show in their works a tendency to transcend the ordinary and to subvert the notion of agreeable through the use of the inversion of an assumed normality, a process which allows them to reject affirmative, conformist culture and to embrace the mysterious, the negative, the subconscious and the unknown. Chafes justifies this posture defending that “There must be solitary souls, outcasts, madmen, nonconformist wolves with soul, who resist the alluring power of homogeneity”

(Chafes 257). Showing the same intense emotional reaction, Vera Mantero follows Jean Dubuffet's advice that we should see the things that surround us with different eyes. She observes that in her play *Sob* she concentrated herself on the idea of "monster" to show the necessity to look into ourselves to know what we do not usually like to see and say, what is obscure and even ugly, for the simple reason that we should not be afraid to experience a necessary disorder, since this fear prevents us from having access to intensity. A similar point of view is also common in gothic creativity, which usually displays a tendency to subvert the established structures of thought, as the English writer, Patrick MacGrath, noticed saying that "the Gothic tends always to assume this posture in relation to the dominant values of a culture. It negates. It denies. It buries in shadow that which had been brightly lit, and brings into light that which had been repressed" (Grunenberg 156). *Leçons de ténèbres* (2001) by Rui Chafes evokes that interior space where a secret life waits to be revealed, full of an embodied intensity where we can feel a radical division between the inside and the outside, as if his sculptures wanted to show the hidden side of things, or the soul of some creative objects, which led him to say that "I believe art can awaken secret powers in men, which reason cannot explain" (Chafes 255). The abstract forms of Rui Chafes and the transgressive dance of Vera Mantero can bring to the contemporary Portuguese artistic expression the wealth of philosophical and psychological insight that the Gothic also raised from the darkness of the unconscious.

The titles of some of their previous works are good examples of this possible association. *Dream of Death* (1993) by Chafes is a series of black iron parallelepipeds with a row of openings that show a dark inside where the light is interrupted as if they were coffins. *Poetry and Savagery* (1998) defines the unusual expressivity of the aesthetics of Mantero's dance bringing to the stage the scenery of a primitive ritual, or signs of an earthquake. Common to both

artists is the intention to reveal hidden meanings and to disturb the viewers and the audience with their creative doubts that try to maintain the balance that characterises the perceptive dichotomies of sensitiveness and intellect – as in the spontaneous choreographies of Mantero – or to preserve the constant interdependency between light and darkness as in *Dawn* and *Soft Dark Fear*. In this piece, an iron sphere was compared by Chafes to a black sun, thus highlighting the paradox that it is possible to create, in iron, delicate shapes that, in spite of being very heavy, are able to float above the ground searching for a freedom and transcendence only attainable through the imagination. When Mantero informs that her dance is philosophy, possessing a potential for creative destruction, where the grotesque play between laughter and pain creates an absurd carnival; and when Chafes assumes his dark romantic and melancholic sensitiveness saying that for him “there is no beauty without traces of death, separation and hurt” (Chafes 256), both artists are getting very close to that gothic spirit apprehended by Fred Botting, who concluded that “Gothic became part of an internalized world of guilt, anxiety, despair, a world of individual transgression interrogating the uncertain bounds of imaginative freedom and human knowledge” (Botting 10). This uncertainty expresses these artists’ belief that creativity is in part destructive, because things can become more beautiful at the point of destruction, showing that beauty and horror cannot exist except in contrast to each other, which creates and develops the concept of “terrifying beauty”, that can not only be applied to the gothic aesthetics, but also to the contradiction or to the battle between two art forms, in the case of Vera Mantero and Rui Chafes, two different artists that, in their dialectic relation, explore and reflect the contemporary Zeitgeist, but at the same time keep something eternal hidden in their works.

As a reflection of their interest in new forms of cognition that promote an unrestricted exercise of the imagination, Mantero and Chafes inquire into places



of exhaustion of the body, where they can be acquainted with several possibilities of self-knowledge that stem from a performative aesthetic. This is what Lea Vergine, in *Body Art and Performance*, considered a process of artistic investigation according to which “the body is stripped bare in an extreme attempt to acquire the right to a rebirth back into the world. Most of the time, the experiences we are dealing with are authentic, and they are consequently cruel and painful. *Those who are in pain will tell you that they have the right to be taken seriously*” (Vergine 8). These words remind us of the importance of suffering for Anthony Gormley, an artist who also considers the body an art and the primary language before verbal language, producing a work that is derived from real moments of lived time that are captured in plaster, saying that “they are all registers of moments of real being: witnesses to human existence, and they suffer but they also own their existence” (Gormley 129). According to this famous American sculptor, “to be is to endure and at least half of the endurance is pain”, because he insists that “all being is subject to ignorance and is bound to suffering” (Gormley 129). This shows that some good examples of contemporary art, associated in some way with the gothic aesthetics, continue to explore the negative pleasures of the sublime which, as Edmund Burke defined it in the eighteenth century, is “productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. I say strongest emotion, because I am satisfied the ideas of pain are much more powerful than those which enter on pleasure” (Burke 39).

