CROSSROADS

A Journal of English Studies

ISSUE 36
1/2022

An electronic journal published
by The University of Bialystok

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Publisher:
The University of Białystok
The Faculty of Philology
ul. Liniarskiego 3
15-420 Białystok, Poland
tel. 0048 85 7457450

crossroads@uwb.edu.pl
https://czasopisma.filologia.uwb.edu.pl/index.php/c/index
www.crossroads.uwb.edu.pl

e-ISSN 2300-6250
The electronic version of *Crossroads. A Journal of English Studies* is its primary (referential) version.

SPECIAL ISSUE

HOUSE AND HOME IN LITERATURE

Guest editors
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BEATA PIĄTEK

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House and home in literature: Introductory remarks

The articles that comprise this volume illustrate a spectrum of literary representations of house and home: the architecture of the house, the house as a material inscription of national history (Topolovská), the house as a spatio-temporal entity preserving the past and connecting past and present (Kucała), home as a space of domestic discomfort (Piątek), home as a site of individual and collective identity (Dudek), the country and its geography as a hospitable or inhospitable homeland (Klonowska), the politics of the house, dwellings as exteriorisations of social and ethnic divisions (Klonowska, Jęczmińska).

Although highly selective, the list testifies to the enormous potential inherent in the relatively new academic field of housing studies. The primary distinction between the concepts of house and home alone has given rise to manifold types of research. As Chiara Briganti and Kathy Mezei explain, "Whereas the house is generally perceived to be a physical built dwelling for people in a fixed location, the home, although it may possess the material characteristics of a built dwelling, implies a space, a feeling, an idea, not necessarily located in a fixed place" (2012: 5). However, as these definitions imply, far from being clear-cut, the distinction also involves a significant overlap. For example, Witold Rybczynski's well-known study *Home: A Short History of an Idea* (1986) is underpinned by the interdependence of house and home. Spanning the time from the Middle Ages until modernity, the author discusses types of domestic spaces, linking them not only to the material conditions of living typical of a given period in history, but also to social and familial relations and hierarchies, and to the ideas that shaped the domestic fashions, preferences and expectations of the age. House and home may be studied both synchronically and diachronically – while they are common to all human societies and have universal appeal, they are invariably "framed by time, place, and culture: the concreteness of geography and history" (Bukowczyk 2002: ix). In the words of Bożena Shallcross, "the discourse on the home is a truly cross-, inter-, and multidisciplinary entity that has evolved simultaneously from anthropology, sociology, philosophy, psychology, architecture, and cultural studies" (2002: 2).

A seminal study by Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (1958), is grounded in the dual perception of the house: on the one hand, it is an actual building, made of solid materials; on the other hand, it is also "an imaginary entity," made up of memories and the shared past of its residents (Moran 2006: 28). The ideal house conjured up by Bachelard connotes the notions of shelter and protection. Departing from Bachelard's oneiric model, Joe Moran points out that in practice houses have more to do with "the mundane and ongoing activities of daily life" (2006: 41). Therefore, he argues that the poetics of space should be supplanted by attention to its politics (2006: 42); as he insists, the notions of house and home are inevitably connected with "history, economics and politics" (Moran 2006: 27).

Although the house, in some measure, reflects its social environment, it also separates the public and the private, creating a space for individual identity and self-expression. Originally, human dwellings as "artificial shelters" served the basic need for separation and protection from the natural environment – a function which obviously remains crucial to the concept of the house (Smyth & Croft 2006: 13). The architecture of houses has practical, social as well as aesthetic value. From a philosophical perspective, home has been employed by Martin Heidegger as a metaphor to argue that being not-at-home is an intrinsic aspect of human alienation in the world (Smyth & Croft 2006: 15). To extend the ramifications of these concepts, it may be demonstrated that "[m]any assumptions we make about homes are linked to cultural or national reference points" (Atkinson & Jacobs 2016: 2). Whatever the context in which house and home are described, they signify the fundamental human need to define one's place in the world. Accordingly, the concepts of house and home, in all the range of meanings indicated above, are staple themes in literature.

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DOI: 10.15290/CR.2022.36.1.01

Housing the past: Victorian houses in neo-Victorian fiction

Abstract. As argued, among others, by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (1958), a house which has been inhabited over a period of time becomes a composite of its physical structure and the mental space created by its residents' thoughts, dreams and memories. This article analyses two contemporary novels in which houses as tangible manifestations of temporally remote experience provide a link to the Victorian past. Lauren Willig's *That Summer* (2014) and Kate Beaufoy's *Another Heartbeat in the House* (2015) represent the same type of neo-Victorian fiction: their plots are composed of two strands, one set in the modern age and the other in the nineteenth century, and in the course of each story parallels and convergences are revealed between the two ages and the two casts of characters. The article argues that both novels are also typical "romances of the archive" – as defined by Suzanne Keen (2001) – in which the material legacy of the past triggers a personally motivated inquiry, leading contemporary characters to uncover certain bygone mysteries, and, crucially, to recognise the past's continuing appeal and relevance.

Keywords: neo-Victorian fiction, the house in literature, romances of the archive, interaction between past and present, double plot.

In his seminal study *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard advances the concept of the house as a dwelling which transcends its material dimensions: "A house that has been experienced is not an inert box. Inhabited space transcends geometrical space" (1994: 47). From his phenomenological perspective, it is the people who inhabit it that shape and reshape the identity of the house; effectively, it also becomes a mental construct capable of storing and integrating our "thoughts, memories and dreams" (1994: 6-7). The building is mentally and emotionally appropriated by its residents in the process of habitation, as they experience the house "in its reality and in its virtuality" (1994: 5). A key assumption behind his reflections is that the nebulous sphere of memories and imaginings intersects with a material entity.[2] For Joëlle Bahloul, the accretion

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2 As Joe Moran argues, although Bachelard refrains from describing specific dwellings, his oneiric house may in fact be linked to an identifiable kind of architecture – pre-modernist, non-urban, and capable of accommodating multifunctional spaces designed for a variety of people (2006: 29). Hence,

of memories is a key constitutive element of the house: "The domestic and family world makes up the woof of remembrance, of memory. The house is 'inhabited' by memory. Remembrance is moulded into the material and physical structures of the domestic space" (2012: 260).[3] In her anthropological study of houses, Mary Douglas emphasises that a house has to be inhabited over a period of time to become a home, which she regards as a blend of space and time: "A home is not only a space, it also has some structure in time; and because it is for people who are living in that time and space, it has aesthetic and moral dimensions" (2012: 52). Implicit or explicit in all the reflections above is a view of the house as a composite of spatial and temporal dimensions, as well as of the meaning attributed to it by its residents.

Houses play a crucial role in the neo-Victorian novels[4] by Lauren Willig and Kate Beaufoy. In Willig's *That Summer* (2014)[5] and Beaufoy's *Another Heartbeat in the House* (2015)[6] dilapidated Victorian mansions offer contemporary heroines a way of reaching out to the past. The experience of walking down the corridors, exploring the rooms and attics, examining objects and mementoes leads to the gradual revelation of the real-life stories stored within the confines of the Victorian walls. Importantly for the plots, this is a past that eventually turns out to resonate with the heroines' present. However, the protagonists of Willig's and Beaufoy's novels are initially confronted with actual, material structures that mean nothing to them. To use Bachelard's formulation, Herne Hill in *That Summer* and Lissaguirra in *Another Heartbeat in the House* at first appear to be no more than "inert boxes," or "geometrical spaces," with none of the transcendent dimension acquired in the process of being inhabited. The fact that, without physically changing from the perspective of the heroines, both houses evolve and alter their identities in the course of each story validates Bachelard's claim about a house's capacity for metamorphosing into a mental construct shaped by the experience of its residents.

Houses provide a material link to other people's pasts. In the words of Joe Moran, houses "represent continuity and permanence: they often outlive us, and will probably have already housed people who are now dead" (2006: 33). This is precisely what the

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his vision of the house would appear to include Victorian country houses such as those depicted in *That Summer* and *Another Heartbeat in the House*.

3 In his essay "Between memory and history: *les lieux de mémoire*" Pierre Nora contends that "[m]emory takes root in the concrete, in spaces, gestures, images, and objects" (1989: 9); memory is anchored, "crystallizes and secretes itself" in "sites of memory" (*lieux de mémoire*) (1989: 7).

4 The term "neo-Victorian" is employed here in a broad and inclusive sense, to denote "contemporary fiction that engages with the Victorian era" (Hadley 2010: 4).

5 Born in New York, Lauren Willig is a full-time writer, the author of several historical novels. Cf. `https://laurenwillig.com/`

6 Kate Beaufoy is an Irish actress and a novelist. *Another Heartbeat in the House* is her second historical novel. Cf. `https://www.katebeaufoy.net/`

modern heroines in the two novels discover. As they are clearing out the old houses, they learn to relate objects to their proper historical context and see them for what they originally were, instead of treating them as mere curiosities.[7] There is an explicit comment on the meaning of domestic objects, voiced by a Victorian artist in Willig's novel. In his medievalist paintings, Gavin Thorne tries to invest relics of the past with the meaning they once had for the people who used them: "To me, they were the possessions of the people who had them in the time when they were made. Putting them into the scene felt like … well, like returning them to the time in which they belonged" (2014: 112). The modern heroines unwittingly re-enact his attitude. In each novel, the narrative alternates between the Victorian age and modern times; the tangible continuity of the nineteenth century, ensured by the survival of a Victorian mansion and its contents, helps create meaningful connections between the temporally remote stories.

This article analyses the process whereby in the two neo-Victorian novels the material, domestic relics of the Victorian age, attain significance in the eyes of the modern-day heroines. The Victorian houses begin to be perceived as spatio-temporal constructs, capable of forging connections between past and present. In each book, the duality of the temporal framework is constitutive of these processes: each house is gradually revealed to be a palimpsestic entity with a history stretching back over a hundred years and connecting different periods. As in Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope, "spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole" (Bakhtin 1990: 84). In each novel, the Victorian house gives the modern-day protagonist access to the past by inspiring not only personal interest, but also amateur historical enquiry which ultimately yields tangible results. Hence, it is argued that *That Summer* and *Another Heartbeat in the House* may be analysed as instances of the type of fiction that Suzanne Keen termed "romances of the archive" (2003 [2001]) – novels whose plots are driven by archival research.

The house as a palimpsest

In Willig's and Beaufoy's novels alike, the process of retrieving the past originates in the materiality of the house. The "concreteness of the physical environment" functions as "an important fixing agent" (cf. Moran 2006: 40), however, not so much for the protagonists' own memories, as Bachelard claimed, as for other people's histories. On her arrival at Lissaguirra, the sight of different layers of wallpaper immediately alerts the heroine of *Another Heartbeat in the House* to the build-up of history within its walls:

7 Following Walter Benjamin, Moran points out that "the afterlife of material artefacts, once they have ceased to be useful as commodities, opens them up to concealed histories and involuntary memories" (2006: 33).

> A patch of damp by the window had caused a strip of wallpaper to come away, revealing a layer of Amaranth purple paper, and beneath that another of Prussian blue. Edie picked at the edge but resisted the temptation to start pulling, because she knew that once she started she would not be able to stop. There was a word for it, she knew – a word for layers upon layers upon layers. Palimp-something. It would come to her later. (2015: loc. 596-601)

And, indeed, it soon does: the term is "palimpsest," which, according to the dictionary definition she recalls, signifies "a layering of present experiences over faded pasts" (2015: loc. 620).

Although the notion of the palimpsest harks back to the practice of overwriting manuscripts on the same surface, it may be extended to apply, as the protagonist suggests here, to other entities which evolve by the accumulation of different strata. In his discussion of the significance of human and non-human dwellings, the anthropologist Tim Ingold draws an analogy between houses and natural habitats – he contends that houses are organic environments, capable of development. The inhabitants of a given house make it grow and change by "keeping it under repair, decorating it, or making structural alterations in response to their changing domestic circumstances." Hence, he suggests that "[h]ouses [...] are living organisms. Like trees, they have life histories ..." (2012: 34). The old houses of Herne Hill and Lissaguirra have amassed material evidence of decades of habitation.[8] Both heroines discover that apparently none of the inhabitants ever threw anything away. In each novel, the mundane task of clearing out a disused house causes the protagonist to embark on a compelling and riveting investigation of the layers of remote as well as more recent history. Indeed, the novels themselves are palimpsestic in the sense of staging a co-existence and interaction of two narratives. As Mark Llewellyn avers in his essay on neo-Victorian fiction,

> The importance of the palimpsest lies not in its writing of new texts over old ones, but in the simultaneous existence of both narratives on the same page, occupying the same space, and speaking in odd, obscure, and different ways to one another. For it is important to remember that, as the neo-Victorian text writes back to something in the nineteenth century, it does so in a manner that often aims to re-fresh and re-vitalise the importance of that earlier text to the here and now. (2008: 170-171)

8 Both Victorian mansions have Gothic features as well, with cluttered attics, nooks and crannies, which contain both treasures and detritus. Cf. Bachelard on the importance of such extra spaces within a house: "thanks to the house, a great many of our memories are housed, and if the house is a bit elaborate, if it has a cellar and a garret, nooks and corridors, our memories have refuges that are all the more clearly delineated" (1994: 8).

The plots of *That Summer* and *Another Heartbeat in the House* bear a striking resemblance to each other: in each novel, the heroine's encounter with the Victorian mansion is unexpected, unsolicited and unsought, but in hindsight it appears nearly supernaturally engineered, as if the dead wanted to be contacted and redeemed by the living. Indeed, the houses themselves seem to have a life of their own.

In Lauren Willig's *That Summer*, Julia, a young Englishwoman living in New York in 2009, finds out that "[s]omeone's left [her] a house […] In England," as she casually puts it (2014: 1). Having been whisked away to the United States by her father at a very early age, she remembers neither the house nor the aunt who bequeathed it to her. Convinced that the house has nothing to do with her and is "just a house" (2014: 10), she perceives it as an unwanted gift she would rather renounce. The only value it has for her is its market value, so she travels to England determined to sell it at the first opportunity and return to New York. Things, however, turn out differently. In the course of the story, Julia discovers the relics of nearly two centuries accumulated in her house, a Pre-Raphaelite painting hidden away in a wardrobe, and a skeleton in the garden. Prompted by her findings, the heroine stumbles upon a Victorian story which proves to have a bearing on her own life. The past darkly glimpsed thanks to the objects she uncovers resonates personally with Julia when her own lineage emerges from the recesses of the house – it is quite plausible that she is descended from the people portrayed in the painting; indeed, the murdered man may have been her great-great-grandfather. Simultaneously, disjointed memories from her early childhood emerge. Thanks to the recollections awakened by the house, the traumas of her parents' split and her mother's death in a car accident are reconfigured in her perception, to be finally successfully confronted and overcome. Hence, towards the end of the novel, when the house has revealed some of its mysteries, Julia also feels that "the locked room in the back of her mind was open, the demons that had hounded her for so long banished" (2014: 318). The novel is open-ended, but it is likely that rather than sell the house, as she intended, Julia will keep it and make it her home, thus accepting her inheritance and her place in the filial history. From her point of view, Herne Hill has been transformed utterly, from an old decaying building to a space animated by the past and vibrant with prospects for the future.

Edie, the heroine of Beaufoy's novel, travels to an abandoned Victorian house in Ireland for a similar reason: one of her relatives whom she unexpectedly met at a New Year's Eve party asked her to do him the favour of preparing his holiday house for sale, since he is too old to do it himself. The time is 1937, and English house owners are anxious to dispense with their property in Ireland. Edie's task is clear: "Packing everything to go to auction and putting the house up for sale" (2015: loc. 396). However, as in the previous novel, the moment of arrival is concomitant with the forging of an emotional bond between the house and the heroine. Lissaguirra becomes personified in Edie's eyes: "Edie turned to the house, and smiled. It looked back at her with the merest

hint of challenge, waiting for her to make the first move. [...] The door swung open, and the house breathed out" (2015: loc. 547-551). The manuscripts and artefacts she discovers while preparing the property for sale reveal to her the richness of the human experience which the house has witnessed, and, consequently, make her anxious for it not to be demolished but, instead, to be offered a new lease of life: "Edie felt a great surge of love for the house. She wanted to protect it, to cocoon it..." (2015: loc. 2429). With her newly formed attachment to the house and a sense of responsibility for its survival, Edie eventually chooses suitable buyers – a young couple who appear to be genuinely impressed by the place and, unwittingly, intend to use it in accordance with the first owner's wishes.

It will be clear from the synopses above that in each novel the protagonist's project amounts to the restoration (or partial restoration) of an unknown past. *That Summer* and *Another Heartbeat in the House* represent the kind of neo-Victorian fiction which, in the words of Kate Mitchell, is "less concerned with *making sense* of the Victorian past, than with offering it as a cultural memory, to be re-membered, and imaginatively re-created, not revised or understood" (2010: 7). This view is consonant with Ann Heilmann and Mark Llewellyn's claim that a significant part of neo-Victorian fiction relies on the motif of anamnesis: the neo-Victorian novel "often revolves around the re(dis)covery of a personal and/or collective history and the restitution of a family inheritance through the reconstruction of fragmented, fabricated, or repressed memories: a retracing and piecing together of the protagonist's roots" (2010: 34). This is exactly what happens in Willig's novel: the mansion helps the protagonist reconnect both with her childhood and with her Victorian ancestry. But, to a degree, it is also true of Beaufoy's story: the strong-minded, unconventional Edie appears to be a twentieth-century incarnation of the female Victorian writer who originally owned Lissaguirra; perhaps more importantly, she also happens to be precisely the kind of appreciative editor that the unpublished novelist waited for.

Possessed by the past

In A.S. Byatt's *Possession* – which is arguably the best-known and paradigmatic neo-Victorian novel with a double plot featuring contemporary characters re-enacting, with a difference, a nineteenth-century story – the structure is underlain by serendipity, coincidence and uncanny correlations between the two strands of the plot.[9] In *Possession*, comments Jackie Buxton, "Victorian fictions are somehow dictating contemporary realities" (1996: 210). From the moment Roland Michell, a contemporary literary scholar, chances upon unknown nineteenth-century manuscripts by the Victorian

9 A Kirkus reviewer invokes *Possession* and Peter Ackroyd's *Chatterton* – both of which alternate two plot strands – as *That Summer*'s "superior predecessors" ("*That Summer* by Lauren Willig," 2014).

poet Randolph Ash, he is driven, or possessed, by the compulsion to pursue the opaque Victorian story. His research leads him to another Victorian poet, Christabel LaMotte, and subsequently to the contemporary specialist on LaMotte, Maud Bailey. As their joint quest becomes more and more compulsive and personally motivated, Roland's critical self-consciousness enables him to recognise his implication in a narrative of someone else's design: "Roland thought, partly with precise postmodernist pleasure, and partly with a real element of superstitious dread, that he and Maud were being driven by a plot or fate that seemed, at least possibly, to be not their own plot or fate but that of those others" (2002: 421).

Whereas *That Summer* and *Another Heartbeat in the House* fall short of the self-consciousness and literary knowingness of Byatt's novel,[10] they resemble it in forging ostensible correspondences between Victorian and modern-day characters and stories. Roland's primal discovery takes place in a library; Julia and Edie make theirs in Victorian houses. Relics of the past not only seem to await discovery, but also they appear to foreshadow the present intervention. Imogen Grantham, a Victorian ancestress of whose existence Julia was unaware until this moment, apparently wishes to communicate with Julia through her portrait. On seeing it, the contemporary heroine is struck by the life-like quality of the painting and the woman's resemblance to her mother and to herself:

> … she found herself face-to-face with a woman on the wall.
>
> For a second, the dark hair, the pale skin, the flowers, made Julia think of her mother, of that faded image in an old snapshot.
>
> But there was nothing faded about this picture. Even dimmed with dust and neglect, there was a vibrancy about the painted image that drew the eye like a magnet. […]
>
> She looked, realized Julia, as lost as Julia felt. […] She felt a kinship with this unknown woman, whoever she might be […] Julia took a step forward, feeling as if, if she only got close enough, those lips might whisper secrets to her. (2014: 40)

Seized by a desire to discover the identity of the woman, Julia begins to appreciate the palimpsestic quality of her house. Rather than throwing away the relics of the past prior to sale, she is prepared to investigate them: "It could be interesting. It's like an archaeological dig, layers of history all crammed together" (2014: 69).

10 This is not to say that they are devoid of intertextual allusions. One of the characters in *Another Heartbeat in the House* is William Thackeray, who models Becky Sharp on Eliza Drury, the nineteenth-century heroine of Beaufoy's novel. The unhappy marriage of the Victorian heroine in *That Summer* brings to mind Dorothea's marriage to Mr Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*.

From his or her superior vantage point, the reader can already see much more than Julia: her sense of kinship with Imogen Grantham is not so mysterious after all, given that they are related. The book is deliberately structured in such a way as to highlight similarities in the lives of the heroines. The constant shifts between the nineteenth- and the twenty-first century stories underline the parallels so that Julia increasingly appears to be a contemporary embodiment of the woman in the portrait. The discovery of a hidden painting, in which that same woman is depicted as Iseult, intensifies Julia's curiosity about the Victorian story to such an extent that, like Roland and Maud in Byatt's novel, she becomes genuinely possessed by the desire to get to know the past.

A strikingly similar sense of narrative determinism may be detected in Beaufoy's novel. Among the miscellany of objects she is trying to sort out, Edie finds a chest with the initials E.D. Although they stand for Eliza Drury, the woman for whom the house was built in the 1840s, Edie's first association is with her own name. This association, in a sense, becomes legitimised as the story progresses. The memoirs she finds in the chest absorb Edie so much that the reading takes priority over her domestic chores. The veracity of the memoirs is corroborated by the other artefacts she finds in the house – Eliza's books, her other papers, her clothes and memorabilia.[11] Edie is very excited; as she says to her dog (her only companion in the secluded place), "we may have found ourselves a mystery to solve!" (2015: loc. 859). Indeed, it may well be the other way round – the mystery was waiting for her to solve it. Her immersion in the story and identification with Eliza Drury grow; towards the end of the novel, Edie puts on Eliza's clothes and is even mistaken for the ghost of the Victorian woman. The last section of Eliza's memoirs, uncannily, seems to describe Edie at the present moment: "The swans have re-emerged from the rushes. Perhaps, in years to come, somebody will sit upon this window seat and watch another pair glide past on the water. I like to think that some day someone will be happy here. I like to think that some day, there will be another heartbeat in this house" (2015: loc. 5455).[12] Edie is determined to fulfil the author's wishes and publish the captivating memoirs; as she explains to her superior at her London publishing house, "I

11 In fact, the written records and the other artefacts complement and authenticate each other. For instance, while perusing Eliza's manuscript, Edie finds references to the garments she has found in the house, while those that have not been mentioned yet await their turn in Eliza's story: "She felt her mouth go dry and her heart pitter-pat as she reached for her notebook and ran a finger along the listed items. There!
74: A grey silk moiré evening dress.
67: A rose-pink sash with appliqué.
She mentally reviewed the other garments she had found in the trunk – the riding habit, the cashmere robe, the dinner gown – and wondered what had happened to the green tabinet and the sprigged mousseline mentioned by the narrator." (2015: loc. 1160-1165)

12 The swans, which to both heroines seem mysteriously immune to the passage of time, may be an allusion to W.B. Yeats's "Wild Swans at Coole."

didn't ask to see [the manuscript] – it presented itself to me. But it was almost as if it was meant to come my way, as if it had been waiting for me to find it" (2015: loc. 5486).

