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A Festschrift for Professor Jacek Wiśniewski

Guest Editor:
Grzegorz Moroz

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Preface

This special issue of *Crossroads* is a festschrift for Professor Jacek Wiśniewski. It opens with an introduction in which Professor Wiśniewski recounts how he became a scholar of British and American literature and describes the teachers who influenced and inspired him on his academic path. This volume has been written and compiled because Professor Jacek Wiśniewski, in turn, influenced and inspired many more students, some of whom wrote M.A. and Ph.D. dissertations under his guidance and went on to become scholars of British and American literature themselves. We have gathered five papers written by five people who at different points of time, between late 1980s and the beginning of this millennium had a privilege to write their Ph.D. dissertations under Professor Wiśniewski's supervision. It is their way of saying 'thank you so much for all Your hard work, meticulous corrections, and endless inspirations'.

Grzegorz Moroz

Guest Editor

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Introduction

Let me start from the very beginning, or *ab ovo,* to explain how fate decided that I would become an English scholar. The study of the English language (and culture) was not, in the King Batory grammar school in Warsaw, my favourite subject. During the first two years, English was taught by an elderly lady, brought up and educated in the United States, but she was not a linguist and knew little about the methods of teaching a foreign language. She strictly followed the textbook and loved teaching us English and American songs. We sang *Jingle Bells* and *If I had a Hammer* with gusto: we thought it was better than memorizing the forms of irregular verbs. My favourite subjects in that school were Polish, history, and very attractive arts classes conducted by a charismatic scholar, Tadeusz Szadeberg, creator of the statue of King Batory which graces the courtyard of our school. Luckily, in our third year, English classes were taken over by a strict but wonderful teacher, Wanda Rutkowska, author of many English textbooks and a great expert in the field of ToEFL. Remember, it all happened in the 1960s, before well designed and nicely illustrated British and American textbooks became available in Poland, before English courses developed, and before texts recorded by native speakers appeared on Polish television. Even LPs with language courses were hard to get. But it is important to remember the attraction of the 1960s, when teenagers raved about the pop music and pop groups of those years: The Animals, The Beatles, Cream, The Doors, The Rolling Stones. We learnt the lyrics by heart, and some of us even tried to play and sing them. Needless to say, there was an ongoing battle between us students and the teachers about hairstyles and fashions.

I now need to take a step back to the time I was fifteen and my elder brother Witek was seventeen. He was getting ready for his entrance examinations to the Department of Architecture. His choice was in a sense a natural one: he was good at maths, and could draw and paint beautifully. It wasn't easy to get a place at the Department of Architecture in those days. There were entrance exams in drawing and maths, and candidates were expected to submit a portfolio of their designs and watercolours. There were more than a dozen candidates for each place. Our father was an architect, and most of his friends were interior designers, builders and architects. Our aunt Hania was also an architect and interior designer. We loved her because she was an excellent skier and often took

us skiing. Her boyfriend Jerzy Chylewski was also an architect and painter. Later on, when Witek was already a student of architecture, he met his future wife, Bożenna, who also studied there: we were a family of architects! The only exception was my mother, Seweryna Szmaglewska, who was a writer. She wrote several books about her experiences during the Second World War, including *Smoke over Birkenau,* but she was also quite successful as a writer of books for kids, for instance *Black Feet.*

So here I am, 16 years old and quite uncertain what I'd like to be in future. It was important to get ready for entrance exams, to take extra courses and take part in competitions. One day over Sunday breakfast my parents asked me about my preferences: 'What subject would you like to study, Jacek?' Without a second thought I said, 'architecture,' and they exclaimed, 'No! We have too many architects in this family already, you must choose something else!' A few days later my brother brought a booklet which alphabetically listed all the universities and all possible subjects. Before *Architecture* there was *Anglistyka (English Studies)*, and everybody exclaimed, "Right! This is just right for you, you are good at English, you like Polish and history!" But I wasn't sure: it's one thing to get good grades in English (after just two years of study at school) and quite another to read English and American literature in the original, to attend lectures, classes and seminars, all conducted in English. All the semester papers and then the MA paper had to be written in English. Some of the students had attended schools abroad; they were like native speakers. I hesitated…

Fortunately, during summer holidays in Yugoslavia when I was 16, I met Lizzie, a lovely English girl, red-haired and freckled. We played volleyball together, went for long swims in the sea and long walks along the beach, talking all the time. She and her elder brother were wonderful pals for me and my brother. It all happened because Lizzie's father, an ex-officer in the Royal Air Force who trained Polish pilots during the war, recognized the Polish language and encouraged his kids to make friends with a couple of rather bored Polish boys. She, a pupil at a good grammar school in Oxford, turned out to be a wonderful and patient teacher. We became pen friends, and over the next two years we exchanged hundreds of long letters about anything and everything. For me it was an easy way to improve my English while getting ready for entrance exams (which were both written and oral). What may seem incredible is that, after more than half a century, we are still in touch, writing letters and meeting quite regularly in Poland or in Scotland, where she now lives with her family. My children and grandchildren are friends with her children and grandchildren, we have the same hobbies (travelling, bird watching and ecology), we love the same games (scrabble, crossword puzzles, and bananas), and writing limericks. From time to time we are guests in her cottage on Shieldaig Bay on the north-west coast of Scotland, and they come to stay in our cottage on the Bug River. If I passed the entrance exams with flying colours two years later, it was all her doing.

I can't remember the exam itself. There must have been tests of grammar, some listening comprehension and some reading comprehension. I went on to the oral exam

in which the strict Head of the Department, Professor Grzegorz Sinko, asked me about the Battle of Britain. Arkady Fiedler's books, fragments of Winston Churchill's *History of the Second World War,* which we read with Mrs Rutkowska, and Lizzie's father's tales about Polish pilots from squadrons 303 and 307 proved enough—the professor nodded his head, and I felt I had done quite well. It took quite a long time to get the final results: the system of extra points for kids from working-class families complicated the procedure immensely. So, with a few friends I went to the seaside, and on the very day of my 18th birthday I received a telegram from home, with congratulations.

In the summer of 1967, the Institute of English Studies was moving from its temporary premises at Traugutt Street, which is next door to the Holy Cross Church, to a fairly small but very attractive old building called the Czetwertyński residence, close to the main entrance to the university campus. The move was supervised by Professor Sinko himself. In the first few days of September all the students were invited to arrive (with rucksacks!) to help transfer the Institute's book collection to the new library. Ms Basia, the head librarian, was in charge at the Traugutt Street end, and the Czetwertyński end was run by Ms Marysia (called Myszka, or 'little mouse' by all the students—she was such a lovely, friendly lady). We went round and round, carrying all those dictionaries, anthologies of English and American literature, and loads of rather tired textbooks, while Basia and Myszka were trying to make sure that all those precious sources of academic knowledge found their place on the library shelves, A to Z. We carried hundreds of books, wondering if we were supposed to read them all in five years of study.

I can't remember my first inauguration day in October 1967. There were so many later academic ceremonies when I was a student, then a Ph.D. student, and then a teacher for almost half a century (several years as Dean of the Department of Modern Languages). There must have been the President's address in the huge hall of Auditorium Maximum, professors and deans with sceptres and chains, wearing black gowns and mortarboards, as well as *Gaudeamus* and *Gaude Mater Polonia,* sung beautifully by the University choir. There were the first meetings with colleagues, most of them girls—in those years English studies were supposed to be attractive to women who wanted to become teachers. Each student group had only one or two boys. Student books (little booklets listing all the courses, and all our credits and grades—this explanation is addressed to students born in the 21st century!) were ceremoniously handed to us all in the very modern but very ugly building of the Department of Modern Languages in Browarna Street, close to the river. Last year this eyesore was replaced by a functional and rather pretty, green and yellow edifice, 40.000 square metres, where (after years of wandering) all the sections of the Department, including English studies, found their place. I am happy to say that the new building had been designed by my partner and soul mate, Professor Ewa Kuryłowicz.

It was great fun to be a student during the sixties and the early seventies. All our classes and seminars were taught in the Czetwertyński building, main University campus, while

for the lectures we just had to walk a hundred paces across the campus to Auditorium Maximum. Between lectures and classes we often spent time together in Harenda, a nice coffee bar close to University, and very close to the famous statue of Copernicus. From time to time we could also afford coffee and cake at the Bristol Hotel—it seems impossible today, with their prices, but fifty years ago students of English could earn decent money teaching English courses or giving private lessons. It is perhaps hard to imagine it today, but in those years everybody or almost everybody was a smoker! The stench of cigarette smoke surrounded us everywhere, not only in bars, cafes and restaurants, but also in the corridors and staircases of university buildings. Once a week all the male students, dressed up in ancient-looking green uniforms, had to take part in military training—we were supposed to rise to the rank of second lieutenants before we graduated.

What I remember best are lectures in the history of English literature conducted by Professor Sinko. At his disposal he only had a lectern, a blackboard and some chalk—no PowerPoint or Prezi—but he managed to take us on magical mystery tours of Shakespeare's theatre in 16th century London, or Dickens's Victorian England. He had something that we often called yeast: he inspired us with his knowledge, and after each lecture we rushed to the University library, or the marvellous library of the British Institute, hoping to study all the sources which he recommended: texts, critical commentaries and books of essays before the next lecture in seven days' time. I also remember excellent history of Britain lectures taught by Professor Jan Kieniewicz, and American literature courses taught by his sister, Doctor Teresa Kieniewicz. I was not very keen on courses in linguistics, methodology or teacher training, but with a little bit of help from my colleagues and their lecture notes, I was able to make it.

The M.A. seminar in English literature, four semesters in our fourth and fifth years of study, was conducted by our favourite teacher, Professor Sinko. Working with him was a privilege and a pleasure, but he surprised us all in our first meeting when he said that this time, instead of poetry, fiction or drama, we were all going to examine several somewhat neglected genres of non-fiction writing, often referred to by theoreticians of literature Czesław Niedzielski and Roch Sulima as literature of fact. So, instead of poems, plays, short stories or novels, we were going to focus on genres of writing which are less often analysed but still terribly important in English literature: chronicles, travel writing, reportage, memoirs, diaries, collections of letters, autobiographies, even histories, biographies and newspaper columns. We were not very happy about it, but in our next meeting we were given a list of subjects to choose from, for instance: Lord Byron's letters; William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* as a political pamphlet; Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne;* Winston Churchill as the author of historical books, parliamentary speeches and journalism; Elizabeth Gaskell as the author of biographies; George Orwell as a political and social writer in books like *The Road to Wigan Pier* and as a war correspondent in *Homage to Catalonia;* T.E. Lawrence as a war correspondent and memoirist

in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom;* Virginia Woolf as an essay writer, and so on; the list seemed to have no end. A good friend of mine ended up writing his M.A. paper on Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler* as a philosophical essay. In the end I was assigned Axel Munthe's famous book *The Story of San Michele*, a huge international bestseller, translated into 25 languages. Munthe, physician to the Swedish royal family and one of the early practitioners of psychoanalysis, fused elements of autobiography with essays about psychology, essays about natural history, anecdotes about famous people he met, philosophical prose in the shape of his dialogues with himself, and concluded with the story of his summer residence on the island of Capri. Professor Sinko helped me with the logical and lucid arrangement of the whole apparently chaotic matter, with defining all the diverse subgenres, and answering the difficult question of how Munthe's interesting and remarkable life story had been converted into a fascinating work of literature.

After graduation I faced the choice of becoming a teacher of English in one of the grammar schools in Warsaw or discovering some alternative, for instance working for one of the publishing firms, Czytelnik or PIW, which specialised in publishing foreign fiction in translation. I finished a course in editing organized by the Association of Polish Publishers, and a course for translators of literature organized by Polish Writers' Union, conducted by eminent Polish translators Bronisław Zieliński, Anna Przedpełska-Trzeciakowska, Jerzy Sito, Maciej Słomczyński and many others. One of the participants was the late Anna Kołyszko, my colleague from the Institute of English Studies, who went on to become one of the very best translators of the younger generation. There was a series of lectures on the theory and practice of literary translation, and translation workshops. I suppose we learnt most from Wacława Komarnicka, who was at that time working on her translation of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by John Fowles. She asked us to translate several passages in the novel, and then we compared our versions. Her critical comments highlighted silly errors, awkward phrases and fairly frequent cases of guesswork and conjecture, but she also encouraged us to comment on her own translations. Even after the course was officially over, she made her home in Mokotów a sort of consultation centre for young translators. Years later, when I was translating critical essays and other stuff for the literary monthly *Literatura na świecie,* I often asked her to look through and improve my texts.

The first year after graduation was a time of hesitation and uncertainty for me, but fortunately just a couple of months after my M.A. exam, the University started recruiting for three-year Ph.D. courses, and I applied immediately. The stipend was very modest, but with a little help from my parents and some extra money from teaching English courses, I was able to make ends meet. I did not mention this before, but three times during my studies I managed to spend my long summer holidays, July to September, in London. I always stayed with my very special friends, Harry and Cindy, who had a large flat in the Irish district of Kilburn. Another friend, Geoff, a Ph.D. student at University College,

London, was somehow always able to find me lucrative employment, working for his parents' friends. Most often I worked as a decorator and carpenter. From Kilburn, via the famous Abbey Road and passing the famous recording studio, I could reach Hampstead, Belsize Park and other attractive NW3 districts in about fifteen minutes. A hard-working Polish decorator could easily earn quite a lot of money in a short time, so that the rest of the holiday, August and September, was spent sightseeing and travelling. I often went to Oxford, where Lizzie's parents had a lovely house in Boars Hill, or to Northumberland, where I had friends, English musicians and painters and weavers who studied in Warsaw in the 1970s, or to Eastbourne, a resort on the south coast, where I visited families of Polish veterans of the Battle of Britain.

My Ph.D. studies started in 1973, half a century ago. There were half a dozen linguists and half a dozen literature people. The seminars in literature were conducted by two eminent professors, Irena Dobrzycka (an expert on the Victorian novel) and Wanda Krajewska (English poetry of the 19th century). They both published important work on Dickens, and also on Byron and other English romantic poets, as well as William Butler Yeats. We were surprised when they encouraged us to choose our own topics for our dissertations. I expressed my interest in books written by participants of the Great War: Robert Graves, Edmund Blunden, Siegfried Sassoon, Frederic Manning, Richard Aldington and several others, and they both encouraged me to go ahead with my research. I managed to get in touch with British experts in this field and study their seminal publications: Bernard Bergonzi (*Heroes' Twilight: A Study of the Literature of the Great War*), Jon Stallworthy (editor of *The Oxford Book of War Poetry*), and Jon Silkin (*Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War*). I had the honour of meeting them in person and asking their advice during my summer sojourns in England. They all became, later in my academic life, great friends and mentors. To my great surprise, Bergonzi even agreed to send parcels of books (from Warwick University Library!) to Warsaw, but I had to give my word of honour that they would all be returned without fail.

Ph.D. seminars and consultations with our professors was one thing, but we were also encouraged to attend lectures in philosophy (Professor Tadeusz Płużański), structural linguistics (Professor Adam Weinsberg) and history (Professor Henryk Samsonowicz). What I remember best is a wonderful series of lectures (with slides and tours of the National Gallery) conducted by Professor Jan Białostocki. Whenever and wherever I travel, whether it is one of the European capitals, or cities like New York, San Francisco or Kansas City, I always remember to visit their galleries and museums, looking for the masterpieces which Professor Białostocki chose for his analyses.

During my third year of Ph. D. studies my supervisor whispered in my ear that if I was seriously thinking about becoming a lecturer or assistant in the English literature section, I should finish writing my dissertation before the summer holidays, and that I should try to gain some teaching experience. I took part in literature exams, and my

good colleagues in the Institute, Wanda Rulewicz, Marylka Jędrzejkiewicz and Andrzej Weseliński invited me to attend and then teach some of the courses. I enjoyed that very much. The only obstacle was that in Poland before the fall of communism all employment, even in academia, was controlled by the state. By happy chance, a colleague from the literature section, on a scholarship in Britain, chose not to return, and so one opening was waiting for me!

I loved working with students, teaching courses in British literature, and then MA seminars. Several of my best students went on to write their Ph.D. dissertations, and today they are young professors in several Polish universities. In the 1990s there emerged considerable new freedom in academic curricula, allowing us to teach selective courses in subjects which interested both the instructor and the students. I was particularly fond of lecturing in the history of English literature (15 lectures in every semester), and I was the first teacher in the Institute to make the most of PowerPoint presentations: each 90-minute lecture was accompanied by a considerable number of slide shows with important definitions, fragments of analysed texts, quotations from eminent critics, portraits of famous writers, reproductions of paintings—all this was meant to animate the lecture and to keep the lecturer from digressing too much! Before each examination period my students gained access to the presentations, including my remarks and annotations which conveyed the gist of each lecture.

After ten years of work as assistant lecturer there came the time for my post-doctoral dissertation. It was a fairly large work (well over 300 pages long), entitled *Mars and the Muse: Attitudes to War and Peace in 20th Century English Literature,* including sections on the Great War, the Spanish Civil War and the Second World War. I mostly wrote it during my two research sojourns in Britain and the States, conferring with eminent critics, Bergonzi, Silkin and Stallworthy. At Princeton University I attended a course of lectures on the subject of war literature offered by a leading expert in the field, Professor Samuel Hynes, who became one of the reviewers of my book, published by Warsaw University Press in 1988. A kind of by-product of my ACLS (American Council of Learned Societies) scholarship was a collection of essays, *The Great Crusade: American Literature of the First World War,* 1995.

The subject of war literature kept my attention over those years around the beginning of the new millennium. My next book, published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in 2009, was a detailed study (350 pages long!) of the life and work of Edward Thomas, literary critic, nature writer and poet, who died, as a Royal Artillery officer, in the spring of 1917, on the very first day of the Arras offensive. The book, entitled *Edward Thomas: A Mirror of England,* was spruced up (after all, it was going to be published in Britain) by a very good friend of mine, Professor Desmond Graham of Newcastle University, poet and translator of Polish poetry into English, so I want to take this opportunity and acknowledge his generous help.

The subject of war literature is fascinating, but in the end it proved to be rather depressing, so in the last few years I decided to move back in time, more or less 200 years. I focused on the amazing biography and oeuvre of a forgotten Romantic poet, John Clare, who enjoyed his first and rather stunning success with the publication of his first two volumes of poetry, entitled *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, 1820, and *Village Minstrel,* 1821. What is amazing about Clare is that he was born into a family of very simple, poor and illiterate landless peasants. All the very basic education he received was just a few years in the local Sunday school, but he went on to educate himself by reading the most important English poets, from Shakespeare to Milton to the great 18th century poets like Thomas Gray, James Thomson and Edward Young. He went on to write a tremendous number, thousands, of beautiful poems, but fame was short-lived, and he ended up, when he was only 44 years old, in a lunatic asylum where he spent more than a quarter of a century, but he went on writing! My first publication on Clare was an introductory essay for *Literatura na świecie,* 2012, in a double issue devoted to English Romanticism. The editor in chief of the monthly, Piotr Sommer, persuaded me to write my study of Clare's poetry in Polish, since there is quite a lot about him by English, American and even Canadian critics, but nothing in Polish. I said fine, I will, but there is the obvious difficulty: there are just a few poems by Clare translated by Zygmunt Kubiak and Juliusz Żuławski, one or two more by Stanisław Barańczak, and fifteen more translated beautifully by Zbigniew Machej for *Literatura na świecie.* I ended up translating more than a dozen poems myself, including the marvellous *Badger,* which are presented and analysed in my book. Entitled *John Clare: an unknown romantic poet,* it is ready for the printing press, provided that the Polish Science Foundation finds it acceptable, so fingers crossed!

I want to end this rather chaotic commentary on my half-century as an English scholar (counting from the time I graduated from the Institute of English Studies) by sending a warm greeting to all my former students and colleagues at Warsaw University and SWPS University. On April 20th, 2023 English studies at Warsaw University celebrated its one hundred years anniversary. We met in a brand-new building of the Department of Modern Languages. We met old colleagues and new students. We heard the Rector's address and talked about the past. We enjoyed a concert of English Baroque Music and took part in a celebratory banquet. I am sure English studies have a wonderful future in Polish universities.

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Jacek Wiśniewski is a retired professor of English, Warsaw University 1976–2011, SWPS University of Social Sciences and Humanities, 2012–2019. MA: 1972. Ph.D.: 1976 (*English Prose of the Great War*).

Major publications:

1. *Mars and the Muse: Attitudes to War and Peace in 20th Century English Literature,* a post-doctoral dissertation, Warsaw University Press, 1990.
2. *The Great Crusade: American Literature of the First World War,* Warsaw University Press, 1995.
3. *Edward Thomas: A Mirror of England.* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009.
4. *The Poetry of John Clare,* work in progress, ready for publication in 2023.

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"Speech delighted with its own music": Birds as Symbols of the Creative Process in the Poetry of W.B. Yeats and Edward Thomas

Abstract. The article focuses on the symbolic meanings of birds in selected verse of two distinguished 20th century English language poets—William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and Edward Thomas (1878–1917). There have been hardly any critical attempts to compare their creative output, despite Thomas's reviews of Yeats's works which prove a strong impact of Yeats's style and sensibility on Thomas's mind. Here, a comparative analysis is offered of bird symbolism in "The Wild Swans at Coole" (1917) by W.B. Yeats and "The Unknown Bird" (1915) by Edward Thomas, where both poets use birds as symbols of the creative process. In their reliance on symbols, they draw heavily on Romantic dialectic to resolve the inner conflict in consciousness and bridge the gap between the poetic self and the natural world. Also, the article is intended to show the impact of Romantic sensibility on the poets' original styles, which confronts tradition with modernity.
Keywords: William Butler Yeats, Edward Thomas, bird symbolism, creative process, Romantic sensibility, modernism, swans, birds

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I welcome you that have the mastery
Of the two kinds of Music: the one kind
Being like a woman, the other like a man.
Both you that understand stringed instruments,
And how to mingle words and notes together
So artfully that all the Art's but Speech
Delighted with its own music;
(W.B. Yeats, *The King's Threshold*)

1. Introduction

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) and Edward Thomas (1878–1917) belonged to the most important 20th century English language poets who widely used bird symbolism to project their emotional and spiritual inner selves onto the natural landscape. Although they were nearly contemporaries, writing in the times of the Great War, there have been scarcely any critical attempts to compare their creative output. This deficiency could be a consequence of some difficulty in aligning them with any aesthetic movement. Edna Longley (2013) is one of the few critics who have recognized certain, though not obvious, parallels between Yeats and Thomas: "his [Thomas's] poetry throws into relief dimensions of Yeats's poetry that recede when Yeats is consigned, with Eliot and Pound, to the file marked 'modernism'" (2013: xiii). This ambiguous status of both poets can be attributed to their original and highly individual way of connecting tradition with modernity. Both were strongly attached to Romantic heritage for its interest in nature and landscape, but were modernists in respect of the formal qualities, subject matter, themes and modes of expression.

As Longley (2013) observes, Thomas is seldom compared to Yeats, "despite the felt affinities suggested by his reviews of Yeats's work" (2013: 68), which show his deep-felt admiration for Yeats's mastery of style and prove the notable impact of Yeats's sensibility on Thomas's mind. Quoting the lines from the king's speech opening *The King's Threshold* in a review of Yeats's play from 18th June 1904, Thomas observes: "'Speech delighted with its own music' is the best definition of Mr Yeats's verse" (quoted in Longley 1981: 81). In the same review, he writes on Yeats's mastery of blank verse: "I seem to find, with astonishment, that verse is the natural speech of men, as singing is of birds" (1981: 81). In his monograph *Edward Thomas: A Mirror of England* (2009), Jacek Wiśniewski offers illuminating insights into the parallels between the two poets, especially as regards their perfect command of style and shared sensibility. Wiśniewski observes that Thomas "was one of the first critics to recognize the accomplishment of W.B. Yeats's poetry and drama" (2009: 4). Quoting an extensive passage from Thomas's review of Yeats's play, the scholar argues: "Yet for the next twelve years he [Thomas] went on to write in prose which occasionally reached the level of 'speech delighted with its own music'" (2009: 71).

I find Thomas's comments on Yeats, as well as Wiśniewski's reflections, to be an encouragement to explore the affinities between Yeats's and Thomas's poems, especially their use of birds as symbols of the creative process. I will argue that the "natural speech", which resembles the "singing of birds", is the distinctive feature of both poets' styles that approach "speech delighted with its own music" (quoted in Longley 1981: 81).