Assuming that pain is a central and recurring theme in his work, especially pain as a metaphor for the body, Chafes clarifies this perspective: “I believe art must hurt us, as death does. Art must be a radical cut. If art does not awake us, then it is not worth making it” (Chafes 256). Similarly, Vera Mantero moves towards the limit to provoke an explosion that could impress people in order to surprise them, not only by the unexpected, but also by many contrasts and dissonances. From this perspective, these two Portuguese artists approach a kind

of aesthetic terrorism which is based upon a vigorous opposition to the phenomena of elitist and consumer art, rejecting all its formulas and stereotypes. The need to search out painful and humiliating situations comes from the urgency Mantero also feels “to put the guts out” in order to turn the body inside out to show its fragilities and vulnerabilities, its inner face. This explains why the dance of resistance of Vera Mantero adapts itself so well to the organic forms of Rui Chafes, which seem to seek a body so meaningfully absent but so associated with the power of violence they possess for being connoted with instruments of war, torture and aggression. In the exhibition “The Vocation of Fear” (1990), Chafes presented a series of coats woven with iron whose double function of forming or deforming the body can never disguise the threat or trap they represent. The uncomfortable presence of death can be deeply felt in these works, which explains that for Chafes “the one who makes art speaks of death” and that “there is no beauty without traces of death” (Chafes 255), because he believes death keeps us awake and alive. The very origin of sculpture explains the importance of this central theme. In “Playing with Dead Things”, Mike Kelley reminds us that “the aura of death surrounds statues. The origin of sculpture is said to be in the grave; the first corpse was the first statue” (Kelley 177). According to Chafes, the conscience of death keeps us awake, and Mantero believes we need the arts not to die. Like in the performative art of Fried, Trotta and Rupperberg, the theme of death is so important in the works of these two Portuguese artists, because as Lea Vergine also concludes: “it’s a question of facing up to death through life, rummaging around in the under and seamy sides of life, bringing to light the *secret* and the hidden. Only by experimenting a little at a time with death does one come to understand a little bit more about life” (Vergine 9). The evocation of death in Mantero and Chafes can also be perceived as a gothic reference that expresses their desire to confront the viewers with their alienated bodies and death

wishes, showing them it is always very painful to know we are dead, which should develop in people their need for a lost spirituality in a rationalistic culture, where, according to Chafes, the artist should “resist against this digital, colored, transparent, flexible world”, so that he can “set a strategy of deceleration against the strategy of speed, a strategy of weight against a strategy of lightness” (Chafes 258). In *Contemporary Gothic*, Catherine Spooner also noticed this loss of corporeality in our time, which justifies some physical manifestations of Gothic in art through the creation of grotesque bodies, the fascination with freakishness based on performative notions of identity being that which tries to remake the self as monstrous as an “attempt to reinstate the physicality of the body in an increasingly decorporealized information society” (Spooner 29). This fact led Sally O’Reilly, in her work *The Body in Contemporary Art*, to defend the presence of the body in the art as a site of common physiological experience that makes it an excellent tool for inspiring empathy, concluding that in contemporary art not only is the presence of the audience acknowledged but the individual’s power to generate meaning is actively encouraged, as one abolishes the image of an impassive audience consuming static art infused with fixed meaning by an authoritative artist, which “has given way to a reciprocal and conditional situation in which ambiguity scuppers meaning, so that the artist, artwork and viewer together negotiate an intellectual and sensory experience” (O’Reilly 193).

From the artistic dialogue between Mantero and Chafes, in *Eating your Heart Out*, could only result an ambiguous and disturbing strangeness that was probably influenced by the choreographer’s aesthetic desire to activate turbulences and by the sculptor’s uncontrollable need to what Doris Von Drathen called “embodiments on the razor’s edge” (von Drathen 235). Here the concept of gothic uncanny is very much present, the title avoiding any kind of sentimentality in order to establish a dialogue with the other side of a familiar existence that can only be maintained through an endless dialectic confrontation

that is open to many contradictory possibilities which turn the whole work into a difficult or even impossible dialogue between a living person and a void or between a naked woman and an iron sculpture. To dance and move freely on top of a six-metre-high tripod is completely impossible, which means the dancer will be trapped and her movements limited, transforming her into a grotesque figure with her nakedness concealed beneath a web of plantlike, organic forms that look like the body's inner organs. Transformed into a hybrid monster made of woman and plant, the dancer is reduced to her lamenting voice that can express her awareness of the dangerous presence of a large balloon-like iron sphere that at any moment might suck up and carry away her body. One of the paradoxes consists in perceiving that the dancer is the heart of a sculpture that may devour her but without whom that iron figure cannot survive, being nothing more than a terrifying emptiness.