Unquestionably, there is a degree of contrivance in the way the authors interweave the two strands of the plot so as to demonstrate the interconnectedness of the Victorian and the modern stories and characters, as well as to make the twentieth- or twenty-first century story, respectively, a continuation and a variation – with a relatively happy ending – on the nineteenth-century narrative. Byatt used a similar strategy in *Possession* and chose to subtitle it a "romance," thus overtly laying claim to some freedom from the principle of verisimilitude to which a novel supposedly adheres. One of the epigraphs in *Possession* quotes Nathaniel Hawthorne's assertion that a romance "has fairly a right to present [the truth of the human heart] under circumstances, to a great extent, of the writer's own choosing or creation."

Romances of the house

Inspired by her reading of *Possession*, Suzanne Keen coined the term "romances of the archive" to designate stories propelled by archival research. One of the defining characteristics of the genre is the fact that the characters are professional or amateur researchers, and key scenes take place in "libraries or in other structures housing collections of papers and books" (2003: 3). Taking little notice of postmodern historiographic scepticism, the questers "unabashedly interpret the past through its material traces" and, more often than not, succeed in accessing it. The romance of the archive overlaps with the genres of adventure story and detective fiction: typically, the research becomes a thrilling, sensational quest for the truth, the resolution of a mystery, the discovery of new evidence. Crucial to Keen's definition of the romance of the archive is the protagonist's desire to "connect separate time periods, deeper and nearer pasts" (2003: 4), which, when carried over into the structure of the plot, results in coincidences and repetitions (2003: 39). In a mode which, with regard to mimetic standards, is closer to the romance than to the novel, such narratives employ a stock formula for happy endings: "characters are transformed, wrongs righted, disasters averted, villains exposed, crimes solved" (2003: 4). In contrast to historiographic metafiction, the focus has shifted from epistemological problems to the effects and consequences of the acquisition of knowledge about the past. As Keen has put it, "The history invoked by romances of the archive is predominantly a usable past" (2003: 5) – something is achieved, certain changes happen, the new evidence has a practical application. Among the palpable results are the awards awaiting the dedicated researchers – in *Possession*, these include "enhanced prestige, multiple job offers, cash, career changes, even better sex" (2003: 41). Stressing that in a romance of the archive the truth about the past is revealed thanks to its "material traces" (2003: 52), Keen points out that the results of the research may be material as well, in the form of some kind of "physical union of past and present, scholar and subject" (2003: 42).

To cite the example of *Possession* again, the contemporary heroine discovers her "corporeal or genetic tie" (2003: 42) to the Victorian poets she studies – she turns out to be their distant descendant, and simultaneously the inheritor of their manuscripts. Therefore, ultimately, the enhanced understanding of the past in a romance of the archive proves beneficial in many respects (2003: 54).

Manifestly, *That Summer* and *Another Heartbeat in the House* are typical representatives of the genre defined by Keen. In each, the traces of the past prompt amateur research, leading to the discovery, or partial discovery, of facts which change art history, or literary history, respectively, as well as transform the lives of the questers. In Willig's novel, the twenty-first century heroine embarks on a private pursuit of the past after finding a Pre-Raphaelite portrait in her house, and in particular when soon afterwards she fortuitously chances upon a concealed painting of Tristan and Iseult, apparently by the same artist. Together with another researcher, an antiques dealer with whom she becomes romantically involved in the process, they study the manuscripts found in the house, search the internet, and consult art histories and library resources. As in a typical romance, the quest bears fruit – in their small way, Julia and Nick rewrite art history by discovering the identity of the artist – Gavin Thorne, a little-known Pre-Raphaelite painter.[13] After a promising start to an artistic career, Thorne completely disappeared from the records. Thanks to Julia and Nick, more of his paintings are revealed, and his *Tristan and Iseult*, which the Tate Gallery wants to buy, is likely to attain its proper place among the masterpieces of Pre-Raphaelite art. Additionally, after a hundred and sixty years, the mystery of his disappearance is solved – he was murdered and buried in the grounds of Herne Hill. The reader, who is familiar with the Victorian plot in the novel, can appreciate that the contemporary characters correctly surmise the painter's romantic affair with the lady of the house. As in *Possession*, a physical union between past and present is forged when Julia realises that she is a distant descendant of the painter and his model. This genetic legacy, in turn, revives her interest in art. After several years of unrewarding work in the financial sector, and currently unemployed and adrift, Julia is keen to return to university and do a PhD in art history. She notes another coincidence – Gavin and Imogen never managed to escape to America,[14] but she has come back from there to take possession of her inheritance.

The Victorian mansions not only enable the heroines to vicariously experience other people's lives, but also turn out to have direct relevance to their own. Julia in *That Summer*

13 Thorne is a fictitious figure, but Dante Gabriel Rossetti and John Everett Millais make an appearance in the novel as minor characters.

14 The relevant passage in the novel reads: "Julia found it ironic that they had been bound for New York. It was enough to make one wonder about karma. […] it struck Julia strongly […] that she had wound up where Gavin and Imogen had intended to be" (2014: 332).

discovers yet another, more recent painting, which invokes a suppressed memory in her mind, so that the two images immediately converge. She recollects that the painting was done by her mother and identifies the little girl in the painting as herself. More long-buried memories flash through her mind, which enables her to reinterpret the life-changing, traumatic experiences in her life. Julia realises that at the time of her death in a car accident her mother was coming back to her family instead of running away from it. This new understanding brings about a reconciliation with her father, and a belated appreciation of her mother, which in turn makes her ready to start a mature relationship. She at last begins to recollect her own visits to the house as a very young child; apparently, Herne Hill is not as alien to her as she initially supposed. The protagonist learns from the more remote past as well: finding out about the tragic end of Imogen and Gavin's affair, she is determined that her own romantic story should not end unhappily, which is why she attempts to and succeeds in resolving her disagreements with Nick. Because the traumas experienced by the female characters in the book are in fact intergenerational, the novel's dual perspective helps to "address [...] the past in order to deal with the present, being simultaneously retrospective and prospective," which is typical of much neo-Victorian fiction (cf. Kohlke & Gutleben 2011: 33).

Likewise, Edie in *Another Heartbeat in the House* is uniquely placed to appreciate the artefacts she finds in the forsaken house. Due to her expertise in literature, she can trace the connections between the personality of the manuscript's authoress and Becky Sharp in William Thackeray's most famous novel. While it is well known to his biographers that Thackeray travelled in Ireland, the discovery of his stay at Lissaguirra and his friendship with Eliza Drury will be Edie's contribution to literary history, as well as the revelation that through the ideas she shared and the advice she gave to Thackeray, Eliza to some degree co-authored *Vanity Fair*.[15] And there are personal benefits awaiting Edie as well. She arrived in Ireland during a period of prolonged trauma in her own life, caused by the sudden death of her best friend Hilly, and exacerbated by a recent stint of rather frustrating editorial work, when she waited in vain for publishable material. In fact, she is not a complete stranger to the Irish house she is preparing for sale; during her present stay, she recollects holidaying at Lissaguirra as a teenager, together with Hilly. Towards the end of the story, Edie is ready to come to terms with her grief, as her happy adolescent reminiscences begin to dominate over the pain of her recent bereavement. Also, with the superb manuscript she chanced upon, she is looking forward to resuming her publishing work. As in *That Summer,* dealing with the past helps the

15 This, of course, is Beaufoy's fantasy. There are other literary references: Ian Fleming is Edie's eccentric, flamboyant friend, planning to become a writer of spy fiction; Beaufoy also acknowledges a debt to Mary Wollstonecraft's feminist ideas in the creation of Eliza Drury (Leonard 2015). There is an echo of Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* in Eliza's insistence that in order to write she must have her own house and must be financially independent.

modern-day character face up to her own past and future, whereas the history of the house, thanks to her, will go on.

Conclusion

Considering the decades of their histories, neither Herne Hill in *That Summer* nor Lissaguirra in *Another Heartbeat in the House* has any stable identity or unambiguous connotations. From the perspective of particular inhabitants, the meaning of the two Victorian dwellings fluctuates from a safe domestic space, an anchor for one's identity, to a place of exclusion or even a veritable domestic prison (as is the case of Imogen). Therefore, the chief value of the houses resides elsewhere – in their function as an empirical residue of the past, and a storage space for the human experience lived within their walls. That is why in each novel the reader encounters intimations that the house is a living entity, responsive to the lives lived within it. Thanks to their material existence, the Victorian dwellings testify to the reality of the past. As Julia in *That Summer* reflects, "It was too easy to manufacture memories, to stitch together bits of books and stories and convince herself that they were real. Only the solid, the physical, held any true security" (2014: 89). It is in recognition of this fact that the modern heroines in both novels are anxious to ensure the houses' survival. To refer to Suzanne Keen's analysis of the motif of archival research in a range of contemporary novels, it should be observed that both Herne Hill and Lissaguirra may be regarded as domestic archival spaces, offering those who wish to access the past a firm promise of success, in a mode reminiscent of romance. As historical novels, *That Summer* and *Another Heartbeat in the House*, like a substantial proportion of contemporary historical fiction, "demonstrat[e] a vivid awareness of the problematics involved in seeking and achieving historical knowledge, [but] remain nonetheless committed to the possibility and the value of striving for that knowledge. They are more concerned with the ways in which fiction *can* lay claim to the past, provisionally and partially, rather than the ways that it can not" (cf. Mitchell 2010: 3). The modern plots in Willig's and Beaufoy's novels have cautiously happy endings, with the protagonists thinking about the future with a degree of optimism. Equally optimistic is the other, implicit conclusion that each novel offers, namely that dedicated research leads to genuine knowledge of the past. Rather than being merely "geometric spaces," the Victorian houses disclose to the modern questers the layers of the past contained within their materiality.

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DOI: 10.15290/CR.2022.36.1.02

The Glass Room: Housing space, time and history[2]

Abstract. This article presents *The Glass Room* (2009), a novel by the British author Simon Mawer set in Brno, the Czech Republic, as a unique literary portrayal of a historical period and Modernist architecture in fiction. Shortlisted for the Man Booker Prize, the novel marked a turning point in its author's career, inspiring both theatrical and film adaptations, and, perhaps more importantly, it sparked a resurgence of interest in its model, the famous Tugendhat House, a revolutionary piece of Modernist architecture built between 1928 and 1930 by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. The narration of the novel is determined by the centrality of both the Landauer House and its main living space, *the Glass Room,* and their capacity to frame the intimate histories of the characters as well as the tumultuous social, political, and cultural developments of Central Europe. The spatial poetics of *The Glass Room* reflects this thematic complexity, whilst expressing the key aesthetic and ethical preoccupations of Modernist architecture and contributing to the novel's role in providing a multifaceted insight into history and architecture.

Keywords: *The Glass Room,* Simon Mawer, architecture in literature, Modernist architecture in literature, historical fiction, neo-historical fiction.

The Glass Room (2009) marks both a turning point in Simon Mawer's writing career and its culmination. Prior to the publication of *The Glass Room,* Simon Mawer had had the reputation of being "a quiet stylist, a writers' writer" (Crown 2009), mainly amongst literary critics and scholars, but was otherwise little known by the general reading public. The Booker Prize-shortlisting of the novel marked a watershed in Mawer's career and turned him into a critically and commercially successful novelist (Cooke 2012). At the same time, *The Glass Room* revisits a number of signature aspects of Mawer's works, such as a tempestuous dramatic historical period, a culturally and geopolitically highly

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2 The research for this article was supported by the Czech Science Foundation, project number 20-24867S "Representations of Space in the Novels of Jim Crace and Simon Mawer."

complex area,[3] protagonists whose identities are intertwined with radical historical, social and cultural transformation and, finally, the employment of a powerful and complex central conceit, which concentrates the central dilemma of the novel and embodies the essence of its poetics. In this case, it is the eponymous Glass Room, a spacious room with walls made entirely of glass, which frames the course of the tumultuous twentieth century in Central Europe[4] and shelters the histories of individuals against the backdrop of the traumatic events of the period.

This article studies the ways in which *The Glass Room* develops the leitmotifs of Mawer's literary creation, i.e. his treatment of history, space and place. Mawer's approach to history, mostly recent history, inspires an enquiry into the concept of historical fiction and its contemporary understanding. The main focus of the interpretation, however, is the novel's unique spatial poetics, which echoes the topocentric qualities of Mawer's novels whilst presenting a singular portrayal of a piece of Modernist architecture during the dramatic events of the twentieth century in Europe. Out of a host of possible directions of research this study will take the two most prominent, firstly contrasting the aesthetic and ethical purism of the ideals behind Modernist architecture embodied by the Landauer House from the novel with the realities its materialisation, the Tugendhat House, was forced to endure. Secondly, the relation of houses and historical narratives is developed as a part of an enquiry into the spatial poetics of *The Glass Room*.

The Glass Room from the perspective of historical fiction

In spite of Mawer's thinly veiled attempts to fictionalise the setting of *The Glass Room,* the novel's depiction of the fate of the Landauer House and the family of its first owners bears a striking resemblance to the Tugendhat House and its original inhabitants. The Tugendhat House, which was granted UNESCO World Heritage status in 2001, was designed by the German architect Mies van der Rohe between 1928 and 1930, and is considered, together with his Barcelona Pavilion, to be the peak of his European career and the embodiment of the ideals of the modernist conception of (domestic) architecture as well the articulation of the principles of the International Style (Davies 2018: 132). The impact of WW2 and its aftermath was compounded by several highly unprofessional

3 For more information concerning Mawer's treatment of historical details, see Topolovská, T. 2021. Through the looking glass: space and place in Simon Mawer's *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky.* In: Bubíková, Š. & Roebuck, O. (eds.), *Places and Spaces of Crime in Popular Imagination.* Kraków: Jagiellonian University Press.

4 At the time of its writing, it was Mawer's fourth venture into the area of Central Europe, more specifically the realm of where the Czech Republic is to be found nowadays, with one fiction book, *Mendel's Dwarf* (1997) and one non-fiction work, *Gregor Mendel: Planting the Seeds of Genetics* (2006), situated there as well, only to be followed by his latest excursion into the tormented Czech past, *Prague Spring* (2018).

and insensitive restorations (Černá & Černoušková 2011; Davies 2018: 132; Zimmerman 2009: 45-51).[5] Before extensive restoration, which took place between 2010 and 2012, the historical site was known as "one of the most grievous casualties suffered by the modern movement during its post-1933 extremity" (Schulze & Windhorst 2012: 135).[6]

Mawer acknowledges the role of the Tugendhat House in the conception of the novel; upon visiting it in the early 1990s he saw the house as "emblematic of the Czechoslovakia of the interwar period – a place of progressive ideas, of culture, of light and openness – and the dreadful double disaster of Nazism followed by Soviet Communism" (Rawsthorn 2012). In the same interview, commenting on the reopening of the Tugendhat House to the public, he claimed that given its unique qualities and its narrative capacity, "the appeal for a novelist was obvious" (Rawsthorn 2012). Irrespective of the inspiration for the conception of the novel and the inclusion of a number of historical details based on extensive research, Mawer insists on the fabricated nature of the story, cemented by the employment of a generic toponym "Město", which simply means "town" in Czech (Mawer 2009: 75),[7] his use of fictional names, and some degree of deviation of the Landauers' plotline from the history of the Tugendhat family. In spite of these efforts, the choice of subject matter – the historical and spatial setting of *The Glass Room* – has been criticised by some of the members of the Tugendhat family.[8] The dispute over Mawer's treatment of history illustrates possible reservations concerning his classification amongst historical novelists and also reflects some tendencies of contemporary historical fiction.

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5 The house's Jewish owners were forced to flee Nazi persecution, then the house was confiscated by the Gestapo, subsequently hit by a bomb and later seized by the Communist government and turned into a gym.

6 Nowadays, the villa has become an incredibly popular historical site, with visits needing to be booked months in advance. The popularity of Mawer's novel plays an integral part in the general renown of the place. It has inspired both a successful theatre adaptation and a less critically-acclaimed film, *The Affair* (2019) (Lodge 2021), which was shot in the villa.

7 In his 2010 interview with Marek Sečkař for *Host*, Mawer claimed that he was dissatisfied with the decision of Lukáš Novák, the author of the widely-acclaimed Czech translation of the novel, to replace Mawer's neutral "Město" with Brno. For Novák, the obvious referentiality of Město to Brno outweighed Mawer's desire to "keep formal distance."

8 Professor Daniela Hammer-Tugendhat, one of descendants of Greta and Fritz Tugendhat, repeatedly expressed her dissatisfaction with the novel, accusing Mawer of robbing the family of their history. Upon the occasion of her lecture "Das Haus Tugendhat und Seine Bewohner" which took place in The Ministry of Culture in Prague on 1st October 2012, she insisted that the author should have contacted and consulted the family in the first place. In any case, he should have either avoided the history of the family altogether or resisted his poetic licence and remained truthful to their actual history (Hammer-Tugendhat 2012).

The 2009 shortlist of the Man Booker Prize for Fiction, which included *The Glass Room,* consisted entirely of works of historical fiction, testifying to the growing popularity of the genre. The media coverage of the shortlist opted for a critical perspective, accusing the judges of Anglocentrism and of being "reactionary" and "backward-looking" (Miller 2009). One of the judges, literary journalist and novelist Lucasta Miller, explained in her 2009 article defending the choice of the nominations, that the novels, in spite of being set in the 16th, 19th and 20th centuries, did not linger in the past and were considered for the prize because of the "depth of sophistication and not the genre" (Miller 2009). She further declared that the quality the novelists shared was a uniquely individual voice, which contributed to the diversification of different approaches to historical fiction, and proved that although "the average historical fiction may be easier to pull off than the average novel, simply because you don't have to invent so much. [...] the best transcend genre, adding something that a nonfiction treatment could not."

Texts with similar qualities have been subjected to the scrutiny of literary scholars who focus on contemporary historical fiction, such as Elodie Rousselot or Jerome De Groot. De Groot is particularly interested in the nature of the narrativisation of the past and asserts that fiction, and novels in particular, are no longer perceived as merely fictitious and therefore dubious (De Groot 2016: 6). Quite the contrary, throughout his monographs De Groot repeatedly demonstrates that narrativisation conditions the very understanding of the notion of pastness and thus different fictitious representations of the past act as highly useful tools for its investigation.

In accordance with this new understanding of the role of historical fiction, Mawer actively rejects the label of historical novelist (Flood 2016)[9] and mainly stresses the liberating properties of fiction that grant him poetic licence and allow him "to manipulate things as I choose" and even "to lie" (qtd. in Crown 2009). He researches the period detail meticulously whilst simultaneously adding to the dynamism of his novels' free reimagining of the past by mixing fact and fiction.[10] He thus explores "the dissonance and displacement between then and now, making the past recognisable but simultaneously authentically unfamiliar" (De Groot 2010: 3). Although his work is rarely mentioned in the recently published academic overviews of contemporary British literature, Mawer may be classified amongst authors who, like him, focus on historical

9 He paradoxically did so while receiving the 2016 Walter Scott Prize for Historical Fiction for *Tightrope* (2015), the critically-well received sequel to the spy novel *The Girl Who Fell from the Sky* (2012) (Flood 2016).

10 Mawer frequently projects his personal experience into his writing (Pengelly 2015). As far as (auto) biographical novels are concerned, there is the semi-fictional account of living in Italy in *A Place in Italy* (1992). Surprisingly, he acknowledges *Swimming to Ithaca* (2006) as his only (auto)biographical work (Sečkař 2010).

themes, narrativising the past and analysing and problematising the parallels between the past and the present, which echoes the preoccupation of the contemporary genre of neo-historical fiction. Elodie Rousselot connects the recent resurgence of historical fiction with "critical re-appraisal of specific historical periods and of their social, cultural, and political contexts" (Rousselot 2014: 1). *The Glass Room* invites its readers to relive and, more importantly, review the key moments of 20th-century Czech history – the First Czechoslovak Republic, Nazi and Communist rule, the relatively liberal period of the 1960s and the newly democratic 1990s. Rather than stressing the difference between the present and the past, the narrative steers towards a highlighting of the parallels between them, which Mawer considers to be one of the dominant concerns of his fiction since the similarities mediate an understanding of the present and condition our approach to the future: "if we do not understand where we've come from, then we won't have any idea where we are going" (qtd. Flood 2017).

The Glass Room and the ideals of modernism

The Glass Room, apart from mediating a nuanced portrayal of Czech history by means of a house and a room, provides an extensive commentary on Modernist architecture, its ideology and its creators, and that acts as one of the key elements of its spatial poetics. Although the novel covers the time span of almost the entire 20th century, its focal point is the First Czechoslovak Republic, the time when the design of the house is conceived out of the desire of a newly-wed couple, Viktor and Liesel, both from upper-class, German-speaking industrialist families, to sever ties with tradition. They reject "this clinging to the past. This is everything our new house will not be!" (Mawer 2009: 9). Driven by the wish to inhabit a domestic space which would project their beliefs in progress, the future and the emergence of an unconstrained society governed by reason and democratic values, they let the (fictitious) architect, Rainer von Abt, build a luxurious futuristic house incarnating their beliefs: "It'll be a revolution. [...] A casting off of the past. A new way of living" (Mawer 2009: 66). The exorbitant cost of the villa should not demonstrate fortune and privilege, but rather the philosophical principles of both the owners, the future inhabitants and their architect: "The whole essence of *the Glass Room* is reason. That is what Viktor thinks, anyway. For him, it embodies the pure rationality of a Greek classical temple, the austere beauty of a perfect composition, the grace and the balance of a painting of Mondrian. [...] There is nothing convolute, involute, awkward or complex. Here everything can be understood as a matter of proportion and dimension" (Mawer 2009: 137).

In the novel, the chief spokesperson of Modernism's desire to "reshape the world" (Vidler 2001: 52) by revolutionising the way people live is Rainer von Abt, a fictitious German architect, a "composite modernist" (Vilder 2001: 52), acting as a synthesis of a number of pioneers of architectural Modernism, most strikingly Adolf Loos (von

Abt proclaims himself to be his disciple (Mawer 2009: 17)), Le Corbusier, and Theo van Doesburg (Mawer 2009: 17). There are both direct mentions of them in the text, most often made by von Abt himself, or their famous statements are presented as voiced by von Abt. Von Abt is portrayed as a true trailblazer in the field of the conception of architecture and the profession of architect. Rejecting the label of architect, he considers himself to be "a poet of light space and form" (Mawer 2009: 16), who works with "nothing but ideas" (Mawer 2009: 22), "creating a work of art" (Mawer 2009: 21).[11] Echoing Loos and his abhorrence of superfluous ornaments, von Abt can design nothing but "form without ornament" (Mawer 2009: 23), where he encloses space into "ruled lines as sharp as razor cuts, a mathematical precision that is beyond natural" (Mawer 2009: 41). Architecture, in his view, had for a long time been dominated by nothing else but "cave building", but his desire is to "take man out of the cave and float him in the air. I wish to give him a glass space to inhabit" (Mawer 2009: 18). He demonstrates his embrace of the Wagnerian conception of *Gesamtkunstwerk* by wishing not "just to design a house but to create a whole world. I want to work from the foundations to the interior, the windows, the doorways, the furnishings, the fabric of the place as well as structure. I will design you a life. Not a mere house to live in, but a whole way of life'" (Mawer 2009: 28).[12] The design of the Landauer House is conceived as a universal, international project (Mawer 2009: 64), which shall act, first and foremost, as a home: "It is not intended to be a sensation. It's intended to be a home" (Mawer 2009: 63).

The main living space of the Landauer House, *the Glass Room,* is repeatedly characterised as "open, infinitely extended, and thereby cleansed of all mental disturbance" (Vidler 2001: 51). Its invisible walls evoke the myth of spatial and social transparency that Modernist architecture shared with the thinkers of the late eighteenth-century and creates the effect of ineffable space (Vidler 2001: 54).[13] However, in spite of the literal

11 "Architects such as Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, who looked upon their buildings as works of art, were criticized as 'formalists'" (Davies 2018: 108).

