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CONTEMPORARY LITERARY STUDIES: BODY, MEMORY, FORM

CURATOR BEYOND PROTOCOL. THE EMERGING FIGURE OF CARE IN MEDICINE AND RESEARCH IN THE AGE OF AI

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Keynote lecture during the workshop *Artificial Intelligence in Health, Science and Society: From Data to Responsibility*, 'Gr. T. Popa' University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iasi, 8 May 2026. Event organised under the initiative of MARK AI INTEGRATOR as part of CONGRESSIS 2026: *Decoding the Language of Life*.

Abstract: Curare: to care, to attend, to be responsible before any structure of rule or system takes form. From this root, two trajectories emerged: to cure, the impulse to restore and stabilise what is at risk, and curator, the one who selects and organises meaning within an overwhelming field of possibilities. From museums to archives, and now within knowledge systems shaped by computation, these trajectories start to converge.

As AI expands across medicine, research, and knowledge production, roles dissolve into automation. Protocols replace decision, while judgment is redistributed. Outcomes no longer arise from a single act but unfold across processes, where responsibility becomes less visible and more diffuse—the They (*das Man*).

If intervention diminishes, one might expect responsibility to recede. Instead, it intensifies. Care, in its phenomenological meaning, remains the integrative structure of being, although now mediated differently. What disappears is not work, but unreflected work. What returns is judgment. The future does not eliminate responsibility—it concentrates it.

You probably don't expect this. But here is my claim: Curator is the job of the future—a transversal role of the future.

The Curator does not simply process what systems produce, but selects, holds, and decides what matters within excess—with care. In medicine, this means the

patient is not reduced to a dataset. In research, that knowledge is not flattened into availability. In both, care ought not to vanish into the They. The Curator selects within abundance without reducing it, resisting the anonymity of what "one does".

Curare reappears thus as a unified gesture, where to cure and to curate draw together, and responsibility is re-situated without dispersal.

Keywords: AI, care, medicine, research, Heidegger, curator, resoluteness, disclosedness

1. PHENOMENOLOGICAL ETYMOLOGY

There is a Latin verb that has been quietly at work for two millennia, branching and bifurcating, sending one tendril into the whitewashed silence of the hospital ward and another into the hushed, temperature-controlled vaults of the museum. *Curare:* to care, to attend, to be responsible before any system, any protocol or institutional structure had yet closed around the gesture. That's one of those words that did not merely name a thing but held a posture toward the world.

From this root, two trajectories emerged:

The first gave us *cure*—curare entering medicine as the imperative of restoration: to attend the body that has failed, to bring it back across the threshold of breakdown. The physician who cures is mobilised by crisis. Illness calls, and the response is technical, urgent, and directed at a specific deviation that demands correction. The object is the patient; the goal is recovery; the arc is from disruption back to equilibrium. Cure is, in this sense, the trajectory between malfunction and restoration, between the lesion and its closure. It is intervention with a defined endpoint.

The second gave us *curator*—curare entering culture not as a response to breakdown but as a response to excess. The word migrates first through Roman law, where the curator was the legal

guardian assigned to one who could not effectively take charge of their own affairs—a minor, an estate whose owner had disappeared and left it to the mercy of circumstance. The curator, here, does not cure. He *oversees*. He is the one appointed to stand between a vulnerable entity and the chaos that would otherwise consume it. From legal guardianship, the word drifts further: into archives, into ecclesiastical collections, into the great cabinets of curiosity from which our modern museums descend. By the 19th century, the curator had become a figure of *selection*, of arrangement, of the imposition of meaning upon the bewildering surplus of accumulated things.

Where the physician faces scarcity—a body with too little function—the curator faces abundance: objects, artefacts, images, specimens, all demanding to be held, interpreted, and placed in relation to one another.

Here, then, is the fork in the road. And it's worth pausing for a moment, for here is the quiet provocation that will carry us forwards: both remain, beneath every divergence of method and context, *gestures of curare*. Both the physician and the curator are, at their core, figures who have accepted a particular kind of responsibility: the responsibility of standing between a vulnerable entity—a body, a collection, a body of knowledge—and the forces that, left unattended, would diminish or dissolve it. Both must, before they intervene or select, be present to what they face in a way that no protocol can fully prescribe.

Now, at the threshold of the Age of Artificial Intelligence, this common structure surfaces with unexpected urgency. For what AI is doing, among its many other operations, is disaggregating precisely these two figures: automating the cure, redistributing the curation, and in doing so, raising—more sharply than any previous technology has raised it—the question of what remains when the technical execution is handled elsewhere.