Entrapment and confinement are also very recurrent gothic themes, which demonstrates that some themes in contemporary art can be grounded in very famous novels and short stories from the eighteenth and nineteenth-century gothic literature. One of these good examples is Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892), regarded as an important work of American feminist literature that illustrated attitudes in the nineteenth century toward women's physical and mental health. Forbidden from working by her physician husband, the central character is a woman who narrates her confinement story in the first-person perspective, presenting many details of her descent into madness and psychosis caused by the effects of her entrapment in a strange place, which explains her obsessions by the pattern and color of the wallpaper:

It is the strangest yellow, that wall-paper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw – not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things. But there

is something else about that paper – the smell! ... The only thing I can think of that it is like is the *color* of the paper! A yellow smell (Gilman 97-98).

Believing in the power of writing, as Vera Mantero, and maintaining the routine of writing in a journal to recuperate from her “temporary nervous depression – a slight hysterical tendency” (Gilman 87), the woman in *The Yellow Wallpaper* seems to be a performer like Mantero, someone who exposes herself and magnifies or exteriorizes what it means to be a human being, stretching her voice, her body and her speech so that meaning can become visible through a scream that proclaims what can happen to human beings. In *The Yellow Wallpaper*, the narrator’s hysteria, due to her descent into madness and to her entrapment, is similar to Mantero’s hysterical movements that express her helplessness when trying to get free from the sculpture that imprisons her. This proves that a huge and inhuman iron piece is more powerful than her female frailty, because it can repress her spontaneity and reduce her body to a moaning and groaning doll which seems to be driven by a puppeteer, one who proves as able to immobilise her body as a physician husband intent on keeping his anxious wife isolated in a room. Mantero’s movements of despair, which reveal her body debating itself between submission and insurrection, between conformity and subversion, are very similar to the efforts of a woman obsessed to free herself together with the figure of another woman, her double, who, she imagines, is hidden and creeping behind the pattern of the yellow wallpaper, trying to escape the bars from the shadows. Mantero’s gestures can be comparable, in their anguish and desire for freedom, to a woman who, after realizing she must try to free the woman in the wallpaper, begins to strip the remaining designs off the wall, peeling away the wallpaper and creeping around the room, circling the walls, while she exclaims “I’ve got out at last” (Gilman 110), after stepping over her husband’s inert body, who turned himself into a victim of his own ineffective

and cruel method of treatment. The woman's last words can be compared to Mantero's vocal sounds because both are experiencing a process of transcending the body and all its limitations. At the same time, they cry for freedom, trying to escape from all the stereotypes regarding the representation of women, as Mantero succeeded in doing in her solo *Olympia*, a version of Manet's emblematic figure of art that in his time appalled the public by the frontal nakedness that turned it into an artistic object of scandal. All these representations of women show them as figures out of place, condemned to be objects of scandal, that subvert all the stereotypes associated with the representation of the female figure, a subversion transformed into a very particular power which relates them to the Gothic for showing a special "inclination to transcend the ordinary" (Williams 15). Entrapment is also an inescapable condition of the bodies that dare inhabit Rui Chafes's sculptures, as Laurent Goumarre concludes in "Vera profundissime Olyimpia's truth", saying that "Chafes's sculptural work functioned as a trap for the bodies; as soon as the body slipped into his premises it would stop, take position, and repeat from the interior the form that it exposed to the exterior; contaminated, it became a living sculpture, but black, *en-fer-mée*, opaque" (Chafes and Montero 105).