12 For more detailed information concerning the conception of architecture in the novel and parallels between Rainer von Abt and the masters of Modernist architecture see Topolovská, T. 2013. *The Glass Room:* Architecture as a poetic emotion. *Prague Journal of English Studies* 2(1): 65-79; Topolovská, T. 2013. On the analogy between the language of architecture and language of literary work: The role of the conception of architecture in generating the poetics of *The Glass Room.* In: M. Hirschová (ed.), *Filologické studie,* 15-31. Prague: Karolinum.

13 In his 2001 monograph *Warped Space: Art, Architecture and Anxiety* in Modern Culture, Anthony Vidler highlights the role of Le Corbusier's fascination with the demolished Parthenon in the conception of *ineffable* space. This sublime experience of the pioneer of architectural Modernism defined his view of space. He therefore stipulated ineffability as its chief quality, dissolving walls and opening "the inside to the outside, an outside now simply framed in order to testify to its visual existence, but open more or less panoramically around the entire building. Ineffable space would then be that dreamt and idealized, worked and realized experience that matched the heights of Periclean Greece"

transparency of their main living space, which brings and merges the inside and the outside ("[t]he inside and the outside will be the same thing" (Mawer 2009: 43)), the Landauers' dreams of domestic life inside a work of art do not materialise. Although Viktor Landauer cites André Breton's Nadja on the occasion of the housewarming party and identifies his wife Liesel and himself with the house ("this glass house says who Liesel and I are" (Mawer 2009: 76)) and boasts that "[i]n our wonderful glass house you can see everything" (Mawer 2009: 76), the lofty ideals are not fulfilled. The house and its central living space become sites of deceit, violence and neglect.

In spite of its purely abstract aspirations (or at least those of its designer, Rainer von Abt's), the space of the Landauer House is not portrayed as an "enclosed space, a box" (Mawer 2009: 308). Quite the contrary, it "transcends geometrical space" (Bachelard 1994: 47) as it is a lived-in space and becomes a shared experience of the characters and the readers alike. Both personal and social histories intervene, and the building and the room are repeatedly depicted as silent witnesses, sometimes even victims of different types of atrocities. *The Glass Room,* in spite of its powerful sensory effect, eventually proves to be only "as rational as the people who inhabit it" (Mawer 2009: 360). By employing the complex spatial conceit of the Landauer House and, more importantly, *the Glass Room,* Mawer is able to provide a far-reaching commentary on the moral aspirations of architecture and art. As *The Glass Room* exemplifies, "a building just is" (Mawer 2009:100), it cannot directly shape its inhabitants since it should not have any "politics", it may only inspire them by its perfect proportions and the impression of balance and classical beauty it radiates. The central spatial conceit of the novel, *the Glass Room* and its apparent indifference and neutrality, enables it to successfully frame history whilst accentuating the tragedy of "the rough tides" (Mawer 2009: 100) of those years.

The spatial poetics of *The Glass Room*

What defines Mawer's literary creation is the role played by the setting. His novels convincingly and self-assuredly inhabit space and time while echoing the mental processes of the protagonists and accentuating the overall thematic focus of his works. Both the temporal and spatial settings of Mawer's fiction are highly prone to profound transformation. Therefore, their common denominator is a deep social, historical, and

(Vidler 2001: 55). The resulting impression of boundless, limitless, unconstrained space demonstrated its transcendent quality (Vidler 2001: 54). Le Corbusier's approach restricted the positive and purely aesthetic quality of such space and emphasised its terrifyingly sublime nature (Vidler 2001: 55). Yi-Fu Tuan stressed the ambiguous nature of open space in his *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience:* "space is a common symbol of freedom in the Western world. Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action. On the negative side, space and freedom are a threat. To be open and free is to be exposed and vulnerable" (Tuan 2018: 54).

cultural change, as a result of which the protagonists' lives suffer an enormous upheaval. In the case of *The Glass Room,* the first idyllic years of the family and their new house are contrasted with the ominous atmosphere before the Munich Agreement and the German Protectorate. The following citation is taken from the chapter dedicated to the housewarming party and its atmospheric depiction of an impending storm, symbolising the looming war years: "They crowd into the space of *the Glass Room* like passengers on the observation deck of a luxury liner. Some of them maybe peering through the windows onto the pitching surface of the city but, in their muddle of Czech and German, almost all are ignorant of the cold outside and the gathering storm clouds, the first sign of the tempest that is coming" (Mawer 2009: 78). The Landauers are forced to flee because of their Jewish origin, and their house is confiscated by the Gestapo and turned into a laboratory focusing on the study of eugenics.

Mawer comments on the striking change of circumstances by developing an equally striking contrast by juxtaposing two expressions of appreciation of *the Glass Room*. The first one is uttered by Liesel and Viktor Landauer, the first owners of the house, upon their visit to the almost complete room, and refers to the liberating effect created by its space and light:

> Liesel and Viktor stood and marvelled at it. It had become a palace of light, light bouncing off the chrome pillars, light refulgent on the walls, light glistening on the dew in the garden, light reverberating from the glass. It was though they stood inside a crystal of salt. 'Isn't it wonderful,' she exclaimed, looking round with an expression of amazement. 'You feel so free, so unconstrained. The sensation of space, of all things being possible.' (Mawer 2009: 65)

The second time the same qualities of *the Glass Room* are praised, the context cannot be more different from the first occasion. The room is being inspected by the Nazi scientists who wish to transform it into a eugenics laboratory. The significance of the light and space acquires suddenly a shockingly dissimilar dimension: "*Gläzend!* Even more impressive than the photographs: a great open space of a place, almost the entire floor area of the whole building. Open plan. Stahl likes that. Ideal for a laboratory" (Mawer 2009: 218). Later, the house gets almost destroyed during an air raid, and the horrors of war are followed by the stifling rule of the Communist Party. The Landauer family first escapes to Switzerland and later to the United States, while the novel portrays the fate of those who stayed behind, mostly the character of Hana Hanáková, the prototypical incarnation of the *femme fatale* of Mawer's novels, who tries to protect the house from any further harm.

The spatial poetics, and in fact the whole narration of *The Glass Room,* is dominated by its double centrality. Firstly, there is the centrality of the house in relation to the

narration and, secondly, there is the dominant role of *the Glass Room* within the villa. Mawer employs the archetypal literary device of a building symbolising the history of a community, often employed by writers and even described as universal by some theoreticians (Bachelard 1994: 6). Thus, in *The Glass Room* "a real house effectively becomes the subject of a biography" (Miller 2009). Though the house may survive a precarious period, some of its inhabitants do not, and thus it serves as "a testimonial to our tragedies and our triumphs, to depravity and to all the soaring heights of which humans are capable" (Robertson 2015: 115). The home and its most canonical, archetypal representation, a house, is closely related to the study of place as a category of both scientific research and human understanding (Creswell 2015: 1). Humanistic geographers who stress the mutual conditioning of the category of place and human life, such as Yi-Fu Tuan, have been building upon the works of Martin Heidegger and Gaston Bachelard (Bachelard 1994: 8; Creswell 2015: 39). Heidegger developed the concept of dwelling as the expression of authentic human existence: "Man's relation to locations, and through locations to spaces, inheres in his dwelling. The relationship between man and space is none other than dwelling, strictly thought and spoken" (Heidegger 2001: 157), while Bachelard draws parallels between the role of the house in human life and its employment in literature, stressing the decisive, defining role the house has in the way we perceive other places in life as well as in literature. One of the most noticeable tendencies in fiction is to employ (and exploit) the integrative potential of the enormously potent archetype of the house to narrate social and individual histories. The capacity of the Landauer House from *The Glass Room* to represent the history of a family is "a literary device that has been employed to powerful effect to depict a building that has survived dramatic times, even as some of its inhabitants have not" (Robertson 2015: 94).[14] In the preface of their 2012 monograph, *The House of Fiction as the House of Life: Representations of the House from Richardson to Woolf,* Francesca Saggini and Anna Enrichetta Soccio state that the house has become a popular subject of scrutiny "to the point that in many ways houses seem to be situated at the very core of the creative, artistic and cultural domains of contemporaneity" (Saginni & Soccio 2012: 2).

The second form of centrality *the Glass Room* takes in the novel is the role of centre within a centre. Featured in almost every chapter of the novel, its prominence supports Bachelard's conception of the "house imagined as a concentrated being" (Bachelard 1994: 17). The central image of *the Glass Room* simultaneously acts as the leitmotif, setting

14 Robertson's text on the parallels between the fate of the Budapest Glass House and that of its original owners is to be found in the 2015 monograph *Global Perspectives on the Holocaust: History, Identity, Legacy.* It is no coincidence that the film adaptation of *The Glass Room* was screened during the London Jewish Festival in 2019 to illustrate the effect of the Holocaust in Central Europe.

and symbol of the intellectual and aesthetic aspirations of its creator, of its inhabitants[15] and their historical periods. Thus, beside demonstrating its centring ability, *The Glass Room* surpasses purely literary qualities and aspirations to historical accuracy and ventures into the cross-disciplinary realm. The following citation illustrates the need to apply a wider scope of disciplines in the analysis of the novel because of the transgressive, genre-bending parts of the work, which mix fiction with other modes of artistic expression – poetry and architecture.

> She dreams. She dreams of cold. She dreams of glass and light, *the Glass Room* washed with reflection, and the cool view across the city of rooftops, the cold view through the trees, the crack of snow beneath your boots. She dreams of a place that is without form or substance, that exists only in the manner of dreams, shifting and insubstantial, diffuse, diverse:
> space
> glass, walls of glass
> a quintet of chairs, placed with geometrical precision
> a sweep of shining floor – ivory linoleum
> white and black
> the gleam of chrome
> These things move, evolve, transform in the way they do in dreams, changing shape and form and yet, to the dreamer, remaining what they always were: der Glasraum, der Glastraum, the single letter-change metamorphosing from one into the other: *the Glass Room* become the Glass Dream. (Mawer 2009: 304)

The excerpt relies on a prominent employment of syntactic parallelism within the repetition of the same elements of the sentence structure, beginning with: "She dreams", which secures the coherent form of an evocation of impressions. The middle part of the citation acts as a catalogue juxtaposing the individual elements of the imagery into a list, whose organisation clearly indicates a rhythm and marks both the oneiric nature of the sequence as well as its proximity to poetry. What is more, the textual and visual component of listing the individual parts of the spatial experience mediated by the text, e.g. "glass, wall of glass, a sweep of shining floor, a quintet of chairs" corresponds with a caption to be found in architectural plans and emphasises both the explicit and implicit architectural dimension of the text.

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15 Petr Anténe attributes a similar function to universities and mainly their liberal arts departments. Not only do they provide the setting for the novels discussed in his monograph *Campus Novel Variations: A Comparative Study of an Anglo-American Genre*, but they "have often been seen as one of the pillars of this very society" (Anténe 2015: 7).

The highly evocative imagery of *The Glass Room* provides an apt as well as atmospheric insight into the aesthetic and ideological preoccupations of Modernist architecture. Its principles are repeatedly and aptly summarised by the character of Rainer von Abt, the fictitious architect. The qualities of Modernist architecture seep into Mawer's mode of expression and the resulting text thus acts as an intermediary between the sphere of architecture and that of language. What is more, *The Glass Room* pertinently contrasts the utopic nature of the premises of Modernist architecture (Benton 2007: 148-223) with the realities of history and human nature. *The Glass Room* bears testimony to Mawer's capacity for apt use of poetic language to effectively communicate the spatial poetics of the novel. Beside similes, the author often relies on a number of unexpected parallels (Mawer 2009: 52), such as when he underlines the organic process of designing and building a house by comparing it to the development of a baby:

> The house grew, the baby grew. The latter was a strange and rapid metamorphosis, punctuated by events of moment: the grasp of her hands, the focus of her eyes, her first smile, her recognition of Liesel and then Viktor, the first time she raised herself on her hands, the first laugh. The growth of the house was more measured: the laying of steel beams, the pouring of concrete, the encapsulating of space. (Mawer 2009: 52)

In accordance with these tendencies, Rosa Ainsley described *The Glass Room* as an example of "archi-fiction" in her article for *Architecture and Culture* (2020). In her view, novels such as *The Glass Room* "look again to architecture to provide a location, to set a specific stage for the narrative, adding some notion of authenticity (this is real!) and importance (this is a highly significant building!)" (Ainley 2020: 21). In terms of fiction inspired by actual architectural works, Ainley proposes the term "artefactual" (Ainley 2020: 21) to describe works such as *The Glass Room* in which architecture surpasses the role of mere backdrop and becomes an instrument for framing complex social, cultural, political and individual histories. This tendency is foreshadowed in the Prologue, which sees Liesel Landauer returning to the house after more than 30 years of exile and reminiscing about one peculiar quality of *the Glass Room,* its retractable window panes. Mawer employs this unique aspect of the room, and mainly its effect of "temporary equilibrium", as a symbol of the former life of the Landauers in the First Czechoslovak Republic and the failed liberal ideals and aspirations of the period.

> The slow slide of the pane downwards as though to remove the barrier that exists between reality and fiction, the fabricated world of the living room and the hard fact of snow and vegetation. There is a pause during which the two airs stand fragile and separate, the warmth within shivering like a jelly against the wall of cold outside. And then this temporary equilibrium collapses so that winter with a cold sigh intrudes, and

presumably, their carefully constructed, carefully warmed interior air is dispersed into the outside world. (Mawer 2009: 4-5).

Conclusion

The storyline of *The Glass Room* revolves around the archetypal anchoring trope of a house, in this case the fictitious Landauer House, modelled upon the famous Tugendhat House, situated in Brno in today's Czech Republic. Based on its integrating properties, the microcosms of the house and the eponymous room reflect the macrocosm of the world. Because of its singular, multidisciplinary character, the novel may be approached from a number of different perspectives, the two major being Mawer's vision of history and the work's topocentric qualities. As this study determines, Mawer's stance on the depiction of historical events echoes the preoccupation of neo-historical fiction, which often narrativises the past in order to be able to critically assess it and approximate it to the present. The spatial poetics of *The Glass Room* is defined by the double centrality of Mawer's narration. The Landauer House centres a narration while sheltering individual and social histories. These are placed in *the Glass Room,* which appears in nearly every chapter of the novel.

Another vital aspect of the spatial poetics of *The Glass Room* is its presentation of the ideals of Modernist architecture. The novel provides an evocative commentary on the nature of Modernist architecture, with its utopian belief in its own liberating power and its ability to promote and mediate ideas of unconstrained freedom and inevitable social and cultural progress (Benton 2007: 148-223). What is more, *The Glass Room* contrasts the utopic premises of Modernism, mainly its moral and aesthetic purism, with private and official histories. As a result, not only does the narration of *The Glass Room* exemplify a unique fusion of literature, architecture, history and politics, but it also provides a suggestive meditation on art, its aesthetic and ethical functions and their limitations.

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DOI: 10.15290/CR.2022.36.1.03

Ireland's "broken" homes in the novels of Tana French

Abstract. This paper argues that Tana French effectively uses the figure of house and home in order to comment critically on the state of the nation in her Irish crime novels. The analysis focuses on three selected novels: *The Likeness* (2008), *Broken Harbor* (2012) and *The Searcher* (2020). It demonstrates that in *The Likeness*, French uses the historical and literary tradition of the Big House to comment on the economic and class tensions during the period of the economic boom known as the Celtic Tiger.[2] In *Broken Harbor*, she employs the gothic mode of writing in her portrayal of the consequences of the credit crunch. And finally, in *The Searcher*, she debunks the myth of rural Ireland as a pastoral retreat and safe haven. The paper applies Susan Fraiman's notions of "shelter writing" and "alternative homemakers" (2017) in order to show how French uses domestic space and domestic rituals in order to problematize gender stereotypes and undermine conservative expectations about the nuclear family.

Keywords: Irish crime fiction, Tana French, house and home, Celtic Tiger, domestic rituals, shelter writing.

This paper aims at analysing the role of home in the portrayal of modern Ireland in the work of Tana French, a contemporary Irish writer, who has achieved popular success and is gaining increasing critical acclaim as the author of police procedurals set in and around Dublin.[3] French's first novel, *In the Woods* (2007), received the Edgar Allan Poe Award for best first novel, the Macavity Award, the Barry Award and the Anthony Award, all in 2008. Her fourth novel, *Broken Harbor* (2012), was awarded the Los Angeles Times Book Prize for mystery thriller and the Irish Book Award in the category of crime fiction.

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2 Celtic Tiger is a term applied both to the economy of the Republic of Ireland during the period of its unprecedented growth between the mid-1990s and the late 2000s and to the country itself. It alludes to the exceptionally high rate of growth, matching only that of East Asian nations.

3 Tana French has published eight novels so far. All have sold millions of copies and been translated into many languages (including Polish), but the critical acclaim is a relatively new development. In 2014 the oldest American academic journal devoted to the study of detective fiction, *Clues,* honoured her with a special issue. *Critical Inquiries into Irish Studies*, a journal published by Seton Hall University in the US, is planning a volume devoted to the critical analysis of French's work for autumn 2022.

Critics and reviewers who have registered a veritable boom of Irish crime fiction observe that it coincided with the economic growth which took place in the final decades of the last century (O'Toole 2011; Clark 2013; Gregorek 2014; Schaffer 2014; Mannion 2016). Fintan O'Toole explains this phenomenon by pointing out that the economic prosperity of the 1990s brought about a crisis of moral authority in Ireland. The investigations and subsequent reports into sex scandals in the church, child abuse in religious schools, the abuse of women and children in the Magdalene laundries, all in full view of politicians, seriously undermined moral, religious and political authority in the country (2011). Thus, according to O'Toole, "boom-time Ireland reproduced social conditions that created crime fiction as a mass genre" (2011: 359). What is more, the critic goes on to claim that crime fiction is "the nearest thing we have to a realist literature adequate to capturing the nature of contemporary society" (2011: 360). The opinion that Irish crime fiction in the 21st century offers a particularly accurate portrayal of the lives and anxieties of the Irish has been endorsed by several other critics (Clark 2013; Mannion 2016; Peterson 2016). The preoccupation with the economic realities of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath in the novels of Tana French has already been discussed to some extent (Casey 2014; Gregorek 2014; Reddy 2014; Peterson 2016). Maureen Reddy very persuasively demonstrates that French actually writes rather pessimistic state-of-the-nation novels (2014).

The present paper offers a detailed analysis of three novels selected from different stages in French's writing career: *The Likeness* (2008), *Broken Harbor* (2012) and *The Searcher* (2020) in order to demonstrate the centrality of the figures of house and home in her fiction. While houses and domestic space are highly prominent in all her novels, I have selected the above three titles to illustrate how throughout her writing so far the author has effectively used the figure of a house to comment on the state of affairs in the home of Ireland. In *The Likeness*, French uses the motif of the Big House to reach to Irish history and link the past with the present. In *Broken Harbor*, a ghost housing estate allows the author to comment on the economic and social cost of the housing crisis. In *The Searcher*, French resorts to antipastoral mode to debunk the myth of rural Ireland as a safe home. These three novels also illustrate the generic evolution of French's writing: from a typical police procedural to a psychological thriller with elements of murder mystery.[4]

4 In the police procedurals (from her debut, *In the Woods* to *The Trespasser* (2016)) Tana French uses an interesting narrative technique in order to create a relationship between the readers and her detective and offers a double perspective on the action of the novels, i.e. in each novel the investigation is conducted by a pair of officers from the Dublin Murder Squad. We see the action from the perspective of one officer, but in the next novel the other officer (the sidekick) will conduct the investigation, often reflecting on the previous case and his or her colleague. In this way the readers learn to notice that the first-person narrators may be unreliable. Additionally, she always makes her detectives vul-

Reaching to the past – Big House in *The Likeness*

Tana French's third novel was written at the height of Ireland's economic boom and is set in the first years of the 21st century. Its characters, in the words of one critic, "seem to embody the central problem of Celtic Tiger Ireland – the past cannot simply be rejected in favour of a blank slate of modernity" (Casey 2014: 94). The dominant themes of the novel are class tensions and anxieties over home ownership and financial independence persisting at that time.

Cassie Maddox, who had left the Dublin Murder Squad after traumatic experiences in her previous case, is persuaded to take part in an undercover operation when the body of her lookalike is found in an abandoned cottage in a village a few miles from Dublin. Cassie assumes the victim's identity. As Lexie, she pretends to have miraculously survived the stabbing and returns home, to a slightly dilapidated country house, which she shares with four other graduate students of English literature. Cassie's task is to discover who murdered Lexie and why. In order to do that she must persuade all the inhabitants of Whitethorn House (Daniel, Abby, Justin and Ralph) that she is Lexie, albeit with impaired memory following the trauma and drug induced coma.

Whitethorn House is a historical Big House, i.e. a country house on a large estate belonging to the "Protestant Ascendancy" and as such deeply rooted in the history of the struggle of the Catholic tenants for land rights in the 19th century, the trauma of the Great Potato Famine, and reprisals against the Protestant landlords in the years following the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921.[5] As Otto Rauchbauer states in his introductory sketch in *The Big House in Anglo-Irish Literature*, "For more than two centuries, the Big House has been a setting, a subject matter, a symbol, a motif [and] a theme in Irish fiction" (1992: 17). In setting the action of her novel in a Big House, Tana French not only draws on this literary tradition, but she uses it to mark a clear link between the past and the present. What is more, the house is more of a character than a setting, as it seems to be endowed with a power to enchant people and is an object of love so powerful that its inhabitants are prepared to murder one of their alternative family when she threatens the future of the house and their commune. French explains this seemingly uncanny power of the house in economic terms: inheriting Whitethorn House has provided Daniel March with economic freedom and enabled him to offer the same to a carefully selected group of friends. Once he made a legal donation of the house in equal parts to

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nerable and constructs them so that their past experiences are somehow reflected in the case they are investigating.

5 In the Polish edition of the novel, which was translated as *Lustrzane odbicie* and published by Albatros, the picture on the cover shows a dilapidated wooden cottage resembling a Polish "szałas" of the kind you see in the Tatra Mountains, or a ramshackle house from a Western movie. It is an unfortunate choice as it sends a completely wrong paratextual message to the reader.

all the members of the group, they became liberated from financial anxieties and tied into becoming an alternative family. Jean Gregorek points to the similarities between the attitudes and internal dynamics of Daniel's group and the Bloomsbury group. She observes that like Virginia Woolf and her friends, Daniel March and his friends cherish the newly gained economic freedom, which allows them to lead authentic, intellectual lives and to contest the materialistic and consumerist values of their generation (2014). Unlike the artists and intellectuals of the early 20th century, the inhabitants of Whitethorn House reject modernity. They insist on restricting the use of modern technological devices to a minimum. With no screens in the house, they type their essays on an old-fashioned typewriter and spend their evenings reading and listening to vinyl gramophone records. There is an economic and class paradox involved here. The young people may show contempt for their peers, whom they see as enslaved by their employers, and to Ralph's businessman father, only because through Daniel's inheritance they have come into possession of valuable real estate. Thus they become members of the privileged class, and historically their financial comfort derives from a great deal of suffering and exploitation of the dispossessed. Troubled Irish history is first evoked by the fact that Lexie's body is found in an abandoned famine cottage, and as if that was too subtle a hint, French makes a detour into a historical sub-plot of illicit romance between a village girl and a young man from the Big House. Cassie finds documents which at first lead her to believe that it is a typical story of seduction, illegitimate child and suicide, only to frustrate her and the reader's expectations when she discovers that the young woman a hundred years ago was more of a victim of the bigotry of her community than of the cruel landlord.