Both poets were post-Romantic as regards their interest in nature, strong reliance on the pastoral tradition, attachment to natural imagery and the musicality of language. Writing about Yeats, Denis Donoghue points to the mystic quality of language as a driving force at the heart of his creative process. In contrast to modernist poets, following Eliot and Pound, who thought of language as a closed system of words set up in a network of associations which constitute "the only reality there is, for the life of the poem" (Donoghue 1968: 128), Yeats used language for its dramatic quality, that is "the dynamic element which bridges the gap between consciousness and experience" (1968: 135). What joins Yeats with Thomas is the mystical dimension of their poetry, which finds expression in the symbols they employ. Longley observes that "the term 'Symbolism' illuminates (and is illuminated by) their common aesthetic bearings" (2013: 68). Their understanding of symbolism consists in the suggestive appeal of a symbol, evoking the emotions that escape a mere intellectual analysis. Yeats defines a symbol in his essay "The Symbolism of Poetry" (1900):

> All sounds, all colours, all forms, either because of their pre-ordained energies or because of long association, evoke indefinable and yet precise emotions, or [...] call down among us certain disembodied powers, whose footsteps over our hearts we call emotions; and when sound, and colour, and form are in a musical relation, a beautiful relation to one another, they become, as it were, one sound, one colour, one form, and evoke an emotion that is made out of their distinct evocations and yet is one emotion. (Yeats 1961: 156-157)

For Yeats, the symbol is then an expression of "some invisible essence, a transparent lamp about a spiritual flame" (1961: 116), and a means of giving "body to something that moves beyond the senses" (1961: 164), which discloses its subconscious or transcendental contents to consciousness through free associations and suggestion. The same suggestiveness, sometimes escaping logical judgement or eluding definition in critical terms, can be observed in Thomas's poems. Anthony L. Johnson (1987) finds this quality—which he defines as "a poetic of suggestion", in contrast to "a poetic of statement"[2]—to

2 "A *poetic of statement* and a *poetic of suggestion* are defined as "qualitatively differentiated components contributing to an overall poetic. A *poetic of statement* derives from the signified, whose messages will tend to be readily accessible to consciousness, whereas a *poetic of suggestion* derives from the

be a distinctive feature of both poets' dialectic style that owes much to their Romantic and post-Romantic legacy:

> The poetry of both bears some of the distinctive hallmarks of late Romanticism; in particular, it displays a rich spectrum of resolutions of a dialectic in which a poetic Self defines itself through the contact with a resistant Other. But the precise forms taken by that dialectic in the poetry of Yeats and Edward Thomas are strikingly different. (Johnson 1987: 85)

By recalling Lacan's psychoanalysis, Johnson attracts one's attention to the dialectic between the logical message, which is transmitted to the intellect (the left hemisphere) through language, and the intuitive suggestion, transmitted immediately to the senses (the right hemisphere) through sounds and images. Their poems constitute an attempt to communicate the totality of experience through the medium of symbols and the associations they evoke.

Both poets rely on "instinctive (organic, emotional, archetypal) symbols" (Longley 2013: 91) and resort to language as an "instrument by which a man meditates between himself and a world not himself; an instrument in the service of a reality that is not linguistic" (Donoghue 1968: 129). Their dialectic is convergent with Gadamer's understanding of symbol, which "'does not simply dissolve the tension between the world of ideas and the world of the senses'; rather it is a space where this tension is often aggressively performed" (Dwan 2019: 8). To both poets, the symbol offers a dramatic space for the mediation between the ideal and the empirical: "it is less a representation than a performance or event in which the absolute discloses itself" (2019: 11). Thus, their language and symbols offer revealing insights into a reality independent of consciousness, which is a quality shared with the Romantics. However, in order to open imagination to spiritual experience, they adopt modern aesthetics: the simplicity and economy of language, vivid and lively natural imagery, clarity and transparency of the form. The reading of their poems reveals a sensibility which Thomas R. Whitaker (1989) assumes to be the most adequate grounding for any study of poetry: "a dialogical understanding of human experience, an openness to unconscious and transcendental sources of thought and action, and a conviction that poetic form can be a very precise medium for the discovery and articulation of our responses to life" (1989: xii).

2. Bird symbolism in Yeats's and Thomas's poems

Both poets are appreciated for the unique musical quality of their language, which attracts the reader's ear to the sounds and strongly appeals to the imagination. Yeats's poems

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signifier, whose messages will tend to operate on a pre-conscious plane but to penetrate the psyche all the more deeply because of the signifier's resistance to analytic formulation" (Johnson 1987: 85).

were praised for their exquisite dramatic quality (vivid images, full of life) while Thomas used highly poetic language in his prose which resembled poetry due to the sounds, rhythm and the choice of words. Both visual and aural qualities of their verse can be easily detected in the symbols they employed in their poems. This paper will focus on bird symbolism and the way it works to display the poets' inner conflicts and dramatize the tensions between their consciousness and experience. Their selected poems will be examined with respect to how the musical quality of the verse, its rhythm, sounds and meter perceptible to the ear (or, more precisely, the "inner ear") of the reader stir the imagination to conjure up images perceptible to the "mind's eye".

To compare how birds work as symbols in their poetry, I have chosen two poems written approximately in the same period, during the First World War: "The Wild Swans at Coole" (1917) by W.B. Yeats and "The Unknown Bird" (1915) by Edward Thomas. These poems mark a transitional stage in their lives and express the inner crisis in which the poets found themselves. They also show a turning point in their creative careers, foreshadowing their personal and artistic transformation.

The poem "The Wild Swans at Coole" [3] opens Yeats's collection under the same title. The whole volume reveals Yeats's attempt to transform his personal experience into a more universal and symbolic vision. Donoghue argues that "the best way to read Yeats's *Collected Poems* is to think of it as dramatizing a great dispute between Self and Soul; Self being all those motives which tie one to earth and time, Soul being the freedom of imagination transcending the finite" (1968: 141–142). The poem displays the tension between the Self, tied to time and change, and the Soul, represented by the timeless beauty of the swans. Widely explored in Yeats's poetry, swans undergo a transformation: "From their role as immortal lovers in the dream-like magical world of Irish mythology, swans evolve into a more dramatic and complex mythological symbolism in *The Wild Swans at Coole,* both on a personal level and in a universal dimension" (Billigheimer 1986: 55). Yeats himself described the swan much later (in a 1932 letter to his wife) as "a symbol of inspiration" (quoted in Hone 1965: 425), but this symbol can be associated with many different concepts. The swans, besides their symbolic significance, have a physical existence as real birds, located in a physical space. In the title, the birds are specified as "the swans" (the definite article stresses their particular meaning to the poet) that are "wild" (uncontrollable) and attached to a particular place, i.e., Lady Augusta Gregory's estate at Coole Park, which Yeats frequently visited and where he met his almost lifelong love and muse, the actress and Irish activist Maud Gonne (see Levine 1981: 411–426). Although

3 The poem was written between 1916 and 1917, probably in October 1916. It was first published in *The Little Review* in June 1917 and then became the title poem in the 1917 and 1919 collections *The Wild Swans at Coole* (Levine 1981: 418–419). The analysis refers to the second version, published in the 1919 collection (enlarged and revised).

the biographical context is not indispensable for interpreting the poem, the personal element—Yeats's disappointment and despair at the rejections of his marriage proposals by Maud Gonne and then her daughter Iseult, as well as his stay at Lady Gregory's residence to cure his broken heart—provides a significant context for reading the poem as the poet's meditation on loneliness, ageing, pain and longing for the memories of youth.

Yeats's depiction of the swans here shows his stylistic transition from his early poetics, rooted in Romanticism, towards a modernist aesthetics, and marks his departure from the pastoral convention drawing on Celtic legends and fairy tales. The fusion of these two aesthetic modes is reflected in the balance between the subjective and objective perspectives. Yeats's ambiguous interpretation of the swans—either as an impersonal image or as a reflection of his personal feelings—was discernible in an early draft of the poem: "They're but an image on a lake / Why should my heart be wrung" (quoted in Levine 1981: 419). Levine observes that the poem was born out of "the profound disjunction between past and present meanings of that image on the lake" (1981: 419). The two versions[4] of the poem, in 1916 and 1919, manifest a transition from the "ode to private memory" to "the poet's symbolic vision" (1981: 420). The attempt to reconcile the Romantic subjectivity with a more universal vision emerges from Yeats's dynamic dialectic.

The poem opens with an evocation of the autumn landscape, reminiscent of Keats's ode "To Autumn", with its "Season of mist and mellow fruitfulness". In Yeats's poem, the introduction of the swans mirrored in the still waters of the lake shows a perfect harmony between the image and its reflection—the physical world and eternal beauty.

> The trees are in their autumn beauty, (1)
> The woodland paths are dry,
> Under the October twilight the water
> Mirrors a still sky;
> Upon the brimming water among the stones
> Are nine-and-fifty swans. (6)

The empirical reality of the swans—as authentic birds, not distant symbols from Celtic legends evocative of his early poems—attests to the personal character of the poet's encounter with the swans and offers a possibility to transcend personal experience into a universal dimension. In the opening lines, the poetic imagination and the

4 In the first printing, the arrangement of the stanzas was different: 1, 2, 5, 3, 4, which made the poem end on a more pessimistic note: "All's changed" (O'Neill 2004: 119). According to Levine (1981: 420), the poem was revised between November 1917 and March 1919, which was natural in the light of Yeats's marriage to Georgie Hyde-Lees in October 1917 and the purchase of a permanent home at Thoor Ballylee, near Coole Park, as well as the onset of his wife's automatic writing that led to the symbolic system of *A Vision*.

reflecting mind are placed in the landscape, besides the poet's mind, which undermines the concept of classical mimesis.[5] The mirror does not reflect the poet's mood, but the sky, which displays modern aesthetics. The opening stanza shows a static image, but underneath there is a dynamic movement evocative of the forthcoming change, as well as the passing of time. There is an attempt to reconcile time (the transience of "October twilight") and eternity (the stillness of the mirror reflection). Time is associated with the change of the seasons, while eternity is represented by the beauty of the swans. The artist seeks the sense of himself neither in the eternal images that pre-exist in Nature (unlike a Romantic poet) nor in the swans' beauty, which is an inherent quality of the object (as in modern aesthetics). Instead, Yeats creates a beautiful image that emerges from the dramatic encounter between the temporal (the poetic self) and the eternal (the soul or image). Thus, the fleeting swans are transformed into an eternal image of beauty through his creative process.

Freezing the image in a double "still frame" (the "still sky" reflected in the "brimming water") creates an illusion, while closing the line abruptly with the archaic phrase "nine-and-fifty swans" detaches the swans from the poetic persona and reinforces his alienation from the landscape. The reference to exact numbers in the phrases "nine-and-fifty swans" and "[t]he nineteenth autumn" seems to undermine the initial sense of a subjective, sentimental narrative (implied in the "autumn beauty") and can be seen as an attempt at exact analysis, typical of a modern poem. These fifty nine swans are both mythological creatures and real birds linked to Yeats's personal experience. The symbolic number "nine-and-fifty" is derived from Celtic folklore[6] and is set against the recurrent nineteen autumns that have passed since the poet made the first count—the contrast places the swans both in the realm of the imagination and in the natural world. Likewise, nature is liberated from the poet's mind to become a pretext for meditation.

The poem works through the suggestions, implications and understatements evocative of the poet's inner conflict between the personal emotions (implicit in the sounds and structure) and the rigour of the impersonal mode that imposes a formal control onto the wildness of the swans. The tension results from the interaction between the apparent "stillness" of the image in the opening lines and the undercurrent movement within the structure of poem, suggestive of the forthcoming change.

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5 In Romantic "expressive" theories of art, the classical notion of *mimesis*—defined as a reflection of the external world in art—transforms into that of poetry being a projection of the poet's inner state of mind, in contrast to modern "objective" theories, which grant poetry "the autonomy of the work itself as existing for its own sake" (Abrams 1971: 28).

6 According to the commentary on the poem, they were well described in Lady Gregory's *Coole* (1931): "there *were* fifty-nine swans there when Yeats wrote the poem, in a mood of intense depression" (Yeats 1996: 551). The symbolic number "nine-and-fifty" has been adopted from the folk ballad "Thomas Rymer" and refers to the horse with "fifty silver bells and nine" hanging from its mane (Billingheimer 1986: 56).

The nineteenth autumn has come upon me (7)
Since I first made my count;
I saw, before I had well finished,
All suddenly mount
And scatter wheeling in great broken rings
Upon their clamorous wings. (12)

There is a shift from the impersonal image in the first stanza to the personal expression in the second—it introduces a subjective perspective on time (the "nineteenth autumn has come upon me"). The poetic persona is introduced here for the first time and becomes intrusive throughout the whole stanza (the "I" is repeated four times in the first three lines, which suggests the poet's deliberate effort to take control over the disappearing image). The swans "suddenly mount" before the poet can finish the count, that is before he can extract a static image from changeable nature. It is not nature that endows images with eternal beauty, but the artist who is trying to grasp a reflection of one fleeting moment in his own perception. There is a sudden change destroying the still structural order of the previous stanza. The attempt to achieve harmony is abruptly broken by the sound of the swans' "clamorous wings", when the birds "suddenly mount" and "scatter wheeling" in "broken rings" (which recalls Yeats's "gyres").[7] Although the visual image is dispersed (the swans disappear from sight), a sudden upsurge of energy is released from the sound (the "bell-beat" of the wings) and the dynamic structure of lines 15–18 (enjambments), which sets the static image in motion.

I have looked upon those brilliant creatures, (13)
And now my heart is sore.
All's changed since I, hearing at twilight,
The first time on this shore,
The bell-beat of their wings above my head,
Trod with a lighter tread. (18)

The transition in the third stanza links the present with the past in the poet's memory. The interaction between the static mood of the first stanza and the dynamic movement of the second offers a new perspective on the swans and their effect on the poet's emotions:

7 In Yeats's cosmogony, progress was presented as series of intersecting cones, or "gyres", which illustrated a 2,000-year progression of eras in history (see Yeats 1966: 68). The imagery in the 1917 version of the poem prefigures the iconography he adopted in his later works, based on *A Vision* (1920), after he departed from the early symbolism drawing on Celtic legends and liberated himself from the obsession with Maud Gonne.

looking at these "brilliant creatures" now gives him pain. His "heart is sore" at a sense of inner division between himself and the swans, which have scattered in "broken wings". He has lost possession of the image. The repetition of "twilight" from the first stanza widens the gap between the present and the past and deepens the feeling of loss. The phrase "All's changed" (recalling "Easter 1916" and Yeats's disillusionment after the tragedy of the Easter Uprising) traps the poet again in the mundane sphere governed by time and change, while the swans remind him of eternal beauty, now distant and unattainable. The sense of being torn apart between contradictory impulses is intensified through the simultaneous reference to the senses of sight (watching the "brilliant creatures") and hearing (the "bell-beat" of the swans' wings). It is hearing the dynamic sound of the wings—rather than seeing the static image of the swans drifting on the still water—that makes the poet recall his youth when he "Trod with a lighter tread". The energy returns to the poem for a moment thanks to the audible interplay between the plosives in "bell-beat" and the sonorous "trod" – "tread". However, the underlying mood is nostalgia for time that is fleeting and the inner split between the poet and the swans, making their beauty beyond reach.

> Unwearied still, lover by lover, (19)
> They paddle in the cold
> Companionable streams or climb the air;
> Their hearts have not grown old;
> Passion or conquest, wander where they will,
> Attend upon them still. (24)

The fourth stanza transfigures the swans into an eternal symbol of "passion and conquest" that will "wander where they will". In contrast to the poet, whose "heart is sore", "their hearts have not grown old"—they are constant in their youth, "unwearied" beauty, and their ability to mate for life, as they paddle "lover by lover" in "companionable streams". This immutability is reinforced by the repetition of "still" in the first and last lines. Although the poetic persona is absent from the landscape, his presence is implied through the contrast between the swan's young inexhaustible hearts and the solitary poet's broken heart. Unlike the ageing poet, they are resistant to time and change (although he actually describes different swans than the ones he saw in his youth). The swans he creates are not real birds, but a projection of the poet's mind. Their timelessness arises neither from the physical world (fleeting and transient) nor from the eternal ideal (immortal but unattainable), but from the dynamic interaction between passion (the heart) and contemplation of eternal truths (stillness). The image thus gains independent life, although it is born out of the poet's passion and suffering.

But now they drift on the still water, (25)
Mysterious, beautiful;
Among what rushes will they build,
By what lake's edge or pool
Delight men's eyes when I awake some day
To find they have flown away? (30)

The final stanza liberates the swans from the sphere of a private memory into a symbolic realm. The poem ends with a vision of "mysterious, beautiful" creatures that "now drift on the still water" but will fly away some day. The swans are immortal, but trapped in a world governed by time. Another frame is imposed on this image by recalling the stillness from the first stanza, but this time the image is inverted, since "still" refers to the water, not to the sky. The swans' "mysterious" beauty provides a temporary reconciliation between the eternal beauty of the "brilliant creatures" and the transient "autumn beauty" of nature. The poem ends in an open question about the future, stressing the perpetual uncertainty of the vision, which can disperse at any moment. Wild swans will exist somewhere and enrapture others with their beauty, but they will disappear from the poet's sight—he will lose the possession of the image. This loss is revealed in the imperfect inner rhyme between "awake" and "away", visible to the eye, but inaudible to the ear. Although the poem ends on a promising note, pointing to the potential of the image to delight others, the reader is left with the feelings of disappointment and sorrow as the swans are missing from the landscape.

Although the poem begins and ends with an impersonal static image, the implicit movement within its structure attracts the reader to the undercurrent hesitant moods. According to Michael O'Neill, the poem "works through understatement and implication" (2004: 120) due to the dynamic use of the word "still". The word is repeated four times: in lines 4, 19, 24, 25, which moves the poem forward and accounts for the feelings of anxiety and unrest underneath its apparent structural order. "Unwearied still", the swans drift on the "still water" that mirrors the "still sky", which creates multiple illusions and opens the space for mystery. This "dance of 'stills' grows mesmeric" (2004: 120) but makes the reader aware of the poet's "unstill" feelings beneath the apparent stillness of the landscape.

Another distinctive feature of Yeats's style is its exquisite musical quality based on the interplay between the sound and the image. The swans are evoked in the "mind's eye" due to their visual beauty, rather than their song, but it is the sound of the swans' beating wings and their wheeling movement that fill the static landscape with energy. The musical turn of phrase reflects Yeats's Gaelic roots, enriching his English with features of Gaelic prosody, which, in Stephanie Noirard's observation, defines Yeats's Irish idiom.

> The Irishness of the poem is rather to be found in its prosody. Indeed, several features of Gaelic poetry may be found here such as the reliance on assonances (/eI/ /I/) and alliterations (/s/, /t/, /b/); on the repetition of words (upon, still); on word ladders ("ring-wing", "count-mount", "stone-swan"); or on *aicill,* a process by which a word inside a line is made to rhyme with the last line of another ("awake"/"away"). (Noirard 2009: 238)

As Donoghue observes, "Yeats's characteristic poems are cries, laments, prayers, stories, legends, rebukes; human sounds rather than objects" (1968: 133). The poem expresses Yeats's cry over the loss of youth and happiness, and evidences his dramatic effort to recreate the sense of poetic self through the image. Yeats uses the mask of the swan to hide his private feelings behind the "mysterious beauty" of the image. He intends to seize the vision before it disappears but is not able to do so. Yet, the swans' beauty can give him a moment of rapture before he awakes from a dream to the sorrowful reality. His poem is an attempt to create his own inner landscape and fill it with symbols that he moulds in his imagination. His swans are both real and eternal, their existence is grounded in the physical, material world, but they also enter a spiritual sphere through the artist's creative power to transform his personal experience into a universal vision. The energy comes from his dramatic ability to bridge the gap between consciousness and experience. Although the balance is restored for a while (with the swans floating on the still water), the inner conflict remains unresolved—the poem ends in a vision which vanishes from the poet's view before he is able to get hold of it. As Kelly Sullivan comments, "These swans also break free of symbolism, resisting any attempts to count them [...]. But they allow him to empathise with the future viewer whom they will delight" (2021: 96). Notably, Yeats's later poems show a tendency for a gradual release of the swan from the symbolic dimension. The symbolic swan was superseded by "something more literary avian" (2021: 91) and finally "leaped into the desolate heaven" (Yeats 1996: 316) in the poem "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen". "This distinction between representing and experiencing - or, [...] between echoing and directly showing - preoccupies aspects of Yeats's poetic ouevre, particularly in relation to birds and other animal life" (Sullivan 2021: 91). Thus, the poet's attempt to make the swan present through its absence links Yeats's bird symbolism with Edward Thomas.

Critics (e.g., Horne 2020) often detect a deep sense of melancholy and dissatisfaction discernible underneath the surface of Yeats's and Thomas's poetry, which is brought to the fore in their descriptions of nature, especially their symbolic depictions of birds. While to Yeats nature is associated with the transient human condition, with birds becoming the symbols of eternal beauty, to Thomas nature becomes a space to explore the absence of and encounter with other living creatures, both human and non-human, such as birds. Both poets' sensibilities show the impress of Keats, especially the poet's desire to suspend judgement and identify oneself totally with the object of inspiration. Keats defined this

quality in a letter to his brothers George and Tom, of 21st December 1817, as "Negative Capability, that is, when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (quoted in Wiśniewski 2009: 139). As Wiśniewski observes, "Thomas associates the poetic moment—unpremeditated and unsought for, sudden, surprising and hard to capture, or captured "unwontedly"—with the self-transcending of ecstasy.[8] It may be represented in his poems by the lovely notes sung by an unknown and never seen bird …" (2009: 139). While Yeats's poem voices his cry over the loss of the image that disappears from his sight to delight other men's eyes, Thomas is more of a passive listener to the voices of nature who lets the birds fill the empty space of his inner landscape. His images are not imaginary but natural, and it is their material existence that turns them into symbols. Nature is distant and indifferent to human beings, but it has its own language to which the human inner ear can be attuned. Rowan Middleton suggests that many of Thomas's poems "concern both the physical aspects of nature and a quiet search for something beyond the physical that is felt to be there, even if access to it is uncertain or unachieved" (quoted in McAvoy 2020: 16).

Christopher Horne (2020) observes that unlike Yeats's poems, whose power lies in a transcendent vision, Thomas's "poetic landscapes are never wholly removed from his participation in WWI, there arises a contradiction between the Romantics' transcendent mode and the psychological realities of war" (2020: 106). Listening to the birds singing helps the poet to overcome his frequent bouts of depression and to forget about his traumatic war experience. Unlike Yeats, who uses the solitary birds, including the swans, as natural symbols to represent subjectivity,[9] individuality and self-sufficient loneliness, Thomas often describes small anonymous birds and tends to link their singing with the coming of seasons.

While Yeats's swans show his attempt to transform his personal experience into a universal vision and hide his private experience behind the mask of his swans, Thomas's poems strongly rely on the physical reality and personal experience, which form the basis of his natural symbolism. The symbolic "unknown" bird is grounded in the poet's actual experience. In *The Happy-Go-Lucky Morgans*, Thomas's autobiographical novel, the author (who portrays himself as Mr Torrance) recalls the sinister cypress where no birds built nests and only one bird perched and sang, which cheered him up and annoyed his father:

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8 See: Thomas's abandoned project, an essay on "Ecstasy", which includes thirteen typescript sheets and proves Thomas's deeper understanding of Keats's "ecstasy" as "alienation or destruction of mind", opposite to its primary sense of "standing outside, in a frenzy or stupor, fearful, excited" (Wiśniewski 2009: 138–139).

9 Yeats writes about birds in his introduction to the play *Calvary* (1920): "… such lonely birds as the heron, hawk, eagle, and swan, are the natural symbols of subjectivity, especially when floating upon the wind alone or alighting upon some pool or river, while the beasts that run upon the ground, especially those that run in packs, are the natural symbols of objective man" (quoted in Jeffares & Knowland 1975: 167). This is the iconography he employed in his later works, based on *A Vision* (1920).

> Birds were continually going in and out of it, but never built in it. Only one bird sang in it, and that was a small, sad bird which I do not know the name of. It sang there every month of the year, it might be early or it might be late, on the topmost point of the plume. It never sang for long, but frequently, and always suddenly. It was black against the sky, and I saw it nowhere else. [...] I laughed at it, and was not at all sorry to see it there, for it had stood on that perch in all the happy days before, and so long as it remained the days would be happy. My father did not like the bird, but he was often looking at it, and noted its absence as I did. The day after my sister died he threw a stone at it—the one time I saw him angry—and killed it. (Thomas 2020: 146–147)

In "The Unknown Bird", Thomas shows a fusion of personal and impersonal elements, which links his sensibility with Yeats's. Thomas's poem attempts to create a unique personal vision—an intimate union between the poet and the bird—which is based on the absolute rejection of the self that passively surrenders to the vision. In the poem, Thomas recalls a unique moment from the past when he heard a bird singing. The poem reflects the poet's struggle to strike a balance between the personal and the universal. In contrast to Yeats, who specifies the context for the swans in the title, Thomas's bird is entirely abstracted from the context. As Johnson observes, what we find here is "the paradoxical presence of a bird that is all absence" (Johnson 1987: 98). The title points to the contradictory nature of the bird as "unknown" on the one hand, and familiar to the poet on the other. The definite article stresses the bird's particular value to the speaker and makes it represent the whole of nature. However, in contrast to Yeats's poem, which reflects the speaker's creative effort to take possession of the image, in Thomas's poem it is the bird—or rather its song—that takes possession of the poet's self, which passively surrenders to the sound of the three lovely notes it whistles.

> Three lovely notes he whistled, too soft to be heard (1)
> If others sang; but others never sang
> In the great beech-wood all that May and June.
> No one saw him: I alone could hear him
> Though many listened. Was it but four years
> Ago? or five? He never came again. (6)

From its very beginning, Thomas's poem displays paradoxes or contradictions that reveal his hesitation and search for the deeper meanings inherent in nature, which is distant to humans and full of mystery. The bird is "unknown", but the poet acknowledges its reality, speaking from experience: "I alone could hear him". The bird's unique status (to the poet) is accented through personification— "he" appears in the first line and is contrasted with insignificant "others" (other birds or singing creatures), which never sing. As Siriol McAvoy

remarks, "The ambiguity of this poem lies in whether this bird, a classic emblem of poetic inspiration, is part of the speaker's self—a fantasy, generated by the mind—or whether it has its own, separate existence" (2020: 17). The real existence of the bird (but for the poet) is questioned from the outset—the experience is so mystical that it eludes sensual perception. The opening lines reduce the image to the sound, since "no one saw him"—the bird is not seen, not even heard "though many listened", its voice is "too soft to be heard", and what is heard is not even a song, but "Three lovely notes". This mystical bird cannot be seen even by the poet. The reduction of the context is emphasized with the conditionals and negations: "others never sing", if they sing at all. The bird's voice is audible only to the poet, which points to their unique relationship: the bird was heard at a distance and but for a moment, it was reduced to only three notes. However, there is a strong impact of the rhythmically stressed "three lovely notes" on the reader's ear, which opens the consciousness to sensual and intuitive perception of the bird as a real being. The language of nature, however strange and incomprehensible, sounds "lovely" to the ear.