Its desire for transcendence means that the Gothic signified a trend towards an aesthetics based on feeling and emotion and associated primarily with the sublime. Also regarded as an experience of sublimity caused by the resistance to representation due to its refusal to imitate an action or to reproduce an event, *Eating you Heart Out* can be read as a continuous and hysterical dramatization of the conflicts between desire and defense, license and prohibition, memory and resistance, castration and self-conservation, life impulses and death impulses, voyeurism and exhibition, impulses towards sadism and masochist pleasure, destructive fantasy and cathartic fantasy. The body is considered as a place of conflict that follows a strategy of subversive

expression which preserves its condition of unrepresentability to express the unutterable tensions between life and death or between beauty and terror. This happens because there is a common desire for authenticity on the part of these artists. If Chafes is interested in the soul of an object, for Mantero it is important to know how the human soul functions and what makes reality, to show a more authentic dimension which is not commonly perceived. Beauty is for her a synonym of “truth”, because she thinks truth is strangely beautiful even when it is cruel chaotic and wild. This aesthetic sensitiveness based on a negative sublimity is associated with the Gothic, because, as Patrick McGrath observes in his essay “Transgression and Decay”, “The Gothic consistently attempts to speak about the unspeakable – that is, death” (McGrath 154). Developing a very special interest for beautiful atrocities, Gothic reveals an implicit death wish easily perceived in its crumbling mansions and crumbling minds, which led McGrath to conclude that “in the Gothic we can safely look at the destructive energies we detect in the world around us, as well as in our psyches, and defuse the menace we discover there. The Gothic allows us to manage the nightmares of a world in which control seems increasingly tenuous” (McGrath 153). As we have been noticing, death is a central theme to these artists, whose works express what Mantero calls “an atrocious doubt”, also very present in gothic art, which led Christoph Grunenberg to conclude that “no longer concerned with the production of a grand and majestic terror, the gothic sublime today reflects a hesitant and apprehensive state of mind obscured by a deep fear of the unfamiliar future” (Grunenberg 160). Chafes and Mantero confront this feeling of an uncertain future by removing masks to try to destroy the artificial screen that separates the *public* from the *private* and showing what we keep hidden under our skin.

*Eating your Heart Out* is a collaborative sculpture that seeks to transcend the limits of the body, which can be a very good example for the transcendence

of the limits of art itself, underlining the importance of the transdisciplinary artistic practice that insistently these two Portuguese artists have been defending, by promoting a constant and infinite pollution and contamination between the arts, even defying the danger that they could devour each other to preserve the secret they create.

### Works Cited

Botting, Fred. *Gothic*. London: Routledge, 1996.

Burke, Edmund. *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Ed. by James T. Boulton. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987.

Chafes, Rui. *Um Sopro - A Breath*. Porto: Galeria Graça Brandão, 2003.

Chafes, Rui, and Vera Mantero. *Eating Your Heart Out – Catalogue of the 26th São Paulo Biennial*. Lisboa: Instituto das Artes, 4 February -17 April, 2005.

Gavin, Francesca. *Hell Bound – The New Gothic Art*. London: Laurence King Publishing, 2008.

Gilda Williams. *The Gothic – Documents of Contemporary Art*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2007.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." *American Gothic Tales*. Ed. by Joyce Carol Oates. New York: Plume, 1996: 87-102.

Gormley, Anthony. *Mass and Empathy*. Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 2004.

Grunenberg, Christoph. *Gothic – Transmutations of Horror in Late Twentieth Century Art*. Boston: The Institute of Contemporary Art, 1997.

O'Reilly, Sally. *The Body in Contemporary Art*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2009.

Spooner, Catherine. *Contemporary Gothic*. London: Reaktion Books, 2006.

Vergine, Lea. *Body Art and Performance – The Body as Language*. Skira: Milano, 1976.



# Film at the Crossroads of Narrative and Dramatic Genre



Maria do Rosário Leitão Lupi Bello | Universidade Aberta

## Abstract

If film is a form of visual art, why does it rely mainly upon narrative text and is not more indebted to drama? Why are theatrical plays not so easily (and frequently) adapted for the screen as novels and short stories? Is it true, as Käte Hamburger suggests, that “filmed drama becomes epic”? In order to grasp the concept of film hybridism (both film theorists and film makers have long dealt with the natural tendency of film to absorb other art features and forms), in this paper I intend to address the issue of film genre by taking into account Jauss’s evolutionary theory and confronting it with Frye’s concept of “radical of presentation”. André Bazin spoke of the impurity of film, whilst Manoel de Oliveira, who has been said to produce “theatrical films”, clearly states that “film adds to theatre the capacity of fixing the image in time”. Time is, in fact, a decisive factor in genre definition – as Hegel clearly demonstrated – and it is through the way that film deals with this factor that we are able to gauge either its distance from or its closeness to drama and/or to literature.

After several years of research in comparative studies on literature and film a question arose which encouraged me to venture forth along a new path in my investigation, of which this text is the outcome. The issue I am dealing with here is not a closed matter; quite the opposite, this is a theoretical problem with many implications and consequences, and therefore I shall merely try to outline here the main features of my thinking up to this moment, in full awareness that they demand further and more profound investigation.