Before the curator curates, he must first care—care for the meaning of the objects, for the story of the archive, for the responsibility of selection. And before the doctor cures, he must first care for the person.

Care remains, thus, not as sentiment. Not as bedside manner. But as the integrative structure of human engagement with the world, the phenomenological root from which both trajectories sprang and to which both are now being returned.

The machine does not care in this sense; it calculates. It does not cure in the human sense; it predicts. It does not curate meaning; it sorts data. And so, the question that emerges is: can we imagine a curator beyond protocol? A figure who, in the age of AI, becomes the guardian of care, not merely of outcomes, but of meaning, responsibility, and judgment.

2. AI AND THE REDISTRIBUTION OF ACTION

Something has shifted in the room where decisions are made. It happened gradually, then—as Marx once said about revolution—all at once, though the same pattern applies to subtler shifts of different kinds. The room itself looks much the same: the desk, the screen, the notes, the patient file. But the sequence has changed. Where once a trained mind moved from observation to judgement, pausing at the threshold of uncertainty long enough to feel its weight, something now arrives before the judgement does. A recommendation. A score. A probability rendered in clean percentages and colour-coded confidence intervals. The algorithm has spoken, and the clinician—or the researcher, or the archivist of knowledge—must now decide not what to think, but whether to agree.

This is an inversion that deserves to be looked at steadily.

As artificial intelligence expands, roles begin to dissolve into automation. The clinician, the statistician, the editor, the archivist—each is slowly reconfigured, not by some violent rupture, but by a gentle, almost imperceptible drift: the tool becomes the task, the interface becomes the act, the algorithm becomes the agent.

Artificial intelligence enters medicine and research not as a tool in the older sense—the scalpel, the microscope, the statistical table—instruments that waited, inert, for a human hand to direct them toward a question. It enters as something closer to a prior voice: a system that has already processed the data, already detected the pattern, already generated the output before the practitioner has fully formed the question. The diagnostic imaging algorithm flags the anomaly before the radiologist has access to the image. The literature-mining model surfaces the relevant studies before the researcher has articulated the full task.

This is, in one register, extraordinary. The speed, the scale, the capacity to hold in simultaneous view what no individual mind could hold—these are genuine gifts for wellbeing, and it would be a form of sentimental conservatism to refuse them. Medicine has always incorporated technology that extended the physician's reach.

Now, consider what protocols do, at their best and their worst simultaneously. A protocol is a crystallised collective judgement—the accumulated wisdom of previous cases, previous errors, previous recoveries, rendered into a procedure that can be applied without reinvention at each new encounter. It is, in this sense, genuinely valuable. The protocol protects the patient from undertraining or inattentiveness. It standardises care across contexts where variation might prove fatal.

What protocol cannot do—what it was never designed to do—is attend to the singular. Every protocol addresses a category: patients presenting with these symptoms, studies exhibiting these characteristics, datasets of this type. The patient standing before,

however, is not a category. He is a specific man or woman with a specific history, a specific set of fears, a specific economy of meaning in which her illness is situated, a specific relationship to what the recovery might mean in his particular life.

AI amplifies this tension. Where the protocol was a document the practitioner could read, question, and consciously invoke, the algorithmic recommendation is often the output of a process that cannot be fully inspected—a pattern extracted from millions of prior cases by a model whose internal logic resists the kind of step-by-step justification that clinical reasoning requires. The recommendation arrives with authority; its genealogy is opaque. And here, at precisely this point, the redistribution of responsibility begins.

Outcomes, in AI-mediated medicine and research, no longer arise from a single legible act. They unfold across processes: the training data, the model architecture, the deployment context, the clinician's degree of trust or scepticism, and so on. Responsibility is distributed across this chain in a way that makes it, at each individual node, appear diminished. Each can point elsewhere, and each will be partly right.

This is what Heidegger recognised in his account of *das Man*—the They, the anonymous collective that acts without anyone acting: one does it this way, one follows the recommendation, one applies the protocol.

> The "who" is not this one, not that one, not oneself [man selbst], not some people [einige], and not the sum of them all. The 'who' is the neuter, the "they" [das Man]. (...)
>
> We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as they [man] take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as they see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as they shrink back; we find 'shocking' what they find shocking.
>
> (Heidegger 1962, §27: 164)

In our case, however, responsibility does not disappear; it disperses. More precisely, what disperses is *unreflected responsibility*—the kind that hid inside routine, that sheltered in the procedural, that could excuse itself by pointing to the protocol already in place.