Thomas questions the reality of time and memory as the foundation of his experience. The speaker is not sure when he heard the bird: "Was it but four years / Ago? or five?"—there are two question marks—he is unable to locate the sound in time and places the bird somewhere in the spiritual realm, out of the physical world. Shifting "Ago?" to the next line stresses the speaker's uncertainty about the reality of time; it could well have been a dream ("as if he and I were in a dream"). Unlike Yeats, whose reference to the exact number of swans counted shows his attempt to possess the image, Thomas's senses are sharpened in a passive wait for the recurrence of the bird to possess him, but to no avail: "He never came again".

> Oftenest when I heard him I was alone, (7)
> Nor could I ever make another hear.
> La-la-la! he called, seeming far-off—
> As if a cock crowed past the edge of the world,
> As if the bird or I were in a dream.
> Yet that he travelled through the trees and sometimes
> Neared me, was plain, though somehow distant still
> He sounded. All the proof is—I told men
> What I had heard. (15)

The further lines evidence the poet's individual effort to establish a personal connection between the bird and himself. The bird is alone and the poet is alone—this loneliness forms the grounds for their intimacy. This union is confirmed by the position of "alone": the stress on "alone" in line four, "I alone could have heard him" ('I was the only one'), points to their unique relationship, exclusive of "others". The word "alone" is repeated in

line 7, "when I heard him I was alone" ('lonely, without company')—the bird's notes were heard in silence. The poet questions even his ability to hear any bird whatsoever ("Nor could I ever make another hear"). The character of their exquisite encounter is undefined and undetermined, beyond any system designed by science (the naturalists), and depends on the poet's passive and receptive disposition to wait for the bird to speak to him—the consciousness is entirely open to an outer experience. On the verbal and semantic level, all communication is denied, as the bird is reduced to a disembodied song, which is graphically marked as "la-la-la" (being the poet's impression of the sound, rather than the real tweet uttered by a bird), which to the poet's senses feels like "bodiless sweet". The denial of verbal communication is confirmed on both empirical and semantic planes: he sounded "seeming far off", "as if a cock crowed past the edge of the world", "As if the bird or I were in a dream". The senses are attuned to listening for a very distant sound to be heard from "the edge of the world", which may bridge the gulf between the self and the natural world, and awaken one's consciousness.

The structure of the poem, which is graphically divided into two parts with a split in line 15, shows an attempt to strike an inner balance between its both parts—the first referring to the bird, the second to the poet. The balance is restored with the repetitions of the same words in a different context, stressing the dynamic relationship between the poet and the bird. The bird is first heard at a distance, which is gradually being reduced as the sound approaches the speaker: the bird "neared me", yet was "distant still". Putting these phrases in one line eliminates the spatial dimension. Unity is achieved for a moment, as the bird and the speaker merge into a single "plain" sound. The consciousness opens to the mystery of a creative act, an incarnation of the voice.

I never knew a voice, (16)
Man, beast, or bird, better than this. I told
The naturalists; but neither had they heard
Anything like the notes that did so haunt me,
I had them clear by heart and have them still.
Four years, or five, have made no difference. Then
As now that La-la-la! was bodiless sweet:
Sad more than joyful it was, if I must say
That it was one or other, but if sad
'Twas sad only with joy too, too far off
For me to taste it. But I cannot tell
If truly never anything but fair
The days were when he sang, as now they seem. (28)

The reality of experience is supported with the dry statements of facts: "He sounded", "I told men", "what I had heard". This is tangible proof of the bird's existence in the poet's experience and provides empirical grounds for that knowledge. While the mysterious bird becomes a part of the speaker's inner self on the sensual plane, this is denied on the semantic plane. The line cleft crosswise splits the poem into two parts, creating a visual gap between experience and knowledge. The expression "I never knew a voice" (instead of "I never heard a voice") suggests that the mystic knowledge revealed to the speaker by the bird is different from the scientific knowledge of the naturalists. The contrast between the negations used to describe naturalists ("neither had they heard/ Anything like the notes") and the poet's intuition that bordered on certainty ("that did so haunt me") points to the speaker's desire to become one with nature. This uncertain and hesitant attempt to hear the birdsong is gradually transformed into the poet's absolute command of the secret language of birds: "I had them clear by heart and have them still". Repeating "have" in the past and in the present tense suggests the timelessness of the birdsong, while the adverb "still" (meaning 'now as before') testifies to the "reality" of the voice. The emotional balance is gradually achieved (was it more "sad" or joyful", "sad only with joy too"), which transforms the sense of time: "four years, or five, have made no difference". Time does not matter because the poet hears these notes "now" as he heard them "then". The song marks the moment of creation which transcends time—the bird's voice is always perceptible to the senses: it is simultaneously heard ("la-la-la") and tasted ("bodiless sweetness")—the synaesthesia opens the senses to intense concentration that enables the bringing to presence what is "all absence". There is no bird, not even a song, only three notes "la-la-la" (strange as they may sound) heard in the distance – but their constant presence in the speaker's consciousness is acknowledged by the dynamic progression of the sound over time and space: "distant still", "have them still", "now I know". The sense of time and space is abandoned, while possession becomes one with knowledge.

The encounter with the bird is elusive to others' knowledge or experience (no one heard the bird "Though many listened"), or eventually to the poet himself ("I cannot tell" when it was). The syntax of the final lines is so strewn with negatives, hesitations, "buts" and "ifs", that it undermines Thomas's ability to opt for any resolution, except for this "bodiless sweet" sensation that comes from his private and subjective experience.

> This surely I know, that I who listened then, (29)
> Happy sometimes, sometimes suffering
> A heavy body and a heavy heart,
> Now straightway, if I think of it, become
> Light as that bird wandering beyond my shore. (33)

The final lines restore a perfect balance to the poem's structure. The poet gains deeper knowledge, bordering on certainty ("this surely I know"), which comes from attentive listening to the bird's song ("I who listened"). This subjective, mystic knowledge allows the speaker to reconcile the contradictions, and finally restore integrity to his troubled physical and mental condition: a "happy sometimes" and "sometimes suffering"; "a heavy body" and "a heavy heart". The inner conflict—reflected in the poet's consciousness by a hesitant, uncertain struggle between "buts" and "ifs"—is reconciled but for a moment (like in Yeats's poem) and gives a sudden impulse to "a heavy body and a heavy heart" to proceed with the journey. The word "straightway" suggests "straight away" ('suddenly') and a "straight way" ('course of the journey'). The final tone is joyful (unlike Yeats's despair)—the sound heard somewhere in the distant regions of memory invigorates the poet's "heavy" body and soul with a vital force to overcome his physical exhaustion and mental depression, and advance in life. He becomes as "Light as that bird wandering beyond my shore"—the spirit transcends the weary physical and mental condition while the self becomes one with the bird "wandering beyond my shore". The impulse from the birdsong opens the mind to a fresh upsurge of energy, making it possible to exceed the limits of empirical experience and progress into the mystical.

3. Conclusion

Both Yeats and Thomas were modernists drawing on Romantic tradition, in whose works Romantic sensibility was filtered through modern aesthetics. Both poets relied on post-Romantic heritage based on Keats's mysticism, which attempted to bridge the gap between the poetic self and the natural world. They shared the same Romantic sensibility evident in the mind's disposition to respond to natural phenomena—they were open to the metaphysical dimensions of existence and found in nature the energy to communicate with their unconscious or spiritual spheres. They applied birds as symbols to resolve the inner conflict between consciousness and experience lying at the heart of the creative process. Though different, their poems—when read together—display a remarkable resemblance as regards the musicality of the language, the powerful and suggestive impact of the sound and imagery upon the reader's senses, and the ability of verse to turn imagination to spiritual experience. The symbolism of birds proves the poets' creative effort to achieve a balance between fact-based knowledge and intuitive insight, which opens the mind to the mystical. Both poets attempt to strike a balance between sound and image through the natural rhythms and music of speech, which attunes the reader's ear to the "pre-ordained energies" inherent in words. Yeats's swan iconography reflects his deliberate endeavour to recreate the sense of the poetic self through the image, while Thomas's symbolism manifests a total surrender of the self to the sounds of nature, which helps him regain integrity and balance. Their poems show an effort to extract from nature the primitive sense of life, the primeval energy and

inner pulse which invigorates the spirit. While both poets resort to bird symbolism to provide an insight into the mystery of creation, their impulses are running in opposite directions. While Yeats makes a reference to the visual aspect of the image (the swans' beauty), Thomas appeals to the sense of hearing. It is hearing the birdsongs—more often than seeing the birds—that offers him an insight into the sphere beyond the ordinary experience and attunes his consciousness to the mystical quality of the vision. Yeats's poetry shows his creative struggle to adjust language to the demands of his powerful imagination, while Thomas's poetry reveals his disposition to attune his ear to the music inherent in nature, which resembles "the singing of birds" and gives a natural rhythm to his verse. Diverse as it is, the symbolism of birds—as image and voice—proves to offer a therapeutic value to both poets and helps them overcome feelings of melancholy, sadness, pessimism, and loss.

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From "where I live" to "my slave songs": Integrity and Extension in Wanda Coleman's Poetry

Abstract. This article discusses Wanda Coleman's poetry in terms of two interconnected categories which launched the studies of black literature by Craig Werner: "integrity" and "extension". These categories are assumed to correspond to the standard critical perception of Coleman's *oeuvre* as content- and form-oriented, respectively, where the former pre-conditions the latter. However, the implemented concepts not only demonstrate how well-acquainted the poet was with the everyday ghetto lives of poor black women and with multiple forms of discrimination against them ("integrity"), but also reveal her experimental attitude to language and to formal dimensions of poetry ("extension"). Also, a close reading of Coleman's protracted series of American jazz sonnets and her "Retro Rogue Anthology" poems reveals that this formal strategy extended her attention to a new subject matter (i.e., history, culture, and black identity), perceived and presented from a collective black perspective. Eventually, Coleman's re-writing of white classic poems bears the marks of the strategy of Signifyin(g) combined with the iconoclastic tradition pioneered by Friedrich Nietzsche.

Keywords: Wanda Coleman, black poetry, integrity, extension, American (jazz) sonnets, Retro Rogue Anthology, iconoclastic Signifyin(g)

In an interview with Malin Pereira, Wanda Coleman claims that she has taken her inspiration not only from the deep-imagist poet Diane Wakoski, whose poetic workshop she attended, but also from Charles Olson. Yet, despite the fact that the "[f]ocus in [her] work had been as much on form … as on content", her "content received the most of any outside attention" (Pereira 2010: 15). That lack of recognition of her attention to form by critics, who concentrated almost solely on Wakoski-like "anger, repetition, and feelings of loss and betrayal" (Pereira 2010: 10) and disregarded the jazz-inspired open-form lineage of *The Maximus Poems* that pulsates in her poems, provoked in Coleman a desire to

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"show off [her] intellect" (Pereira 2010: 15), and disentangle herself from being narrowly pigeonholed and dismissed by critics as a late voice of the Black Arts Movement. Still, the content and form dualism may be perceived as corresponding to "integrity" and "extension", respectively, the terms applied by Craig Werner to reading literature of the muted groups who must live in the wild zone within a hegemonic society.

In this article, firstly I look at the content-oriented poems from the first two volumes: *Mad Dog Black Lady* (1979) and *Imagoes* (1983), in which Coleman concentrates on the lives of poor black women. This allows us to see how integrity helps the poet express the truth of black women's marginalized existence, and speak about such things as the widespread racism they experience on a daily basis, which manifests itself in various forms of discrimination as well as sexual exploitation (in personal love relationships included), and their economic survival and lack of prospects, to mention but a few topic areas she persistently explores from the black woman's standpoint. Secondly, I move on to discuss her later poems from the collections entitled *American Sonnets* (1994)[2], *Bathwater Wine* (1998) and *Mercurochrome* (2001), which include both her protracted sonnet series of one hundred American sonnets and the *Retro Rogue Anthology* poems. I demonstrate how her turn to extension, which often takes the form of iconoclasm rooted in the tradition of Friedrich Nietzsche's *Twilight of the Idols*, not only eventually brought a new, less immediate subject matter pertaining to larger, more general and reflective themes approached from a black perspective, such as history, culture, and black identity, but also generated an original poetics that demonstrates her attention to Modernism's formal experimentation and challenges the racism of the white poetic tradition.

Nonetheless, the uniting factor between integrity and extension is Coleman's use of form and language, which draws on black speech and on her black jazz sensitivity and the attitude inherited/borrowed from Projectivist conceptualizations of language and composition, which suggest that the form of a poem should emerge spontaneously in the process of writing, and emphasizes that a poem's final formal shape should result from the development of its subject matter. As summed up by Joanna Durczak (2003: 167–168), the purpose is not a linear development of the theme in a way determined by logic or the rules governing language, but a constant movement, a faithful registering of one perception after another, thought after thought, impulse after impulse, against the tyranny of linguistic rules and habits. As a result, not only in the case of Coleman but also Robert Creeley and Olson, writing poetry is an improvisatory activity, and in this respect is reminiscent of free jazz, which in the late 1950s was launched by such black musicians as Ornette Coleman and Cecil Taylor, whose intuitive approach to the

2 The first part of Coleman's American sonnets series was published as a chapbook entitled *American Sonnets* in 1994. Her complete American Sonnets were published in 2022 under the title *Heart First into this Ruin. The Complete American Sonnets*.

sound matter may be perceived as closely analogous to the composition by field, and an inspiration to Projectivist poetics.

Keeping the above remarks in mind, as already mentioned, my proposition is to read Coleman's poetry by drawing on two interconnected concepts introduced into the study of black literature by Craig Werner in his 1986 essay entitled "New Democratic Vistas", identified by the critic as integrity and extension. As Werner says, "[i]ntegrity involves recognition of the full experience of all individuals and groups, including those experiences usually consigned to the wild zone", by which he means the experiences of the members of a muted group, which are crude or "relatively unmediated". As such, these experiences are not permitted to be expressed publicly, and are relegated to the twilight zone of enforced silence. Since they are expressed in the dialect of the muted group(s), dialects based on individual vocabularies that are unrecognized by the dominant culture, which maintains institutional control over proper forms of literary discourse, these experiences themselves are perceived as trivial and unimportant. As the critic argues further on, "this recognition is a necessary precondition for extension, which involves the desire to draw on and contribute to the experience of other groups and individuals" (Werner 1986: 54), which suggests a mutual curiosity, equality and freedom in terms of cultural exchange, and also equal access to a language perceived as "Universal". Nonetheless, such an exchange never happens in the real world, as it may take place only in a pluralistic model of culture. In fact, as Werner argues, we live in a world where a solipsistic model predominates entirely, a model that eliminates dialog as a means of establishing how individual and individual groups' experiences are communicated. Historically, for the black writers in America—i.e., who operate within the boundaries of the hegemonic cultural solipsism—it meant that, metaphorically speaking, they had to knock on heaven's door only to be let in on the condition that they employed the dominant language and ascended to the standards of the hegemonic culture. Those poets were frequently classified as the integrationists, since in their poetry they employed the dominant forms of expression; as a result, they were usually regarded as merely imitators of the white norms. Paradoxically, as Werner emphasizes, the Black Arts Movement and its "representatives" such as Amiri Baraka, managed to establish an "inflexible dialect" (rooted in the "individual vocabulary") and attacked the "source of the cultural solipsism by forcibly demanding entrance into [institutional] discourse" (1970: 74). But demanding does not automatically mean being granted entrance—such a complete immersion in black culture as practiced by the BAM poets and critics, although apparently necessary at that point, had to create a closed system of reference, and all closed systems, by definition, inevitably lose energy and fall apart due to entropy. When Coleman had her debut volume published in 1979, the BAM had already been fading out. Yet, her "incorporat[ing] some of the familiar stylistic tropes of Black Arts poetry" (Ryan 2015: 416), together with her immersion in black culture and poetry, and profound understanding of lives of poor

black women, prove that in her case integrity reached a very high level of saturation with blackness.

Coleman's natural poetic habitat is Watts, the black neighborhood of Los Angeles, the black ghetto her personae—black women all of them—dwell in, and where they spend their purposeless existence with no future before them. In "Where I Live", a poem from *Mad Dog Black Lady*, the poet sketches a picture of the city and its inhabitants, focusing on street life rituals, whose rules are dictated by poverty, sex and violence, mostly pertaining to black women and their survival in this hostile environment. The persona characterizes the place "where [she] live[s]" by making references to noisy soul music from the radio, strong smells and tastes of "hamburgerfishchilli" that draw "hungry niggahs off the street" to the "juke on the corner", being observed by the police helicopter constantly present "like god's eye" in the sky, and being felt by perfect strangers—"niggahs pinching my meat", the "dudes [who] hate my / ways and call me a dyke cause i wouldn't sell pussy" (13). Such use of synesthesia, together with mentioning some individual inhabitants of the black space (e.g., an old black woman who "collects / the neighborhood trash" or an "insane old bitch next door beating on the wall") and all-pervasive street violence ("bullets and blood") de-romanticize the black ghetto—strongly romanticized during the Black Arts Movement period—and turn it into an infernal space of loneliness and alienation. Moreover, the line which opens the poem and is repeated close to its end ("at the lip of a big black vagina / birthing nappy headed pickaninnies every hour on the hour"), suggests that the ghetto functions like a self-regenerating organism that produces at speed only meaningless lives and human suffering. It is not surprising then that the female persona is "looking forward to the / day [she] leave[s] this hell".

Decoding the Los Angeles ghetto where she lives as "this hell", and an open expression of a desire to escape the unbearable reality of the black existence, whose beauty is praised by Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) as "our terribleness", point to the fact that the speaking persona does not feel that she might ever belong in that place. The poem may be juxtaposed with Sonia Sanchez's "Homecoming", in which we read about the persona's conscious decision to finally return to the black ghetto as a mature person/poet who wants to serve her community. The excerpt from Sanchez's poem, which reads "this is for real / black / niggers / my beauty", demonstrates her complete identification with the black inhabitants of the ghetto, and the return is a condition to discover the beauty in blackness. In this respect Sanchez's poem remains influenced by Jones/Baraka, who formulated the ideological blueprint for the representation of the beauty of the black community in his essay entitled "City of Harlem", where he states that

> [t]he legitimate cultural tradition of the Negro in Harlem [or, arguably, of any other black ghetto] is one of wild happiness, usually at some black man's own invention—of speech, of dress, of gait, the sudden twist of a musical phrase, the warmness or hurt of someone's

> voice… Harlem … is a community of nonconformists, since any black American, simply by virtue of his blackness, is weird, a nonconformist in this society. (1966: 92–93)

In Coleman's poem, written almost a decade later than "Homecoming", the "Black is beautiful" stance seems to be merely an illusion invented and maintained by the black activist poets, who turn a blind eye to the truth and replace it with the perceptions dictated by the black revolutionary ideology. In Coleman's early volumes there is no fascination with, let alone delight at the black existence or lifestyle. Instead, her persona seems to be sinking into depression when she realizes that "the county is her pimp", so she cannot expect any institutional support, but at the same time saves herself from falling apart under the weight of harassment, violence and ugliness by turning "a trick / swifter than any bitch ever graced this earth / she's the baddest piece of ass on the west coast". Krista Comer reads this statement in positive terms as the final victory, as she claims that "the lingering aftereffect is less one of racial or female suffering than of adaptation, survival, and a sly, confident, and defiant victory" (1999: 366). Nonetheless, defiant as it is, we should be cautious in reading it as a victory since the new identity of the black female persona in "Where I Live" results from embracing a stereotype of a black woman, and reducing her to a sexual object. The fact that she refuses to accept this stereotype from the outside world, but takes it on by her own decision, suggests a strategy of mimicry which, as argued by Luce Irigaray in the context of feminism, is an ironic adaptation to the existing conditions in the cul-de-sac situation.

A similar mixture of bitterness and ironic tone can be found throughout the whole debut volume. For example, the poem "Waiting for Paul" (*Mad Dog*…: 59) expresses a longing for an ideal world that is very far from the reality of the here and now or, simply put, is its opposite:

> in the bar
> they play songs about outer space
> where people love each other truly
> where whores are goddesses
> pin ball machines pay jackpots
> of ten grand and
> presidents suck dicks for quarters…
> …
> songs about outer space
> here drugs are legal
> but no one has the need…
> …
> the problems of humanity
> solved on the unprinted side of a paper napkin

red light and juke flashing
come in captain zero

Simple as it is in terms of its structure based on striking contrasts, the poem does not require an extensive critical commentary, as the juxtaposition of the drab ghetto reality and the fantasy world of "outer space" clearly suggests the utopian character of the imaginary place. In "outer space" there is a world where justice has become a fact and is guaranteed, so there is no longer a need for heroes like Captain Zero—the last of the pulp magazines' crime-fighting figures modelled on such characters as the Shadow and Batman. As there is no crime, Captain Zero, who, as a result of an accident connected with high radiation becomes invisible at night and thus arguably may be black, can relax in the bar in the "red light" and become immersed in sounds of "mellow ballad / sipped from purple glass". The ballad about outer space as "the problems of humanity" had been solved apparently forever. Nevertheless, it is interesting to read the figure of Captain Zero as Jones/Baraka, since this connection is clearly suggested through allusion to Ellison's figure of the Invisible Man as well as the fact that Jones/Baraka used such pop culture characters as the Shadow, Green Lantern, and the Lone Ranger in his first collection. In this light the fact that the place where the utopian world is taken for reality is a bar might suggest that access to this fantasy is induced by the music from a juke-box that intoxicates the patrons. As a matter of fact, there is no escape from that place, even though black poets such as Jones/Baraka claim that "this hell" is in fact a black paradise.

In many poems in *Mad Dog Black Lady* and *Imagoes* Coleman uses various black female personae—be it a medical billing clerk, a prostitute, a woman raped by two burglar/rapists or a young mother—who speak from their specific underdog position about their own experiences and problems of the poor living in the ghetto community. The poems abound in no-choice situations, exploitation of the poor, and crimes that involve black women as victims of economic discrimination and oppression.

For instance, a poem from *Mad Dog Black Lady* entitled "Drone" is a monologue of a medical billing clerk who speaks in a monotonous and automatic voice about the patients of the clinic where she works, typing "the same type of things all day long", filling in "insurance claim forms / for people who suffer chronic renal failure". These people are "poor, black or latin", whereas the doctors are apparently white, although it is not stated directly in the poem. On the one hand, it seems that the clerk is aware of the injustice of the system, which exploits these people for its own benefit since "the cash flows and flows and flows / so that the doctors can feed their race horses / an play tennis and pay the captains of their yachts / and keep up their children's college tuition and / trusts an maintain their luxury cars" (91–92). On the other hand, the robot-like way of her speaking protects the persona as it cuts her off from emotional involvement with the poor. Even though she herself is "paid a subsistence salary" (92), which situates

her on their side, the fact that she has a permanent job at all, and does not want to lose it, separates her from them.

A poem entitled "Today I Am a Homicide in the North of the City" (*Mad Dog…*: 25) is an interior monologue of a black woman riding a bus:

> on this bus to oblivion i bleed in the seat
> numb silent rider
> bent to poverty/my blackness covers me like the
> american flag over the coffin of some hero killed in action
> unlike him i have remained unrecognized, unrewarded

The persona reflects on her own invisibility related to her race and poverty (the slash used in the phrase suggests their inseparability), which is linked to her being defined as a "silent rider", and thus a member of the muted group. In the poem her invisibility is not an asset as it is for Captain Zero, but a result of American racism and gender discrimination. She is well-aware that if she gets killed, no-one will know about it as she is on the ride where the last stop is oblivion, a "dark corner" where she gets off the bus and walks away in her "too tight slacks…into the slow graceful mood of shadow". Dressed to kill, the persona half-consciously attracts the attention of black men who might rape or even murder her. The final line of the poem reads: "i know my killer is out here"—making the destination become the black woman's destiny.

The danger of walking alone through the dark streets of the ghetto in such an outfit exposes the persona to a high risk of being hurt, no matter that she does not provoke the criminal. Yet, there is no security for a black woman anywhere, even at home, which is the subject of a poem entitled "Rape" from *Imagoes*. Here, the victim of rape is giving testimony to two policemen (in the opening stanza), one of whom declares that they are "here to help [her]", and to a doctor (in the second stanza) who wants to know "every detail" (122), forcing her to go through the horror of that experience once again. Yet immediately the falsity of the policemen's help is revealed to her as after hearing her testimony "he laughed and his partner laughed".

The policemen's spontaneous reaction after the official declaration of help results from the common disbelief that a black woman could be the victim of a sexual crime, which was encoded by American history of slavery and inscribed deeply in the popular attitude to black women, who were perceived as sexually active to the point of not only attracting rape, but liking it. According to Patricia Hill Collins, who classified and described four "controlling images" of black women, the most widespread of which is thinking of black women as jezebels (1991: 77), i.e., hypersexual or whores, the image makes oppression and prejudice against black women seem natural and excused. Thus, the doctor's enquiry reveals his curiosity masked as impatience, since everything he

says to the victim comprises brief phrases such as: "tell me every detail", "next detail" and, impatiently, "detail, detail". At the end, however, he asks the victim three questions pertaining to whether she had an orgasm while being raped: "did it feel / good?" "did you cum?" "both times?". The implication of the positive answers and details she is forced to tell sends the reader back to the above-mentioned stereotype of black woman as jezebel, especially because the victim, in an attempt to answer the doctor's second question, says that the rapists "were gentle lovers" (*Imagoes:* 122).