The whole problem originates from the following: if film is a visual art, why does it rely mainly on narrative text, owing much less to drama, which is a

**Citação:** Maria do Rosário Leitão Lupi Bello, “Film at the Crossroads of Narrative and Dramatic Genre”. *Via Panorâmica: Revista Electrónica de Estudos Anglo-Americanos / An Anglo-American Studies Journal*. 3<sup>rd</sup> series. 1 (2012): 175-186. ISSN: 1646-4728. Web: <http://ler.letras.up.pt/>.

“spectacular” genre (like film)? Why are theatrical plays not so easily (and extensively) adapted for the screen as novels and short stories? The discussion of this topic naturally involves the definition of genres. But it is important to clarify that I take this word “genre” here in its original, classical sense, that is, the distinction between epic, lyric and dramatic genre (comedy and tragedy), in as far as these categories have to do with what Wolfgang Kayser calls human “basic attitudes”, “fundamental possibilities of human existence” (Kayser 371) and not, of course, in the sense it later acquired in cinema studies, where genre means a definition of film according to specific types: western, *film noir*, thriller, war movie, etc. – which are categories defined by literary studies as subgenres. The question I want to deal with here is whether film, although it unquestionably manifests dramatic features in its origin and form, is closer to narrative literature than to drama (thus demonstrating epic characteristics), and if this is indeed the case, why.

A possible answer to these questions is rooted in the perception of the nature of narrative itself. Narratology has moved a long way from its structuralist origins to its new direction, to which Monika Fludernik has given a decisive contribution, by emphasising the experiential dimension of narrative:

*Narrativity is a function of narrative texts and centres on experientiality of an anthropomorphic nature.* This definition divides the traditional area of enquiry (i.e. narratives) along unexpected lines, claiming narrativity for natural narrative [spontaneous oral storytelling] (the term *text* is therefore employed in its structuralist sense) as well as drama and film (*narrative* is therefore a deep structural concept and it is not restricted to prose and epic verse) (Fludernik 26).

Far from being a mere linguistic phenomenon or even a literary strategy, narrative is a cognitive “tool”: it emphasises the perception of temporal flux as evidence of change, through the successive record of events. This record of

sequentiality manifests a specific apprehension of reality, and is therefore a sign of a particular form of *knowledge* (according to its Sanskrit root, *gnā*). In the epigraph to this chapter on narrativity, Fludernik quotes Edward Branigan:

*narrative is a perceptual activity that organizes data into a special pattern which represents and explains experience.* More specifically, narrative is a way of organising spatial and temporal data into a cause-effect chain of events with a beginning, middle and end that embodies a judgement about the nature of events as well as demonstrates how it is possible to know, and hence to narrate, the events (Fludernik 26).

And so, Fludernik concludes: “The (post) structuralist obituary on narrative of course conceptualises narrative as plot. It is only by redefining narrative on the basis of consciousness that its continuing relevance can be maintained” (Fludernik 27). In his well-known work on time and narrative, *Temps et Récit*, the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur underlines the narrative dimension of human experience of temporality, stating that this is precisely the factor which allows the understanding of the literary phenomenon. If human experience of time were not, in some way, pre-narrative we would not be able to understand any form of narrative whatsoever. And he repeatedly explains: “To tell and to follow a story is already to reflect upon events in order to encompass them in successive wholes” (Mitchell 174).

So the first aspect I would like to outline here is the fact that narrative is something other than plot, a phenomenon that has to do with the apprehension of reality, revealing a specific sort of “judgement about the nature of events”. Now we must confront this statement with Hegel’s distinction between the epic and drama, by asking the question: does drama not favour a similar experience? What is the nature of dramatic events as opposed to that of epic/narrative events?

Hegel's requirement for the definition of the world of epics is his famous concept of "totality of objects". He considers narrative to be essentially a means of interaction between each particular action and the world around it, which he calls "its substantial basis". As Lukács explains, when analysing Hegel's theory, "an epic work which presents only the inner life of man with no living interaction with the objects forming his social and historic environment must dissolve into an artistic vacuum without contours or substance" (McKeon 222). The relationship between narrative and the world is a central issue, not a secondary one. Narration is useful for the creation of the world, as Wolfgang Kayser would put it (Kayser 390). Of course that drama also aims at a total embodiment of the life process, as Lukács points out; yet Hegel uses another concept, "total movement", to define its nature.