Nevertheless, the local community in the contemporary plot bring up the memory of the girl's suicide in order to blame it on the current inhabitants of the house. The animosity between Glenskeyhy village and Whitethorn House bears an uncanny resemblance to the historical conflict between the tenants and the landowners. Like the landowners of the past, the students are portrayed as members of a superior social class who can afford to pursue the life of leisure. Whereas the inhabitants of the village, who seem to have been bypassed by the economic boom of the Celtic Tiger, rely on benefits and see the students' refusal to sell the house and develop the estate into a hotel and golf course as an act of selfishly cruel arrogance. The students' insistence on preserving the house and the grounds in its entirety rules out what the villagers see to be the only chance for employment in the area. From the point of view of the village, the Big House today stands for the same degree of aloof arrogance and disregard for their needs as it did a hundred years before. Thus, it comes as no surprise that at the end of the novel Whitethorn House is burnt down, like so many Big Houses in the past and in Irish fiction, and like in many Big-House novels "the fate of the family is tied up with

the house" (Norris 2004: 114), so the group break up and are forced to face the material reality which they had been trying to avoid.

The relationship between Cassie Maddox and Whitethorn House is carefully constructed by the author and used as a pretext for reflections on the state of Irish society. Early on in the novel, Cassie offers a historical explanation for the housing boom of the Celtic Tiger:

> The country's passion for property is built into the blood, a current as huge and primal as desire. Centuries of being turned out on the roadside at a landlord's whim, helpless, teach your bones that everything in life hangs on owning your home. (French 2008: 53)

However, she remains unaffected by this "passion for property"; she lives in a rented bedsit and refuses to enter the property market as she considers the new houses to be overpriced and of low quality. Therefore, she will have no difficulty in identifying with Daniel's anticapitalist rant later in the plot. In this context, the emotional attachment which Cassie develops for Whitethorn House is highly significant. Like the narrator of du Maurier's *Rebecca*, she falls in love with the house at first sight, she is smitten by its architecture and setting, by the fact that the building seems to be part of the landscape: "it looked like it had grown there" (French 2008: 127). Gradually, as she feels more secure in her role as a member of the group, she becomes enchanted by the house as a mental construct. She taps into all the emotions and hopes that her housemates have invested in this space. Like the other members of the group, she derives comfort and strength from the routine of domestic rituals which they have developed. The communal cooking and eating, as well as working on renovation and interior decoration during the weekends contribute to the growth of a family atmosphere which Cassie (orphaned in childhood) finds hard to resist. She sees the students as a family, "the comforting kind that go on for years …" (ibid.: 188).

There are extensive sections in the novel which could fit into the critical category of "shelter writing", which Susan Fraiman defines as "a post-traumatic mode of realism" where "hyperinvestment in homemaking [functions] as compensation for domestic deprivation or difficulty" (2017: 20). Fraiman identifies this mode of writing in the narratives of social outcasts or castaways, people for whom domestic endeavours become urgent and precious, a form of self-expression and a means of survival (2017). All the inhabitants of Whitethorn House (including Cassie and the deceased Lexie) fit into Fraiman's description; the emotional investments which they make in the house are made all the more believable by their troubled family histories. When at some point the undercover operation becomes too risky and Cassie's superiors want to pull her out of the house, she insists on staying on, fantasizing about all the domestic pleasures she would have to forsake. Towards the end of the novel we see Cassie seduced by Daniel's charm and the fantasy of the ideal home which he created in Whitethorn House, only

to discover that the "comforting" family was only a delusion, with the group trapped by the financial arrangement into a relationship whose dynamic was ridden with secrets and power games. The action develops very fast from the night when Cassie/Lexie kisses Daniel. The kiss confirms his suspicions about her identity, and what could have been a love affair becomes a power struggle between two antagonists. Cassie discovers that Lexie was pregnant and planned to sell her share of the house to start a new life, a decision which the group saw as betrayal, even though, as Cassie discovers, they did not share Daniel's obsession with the house, especially after Lexie's stabbing in a group fight. In the end Cassie is shown to admit to herself that she fell for Daniel's charisma and for the old-fashioned way of life in Whitethorn House, which obfuscated her better judgement of the whole situation.

Jean Gregorek draws a controversial conclusion about the message of *The Likeness* when she says that "the frame of Cassie's [...] rehabilitation clearly implies that a working-through and rejection of the past – and with it, the anachronistic values of Whitethorn House – is a necessary part of the process of healing and moving ahead" (2014: 162). Conversely, if we take into account the relationship between Whitethorn House and Glenskeyhy village, the novel maintains that the working through of the historical traumas is as necessary as acknowledging that the old class divisions were replicated in the Ireland of the Celtic Tiger, where the old "land question" was merely replaced by access to qualifications and jobs. Although in the end it turns out that Lexie was not murdered by a man from the village, the relations between the village and the inhabitants of the Big House remain tense till the end. Tana French seems to indicate that the economic and class barriers of the past still exist in the Ireland of the Celtic Tiger and that the Big House remains a symbol of privilege in the twenty-first century.

Critical account of the present – housing crisis in *Broken Harbor*

The publication of *Broken Harbor* in 2012 with its focus on the economic and psychological consequences of the collapse of the Celtic Tiger is a logical step in Tana French's artistic progression. In *The Likeness* her characters expressed serious doubts about the future of those who were investing in overpriced, shoddy houses. In *Broken Harbor* we witness the detective, Michael Kennedy, reconstructing the history of one family who had made that very mistake. Although the novel still displays some elements of a police procedural, French clearly moves in the direction of the psychological thriller. Kennedy cannot identify obvious villains. There are no criminals who could be convicted for the murder of the Spain family, and there is no relief of justice for the readers. Instead, or maybe rather, therefore, French accuses the system: the government, the bankers and the developers. They emerge as the only agents which may be held responsible for the violent crime committed in the housing estate of Brianstown. The location of the

fictional crime fits the description of the estates which were most susceptible to the effects of the banking crisis according to a government report published in 2013: "the areas most affected [by the crash] were in the commuter belt that experienced the most rapid development towards the end of the boom. Most of these areas are about one to one and a half hours' commute from the capital where the bulk of 'ghost estates' are located" (O'Brien 2013 online).

Kennedy is investigating the murder of an entire family, inhabitants of the abandoned housing estate: two children have been smothered in their sleep, the father, Patrick Spain, died from stab wounds, and the mother, Jenny, has been taken to hospital with life threatening injuries. As Kennedy's investigation progresses, he discovers that the Spains are victims of the economic crisis and that the failed investment in the house lies at the centre of their tragedy. It is no surprise, therefore, that the "ghost estate" and the dream home, which turns into a horror trap, is the main focus of the narration. Maureen Reddy observes that Pat and Jenny Spain are "Irish everypeople" (2014: 88), they are a typical nuclear family with jobs in the new economy of the Celtic Tiger and ambitions to move up socially, which they try to realize through investment in real estate. They fall for the developer's pompous slogans, like the one on the signboard at the entrance to the estate: "Welcome to Ocean View, Brianstown. A new revelation in premier living. Luxury houses now viewing" (French 2012: 12-13), only to find after a few months that the developers have abandoned the estate without completing the building work, with no roads, no street lighting, no shops or any other facilities. In consequence, they have ended up in "the village of the damned" (French 2012: 13), with a house whose value has plummeted so that it cannot be sold, and a huge mortgage which they cannot pay off because Pat has been made redundant and Jenny is a stay-at-home mum. Kennedy talks to the family, friends and neighbours of the Spains, and finally, after he gains access to Pat's computer search history, he reconstructs the story of the psychological and emotional strain of the couple fighting with financial difficulties. He discovers that the Spains were too embarrassed to reveal the extent of their financial problems to their family or friends, and too ashamed to ask for help. They fell into a chasm of social isolation exacerbated by the conditions on the "ghost estate" where they lived. As Pat developed a psychotic obsession with a mysterious animal, which he believed to be hiding in the attic, Jenny focused on protecting their children from the knowledge of their financial ruin and of their father's deteriorating mental health. In the end, Jenny also suffers a nervous break-down. When the children start talking about the animal, she discovers that she has failed to protect them from the knowledge. She decides to murder her family rather than have them face the humiliation of their insanity.

Tana French draws on the literary tradition of the gothic in order to create an anti-narrative of domesticity in which the "trophy house" turns into a curse which drives the Spains to ruin and insanity, to eventually become the house of horror and the scene of

a bloodbath. As Brian McHale observes: "nothing is more domestic, more normal than a middle-class house, so nothing is more disruptive than other-worldly agents penetrating and 'taking over' a house" (1987: 77). To the Spains the house is haunted: Pat believes that his house is infested by a wild animal, but Jennifer (rightly) suspects that the house is visited by an intruder while they are out. Both Spains are possessed by the house. When they lose control and break down, they act their anxiety out in the house. In both cases their actions are marked by excess, which is one of the most effective narrative strategies of the gothic (Becker 1999). Pat and Jennifer perform an excessive or distorted form of the rituals assigned to the genders in a conservative nuclear family. Pat becomes a preposterous protective father. He is so obsessed with keeping his family safe that, in his attempts to catch the imaginary animal, he sets traps, installs baby monitors and eventually breaks holes in the walls, thus making life in the house unbearable for his wife and children. Jenny, in turn, tries to compensate for their dire straits by overinvesting in housekeeping. She keeps on frantically cleaning and arranging the ornaments, she produces meals they can ill afford, and in the end she tries to "arrange" the children so that they "make Daddy happy" (French 2012: 321). Her frenzied instructions on how the children should act when their father comes home produce a truly gothic effect, which "foregrounds the hidden horrors of a unifying, universalising image of Woman" (Becker 1999: 6). By showing the evolution of a perfect suburban housewife into a gothic monster, the author also subscribes to "the shattering of apparently sacrosanct notions of the benign and nurturing femininity" (Fogarty 2000: 64) in Irish fiction.

Freud's remarks on *das Unheimliche,* another trope characteristic of the gothic, resonate with the psychological situation created in the novel. According to Freud: "this uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and long-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression [...] something which ought to have remained hidden but which has come to light" (1953-74: 241). Indeed, the excesses of the Spains and their eventual mental break-downs result not only from the insidious trauma of constant stress, but from their insistent repressing of their financial predicament. While they are both prepared to go to great lengths to conceal their plight from family and friends, they do not admit even to themselves that they have lost control of their situation. Maureen Reddy claims that "Jenny's secrecy suggests that she thinks troubles are not fully real unless they are publicly known, an attitude which links her to [...] the central role of repression in Irish cultural memory" (2014: 89).

Finally, the estate of Brianstown and the house of the Spains display gothic features, albeit with a 21st-century twist, i.e. there is a sharp contrast between their appearances and reality, or between what had been promised in the developer's brochures and what became of the house. Instead of the "self-contained haven with all the premier facilities of cutting-edge luxe living on your doorstep" (French 2012: 64), the Spains end up in a

"ghost estate," with no facilities, no public transport and abandoned construction sites. Even the police officer, Kennedy, finds it disturbing: "Ocean View looked worse every time. [...] I half expected feral dogs to slink up around the car when I stopped, last survivors to come staggering and moaning out of skeleton houses" (ibid.: 317).

The unfinished houses provide shelter to the stalker, Jenny's former boyfriend, who begins to spy on the family out of genuine concern, but unwittingly contributes to Jenny's nervous break-down. The fact that the glass wall of the "kitchen-cum-dining room-cum-playroom, running the whole back wall of the house" (French 2012: 20), which was meant to offer luxury views of the sea to the inhabitants of the house, exposes them to prying eyes and makes them vulnerable to the intruder, is a gothic transformation. In a similar twist, the baby monitors, which Pat had placed around the house to catch the sounds of the animal which he is convinced lives in the attic, cross-circuit with the baby monitor in the house of the neighbours, and all the embarrassing details of the Spains' spiral of insanity become available to the spiteful Gogans. The fact that the Gogans do not try to help, or even feel sorry for the Spains, is symptomatic of the lack of community spirit on the estate – that "traditional Irish society [is] communitarian and caring" (Fogarty 2000: 64) is yet another myth shattered by the realities of the Celtic Tiger and its aftermath.

In her very insightful analysis of *The Likeness* and *Broken Harbor,* Jean Gregorek criticizes Tana French for her preoccupation with "anxieties of the troubled middle class", which she condenses "into a quarantine-able threat with a recognizable human face" (2014: 72). According to the critic: "The generic demands of the procedural call for the identification and removal of an individual offender and not an analysis of a complex system. The impact of the criminogenic structures of postmodern finance capitalism may be registered, but these structures themselves remain beyond scrutiny" (ibid.: 72). However, I believe that such reading of these two novels fails to take into account the relentless attack on the capitalist mechanisms behind the housing bubble and the economic crash of 2008, which French clearly blames for the human tragedies she describes. The reader is left with a strong sense that the order in the home of Ireland is distorted so badly that a highly commendable desire for a house of your own, which so many of us share, may lead individuals to take drastic actions.

The Searcher – "the skull beneath the skin of the countryside"[6]

Tana French's latest novel to date is a departure from her previous work, since it is the first to be set outside Dublin or its immediate suburbs, and the first with an American

6 Macfarlane, Robert. "The eeriness of the English countryside." *The Guardian,* 10 Apr. 2015, www.theguardian.com/books/2015/apr/10/eeriness-english-countryside-robert-macfarlane.

principal character. It is also unusual in that it uses third-person narration (only one other of her novels, *The Secret Place*, is not narrated by the voice of the detective). It is not a typical police procedural as the main protagonist, Cal Hooper, has retired from Chicago PD and bought a ramshackle cottage in the West of Ireland to recover from the break-up of his marriage and the stress of working in an increasingly violent and racist environment. He is, therefore, deprived of the privilege of his badge and free from the constraints of working for law enforcement. The novel is stylised as a western: the central plot pattern is that of a stranger who comes to a small town. The title alludes to *The Searchers,* a classic western from 1956, directed by John Ford, starring John Wayne in the role of a Civil War veteran who tries to find his abducted niece.

Cal Hooper is approached by a teenager, Trey Reddy, who persuades him to use his skills and experience to find out what happened to Brendan, Trey's 19-year-old brother, who went missing six months before. The Reddys are a dysfunctional family. Sheila, Brendan's mother, cannot cope with providing for her four younger children, so she prefers to assume that her son has left for Dublin or London. Trey cannot persuade the indolent local police force, the Garda, that this cannot be the case simply because Brendan would not abandon them like their father before. Cal starts making inquiries, pretending that he needs Brendan to help him rewire electricity in his cottage, only to discover that various hitherto friendly neighbours become hostile and clearly mind his nosy questions. By the time Cal finds Brendan's body and solves the case, he discovers that his initial assumptions about the rural idyll of Ardnakelty, and Ireland in general, were completely wrong. He suspected that Brendan got into trouble with gangsters from Dublin who were selling drugs in the area, but it comes to him as a shock when he discovers that Brendan's killing, and a whole campaign of violence which was supposed to warn him and Trey off the investigation, was orchestrated by his friendly neighbour, Mart Lavin and his cronies, who are sheep farmers in daytime but turn into cruel vigilantes at night.

Rural Ireland in *The Searcher* is a lawless country; like the American frontier in the westerns, Ardnakelty is too far from the centre of power for the police or other state institutions to operate there. Mart Lavin sees the modern world as particularly dangerous to young men:

> 'When I was a young lad, we knew what we could want and how to get it, and we knew we'd have something to show for it at the end of the day. A crop, or a flock, or a house, or a family. There is great strength in that. Now there's too many things you're told to want, there's no way to get them all, and once you're done trying, what have you got to show for it at the end? [...] The women do be grand anyway; they're adaptable. But the young men don't know what to be doing with themselves at all. [...they] are hanging themselves, or they are getting drunk and driving into ditches, or they are overdosing on the aul' heroin,

> or they are packing their bags. I don't want to see this place a wasteland, every farm looking the way yours did before you came along: falling to wrack and ruin, waiting for some Yank to take a fancy to it and make it into his hobby'. (French 2020: 358)

He takes it upon himself to protect the local community from the Dublin gangsters. When Brendan tried to open a lab and produce synthetic drugs for them, Mart and his cronies decided to beat him up, but the boy hit his head on a metal gas cylinder and died on the spot.

Like a classic western, this novel is about a moral code and justice. Mart's sense of morality and justice is perverse; his form of protecting the community cannot be justified. However, he is not a stereotypical cold blooded patriarch. He puts on the act of being a garrulous country bumpkin, but he offers Cal short lectures on EU farming regulations, and on the benefits of Irish antibiotics-free bacon, as well as gay rights and gay marriage (which he voted for). He is a homemaker who cooks elaborate exotic dishes, distinguishing between the taste of Italian and Spanish olive oil, which comes as a surprise to Cal, given Mart's penchant for pink meringue cookies.

Tana French undermines gender stereotypes: Trey Reddy, whom Cal first encounters as a wild, almost feral teenager, with a shaven head, wearing a dirty track suit, turns out to be a girl, who, nevertheless, shows a talent for carpentry and shooting. Her mother is far from nurturing and caring. At some point, under pressure from Mart, she subjects her daughter to a ferociously brutal beating. As if to redress the balance in the community, French also introduces the figure of a middle-aged widow, Helen, who is surprisingly reasonable, honest and in control of her life. But the chief homemaker in the village is Cal. He treats the tasks of renovating the house as therapy first for himself, then, when he senses that he is dealing with a troubled child, for Trey. The detailed descriptions of their harmonious cooperation in the restoration of the wooden desk evoke a healing ritual, in which the slow process of polishing wood has the effect of soothing the troubled mind.

Susan Fraiman, in her book entitled: *Extreme Domesticity,* proposes to "claim domesticity while wrenching it away from such things as compulsory heterosexuality, selfless maternity, class snobbery, racial purity, the wanton display of stuff, and the illusion of a safely barricaded life" (2017: 4). For that purpose she focuses on "alternative homemakers" whom she defines as "outsiders of normative domesticity" (ibid.: 5). Although houses and alternative homemakers feature prominently in *The Searcher,* like in all French's other novels, what is of interest for this paper is the focus on the rural countryside as home and French's antipastoral mode of writing about rural Ireland.

Tana French engages in a debate with the myth of rural Ireland as a "site of idyllic pastoral retreat" (O'Connor 2017: 91), which, according to Maureen O'Connor, had been perpetuated by the British since the 18th century (2017). What is more, since the 1950s,

"when Ireland stepped up development of its critically important tourist industry, eager to welcome visitors, especially those with well-lined pockets, tourist board promotional material constructed an idyllic Ireland filled with pastel-coloured villages and friendly natives" (Schofield 2013: 1176)[7].

By focalising the narration through the eyes of an outsider from a big American city, Tana French can lead her readers through various stages of his encounter with the Irish countryside. He admits complete ignorance about the country: "The West of Ireland looked beautiful on the internet …" (French 2020: 2), but he falls in love with the beauty of the landscape and surrounding nature:

> The sky, dappled in subtle gradations of grey, goes on forever; so do the fields, coded in shades of green by their different uses, divided up by sprawling hedges, dry stone walls and the odd narrow back road. Away to the north, a line of low mountains rolls along the horizon. Cal's eyes are still getting used to looking this far, after all those years of city blocks. Landscape is one of the few things he knows of where the reality doesn't let you down. (ibid.: 2)

Any seasoned reader of Tana French novels will guess that Cal must be wrong to believe that just because he has moved to a small and beautiful place he can assume that it is safe and peaceful. The author complicates the notions of retreat and haven, employing a truly anti-pastoral mode of writing, thus offering a corrective to the myth of rural Ireland as an idyll. The descriptions of beautiful landscapes and bucolic scenes, like "Mart's dog trotting beside the sheep as they plod peacefully towards their pen" (ibid.: 4), are accompanied by Cal's careful observations of nature: "the rooks have got hold of something. […] Whatever the thing is, it's on the small side and still moving. […] The thing on the lawn twists wildly, shaking the long grass. A big daddy rook jumps closer, aims one neat ferocious stab of his beak, and the thing goes still" (ibid.: 1). When Cal tries to win the rooks over by offering scraps, the birds "yell" and "laugh" (ibid.: 1) at him. As Glenn Harper comments, the birds are anthropomorphized "as a microcosm of the local natives and yet are also ruthless in the totally natural manner of the animal kingdom" (2020 online). The parallels between the violence and cruelty which Cal

7 Interestingly enough, this image of Ireland on the big screen was first promoted in another John Ford film with John Wayne. *The Quiet Man,* released in 1952, was a very loose adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew,* with Wayne in the role of the Returned Yank (an emigrant returning from America). The film was shot in Ireland and "stimulated cultural and 'roots' tourism" (Schofield 2013: 1191). It also popularised the figure of the Returned Yank, which has since then served in popular culture to explore (among others) the tensions between rural and urban life, since his urban, materialistic American ways allow his Irish compatriots to define themselves in contrast as "authentically rural, communal and old-fashioned" (Schofield 2013: 1183).

observes in nature and in the community of Ardnakelty will only intensify as the story progresses. At night Cal hears the sounds of the owl and the fox hunting, but these are soon accompanied by the sounds of "the engines revving" (ibid.: 4) at 3 a.m., which turn out to be those of the gangsters from Dublin racing their Hummers in the fields. Then more sinister events take place: farmers have their sheep killed and horribly mutilated, and then Cal is given a warning by the locals to stop asking questions about Brendan's disappearance, which he ignores until Trey's mother is forced to beat her daughter to a pulp, and when this does not help, Cal is attacked by masked men with hurling sticks. If you pay close attention and count all the mentions of violent attacks on strangers trying to stop badger baiting, the instances of bullying at school, domestic violence, suicide, fights among teenagers, extortion and vigilantism, then the excess of brutality in this small community reaches preposterous proportions.

Since these events are either hinted at, or recounted in a dark-humorous tone, their implications do not strike the reader immediately, especially that French does not exploit violence for the sake of violence or for melodramatic effects. In her plot she offers an explanation which is at the same time an accusation of the indolence of the state and its institutions. The West of Ireland is shown as a lawless place, where rural poverty threatens the lives of children, where schools, social services and Garda have failed the local population, and the beauty of the landscape cannot disguise this brutal reality. When Cal discovers the grip that the Dublin gangsters have on the local youth he reflects on how the landscape has misled him into an idealised perception of the place:

> The morning has turned lavishly beautiful. The autumn sun gives the greens of the fields an impossible, mythic radiance and transforms the back roads into light-muddled paths where a goblin with a riddle, or a pretty maiden with a basket, could be waiting around every gorse-and-bramble bend. Cal is in no mood to appreciate any of it. He feels like this specific beauty is central to the illusion that lulled him into stupidity, [...] If all this had happened in some suburban clot of tract homes and ruler-measured lawns, he would have kept his wits about him. (ibid.: 320)

In *The Searcher,* French reaches beyond the confines of the urban and suburban environment, only to leave the reader with equally dark conclusions about the social reality of Ireland as she did in the previous novels. What is new and original here is the ecocritically informed diagnosis which Maureen Corrigan succinctly presented in her review of *The Searcher* in the *Washington Post*: "By the novel's end any place – even the grimiest, meanest streets of hard-boiled crime fiction – seem preferable to the sinister and silent watchfulness of the lush Irish countryside" (2020 online). In her venturing out of the metropolitan centre to the countryside, French constructs characters who focus on homemaking and domesticity even in the most unlikely of circumstances.