The third stanza refers to her boyfriend's immediate reaction after he came back home and learned from her what had happened. His anger manifests itself in his grievances that are directed at her, as if he thought her guilty of co-operating with the rapists and, as a result, cheated him of his ownership of her body. Tony Magistrale observes that the boyfriend's "contribution to this woman's defilement can be read as a desperate attempt to reclaim his threatened masculinity by re-establishing his dominance in the relationship" (1989: 546), which leads to his "furtive, particularly masculine identification with the earlier burglar/rapists, who also viewed her body merely as chattel" and abuses her body himself:

> … he asked her where
> it happened. She showed him the spot. he
> pulled down his pants, forced her back onto the sheets
> i haven't cleaned up, she whined. but he was
> full saddle hard dicking and cumming torrents (*Imagoes:* 122–123)

The rest of this long poem contains many more vivid details since it consists of flashes of memory as the victim recalls what has really happened and how. Arguably, the most shocking thing is that the rapists appear in her memory to be not worse than the policemen, the doctor and her boyfriend, as they try to maintain some sort of human relationship with her (e.g., one of them tells her his name; the other gives her his phone number and kisses her good-bye). They even seem to be better in a way since, in order to protect herself and the kids from being killed, she calls them "*gentle* lovers" (122) and "such / *polite* rapists" (123), and also recalls that "the dark one …/… laid her *gently* on / the bed" (123) [italics mine]. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the rapists also play the same patriarchal game of ownership as one of them says: "where is your old man? he's / a fool not to be here with you" (123), apparently getting satisfaction also from the fact that her boyfriend (read: 'owner/protector') is absent, which implies that she must be in need of sex. After they left, "she waited / until she was sure they wouldn't / come back and kill"—the real reason for being co-operative with the burglar/rapists, and "she picked up the phone / and made the mistake of thinking the world / would understand" (124). "The world" clearly refers to the institutions (masculinist at that time) and persons that would be responsible for tracking down the burglar/rapists (i.e., the policemen), taking

care of her physical and psychological help (i.e., the doctor), and assumingly offering her support and kindness (i.e., the boyfriend). As all these men perceive the victim in terms of a jezebel, the hoped-for understanding does not take place whatsoever; on the contrary, seeing the black woman through this stereotype distorts the perception and makes her as if responsible for the sexual assault. In the end there is a role-reversal, explained by Coleman herself in the Magistrale interview when asked about the function of the word "polite" in the poem and about her intention behind using it. The question reads: "Did you mean to be taken ironically?", to which the poet answers: "The physical rapists were polite. But when you talk about the psychological and emotional rape that took place through the system, those people were pretty rude … You are constantly treated that way by men—to a lesser extent by your own black men" (Magistrale & Ferreira 1990: 507).

Still, discrimination against black women as blacks and as women by white and black men, respectively, is the subject of the poem entitled "Women of My Color", where, as Magistrale puts it, "[t]he isolation and persecution of black women victimized as a consequence of both their sex and race is underscored … accentuating that black woman's exploitation is not merely racial, but also gender-specific" (Magistrale 1989: 547). Indeed, an act of fellatio which the persona is forced to perform in the poem signifies the domination and oppression of black women by males, and "following the curve of his penis" brings her "down" to the observation that "there is a peculiar light in which women / of my color are regarded by men", the phrase repeated twice more in the poem, although with a slight modification, i.e. the word "color" is later replaced by the word "race", which connects with and evokes "racism" as a constant practice in American society. In the course of the poem Coleman points out somewhat didactically that the only difference in the perception and treatment of black women by black and white men, respectively, is that the former regard them "as saints / as mothers / as sisters / as whores / but mostly as the enemy", whereas the latter perceive them "as exotic / as enemy / but mostly as whores" (24). Arguably, this difference in stereotyping black women does not seem to be qualitative, and changes nothing from the point of view of black females, since, to quote Magistrale again, "[b]oth white and black male worlds want her 'down', conforming to an emotional and economic 'curve' where men are able to assert their power and pleasure at the expense of her identity" (Magistrale 1989: 548). Thus, the conclusion illustrated by these divagations reads:

> being on the bottom where pressures
> are greatest is least desirable

Poems whose subject matter is the discrimination and degradation of black women in their relationships with black men are aplenty in Coleman's oeuvre. However, a quite original take on the topic appears in the poem "Indian summer" (*Mad Dog…*: 129), in which, as

a result of a shortage of financial means, the female persona cannot escape from the place she stays in with her lover, although, as she says, "we'd rather be elsewhere", and remains stuck forever in the room where "we suffer heat", and where there is "no ventilation", only "the fan hums / unkept promise". However, in spite of the fact that the black lovers are equally affected by the hot weather, there is no equality between them due to the gender difference. That is why the subject "we" suddenly splits in the poem into its two components, as "he finds his way out", whereas "I'm stuck here / with the children". The traditional gender role of a mother makes it impossible for the black woman to escape the unbearable and oppressive conditions. Through the metaphor of the heat (i.e. oppression), Coleman demonstrates how economic discrimination works, turning black women into real scapegoats and putting them at the very bottom of the social ladder.

A matter-of-fact report from "the bottom where pressures / are greatest", which touches upon the horrors of black women's everyday experience, appears in "Sweet Mama Wanda Tells Fortunes for a Price" (*Mad Dog*...: 79). In the poem a black prostitute with "cocoa thighs" relates in spare words an encounter with a client. The whole atmosphere in the poem—the "dark stairs", the coldness of the room, the anonymity of the encounter, and the obvious lack of the prostitute's emotional involvement—is far from erotic. The persona says in a cold, informative tone:

> i am here to fuck
> then go back
> to the streets

The encounter is as quick as it can be, and it takes only six brief lines to report before "he comes off calling mama" and the prostitute-persona may leave the room with the money she has just earned:

> outside
> i count my cash
> it's been a good night
> the street is cold
> i head east
> i am hungry
> i smile

The persona experiences a deep relief which results from her returning to feel the external stimuli (the coldness of the street and hunger) that are contrasted with the complete lack of reference to her senses when the client was touching her ("he sighs / touches / my lips / my cocoa thighs"). Also, the phrase "i head east" may be understood as a sign

of a regained freedom to move in whatever direction she wants. All these bring a smile to her face and, together with satisfaction from the money she has just made, allow her to think that "it's been a good night", However, the two lines which close the poem ("i know what tomorrow / is all about") sound dubious and ironic as the chances that the prostitute-persona will change anything in her life are close to none, and she must be counting on her physical attractiveness as well as on the generosity of her clients.

Literally the same phrase (i.e., "i know what tomorrow / is all about") also ends the poem "Sweet Mama Wanda Tells Fortunes for a Price (2)" from Coleman's second volume *Imagoes*. Here, the persona—a mother healing just after giving birth to a child in a maternity ward—thinks/talks about the pain that she shares with "other mothers" moaning in "other rooms" (I, 111). Like in the prostitute poem, in the mother poem the persona also smiles, this time as a result of physical contact with her baby:

> little thing is brought in
> nourishes from my breasts
> i smile
> i hold him

Compared to the brutality of a black woman's experience in the 'prostitute poem', the smile in its sequel from *Imagoes* might have positive connotations as it expresses the mother love and satisfaction that the boy-child is healthy. However, after this four-line stanza there comes the closing phrase pertaining to the boy's and the persona's own future, which seems to be as grim as ever for the blacks. As a result, it might be interpreted as a smile of illusion that quite soon will be corrected by the street reality of ghetto life.

As we have seen, Coleman's poems represent black women as alienated individuals, separate from any sense of a group identity based on solidarity which might result from their shared experiences: being discriminated against, and frequently living below the breadline in "this hell". In some of her poems, the poet directly explores the phenomenon of poor black women's alienation and lack of collaboration with others in order to protect themselves against their male oppressors. They do their "battle[s] with the wolf" ("Doing Battle with the Wolf", *Mad Dog…*: 17–19) or turn against a "legislature of pricks" ("No Woman's Land", *Mad Dog…*: 26) in their lonely acts of resistance. As many of Coleman's poems testify, there is no feminist alternative to their oppression, no sisterhood they could engage with and rely on. As the poet states in "The Women in My Life", (*Mad Dog…*: 40):

> my sisters do not visit. unrequited footfalls
> a path crisp and new with anxious welcome
> a silent door

The bitter conclusion on women's relationships comes in the same poem when the persona states matter-of-factly:

> my comrades are men
> hard with the wisdom of the street, prison, university
> sex attraction harnessed by circumstance

Not only is such crude sincerity and honesty a characteristic feature of Coleman's poems, but it seems to represent a full expression of transgression, as she tells the truth from the uncompromised standpoint of the wild zone poet.

Nevertheless, as Coleman in her early poems exhausted the limits of integrity, the time was ripe for extension which, let me repeat after Werner, "involves the desire to draw on and contribute to the experience of other groups and individuals" (1986: 54), and not only black women living in the LA ghetto. In spite of the fact that Coleman's strategy verges on complicity as she seems to have moved in the same direction that American poetry went at that time, her turning towards formal poetry, which in practice apparently meant for her engaging with the contemporary poetic trends and white (post)-Modernist tradition, to my way of thinking was yet another manifestation of Coleman's inherent iconoclastic leanings. In the process of drawing on the experience of another group (i.e., white Americans as the representatives of the dominant culture), her poems challenged and, arguably, modified-without-destroying the entity of the hegemonic tradition's borders, breaking into the discourse through the back door and letting the black voice enforce a dialogic relation with it. Coleman's attitude to white canonical poetry may be reduced (in the Husserlian sense) to a strategy of "exorcising Modernism" in the practice that makes her "exercise" it. I borrow these ambiguous terms as useful to my discussion of Coleman's formal turn from Mikołaj Wiśniewski (2014: 7), who explains/explores their meaning in this manner:

> "Exorcising Modernism," or … "Exercising Modernism"? In a sense, it is both, for it is intended to reflect the ambivalent attitude of the poets discussed here to the tradition of High Modernism which they challenged, but which also—undoubtedly—determined their attitudes and stylistic pursuits. In other words, the process of "exorcising modernism" cannot be regarded without taking into consideration the ways in which modernism was, and perhaps still is, "exercised" by post-war American poets.

The book edited by Wiśniewski does not contain any essay on a black poet's work, yet we can detect in Coleman's attitude to that tradition a similar ambivalence he talks about. Still, in this respect, the difference is that she is fully aware of High Modernism's hegemonic influence on American poets, and she herself uses it absolutely consciously and

deliberately in her own poems, which draw on the existing texts that appear in anthologies of American verse, and which were written by (mainly) white authors. In this way, Coleman, by modelling her poems (i.e., exercising) on the white poets' texts, practices simultaneously "a thorough critique of [the] ideological assumptions" of the "modernist avant-garde" (Wiśniewski 2014: 7) poetics, and demands extension, introducing a black perspective that results from the African American collective experience, correcting (i.e., exorcising) the dominant tradition that, according to George Kent, only (re)presents itself as "Universal"[3]. A conspicuous example of her strategy of "giving voice" (Wiśniewski 2014: 7)—as put by Grzegorz Czemiel, who comments on Mina Loy, a consistent critic of Modernist aesthetics—to the "human refuse generated by great modernist designers" (2014: 21) and of "reclaiming social territory abandoned by the moderns" (15) is found for instance in "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Bluesbird", Coleman's virtuoso rendition of Wallace Stevens's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird", a perfect Modernist poem, as well as in "Keeping Things Honest", written after Mark Strand, a High Modernism disciple, thriving in the long shadow cast by that colossus of a movement.

In both poems Coleman makes a successful attempt to rewrite—rather than adore—their authors (i.e., Stevens and Strand, respectively) by drawing on and challenging their concrete and extremely popular and widely discussed texts. Her re-writing of the poems becomes a consistently exercised anti-idolatry move as it is done together with unmasking both the white Modernism that the poems exemplify and the racial stereotypes that they sustain. As a result, the extension which Coleman practices in her retro rogue poems takes a form of Signifyin(g) "with a hammer", where "Signifyin(g)" refers to Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s codifications in his milestone book *The Signifying Monkey,* which presents Signifyin(g) as a quintessentially black strategy of writing that is linguistically, formally and conceptually subversive in a trickster-ish manner. The hammer component is taken from Nietzsche's (2003: 32) concept of "philosophiz[ing] with a hammer", a critical strategy of "sounding-out of idols" by "touch[ing] [them] with a hammer as with a tuning fork" in order to hear the "hollow" sound that they make.

In Coleman's "Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Bluesbird" Stevens's blackbird is replaced by the bluesbird, which immediately creates an association with the black vernacular culture of the blues, an association that becomes even stronger since, unlike the blackbird, the bluesbird is only a metaphor as such a bird does not exist in nature. Perhaps that is the reason why the name of the bird is not mentioned even once by Coleman in her poem, whereas in Stevens's text it appears thirteen times, i.e., in every part of the text. Another apparent similarity between the poems is that in terms of form Coleman painstakingly follows Stevens's original. Like his poem, hers is also divided into thirteen parts, and the number of lines in each part also emulates the springboard poem

3 See: George Kent. 1972. *Blackness and the Adventure of Western Culture*. 112. Chicago: Third World Pess.

by a great Modernist, yet the bluesbird poem systematically questions and challenges Stevens's elusive meanings by alluding to black experience and its truths, which result from "twenty centuries of witnessing" and being defined as a member of a muted group. Nonetheless, here Coleman breaks the spell of the enforced silence, and regains the black voice—and hence the black perspective—by making specific allusions to black culture as well as using black speech as a means to understanding the white world. The example of the former strategy appears in parts ii and xii of the bluesbird poem, when Coleman alludes to the anti-slavery activity of a black visionary, Sojourner Truth ("i saw further winds / like sojourner / in which there winged truth's saviors") and when she mentions a mourning flood that took place after the brutal murder of a black fourteen-year old boy ("the foundation is flooded / emmett must be crossing over"), whereas the latter emerges in part vii when the poet demonstrates her virtuosity in implementing black vernacular in a poem that consistently implements the High Modernist poetics:

> o gat-totin' gangstah-gunnin'
> innocents, can y'all imagine dat
> zoostriped loveride hebbenward
> where jazz singers mop
> da floors under God's spats 'n taps?

In this way Coleman transforms Stevens's philosophical poem on the power of perception of a shifting reality into a collective black poem where perceptions are decoded as they appear, becoming concrete observations that pertain to the exploitation of blacks and their will to survive.

Later in her poetic career Coleman prepared a whole series of poems written after white poets, whose texts she took from a random anthology of American poetry that was sitting on a shelf at her home, and gave that series the title *Retro Rogue Anthology*. In the interview with Pereira, the poet talks about her method of "*jazzing it up*", i.e., "superimpose[ing] her 'very black' perceptions over the culturally 'neutral' event …, expanding, turning and/or reversing it". This observation demonstrates the mutual dependence of extension and integrity, as "very black" perceptions are always a pre-condition to such poetic reversals. In the case of Strand's "Keeping Things Whole", the author maintains that "poems must exist not only in the language but beyond it", meaning that they exist in the physical world. Coleman challenges that claim by addressing that issue, as she puts it, "directly and definitively" (24) in her answer poem entitled "Keeping Things Honest" (*Mercurochrome*). Here again, the neutrality of the poem by Strand is replaced by black perceptions of a world that reacts to the black presence in an instinctively racist manner: "In this country / I am the absence / of country"; "Whenever I am / I am what is seen but ignored"; "When I walk / I part the eyes"; "the heads whirl / to fill the gap /

where my history's inscribed" (223). And racism, as W. J. T. Mitchell acutely observes, is "a brute fact, the bodily reality", whereas race is "the derivative term, devised either as an imaginary cause for the effects of racism or as an attempt to provide a rational explanation, a 'realistic picture' and diagnosis of this mysterious syndrome known as racism". Thus, to boil down the term to its rudiments, "[r]ace is not the cause of racism but its excuse, alibi, explanation, or reaction formation" (Mitchell 2012: 19).

Driven by the imperative of honesty, Coleman's poem addresses the fragmentation of the American culture, a fragmentation generated by racism in its concrete and palpable manifestations (hence the title "Keeping Things Honest"), whereas Strand's poem avoids that issue completely, being perfectly satisfied with his believing in opposing a fragmentation, which is the essential part of physical reality, and "keeping things whole" by making statements such as: "[i]n a field / I am the absence / of field"; "when I walk / I part the air"; "the air moves in / to fill the spaces / where my body's been". In the conclusion of the poem, Strand's persona says: "We all have reasons / for moving. / I move / to keep things whole", as if promoting an all-inclusive, holistic concept of a friendly relationship between the persona and the world. In Coleman's answer poem, in the conclusion, there is only anger left as a natural reaction to the institutional, socio-cultural and historical discrimination of the blacks in America, since the persona says: "I have hoarded all the reasons / for a crackling / wall of flame" (223).

American Sonnets, Coleman's parallel poetic project, which consists of one hundred individual texts placed in three separate volumes, shares with the retro rogue poems similar attitudes to the work of white poets and to the white tradition in general, as it also challenges them as an established norm by whose standards the black truth cannot be expressed. Some of the sonnets from Coleman's protracted series could find their place in *Retro Rogue Anthology* as they are also answer poems addressing concrete, and mostly white texts—for instance, sonnet 10 (written "after Lowell"), sonnet 12 ("after Robert Duncan") or sonnet 38, after William Blake (here Coleman draws on two Blake's poems: "The Tyger" and "Little Black Boy"). Still, the difference between Coleman's *American Sonnets* and her *Retro Rogue* poems lies in the fact that the former series takes to task a well-established traditional form (i.e., the sonnet), whereas the latter represents the individual challenges—through emulation rooted in the strategy of Signifyin(g)—to particular poems, most of which are written in free verse. These issues demand careful analysis and methodical presentation, and here they are only cursorily signaled. Nonetheless, even such a surface signaling is necessary to briefly demonstrate how extension operates in Coleman's sonnets, and how the sonnets themselves are made blacker than ever by being classified by their author as "jazz sonnets".

In her 1988 essay "On Theloniousism", Coleman explains the idea of a "jazz sonnet" by drawing an analogy with architecture. As she acutely states, compared to "traditional writing" represented by a "furnished room" metaphor, "[a] jazz apartment" is

characterized by "modular/movable walls", and develops that idea/metaphor further, as she clarifies that

> this is an environment allowing the predictable to coexist with the unpredictable, ape the Classical [i.e., the traditional] then suddenly break loose into variation to the point of unrecognizability; i.e., new, alien, and always as renewable as the occupant (artist/creator) desires—limited only by the occupant's … imagination. (Coleman 1988: 106)

The most striking example of the "jazzing it up" technique is sonnet 100. The connection with traditional sonnets is not mentioned directly, yet the use of archaic vocabulary, its style based on striking ornamentation, the structure determined by enjambment, the use of rhymes, and the allusions and phrases which evoke Shakespeare's sonnets, leave no doubt that the poem praises as well as challenges the Bard's tradition.

The sonnet begins with an address to the reader, who assumingly is not satisfied anymore with the tradition of the early sonnets:

> when thou dost find no joy in all famed Erato's
> honeyed breast, wordsport a gangster poet's jest

The message is communicated to the reader through the complex syntax and words, which strike us as archaic, and through the reference to Erato, the muse of love poetry, and we have to remember that originally the sonnet is a love lyric. The first line, which is broken up by enjambment, and in fact ends with the word "breast", must strike the modern reader as too wordy and too long, as the word "honeyed" seems to be redundant, whereas the second line is disciplined and economic in the modern sense, as it contains only the words necessary for communicating the message. As a result, the opening distich illustrates a clash between the flowery style of the Renaissance period (i.e., when the sonnet reached its formal perfection as the English sonnet) and the Imagist requirement for using only words necessary for the presentation. Obviously, words such as "wordsport" and "gangster poet" have an ironic undertaste and belong to the contemporary world, whereas "thou", "dost", Erato" and "honeyed breast" come from the early days of the sonnet in the English language.

The rest of the poem draws on the contrast established at the very beginning. There is no doubt that due to the internal tensions we have here a text that evokes a "jazz apartment":

> how black and luscious comes each double-barreled
> phrase, like poisoned roses or a maddened potter's
> glaze. words abundant dance their meanings on

> the thrilling floor, the stolen song of ravens and
> purloined harps galore. this is the gentle game of
> maniacs & queens, translations of the highly-souled
> into a dreamer's sputterings where dark gives voice
> to gazer's light and writerly praise is blessed
> incontinence, the spillage of delight.

The placement of the periods and commas demonstrates an almost traditional attitude to the use of sentences that the poem consists of, as if Coleman respected the convention, but at the same time they make the reader realize that the sentences' structure, due to the use of enjambment, remains all the way through at odds with breaking up lines. However, if we read the poem out loud, we can hear the rhymes, which are placed at the sentences'—but not the lines'—ends.

Also, it must be noted that the poem draws on Shakespeare's sonnets for one more reason: in both cases the subject matter is concealed behind linguistic and stylistic virtuosity, and the tension created between surface and depth. Coleman's poem alludes to the presence of a hidden subject as it points to the ambiguity of some "double-barreled" phrases, strategically dispersed in the sonnet, which introduce the subject of race and racism in the context of slavery. If the literary genres represent a hierarchy of power, it is worth reminding the reader that the first edition of *Sonnets* by William Shakespeare was published in 1609, precisely a decade before the first African slaves were brought into the English colony of Jamestown, Virginia.

Moreover, the sonnet is unique in Coleman's series as it contains an easily identifiable volta that is signaled by the use of imperatives directed at the reader at the very end of the poem, which closes with a note of affirmation:

> sing to me
> the anthem of untasted fruit. slay in me the
> wretchedness that names me brute. liberate my
> half-dead kill. come. glory in my rebirth.
> come. glory in my wonder's will

The poet/persona, themself a descendant of slaves, emphasizes the fact that "the wretchedness" of the past, which defines them as "brute" (i.e., a black and a slave), has been exorcised in her collection of sonnets ("the anthem of untasted fruit"). As a result, the persona, together with other American blacks, is free at last and, having cast off that burden, born anew. Such a metamorphosis may surprise the reader, as Coleman characterized the poems in her protracted series as often "surreal and ironic". Perhaps the affirmative tone cancels irony after all. Furthermore, the unspecified gender identity of the

persona in sonnet 100 is at odds not only with the female personas in the content-oriented early poems by Coleman, in contrast to poems from *Mad Dog Black Lady* and *Imagoes*, but also with her jazz sonnets in the protracted series as well, which might suggest that race awareness dominates over gender identification of the poet/persona. Yet, it seems to be one more feature of sonnet 100 that alludes to Shakespeare's poems since in the Bard's collection we encounter many sonnets that explore and play with gender instability.

The evidence that in Coleman's sonnet series race and gender are closely interconnected and work together against the solipsism of American culture by practicing extension can be found in the majority of her poems. Nonetheless, nowhere is it so clearly articulated than in sonnet 61, in which the persona sets on the "voyage beyond that / point where self disappears", the word "voyage" evoking the trauma of the Middle Passage. From the very beginning of the sonnet Coleman speaks openly as a black woman who says:

> reaching down into my griot bag
> of womanish wisdom and wily
> social commentary, i come up with bricks
> with which to either reconstruct
> the past or deconstruct a head.

The "griot bag / of womanish wisdom" equips her with the specific and almost preternatural power of the spoken word, as in West Africa a griot is responsible for preserving the past in the form of oral history, and passing it on to the next generation, Nonetheless, it must be noted that as the bag contains specifically "womanish wisdom", in this case we get a reconstructed past in the form of oral *her*story. This gender modification also makes it possible for the persona to say in the last line of the sonnet that "these are my slave songs", and since the sonnet means literally a "little song", the comment strikes us as self-reflexive. Thus, Coleman's extensions embrace not only a completion of American history with black experience expressed in the black dialect, to refer back to Werner's nomenclature, but also her "slave songs"—worded (as the self has already disappeared) in the individual women's vocabularies until recently regarded by the white hegemonic culture as not concerning us, hence quite unimportant.

In this way, Wanda Coleman's poetry can be perceived as a model example of writing saturated with blackness (both thematically and formally), in which integrity is a foundation that draws on an uncompromising attitude to communicating the everyday existence and experiences of random black women. Nonetheless, similarly uncompromising is Coleman's practice of extension. As demonstrated by even a brief and cursory analysis of her series of poems such as *Retro Rogue Anthology* and *American Sonnets*, the poet's intimate knowledge of white-in-origin forms (i.e., the sonnet) and her potent skills in emulating-with-a-difference, which is arguably a form of iconoclastic Signfyin' done on

the white poets and their texts, serve the purpose of confronting and challenging, by drawing on its poetic production, the widespread racism of American culture. As demonstrated in this article, the hegemonic culture's solipsism is revealed in Coleman's later poetry in two ways: by extension of its subject matter beyond the life of black women to historical and cultural issues, and by the implementation of intricate formal experiments, in which the inherited forms are struck by the poet with a hammer in the Nietzschean fashion, so that we can clearly hear the hollow and false sounds that they make.

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Edward Thomas as a Travel Book Writer

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to examine Edward Thomas's literary representations of his walks and bicycle rides from the perspective of the development of the genre of the travel book in Britain. The paper provides a brief outline of the history of the synergy and friction of travel books with the genres of the novel and the autobiography, and the ways in which the developing naturalist and pedestrian discourses influenced travel books and travel accounts. A key argument constructed and developed in the second part of the paper is that the combination of Thomas's dissatisfaction with the loose collage-like nebulousness of his early travel accounts from *Beautiful Wales* (1905) to *The South Country* (1909) and his wide knowledge of 19th-century British travel writers resulted in two 'conventional' travel books *The Icknield Way* (1913) and *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914), in which Thomas relied on such standard generic features as the diary format and the central role of the narrative persona.