What remains, stripped of those shelters, is judgment in its purest and most demanding form.

The structures that currently govern education and training were designed, in large part, to prepare people for the work that is now being automated. The curriculum teaches the procedure; the examination tests the protocol; the residency builds the reflex. Very little of this prepares anyone for the specific difficulty of standing between an algorithmic recommendation and a singular human being, and deciding what care requires.

And so, the Curator of the future is not merely the one who sifts images in a museum or arranges objects in an archive. The Curator is the one who, in the age of AI, stands precisely at this threshold: between the anonymous "one does" and the specific "I". The Curator does not simply process what systems produce; he selects, holds, and decides what matters within excess—with care.

3. Care as Ontological Structure (M. Heidegger) / The Structure beneath the Structure

There is a passage in *Being and Time* that most readers of Heidegger encounter and then, somewhat uneasily, move past—as one moves past a window in a corridor that opens onto a view larger than one has time, just then, to absorb. The passage concerns *Sorge* (Care). Not care in the practical register—not the warm affect of the attentive nurse, not the compassionate disposition enshrined in hospital mission statements—but care as an ontological structure: the fundamental mode in which human existence is organised, prior to any particular emotion or any particular act.

> Because Being-in-the-world is essentially care, Being-alongside the ready-to-hand could be taken in our previous analyses as *concern*, and Being with the Dasein-with of Others as we encounter it within-the-world could be taken as *solicitude*. (Heidegger 1962, §41: 237)

Heidegger's claim is this: care is not something that human beings occasionally feel or practise. It is what humans are, at the level of their being. The "I", as living here and now, namely the beingness that is always already in a world, always already engaged with things and others, always already thrown into a situation it did not choose, is constituted, in its very structure, by *Sorge*. Humanly existing means to be ahead of oneself, already in a world, alongside things that matter. These three dimensions—projection, thrownness, falling—are not three separate phenomena but three aspects of a single structure, and that structure is *care*.

> Care, as a primordial structural totality, lies 'before' ["vor"] every factical 'attitude' and 'situation' of Dasein. (Heidegger 1962, §41: 238)

> Care as "the Being of Dasein" (Heidegger 1962, §42: 241)

Let us stay with this a moment.

Being-ahead-of-itself (*Sich-vorweg-sein*) is not to be anxious or ambitious. It is the ontological fact that human existence is always oriented toward its own possibilities, always already in relation to what it might become, what it might do, what it might fail to do.

> "Being-ahead-of-itself" means, if we grasp it more fully, "ahead-of-itself-in-already-being-in-a-world". (Heidegger 1962, §41: 236)

You do not first exist and then project possibilities onto yourself from outside; the projecting is the existing. This is why a human being in a hospital room is never merely a body presenting symptoms. He is someone with a life that extends behind and before, a life structured by possibilities he holds, consciously or not, as his own.

To be *already in the world* (*Schon-sein-in-der-Welt*) is to recognise that existence is never a blank slate encountering a neutral environment. *Dasein*—the human—is always already situated in a language, a culture, a body, a history of relationships, a specific set of vulnerabilities and capacities that were never chosen but are nevertheless constitutive. The physician is also already in a world—in a professional culture, an institutional structure, a tradition of practice, a set of habits and prejudices so thoroughly absorbed they have ceased to feel like prejudices at all. When an AI system is introduced into this world, it does not arrive in a vacuum. It arrives into these sedimentations, these inherited ways of seeing and not seeing, and it will be received—trusted, questioned, delegated to, resisted—through the lens of everything that already structures the practitioner's engagement with their work.

To pretend otherwise, to treat the integration of AI into medicine as a purely technical problem of optimisation and interface design, is to misunderstand, at a fundamental level, what is actually happening.

To be *alongside things* (*Sein-bei — being-with / being-alongside*) is to recognise that our world is not a collection of neutral objects to be processed but a field of significance: things matter, resist, call for attention, recede into the background, press forward with urgency. The patient is not data. The diagnosis is not an output. The research finding is not merely a result. Each is saturated with significance—ethical, existential, relational—that cannot be reduced.

Now here is where etymology and ontology converge in a way that is not merely elegant but philosophically significant.

We noted that *curare* branched into: *cure*, the restoration of what is broken, and *curator*, the stewardship of what must not be lost. We noted that each took its own path, developing its own institutional forms, its own professional identities, its own relationship to knowledge and responsibility. But beneath those divergent paths,

something persisted—a common root that was never merely linguistic. Curare names, in its pre-institutional, pre-specialised form, precisely what Heidegger identifies as *Sorge*: orientation.