Conclusions

Although Tana French is widely acclaimed as the author of popular page turners, she has managed to construct a very elaborate critique of the state-of-the-nation within the criminal plots of her novels. She has done so by domesticating crime, that is by consistently presenting the danger and threat as coming from within the family or the close community and by linking its causes to unresolved class tensions, and the failings of the state and public services, in other words, by insisting that the problems of Irish society always originate at home. Thus she proves to be a highly perceptive observer of, and commentator on, the social and economic anxieties of modern Ireland. In view of the above, it is hard to overestimate the role of the house and of the domestic rituals of homemaking in the novels of Tana French. Houses are desired, fought over, defended and lost, while homemakers may be obsessed, desperate and violent.

In *The Likeness*, nostalgia for the past evoked through the beauty of Whitethorn House is undermined by the proximity of the ruins of a famine cottage. The novel's protagonists express serious doubts about the economic viability of the housing market, which establishes a direct link with the plot of *Broken Harbor*. In both novels the houses are endowed with agency and exert uncanny powers over their inhabitants in keeping with the gothic convention. Of the three novels discussed here, only *The Searcher* depicts the house as a shelter; a place where homemaking offers comfort and solace to the troubled protagonist. Indeed, the house is a much needed safe haven in view of the threat of violence looming in the pristine countryside outside. That violence is attributed to the underlying economic crisis which drives young men away from the land or into criminal activity. While in *The Likeness* and *Broken Harbor,* the author alludes to the Big House novel and the gothic novel respectively, in *The Searcher* she draws on the popular motif of migration. In all three novels the house and home lie at the centre of the plots. Tana French builds suspense by frustrating her readers' expectations of conventional domesticity, while offering them the unexpected satisfaction of dialogue with Irish literary and cultural tradition.

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DOI: 10.15290/CR.2022.36.1.04

Spiritual and material dimensions of home in J. M.Coetzee's *Age of Iron*

Abstract. The aim of the article is to analyse the living conditions presented in J. M. Coetzee's novel *Age of Iron* with reference to differences between the white and black communities of Cape Town in South Africa. It argues that differences in the conditions of living related to social and racial divisions are also reflected in the visions of the afterlife. The protagonist of the novel, Mrs Curren, portrays white people as living in comfort and dying in old age due to natural causes. The moment of their death constitutes a transition from earthly life to spiritual or incorporeal existence. In contrast, black people die young in apartheid fights. The dismal portrayal of the destruction of black people's housing corresponds to Mrs Curren's naturalistic descriptions of the dead bodies of young black activists. Their death does not involve a transformation into a spirit that has shed its body; death offers no relief, since their bodies and souls remain in "African hell".

Keywords: J.M. Coetzee, *Age of Iron*, home, house, spirituality, materialism, naturalism.

J. M. Coetzee's novel *Age of Iron* from 1990 portrays the life of its main protagonist, Mrs Elizabeth Curren, who is an elderly woman living in Cape Town. An important theme in the novel is the problem of housing conditions and their differences between different social and racial groups. Georg Gugelberger classifies the novel as "the new fiction of the unhomed", which tackles important issues of homelessness and migrancy (Gugelberger 1995: 133). He stresses the close connection between "the homeless" and "the uncanny": the latter word "in the original sense of the German word *unheimlich*" means "*unbehaust*, without a home/*Heim*)", which "makes this novel so uncanny" (Gugelberger 1995: 131). The problem of homelessness may be discussed in a broader context of the presentation of homes and houses of different characters in *Age of Iron*. This article will argue that differences in the conditions of living related to social and racial divisions between Cape Town people are also reflected in the conditions of existence of their souls after death.

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Age of Iron uses first-person narration with Mrs Curren as the narrator. It may be classified as an "epistolary novel" (Woessner 2017: 154) or as written in an "epistolary mode" (Worthington 2011: 115): it has the form of letters from Mrs Curren to her daughter who emigrated to the United States. The letters describe what Mrs Curren witnesses at the end of her life in South Africa in the apartheid era. At the beginning of the novel, the protagonist is diagnosed with terminal stage cancer. Shortly after the diagnosis, she meets a homeless man, Verceuil, who came to her garden and stays in her house. Mrs Curren employs a black servant, Florence, as a domestic help. Florence's son Bheki fights, together with John and some other friends, with apartheid soldiers. In one of these fights Bheki is killed, which is followed by John's apprehension by the police. The novel ends with an ambiguous scene that may be interpreted as the moment of Mrs Curren's death in her house.

As noted by Gillian Dooley, the title of the novel refers to Hesiod's classification of ages, in which the current Age of Iron is preceded by other ages: Golden, Silver, Bronze, and Heroic. Hesiod made no predictions concerning possible future ages after the Age of Iron (2016: 102-103). In Hesiod's *Works and Days*, the Age of Iron is described as the present era, in which "men never rest from labour and sorrow by day, and from perishing by night; and the gods shall lay sore trouble upon them" (Hesiod 170, qtd. in Dooley 2016: 102). According to Hesiod, this age is characterised by suffering and injustice: "Strength will be right and reverence will cease to be; and the wicked will hurt the worthy man, speaking false words against him [...] [T]here will be no help against evil" (Hesiod 170, qtd. in Dooley 2016: 103). To some degree, this injustice is also reflected in differences in the conditions of living of the white and black people in South Africa, as well as in the protagonist's visions concerning their afterlives.

As pointed out by Olfa Belgacem, colonial literature usually describes the bodies of representatives of non-white races as either imperfect, ailing, or in some other way "marked". Consequently, black people's bodies are usually presented "as a foil to the superior, perfect" or idealised white body (Belgacem 2021: 29). Yet, as illustrated by Belgacem, this tendency is modified in post-colonial novels such as those exemplified by Coetzee's fiction, in which white characters also suffer from malformations of their bodies. This change in the representation of white bodies can be noticed in *Age of Iron,* in which the main protagonist observes morbid changes in her body during the final stage of cancer (Belgacem 2021: 33). It may be argued, however, that it is still possible to discern some contrast between the representation of the black and white races, yet it is shifted to differences between the conditions of their possible afterlives rather than their actual physical bodies. These differences are also reflected in housing conditions during the earthly lives of these two racial groups. It is possible to distinguish several categories of citizens whose conditions of living are described in the novel. These different categories include Mrs Curren, Vercueil and black people. Moreover, Mrs Curren often evokes

the idea of imaginary souls, whose conditions of existence also reflect differences in habitation between two distinct groups of people who were their earthly embodiment.

Mrs Curren is a representative of the white community of Cape Town. As pointed out by Carrol Clarkson, *Age of Iron*, just like *Life & Times of Michael K* and *Disgrace*, has a very highly specified location: the characters of these novels "are meticulously tracked in the recognizable co-ordinates of named towns, roads, and landmarks of South Africa's Cape regions" (2009: 133). In *Age of Iron,* Mrs Curren's house is located in the area of Breda Street, Schoonder Street and Vrede Street (Coetzee 1990: 145). Therefore, it may be inferred that her house is located in or near the Gardens district, the inner-city suburb in Cape Town. This is an affluent area, which is nowadays inhabited mostly by young professionals, with a plethora of chic restaurants, pubs, shops and art galleries (Minford 2018). In Mrs Curren's words, this area represents the history of the domination of white people in Cape Town:

> Did these things really happen? Yes, these things happened. There is no more to be said about it. They happened a stone's throw from Breda Street and Schoonder Street and Vrede Street, where a century ago the patricians of Cape Town gave orders that there be erected spacious homes for themselves and their descendants in perpetuity, foreseeing nothing of the day when, in their shadows, the chickens would come home to roost. (Coetzee 1990: 145)

Mrs Curren's house may be perceived as a symbol of the past but also as a shelter for people who come to visit her. Mrs Curren is a former Classics professor (Worthington 2011: 115), which is reflected in her frequent references to the past, Classical mythology and culture. Mrs Curren's house also gives shelter to Vercueil and young black boys. Her home is a pleasant place that offers comfort and illustrates "Mrs. Curren's daily habits of orderliness, cleanliness, and thrift", as emphasised by Derek Attridge (2004: 99).

The connections with the past and the atmosphere of peace which characterise Mrs Curren's dwelling place are also reflected in her images concerning her possible future afterlife. While contemplating life and death, Mrs Curren reveals her beliefs in the existence of both material bodies and spiritual souls. As observed by Jarad Zimbler, the "soul" is an important concept in the novel, since the word appears at least 37 times; only in three cases does its use seem idiomatic (Zimbler 2015: 173). The prevailing non-idiomatic occurrences often refer to "the transition from life to death", in which the soul "identifies that part of the self that survives" (Zimbler 2015: 173). Approaching her imminent death, Mrs Curren consistently identifies herself with her soul rather than her body. She perceives her material parts as merely tools that can be used as long as the body functions properly. The body seems to be something alien to her. She feels as though she was forced to take care of something that she does not truly identify with.

Consequently, she wonders why she should take her legs "to bed with [...] [her] night after night and pack them in under the sheets, and pack the arms in too, higher up near the face, and lie there sleepless amid the clutter" (Coetzee 1990: 11). Likewise, she feels disconnected from her internal organs and their processes: the abdomen "with its dead gurglings" and the heart, which seems to be beating for no reason (Coetzee 1990: 11). Her bodily parts are not integral to her but rather something distant, since she asks: "What have they to do with me?" (Coetzee 1990: 11). She feels betrayed by the body since it has developed cancer. As stated by Olfa Belgacem, Mrs Curren "experiences a certain alienation from her own body" (2021: 33). This is in line with another metaphor in the novel, in which Mrs Curren portrays her body as a house in which her soul lives. At the end of the novel, she says, "I will draw a veil soon. This was never meant to be the story of a body, but of the soul it houses" (Coetzee 1990: 170).

At the beginning of the novel, shortly after having been informed about the cancer, Mrs Curren tries to imagine possible destinations of souls. She compares heaven to everyday places, such as a hotel lobby and a crowded bus. The first image seems peaceful although it is simultaneously rather boring: heaven is a place of rest, in which elderly people are sitting around, listening to music, free of any pain:

> Heaven. I imagine heaven as a hotel lobby with a high ceiling and the Art of Fugue coming softly over the public address system. Where one can sit in a deep leather armchair and be without pain. A hotel lobby full of old people dozing, listening to the music, while souls pass and re-pass before them like vapours, the souls of all. A place dense with souls. (Coetzee 1990: 22)

Mrs Curren describes souls as immaterial, yet in her images they wear clothes, although of "an abstract kind":

> Clothed? Yes, clothed, I suppose; but with empty hands. A place to which you bring nothing but an abstract kind of clothing and the memories inside you, the memories that make you. A place without incident. (Coetzee 1990: 22)

This place is a kind of waiting room, although there is nothing to wait for, which makes it similar to "a railway station after the abolition of trains" (Coetzee 1990: 22). The souls lazily spend their time, contemplating memories of their earthly life: "Listening to the heavenly unending music, waiting for nothing, paging idly through the store of memories" (Coetzee 1990: 22). In "Perversions and Reversals of Childhood and Old Age in J. M. Coetzee's *Age of Iron*" Christiane Bimberg recognises in this scene "romantic-escapist" elements that characterise "a carefree zone" (Bimberg 2005/2006: 74). As argued by Emanuela Tegla, this vision of heaven corresponds to the lifestyle of affluent

social groups. Tegla enumerates several features of this vision which may be interpreted as congruent with the bourgeois viewpoint on life and afterlife. First, heaven is located in a hotel, which represents "holiday, rest, comfort, respite from real, everyday life" (Tegla 2012: 975). Second, the hotel lobby has "high ceilings", which are typical of "aristocratic houses" (Tegla 2012: 975). Third, armchairs are covered with leather, which symbolises financial prosperity and presumably "attention to style" (Tegla 2012: 975). Fourth, the classical music that is streamed in heaven can be associated with the traditional sense of style characterising wealthy people. Fifth, the souls in this heaven do nothing: they are "dozing" so they simply relax without any obligations or duties to fulfil. These circumstances create the image of heaven as "born from a bourgeois imagination, which indulges in wishful thinking for elements of bourgeois well-being and comfort in afterlife" (Tegla 2012: 975). Yet, these peaceful images of heaven do not make Mrs Curren forget about her real home on earth. She worries about what may happen to her material house after her death. She is concerned about its condition and its future inhabitants:

> Will it be possible to sit in that armchair listening to the music without fretting about the house closed up and dark, the cats prowling in the garden, unfed, cross? It must be possible, or what is heaven for? Yet dying without succession is – forgive me for saying this – so unnatural. For peace of mind, for peace of soul, we need to know who comes after us, whose presence fills the rooms we were once at home in. (Coetzee 1990: 22)

Later, when she sees Verceuil smoking a cigarette outside her house, she starts to imagine sexual contact with him, which fills her with disgust but also makes her consider a different vision of heaven, in which people would have close contact with each other. This idea brings to her mind a portrayal of heaven in which people would stand in a crowded bus. In this afterlife people would not have any privacy and would be forced to constantly touch each other, despite having been transformed into souls:

> Like travelling in a bus in Sicily, pressed face to face, body to body against a strange man. Perhaps that is what the afterlife will be like: not a lobby with armchairs and music but a great crowded bus on its way from nowhere to nowhere. Standing room only: on one's feet forever, crushed against strangers. The air thick, stale, full of sighs and murmurs: Sorry, sorry. Promiscuous contact. Forever under the gaze of others. An end to private life. (Coetzee 1990: 27)

As argued by Emanuela Tegla, this image is much less inviting than the first one. In this vision, boundaries between individuals become blurred and they all become just parts of a conglomerate. Tegla points out that the presence of others in the bus is so overwhelming that there is absolutely no privacy. Even though people in the bus are

strangers to each other, everyone is merely a "part of a crowd" (Tegla 2012: 976). There is no escape from the "suffocating presence of others" (Tegla 2012: 976). Tegla argues that this scene may symbolize the guilt and shame felt by the social group that is represented by Mrs Curren. In Tegla's opinion, white people in South Africa may feel collectively responsible for the discrimination of the black race. Just like their souls in the afterlife, citizens of the privileged class become fused and united in their responsibility for social injustice: "This holds true in real life as well, therefore the shame the protagonist feels, which derives from a sense of collective guilt" (Tegla 2012: 976).

Not only does Mrs Curren compare heaven to ordinary places, but she also makes reverse comparisons, in which buildings or parts of the empirical world are compared to possible destinations of souls such as spiritual realms described in mythology or religion. When Mrs Curren visits John in hospital, she can see other elderly people who are ill, which makes her feel uncomfortable and overwhelmed. She starts to feel oppressed and intimidated by the vast number of ailing people who suddenly appear in front of her eyes. The hospital seems a democratic meeting place for patients that represent both racial groups ("black and white") and both genders ("men and women"), which are united by the same condition: waiting for death (Coetzee 1990: 63). Yet, Mrs Curren, due to her privileged social status, is able to escape this place and go back to her own house, which offers comfort even when she is terminally ill (Coetzee 1990: 63-64). The protagonist believes that other patients can guess that she, just like them, is facing her death: she senses that they are "catching unerringly on [...] [her] smell of death" (Coetzee 1990: 63). Mrs Curren feels almost guilty that she does not have to spend her final days in hospital but can live in her house instead. People around her seem to look at her as an "impostor" who leaves the hospital at will; they seem to be jealous and eager to draw her back to the place of their own suffering. They seem to demand from her to suffer just as they do in this disheartening institution: "Don't you know the rule? This is the house of shadow and suffering through which you must pass on the way to death" (Coetzee 1990: 63-64). It seems unjust that she can come back to her cosy house whereas "none of the condemned flee back to the air, the light, the bounteous world above" (Coetzee 1990: 64). In Mrs Curren's eyes, the stay in hospital is an obligatory punishment for the terminally ill: "a term in prison before the execution" (Coetzee 1990: 64). Mrs Curren compares the hospital to Hades patrolled by dogs, "[o]ld hounds" resembling Cerberus (Coetzee 1990: 64). Finally, she manages to escape this dismal place and come back to her own part of town, which fills her simultaneously with relief and guilt: "Hades this place, and I a fugitive shade. I shuddered as I passed through the doorway" (Coetzee 1990: 64).

Soon afterwards Mrs Curren's comparisons become even more sinister when she witnesses the horrors of apartheid fights in South Africa. When she sees the dead bodies of Bheki and his friends, she fully realises the cruelty of the country she lives in. This motivates her to describe the entire African continent as hell or Hades. Instead of being

abstract realms, Hades or hell may have an actual realization in Africa. In her metaphor, her native land, with its naturally hot climate, is compared to the infernal place where people act in an evil way:

> Hades, Hell: the domain of ideas. Why has it ever been necessary that hell be a place on its own in the ice of Antarctica or down the pit of a volcano? Why can hell not be at the foot of Africa, and why can the creatures of hell not walk among the living? (Coetzee 1990: 101)

As argued by Belgacem, when Mrs Curren witnesses the crimes of the apartheid era in South Africa, it fills her with feelings of shame and guilt (2021: 99) since she belongs to the privileged white community. Mrs Curren often describes her neighbours and friends who are representatives of the white community as "full-bellied neighbors leading an easy life", which is juxtaposed against the difficult life of black people, including Florence and her husband, who have to work hard to earn their living (Belgacem 2021: 143). The white people are portrayed "in scenes pertaining to holidays" whereas the black citizens are described "in scenes of labor" (Belgacem 2021: 144). The white community's privileges manifest themselves not only in better conditions of living, but also in the circumstances of death: Mrs Curren dies as an elderly person due to a natural disease rather than in young age in an act of extreme violence like the black boys.

Age of Iron depicts significant differences in the conditions of living between white and black communities in South Africa. It may be argued that these differences are also reflected in Mrs Curren's images of the conditions of the afterlife of people belonging to these two different racial groups. On the one hand, white people enjoy affluent earthly life. Moreover, in her descriptions of the afterlife of people belonging to her own class, Mrs Curren reveals a spiritual orientation towards death, which is treated as a threshold to another, eternal existence. On the other hand, black people suffer dismal conditions during their earthly existence, which also finds its reflection in Mrs Curren's imaginings of what happens to them after death. In describing their death, Mrs Curren focuses on the crude, materialist aspects of their lives. She imagines that their afterlife will not offer any consolation since it will be a continuation of their earthly hardship.

In his monograph *J. M. Coetzee. Truth, Meaning, Fiction*, Anthony Uhlmann compares Mrs Curren and Verceuil's interactions with the black community to "Dante and Virgil entering hell" (2020: 119). However, Verceuil is not interested in being involved in the social conflict, so when Mrs Curren is asked by Florence to come to Guguletu, a black township near the city, Verceuil refuses to go with them so the women have to set off alone. When Mrs Curren leaves Cape Town to get to the black township, she leaves the affluent districts that are characterised by comfortable conditions of living. The passage between areas inhabited by white people and black people is a transitional area, which Mrs Curren metaphorically describes as haunted by "wraiths" and "spirits":

> Full of misgiving I drove on into the darkness. [...] The roadside, along which, at this hour, thousands of men would ordinarily have been plodding to work, was empty. Swirls of mist floated toward us, embraced the car, floated away. Wraiths, spirits. Aornos this place: birdless. I shivered, met Florence's gaze. (Coetzee 1990: 83)

In "'Where Is Hope?': Coetzee's Rewriting of Dante in *Age of Iron*" David Hoegberg describes this visit as "the most Dantean section of the novel" (1998: 30), finding various correlations between Coetzee's descriptions of the scene and Dante's *Inferno*. When Mrs Curren comes to the area of Guguletu, she portrays the ghastly destruction of black people's houses. Hoegberg points out that the novel refers to an actual historical event – "the destruction of squatter camps at Crossroads in May and June of 1986" (1998: 32). These squatter camps, called the "Crossroads complex", were "adjacent to the black township of Guguletu", and their destruction "resulted in the deaths of an estimated 100 people and in homelessness for about 70 000" (Cole 1987: 146 qtd. in Hoegberg 1998: 32).

In Guguletu as described in *Age of Iron*, black people live in shanties made of simple materials such as wood, iron and plastic. Their conditions of living are rough and uncomfortable, not providing enough protection against natural threats such as flood or fire. Mrs Curren describes the black people's area as a makeshift arrangement:

> The path widened, then came to an end in a wide, flat pond. On the far side of the pond the shanties started, the lowest-lying cluster surrounded by water, flooded. Some built sturdily of wood and iron, others no more than skins of plastic sheeting over frames of branches, they straggled north over the dunes as far as I could see. (Coetzee 1990: 87)

She witnesses the effects of the devastation of the area in apartheid fights. The shanties did not provide permanent protection or shelter since they could be easily damaged. They were burnt by arsonists during the fights:

> We were at the rear of a crowd hundreds strong looking down upon a scene of devastation: shanties burnt and smouldering, shanties still burning, pouring forth black smoke. Jumbles of furniture, bedding, household objects stood in the pouring rain. Gangs of men were at work trying to rescue the contents of the burning shacks, going from one to another, putting out the fires; or so I thought till with a shock it came to me that these were no rescuers but incendiaries, that the battle I saw them waging was not with the flames but with the rain. (Coetzee 1990: 87-88)

Mrs Curren compares the scene of the destruction of the shanties to a funeral ceremony. People who suddenly became homeless are looking at their destroyed houses with sorrow and grief that resemble the loss felt by mourners:

> It was from the people gathered on the rim of this amphitheatre in the dunes that the sighing came. Like mourners at a funeral they stood in the downpour, men, women and children, sodden, hardly bothering to protect themselves, watching the destruction. (Coetzee 1990: 88)

Hoegberg (1998: 31) argues that this passage illustrates clear analogies between the arrangement of the place and the people gathered there and the description of the circles of the Inferno and the sighing and crying of the souls in Dante's *Divine Comedy*. The destruction of this provisional housing renders the situation even more dramatic for the black community in the township since they are not abstract souls condemned for their sins but flesh-and-blood humans who have to endure these poor conditions throughout their entire life (Hoegberg 1998: 31). These people have no chance to improve their circumstances due to apartheid rules that regulate "the complicated system of residency and employment laws" (Hoegberg 1998: 31). Hoegberg stresses that although the rough conditions of living might be interpreted as a punishment in itself, the destruction of the black people's shanties renders the situation even worse (Hoegberg 1998: 31-32). Therefore, Hoegberg claims that "[i]n this hell of human creation physical suffering is not an allegory of a future spiritual state but a brute fact" (Hoegberg 1998: 32).

Hoegberg also points out that Mrs Curren initially perceives black people's shouting and crying as though they were made by wind and rain, "as if the wide world itself were sighing" (Coetzee 1990: 87). Her first impression is that the sounds she hears are of a nonhuman nature. Hoegberg comments that "[f]rom a distance the sounds of black conflict and suffering" are for Mrs Curren at first "indistinguishable from the natural sounds of the storm" (Hoegberg 1998: 34). When she comes closer to the source of the noise she starts to "distinguish [...] sounds, as if a veil of naturalizing rhetoric were being drawn aside" (Hoegberg 1998: 34). It may be inferred that only a closer examination enables her to become fully aware of the human suffering.

Mrs Curren's naturalistic attitude intensifies when she examines black people's bodies. The dismal portrayal of the destruction of black people's housing corresponds to her naturalistic descriptions of the dead bodies of young black activists: Bheki and his friends. She gives a lot of details: concerning their clothes, the impact of weather conditions and the features of their faces, including the presence of sand in the natural bodily orifices. Their bodies are described as mere physical objects:

> The inside of the hall was a mess of rubble and charred beams. Against the far wall, shielded from the worst of the rain, were five bodies neatly laid out. The body in the middle was that of Florence's Bheki. He still wore the grey flannel trousers, white shirt and maroon pullover of his school, but his feet were bare. His eyes were open and staring, his mouth open too. The rain had been beating on him for hours, on him and his comrades, not only here but wherever they had been when they met their deaths; their clothes, their very hair, had a flattened, dead look. In the corners of his eyes there were grains of sand. There was sand in his mouth. (Coetzee 1990: 94)

Olfa Belgacem stresses that although the sight of Bheki's dead body makes Mrs Curren "outraged and sad", the protagonist is still capable of examining the corpse in detail (2021: 34). Mrs Curren is familiar with death herself, since she is terminally ill (Belgacem 2021: 35). Yet, the scene shocks the protagonist due to the brutality involved in the sudden end of the young boys' lives.