Keywords: Edward Thomas, Robert Macfarlane, travel books, travel writing, nature writing, pedestrianism

1. Introduction

Edward Thomas (1878–1917) is considered a major British writer, whose reputation today "rests almost entirely on his poetry" (Wiśniewski 2009: 1). This opinion is generally supported by Thomas's biographers, scholars and fellow poets, one of whom, Ted Hughes (1930–1998), a Poet Laureate, famously said of Thomas as a poet—at the unveiling ceremony of the memorial stone of the Great War poets in Westminster Abbey on 11 November 1985—that "he is the father of us all" (quoted in Wiśniewski 2009: 4). Yet Thomas was writing poetry "only for the last two years of his life, between December 1914 … and December 1916" (Wiśniewski 2009: 1), while in the period between 1897 and 1916 he had written about thirty prose books, some of which are critical studies of literature in general and poetry in particular, but most of them are non-fiction texts generically straddled in various fashions between the two nebulous and hybrid categories of 'travel writing' and 'nature writing'. In this paper, written in honour of Professor Jacek Wiśniewski, the supervisor of my Ph.D. thesis

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(which was about Evelyn Waugh's travel books), I attempt to look at some of these prose books from the perspective of the travel writing scholar I have become, to a large extent thanks to Professor Wiśniewski's guidance and help in the period between 1987 and 1993.

2. Travel writing studies and travel books

Travel writing studies evolved as an academic discipline in the last two decades of the 20th century, and Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) as well as Paul Fussell's *Abroad: British Literary Traveling in Between the Wars* (1980), though methodologically diverse, may be considered its two foundational texts. Most of the Anglophone scholars, such as Jonathan Raban (1987), Carl Thompson (2011) or Tim Youngs (2013), define travel writing as a hybrid, non-fiction genre and treat 'travel writing' and 'travel book' as synonymous terms. Ian Borm, in his seminal article "Defining Travel: On the Travel Book, Travel Writing and Terminology" (2004), suggested that 'travel writing' should be treated not as a genre, but as a supra-generic category, "a collective term for a variety of texts both predominantly fictional and non-fictional whose main theme is travel" (Borm 2004: 13). Then, Borm went on to argue that a 'travel book' should be treated as a genre, and defined it as "any narrative characterized by a non-fiction dominant that relates (almost always) in the first person a journey or journeys that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality while assuming and presupposing that author, narrator and principal character are but one or identical" (Borm 2004: 17). Borm's taxonomy is synchronic; it postulates the wider supra-generic category of 'travel writing', with the "predominantly non-fictional travel book" as part of it, existing as if 'here and now' and not approached diachronically. I found Borm's distinction very useful and decided to apply it historically to describe the development of Anglophone travel writing as a supra-generic category and a travel book as a genre included in this category in: *Travellers, Novelists and Gentlemen: Constructing Male Narrative Personae in British Travel Books, from the Beginnings to the Second World War* (2013) and *A Generic History of Anglophone and Polish Travel Writing* (2020). I am convinced that the analytical tools and generic arguments I have constructed in these two studies are also valid and useful instruments with which to approach Edward Thomas as a travel writer.

The key advantage, in my opinion, of diachronically applying Borm's distinction between the supra-generic 'travel writing' and the genre of a 'travel book' as the former's important component over the traditional approach of Anglophone travel writing scholars which treats these two categories as synonyms is that it allows us to conceptualize more precisely the changes which textual representations of true (but also imaginary) journeys have undergone over the last three centuries. In *Travellers, Novelists and Gentlemen* I argued that the development of 'voyages and travels'[2] in the course of the 18th

2 In *Travel Writing* Thompson thus defined 'voyages and travels': "From the sixteenth to the nineteenth century, the most common generic label for what we would now call 'travel writing'" (Thompson 2011: 206).

century could and should not only be seen as a shift in paradigm from 'scientific' to 'sentimental' travel writing, as scholars such as Mary Louise Pratt (1992) and Casey Blanton (1997) postulated,[3] but that, in Britain, the genre of the travel book was established in the middle of this century and started to evolve dynamically. The development of this new genre happened alongside two other prose genres, which were also established and started to flourish in this very period: that of the novel and the autobiography. My conceptualization of the 'rise of the travel book' follows in the wake of the key argument first presented by Ian Watt in *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding* (1957) that historical, economic, institutional and social contexts strongly influence the ways in which literature has been written, and that 'the rise of the novel' in 18th-century Britain should be analysed as a process being the result of the operation of the dynamic development of capitalism in this period, which brought about (among many other things) the development of the middle class and of the "individualist and innovating reorientation" (Watt 2015: 13) of literature, and also the expansion of the book market geared towards the tastes and expectations of this class. The process of 'the rise of the novel' in the 18th century was paralleled by 'the rise of the travel book' and 'the rise of the autobiography'. These three genres, which crystallized and evolved in this period, share some important features: the hybrid nature, the focus on individual experience and the focus on 'realistic' representation, even though the novel eventually ended up on the fictional side of the troubled fiction/non-fiction border, while the travel book and the autobiography are regarded as predominantly non-fictional.

I argued in *Travellers, Novelists and Gentlemen* that the beginnings of the new travel book genre should be traced to the Preface to *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* (1755) by Henry Fielding. In the earlier prefaces to his novels Fielding had written about the advantages of fiction being presented within the convention of realism over works of non-fiction. In the Preface to *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* he reversed this claim, and even though he constructed there a binary opposition between works of fiction and "the work founded like this, on truth" (Fielding 1755: xv), at the same time he gave himself (and travel writers to come) an artistic *licentia poetica* to include "all kind of ornament of stile and diction, or even of circumstance" (Fielding 1755: xiii), that is to embellish his non-fictional prose report from a relatively inauspicious journey with 'ornaments' he had learnt to construct while writing his novels. The decision to name *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* as the first modern travel book parallels Ian Watt's (and Watt's followers) decision to call the long prose narratives of Defoe, Sterne and Richardson the first modern novels. Watt distinguished these first modern novels from earlier 'romances', taking the

3 Scholars like Parks (1964), Stafford (1984), Cardinal (1996) Carl Thompson (2011) used the dichotomy of Enlightenment versus Romantic to account for this shift, while Barbara Korte (2000) wrote, in a similar fashion, about "object oriented" versus "subject oriented" travel narratives.

perspective of the development of the genre from the second half of the 18th century to the moment in which he was constructing his taxonomy in the mid-1950s. Similarly, Fielding's and Smollett's travel books inaugurated the new genre from the perspective of early 21st-century travel writing studies. However, it should be borne in mind that the traditional 'scientific' travel books of exploration, oriented towards 'objective' descriptions of discoveries and not towards the style, diction and uniqueness of a narrative persona, continued to be written from the second half of the 17th century[4] till the end of the 19th.[5]

More than a century and a half elapsed between the publication of *The Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon* and *The Icknield Way* (1913) by Edward Thomas. It took the newly established genres of the travel book, the novel and the autobiography most of the remaining decades of the 18th century to disentangle from one another and to establish relatively steady, even though constantly evolving, generic "horizons of expectations".[6] Texts such as *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (1768) by Lawrence Sterne were for a long time read as travel books, before they were re-conceptualized as novels, when the genre of the novel crystallized and stabilized.[7] The motif of a journey (both real and metaphorical) was to remain important for the genre of the novel in the 19th century, while authors of travel books in this period were to rely more and more confidently on the techniques which are usually associated with works of fiction in general and the novel in particular: "free indirect style, scenic construction, present time narration, prolepsis, iterative symbolism" (Lodge 1997: 8). The genre of the travel book has been a hybrid one since it took off in the middle of the 18th century. One important aspect of its hybridity is that travel book writers, while constructing their texts, have relied (in various ways and to varying degrees), apart from travel writing discourse, on such disparate discourses as: sentimental, scientific, aesthetic, colonial, classical, the discourse of mercantile good sense and, last but not least, on naturalist and pedestrian discourses—the assessment of which is crucial when analysing Edward Thomas's achievement as a travel writer.

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4 Robert Hooke, the first Curator of Experiments of the Royal Society (established in 1662) in 1664 issued a set of instructions to "Seamen and Travellers" which urged them to an attitude which Michael McKeon summarised aptly in this manner: "The fundamental trope of this anti-rhetorical style is the self-reflexive insistence on its own documentary candour, as well as on the historicity of the narrative it transparently mediates" (1988, 105).

5 Carl Thompson located the end of travel writing as "a knowledge genre" at the very end of the 19th century and attributed it to "the expansion of the university system and growing academic specialisation" (Thompson 2019: 123).

6 On "horizons of expectations" and genres, see, e.g., Hans Robert Jauss, *Literary History as A Challenge to Literary Theory*.

7 Percy G. Adams wrote in *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel*: "Although Sterne's *The Sentimental Journey* is now a 'novel', in the 18th century it was a travel book and inspired a huge school of sentimental travel accounts" (1983: 198).

3. Travel writing and nature

The manner in which Edward Thomas represented nature in his non-fictional prose narratives and the manner in which these narratives are straddled between nature and travel writing can be best explained, I am convinced, through the conceptualizations constructed and explained in Paul Smethurst's *Travel Writing and the Natural World* (2012). In this ground-breaking study Smethurst, following Raymond Williams, located the emergence of nature-as-construct in the 18th century (Smethurst 2012: 1) and argued that although the developments of Enlightenment science had started to reconfigure the attitudes to nature and the natural world "since the end of the sixteenth century … it was in the latter half of the eighteenth century that the attitudes to the natural world were dramatically altered by the related practices of natural history and global exploration" (Smethurst 2012: 1). In *Travel Writing and the Natural World* Smethurst analysed a whole range of travel narratives which "share a consuming interest in the natural world" (Smethurst 2012: 5) and which were written in the second half of the 18th and the first half of the 19th century. These narratives appeared in many diverse forms of "memoir, scenic tour travel, topographical essay, romantic narrative, exploration journal and guidebook" (Smethurst 2012:5). Smethurst argued that "[e]xploration, natural history, scenic tourism, the picturesque and romanticism all provide diverse windows onto attitudes to nature and direct involvement of the natural world." (Smethurst 2012: 6–7). In what follows in this section the focus will be placed on these "diverse windows", which had a discernible impact on the ways in which Thomas Edward represented nature and his travels.

Exploration narratives and texts on natural history in the 18th century were, on the whole, more 'scientific' and more 'objective' in their description of nature than the texts which started to evolve during a "sublime turn" (2012: 130) which, according to Smethurst, started some two decades before Burke's seminal essay on the sublime and the beautiful (1757): "[f]rom the 1730's these [topographical descriptions] began to turn from factual accounts of physical curiosities in the landscape, to an appreciation of natural beauties and responses to it. Naturalists and tourists began to eulogise over the 'romantic' and 'sublime' scenes …" (Smethurst 2012: 130). The second phase of the "sublime turn", during which nature continued to be produced textually as an object for aesthetic consumption, took place at the end of the 18th century and took the form of the "picturesque". William Gilpin (1724–1804), who coined the terms "picturesque" and "picturesque beauty", was an important early theoretician of these concepts. In his first theoretical work, *Essay on Prints* (1768), Gilpin defined the picturesque as "that kind of beauty which is agreeable in a picture" (Gilpin 1768: 2). Gilpin was not only an important theoretician of picturesque beauty, but also a popular and important travel writer, who wrote, illustrated and published (between 1782 and 1809) eight travel books: the title of each of them begins with *Observations on …*, and all these books contain descriptions and aquatints from his "scenic travels" to different regions of England, Wales and Scotland. Gilpin's notions of picturesque

beauty and the ways in which he applied them in his travel books had a lasting impact on the ways in which nature was to be represented in travel and nature narratives in general and in travel books in particular throughout the whole of the 19th century, right up to the moment when in 1897 *The Woodland Life*, the first collection of Edward Thomas's 'nature studies', was published. Gilpin's theories and Gilpin's travel books started and set in motion many, often contradictory, social, aesthetic and literary processes.

The popularity of Gilpin's picturesque mode of tourism coincided with more and more positive assessments of home tourism as patriotic, a phenomenon which, according to Zoë Kinsley (2008: 1–2), had originated with the travel accounts of Celia Fiennes written at the end of the 17th century. Almost a century later, the Napoleonic Wars blocked the traditional Grand Tour routes in France and Italy and caused even more Home Tour travelogues to be written (Turner 2001: 206).

4. The rise of pedestrianism, peripatetic theory and practice

In the 19th century Home Tours and their textual representations continued to be popular thanks, to a large extent, to the itineraries and mind-sets of the Romantic poets, particularly those of William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who helped to popularize the new 'pedestrian' (also called 'peripatetic') fashion. Robin Jarvis, following Morris Marples's pioneering 1959 study of literary pedestrians entitled *Shank's Pony: A Study of Walking,* noted that the rapid growth of recreational walking in that period could be attributed to "the changes in the attitudes to the natural world and the growth of aesthetic tourism" (Jarvis 1997: 5). After Wordsworth, pedestrian literature, praising nature but also the timelessness of the very act of walking, developed mostly in essays such as William Hazlitt's "On Going on a Journey" (1821), Leigh Hunt's "A Walk from Dulwich to Brockham" (1828), or Leslie Stephen's "In Praise of Walking" (1902), but also in travel books like George Borrow's *Wild Wales* (1862) or Robert Louis Stevenson's *Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes* (1879).

5. Edward Thomas and the travel book tradition

Chapter Two of Jacek Wiśniewski's biography of Edward Thomas, entitled "Edward Thomas's Nature Books – *In Pursuit of Spring*", introduces and briefly analyses Thomas's non-fiction "nature books" from *The Woodland Life* (1897) to *The Icknield Way* (1913) and *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914). Wiśniewski explains in this chapter that:

> [t]he genre, represented by all these prose books, is called by some critics 'rural literature' or 'topographical writing' and by others 'country books'. It is a uniquely English sub-category of non-fiction writing, a demanding form of literature with a long history behind it, going back to the 17th century and the English Restoration …(Wiśniewski 2009: 90)

Earlier on, in Wiśniewski's introduction to Thomas's biography we read: "Some of his [Thomas's] best travel books, like *The Icknield Way,* 1913, and *In Pursuit of Spring,* 1914, take the reader west along the old highways of the South Country from London to the Welsh border" (2009: 1). In what follows I would like to agree with Wiśniewski's high assessment of these two books as 'travel books' and argue at the same time that *The Icknield Way* and *In Pursuit of Spring* are simultaneously 'nature books' and 'travel books', and that other books, such as *The Heart of England* (1906) could be added to this pair. In all his books where nature is central, all the way from *The Woodland Life* to *In Pursuit of Spring,* Thomas achieved "the concreteness of vision" thanks to a shorthand note-taking technique he had learnt from Richard Jeffries (Wiśniewski 2009: 87).

I am convinced that for all the nebulousness of the generic labels such as the ones listed by Wiśniewski ('rural literature', 'topographical writing', 'country books') but also some others, like 'nature writing', there would not be many scholars who would contest Wiśniewski's usage of the term 'nature books' to any of the books, from *The Woodland Life* to *In Pursuit of Spring.* However, the situation becomes more complex when, in order to decide which of these nature books can also be regarded as travel books (and to what extent), we put them through the test of Jan Borm's definition of a travel book, which requires that a representative of this genre should exhibit the following three features: firstly, the non-fiction dominant; secondly, relating "a journey or journey that the reader supposes to have taken place in reality"; and thirdly, "identity of the author, main character and (almost always) first person narrator" (Borm 2004: 17). I believe that Thomas's 'nature books' approached from the travel book perspective could and should be seen as moving chronologically from 'pure' nature writing with no elements of travel books, through the intermediate phase of the balance between naturalist and travel discourses, towards travel books *sensu stricto.*

6. From nature books to travel books

Thomas's first book, *The Woodland Life,* published in 1897 when he was just nineteen years old, is a collection of eleven essays and a naturalist's diary covering one whole year. These essays describe "the woodland life" during all seasons of an area in England Thomas later called "the south country". There is not even a hint of a first-person narration in any of the essays, no hint of a narrator who would embark on any form of journey. It is pure 'nature writing'.

In the first decade of the 20th century—during which he was working frantically hard to support his growing family with his writing, mostly as a literary critic and later also as a biographer—Edward Thomas received three commissions to write texts for books which had originally been conceived as a series of colour reprints of paintings by renowned British painters. *Oxford* (1903) and *Beautiful Wales* (1905) were both published by A. & C. Black. The first of them contained sixty coloured reprints of cityscapes of Oxford

painted by John Folleylove (1845–1908), and the second seventy-four coloured reprints of Welsh landscapes painted by Robert Fowler (1850–1926). The title pages of these two books have the same design and follow the same pattern *Oxford: Painted by Robert Fowler, R I, Described by Edward Thomas …* and *Beautiful Wales: Painted by John Fulleylove, R I, Described by Edward Thomas …* . "R I" after the names of the painters signifies that they were members of the prestigious Royal Institute of Painters in Watercolours, while the fact that the names of the (well established) painters come before the name of a young writer (with no letters to follow) shows the publisher's priorities. The third of these books (containing forty-eight illustrations) was published in 1906 by J. M. Dent. The author/illustrator hierarchy, at least on the title page, is more orthodox: "*The Heart of England* by Edward Thomas, with coloured illustrations by H. L. Richardson".

None of these three books is a travel book *sensu stricto,* i.e., a first-person narrative structured chronologically around a 'real' journey or journeys, but they all include longer or shorter fragments of first-person descriptions of journeys typical of travel books. *Oxford* is the least 'travel writing oriented' of the three as it consists mostly of guidebook-like historical descriptions and musings. However, the book's first chapter, entitled "Entering Oxford", opens as a travel book, not a guidebook:

> Passing rapidly through London, with its roar of causes that have been won, and the suburbs, where they have no causes, and skirting the willowy Thames, — glassy or silver, or with engrailed grey waves — and brown ploughlands, elm-guarded, solitary, I approached Oxford. (Thomas 1903: 3)

But the cadence of the evocative, impersonal prose soon takes over, like in this fragment: "In Oxford nothing is the creation of one man or of one year. Every college and church and garden is the work of centuries of men and time …" (Thomas 1903: 12). The recollections of the narrator's own walks in and around Oxford are few and short, and it is only in the two final pages of the penultimate chapter that Thomas indulges in what appears to be a poetic recollection of a walk along one of the footpaths "[t]he Oxford country is rich in" (Thomas 1903: 252), taken in the company of unspecified undergraduate friends: a walk which started from "one of the many fair little Oxford bridges" (Thomas 1903: 253), and took them away into the country along "the great hawthorn hedge" (Thomas 1903: 253) and then back along the slow flowing river when "twilight began to drive her dusky flocks across the west, " (Thomas 1903: 254) until "troubled tenderly by autumnal maladies of souls, we came to our place of rest—a grey, immemorial house with innumerable windows" (Thomas 1903: 254). Thus, Thomas's own 'praise of Oxford', a poetic reconstruction of an autumnal walk with his student-friends back to their college rooms, strategically ends the penultimate chapter of the book and it immediately precedes the final chapter, entitled "In Praise of Oxford", which consists of fragments of poetry and

prose of the 'classics' like John Lyly, William Wordsworth or John Dryden selected by Thomas.

In *Beautiful Wales,* the next book after *Oxford,* which Thomas was commissioned to write to accompany the coloured series of illustrations of a renowned painter, the ratio between impersonal guidebook discourse and first-person travel narration is reversed, in favour of the latter. Jean Wilson perceptibly noted that in *Beautiful Wales* Thomas rose:

> … well above the level of the guidebook and commentary A. & C. Black commissioned. By ignoring what was expected in such a series—that is, a text subservient to Robert Fowler's illustrations, a practical guide to the whole country and an introduction to its most famous sites—he makes room for his own vision of Wales, anticipating innovations in the travel book over the century. (Wilson 2015: 137)

Wilson described how much historical research on Wales Thomas had done in the British Museum Library and how much more research he planned when, confronted by the imminent commission deadline, he "decided to omit all history" (quoted in Wilson 2015: 137) and wrote the whole second part of *Beautiful Wales* as a 'calendar', which gave him an excuse to indulge in the passages which, as it turned out, he enjoyed most, even though he self-depreciatingly was to write that they were "25000 words of landscape" (quoted in Wilson 2015: 139) and "marvellously irrelevant as a rule" (quoted in Wilson 2015: 138). Wilson called these passages "a series of prose poems" (Wilson 2015: 138) and she showed that they not only allowed Thomas to "give voice to the many dreams, visions and memories with which he lives" (Wilson 2015: 138), but also to use not only "the copious notes he made in his three-day tramp" (Wilson 2015: 138) in Wales, but also essays he had written earlier for himself elsewhere "on London suburbs for instance." (Wilson 2015: 138)

Beautiful Wales is, of course, not composed solely of what Thomas self-ironically referred to as 'landscape'—short impressionistic recollections of walks, written usually in the first-person narration and piled one after another in an unchronological and topographically disjointed fashion. There are long 'objective' guidebook-like passages introducing educated British readers to Wales in the first two chapters, and descriptions of a few characteristic Welsh characters in Chapter Four, but Chapter Three, "A Farmhouse under a Mountain" and Chapter Five, "Wales Month by Month" (which covers more than one hundred pages and more than half of the book) are almost exclusively 'landscape': reminiscences of walks somewhere in the country taken in some unspecified time and order. In Chapter Five, 'landscape' reigns and begins in the first, January, paragraph.

> The road ran for ten miles between mountains on which the woods of oak and fir moaned, though there was little wind. A raven croaked with a fat voice. I could hear a score of

> streams. But the valley would not speak with me. The sole joy in it was that of walking fast and of seeing the summits of the hills continually writing a wild legend on the cloudy sky. (Thomas 1905: 99)

'Landscape' collages remained Thomas's main construction method in his two next 'topographical books': *The Heart of England,* published in 1906, just a year after *Beautiful Wales,* the third and last in the series of Thomas's books written to accompany collections of coloured illustrations, and *The South Country,* published in 1909. *The Heart of England* consists of forty-six short landscape-chapters grouped in five parts with topographically non-committal locations ("Leaving Town", "The Lowland", "The Upland", "The Mountains", "The Sea"); some of these, like the first chapter, "Leaving Town", are first person foot travel narratives, while others, like the second chapter "Faunus", are more like prose-poems praising English landscapes without resorting either to a first-person travel narrator or disclosing the location. Jean Wilson argued that: "by keeping his topographical books deliberately vague … Thomas was able to use old or extraneous material" (Wilson 2015: 152) and, while writing about *The Heart of England,* she pointed to three chapters "written in 1902 or earlier ("Village", "Frieze at the 4 Elms" and "August") which he inserted in a panic when the publisher Dent informed him that he was 5,000 words short of the agreed length" (Wilson 2015: 151), and to the last chapter entitled "The Castle of Carbonek": "ostensibly a mythical castle from Arthurian legend but in reality based on Penard Castle near Swansea" (Wilson 2015: 152) (that is in Wales, not in 'the heart of England').

The South Country, published by J. M. Dent, was part of a topographical-pastoral series which also included Belloc's *The Historic Thames,* and Thomas's own *The Heart of England* (in this edition it was printed without any of the forty-eight coloured Richardson illustrations; the other two books in this series were also unillustrated). In the Preface to the 1932 edition Thomas's wife Helen stated:

> *The South Country* is one of the happiest of the prose works of Edward Thomas. It was written at the period of comparative ease and tranquillity, and was, as not many of his books could be, written for his own pleasure, and is therefore characteristic of the author at his best. (Thomas 2009: 13)

From the perspective of the development of Thomas as a travel writer it is interesting to observe that, even though *The South Country* was written "for his own pleasure" and not as a commission with a short deadline and a high minimum number of words, as had been the case with *Beautiful Wales* and *The Heart of England,* Thomas used and perfected in it his 'landscape technique', which he had 'invented' while struggling with *Beautiful Wales* and developed in *The Heart of England.* In his 2009 Introduction to *The South Country,*

Robert Macfarlane, a contemporary nature and travel writer, and an enthusiastic follower in the topographical and literary footsteps of Edward Thomas, wrote:

> The book jumps about: geographically, seasonally, meteorologically. One moment you are in Suffolk, then you're in Hampshire. One chapter is summer, the next is autumn. One sentence it's raining, the next it's blazing. There's something hypermodern about the book's collage-like feel, it shifts and bucks. (Macfarlane 2009: 9)

For Macfarlane "the collage-like feel" is something "hypermodern" and thus, presumably, new, innovative and creative. It is its "absence of a continuous journey, or an ever-present walker narrator, that distinguishes *The South Country* from other Edwardian nature-travelogues" (Macfarlane 2009: 9). I believe that when Joan Wilson wrote in 2015 about Thomas's first use of this 'collage' method in *Beautiful Wales* that it anticipates "innovations in travel book over the century" (2015:137) she expressed a similar positive, progressive assessment of it. However, immediately after the publication of *The South Country,* Edward Thomas's own assessment of the structure of the book was much less enthusiastic. In 1910 he found the book "full of nasty jingling rhythms", of "endless description", and, last but not least, with "an insufficient thread running through and no connecting links" (quoted in Macfarlane 2009: 8).