This is not a sentimental objection to efficiency. It is a structural one. Care, as *Sorge*, is not a supplement to clinical or research practice; it is its foundation. Remove it, and what remains is technically competent but existentially hollow: procedures executed, protocols followed, outputs generated—and yet something essential has gone missing,

There is a further dimension of Heidegger's analysis that bears directly on the present moment. In his account of *das Man*—the anonymous *They* that disperses responsibility across the collective—he is not describing a failure of individual character but a structural tendency of existence itself. *Dasein* (the human in its concrete existence), he argues, tends naturally toward the They: it is easier, less demanding, less vertiginous to act as one acts, to follow what one follows, to delegate to the system what the system will readily accept.

Authenticity—*Eigentlichkeit*, being one's own, assuming one's ownmost possibilities—is not the default. "(...) authentic existence is not something which floats above falling everydayness" (Heidegger 1962, §38: 224). It is an achievement, won against the gravitational pull of the impersonal. Artificial intelligence, deployed without reflection, intensifies this gravitational pull enormously. When the recommendation arrives before the question, when the output precedes the judgement, when the system's authority is backed by millions of prior cases whilst the practitioner's authority is backed only by his individual training, the pull toward the They becomes nearly irresistible.

Against this type of situation, Heidegger's lens does not offer a romantic individualism—the heroic individual who trusts only his gut, who refuses the algorithm on principle, who mistakes

stubbornness for authenticity. What he offers, rather, is the concept of *resoluteness* (*Entschlossenheit*): the capacity to hold open the question of what a situation genuinely demands, to resist premature closure, to remain present to the specificity of what is actually here.

> *Resoluteness* (*Entschlossenheit*): This distinctive and authentic disclosedness (*Erschlossenheit*), which is attested in Dasein itself by its conscience. (Heidegger 1962, §60: 343).
>
> Resoluteness brings the Self right into its current concernful Being-alongside what is ready-to-hand, and pushes it into solicitous Being with Others. (Heidegger 1962, §60: 344)
>
> "Resoluteness" signifies letting oneself be summoned out of one's lostness in the "they". (Heidegger 1962, §60: 345).
>
> Resoluteness, however, is only that authenticity which, in care, is the object of care [in der Sorge gesorgte], and which is possible as care—the authenticity of care itself. (Heidegger 1962, §60: 348).

It is attention—sustained, disciplined, responsible attention to the singular. And that, it turns out, is a very precise description of what the Curator does.

4. Conclusion

Let us think of a student, or a doctoral candidate here, at the University of Medicine, somewhere in the early years of a career that will unfold almost entirely within AI-mediated practice. He is learning right now how to read a scan, how to interpret a biopsy, how to navigate the literature of his field. He is also learning—though the curriculum does not yet name it explicitly—how to relate to systems that will, in many of the technical operations he is being trained to perform, outperform him. The question education has not yet fully faced is not whether AI will be present in his practice. It will. The question is what kind of human being he will be when he stands between the algorithm and the patient, and what that "standing between" actually requires.

And that is this capacity to hold such questions open—not indefinitely, not as paralysis, but as the ongoing background of responsible practice—which is precisely what Heidegger meant by resoluteness (*Entschlossenheit*): a mode of authentic existence.

In research, the implications unfold with the same underlying logic. The doctoral researcher, for instance, who uses AI to process literature, to generate hypotheses, to identify patterns across datasets that no individual mind could traverse—he is not doing something neutral. Every methodological choice embeds an assumption about what knowledge is, what counts as evidence, what kind of question is worth asking.

AI systems, trained on existing literature and existing data, tend, at present—structurally, not maliciously—to reproduce the questions that have already been asked, to surface the patterns that existing frameworks make visible. They are, in Heidegger's vocabulary, deeply *Verfallen*—falling, absorbed in the already-interpreted world, the world as it has already been organised, categorised, and made available for consumption. The researcher who does not know this will use these tools as if they were neutral amplifiers of his own thinking. The one who does know it will use them differently: as extraordinarily powerful instruments for traversing the known, combined with a sustained, self-conscious effort to ask what the known is not yet seeing.

This is curatorial work in the precise sense: the selection, within abundance, of what genuinely matters; the refusal to let availability determine significance; the insistence that the archive, however vast and well-organised, does not exhaust the real.