The account of the death of the black people contrasts with Mrs Curren's perception of how white people die. As stressed earlier, Mrs Curren envisions some spiritual transformation in the afterlife of white people, which she does not imagine in the case of black people. There are also differences in the circumstances of the deaths of people belonging to these two different racial groups. She admits that representatives of her own race usually die in old age, mostly due to natural causes, often due to diseases. Before their death, they become weak, thin or "papery" due to emaciation characteristic of senility, which makes them "burn well":

> 'I have not seen black people in their death before, Mr Vercueil. They are dying all the time, I know, but always somewhere else. The people I have seen die have been white and have died in bed, growing rather dry and light there, rather papery, rather airy. They burned well, I am sure, leaving a minimum of ash to sweep up afterwards. Do you want to know why I set my mind on burning myself? Because I thought I would burn well.' (Coetzee 1990: 114)

By contrast, in the novel black people die violent deaths at a young age. Mrs Curren metaphorically describes them as made of "iron or lead", which is the reason why they do not burn easily. She imagines that their unchanged bodies remain in the soil after their death, which explains why she can only imagine the materialist dimension of their death without any reference to a possible transformation into a spirit in their afterlife:

> Whereas these people will not burn, Bheki and the other dead. It would be like trying to burn figures of pig-iron or lead. They might lose their sharpness of contour, but when the flames subsided they would still be there, heavy as ever. Leave them long enough and they may sink, millimetre by millimetre, till the earth closes over them. But then they

> would sink no further. They would stay there, bobbing just under the surface. If you so much as scuffled with your shoe you would uncover them: the faces, the dead eyes, open, full of sand. (Coetzee 1990: 114)

After their death, black people's bodies still occupy some space in the ground, which Mrs Curren metaphorically understands as their inability ever to leave the African hell. In her conversation with Bheki's friend, Mrs Curren states that "Bheki is in the ground [...]. He is in a box in a hole with earth heaped on top of him. He is never going to leave that hole. Never, never, never" (Coetzee 1990: 131). Earlier, when she sees the dead bodies of Bheki and four other boys displayed at the school, she also describes the black people's spirits as strongly bonded with their bodies: "I thought of the five bodies, of their massive, solid presence in the burned-down hall. Their ghosts have not departed, I thought, and will not depart. Their ghosts are sitting tight, in possession" (Coetzee 1990: 96). Even after death their spirits do not gain freedom: they seem to be unable to escape the control of some other forces. The contrast between descriptions of the two types of bodies, black and white, is described in geographical or spatial terms, referring to different places and different dimensions. As noticed by Belgacem, Mrs Curren indicates different destinations for the bodies. The bodies of black people are associated with the earth and "the land" to the degree that they "are pulled downwards by the law of the earth" (Belgacem 2021: 163). The bodies of the white people, by contrast, are "airy" as described by Mrs Curren (Coetzee 1990: 114) so their point of destination is "the sky" (Belgacem 2021: 163). Belgacem points out that in South Africa the body functions as a guideline that informs us "where to find and how to recognize" people of these two different races (Belgacem 2021: 163–164). Therefore, she argues that the body "is a reliable historical and geographical map that has an identitarian dimension" (Belgacem 2021: 164).

At the end of the novel, when Mrs Curren runs away from her house, which was invaded by the police, who were searching for John, she loses the sense of time and becomes delusional. She spends some time lying in Buitenkant Street, "amid the rubble and filth" and vagabonds walking in the streets (Coetzee 1990: 143). What may be significant is the etymology of the street name "Buitekant": Buitekant Street could be translated as "Outside Street" since "*Buitekant* is the Afrikaans word for 'outside', literally made up of *buite* (out) and *kant* (side)" (Hayes 2012: 159). As explained by Patrick Hayes in *J. M. Coetzee and the Novel: Writing and Politics After Beckett*, this name comes from the fact that the street "formerly marked the boundary between what was then the Cape Colony and the rest of Africa" (Hayes 2012: 159). The name of Buitenkant Street may symbolise a place of transgression or even transformation. At this moment of degradation and confusion, when she is outside the comfort of her own home and experiences the roughness of life on the streets, she recollects Marcus Aurelius' idea of the cyclical transformations of universes, in which souls unite and dissolve to enter another cycle

of life: "How is there space in the skies for the souls of all the departed? Because, says Marcus Aurelius, they fuse one with another: they burn and fuse and so are returned to the great cycle. Death after death" (Coetzee 1990: 144).

Between the two strongly divided racial groups stands the figure of Vercueil. It is significant that this character is a homeless person. As argued by Georg Gugelberger, Vercueil is a "nomad" and "the threat of the unhoused which the order of the housed has to face" (Gugelberger 1995: 130). His semi-nomadic lifestyle reinforces his image of a messenger who is to send Mrs Curren's letters to her daughter after the mother's death. Although Mrs Curren is not sure if he will actually fulfil his promise, she sometimes symbolically juxtaposes him with a literary or mythical figure of a messenger travelling between different realms. When she refers to his habit of disappearing from time to time and leaving only his dog in her garden, she states that he is "[n]o Odysseus, no Hermes, perhaps not even a messenger" (Coetzee 1990: 128). She describes him as a "circler-around" or "ditherer, despite the weatherworn front" (Coetzee 1990: 128).

What is also important in the context of South African racial divisions is the fact that Verceuil's race is actually never specified in the novel, as noticed by Attridge (2004: 87, 95) and Worthington (2011: 116). What can support the idea that he actually may be white is that the black boys who come to Mrs Curren's house, and Florence's daughter Hope, are hostile towards him (Coetzee 1990: 41-42) and he refuses to visit Guguletu. Mrs Curren describes his eyes as "strange green eyes: unhealthy" (Coetzee 1990: 6). Yet, although the green colour might also make it more natural for him to belong to the white race, this colour may be interpreted in metaphorical terms, for instance as reinforcing his "animality" or closeness to nature, also noticed by Mrs Curren when she describes his eyes as "alert, like an animal's" (Coetzee 1990: 147). It may even have a purely symbolic meaning of hope that he embodies as being involved in sending the letters to the Western World to inform it about the atrocities of the war in South Africa.

Verceuil is an elderly man who spends a lot of time with his dog, living on the street until he finds refuge in Mrs Curren's house. When she sees him for the first time in her garden, Mrs Curren notices his shabby appearance and resemblance to an animal: he is "tall, thin, with a weathered skin and long, carious fangs" and he wears "a baggy grey suit and a hat with a sagging brim" (Coetzee 1990: 3). She recognises him as a man who lives on the streets, as "one of the derelicts who hang around the parking lots on Mill Street, cadging money from shoppers, drinking under the flyover, eating out of refuse cans" (Coetzee 1990: 3). Now he has made for himself a provisional shelter in Mrs Curren's garden in the form of "a house of carton boxes and plastic sheeting" (Coetzee 1990: 3). Verceuil is unemployed, dirty and smelly, and a drunkard. His homelessness is associated with the general repulsiveness of his appearance. Since Verceuil is a homeless man, he does not have proper protection against the cold, so he may perish easily. Mrs Curren speculates that he will die just as he lived – on the street. Even after death,

his body will not have its own place – he will most likely be cremated without any special ceremony:

> One winter's night, sooner or later, when the artificial fire in his veins is no longer hot enough to preserve him, he will perish. He will die in a doorway or an alley with his arms hugged across his chest [...]. They will cart him off [...] and that will be the end of that. No arrangements, no bequests, no mausoleum. (Coetzee 1990: 29)

Literary critics interpret Verceuil as the representation of "the other" (cf. Attridge 2004: 101; Vice 2010). Verceuil continues to be an enigmatic figure until the end of the novel: he "remains unknowable to the end, and in that end fuses – or is fused in Mrs. Curren's mind – with the equally unmodifiable otherness of death" (Attridge 2004: 101). In his interview with Coetzee, David Attwell describes Verceuil as Mrs Curren's "Angel of Death" (Coetzee & Attwell 1992: 250), whereas Coetzee in his response uses the term "a herald of death" (Coetzee & Attwell 1992: 340). Verceuil's special role is noticeable in Mrs Curren's attitude towards the unexpected visitor (Attridge 2004: 34). Despite her doubts concerning his ability to fulfil his promise to send her letters, she describes him using religious terms. As pointed out by Attridge (2004: 34), she perceives his appearance at her home as an "annunciation" (Coetzee 1990: 4) and thinks of him and his dog as "fulfilling their charge, waiting for the soul to emerge" (Coetzee 1990: 170). The most telling sign that she creates an image of him as an angel is her wondering at the end of the novel when he is carrying her in his arms: "When would the time come when the jacket fell away and great wings sprouted from his shoulders?" (Coetzee 1990: 146). Yet, Attridge poses a question concerning the allegorical reading of the novel since various allegorical interpretations are possible, and in fact any interpretation of the novel, including moral or political ones, is in a broad sense allegorical (Attridge 2004: 35; cf. Wilm 2017: 121). It remains true that Verceuil, without a permanent address or a clearly defined status in life, escapes definite classifications due to his enigmatic and obscure character.

To recapitulate, *Age of Iron* may be interpreted as indicating that people's posthumous habitats correspond to their earthly ones. The white and black people depicted in *Age of Iron* definitely differ in terms of their housing conditions in the real world. White people enjoy comfort since they are privileged socially and financially. Their houses function as a legacy of the past and occasional shelter for less prosperous people. By contrast, black people's housing is very primitive, so it does not provide proper protection against natural disasters. Thus, materialist dimensions of home in earthly life are different for these two racial groups. The difference in the material dimension of home corresponds to differences in the protagonist's images of the posthumous habitats of these two different populations. The contrast between these two communities stems from Mrs Curren's different imaginings of their deaths: the bodies and souls of white people separate in

the moment of death, whereas the bodies and souls of black people do not. Mrs Curren portrays white people's death as a transition from earthly life to spiritual or incorporeal existence. White people's bodies are imagined to be a temporary house for the soul, which it sheds or leaves for a better place at the moment of death. The soul's destination is heaven, depicted as an ordinary place such as a hotel lobby or a bus. In contrast, black people's death offers no relief, since both their dead bodies and souls remain in African hell, in which they have already spent their entire earthly life. Therefore, the spiritual dimension of home is also portrayed differently depending on race.

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DOI: 10.15290/CR.2022.36.1.05

Australia as an (in) hospitable home in Peter Carey's *A Long Way from Home* (2017)

Abstract. The concepts of "house" and "home" constitute two poles of experience which negotiate the space between economic and emotional safety. Associated with material well-being and personal relationships, they may serve as litmus-paper tests to probe the economic and personal situation of people living on a given territory. The last to-date novel by the Australian novelist Peter Carey, *A Long Way from Home* (2017), takes up the issue of Australia as a metaphorical home to diverse groups of people: the white descendants of British colonisers, post-WWII survivors and immigrants, and the indigenous Aboriginal inhabitants of the continent. Employing the plot of the all-around-the-country car race, the novel shows how the land, seemingly homely and open to everybody, may be read as a palimpsest of trauma and pain, and quite inhospitable to many of its inhabitants. Referring to the concepts of the picaresque and chronotope, this article will argue that both the metaphoric and the literal meaning of the concepts of house and home are employed in the novel to disclose and discuss the internal and immigration policy of the Australia of the 1950s.

Keywords: house and home, picaresque, chronotope, racial and ethnic policy, postcolonialism.

Peter Carey's Australian fiction

Peter Carey's fiction, well-known and widely read for forty years now, may be roughly divided into two groups of novels. One of them includes historical re-visitations and revisions of the earlier literary canon, historical past or politics, and may be illustrated by such novels as *Oscar and Lucinda* (1988), *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000), *Jack Maggs* (1997) or *Parrot and Olivier in America* (2010). The other group comprises non-historical novels, often – though not always – set in Australia and presenting contemporary portraits – again, mostly, though not exclusively – of the Australian white middle class, and includes such novels as *Bliss* (1981), *My Life as a Fake* (2003), *Theft* (2006) and *The Chemistry of Tears* (2012). Apart from this rough thematic division, one may also notice

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that while Carey's historical novels tend to exhibit an intensive degree of experimentation and innovation (often connected with Postmodernist poetics), the non-historical ones steer towards relatively more traditional, sometimes satirical, social portraits of certain groups or ways of life, thus coming closer to contemporary comedies or novels of manners. Yet, both Carey's historical experiments and contemporary portraits share the tendency to be set in and to represent Australia with its culture, habits, myths and legends, which are probed and tested on their pages. One may also add that until the year 2017, it was chiefly southern Australia and white Australia, with such places as Sydney or Melbourne and the panorama of characters ranging from settlers, missionaries, outlaws or bushrangers to advertising agents, hippies or painters that constituted the interest of his fiction.

Seen against this background, Peter Carey's latest novel, *A Long Way from Home* (2017), may strike one as an interesting exception to the tendencies sketched above. With its action set in the year 1953, the novel is both contemporary and historical, representing the past which is – following Walter Scott's famous precept – located just "sixty years since", that is, both safely distant to be impersonally and objectively explored and yet vivid enough to stir emotions and evoke still fresh experience. Thus, the chosen time setting is a much more vulnerable and sensitive area of representation than, for instance, the previous choice of the 18th or 19th century, as in the collective memory of the people to whom it belongs this past is not yet entirely past and it is much less liable to be manoeuvred into the interplay of literary conventions or intertextual games. It is both past and present, still retaining its connections with the here and now, but not yet distant enough to become just a (his)story. Moreover, the spatial setting of the story, too, marks a departure from Carey's previous novels: this time the protagonists embark on a journey from southern Australia to literally tour the whole continent, including its less urbanised, less populated and less "civilised" remote parts. Activating the chronotope of the road, *A Long Way from Home* expands its spatial dimension to present not just a section of Australia but – if it is possible – the whole country with its various landscapes, climates, habitats, vegetation and people. It is also the first of Carey's novels to take up the issue of non-white Australia, as it introduces characters who represent not just the white middle class but also immigrants and First Nations; it is also the first of his works that refers to the history of the country's racism. In his review of the novel, Alex Preston observes that

> It seems strange at first that Carey – surely Australia's greatest living novelist, even if he hasn't dwelled there for decades – has taken so long to get around to the subject. In a recent interview in the *Australian*, he said that he'd always felt that it was not the place of a white writer to tell this tale. Then something changed: "You can't be a white Australian writer and spend your whole life ignoring the greatest, most important aspect of our history, and that is that we – I – have been the beneficiaries of a genocide." (Preston 2018)

By showing the encounters of the southern whites with "the other" Australia and Australians and their complex history of atrocities and violence, the novel posits the question of what kind of home Australia makes for other than its white Anglo-Saxon inhabitants and how (in)hospitable a place it is for its various other kinds of citizens.

In the following analysis I will argue that *A Long Way from Home* may be read as a critical portrayal of Australia and its then policies towards its people, especially to non-whites. The article will discuss how the novel represents indifference, intolerance and discrimination developed first at the political level, comprising the status and legal situation of non-white characters; then at the social level, shown in common and state-induced prejudice; and finally at the level of imagery, which metaphorically employs landscape and architecture to visualise the observed divisions between the two Australias. Referring to the concepts of house and home, treated both in a most literal and metaphoric way, the analysis will focus on how the fictional portrayal of plots and characters, along with the setting and the buildings and places the novel describes, reflects and represents complex relations within the portrayed Australian society. Following Marilyn R. Chandler, the analysis is based on the premise that "the houses in novels [...] reflect not only the psychological structure of the main character [but also] the social structure in which he or she is entrapped" (Chandler 1991: 3), and that the fictional houses, treated as metaphors, "construct complex analogies between house [...] and social environment" (Chandler 1991: 3). Thus, analysing plots, characters and settings, the following discussion aims to demonstrate that Carey's novel bitterly diagnoses the past of his country as unjust and shows Australia as a comfortable home (and house) to some but not to all of its inhabitants.

A long way (from) home

The plot of the novel involves the journey of the three main protagonists around the Australian continent. Wishing to improve their fortunes, business prospects, financial situation and family relations, they decide to take part in the car race called the Redex Race: a car reliability trial which takes standard-produced vehicles across country roads and all-terrain trails to check and prove their durability and reliability. The route takes the contestants over twenty days from the small city of Bachhus Marsh on the outskirts of Melbourne, through Sydney, up north to Brisbane and Townsville, then west to the Kimberley Plain, Darwin and Broome, all the way south to Perth and then through the Nullarbor Plain to Adelaide and back to Sydney. The race, then, is a genuine *tour de Australia*, bringing together both its urbanised and relatively densely populated southern areas with the barren and desert parts of the remote north and west. The thus sketched plot resembles the classical plot of the picaresque in which the characters travel across the land to experience unusual adventures and then return changed to their homes, and which presents at the same time "the actual structure of society" (Frye 2000: 310).

It may also be productively analysed through the lens of the Bakhtinian chronotope of the road where the space of the road becomes an area of encounters and transformations. Chronotope, as Bakhtin defines it, is "the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (Bakhtin 1981: 84) and a convenient analytical tool to investigate not just temporal and spatial relationships within a given text but also its generic classification or themes. True to form, Carey's novel may be said to employ the chronotope of the road, involving as it does the journey of the protagonists and the adventures they experience. It is thus one of the adventure stories in which "[o]f special importance is the close link between the motif of meeting and the chronotope of the road ('the open road'), and of various types of meetings on the road" (Bakhtin 1981: 98). This chronotope, as Bakhtin points out, involves not just adventures but primarily chance encounters as the road is the place where "the spatial and temporal paths of the most varied people – representatives of all social classes, estates, religions, nationalities, ages – intersect at one spatial and temporal point" (Bakhtin 1981: 243). In keeping with this description, Carey's novel introduces numerous plot twists and revelations which result from life-changing encounters and coincidences.

The journey the three protagonists make does indeed change their lives. For the characters of Irene and Titch Bobs, debuting small-town car-sellers, it brings the end of their happy marriage based on mutual trust and understanding; at the end of the race they grow apart and lonely. For another character, Willem Bachhuber, their neighbour and navigator, the impact of the journey turns out even more cataclysmic: on the road, he is forced to gradually question and then completely redefine his identity, including his race, home and family. For all of them the journey brings the end of innocence and illusion: the knowledge they gain, both about the country, its past and present, and about themselves proves to be life-changing. Unknowingly and unintentionally, the characters embark on a journey of self-recognition, moving into the heart of the continent and into their own hearts. These recognitions turn out not necessarily pleasant. As one of the two alternating narrators, Irene Bobs states, "it was said that Australia was beautiful, but not by me" (part III, chpt. 2, loc. 2320), and she goes on to observe later that "if this was our country's heart, I never saw anything so stony, so empty, endless, devoid of life" (part III, chpt. 3, loc. 2421). Both hearts, then, that of the country and those of the protagonists, seem rather dark, as their true identities seem to be covered with lies and secrets, which come up only later in the story. This metaphorical darkness, together with the plot construction and the revelations experienced by the characters, may intertextually echo Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* with its slow and painful discoveries of atrocities, horrors and evil hidden in the African jungle. Similar to Conrad's story, Carey's *Long Way from Home* gradually reveals to its protagonists both the horrendous past of the ordinary-looking spaces, palimpsestically complicating the seemingly innocent map of

the continent, and the country's present, similarly still marked by violence, discrimination and inequality. At the end of the journey, the protagonists split and return separately, disappointed, embittered yet more aware of the evil man is capable of. Their discoveries concern the history, present-day politics and social life of their country, and make them reconsider the supposed hospitality and homeliness of the state to which they so far unquestionably belonged.

White Australia policy

Willie Bachhuber observes on numerous occasions that the undeclared policy of post-WWII Australia was to prevent the Aboriginal population from claiming their rights to the land and to discourage other than non-white and non-British people from coming to Australia as immigrants. In effect, in the novel Australia seems to be a hospitable home for whites only, with the exclusion of other races and ethnicities.

As the character gradually discovers, this attitude has had a long tradition. Preparing for his job as the navigator in the race, he reads about the territories which in the past were idyllic green pastures for sheep, only to discover that they had been taken away forcefully by white settlers from their native nomadic inhabitants, with all the violence usually connected with such evictions. Bachhuber realises that the maps show former tribal lands – and that they are "maps of murder" (Part I, chpt. 17, loc. 1399); that the particular stretches of the route now called "Horror Stretches" owe their name not only to the driving difficulties but perhaps first of all to the "dispersal of the natives" and the ethnic cleansing that took place there in the past (Part I, chpt. 22, loc. 1801). The map of the land they enter upon leaving the civilised, urbanised south, which in the initial opinion of Irene Bobs was "the country that killed white men; the killer country" (Part II, chpt. 1, loc. 1975), turns out to be much more multi-layered and complicated, with the present state obliterating the past events which only residually come to the surface. One of such instances is provided by the characters' chance discovery of old human bones, uncovered, unburied and untended, which turn out to be the remains of a long-past massacre of the native black inhabitants of Australia. Equally horrendous in the discovery of the past genocide is the present-day reaction of the local police to whom the characters report their finding and who indifferently refuse to take any interest in it. The horrors of the past concerning the "blackfellahs" do not seem interesting to the present-day all-white administration, nor do the latter consider it necessary to treat the human remains and the place with any special respect.

The discriminatory policy towards the non-white native inhabitants is also visible in the practice of social care services taking away children of mixed race from their Aboriginal parents and giving them for adoption to white families in order to offer them a better life. The so-called "stolen generation" is now a well-known and much discussed traumatic episode in the Australian past (cf. Short 2008: 87-105) – in the novel

it is dramatised as the fate of Willie Bachhuber, who is confronted with the fact that, previously unaware of it, he himself happens to be such a child, pale-skinned and fair-haired, who was adopted and raised by white parents out of compassion and good intentions. One of the discoveries he makes on the road is that of his original Aboriginal family and the story of his own capture and their ensuing suffering and desperation. As Lochy Peterson, one of the Aboriginal characters of the novel sadly observes, "we done plenty crying in this camp" (Part V, chpt. 6, loc. 3455); violence, rape, child-taking, protest-quenching and unfair imprisonment seem to be the constant lot of the native population.

Finally, the whites-only policy is also visible in the case of the post-WWII immigration to Australia. Although in theory all immigrants are equal, in practice some turn out to be more equal than others, and the criteria seem to be race and ethnicity. Early in the novel Bachhuber, then still a teacher in a provincial southern school, thus meditates on the question asked by one of the pupils about the so-called "Balts", i.e. the refugees coming to Australia from post-war Europe:

> How could I possibly "teach" him that the Australian government had deliberately misnamed the displaced persons Balts? That was the path by which the word had entered his vocabulary. How many weeks might it take to have him understand that the Australian government were selecting light skinned "Nordic types" as future citizens and that they had, for the sake of obfuscation, named them Balts? (Part I, chpt. 4, loc. 410)

A similar policy is adopted towards people of African or Afro-American origin. The character of Madison Lee, a demobilised WWII African-American soldier allowed to settle down in Australia after the war, is one of the few exceptions to the rule which, unofficially yet efficiently, discourages such people from coming to Australia. As presented in the novel, the immigration policy clearly privileges white-skinned people over dark-skinned ones, making Australia a hospitable new home to the former but not to the latter.