When Thomas returned to representing his real journeys in *The Icknield Way* (1913) and *In Pursuit of Spring* (1914), he was to rely on a very different strategy than in his 'topographical trilogy' (*Beautiful Wales*, *The Heart of England* and *The South Country*). In between self-depreciation of *The South Country* and the writing of *The Icknield Way* Thomas was involved in reading and writing about the travel books of other writers. Thomas's "Introduction" to William Cobbett's *Rural Rides* for the Everyman Library's *Travel Series,* and his book *George Barrow: The Man and his Books* were published in 1912. Wiśniewski wrote of the former that "seldom can one find such vivid and authoritative arguments for Cobbett's literary gifts and his book's deserved fame" (Wiśniewski 2009: 92), and of the latter:

> In *George Borrow: The Man and his Books,* Thomas remarked that in most of his books, novels and travel accounts, Borrow is his own hero, and his principal study is himself. He shows how Borrow's books are held together by the author's personality and extraordinary powers of observation. (Wiśniewski 2009: 93)

I would like to argue that it seems highly plausible that Thomas found in the 'classical' nineteenth-century travel books of Cobbett and Borrow, two travel writers he valued highly, such elements which he had found wanting in *The South Country,* elements which could provide both 'sufficient threads' and 'connecting links': Borrow's strong narrative persona and Cobbett's journal-like day-by-day manner of reporting a journey.

The formats of *The Icknield Way* and *The Pursuit of Spring* are almost identical. The former consists of twelve chapters: the 'introductory' one followed by ten 'main' ones, each being a description of a topographically specific day of the narrative persona's walk following the ancient Icknield Way from Thetford in Norfolk to Wanborough in Wiltshire (over 200 kilometres). The latter consists of ten chapters: the first, 'introductory', is followed by nine 'main' ones. Each chapter, preceded by a detailed map, is a description of a topographically specific day of the narrative persona's bicycle tour undertaken at Easter 1913 from London to Cothelstone Hill in Somerset (over 250 kilometres). These formats differ markedly from the structurally, topographically and temporally nebulous *Beautiful Wales* or *The South Country.* However, for all these differences, it is the evocative and impressionistic poetic prose of Thomas that connects all these books: the style, which could be assessed in terms of development rather than radical change, all the way from the first brief descriptions of Thomas's own wanderings in *Oxford* to his 'orthodox' travel book *In Pursuit of the Spring.*

As his reputation today "rests almost entirely on his poetry" (Wiśniewski 2009: 1), it is no wonder that Thomas scholars and biographers often look at books like *The Icknield Way* or *In Pursuit of Spring* as hastily written prose commissions, in which unpolished gems of great poetry to come could be discerned[8]. Yet these two books are also very fine examples of, on the one hand, Edward Thomas's writerly craft and, on the other, of the versatility, robustness and also development of the genre of the travel book in Britain in this period.

In Pursuit of Spring was written at a very professional pace in just two months (April–May 1913), quite a feat if we take into consideration that he could not devote all his time and energy to it as in these two months ten book reviews, two articles and two books (*The Icknield Way* and *The Country*) were published (Cooper 2017). This shows the pace and pressure under which Thomas was writing for almost two decades from the end of the 19th century till 1915, when he enlisted in the British Army. When in 1911 Thomas started his research on what was to be published two years later as *The Icknield Way,* he was an experienced professional writer with more than one thousand texts published (see Cooper 2017): mostly book reviews, but also his own articles and several of his own books. Quite a few of these articles had been about travel writing, particularly about its 'naturalist branch' practised by such writers as W.H. Hudson or Richard Jefferies (whose biography he published in 1909). When we take into consideration Thomas's professionalism, his remarkably literary expertise in the field of travel writing, and his own negative remarks about the lack of thread and connections in *The South Country* voiced by him in 1910, his choice of format for his next travel account should not be surprising. *The Icknield Way* is ostensibly a straightforward travel book written in the form of a journal reporting ten

8 Edward Frost was the first reader who noticed this, see, e.g., Wiśniewski (2009: 97).

days of the persona's walking along the ancient path. So, in formal terms it follows in the footsteps of earlier British men of letters from Henry Fielding (*A Journal of the Voyage to Lisbon*) to Robert Louis Stevenson (*Travels with a Donkey in the Cévennes*) who used their literary fame and skills to artistically describe in the form of a journal a relatively short and uneventful journey. Yet, as Karen Attar showed, Thomas never went on a ten-day foot trek along the ancient way, although he explored it intensively otherwise:

> Thomas wrote the book [*The Icknield Way*] in 1911. He began with research at home and in the British Museum Library in February and March, when he also undertook a few short expeditions along his conjectured path. He explored the route more fully by bicycle in April and May and again in June and July before writing the book between July and September, a year and a half before publication. (Attar 2017)

Another feature of *The Icknield Way* (and also of *In Pursuit of Spring*), which was new to Thomas's rendering of his travels but is characteristic of many British 'artistic' travel books from Fielding to W.H. Hudson, is the central role of a carefully constructed narrative persona. According to Wiśniewski, "In *The Icknield Way* Thomas appears as a guide, a naturalist, and an expert on England's social and economic history, but also entertaining travelling companion" (Wiśniewski 2009: 89). In *The Icknield Way* and *In Pursuit of Spring* Thomas constructed his own persona at the centre of the narrative, with his idiosyncratic, poetic language, as the tread he could not find in *The South Country*.

7. Conclusion

Edward Thomas was a professional writer, a tireless reviewer and a biographer. He was also an enthusiastic amateur naturalist and an avid walker, and therefore it seems only 'natural' that, as his professional career developed, he moved in the direction of travel books, a genre which had been popular in Britain for more than a century. The first phase of Thomas's development as a travel writer culminated in *The South Country,* a collage-like book of poetic travel impressions. Thomas was very hard on himself and this book, and thought it lacked structural cohesion, so when he was to represent his travel experiences again, he turned to the much more orthodox and straightforward travel book format and wrote *The Icknield Way* and *In Pursuit of Spring*.

Tim Youngs, a tireless travel writing scholar, an editor of *Studies in Travel Writing,* in the monumental recent *Cambridge History of Travel Writing* (which he edited together with Nadinin Das), in a chapter written by himself, entitled "Travel Writing after 1900", stated "[s]o far as travel writing is concerned, the period [1900 till today] takes us from Edward Thomas's book on the ancient track, *The Icknield Way* (1913), to astronauts tweeting from the International Space Station and back again to renewed interest in Thomas and nature writing" (Youngs 2019: 125). It was largely thanks to Robert Macfarlane, an academic,

a nature and travel writer himself, that Youngs could envisage the development of travel writing over the last one hundred years as a circular movement from and back to *The Icknield Way.* Macfarlane wrote an enthusiastic introduction to the 2009 edition of *The South Country* and then made Edward Thomas, as a person and as a writer, one of the key 'heroes' of *The Old Ways* (2012), and also made the Icknield Way one of the key old ways he walked "in search of a route to the past, only to find myself delivered again and again to the contemporary" (Macfarlane 2013: xi). Thanks to scholars like Jacek Wiśniewski, Robert Macfarlane and Tim Youngs, the nature and travel narratives of Edward Thomas are not only saved from oblivion, but new perspectives and new leases of life are injected into them.

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Sir Isaac Newton and the Great Re-Coinage of 1696 in Philip Kerr's *Dark Matter*

Abstract. The aim of this paper is to show how in recent years a comparatively little-known period of Newton's life, his work as the Warden and then Master of the Royal Mint, has entered the popular imagination. Analyzing Philip Kerr's detective novel set in the 17th century, *Dark Matter: The Private Life of Sir Isaac Newton*, I discuss his depiction of the Great Re-Coinage and the criminal world of cockney counterfeiters and 'clippers' whom Newton so successfully prosecuted. Additionally, the paper demonstrates how the "Britishness" of Newton and of old London becomes commodified; Kerr sells the myth of British history, Britain's greatest minds, and British urban folklore for the global market.

Keywords: Sir Isaac Newton, alchemy, the Great Re-Coinage, Philip Kerr, the Royal Mint, Britishness

1. Sir Isaac Newton in Popular Culture

Contemporary popular culture discovered Sir Isaac Newton when the first long-suppressed evidence against his rationality and sobriety surfaced. In 1936 Sotheby's auction house released a catalogue of Newton's hand-written, evidently alchemical manuscripts labelled "not fit to be printed" (Murphy 2014) when Newton died in 1727. After this famous auction, Newton's life, scientific work, occult fascinations, and dabbling in alchemy became literary motifs and are often referred to in novels, whether detective fiction set in the 17th century, thrillers whose protagonists investigate four-century-old conspiracies, or popular biographies. The first of such biographies, Frank E. Manuel's *A Portrait of Isaac Newton* (1968), was published by Harvard University Press as early as the late 1960s. This now famous biography describes the life of Newton from a psychoanalytical perspective, stressing his childhood traumas and the resulting fixation that led to troubled psychosexual behaviour: lifelong sexual abstinence and latent homosexual inclinations. Frank Manuel elaborates on the subject of Newton's alleged esoteric beliefs. In his opinion, the

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young Newton carefully recorded all the instances of telepathy he heard of, trying to trace some strange affinities between bodies. God speaking through the mouths of the prophets, electromagnetism, telepathy, and gravity would be just diverse manifestations of ether. Manuel discusses Newton's studies of ether in the context of his psychological problems. He analyzes the scientist using Freudian theories, referring to Newton's notes, letters, private confessions written before Church holidays, and the memoirs of people who knew him. His diagnosis is that at a very tender age Newton missed his prematurely deceased father, and also his mother, who re-married, moved out, and left her son in her own mother's home. It is emotions such as longing, solitude, unrequited love, and the feeling of rejection that pushed Newton towards his search for the ultimate power: a God who loved him and, albeit from a distance, knew his every action and cared for him. The language of science in Newton's day, which for example described magnetic attraction as an affect, was literal for him, and Newton's juvenile traumas became sublimated into a mystic quest for knowledge and for God. Today, scholars calculate that Newton wrote at least 131 manuscripts, approximately one million words altogether, on the subject of alchemy. His discovery of the laws of gravity and of the nature of life resulted from this very quest. Manuel also makes much of Newton's hypochondria, claiming that the search for the Elixir of Life and the panacea was for Newton an attempt to secure health and immortality.

More popular books about Newton-the alchemist started to be published thirty years later. At the turn of the 21st century, Michael White wrote *Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer* (1997), a popular biography emphasizing Newton's occult and alchemical research, and soon Newton became the subject not only of such popular non-fiction books, but also of thrillers and fantasy novels. A character based on Newton plays the most important role in *The Age of Unreason* (1998–2001), a four-volume series of alternate histories by Gregory Keyes. Neal Stephenson's *The Baroque Cycle* (2003–2004), a series of quasi-fantasy novels concerned with the emergence of modern science, describes Newton's interest in alchemy, his work leading to writing *The Principia*, and his quarrel with Gottfried Leibniz over who first discovered calculus. Michael White's *Equinox* (2006) is a serial murder thriller set simultaneously in the 17th and 21st centuries: here we see Newton's attempts to stage a bloody occult ritual intended to summon some powerful evil spirits, and the contemporary re-staging of a similar rite performed by psycho killer alchemists. White's inspiration for the novel is threefold. Firstly, *Equinox* is a serial-murder thriller; secondly, it repeats Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* formula of a novel exposing a centuries-old conspiracy; and thirdly, it makes use of White's own theses concerning Newton as described in detail some years previously in the already-mentioned *Isaac Newton: The Last Sorcerer.* Michael White in *Equinox* writes about Newton:

> For almost a quarter of a century now he had been searching for the core secret of all existence, the *prima sapentia*. Science had been his first mistress and he had bled her dry

> but he had known all along that there was more to the universe than nuts and bolts… [He] conducted elaborate alchemical experiments in smoky laboratories in his quest for the Philosopher's Stone, the legendary substance that would allow the alchemist to transmute any base metal into gold, the magical interface between the physical and the metaphysical that would also allow the adept to produce the *elixir vitae* and to find eternal youth. (2006: 38)

Such an image of Newton has entered the popular imagination and made its appearance in a number of popular novels, books for very young readers included. For example, Frederic Brounéus's *The Prince of Soul and the Lighthouse* (2012) is a young adult novel dealing with Newton's alchemical experiments.

Thus, the process of re-imagining Newton initiated by the editors of his alchemical papers sold in 1936 at the Sotheby auction remains ongoing, and early 21st-century culture has renegotiated the picture of Newton, making him a manic genius bent on learning the secrets of the Universe who nevertheless, thanks to his brilliance, manages to contribute enormously to official science. All these books (and many others as well) offer some secret windows into Newton's life and take advantage of the fact that contemporary readers have learned about this scientist at school. They are familiar with his major achievements and associate him with the 'boring' history of science rather than with the fascinating secrets that history textbooks are silent about. Recently written *New Age* papers on Newton, for example Brendan D. Murphy's "The Newton You Never Knew: Isaac Newton's Esotericism Revealed" (2014), emphasize that Newton's research in physics—which resulted in the creation of Newton's Laws and Newton's alchemy, his strong belief in ether being the invisible basis of all the Universe—should not be discussed separately, but as the two sides of one and the same research. Murphy claims that:

> It was a collection of works found posthumously in Newton's library, papers and notebooks which revealed that Newton had spent more of his life immersed in studies of alchemy (as well as theology, Bible chronology and natural magic) than he had spent working on "pure science." In 1936 a collection of Newton's papers, amazingly regarded as of "no scientific value" when offered to Cambridge university some fifty years earlier, was purchased at Sotheby's by the respected economist and Newton scholar John Maynard Keynes. Originally left in a stack by Newton when he left his post as the director of the London mint in 1696, these documents had somehow fortuitously escaped the burning of Newton's personal writings arranged after his death—and were discovered two centuries later. (Murphy 2014)

Ironically, Newton thus believed in things that violate Newton's laws as WE understand them. His quest to transmute base metals into gold resulted from the very same idea of the ethereal spirit flowing in the Universe and radiating through all bodies. It would suffice to find the key to this second parallel reality in order to be able to alter the material

foundations of this world. Yet he clearly needed to hide his search for the Philosopher's Stone to stay on the legal side of his contemporary scientific life. Having studied the above-mentioned papers, Keynes gave a lecture to the Royal Society in which he famously stated: "Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians, the last of the Babylonians and Sumerians…[and] the last wonder-child to whom the Magi could do sincere and appropriate homage" (quoted in Murphy 2014).

2. Philip Kerr's *Dark Matter: The Private Life of Sir Isaac Newton*

Newton today is described and researched as a passionate man, as an inhibited and megalomaniacal genius who transcended the Cartesian Universe. His story is sold and made attractive to buyers, whereby Newton has been turning into some sort of merchandise. One very interesting and quite unknown episode in Newton's life (one lasting over 30 years between 1696 and 1727) is his work at the Royal Mint, where he was first the Warden and then the Master. His engagement with the development of the modern economy based on a stable currency and credit, along with his decisive actions against counterfeiters, are among the subplots of Neal Stephenson's *The Baroque Cycle*, but only Philip Kerr's *Dark Matter* (2002) deals exclusively with Newton's life at the Royal Mint in the days of the Great Re-Coinage.

Philip Kerr is best known for his noir crime fiction books featuring the Berlin private detective Bernie Gunther and set in the city after the Nazis' rise to power. Apart from fourteen "Bernie Gunther" books, he also wrote standalone novels which combine detective storylines and historical allusions. For example, the critically acclaimed *A Philosophical Investigation* (1992) is the tale of a serial killer full of references to the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. Kerr's *Dark Matter* is especially interesting because, apart from 'selling' the history of Newton, it also sells the myth of Britishness, which for American readers is associated with the Great Fire of London, Bonfire Night, Guy Fawkes, London counterfeiters, criminals and prostitutes of the *Beggar's Opera* kind, Sherlock Holmes, and the Royal Family. On top of this, Kerr describes in detail the days of severe economic and political crisis in late 17th-century Britain and how the Great Re-coinage directed by Newton was to ameliorate the economy of the country. Thus, *Dark Matter: The Private Life of Sir Isaac Newton* is a perfect example of how Newton has become a prime British export article, for his story is a British story sold on the global market. My aim in this paper is twofold: firstly, by analyzing Kerr's novel I hope to show an unknown face of Isaac Newton, the Warden of the Royal Mint in the days of the Great Re-coinage; secondly, I shall demonstrate the 'Buy British Past' agenda of popular-fiction authors who depict Newton in their novels.

Kerr's novel is, as far as genre goes, a detective story set in England just after the Restoration. In the late 17th century the country had a bi-metallic monetary system based on

silver and gold. The government, or the Royal Mint, arbitrarily fixed the price-relation between the two. For example, it could determine that one unit (an ounce, a pound) of gold could be exchanged for one hundred units of silver. Such a monetary system works smoothly only when the mint and the people of the country are both willing to exchange one hundred silver coins for one gold piece and the other way round. In the early 1690s in England the economic situation was, however, different:

> The market price of silver began to rise at the time when the mint price of gold was higher than the market price. Thus gold bullion was flowing to the mint while silver coins were flowing to the commodity market. By 1695 nearly half of the silver was missing from circulation…as coins were clipped (shaved) with the result that their face value no longer reflected the metal content. (Narron & Skeie 2013)

As a result, England faced very serious problems: the economy was grinding to a halt, and the lack of good money led to enormous unemployment, poverty, and social unrest. In fact, the only available currency remaining on the market was the golden guinea, the smallest gold piece, and various kinds of credit issued by the government. In those days, just before Cambridge's Professor Isaac Newton was made the Warden of the Royal Mint, the mint could not cope with its modest task of producing £15,000 in diverse coins a week, while the total supply of silver coins was about 7 million.

Newton accepted the job at the mint at the beginning of 1696. England was engaged in the Nine Years War with France, and because of clipping and counterfeiting, its currency was steadily weakening. Newton took his post very seriously and his personal intervention soon resulted in the rapid improvement of the production of coins. By late summer the mint boasted a then European record of £100,000 minted in a six-day week. The major problem was that of the counterfeiters and clippers, who despite severe punishments for these offences—hanging, burning at the stake, and quartering—were very active. The Royal Mint Newton inherited was on the verge of collapse, as there was not enough silver in the country to mint the coins England needed, and there were not enough small-denomination coins in circulation to make everyday purchases possible. Moreover, the silver necessary to produce a given coin denomination was worth more than the official value of the coin, and therefore huge profits were waiting for those brave enough to melt coins down and smuggle the silver to the continent. Forgery at that time was technically simple. In any forge fake coins from low-silver mixed alloy could be produced. To make things worse, England was then engaged in an expensive war with France in Flanders and the crown lacked good money to pay its soldiers and thereby ran the risk of desertions, something that would leave the British Isles open to invasion. The National Debt created in 1689 was huge. Philip Kerr's narrator, a hot-blooded young gentleman named Christopher Ellis, is appointed Newton's helper and secretary at the

mint. In accepting the post, he reflects on the economic situation of the country, and it is from him that the readers learn about the real events:

> With the army still in Flanders and King William still unpopular in the country at large, his son the Duke of Gloucester so frail, and Princess Anne—who was second in the line of succession—childless … there was great fear of national insurrection at home. And nothing was perceived to inflame discontent as much as the continued debasement and scarcity of the coin. (2002: 177)

In his memoirs, written 30 years after the Re-Coinage, Ellis remembers his service at the Mint and his cooperation with Newton, who was obliged to be the principal agent of the coin's protection. Ellis is aware that the coin was indeed in need of protection, as the money was debased. In 1695 the Regency Council commissioned essays on the amendment of English coins, and the greatest intellectuals of the epoch, Doctor Newton, Doctor Wallis, Mister John Locke, and Sir Christopher Wren wrote about diverse issues connected with the re-coinage. The Lords Justices of the country, who ruled when the king was engaged in the war in France, were forced to improve the situation, and in June 1696 the Re-coinage Act passed through Parliament, but before Newton took over, things got even worse. Ellis remembers:

> … the Parliament having been imprudent enough to damn the old money before ensuring that there existed sufficient supplies of the new…money had remained in such short supply that tumults every day were feared. For without good money how were men to be paid, and how was bread to be bought? … The fraud of the bankers and the goldsmiths who, having got immense treasures by extortion, hoarded their bullion in expectation of its advancing in value… Indeed, there was such a want of public spirit everywhere that the Nation seemed to sink under so many calamities. (2002: 9–10)

This passage of Kerr's novel does sound like non-fiction. Ellis narrates the real historical events preceding the Great Re-Coinage and thus prepares the stage for his fictional story.

3. The Great Re-Coinage of 1696

The Great Re-Coinage is now considered to be one of the greatest monetary events in British history. And during the debates on how to end the money crisis many solutions were prepared: the Treasure Secretary proposed devaluation, the Treasury Adviser was for expansion of credit, and "Royal Mint Master, Sir Isaac Newton sought to achieve gold and silver price parity" (Narron & Skeie 2013). Finally, John Locke advocated that the Mint demonetize the clipped coins and issue new and good money. This plan was approved, but the Royal Mint was unprepared to replace so many coins in such a short

time. It only produced about 15% of the coins it should, and because the clipped money was de-legalized there was no currency available and the Bank of England had to borrow money in Denmark. To make things worse, forgers and smelters undermined Britain's money supply. This is when Newton took over the Mint. As a former alchemist he proved perfectly prepared for the post as he knew and understood all things connected with working metal. In his "elaboratory" in Cambridge he had once built his own furnace and "melted down plenty of substances, weighed, combined, assayed— all the skills one could hope for in a mint official" (Levenson 2009: 3).

Thomas Levenson, the author of *Newton and the Counterfeiter* (2009), a popular-science book on the Great Re-Coinage, emphasizes that Newton was also one of the most rigorous observers of his day who could watch the flow of precious metal from the melting houses to the final coin presses, and whose accounts at the end of the Great Re-Coinage demonstrate that he managed the passage of millions of pounds' worth of silver through the Mint with scrupulous honesty. As already mentioned, Newton's expertise in alchemy proved very helpful. Just before taking over the Mint Newton suffered what scientists now describe as mercury poisoning (tremor, severe insomnia, delusions of persecution or paranoid ideas, lapses of memory, and mental confusion).

It is worth remembering that Newton had performed alchemical experiments since 1678. For instance, he analyzed the taste of mercury, calling it: "strong, sourish, ungrateful" (Narron & Skeie 2013), along with arsenic, gold and lead. In his notebook he recorded experimenting with chemicals in 1693. Then, 18 months after a breakdown of nervous functioning and physical ailments he was appointed the Warden of the Mint. His friends wanted to help him start a new life in London, while his support of the winning side of the Glorious Revolution helped to secure him this post, as well as the fact that he had already been consulted concerning the re-coinage. With his new position he obtained living quarters near the Mint in the Tower of London. And at 55 his sole purpose in life became overseeing the Great Re-Coinage. Newton worked 15 hours a day, sleeping in his noisy rooms alongside the Mint. He introduced the gold standard, advocated paper money, and investigated, judged and sent to the gallows clippers and counterfeiters. He also became an economic theorist: "as a result of a report written by Newton on 21 September 1717 to the Lords Commissioners of His Majesty's Treasury the bimetallic relationship between gold coins and silver coins was changed by Royal Proclamation" (Narron & Skeie 2013). Overall, he took to his new duties with a breathtaking intensity, and the success of the Great Re-Coinage was his personal achievement. Similarly, Kerr's narrator depicts Newton's life at the Mint in precise detail:

> The Mint was within the Tower since 1299, and by 1696 it was as big as many a sizable town. Two rows of aged wooden buildings, pinned together with clamps of iron, lay between the inner and outer ramparts beginning at the Byward and Bell Towers, extended

> some five hundred yards along and around the foot of each wall to finish up at the Salt Tower. A narrow cobbled road… patrolled by sentries… houses, offices, barracks, stables, wash-houses, smithies, melting-houses, mill rooms, storehouses, taverns and a sutters selling all kinds of victuals… metalworking… cannons… iron wheels… Bedlam could not have seemed more noisy than the Royal Mint. (2002: 16)

Kerr makes the story of the Great Re-coinage a fascinating historical account decorated with period details. The history of Britain here becomes merchandise, and the Re-Coinage a fascinating event, just like, say, the Gold Rush in America. Yet Ellis, Newton's helper, is capable of judging the process with a professional eye, and he even criticizes the crown and governmental policy: "Bags [of silver coins] were sold at the Mint and their dissemination among the people at large left to chance, for there was no public expenditure available for the money's distribution… a great fault of the re-coinage." (2002: 253)

Moreover, Ellis records cases of criminals buying the coins, melting them illegally, and using the alloy to produce tableware of solid silver which, coated with some baser metal, was then smuggled across the Channel to France, where silver fetched high prices. For silver worth 60 shillings in England the equivalent of 75 shillings could be got in France or Amsterdam. Other offenders were faking golden guineas. They used printing presses or cider presses to do so, as all the coining presses were surrendered to the Royal Mint under the Plate Act.