This totality, however, is concentrated round a firm centre, round the dramatic collision. It is an artistic image of the system, so to speak, of those human aspirations which, in their mutual conflict, participate in this central collision. "Dramatic action", says Hegel, "therefore rests essentially upon colliding actions, and true unity can have its basis only in total movement." The collision, in accordance with whatever the particular circumstances, characters and aims, should turn out to conform so very much to the aims and characters, as to cancel out its contradiction. The solution must then be like the action itself, at once subjective and objective (Lukács 222).

In a word: *context*, in its specific aspects, is a fundamental dimension of narrative and hopefully a dispensable feature of drama. Narrative aims to create a "possible world", whereas drama aims to involve us in the dramatic nature of this world, in as far as struggle is a condition of existence.

Moreover, there is a particular aspect of this narrative context that determines our apprehension of narrative as being essentially different from that of drama: the fact that it is temporal. Whereas a novel displays a sequence of

events that gives visibility to the experience of temporality, i.e. to change, by placing the fact of transformation before our eyes (in this sense narrative is indeed the visibility of transformation), in a play our attention is mainly concentrated on each scene in itself, and not so much on its sequential, temporal implications. As André Bazin used to say when distinguishing a painting from the image on the screen, it is as if the main force working in narrative text were of a centrifugal nature (with an outward impulse) whereas in drama it is essentially a centripetal action, concentrating everything in the scene itself (Bazin 201).

One of the most brilliant film makers of the 20th century, Andrey Tarkovsky, defines cinema as “time in the form of fact”. His vision about the intrinsic nature of film is a very curious and most pertinent one, since he does not emphasise the spatial aspect of films, but instead concentrates his whole theory on the temporal dimension of the so-called “Seventh Art”. For him, the essence of the director’s work is “to sculpt in time”:

Just as a sculptor takes a lump of marble, and, inwardly conscious of the features of his finished piece, removes everything that is not part of it – so the film-maker, from a ‘lump of time’ made up of an enormous, solid cluster of living facts, cuts off and discards whatever he does not need, leaving only what is to be an element of the finished film, what will prove to be integral to the cinematic image. (Tarkovsky 64)

The defence of the intrinsic narrative nature of film lies precisely here: by “printing time in its factual forms and manifestations” (Tarkovsky 63) cinema captures the very essence of temporality – the passage of time, thus rendering *transformation* visible, and with it the possibility of consciousness and knowledge.

On the other hand, through montage film creates a sequential *continuum*, thus manifesting the permanent interaction between each particular action and the world around it (before and after it), between the scene we are watching and

its context, attesting in this way to the importance of Hegel's concept of "totality of objects" for its definition. Film indeed suggests a "possible world", a "world in action", as Flannery O'Connor – a particularly pertinent theorist on the nature and aim of fiction – would put it.<sup>1</sup>

So, although cinema also establishes undeniable relations with drama – essentially through its spatial feature of *mise en scène* or framing, to use the specific word in cinema, and also because of the essential *dramaticity* of events, as Kayser would stress – the truth is that its most profound characteristics have to do with its temporal nature (the temporal nature of perception, which is precisely the nature of film experience) and therefore imply a narrative dimension and organisation. This may seem very obvious, but the urge to avoid a possible subordination of film to literature – or, to use Pasolini's words, to "traditional narrative convention" (Pasolini 148) – has led to a general, imprecise, but well-diffused tendency, in certain *avantgarde milieus* (essentially due to simplistic readings of Gilles Deleuze's theory on cinema), to deny all narrativity to cinema. Those who make a deeper reflection underline one must, at least, accept that the narrative condition of cinema is "circumstantial", as does João Mário Grilo in his pertinent book on "cinema, action, thought", *O Homem Imaginado*: "[A great film] is in no way just the mere invention of a technique or of a new way of representing it, but rather the *emergence of the formal and operative nature of perception* as a circumstantially narrative, but above all absolutely and holistic condition" (Grilo 22; my translation).

Yet, Fludernik's approach, defining narrative as "perceptual activity" that "represents and explains experience", as seen previously, provides the key to this remaining dilemma, by erasing the apparent opposition between narrative (a *certain* concept of narrative, it is important to remember) and experientiality, thus implying that narrativity is much more than merely circumstantial in film. It

is, on the contrary, a defining aspect of its underlying nature, establishing hidden relationships with literary, narrative texts.