The main characters, who gradually discover all of these facts and policies on the road, react differently to this new knowledge. The Bobs do not seem particularly interested at first: they are not educated people, nor do they care for education and knowledge; their neighbour who is an impressively educated man (a champion of radio quiz shows, too) becomes a sort of history teacher to them. Yet, they react differently to this teaching: for Titch Bobs, this is merely history. "What use is this to us?" (Part II, chpt. 7, loc. 1801), he asks, dismissing history for the sake of the present. At one point, exasperated, he demands: "you tell us what is happening *now*. I could not give a fuck about what happened a hundred years ago" (Part II, chpt. 1, loc. 2012). For his wife Irene the turning point comes with the finding of a baby's skull – one of the victims of the massacre of the

Aborigines, shot with a bullet a long time before. Moved, she takes the skull with her and thus begins her own journey towards empathy and understanding of people who are not like her. Bachhuber makes his discoveries first as a historian and archaeologist, a teacher and a scientist, unearthing poignant facts which – so he then believes – though terrible, have little to do personally with him. His attitude is concerned yet neutral. It is only when they travel north, where he is first recognised as a half-blood and thus discriminated against, and then when by a coincidence he finds his original Aboriginal family and learns his story, that he realises that the complex racial past and present of his home country is his own story, too. His further "adventures", after he quits the race and stays on his tribal land – involving the defence of his black family, a prison sentence, and then becoming a historian and anthropologist of his people – mark his transformation from a comfortable and unreflective white middle-class man into a much less privileged Australian citizen. His son, who is the narrator of the last section of the novel (again, in contrast to Carey's remaining novels, most of which usually employ just two alternating narrators, this text adds in the last section a third, extra one, who functions as a postscript voice of the next generations), is a black Aborigine who benefits from white education and claims to have the freedom unavailable to his forefathers. As he states, "impossible as this would prove to be, I did not wish myself to be known or restricted by the colour of my skin. For the longest time I was determined that this would have no effect on me at all and I was readily annoyed with anyone who suggested otherwise" (Part V, chpt. 21, loc. 4599). Yet, living in post-war Australia, he, too, is forced to acknowledge that this freedom is a dream rather than reality and he, too, has to face the burden of the past horrors and injustice. Concluding the novel, he states that "our mother country is a foreign land whose language we have not yet earned the right to speak" (Part V, chpt. 21, loc. 4655). The novel, then, presents a fictional sample of representative attitudes towards the complex Australian racial situation, ranging from indifference, through sympathy, to active involvement in pro-egalitarian activism. Triggered by coincidences and chance, the plot events reveal resentment and prejudice as latent in Australian society, deeply ingrained and hard to change, making Australia inhospitable to at least some of its inhabitants.

The ones hardly at home

As the novel makes clear, Australia treats its First Nations and immigrants as third- and second-class citizens. This attitude is expressed in the text not only by references to the official government policies but also shown by the everyday casual discrimination perpetrated by white Australians, who evidently treat their non-white and non-British fellow citizens as inferior, and seem to believe they are entitled to treat them so.

Many episodes show how the non-whites and even non-Australians are regarded as "naturally" worse. Bachhuber himself, in his "first life" as a white man, is discriminated

against as being a "Kraut" since his adoptive family is of German origin. In the freshly post-WWII Australia the anti-German sentiment may be perhaps explainable, yet it is also extended to war refugees and immigrants, who are seen as alien.[2] This is also the case of the Chinese population, both in the present and in the past, when riots against and the abuse of Chinese workers were frequent occurrences (e.g. the mid-19th century "Lambing Flat Riots" described in Part II, chpt. 1, loc. 1997). Despite the immigrant-friendly official rhetoric, the everyday practice positions these Australians as second-class citizens: tolerated, even needed, but far from equal and welcome. Their status may be compared to that of servants in hierarchically organised households: they have their place and role in them, yet they have neither prestige nor respect. The most drastic discrimination, however, concerns native Australians, whose situation is represented in the novel as the worst.

At the time of the novel's action native Aborigines are hardly Australian citizens: they have no voting or property rights; as the novel presents them, their social and legal position can be described as located somewhere between wild animals and slaves. Limited to a given territory, they have a restricted right to move, leave or settle (unless they have a special certificate of exemption); they are also subject to local restrictions such as the curfew hours. They live in structures called "a humpy" or "a gunyah" – a shelter constructed around a tree trunk, made of bark and tree branches, or of rusting corrugated iron and cardboard, with no access to running water, toilet or bath. There is no public medical service they could benefit from or any transportation system available to them. Aborigines are strictly forbidden to drink alcohol (again, unless exempted), and they are generally treated as if they were mentally retarded. This is seen in the attitude to education: they do not participate in the education offered to whites; they have one designed specially for them which involves low-quality local schools whose aim is to teach them little more than broken English for communication purposes; higher education or professional training is neither planned for them nor welcome by their employers or, more accurately, quasi-"owners." This scheme of education is further connected with linguistic discrimination: native languages are tolerated only as a means of inter-family communication; using them in official situations is forbidden. The episodes of the novel set in the Quamby Downs station – a huge cattle breeding establishment – most resemble episodes in the Conradian *Heart of Darkness,* with its treatment of the natives as a slave work force. "Allowed" to live on the territory of the farm and given the simplest supplies, in return the Aboriginal people have to work unpaid for the farm

2 The less-than-hospitable policy towards immigrants is by no means an Australian feature only: one may remember the internment camps for refugees from Nazi Germany in Europe during WWII, or the U.S. internment camps for people of Japanese descent at the same time. Carey's novel, just like historical research done on this subject, brings to light this less pleasant aspect of the allies' help, and the hardships and often humiliation the war and post-war immigration involved.

owner who indeed behaves as if he owned his "blacks". In scenes reminiscent of the colonial past the novel shows how violence, abuse, rapes and murder are still in the 1950s the reality of native Australians.[3]

As a reaction, native tribes develop various forms of resistance. Apart from the obvious and already well described degeneration due to alcohol abuse and crime on the one hand, and the heroic attempts to maintain ancient traditions on the other, they also create secret quasi-religious opposition cults whose aim is to counter the enslavement and preserve the knowledge of the native customs, lore and religion. Though politically and physically helpless in confrontation with far better organised and equipped whites, Aborigines are represented in Carey's novel as actively trying to rescue their complex oral culture and to preserve their dignity despite the enslavement and brutalities inflicted upon them. The character of Bachhuber becomes the chronicler and historian of this resistance and an amateur anthropologist who records shards and pieces of the culture which was designed to be demolished by the white colonisers.

On the pages of *A Long Way from Home*, then, Australia emerges as hardly homely or hospitable to many of its inhabitants. Pursuing the metaphor of a country as a home to its people, one may easily observe that in Carey's novel the Australia of the 1950s is represented as comfortable and generous to whites, quite harsh and uninviting to immigrants, while to the First Nations it is openly hostile and oppressive; it guards its doors and segregates insiders. These discriminatory politics and social practices, which in the story are dramatised at the level of the plot construction and characterisation, are additionally expressed and reinforced by a further element of the novel's architecture, i.e. by a clear visual contrast that determines the construction of space and setting in the novel.

Spatial metaphors

The spatial imagery employed in the novel may be interpreted as clearly organised in contrastive ways. The contrast metaphorically emphasises the division into two Australias and is visible in the descriptions of landscape and of architecture. The novel, constructed around the plot of a journey, describes many places and landscapes, yet one may clearly notice that they may be conveniently analysed as representing two types:

3 In this context it is perhaps worth mentioning that, again, Australia represents here a larger group of countries which have to deal with their colonial past and the atrocities committed then. The fate of the Australian "stolen generation" reminds one of the present-day discussions surrounding Canadian residential schools for First Nations' children, which in a violent and traumatic way deprived them of their families, languages, culture and not infrequently even lives (cf. the reportage by Joanna Gierak-Onoszko, *27 śmierci Tony'ego Obeda* (*27 Deaths of Toby Obeda*) (2019)). Carey's novel, then, inscribes itself in a much broader revisionist trend of recovering the dark pages of colonial history and its still less recognised aspects (e.g. educational policy).

spaces connected with white culture and those which belong to the non-British and non-whites. The former are located mostly in the South of Australia (e.g. Melbourne, Sydney, Adelaide, Perth or Bachhus Marsh) and are settlements of white people whose inhabitants have never even had a chance to see an Aboriginal person. They are described as spacious, ordered and well arranged, with avenues, squares and monuments. They have public services such as transportation, medical centres, schools, libraries or regular shops. They are planted with green vegetation, flowers and trees; the climate is warm but not hot, and there are no shortages of water. They are also places of peace and quiet, sometimes perhaps a little boring but safe and comfortable. The following fragment may illustrate how Irene Bobs describes the provincial town she lives in:

> No-one ever came to the Marsh without thinking, what a pretty town. [...] If there was a prettier war memorial than our Avenue of Honour, I never heard of it. Every tree in the avenue was planted for a local boy who died. Every trunk had its own name. The dead boys are now huge elms and they join together above the road and give a very calm impression. This is how you enter the town. You drive beneath them, up the aisle, beside the apple orchards, the shire offices, the lawn bowls games in progress. You can dawdle through the wide streets and get some glimpse of our boring life. (Part I, chpt. 20, loc. 1650)

Serene and peaceful, with well-designed public spaces and town facilities, the provincial southern Australian town of Bacchus Marsh may seem perhaps boring with its small-town slowness and quiet but it is certainly comfortable to and caring for its inhabitants. Functionality and aesthetics seem to govern its organisation and contribute to the well-being of the citizens. This is an area of risk-free existence, stability and more than decent living standards which are provided by the state.

In contrast, the native territories located in the north and west, near Broome, Darwin, or in the Kimberley, are almost empty due to climate conditions: they are hot and dry, mostly covered by deserts, and home to little vegetation or animal life. They are represented as hostile to life – areas of survival rather than flourishing. Yet, despite this aridity, the landscape turns out to be covered with a surprisingly dense network of secret trails and paths known only to the natives, sacred rocks and caves of ritual significance, and places which offer both shelter and respite. Hostile to the whites, these territories are shown as familiar and safe to the Aborigines, who know how to live in them and for whom they are their home. The contrast, then, which conditions the construction of space in this novel, may be said as that running between white comfort and native hardship, privilege and dispossession, culture and nature.

A similar contrast may be detected in the representation of housing in the novel. Interpreting the term "house" in its most literal sense, i.e. as a place of shelter and protection from the hardships of climate and weather, and a structure tending to the physiological and psychological needs of people, one may notice once again the ideological axis structuring the representation of Australian racial and ethnic policy employed in Carey's novel. As described on the pages of *A Long Way from Home*, the white population lives in proper houses, usually quite nice and comfortable, cosy, furnished and well equipped. Even the characters that are not rich live decently: either in rented houses or in city housing blocks, which nevertheless are comfortable and aesthetically pleasing. Bachhuber thus describes the Melbourne establishment his girlfriend lives in:

> We were entering a Queens Road apartment building. Perhaps you know the type, always divided by a long thin garden path punctuated by blind white statues and melancholy topiary, one of those "Spanish style" blocks which had previously seemed so lost and loveless to me. (Part I, chpt. 17, loc. 1382)

Even apartments blocks, usually focused solely on the function of providing the greatest number of apartments to the greatest number of people, are visibly designed with aesthetic qualities in mind, accompanied by art (statues) and greenery (garden paths, topiary). This description shows the average standard of living as not just basic or comfortable but even pleasing and aesthetically designed. Both urban establishments and the suburban or small-town houses, then, seem homely and friendly. In contrast, the descriptions of houses inhabited by immigrants show them as simple, dilapidated or ruined, lacking ornamentation or design, and poor, as in Broome, where the houses are described as "one-and-two-storey timber shanties" and the pavement as just "red earth" (Part IV, chpt. 3, loc. 2879). These are still houses but sub-standard ones, and the degree of difference between them and the "normal" Australian houses of those times reflects the lower status of the immigrants who inhabit them. Thus, the shape and condition of the houses described in the novel become an index measuring the distance between the different racial and ethnic populations of the post-WWII Australian continent. Finally, the dwellings inhabited by Aborigines could hardly be called houses at all. As already pointed out in previous paragraphs, they are merely provisional shelters: barracks, tents and huts made of corrugated iron, cardboard, tree branches, grass and mud. They serve the most basic and primitive needs, i.e. they protect their inhabitants from weather and wild animals but offer no comfort or conveniences. As Bachhuber describes it, an Aboriginal dwelling is

> a small temporary shelter made from bark and tree branches, with a standing tree usually used as the main support. In Quamby Downs a gynyah is called a *humpy* and was not

> made of bark but of rusting corrugated iron and cardboard. You could not stand up in a humpy. You could not wash inside. You had no bathroom, nothing but a single standpipe in the camp. [...] In the wet season humpies leaked but then there would be a creek and a swimming hole to wash in. (Part V, chpt. 6, loc. 3358)

As the description shows, the "houses" of Aboriginal characters hardly meet the definition of the term and should rather be referred to as shelters since they do not provide many of the functions traditionally associated with the structure called a "house".

The descriptions of both landscapes and buildings provided in the novel are detailed, accurate and precise, well reflecting the shapes, colours and design of the described spaces. On the one hand, one may believe that they quite realistically show the Australia of the 1950s with its topography and atmosphere, offering a sociological record of a certain stage of its history. On the other hand, however, the construction of these spaces has clearly metaphoric functions and draws attention to other than merely descriptive values of the presented sights and buildings. Spatial relations in a literary work, following Yuri Lotman, may be treated as reflections of a wider outside world which is their model (cf. Lotman 1977). In Carey's novel, due to their contrastive structure, textual houses clearly draw attention to the contrast between white and Anglo-Saxon and non-white and non-Anglo-Saxon inhabitants of the seemingly common Australian "home". Again, this contrast is sharp and significant: landscape, architecture and the standard of housing reflect the status of the population inhabiting them – high in the case of white colonisers, poor in the case of immigrants, and next to none in the case of the native people. In their study *In Defense of Housing: The Politics of Crisis*, David Madden and Peter Marcuse observe that "[h]ousing is always more than just housing" (Madden and Marcuse 2016: 85), pointing to its relation-building role within the community and the establishing of power relations among inhabitants. Similarly, one may treat the novelistic representation of space and houses as a fictional reflection of the actually existing power relations within the community this fiction represents, and analyse these relations with the help of the concept of house and home. Thus analysed, the metaphorical reading of the landscape and housing represented in the novel indicates that Australia is neither a comfortable house (in the most literal sense) nor a hospitable home (in a metaphorical one) to its other than non-white inhabitants.

Conclusions

The analysis of the plot, characterisation and spatial relations in the novel help interpret *A Long Way from Home* as a comment on and criticism of the attitude of Australia as a state and of its citizens towards its non-white and non-Australian inhabitants. True to its generic convention of the picaresque novel, Carey's text, while tracing the

adventurous plots of its fictitious characters, presents the structure of the society and the social relations in which they are situated. Likewise, analysed with the help of the Bakhtinian chronotope of the road, the novel illustrates the revelatory potential of the plot which, introducing chance encounters and surprising meetings, exposes the structure of the society seen at a particular intersection of time and space, portrayed with its various classes and ethnic groups. Writing about postcolonial literatures, Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point to the "powerful metonymic force" of the theme of housing, observing that "the construction or demolition of houses is a recurring and evocative figure for the problematic of post-colonial identity in works from very different societies" (Ashcroft et al. 2002: 27). Set in a former colony, in a country whose colonial past is only thinly palimpsestically covered with the post-war present, Carey's novel represents Australia as an heir to the history of colonial violence and atrocity. The text recollects, describes and dramatises systemic discrimination, official and casual racism, and ingrained and inherited prejudice which are exhibited both by state officials and by average white Australians. It also refers to many horrors of the past revealed bitterly as practices which today can only be classified as ethnic cleansing. In so doing, it presents a critical diagnosis of the racial relations in the post-WWII Australia which it exposes as based on inequality and injustice.

Read with the help of the concepts of house and home, the title of the novel may be thus seen as nothing short of metaphoric: thinking of the racial relations presented in it, it seems quite clear that while the Australia of the 1950s (just as in the previous decades and centuries) may seem a hospitable and comfortable space to some, to others it is at that time a place still very far from home, and the distance is not only that of space but rather of time and attitude. The novel is historical as it presents the situation of the 1950s with flashbacks going back to the 19th century, yet one may only wonder how historical, i.e. outdated, this picture has become by now.

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DOI: 10.15290/CR.2022.36.1.06

Identity and transnationalism: Narrating the Haitian-American home in selected works by Edwidge Danticat

Abstract. In contemporary discourses, the lives of migrants are often marginalised and silenced. For this reason, bringing the theme of migrants' identities to the foreground in literary research appears to be increasingly important. This article discusses the experiences of Haitian immigrants to the US as narrated by the Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat. I explore the theme of making a transnational home in her novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) and short stories from the collection *Everything Inside* (2019). The analysis is based on a combination of two theories: Steven Vertovec's theory of transnationalism and Paul Ricoeur's philosophy of narrative identity, which enable interpreting intergenerational identity changes, certain methods of cultural reproduction, and "little" cultural cross-connectedness of "family and household" (Vertovec 2009: 3-18) in the context of personal identity understood as formed through narratives. This article focuses on the transition from a Haitian home to an American one as an important part of identity-formation processes. It also views a migrant's journey as still incomplete after coming to the US and requiring "emplotting" (De Fina 2003: 17) its fragmented events into stories. The article attempts to demonstrate intangible ways of creating a transnational home and domestic methods of narrating and negotiating one's cultural identity in Danticat's fiction. I claim that Danticat's works narrate personal experiences to generate a "refigured" understanding of time and transnational ties within the family sphere.

Keywords: transnationalism, home, identity, Haiti, storytelling, trauma.

Introduction

For decades now, many Haitians, mostly women, have been leaving Haiti and migrating to the United States in the hope of improving their families' financial situation. This article discusses the transnational identities and homes of Haitian-American

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immigrants as narrated in a novel and two short stories by Edwidge Danticat. The first is the writer's debut: *Breath, Eyes Memory,* published in 1994. The book has been very successful and sparked noticeable interest from reviewers and critics. In 1998, it became one of the Oprah's Book Club selections (2019/20 Winner & Finalists, *The Official Website of The Story Prize*). The other two works analysed in the article come from a collection of short stories and, at the same time, Danticat's latest work, published in 2019, entitled *Everything Inside,* which, in 2020, won the author her second National Book Critics Circle Award and her second Story Prize. The aim of the present article is to interpret the selected works as depicting transnational identities. In addition, the paper considers narrating one's home as inseparable from telling a story about their identity. Danticat's works, her novels and short stories alike, allow the reader to get insight into the world of Haitian-American transnational homes, which constitute a living testimony of women's stories of identity struggles and negotiations. It appears that Danticat's perspective transforms her protagonists' personal experiences and attempts to grasp the complex reality of living in a Haitian-American home.

Edwidge Danticat, born in 1969 in Port-au-Prince in Haiti, emigrated from her country of origin to join her parents, who had gone to America earlier to settle down. During her school years, she was discriminated against by other children because of a hate campaign depicting Haitians as infected with Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) (Garcia-Navarro 2018). In spite of difficulties, she graduated from Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. Her first collection of short stories (published in 1995) entitled *Krik? Krak!* became a finalist of the National Book Award for Fiction in the year of publication. Moreover, in 2018, Danticat was awarded the prestigious Neustadt International Prize for Literature. She remains a prolific writer and essayist. What is more, she occasionally publishes children's picture books and novels for young adults. She is also a regular contributor to *The New Yorker.*

Most frequently, Danticat writes about first- and second-generation immigrants and refugees who left Haiti between the late 1950s and early 1990s. It might seem to be a fairly broad time scope. The migration waves from Haiti to America were caused by the terroristic methods of Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier, whose regime lasted from 1957 to 1986 (Laguerre 2005: 830). The dictators reinforced their rule by organising a private militia of volunteers called "the *cagoulars* or the *tonton-makout*" (Polyné 2010: 183). Fanatically faithful to the ruler, those militants terrorised the whole population by tortures, abductions, and blackmail (The Tonton Macoutes 2010). In her writings, Danticat tries to reflect upon the difficult experiences and struggles of the families who were forced to move their homes because of financial and/or political reasons, making their way to America, "the other side of the waters" (Danticat 2008: 146), as economic migrants and/or refugees.

Steven Vertovec's transnationalism and Paul Ricoeur's narrative identity

This article places the interpretation of Danticat's works within two interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks. The combination of transnationalism (as described by Steven Vertovec) and narrative identity theory proposed by Paul Ricoeur in his monumental three-volume work entitled *Time and Narrative* (1984, 1985, 1988) provides a non-obvious perspective that allows us to look at both cultural aspects of identity formation and re-production in the contemporary world, and the self as formed through the symbolic structures of narration. Such observations are possible because analysing depictions of material culture, symbols and customs can be connected with interpreting how the specific ways in which these cultural practices are narrated could construct a certain vision of one's identity.

The perspective of transnationalism suggests that diasporas are and have always been communities that experience the dynamics of living in a world where national borders do not constitute absolute boundaries. Economic, political, cultural, but also family and household ties have been made stronger and, as it seems, have become more visible as happening across countries and continents (Vertovec 2009: 3-4). In light of this definition, it comes as no surprise that the transnational "exemplary community" is the diaspora, whose members' identities are formed "in-between" the place "back home" and "the new home" (2009: 4). The present analysis tends to focus primarily on the "little" transnationalisms of "family and household" and the formation of local "everyday networks" (2009: 12, 18) as bringing the global and the national to the local or domestic spheres and causing one to negotiate their identity not within a large and imaginary space of nationhood but among one's relatives and friends.

For Danticat and many other diasporic writers in North America, one of the most important themes concerning transnational ties is the near impossibility of arriving at "fixity" when it comes to transcultural "transformations of identity", which tend to be theorised around such notions as "syncretism, creolization, bricolage, cultural translation, and hybridity" (Vertovec 2009: 7-8). In addition, it is crucial to notice that the problem of performative fluidity of identity is very often associated with the practices and cultural production of young generations. Cultural studies researchers focus heavily on the problem of the transnationalism of "second generation" immigrants. Vertovec, in his article entitled "Transnationalism and Identity", acknowledges the issue by asking:

> [H]ow exclusive is transnationalism to the first generation of migrants? Will the so-called 'second generation' [...] also maintain [...] ties of some kind [...] with homelands and with co-ethnic members around the world? (Vertovec 2001: 577)

The ways in which Danticat represents hybrid cultural phenomena and the identity positions of young members of the Haitian diaspora in America may tell us how the perspective on what a home is and how a home is created changes from generation to generation. Transnational homes and identities of the parents' generation can be juxtaposed with the usually more syncretic and non-discriminatory transnationalism of the children. While the transnationalism of the parents might be theorised as focused on reproducing their country of origin's culture in the new space, the transnational identities of the second generation are likely to tolerate and even embrace constant changes and multinational ties that are not limited to the relation between their homeland and their "new country". Vertovec suggests that the cultural "bricolage" and "syncretism" of young people may pose a threat to the traditional, largely two-dimensional transnationalism of immigrant parents. In Danticat's works, cultural practices, customs, and culture-based family habits are represented as having a direct impact on family and domestic relations. The particular ways in which those practices are revised in the course of generational shifts may constitute a substantial part of Danticat's narratives of home.