4. Newton the Detective

Yet the greatest problem Newton had to face was an enormous criminal world parallel to the official one flourishing in London at this time. Such a milieu is the setting of the famous *Beggar's Opera* by John Gay, "a Newgate pastoral among the thieves and whores there", as Jonathan Swift called it in a letter to Alexander Pope on 30 August 1716. *The Beggar's Opera* is more of a satire than a pastoral opera. It consists of three acts and many short songs, and its action takes place in London just after the Great Re-Coinage. One of the major characters is Matt of the Mint, a petty criminal who in act II justifies his trade as a means to redistribute wealth among the nation. The comedy shows the complicated love life of the highwayman, Captain Macheath, who is sentenced to death, locked in Newgate prison and is involved in Peachum's gang of thieves, prostitutes and highwaymen. Everybody drinks, impeaches, and spends time in taverns, prison cells, stolen goods warehouses and brothels. *The Beggar's Opera* was a huge success in the early 18th-century theatre and entered the canon, becoming an influential piece of class satire. The stereotypical picture of petty Cockney criminals derives from there, and it seems far from being an accident that Philip Kerr's *Dark Matter* is set in the very same institutions some 30 years before the action of *The Beggar's Opera* is set: the Bedlam asylum, Newgate prison, the Mint, the taverns in the neighbourhood of the Mint, suburban brothels, and

counterfeiters' workshops. The common influence on both literary works is the case against William Chaloner, whom Newton investigated as the King's attorney and whom he had executed at Tyburn gallows. Newton and Ellis in the novel talk to Chaloner's accomplice, "a gentleman lately condemned to death for coining, who sought to bilk the hangman." (Kerr 2002: 27)

Newton the master lectures Ellis the apprentice on the necessity of punishing counterfeiters in the same way as murderers guilty of planning to kill the king: "One is just as disruptive to the smooth governing of the realm as the other… a king might be killed with little disruption to the country at large… But if the money is bad, then so the country lacks a true measure of prosperity and by that same sickness shall it quickly perish" (2002: 30). It is Newton who says this, but Ellis is aware that as an ex-alchemist or 'multiplier' (as these alchemists were called) who tried to produce silver and gold, Newton himself used to break the law. Before 1689 multiplying had been "a felony and therefore, a capital offence" (2002: 37). Following the same logic, spoiling money is weakening the state and thus punishable by death. His sad experience with mercury poisoning enables Newton to identify those who have been acquainted with mercury for a long time: the blackened teeth, the tremulous hands, the great thirst and the unsteadiness of mind give them away when Ellis and Newton survey the inmates of Bedlam. All this expertise allows them to capture a gang of money-spoilers who were "forging golden guineas and exporting silver bullion to advantage the cause of King Lewis of France in particular and Roman Catholicism in general" (2002: 262), which adds political and religious contexts to the economy of the Great Re-Coinage.

The story of the Great Re-Coinage and Newton's involvement in it is for Kerr a piece of Early Modern Period English folklore which can easily get commodified and sold on the global book market. Elizabeth Outka, in *Consuming Traditions: Modernity, Modernism, and the Commodified Authentic,* uses the term "commodified nostalgia" (2009: 231) to describe such narrative strategies. This 'Buy British Past' attitude can be seen in the way Kerr employs stereotypical associations with Britishness, and at the same time in how he defamiliarizes them. The prime example is Newton himself. Everybody knows he was the greatest scientist of the British Enlightenment, yet few people are aware of his involvement with alchemy and banking. Newton in Kerr's novel makes the re-coinage his personal crusade. As a scientist he both cherishes pure knowledge and succeeds in applying it to concrete cases. His assistant, Ellis, hopes that by helping Newton he will gain some education. In depicting him Kerr uses clichéd anecdotes and quotes usually associated with Sir Isaac Newton, the great scientist. "The most important thing I have learned is how little I do know. I seem to myself to have been only like a little boy playing on the seashore, diverting myself with smooth pebbles or pretty shells while a great ocean of truth lies undiscovered before me" (2002: 121), he famously remarks. Another time he shows Ellis how prisms work, lecturing him on the nature of light waves, which

is the subject of his most renowned paper. He also tries to teach his assistant how gravity works on small and gigantic scales alike: "the fall of this dagger is the same as the fall of the moon" (2002: 201). He predictably recounts the story of the falling apple and tells Ellis in confidence that the fruit in question had in fact been a fig, but an apple seemed more becoming when he told the anecdote for the first time. The lifelong chastity of Newton made famous by his psychoanalyst biographers (Frank Manuel and others) is also mentioned: "By being forcibly restrained lust is always inflamed… the best way to be chaste is not to struggle with unchaste thoughts, but to decline them, and to keep the mind employed about other things. That has always been my own experience" (2002: 198).

Moreover, *Dark Matter,* a novel set in London in the days of the Nine Years war, is definitely and emphatically British, and yet its Britishness is also composed of commonplaces recognizable by the global market's literary agents and non-British readers. Jeremy Rifkin in *The Age of Access: The New Culture of Hypercapitalism* notes that in the days of global culture "local cultural resources" are mined and repackaged "as cultural commodities and entertainments" (2000: 5), and this is what happens in *Dark Matter.* On the very first page Ellis fights a duel on November 5, the Gunpowder Plot Day, when all London celebrates the anniversary of King James's deliverance from a Roman Catholic plot to blow up Parliament, and the day "the Prince of Orange had landed at Torbay to deliver the Church of England from… the Catholic King James II" (2002: 7), thus initiating the Glorious Revolution. The fact that Ellis gets into trouble on November 5 of all days is of no consequence; the choice of this date is just a period detail inserted to set the right mood. There are many such details in the text: when Ellis and Newton are in the Tower inspecting the torture chambers they happen to find "the instruments … from the wreck of a Spanish Armada ship intended to help in the work of reconverting the people of England to Roman Catholicism… captured by Sir Francis Drake" (2002: 46). The only reason the characters enter the chamber at all is that Kerr's readers would probably associate the Spanish Armada, Drake, and the Inquisition with the English Reformation. By the same token Newton and Ellis meet in London Daniel Defoe and Samuel Pepys, and talk about Guy Fawkes and Sir Walter Raleigh, all of whom are very loosely connected to the action of the book.

Yet the major 'British' feature of *Dark Matter* is the systematic and consistent modelling of Newton's investigations based on the structure of Sherlock Holmes' narratives. Despite the anachronism of this approach, Kerr's protagonists resemble those of Conan Doyle in nearly everything: Ellis accompanies Newton, witnesses his investigations and is dazzled by his ingenious deductive skills: "so much of me was plain to him, as if he could see into my mind and read my thoughts" (2002: 14), he reflects on the day he meets Newton and is scrutinized by him. Newton, a lone genius with but one helper, investigates the murders committed within the Mint, and yet, theoretically, the Mint is situated in the Tower, and thus the Tower Ordinance, the garrison of soldiers and their

dim-witted officers, should deal with the criminal offences committed there. Ellis and Newton versus the Ordinance is, narratively, Watson and Holmes versus Scotland Yard. "The constable's man Mister Osborne" (2002: 32) stands for Lestrade and plays a similar role. What Kerr in fact does when he describes Newton's scientific mind is to depict an Enlightenment-inspired way of thinking about reality, a simplified version of the scientific method: "make sure you observe nature's obvious laws and processes… all the intermediate degrees of quality can be induced" (2002: 36), Newton says when the body of a murdered counterfeiter is found. By experiments and deduction, he formulates a hypothesis which is then checked. Producing from his pocket a typical Sherlock Holmes device, a magnifying glass, he "proceeded to examine the black metal surface of the machine most closely…'If I am not mistaken this is dried blood'" (2002: 47). To make sure, he takes the specimen to his microscope, and together with Ellis he compares the cells from the sample to those from a drop of fresh blood. Another time he uses a telescope (he had himself made it years previously to observe the moon) to survey the environs of the Tower. He also confiscates a false guinea and takes it to his own old alchemical lab to determine the ingredients used to make it—just as Sherlock Holmes conducts his own chemical tests of evidence.

Moreover, Newton, again in Holmes-like manner, breaks codes looking for numerical patterns in seemingly random samples of letters they found in a letter. And, just like in Conan Doyle, he has his own pet theories concerning people's handwriting and how it reflects a person's age and temper. Even his method of decoding—by determining frequencies of vowels, and consonants' appearance in a given language—reflects one of Sherlock Holmes'. Additionally, in an early attempt at forensic science he studies what he calls the "geometry of punishment" (2002: 209), i.e., the marks left on a dead body which help disclose the time and kind of its death. Newton is competent enough to say that the man who apparently hanged himself was in fact strangled and hung only later by some second party. Kerr's Newton shares some of Holmes's peculiarities. While thinking about a very difficult problem he sometimes enters a strange coma-like trance: "excursion from my physical body" (2002: 273), and he is extremely vain, especially as far as his priority over ingenious adversaries is concerned. It is only after he learns who had devised a very difficult code he broke that Newton feels really happy: "my triumph is complete… I would have defeated Monsieur Descartes above all men" (2002: 326). These intertextual hints pointing at Conan Doyle serve the same purpose as references to British icons, and thus Kerr makes *Dark Matter* an emphatically British narrative about Newton, the nation's pride and joy, who is both a theorist of science and a practical investigator.

5. Conclusion

Setting the novel in the days of the Great Re-Coinage, Kerr reminds the readers of old England's glory:

> Newton's success was astonishing. When he took over the Mint its estimated peak capacity (never fully achieved) was £15,000 worth of silver per week. By the time the re-coinage was completed, three years later, it was running consistently at £100,000 of silver per week. In all, Newton oversaw the minting during this period of £6,840,719 at a cost of £2,700,000. And all this from an academic and politician who had never had a 'real job' before. (Narron & Skeie 2013)

Newton modernized the English financial system, creating a gold standard and introducing the idea of paper money. In recognition of his merits, Queen Anne knighted him and Newton remained Master of the Mint for thirty years, till his death in 1727 when he was in his 80s. Throughout this time he was pursuing fakers, taking depositions from witnesses, and maintaining a network of informers. He sent men and women to the gallows and acquired the reputation of being incorruptible. Therefore, the myth of the Cockney criminal world, spread, for instance, by the success of Gay's *The Bagger's Opera*, is partly influenced by his investigations and severity. All these contexts make *Dark Matter* sell 'commodities': the Britishness of Newton, the Great Re-coinage, and figures such as Sherlock Holmes and Guy Fawkes.

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Narrating Canadian War Memorials, Understanding National Identity

Abstract. Pierre Berton writes that "Canada, more than most countries, is a nation of … memorials". Yet, with the passage of time, war memorials inevitably tend to lose their original significance, becoming altogether 'invisible' for historically-estranged generations. Hence the need for re-remembering war memorials and monuments for the purposes of consolidating a (national) collective memory. The aim of this paper is a comparative analysis of *Fields of Sacrifice* (1963, dir. Donald Brittain), Herbert Fairlie Wood's and John Swettenham's *Silent Witnesses* (1974), Robert Shipley's *To Mark Our Place* (1987), and Robert Konduras's and Richard Parrish's *World War I: A Monumental History* (2014) within the context of the theoretical distinction between memorial and monument cultures in order to discuss the defining ideological tropes of 'Canadianness'.

Keywords: war, commemoration, memorials, monuments, the Great War, World War II, Canada, national memory

1. Introduction

State-imposed commemorative modes of representation of war(s), be it memorials/monuments, museums, or rituals of remembrance, provide the most efficient affective, epistemological and ideological means to ensure a unifying sense of a nation as a "soul, a spiritual principle", a "grand solidarity" (Renan 1994 [1882]: 17) and an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983: 6). However strongly we may condemn wars, the brutal truth is that it is precisely wars that have the greatest potential to consolidate a nation by means of evoking "a moral conscience" (Renan 1994 [1882]: 18). Scholars such as Jay Winter, Daniel J. Sherman, K.S. Inglis, and Steven Trout,[2] working in the field of memorial

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2 For the significance of memorial/monument spaces for an understanding of the ideological workings of national (collective) memory, see Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in*

studies, have all underscored the necessity of seeing commemorative landscapes as a key factor in constructing a sense of national identity in a given present. However, architectural embodiments of (national) collective memory—and collective memory itself—have been put under close scrutiny. The experience of war, inscribed in the minds of those who fought in it or simply lived through it, is inevitably to be supplanted by what Pierre Nora defines as "lieu de mémoire", where "what is being remembered [is] memory itself" (Nora 1989: 16). Nora's "sites of memory" are a determinant of collective memory, which Susan Sontag defined in the following terms: "What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulation: that this is important, and this is the story about how it happened" (Sontag 2004 [2003]: 76). In Peter Novick's words, "collective memory" as a representation of the past carries the danger of oversimplification, which easily allows for ideological manipulations: "To understand something historically is to be aware of its complexity, to have sufficient detachment to see it from multiple perspectives, to accept the ambiguities, including moral ambiguities of protagonists' motives and behavior. Collective memory simplifies, sees events from a single, committed perspective; it is impatient with ambiguities of any kind; reduces events to mythic archetypes" (Novick 1999: 3–4). Taking my cue from Arthur Danto's distinction between the "memorial" and the "monument",[3] I suggest considering the difference between the cultural processes of memorialization versus monumentalization. I define memorialization as a purposeful over-focus on the physical and psychological suffering of soldiers as victims of war in order to convey a powerful anti-war message. This representational schemata is all about underscoring the futility of sacrifice, so as to convey an ethically-motivated anti-war message.[4] In turn, monumentalization is a representational schemata that does not deny that war is hell but aims to depict the suffering of a (national) collectivity as a worthwhile sacrifice superior to the trauma of the individual and the extent of the loss of life, a sacrifice seen as contributing to the greatness of the nation in the present.[5] My argument is that the sense of a distinctive national 'Canadianness' has been written within a war-based ideological overlapping of memorialization and monumentalization,

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European Cultural History (1995), Daniel J. Sherman's *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (1999), K.S. Inglis's *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (1998), Steven Trout's *The Battlefield of Memory" The First World War and American Remembrance, 1919–1941* (2010); see also William Kidd and Brian Murdoch (eds) *Memory and Memorials: The Commemorative Century* (2004).

3 "We erect monuments so that we shall always remember and build memorials so that we shall never forget" (Danto 1985: 152).

4 The most distinctive examples of memorialization encompass the British cultural memory of the Great War and the US cultural memory of the Vietnam War.

5 Significantly, the monumentalization of the Second World War in British and US cultural memory serves to counteract, respectively, the British Great War "futility myth" and the US "Vietnam War Syndrome."

combining a memorial-oriented emphasis on the tragic loss of life with a monument-based evocation of 'the birth of the nation' myth.

Commemorative practices, as Pierre Nora claims, "have no referent in reality; or rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs, and hence their capacity for metamorphosis, an endless recycling of their meaning and an unpredictable proliferation of their ramifications" (Nora 1989: 19). This "incessant recycling" may ultimately lead to a non-meaning altogether, with the passage of time creating an unavoidable historical estrangement, for "[o]nce we assign monumental form to memory, we have to some degree divested ourselves of the obligation to remember. In shouldering the memory-work, monuments may relieve viewers of the memory burden" (Young 1993: 5). Concomitantly, as Robert Musil has emphasized, "[t]here is nothing in this world as invisible as monuments. … It is … the purpose of the most ordinary monuments to first conjure up a remembrance, or to grab hold of our attention and give a pious bent to our feelings …. They repel the very thing they are supposed to attract. One cannot say we did not notice them; one would have to say they 'de-notice' them, they elude our perceptive faculties" (Musil 2006 [1957]: 64–65). It is beyond doubt that, "as part of nation's rites or the objects of a people's national pilgrimage, [monuments and memorials] are invested with a national soul and memory", but, as Young emphasizes, "by themselves [they] are of little value, mere stones in the landscape" (Young 1993: 2). In his 1992 essay, K. S. Inglis asks: "Will it be the more and more common fate of war memorials to be functionally visible only at widely separated ceremonial moments? How is a reverent regard for war memorials to survive the generations which created them?" (Inglis 1992: 18). In the "Preface" to his study of Canadian war memorials, Robert Shipley expresses his concern that "It didn't take many trips to the library to find that virtually no one had yet written about the monuments that are such a ubiquitous feature of Canadian communities" (Shipley 1987: 10).

And why write about memorials? Shipley's answer is that "if we look carefully at these pieces of our national and communal inheritance, we may well be rewarded with an enriched appreciation of our own unique society and country" (Shipley 1987: 21). Yet, the documentary *Fields of Sacrifice* (1963), Herbert Fairlie Wood's and John Swettenham's *Silent Witnesses* (1974), Robert Shipley's *To Mark our Place. A History of Canadian War Memorials* (1987) and Robert Konduros's and Richard Parrish's *World War I: A Monumental History* (2014) are more about encoding than decoding the Canadian commemorative landscape. Two issues need to be taken into consideration here. First, however comprehensive the authors wished to be, the sheer number of Canadian war memorials as well as war cemeteries is such that a selection was necessary. And selection is always determined by a certain ideological bias. Second, it is highly unlikely that any one person could possibly see as many of the memorials and war cemeteries as included in these works, thus what is actually being proposed is a reading of the Canadian commemorative landscape within the interpretative frame offered by the authors. Finally, certain (hi)stories tended to gain prominence over others,

whereas quite a few (hi)stories remained largely untold. One needs to look critically at the narratives which evolved round Canadian practices of remembrance so as to underscore the complex intertwining between nationalism, multiculturalism, and expiating national guilt.

It is true, as James Young asserts, that typically "the memorial operation remains self-contained and detached from our daily lives" (Young 1993: 5). And yet, a commemorative landscape can become a malleable ideological space. This is usually the result of a shift in national politics and/or social awareness. First, there may appear a politically or socially determined need to remove 'old' monuments, which changes both the national commemorative landscape and the national narrative about the past. The transnational phenomenon of "statue wars" is worth noting, with the "Rhodes Must Fall" movement in South Africa, Great Britain and the USA,[6] or the "de-Sovietization" policy in Central and Eastern Europe.[7] In Canada, the repercussions of the discovery of the graves of victims of the notorious residential schools has brought about protests against Pope John Paul II monuments.[8] Secondly, the contestation of the ideologies underlying existing forms of commemoration often brings about a reassessment of the modes of representation. Does it suffice to simply erect new memorials or monuments? Such as the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument in Ottawa? Or does commemoration need to be more firmly written into the everyday life of a community? In the specific case of Canada, Tyler Stiem has praised the idea of "Vancouver [as] a city of reconciliation formally recognising its occupation of the unceded territories and embarking with local First Nations governments on a long-term plan to decolonise and indigenise the city. To begin with, some streets, parks, schools and landmarks will be renamed …" (Stiem 2018). This particular case of Canada shows how embracing the hitherto 'Otherness' of the First Nations may serve to appropriate the memorialization of people for the purposes of a monumentalization of the nation. Let it suffice to quote the following description from the webpage of Veterans Affairs Canada: "The richly symbolic sculpture represents the stories of thousands of men and women who have played a decisive role in defending the freedom of our country" ("The National Aboriginal Veterans Monument").[9]

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6 See Tyler Stiem's "Statue wars: what should we do with troublesome monuments?", 2018, *The Guardian,* https://www.theguardian.com/cities/2018/sep/26/statue-wars-what-should-we-do-with-troublesome-monuments

7 See Helen Parish, "Soviet monuments are being toppled—this gives the spaces they occupied a new meaning", 2022, *The Conversation,* theconversation.com/soviet-monuments-are-being-toppled-this-gives-the-spaces-they-occupied-a-new-meaning-190022

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9 https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/national-inventory-canadian-memorials/details/7972

2. Engraving the Memorial versus the Monumental (Hi)Story of Canada: The Canadian National Vimy Memorial

Though Robert Shipley's *To Mark our Place. A History of Canadian War Memorials i*s devoted exclusively to local Canadian memorials, the focus of Pierre Berton's "Foreword" is, significantly, the Canadian National Vimy Memorial. It is, as Berton writes, "arguably the most massive monument in France, [even though] commemorating as it does one of the briefest and least bloody of the Great War battles" (Berton, in Shipley 1987: 8). The site chosen for the memorial commemorating the Canadian capture of Vimy Ridge, as well as the sheer magnitude of Walter Allward's architectural design, renders it a perfect example of the monument as defined by Arthur Danto: "Monuments make heroes and triumphs, victories and conquests, perpetually present and part of life. … With monuments we honor ourselves" (Danto 1985: 152). Half a century after the official unveiling, Berton writes of the meaning of the Vimy Memorial for Canadian nationhood:

> One, I think, has to do with pride. Canada entered the war as a colony and emerged as a nation. … The Great War was a searing experience and also a turning point. We grew up as a result of that war: for the first time we came to understand that war is not gallant; it is hell. But if we lost our illusions, we also lost our inferiority complex. Like the Australians, we learned that we were equal to any fighting nation in earth. (Berton, in Shipley 1987: 8)

It is clearly noticeable that Berton writes into this ideologically monument-oriented narrative yet another one, very memorial-oriented, and in perfect accord with Artur Danto's definition of "the memorial [as] a special precinct, extruded from life, a segregated enclave where we honor the dead" (Danto 1985: 152). Berton writes:

> The monument says something else, of course. The names of the dead stand for the sacrifice as well as the futility of war—tens of thousands of them spread across the country engraved on sullen bronze. Here you can sense the lifeblood of the nation draining away, the flower of our youth scythed down, the promise of the future distorted. (Berton, in Shipley 1987: 8)

In Berton's view, therefore, the Vimy Memorial perfectly projects the two most prominent and interdependent narratives of Canadian nationhood, one memorializing the Canadian sacrifice of life on the battlefields of France and the other monumentalizing Canada's autonomous national identity gained on the foundations of that sacrifice.

According to Jacqueline Hucker, "[Allward's] monument made no reference to victory. Instead it spoke to national and universal goals for good in the world" (Hucker 2007: 283). However, the reading of Walter Allward's architectural design obviously depends on the

onlooker. Diverse meanings can also be construed through the different photographic takes of the Vimy Memorial. Herbert Fairlie Wood's and John Swettenham's *Silent Witnesses,* published in 1974, was intended as a follow-up to the 1963 documentary *Fields of Sacrifice,* for "it was recognized that only a few of the many memorials and cemeteries could be portrayed, and only a limited amount of information could be given about those that were included" (Wood & Swettenham 1974: 1). Funded by the Canadian Department of Veterans' Affairs, *Silent Witnesses* was to be as wide-ranging a guide as possible to the overseas war cemeteries where the Canadian dead lay buried. It was also the aim of the authors to restore the historical context of the memorial sites, hence the book is also an account of Canada's involvement in all the military conflicts of the 20th century, with particular emphasis on both world wars. Though in both these wars Canadian regiments contributed to the final victory, the tone of the book is sombre, its final message being:

> The men who died for what they believed in thought their sacrifice would bring an end to war. We honour them today in cemeteries and with memorials throughout the world. Let us honour their hopes, too, by doing all we can to prevent a recurrence of the tragic wars of the 20th century while defending the liberties those men gave their lives to preserve. (Wood & Swettenham 1974: 236)

This is a call for an understanding of the price that had to be paid for the peace in which contemporary generations live. And this price of life is underscored by the 236 pages of the book showing cemetery after cemetery in which the Canadian dead lie. This is an overtly memorial-oriented project, hence the very deliberate choice of George Hunter's photograph "The Vimy Memorial by Night" for the frontispiece image. Though the photograph conveys the size of the Vimy Memorial, the visual dominance of the two pylons, the invisibility of the allegorical figures, as well as the enshrouding darkness endow the structure with an austerity befitting a memorial and diminish the inherent grandiloquence of Allward's design so typical for a monument.

A totally different meaning of the Vimy Memorial is conveyed in Robert Konduros's and Richard Parrish's photographic narrative, meaningfully entitled *World War I: A Monumental History,* published in 2014. The second chapter, "Cast in Metal, Carved in Stone", is entirely devoted to the Vimy Memorial, with altogether 18 pages containing photo images of the various constituent parts of Allward's complex design. Regardless of whether the photo was taken in daytime or night, the allegorical figures are always well visible, not to mention that the most impressive image, spread out on two pages (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 25–26), conveys a sense of magnitude by including a minute human figure walking past the gigantic pylons. If, in *Silent Witnesses,* the image was to speak for itself, the photos in *World War I: A Monumental History* are accompanied by commentaries which, though emphasizing that Vimy Ridge was "the costliest victory

in Canada's military history", also highlight that it was nevertheless a victory, the more gratifying as "no one expected the Canadians to succeed" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 27), and thus, not surprisingly, the Vimy Memorial is stated to be "the greatest [monument] the world has seen, … inspired by [Allward's] desire to show the debt Canada owed to its fallen soldiers" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 18).

Konduros's and Parrish's monumental photographic (hi)story of Canadian nationhood intentionally foregrounds the details of the Vimy Memorial as the signifiers of the ideals constituting the foundations of Canadian national identity, including "The Chorus … symbol[izing] Justice, Peace, Hope, Charity, Honour, Faith, Truth and Knowledge", as well as the allegorical representation of "The Sympathy of the Canadians for the Helpless …". Yet, the focus of Allward's design is undoubtedly laid on Canada's sacrifice, which is the source of both national mourning and national pride, as signified by "The Mourning Parents that represent all the mothers and fathers of Canada's war dead", "The Spirit of Sacrifice … symbolizing a dying soldier passing the torch to his battlefield comrade", and "The Defenders", including an allegorical representation of the "Breaking of the Sword" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 28). The figure of "Mother Canada looking down at the stone sarcophagus" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 31–32) poignantly blends the memorial and monumental (hi)stories of Canada, concomitantly signifying a symbolic shedding of Canada's ties to the British Empire. It is at once a statue representing Canada mourning for her sons lost in war, yet, in its appearance, the figure also depicts Canada's readiness to accept the sacrifice of her sons: "[she] shows her power through her disregard of her clothing. … The [exposed] breast of the private world is the source of nourishment for the future hero" (Evans 2007: 124). Most importantly, however, the female figure of "Canada Bereft" symbolically supplants the imperial ideal of "Mother England".