It is most interesting to listen to what Käte Hamburger, the German philosopher and literary critic, has to say about the ontological change occurring in the passage of a play to a film. She speaks of the phenomenon occurring when a drama is captured by a film camera:

It is undoubtedly not by chance that film companies prefer to film novels. The novel offers a better basis for cinema than drama... Cinematographic image works as narrative function, it too can build a global image of the respective narrated world. It can, in the same way, compose particularities in a whole...Overall, the narrating force in cinema is so great that the epic factor seems to be more decisive for its classification than the dramatic one...The moving image is narrative and it seems to render film an epic and not a dramatic form. A filmed drama becomes epic. (Hamburger 161; my translation)

As a matter of fact, a director like Manoel de Oliveira, who is said to produce “theatrical films”, defends the cinema’s independence from drama, from the formal point of view – since theatre is composed of physical, living matter and cinema is its “ghost” –, underlining that film adds to theatre the ability to fix the image in time.<sup>2</sup> But, he stresses, the result is cinema, not ‘filmed theatre’. The mere intervention of the camera, with its capacity of recording temporal sequentiality, introduces a new logic both in the nature and in the reception and experience of film, as Hamburger explains.

What are the main changing features in this process? First of all, the effect of distance. Due to the mediation of the camera, the film spectator establishes a different relationship with events than a member of a theatre audience. He becomes a real spectator, in the literal sense of the word, as his main function is to see (*speculare*). He is not summoned to “action” (if one can use this

expression) – as he would be in the case of the theatrical experience, which is the space, *par excellence*, of performance, where things are *done* with words, words that can (or should, if we accept the classical postulate) lead to cathartic experience; instead, he *watches* events from a specific point of view, from a distance, adopting the required perspective, a perspective he shares with the film director, which enables him to know and judge what he sees. This is precisely the reason why João Mário Grilo reduces the essential material characteristics of cinema to these two aspects: “the invention of a point of view and of a distance, with all its implications: philosophical, political and, above all, conceptual” (Grilo 18; my translation).

This is also what Oliveira says about his work: that he wishes, above all, to invite spectators *to see* – to see beyond the images themselves, to become conscious of what is really at stake – and hence his liking for long shots and fixed frames, for he considers these slow processes the best way of respecting the freedom of his public, freedom to choose, to take a position – something that many film-makers who employ narrative speed and massive doses of special effects are not concerned with. On the other hand, slowness has a particular, paradoxical capacity of attracting attention to the dramatic importance of the temporal dimension. That is the reason why Jean Leirens says that slow pace is capable of evoking the requirements and the passage of time.<sup>3</sup>

It is not a coincidence that the perception of filmic temporality is often compared with oneiric experience. Indeed, through mediation, time becomes an imposing force and since the spectator cannot act upon it, he suffers, he is “the victim” of the condition of time, as María Zambrano would put it: “Underneath dreams, underneath time, man does not dispose of himself. He therefore suffers his own reality” (Zambrano 13; my translation). That is why dreams are always experienced with some kind of anxiety, even happy dreams. Zambrano states: “Hence the anxiety which underlies dreams, even happy ones. Because dreams



invite reality” (Zambrano 14; my translation). Suffering time in a condition of impossibility of choice – which is both the case of dreams and the case of the cinematographic experience – is, paradoxically, a powerful means of awakening in us the urge towards reality, the need to *make sense* of time, the absolute necessity of *consciousness* and *meaning*. Considering this complex phenomenon helps us to understand why film is much closer to narrative literature, from the point of view of reception and experience, than it is to drama, which does not favour this kind of oneiric experience, relying mainly upon the imposing power of *presence* (carnal, human presence) as a means of “purifying” actions (since all attention is focused on the nature and mechanism of human struggle) and therefore helping man to regain his intrinsic *freedom* as a human being.

Of course the lack of tri-dimensionality in movies and fiction is also part of the question, having to do with the previously-mentioned *distance* paradigm. In a play, tri-dimensionality creates an appearance of reality (“acting” is “pretending”). Drama is the theatre of life, the (re)presentation of its dramatic essence. Film, on the other hand, is the theatre of life in its significant form, in the form of meaning and knowledge, rendered possible through the causal nexus of temporality. Irena Slawinska, in her work *Le Théâtre dans la pensée contemporaine*, explains very clearly the connection between temporality and meaning – the absence of meaning implies the absence of time and vice-versa, as Hochkeppel’s formula synthetically expresses: “Sinnlosigkeit ist Zeitlosigkeit” (“the loss of meaning is the loss of time”) (Slawinska 211). Cinema wishes to recapture time, to fix it, so that its meaning can be fully grasped – the cinema’s aim is ultimately the fight against death: against the dramatic irreversibility of the passage of time, as Bazin and so many after him have put it – but also, and essentially, against the death of meaning, which is the final victory of death over life.

And so, to conclude, I would like to return to the question of genre as a useful tool to enable one to understand the nature of film in its relationship with drama, with literature and with the way the public responds to it.