It appears that Paul Ricoeur's notion of narrative identity and his explication of the process of narrative "emplotment", as well as his other remarks on the subject of narrative understanding are valuable points that prove useful while analysing works of diasporic literature. The term "emplotment" was first used by Hayden White in his famous *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1973) and then reapplied by other scholars such as Anna De Fina (2003) and Donald Polkinghorne (1988). White coined the term to explain that absolute objectivity in historical writings is impossible because even the form in which a writer arranges and "tells" facts can affect the way they are perceived by the reader (White 1973: 12-13, 56-57, 142, 276). Ricoeur derives the term and develops it from the Aristotelian idea of *muthos* (emplotment), which he understands as "the active sense of organizing the events into a system" of a story (Ricoeur 1984: 31-33). Ricoeur emphasises the fact that Aristotle's paradigm of the plot is based on the composition of the tragedy and its symbolic *holos*: "completeness [and] wholeness", which contribute to the creation of narrative "concordance" that favours logical intelligibility (1984: 38-39).

Being aware of the limitations of such a basic understanding of emplotment, Ricoeur develops it further. The French philosopher sees human perception and one's understanding of their self as personal attributes that need to be imagined within the temporal dimension. Time in turn has to be narrated in order to be understood and processed by the human mind (1984: 52). In other words, "a prefigured time" or the practical life of a person in time becomes the basis for a plot (1984: 54; 57), in which lived experience is "configured" by the operations of emplotment and ordering (1984: 65). Finally, human perception refers the understanding created in a narrative representation back to "the

time of action and of suffering" (1984: 70-74). This might mean that often incongruous events of one's life can be mediated through a plot of a story in order to become a more intelligible narrative that a person "can take up and hold as constitutive of his personal identity" (1984: 74).

In the "Conclusions" to the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur states that time has to be narrated in order to be understood (1988: 241). In Ricoeur's view, a product of the "interweaving" of the historical and fictional perceptions of time "is the assignment to an individual or a community of a specific [narrative] identity" seen through emplotted time (1988: 245-246). As Hannah Arendt points out, to get to know the identity of a person, it is not sufficient to ask the question about "what" someone is. It is necessary to ask "who" a person is, and this "we can know only by knowing the story of which he [a person] is himself the hero –his biography, in other words" (Arendt 2018: 186). Having this in mind, Ricoeur explains that individuals and communities may see their identities as internally continual and integral over time thanks to emplotting time and events into a body of cultural stories and symbols (Ricoeur: 1988: 247). However, the philosopher moves away from the Aristotelian definition of emplotment when he admits that "narrative identity is not a stable and seamless identity" (1988: 248). According to Ricoeur's analysis, narrative identity may change due to a multiplicity of possible emplotments and interpretations of one event. Ricoeur also seems to believe that a person is endowed with the task of re-examining their inner narrative self in order to construct a sense of "self-constancy" which exists as the continuous action of telling and re-telling one's narrative (1988: 249).

Breath, Eyes, Memory

In her literary debut, Edwidge Danticat creates a painfully dramatic story about the changing notion of home, difficulties in the relationship between a mother and her daughter, and the intergenerational trauma of sexual abuse. In spite of the complexity of the issues raised in the novel, its narrator, Sophie Caco, manages to emplot her life in such a way that she seems to find a new form of transnationalism for herself. She is born in Haiti and goes to the United States as a young girl to reunite with her mother, of whom she has no or very little memory. On the one hand, one might call her a first-generation immigrant since she has her own connection with her country of origin, she speaks Haitian Creole as her first language, and her identity appears to be rooted in her aunt Atie's and her grandmother Ifé's traditions. Due to being brought up by her aunt, she enjoys a special relationship with "Tante Atie", who becomes a mother figure for young Sophie. On the other hand, due to her mother's prior emigration to America, Sophie seems to be able to examine her Haitian heritage more critically than her mother, Martine. Because of this, the protagonist might also be viewed as a second-generation immigrant, who distances herself from her parent's attitudes and beliefs.

Sophie's first perception of home is predominantly based on her imaginary vision of Haiti as the homeland of her childhood. The first five chapters of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* present a "home" that becomes an abandoned girl's story in which Tante Atie substitutes for her mother. One might say that they convey Sophie's image of her Haitian homeland as seen through the eyes of a child who willingly absorbs Haitian traditions and regional customs, such as organising potluck village gatherings or receiving blessings before a journey from the eldest member of a family. However, one must not forget that the childlike perspective is a fictional, novelistic construction. The reader may get insight into Sophie's Haiti but it remains a recreated Haiti, which serves the narrator as a significant point of reference. The protagonist's narrative identity is inextricably linked with her story of "childhood homeland". When Sophie as a child dreams about reuniting with her mother she experiences unpleasant nightmares, in which Martine "chases" and kidnaps her only to be entrapped with her in a photograph (Danticat 1998: 8). Later in the novel, the older Sophie escapes her mother's American home to become free to marry Joseph and to revisit Haiti with a new understanding of her homeland's culture.

When Sophie goes to America, her feeling of displacement is compared to time travel. On the one hand, the girl is aware that she is going to live with her mother in a dilapidated flat located in Brooklyn, New York City, and she "greet[s] the challenge" of a "new life" (Danticat 1998: 49). On the other hand, her immigration to America seems to be incomprehensible for her in terms of the continuity of her life. One might say that her narrative is changed abruptly; she "age[s] in one day, as though she had been through a time machine, rather than an airplane" (1998: 49). It is also useful to note that the first American setting in the novel is Flatbush: the Brooklyn neighbourhood that is also called "Little Haiti". Its diasporic culture and economy are also mentioned by Sophie, who remembers Haiti Express, a postal service shop "packed with Haitians", as a place that "remind[s] [her] of home" (1998: 50). In the United States, Martine makes sure that Sophie receives education and learns English. At the same time, Sophie is sent to a Haitian bilingual school and feels there "as if [she has] never left Haiti" (1998: 66). In consequence, the reader may observe that Martine seems to act as if she was "looking for" a Haitian home in America. In an interview, Danticat herself states that such nostalgia and longing for an unreachable, "abstract" ideal of home might be read as elements specific to immigrant experience (Candelario et al. 2004: 72). Later in the novel, Martine and Sophie move to "a one-family house in a tree-lined neighborhood" (Danticat 1998: 65), which can be a symbol of financial success and hard-earned independence. Here, in the new family space, Sophie meets her future husband and experiences sex trauma inflicted on her by her mother. The supposedly safe domestic sphere full of material references to Haiti becomes the place where Sophie is forced to revise her perspective on Haitian culture and her mother's mode of transnationalism.

However, Sophie is even closer to her Haitian "home" than Martine. When her husband Joseph leaves home for a tour as a musician, Sophie decides to secretly visit her aunt and her grandmother in Haiti, taking her baby daughter Brigitte with her. When Martine joins them, she seems to experience being in Haiti only as a renewal of her trauma of rape. She cannot sleep; she openly says that "[it]'s worse when I am here" (Danticat 1998: 169). Unlike her mother, Sophie is able to go back to her country of origin and develop her relationship with the country and her family in a new way. She does not try to reject her heritage completely, she can still speak the language fluently, and she is eager to create new forms of transnational and intergenerational memory by taking photos of little Brigitte and her great-grandmother (1998: 129). As a result, she seems empowered to confront her first identity, which is based on her memories of Haiti, her relocation to America, and the traumatic experience of being "tested" for virginity by her mother. She openly asks grandmother Ifé about the practice of "testing" teenage daughters' genital organs to check if they are still virgins. Sophie's grandmother explains to her that it is a custom every mother is expected to follow to protect their daughters and themselves from being "disgraced" (1998: 156). In a certain way, it appears that Martine's trauma of rape is transformed in Sophie's narrative into the recurring event of "testing". Due to this, Sophie feels that she is linked to the rape in three ways: she is a biological daughter of the *Macoute* that raped a sixteen-year-old Martine, she takes after her father, and she experiences another sexual trauma her mother inflicts on her.

One could argue that the part of Sophie's narrative identity reshaped by domestic sexual trauma is what paradoxically enables her to see her transnationality within new contexts. The traumatic "testing" may only become mediated through language and "configured" into Sophie's story when she voices her resentment in front of her grandmother and mother (Danticat 1998: 156-157, 170-171). Sadly, Sophie never reaches full recovery: she is petrified of having sexual intercourse with her husband – she experiences it as an extremely painful duty and develops bulimia as a result (1998: 130; 156; 179). Nevertheless, her realisation that Haitian folk culture includes elements as harmful as "testing" makes her capable of assigning new value judgements to her Haitian origin and traditions. This fact brings her narrative identity closer to the characteristics usually associated with second-generation immigrants and their transnational identity negotiations (Vertovec 2001: 577). Although she actively reproduces her transnational ties with her homeland, she does it in a transformed way, different from her mother's mode of transnationalism. Martine's "little transnationalism" consists in making money transfers and sending audio letters taped on cassettes and addressed to illiterate relatives. Other than that, Martine seems to view Haiti itself as a place of trauma and suppression. Even though Sophie's ties with her homeland grow out of a similar image of transnationalism, she experiences visiting her country of origin as a necessary element of her path to personal liberation. She neither despises nor idealises Haiti as her "true home".

Although Sophie Caco's home is a conflicted one, it is also a home that experiences reconciliation. Sophie's transnational, narrative identity negotiations happen mainly through her relationship with her mother. The two women form a transnational dyad. While still in Haiti, Sophie receives voice recordings from her mother from America. Then, in the United States, she is the one who sends them to aunt Atie to Haiti. When the girl emigrates, Martine becomes Sophie's only guide through her Haitian family's history as well as the American reality of New York City and the English language. In spite of their close relationship, Martine becomes the one who controls Sophie in an obsessive manner and "tests" her when she meets Joseph. In this way, the woman reproduces the same patriarchal models that have harmed her. The mother and the daughter reconcile only after several years of not speaking to each other when they meet at grandmother Ifé's house in a Haitian village called La Nouvelle Dame Marie, and only when Sophie asks her mother why she "tested" her. The motif of reuniting with one's mother may be a form of referring narrative "configurations" of events from the sphere of her immigration story back to the realm of "practical understanding" (Ricoeur 1984: 55). Thanks to a new, narratively-developed awareness and comprehension of her life's events, Sophie is able to communicate with Martine and make her intertwined Haitian and American homes complete. The reader must also notice that Sophie reconciles with her mother *in Haiti* as if she is able to fully understand her story only after she comes back to her childhood home and experiences. In this way, Sophie may connect her narrative with the practical action of reconciliation with her mother and can make her story more intelligible for herself.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to remember that Ricoeur's "[e]mplotment is never the simple triumph of 'order'" (1984: 73). The narrative identity emerging from Sophie's story appears to be a dialogue or dialectic between narrative order and disruptive suffering. The reader may see the relationship between Sophie and Martine as an example of difficult cultural identity negotiations that happen in a relatively closed domestic sphere. Martine depends on her daughter since Sophie is able to understand her mother's trauma and her post-traumatic stress: she wakes her up from recurring nightmares and symbolically becomes her mother's saviour (Danticat 1998: 81). Due to this, the mother believes that their spirits become inseparable, especially as souls of women who share difficult experiences of sex abuse and immigration. Despite that, Sophie feels that her mother does not understand her struggle with bulimia. When Martine states that her daughter "[has] become very American" one might notice that she sees the illness only as a symptom of the American culture of abundance (1998: 179). The domestic issues and their links to more general cultural phenomena and stereotypes transform the home and the family house into the realm of cultural negotiations of meaning and understanding. Similarly, the family sphere becomes the ground on which the narrative dialectic of trauma and reconciliation, suffering and order, may become a foundation for ethical

criticism and re-evaluation of the Haitian-American home itself. According to Ricoeur, such re-examination of one's original narrative identity is indispensable for an individual to reach a renewed kind of internal continuity (1988: 249). After all, in Danticat's debut novel the transnational home is represented as narratively (re)constructed. The changes it undergoes do not deconstruct the protagonist's narrative identity. Instead, Sophie's self develops to incorporate her transnational domestic sphere as a symbol of cultural and personal re-evaluation and questioning rather than immutable sameness.

Another element of identity represented through Sophie's narration is the custom of Haitian storytelling. The motif of telling made-up, creative stories is present in many other works by Danticat, *Krik? Krak!* and *Brother, I'm Dying* being only the two most obvious examples. The author also admits that her creativity was nurtured thanks to stories told by her aunts and grandmothers (Candelario et al. 2004: 70). In *Breath, Eyes, Memory,* it is grandmother Ifé who interprets certain aspects of the world by configuring them into the plots of Haitian fairy tales. The two most important fables told by Sophie's grandmother refer to the transition between being "a girl" and becoming "a woman". After Sophie confronts her about the trauma-inducing practice of "testing" Ifé tells a group of village children a story about a lark that seduces a "pretty little girl" and deceives her to kidnap her and take away her heart (Danticat 1998: 124-125). The direct context of the story suggests that it is a parable referring to the rape on Martine, Sophie's elopement with Joseph, and more generally the belief that a young girl has to protect her virginity and outsmart men who may want to abuse her. The language used in grandmother Ifé's story may also lead to a certain ambiguity. At one point, the storyteller states that "she [the girl] gave in to the bird and let him have his way" (1998: 125). The phrase "let him have his way" may refer to the fact that the girl allowed the bird to take her "to a faraway land" as the animal wished (1998: 125); however, it may also imply a sexual undertone and thus direct the reader's attention to the way certain men may deceive women to exploit them sexually.[2] Another story, described by Martine and aunt Atie as one of "all the unpleasant stories *Manman* [our mother] used to tell us about the stars in the sky", presents a simple plot about a girl who wanted to marry a star, "and then went up there and, as real as her eyes were black, the man she wished for was a monster" (1998: 165). To interpret this tale as conveying only misandry would be to oversimplify the narrative undercurrent present in the entire novel. Grandmother Ifé's stories may carry a frightening suggestion that the woman is punished for her love and sexual desire. Thanks to this undertone, the work addresses the problem of women's supposed responsibility for keeping their "maidenly" bodies "whole" for men in a patriarchal

2 According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, the phrase "have one's way with" is an idiomatic expression that may imply sexual connotations ("have one's way with" *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*).

society (1998: 136-137). It seems possible to suggest that such an emplotment of Haitian women's reality may close their experiences of sexual abuse and male violence in simplistic plots which reproduce feminine identities in the expectation of female deference and disrupt or completely scotch what might become a nuanced, narratively mediated identity: being oneself within a new understanding of time and traumatic events.

Everything Inside

In Danticat's latest collection, one may find an image of "a home without a house", which is represented in a short story entitled "Hot-Air Balloons". Lucy, the narrator of the story, is a young, first-year student. Her parents come from Haiti. In contrast to Neah, her roommate from a rich, academic family, she has never experienced the stability of having a house. Without a place to live, her parents decided to, or maybe one should say were forced to, become seasonal harvest workers, constantly moving from one place to another, literally "chasing the harvest" in various parts of the United States (Danticat 2019: loc. 1375). For their daughter, this kind of lifestyle meant that she frequently changed and missed school, and could not make long-lasting friendships. On a deeper level, it resulted in the girl entering adulthood without a sense of personal safety or stability. Nevertheless, Lucy has always felt the support and love of her parents. Although they continue working on farms and the young woman is financially independent, they still insist on sending her monthly pocket money.

Danticat contrasts their affection and the loving "home" they create with "a house without a home". Neah, the aforementioned roommate, cannot find inner peace because of her parents' divorce and her father's high educational expectations. The girl, somehow inspired by Lucy, decides to join a charity organisation helping rape victims in Haiti. She goes on a trip as a volunteer and is absolutely overwhelmed by the amount of suffering and poverty she sees there. While Lucy is not mentally ready and does not have the financial opportunities to visit Haiti, Neah can always take advantage of her parents' Trinidadian ties. Despite this, she overlooks her transnational Trinidadian-American relations and decides to embark upon a mission to help Haitian women. Even though she is forced to finish her studies, she does not want to give up voluntary work for people living in the Caribbean region. The contrast between the two characters might stem from the way their personal narratives differ. Although Lucy has never had one physical place that she can call her "home", her narrative identity seems much more unified than Neah's personal story. The latter's narrative implies an impossibility of reaching "a configured time" (Ricoeur 1984: 54) that could re-order her experiences in an integrating and sense-making manner. Neah seems to meander without a sense of definite closure.

The fact that the young students can understand each other *and themselves* only after wording and revealing their stories is also extremely meaningful. When they meet for

the first time after Neah's charity trip, they begin narrating and exchanging their experiences. Through this fragment of "Hot-Air Balloons" Danticat seems to suggest that putting one's life into a story is a kind of coping mechanism. One understands their life in a new way when they compose a narrative that gives events a structure. The narrator of "Hot-Air Balloons" seems to intuitively grasp the idea that the process of answering a question about identity can be seriously hindered without formulating one's story. Furthermore, the transnational "refusal of fixity" (Vertovec 2009: 7) with regard to personal identity or one's desire for home may be seen as a threat or a challenge to the identity-formation process. However, it appears that Danticat's work reinterprets the lack of fixity as an *opportunity* for individuals to re-tell their stories and thus view the events of constantly changing, losing, and regaining their homes and houses as invigorating and, in fact, restorative experiences, which gain their new meaning only when a narrative about them is composed and mediated to another person.

In another story from *Everything Inside* entitled "In the Old Days" the reader encounters a narrative about a diasporic home, which is not a house but a restaurant owned by the narrator's mother. The restaurant introduced at the beginning of the text appears to be a part of a local diasporic community, forming a crucial element in its structure. From the information provided by Nadia, the narrator, the reader might infer that it is situated somewhere in Little Haiti in New York City. The young woman recalls that as a child she used to indulge in observing how other people's lives unfolded before her eyes in the space of the restaurant. She remembers witnessing "baptism parties, First Communion and wedding lunches, graduation dinners, wakes, and funeral repasts" (Danticat 2019: loc. 552), which may be viewed as personal and cultural identity-forming events. From the way she narrates her childhood time in the restaurant, it seems as though she has never experienced or participated in similar formative events with her as the central figure.

Her own personal story is disrupted when she learns that her mother did not inform her father about her existence when she was born. Her narrative identity experiences a major point of revision when she is about to meet her dying father who has always been absent from her life. She regrets that he has never had a chance to significantly influence her identity and "the course of [her life]" (Danticat 2019: loc. 628). When she goes to Miami, her father's wife invites her to a house in which she sees pictures of her father's friend, Pastor Sorel, his wife, and their daughter. In the photos, the pastor's family is always together, celebrating important events from the daughter's life. The "whole" and coherent narrative emerging from the photos is sharply contrasted with Nadia's having only one uncanny image of her father as "that skeletal man lying in the hospital bed" (2019: loc. 698). She never gets to know her parent and she envies his wife that the woman has someone she can grieve for. The fact that the father left Nadia's mother to return to Haiti in the hope of helping to rebuild the country shows the dark

side of transnational narratives and indicates that neglected transnational blood bonds may become a source of personal alienation. When the father's wife refers to traditional Haitian rituals connected with childbirth and death, the narrator realises that she has an opportunity to become a part of her father's last rites. Thus, the composition of the narrative is framed by the family scenes Nadia witnessed as a child in the restaurant and, metaphorically, it comes full circle when she can become a vital part of a family ceremony herself. At the very end, the narrator admits: "I felt [...] as though I was marching at the head of a king's funeral procession, with an entire village in my wake" (Danticat 2019: loc. 785). It appears that her narrative identity has required a major disrupting event to finally reach a point at which the young woman can re-examine her life story and experience a sense of relief.

In addition, the two selected stories from *Everything Inside* seem to depict a specific kind of home that is narrated as an absent homeland. In "Hot-Air Balloons" Lucy and Neah never see their homelands with their own eyes. On the one hand, Neah does not travel to her native Trinidad but decides to visit Lucy's homeland, Haiti. Lucy, on the other hand, is involved in Neah's family problems and discusses the roommate's rebellious behaviour and charity trip with her father. It seems that their private stories gain a wider context when they connect with each other's homes and homelands. Lucy may feel connected with Haiti not only through her parents but also through her friend, who witnessed the dire situation in the country and shared her memories of it with Lucy. Despite that, Haiti remains the absent homeland for the young student, who may imagine it as a place of women's suffering. Furthermore, in Danticat's "In the Old Days" Nadia's story seems more intelligible to her when she finds the strength to see her dying father and connect him with her family life and domestic sphere. In like manner, imagining her own family practices as linked with her Haitian ancestors' funeral customs allows her to feel close to and practically experience her homeland's culture in her life. Thus, even constructing an imagined homeland contributes to the fact that the protagonists of both short stories understand themselves and their identities in a new, reformed way when they create narratives about home and homeland, or the lack of them.

Conclusions

Referring back to Steven Vertovec's doubts about the second generation's ties with their countries of origin, one may suggest that the transnationalism of young immigrant women is more open to "planet-spanning" forms of relations (Vertovec 2009: 3), which are not limited to and, in fact, are more critical towards their homeland's culture. In Danticat's prose, second-generation immigrants experience their diasporic, transnational lives differently than their parents do. However, this transformation does not exclude the possibility of creating a truly diasporic home that cultivates its ties with its homeland. One might rather argue that along with the changes in the transnationalism

of second-generation immigrants, their "homing desire" (Brah 2005: 177, 189, 194) is not lost but also transformed. It becomes more and more inclusive, incorporating other ethnic and national identities and making narrative identity revisions increasingly possible. For younger generations, Haiti does not disappear from the transnational map altogether. Instead, it changes its place, the sources of its importance vary, and it creates new intercultural and intergenerational connections. The image of Haiti as a paragon of home no longer constitutes the only possible point of reference on a microscopic Haitian-American globe. Haiti's former primacy and centrality as "the home" for the protagonists is diminished due to the aforementioned Vertovec's idea of "planet-spanning" relations and one's critical thinking about their origin and domestic culture. Although the bilateral relation between Haitian and American "homes" is still relevant for the new transnational maps, the cultural place of Haiti might be narratively "refigured" to signify one of many homes instead of the only home.

Moreover, Danticat seems to view the transition from a Haitian home to an American one as an important part of identity-formation and self-understanding processes, which inspire "emplotting". Binding and giving order to fragmented events of an immigrant's life by storytelling or writing is a literary function that suggests an opportunity for regaining a sense of coherence and belonging. "Emplotting" may also reveal the nature of transnational identities as struggling or unable to reach a narrative closure: a final point of unity and completeness. Altogether, in Danticat's works, Haitian-American transnationalism may be a cause of disorientation and difficult experiences; nevertheless, it is often represented by the author as a chance, and not as a threat.

All things considered, the present interpretation of Danticat's works is based on the notion that constructing one's transnational identity is not a single event but a complex and continuous process. By constructing narratives of identity, the author manages to convey two extremely important messages. Firstly, the identity of Haitian-American women of different generations is neither stable nor homogeneous. Secondly, events happening around a transnational home urgently require interpreting through storytelling. In the selected novel and short stories, a narrative about one's home becomes nearly synonymous with a story of their identity. Danticat's writings demonstrate how mediating one's life through stories, and thus giving the events a new sense of temporality, constitutes the very essence of the personal identity of immigrants.

Finally, due to the fact that the present article discusses works that were written at two distant points in Danticat's career, one may notice that narratives of young Haitian-American women still remain the author's primary focus. Moreover, Danticat's *Everything Inside* seems to slightly move her narrative perspective in the direction where new "emplotments" of personal experiences may bring a "refigured" understanding of events, new significance of the past, and a sense of relief. Neah and Lucy, the main characters of "Hot-Air Balloons", understand each other better when they begin to share

their stories. Nadia, the narrator of "In the Old Days", finds symbolic closure when she is invited to actively participate in her father's funeral even though she practically does not know the man. In Danticat's recent works, storytelling is a way to find a sense of having a home despite the struggle for narrative resolution, and reaching to the past for formative rituals provides comfort despite weakened transnational and domestic ties.

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