The fusion of memorial and monumental meanings in commemorative practice is not a specifically Canadian practice, and, it must be emphasized, all depends on the interpretations of the forms of remembrance, for one may well argue that the monumental magnitude of the Menin Gate Memorial or the Thiepval Memorial for the Missing of the Somme quite effectively overshadows their memorial purpose. The Vimy Memorial was designed to be the ultimate Canadian memorial-monument, with the deliberately dominating "heroic figure of Canada brooding over the graves of her valiant dead" (Allward, qtd. in Evans 2007: 124). Yet, the importance of a memorial is not, by definition, ascertained by the mere fact of its construction on a chosen site. According to Eric Brown and Tim Cook, it was the ceremonial ritual surrounding the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial in 1936, including the presence of "6,200 veterans and their families" organized by the Canadian Legion (Brown & Cook 2011: 43), which contributed most effectively to the rise of the "birth of the nation" narrative: "The pilgrimage … was surrounded and underpinned by the mixed messages of pride in service, lament for the dead, …. In the shadow of the Vimy memorial, the battle was recast, carved in stone,

as an iconic, nation-changing event" (Brown & Cook 2011: 53). However, historical facts cannot be ignored. First and foremost, the official unveiling of the Vimy Memorial could not have taken place without the presence and address of King Edward, who, as Prince of Wales, had come to the British Dominion of Canada for a three-month tour in 1919 (Brown & Cook 2011: 114, 117). Secondly, the Canadian Legion, which had arranged the pilgrimage to the 1936 inauguration of Allward's monument-memorial was, as historian Jonathan Vance emphasizes, "a part of the British Empire Service League, which had been established in South Africa in 1921", and "even the Vimy Pilgrimage [itself] that was proclaimed the birthplace of the Canadian nation, was a celebration of empire as well as nation" (Vance 2012: 143–144).

3. 'British' or 'Canadian' Canada?: From "Fields of Sacrifice" to Nationhood

The intertwining monumental and memorial (hi)stories of Canada are inextricably connected to the British Empire. And yet, the shedding of this connection seemed necessary for the confirmation of a distinctive Canadian national identity in the aftermath of the Second World War. In the 1963 documentary *Fields of Sacrifice*, the historical trajectory is reversed, beginning with the Normandy invasion, during which the military commitment of the Canadian soldiers "left behind a liberated people and their dead in final dignity", and ending with the Canadian military contribution during the Great War, the final image of the documentary being the Vimy Memorial, uniting, albeit symbolically, the Canadian killed during 1914–1918 and 1939–1945: "11,000 names of Canadians who vanished and were joined by other Canadians until there were 100, 000 memories of the two world wars over the fields of sacrifice" (*Fields of Sacrifice*). The documentary's strategy is quite transparent, the concluding image being the one the viewers would remember most vividly. It would seem, therefore, that, for Canada, all began with and must return to the Vimy Memorial. And yet the specific emplotment of Canada's military history in this particular documentary is also a delineation of a complex process combining both a necessary acknowledgment of Canada's ties to the British Empire as well as an endorsement of the myth of the birth of [the Canadian] nation.

The starting point of the documentary is the Beny-Sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery in the village of Reviers, with the following comment: "though Normandy was a place of great victory, others died in terrible places of defeat". The reversed historical storyline consequently takes the viewer to the eighteen-day battle for Hong Kong (1941), where the Canadians "never stood a chance", as well as the ill-fated raid on the French port of Dieppe (1942), during which Canada's soldiers "[were] killed by the cliffs and the enemy … looked down on them from the cliffs" (*Fields of Sacrifice*). The eternal reminders of Canadian martyrdom are said to be, respectively, the Sai Wan War Cemetery and the Dieppe Canadian War Cemetery, where the victims of disastrous tactical military decisions were

to be forever buried. However, the message of the documentary is that the greater the adversities the Canadian soldier had to endure, the greater was his sacrifice. The initial defeats were to be followed by hard-worn victories. The tide was to turn in favour of the Allied Forces, and the documentary shifts to the Netherlands, where "[the Canadians] are best remembered" as "[they] brought back the old life". The viewer is provided with an image of children "[who] have no memories of that war, but each year they are taken to the [Groesbeck] Canadian War cemetery... so that they would know of the men who faced fear and death [and] so that they may be born unafraid" (*Fields of Sacrifice*). The post-war footage shows schoolchildren taken to lay flowers at the graves of the Canadian soldiers, as if to accentuate that if the Dutch remember this sacrifice, the more so should the Canadian nation. Quite intentionally, the documentary juxtaposes contemporary and historical images, the more powerfully to foreground the need to remember that the places where people can freely move about, going about their everyday business or spending vacations, were once battle zones.

The meaning of the eponymous "fields of sacrifice" is expanded to also include the sea and the skies, where likewise so many Canadians lost their lives. Though unveiled in 1927, the Diamond War Memorial in Londonderry in Northern Ireland was also to become the commemorative site for the dead of the Second World War. Londonderry itself is defined in the documentary as "the haven for Canada's navy", with "a fond memory of the Canadians" to linger long after the end of the war (*Fields of Sacrifice*). The Diamond War Memorial has a unique design, consisting of a winged figure of Victory placed upon a majestic stone column, the base of which is written over with the names of soldiers killed. Situated on both sides of this centrepiece design are two figures, a soldier and a sailor. The uniqueness of these two statues resides in their dynamic postures. These are not the typical figures of a standing soldier; these are figures of men as if on active duty. And it is the figure of the resilient sailor that is brought into the centre of the lens of the camera, to represent not just the Irishmen lost at sea, but also the Canadians. The documentary also takes the viewers to the fields of England, from where, alongside Englishmen, Canadian pilots "who flew [the Lancasters and Spitfires] to die" were to be commemorated at the Runnymede Royal Canadian Air Force Commonwealth Memorial, with "the names of the 3,000 Canadian airmen" who lost their lives in air warfare (*Fields of Sacrifice*).

The intention of *Fields of Sacrifice* was, predominantly, to convey Canada's right—gained through the eponymous "sacrifice" of life—to a sovereign identity. The reversal of time's arrow allows the showing of a symbolic departure from the British Empire. After the material concerning the Second World War, the documentary depicts contemporary footage of the Menin Gate Memorial, with people taking a pause, in the aftermath of the Second World War, to listen to the Last Post, in an eerie replication of the Great War routine of the stand-to. Designed by Sir Reginald Blomfield, and officially inaugurated

in 1927, the Menin Gate, though performing an obvious memorial function, was also, by means of the recumbent figure of a lion as if towering over Ypres, a monument to the greatness of the victorious British Empire. The documentary also includes images of the Tyne Cot Memorial. Designed by Herbert Baker and unveiled in 1920, the memorial was dedicated to the men who fought in the name of the British Empire. If the Menin Gate and Tyne Cot memorials include Canadian sacrifice within the discursive frame of an imperial unity, the memorials subsequently shown in the documentary delineate Canada's path—leading through the eponymous sacrifice—to independent nationhood. It is not a coincidence that an image of the caribou statue at Beaumont Hamel is shown, for by the time the documentary was made Newfoundland had become a province of Canada. The Bourlon Wood Memorial commemorates the Canadian contribution to the final and decisive counter-offensive, determining Germany's ultimate defeat, to be called "Canada's Hundred Days". One of the most distinctive of the Canadian overseas memorials is, beyond doubt, Frederick Chapman Clemesha's "The Brooding Soldier" in Saint Julien, Belgium. Though the soldier figure is incomplete, the design focusing only on his bowed head and resting arms, the size of the column clearly suggests the resilience of the Canadian soldier. Similarly, the mention of the Courcelette Canadian Memorial serves the purposes of monumentalization, with the inscription reading "THE CANADIAN CORPS BORE A VALIANT PART IN FORCING BACK THE GERMANS ON THESE SLOPES DURING THE BATTLES OF THE SOMME SEPT. 3RD–NOV. 18TH 1916" (*Fields of Sacrifice*).

It is not surprising that *Fields of Sacrifice* ends with a voice-over underscoring the importance of April 1917, when "Germans report the Canadian trenches below Vimy Ridge are alive with activity, they are good troops and well-suited for assaulting", accompanied by documentary footage of "the Canadians [throwing] themselves at Vimy Ridge", and concluding with a bird-eye's view of Allward's Vimy Memorial, with the commentary symbolically uniting the Canadian dead of both 1914–1918 and 1939–1945: "11,000 names of Canadians who vanished were joined in violent death by other Canadians, until there were 100,000 memories of the two world wars over the fields of sacrifice" (*Fields of Sacrifice*). The ending of the documentary foregrounds the Vimy Memorial as the 'birth of a nation' memorial-monument with the victory achieved during the Great War connected, albeit symbolically, to the Canadian contribution to the final victory over the Third Reich in the Second World War,[10] thus confirming Canada's moral right to national pride.

10 It is worth mentioning here J.L. Granatstein's *The Last Good War: An Illustrated History of Canada in the Second World War 1939-1945* (2005).

4. Defining Canada: National Homogeneity or Multiculturalism? And … the Missing Stories…

Memorial/monument-building is essential for constructing a sense of national identity. It is important to note that "monuments are able to communicate their message by their form alone" (104) because "through [the] association of certain shapes repeatedly used for the same purposes, monuments have become a kind of language" (Shipley 1987: 104, 107). A sense of national unity can be achieved by means of the standardization inherent in commemorative practice. Though by the fact of their location, memorials "express[ed] local distinctiveness and individuality", nevertheless "it was [their] similarity to other memorials across the country [that] affirmed that the town shared at least one common experience with a larger collectivity: death in war" (Vance 2005: 410). In Konduros's and Parrish's *World War I: A Monumental History*, the cover photo shows Coeur de Lion MacCarthy's sculpture of a soldier holding a rifle with an attached bayonet in a position suggesting that he is about to kill the enemy. This is a monument honouring the military prowess of the Canadian soldier, and his determination to overcome the enemy in service of his country. The inside front photo shows Vernon March's likewise dynamic-looking soldier-figures, a truly monumental design. The choice of the National Memorial in Ottawa, tellingly also called "The Response", as one of the opening photo-images could not have been coincidental. The National Memorial in Ottawa was officially unveiled in 1939, and dedicated by King George VI. However, when the Memorial was rededicated to honour the Canadian soldiers who lost their lives in the Second World War and the subsequent conflicts of the 20th and 21st centuries, not to mention the decision to entomb here the Unknown Canadian Soldier in 2000, the historical imperial context of Canada was ultimately supplanted by an apotheosis of a truly independent nationhood. The final pages of the album depict the memorials dedicated to Jack Bouthillier (Konduros & Parrish 1014: 171, 175–176) and Karine Blaise (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 172, 173–174), both killed in Afghanistan, both solemn, and yet emphasizing both the nation's gratitude and the readiness of the Canadian soldier to serve, not to mention that these images are followed by a concluding part entitled "Honour Roll", showing sculptures clearly chosen to evoke a sense of national pride. The message of the album is clear: "Remember" (180), and the maple leaf and Canadian flag featuring in many of the images clearly indicates what the Canadians should be proud of.

Differences that are latent in peace time may potentially gain in intensity in times of military conflict and, as Robert Shipley emphasizes, "the bitterness between classes, groups and religions [was] reflected in the stone of monuments or in the lack of it" (Shipley 1987: 96). He provides the example of Sydney in Nova Scotia, where a post-Great War memorial failed to recognize the sacrifice of the Catholic men, listing only the Protestant dead (Shipley 1987: 96–97). There were also communities, Shipley writes, that showed no interest in either supporting the Canadian war effort or, in the inter-war period, erecting memorials to the war dead:

> Waterloo, Ontario was the centre of a pacifist Mennonite settlement. … There was never any indication of sympathy for the Kaiser's cause, but neither were German Canadians in places like Waterloo over-anxious to fight. … West Elgin County, in southwestern Ontario, had been the home for several generations of dispossessed settlers from the Scottish Highlands, nurtured in their resentment of English domination. (Shipley 1987: 97)

Significantly, Shipley devotes less than two pages to such areas of conflict, claiming further on that "what is surprising is that despite centrifugal forces, the requisite degree of agreement was reached in the vast majority of Canadian communities", and this "remarkable ability and willingness on the part of diverse people to bridge gaps and combine their efforts in a common desire to commemorate a common loss" is best seen in the case of "monuments in much of Quebec, New Brunswick, and in parts of Ontario [with the inscription] "*Nos morts—Our Dead*" (Shipley 1987: 98). It is evident that Shipley is focused on an analysis of Canadian war memorials as signifiers of "a new national awareness" (Shipley 1987: 113). Though Shipley underscores the fact that "monuments in certain places also reflected various cultural traditions and ethnic distinctions", providing examples of monuments built by the Scottish, Acadian, Japanese, and Italian communities, and including a photo of "a monument dedicated to the memory of the Ukrainian and Ukrainian-Canadian war victims" (Shipley 1987: 115), the fact remains that he does not devote more than three pages to Canada's endemic "cultural mosaic" (Shipley 1987: 114). For Shipley, just a few sentences suffice to cover the commemoration of other communities, with specific emphasis on the 'Canadianness' of these memorials:

> Polish, Ukrainian, Hungarian, Jewish, and Russian immigrants to Canada have built memorials in such places as St. Catharines and Toronto, Ontario, Rawden, Quebec, and Winnipeg, Manitoba. These monuments generally include both Canadian emblems and the symbols of the old country as well as inscriptions in both English and the particular national language and script. They remember those from the specific community who were killed while serving in the Canadian forces and those relatives and friends who fought in the old countries. (Shipley 1987: 115–116)

Could it be, perhaps, a sign of his times that Shipley is attentive to only selected absences within the Canadian memorialscape, and yet deliberately ignores others? He notes, for instance, that "women's direct involvement as members of the armed forces during the wars was not widely acknowledged before [the Women Soldiers Memorial in Winnipeg] was erected … in 1976" (Shipley 1987: 57), and yet he fails to see what Konduros and Parrish underscore thirty years later, namely that "The names [Aboriginals, First Natives, Indians] change with political correctness but the story of shabby treatment has not" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 76).

World War I: A Monumental History includes a photo of a memorial "erected by the Chippewa Indians of Cape Croker" with information that this is "the only statue for Canadian Indians who fought in the Great War" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 75). A further page is devoted to the history of Corporal Francis Pegahmagabow, whose service during the Great War was exceptional and yet "he was not good enough to be equal", for "such was Canada of the early 20th century" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 78). The implicit message is that Canada has changed, ready to acknowledge its wilful historical amnesia. However, the authors do not include other memorials that had appeared by the time their book was published, such as the National Aboriginal Veterans Monument in Ottawa, designed by Lloyd Pinay and unveiled in 2001. Canada's historical guilt is likewise acknowledged in the very same chapter in the context of the persecution of Ukrainian Canadians during the Great War: "It was mistakenly thought the Ukrainians might be loyal to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Germany's ally. … [They] were interned across Canada and one of the largest camps was near a site known as Kapuskasing. They were forced to clear the woods and build bunk houses during the winter" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 80) It is implied that even if Canada had once strayed from the path of ideals purported to be the foundation of its national spirit, it was ready to rectify the mistakes of the past: "In 2005, the Parliament officially expressed its deep sorrow for having interned persons of Ukrainian origin. The 'Never Forget' statue at the Kapuskasing site … was unveiled in 1995" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 80). Concomitantly, there is no mention of other significant absences within the practices of commemoration pertaining to Canada's national guilt, for instance the mistreatment of German Canadians during the Great War.[11] Though *World War I: A Monumental History* is overtly stated to be a "tribute to those Canadians and *communities* who long ago gave so much in the struggle of civilization against barbarism" (Konduros & Parrish 2014: 2, emphasis mine), the thematic scope of the book is such as to highlight an overarching Canadian national identity, as exemplified by chapters such as "Cast in Metal, Carved in Stone: Vimy Ridge", "Other Canadian Sculptors", "Triplets and Replicas Across Canada", or "The Greatest Poem Ever Written: In Flander's Fields".

5. Conclusion

Commemorative practice serves to construct a sense of national unity by appropriating a chosen ideological schemata, be it within the representational frames of memorialization or monumentalization. A country like Canada, as a former settler colony, has always been faced with the challenge of appropriating its origins and history into its socio-political and cultural constructions of a unique national identity. Every nation needs a sense

11 See Gerhard P. Bassler's *The German Canadian Mosaic Today and Yesterday: Identities, Roots, Heritage,* Ottawa: German-Canadian Congressm 1991; or Bohdan S. Kordan's *Enemy Aliens, Prisoners of War: Internment in Canada during the Great War,* Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2002.

of distinctiveness. Yet, the determinants of this distinctiveness may vary. For Canada today, the political guidelines for commemorative practices appear to revolve round the acknowledgement of diversity underlying 'Canadianness': "Parks Canada's *National Historic Sites of Canada: System Plan*, published in 2000, outlined three strategic priorities for any 'future commemorative activities': the commemoration of Aboriginal history; the commemoration of ethnocultural communities' history (those other than the French and British); and the commemoration of women's history" (Weeks 2019). This may well have been the result of social pressure: "By the end of the 20th century, ethnocultural groups, often assisted by federal and provincial multicultural initiatives, had achieved significant commemorative success" (Strong-Boag 2009: 56); "Indigenous, ethnic, female, and working-class assaults on conventional narratives have also increasingly connected in a wide-ranging condemnation of dominant perspectives" (Strong-Boag 2009: 53). It is worth, however, looking back at the writings of Canadian nationhood throughout the 1960s, the 1970s, and the 1980s from the perspective of the theoretical framework of the monument versus the memorial landscape. It is likewise worth taking a critical look at a cultural writing of the Canadian commemorative practices in the 21st century to see how much it has departed (or not?) from the focus points of the previous decades.

In the case of the documentary *Fields of Sacrifice* and Herbert Fairlie Wood's and John Swettenham's *Silent Witnesses*, the emphasis is on overseas war cemeteries and memorials, the aim of which was to convey an ideal of national sacrifice within the frame of the purported universal standards justifying Canada's participation in the major conflicts of the 20th century. There is no glorification of war (hence also the highlighting of military defeats), but what is obviously underscored is the duty to serve in the name of morally unquestionable principles. Though his primary focus is on homeland memorials, Robert Shipley's *To Mark our Place. A History of Canadian War Memorials* is characterized by a similar pride in the Canadian readiness to fight in the name of such principles. Robert Konduros's and Richard Parrish's *World War I: A Monumental History* is the most problematic, considering the time of its publication. Though noting the involvement of the First Nations in the Great War, it fails to convey the complexity of Canada's multiculturalism. All in all, these works testify to the fact that Canadian commemorative practice was—and remains—affirmative, serving to heal and unite rather than re-open wounds.

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BOOK REVIEW

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Review of *Journalism and Celebrity* by Bethany Usher, Routledge 2020, 216 pp. ISBN: 9780367200886, £36.99.

In his essay "Big Bucks and Fake Tears" (2009) Zachary Snider wrote that the twenty-first century celebrities in America reflect an imitation of reality. In claiming this, he referenced Jean Baudrillard's "Simulacra and Simulation", in the sense that a majority of the American public nowadays want their celebrities to reflect an imitation of reality that they can identify with and relate to. Snider suggested that viewers prefer mirror image-type celebrity archetypes and images of themselves, so that, in our age of obsessive reality TV and tabloids, the viewers themselves feel like celebrities. Celebrity is generated outside celebrity itself; it is a vision that rarely appears with its own voice. By the same token, Zygmunt Bauman (2007), in his foreword to Wiesław Godzic's (2007) thorough analysis of celebrities in tabloid culture, claims that it is the public that creates celebrities and the same public constitutes a surrogate of community, a community which in celebrating celebrities, celebrates itself. The rhythm of celebrities' heartbeats is the same as ours but louder; their dreams are our dreams. When we recognize the actions of celebrities as noteworthy, we gain recognition for our own actions, and so on. Additionally, according to Bauman, celebrities constitute a window through which we may observe the political, social and cultural mechanisms of a society. Without this window they would remain invisible. Celebrities are part and parcel of our culture, they are their essence and one of its central features, to quote Ponce de Leon (2002). The emergence of democracy and the expansion of consumer capitalism changed the nature of fame, and developed it into a new form of public visibility made possible by social, economic and political change,

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and by the power of the masses. That is why celebrities are the product of modernity. They occupy a central place in modern cultures, and as celebrity emerges from contemporary forms of democracy and capitalism it is closely connected to political enfranchisement and literacy. That is why Marshall (2006: 323) claims that celebrities are a function of media and "[i]t is difficult to separate the histories of journalism and the emergence of the contemporary celebrity system".

The aforementioned ideas (and many more) also appear in Bethany Usher's book *Celebrity and Journalism* (2020). The author, who is a former tabloid journalist and a lecturer in Multimedia Journalism at Newcastle University, aims to present the relationship between journalism and celebrity in chronological order, simultaneously examining the social, cultural and political aspects of capitalist democracies against the dichotomy of proper journalism and celebrity news. Bethany Usher focuses on the manifestations of journalism and celebrity from the 18th century to the present day in the "transatlantic cultural sphere" of an English-speaking world (p. 1).

In the chapter entitled '**Journalism and celebrity in the consumer revolution and bourgeois public sphere**' the author traces the beginnings of the emergence of publicly recognized, respected people and 'celebrified politicians' in newspapers and periodical magazines. Usher, citing an extensive bibliography of celebrity studies, claims that celebrity culture emerged in the 18th century, and points to the fact that the term celebrity "emerged with linguistic specificity in the 1760s" (p. 20). Usher claims they were a symbolic representation of life and had the power to stabilize or reshape social norms. The author also, using Rojek's taxonomy of fame, enumerates examples of ascribed, attributed and achieved celebrities, showing at the same time that there was a place in the 'star system' and in public society for those who were outside the worlds of social elites. Usher also traces the public/private binary oppositions and shows how the intertwining of the public, private and personal helped create different people's celebrity and politics. In this chapter, the author also discusses the role of celebrity in political campaigns.

The next chapter's title '**Celebrity and the New Journalism**' is quite misleading. It is not about the New Journalists represented in the United States by Tom Wolfe, Hunter S. Thompson, Gay Talese, Rex Reed or Jimmy Breslin, to name just a few (see e.g. Weingarten 2005). This group of writers, who were revolutionizing journalism in the 1960s, were also engaged with celebrities, hence the confusion, which might also come from willingness on the part of the reviewer to read the author's analysis of this particular movement's engagement with changing celebrity interviews and writing celebrity pieces. Talese's article for *Esquire* magazine, 'Frank Sinatra has a cold', is considered one of the greatest celebrity profiles ever written. 'Do you sleep in the nude?' is Rex's Reed celebrity profile collection, and Thompson's 'Temptations of Jean Claude Killy' describes celebrity sports endorsements. However, it turns out (on p. 49) that this chapter covers the Victorian New Journalists (such as W.T. Stead or Randolph Hearst), and the group of the

abovementioned journalists never appears in Usher's book. In this chapter the author shows that Victorian New Journalism was, on the one hand, understood as a distortion of reality, its masking, reproduction of social conditions, and on the other, as Usher shows, it used celebrity to fight for social and political changes, to perpetuate the social structures of capitalism, or to shape the politics of readers. Usher describes the mutual dependency of capitalism and democracy in celebrity journalism, and its impact on news development, the development of tabloids, celebrity interviews and gossip news.

The chapter '**Acts of Consecration and Desecration. Journalism and 20th century stardom**' discusses different processes of celebrification and explores the power of journalism, explaining how stardom and culture work together to construct reality, mask it or distort it. Usher writes here about the similarity of celebrity functioning and influence to the religious system (see Rothenbuhler 2005; Rojek 2001). This chapter also discusses celebrity interviews, and analyses how different rituals of celebrity journalism make ordinary people extraordinary and create stars in Hollywood, in the political arena and in pop music.

In the chapter '**Tabloidism, television and the neoliberal soap opera'** the author explains how tabloids have changed the practice of journalism. On the one hand, it has become predatory and bloodthirsty (see Rupert Murdoch's case), while on the other hand, thanks to tabloids, journalism has begun to be linked to distinct political orientations and theoretical concepts. It shows the areas of tabloid culture and their voyeuristic tracking of various events, as well as the transformation of the soap opera of the 1980s into tabloid television. This chapter describes how tabloid culture creates politics, disregards moral principles, and facilitates seeing the world as a result of the ideology of consumerism and populism. However, as most divisions of modern culture are characterized by instability and blurring, the author also recognizes the importance of this segment of the press, and argues that it is an inherent feature of democracy, seeing the powerful influence of the tabloid in shaping the opinions of members of a democratic society.

'**The story of the 21st century. Hyperconsumerism, neopopulism and the networked applications of journalism and celebrity**' explains how journalism, in the era of convergence culture, has been dominated by hyperconsumerism, which, as a sequence of practices aimed at producing objects and activating their properties, becomes a creative tool in constructing individual biographies or communicating aesthetic preferences. The hyper-consumptionist nature of postmodernity lies in the inability to function other than mediated by consumption and commodities. However, as the author shows, it is not only oppressive in nature, but there is also some emancipatory potential in it when, for example, journalism realizes the sovereign will, or even the whims and fantasies of the readers. Apart from discussing the phenomenon of microcelebrity, Usher describes how journalism and celebrity have changed in the era of multi-platform environments, and analyses the practices of celebrity news production and the key sites where this production is most visible: Twitter, YouTube and Instagram.

Concluding her book, apart from showing different challenges celebrity journalism might create, the author has some suggestions on how (competently, ethically, and with civic and critical awareness) different institutions, journalists and audiences should approach constructing meanings. The book ends exuding optimism about journalists and celebrities, whose actions may positively influence our societies, and how journalism and celebrity can work better as part of politics.

Bethany Usher has published an interesting book concerning the relationship between journalism and the phenomenon of celebrities. In dealing with this topic this book is not necessarily unique, and the long and rich reference list in Usher's work is proof that the literature on this topic is broad and varied. However, it may also suggest that there is never enough scholarly reflection on the production, consumption and content of this polarizing form of journalism. What makes *Journalism and Celebrity* fascinating and effective is its historical account, its focus on journalism's role in creating celebrity, and the place of celebrity within the news industry. This book is an important contribution to both celebrity and journalism studies. It is well organized and well written, and demonstrates a high degree of understanding of the cultural and economic significance of celebrity journalism, the workings of consumer capitalism in relation to journalism, and the systems that create and maintain fame. Readers with interests in the histories of journalism and celebrity culture will find much value here.

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2 To translate Godzic's title I borrowed Daniel Boorstin's phrase (see: Boorstin 2006[1961]).

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