Northrop Frye suggests that “the central principle of genre is simple enough. The basis of generic distinctions in literature appears to be the radical of presentation. Words may be acted in front of a spectator; they may be spoken in front of a listener; they may be sung or chanted; or they may be written for a reader”. And he adds: “The basis of generic criticism in any case is rhetorical, in the sense that genre is determined by the conditions established between the poet and his public” (Frye 246-247). If we consider film as a “text” in the broad, semiotic sense of the word, and try to apply the principle of the radical of presentation to it, we are confronted with the complexity of the filmic object: although characters are presented to us “directly”, as in the theatre (and differently from fiction), they are subject to camera mediation, approaching, in this sense, the situation of fiction more than that of drama; although words are mainly “recited” to the audience, as in epic literature, they quite often appear in written form as well. It is no wonder then that André Bazin spoke about the impurity of film, its natural tendency to absorb other art features and forms, as if it could only exist by creating a new artistic status, a new, hybrid form.

Indeed, if we relate this idea to Hans-Robert Jauss’s theory on the evolution of genres and on their permanent interaction with each other, one must come to the conclusion that the natural historicity of the arts has taken us to the point where cinema seems to exhibit characteristics of a new, hybrid genre. As literary genres are rooted in life and have a social function, literary evolution should also be defined by its function in History and social emancipation, just as the succession of literary systems needs to be studied in its relation with the general historical process (Jauss 97).

The growing importance of cinema in the context of present-day society is proof of the need to consider its function in the sense we are dealing with here: its relation with drama, but above all its close affinity with narrative (and in this sense – but only in this specific aspect – its affinity with literature). To deny film narrativity would be to deny the meaning of time (or, what would be worse, time *as* meaning) – a significant sign of a specific, critical historic moment. Although film can be situated, as Paulo Filipe Monteiro would say, at the transversality between drama and the epic, I believe it is worthwhile to underline the predominance of the temporal aspect, which acts both in the apparently isochronic time of the framed scene and in the sequentiality of montage. The tendency nowadays of some *avant-garde* criticism to deny and refute cinema narrativity would, therefore, seem to be a sign of the present-day difficulty in dealing with meaning itself – clear evidence of today’s critical moment, requiring urgent reflection about the value of temporality. As Zambrano puts it, “Time is a path not just to be followed but a way to acquire knowledge and self-knowledge. Time is the key” – doubtless an epic task.

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> Sally Fitzgerald, and Robert Fitzgerald, eds. *Flannery O’Connor. Mystery and Manners. Occasional Prose*. New York: The Noonday Press, 1997: 79.

<sup>2</sup> Antoine de Baecque, and Jacques Parsi. *Conversas com Manoel de Oliveira*. Porto: Campo das Letras, 1999: 81.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Leirens. *Le Cinéma et le Temps*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1954: 110.

## Works Cited

Baecque, Antoine de, and Jacques Parsi. *Conversas com Manoel de Oliveira*. Porto: Campo das Letras, 1999.

- 
- Bazin, André. *O que É o Cinema?* Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 1992.
- Fitzgerald, Sally, and Robert Fitzgerald, eds. *Flannery O'Connor. Mystery and Manners. Occasional Prose.* New York: The Noonday Press, 1997.
- Fludernik, Monika. *Towards a "Natural" Narratology.* London: Routledge, 1996.
- Frye, Northrop. *Anatomy of Criticism.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Grilo, João Mário. *O Homem Imaginado. Cinema, Acção, Pensamento.* Lisboa: Livros Horizonte, 2006.
- Hamburger, Käte. *A Lógica da Criação Literária.* São Paulo: Perspectiva, 1974.
- Jauss, Hans-Robert. "Littérature médiévale et théorie des genres." *Poétique*, 1, 1970: 79-101.
- Kayser, Wolfgang. *Análise e Interpretação da Obra Literária.* Coimbra: Arménio Amado, 1976.
- Leirens, Jean. *Le Cinéma et le Temps.* Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1954.
- McKeon, Michael, ed. *Theory of the Novel – A Historical Approach. A Critical Anthology.* New Jersey: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000.
- Mitchell, W. J. T., ed. *On Narrative.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981.
- Pasolini, Pier Paolo. *Empirismo Hereje.* Lisboa: Moraes, 1982.
- Slawinska, Irena. *Le Théâtre dans la pensée contemporaine.* Louvain: Cahiers Théâtre Louvain, 1985.
- Tarkovsky, Andrey. *Sculpting in Time.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996.
- Zambrano, María. *Os Sonhos e o Tempo.* Lisboa: Relógio D'Água Editores, 1994.