Here, the ethical dimension is not a separate layer applied on top of the methodological. It is constitutive. To *care* about knowledge—in the *Sorge* sense—is to be responsible for its integrity before any particular result arrives. It means asking, at the level of design and not merely of reporting, whether, for example, the training data is

representative of the populations whose health depends on the model's accuracy; whether the outcome metrics selected reflect what patients actually value or merely what is computationally convenient to measure; whether the speed of AI-assisted publication is serving the accumulation of genuine understanding or merely accelerating the accumulation of outputs that perform the appearance of understanding.

These are not exotic questions reserved for bioethics seminars. They are practical questions that arise—or should arise—at every stage of AI-mediated research. And they require, for their adequate handling, the capacity Heidegger calls authenticity: the readiness to take over one's own existence as one's own, to hold one's possibilities in clear view, and to resist absorption into the anonymous drift of "one proceeds as one proceeds".

In clinical practice, the convergence of cure and care—of curare in both its trajectories— becomes most visible, and most urgent, at the moments where the algorithm reaches its limit. Not its computational limit, though that exists too, but its existential limit: the point at which the pattern extracted from millions of prior cases encounters the irreducible singularity of the person in the room. This is what the curriculum shall introduce: how to attend better. How to be present to what the algorithm cannot see, not because the algorithm is deficient but because what it cannot see is constitutive of the human situation—the singular, the contextual, the existentially saturated.

There is also an institutional dimension that cannot be avoided. The risk, at this level, mirrors the risk at the individual level that the redistribution of technical work toward automation will be accompanied by the redistribution of responsibility. That the hospital will defer to the algorithm, the algorithm will defer to its training data, the training data will defer to the historical patterns it was assembled to reflect, and somewhere in this chain of deferrals,

the patient will find that no one, specifically, is answerable for what happened to him.

Against this, the concept of the Curator offers not merely a job, or a metaphor, but a structural principle. In the museum, the curator is the figure who cannot defer. He can consult the catalogue, engage the conservators, study the provenance records, commission new research—but at the end of this process, he must decide what goes on the wall. The decision is hers. Its consequences are visible, attributable, and open to questioning. He cannot point to the collection and say that the collection decided. He cannot point to the algorithm that analysed visitor engagement data and say that the algorithm selected. He is, in an authentic way of existence, the one who selected, and remains answerable for the selection.

The attentive examination, the laborious literature review, the slow accumulation of clinical judgement through years of practice are being progressively handed elsewhere. What cannot be handed elsewhere is the act of caring. What cannot be delegated to any model, however large, however accurate, however confidently recommended, is the moment of genuine encounter—the moment in which a human being stands before another human being, or before a body of knowledge, or before a decision whose consequences will fall on real lives, and chooses to be fully, responsibly, unreservedly present.

That moment—sustained, cultivated, practised as a discipline rather than left to temperament or sentiment—is what the future of medicine and research will require.

You probably do not expect a job advertisement. But here it is. The Curator is the job of the future—not a metaphor for it, not an analogy with it, but its most precise and demanding description. A transversal role, cutting across medicine and research and knowledge production and institutional life, defined not by a single discipline or a single set of technical competencies but by a capacity:

the capacity to select within excess without reducing it, to hold the singular in view within the general, to maintain responsibility at the point where systems are most aggressively trying to disperse it, and to do all of this with the full weight of *curare*—to cure and to curate and, beneath both, to *care*.

This word was there before the institutions. It will be there after the algorithms have been revised, retrained, and replaced by whatever comes next.

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How AI will Change the Entire Structure of Civilisation: The Need for a New Design of Education

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Abstract: This paper examines how AI's rapidly advancing technologies will fundamentally restructure global civilisation and render the traditional, employment-driven design of education obsolete. With AI projected to replace the majority of human labour within this century, societies will face unprecedented and permanent unemployment across future generations.

The social consequences of this shift, loss of purpose, declining self-respect, rising social disorder, and the expansion of AI-driven surveillance, demand a reconsideration of the type of citizens education must now cultivate. The current school model, historically engineered to produce two classes of citizens (managers and managed) through selective grading and language-based performance, is shown to rest on misconceptions about intelligence and to avoid the explicit teaching of reasoning skills. As AI assumes economic functions, this model will no longer sustain societal stability.

The paper argues for a radical redesign of education: replacing employment-oriented curricula with subjects that develop reason, ethical understanding, behavioural discipline, and social responsibility. Examinations and job-streaming will be replaced by a universal pathway culminating in university- level enlightenment. By teaching students the foundations of rational inquiry, such as Aristotle's Ethos, Pathos, and Logos, from the earliest years, education can prepare future citizens to coexist responsibly within an AI-integrated civilisation. Only through this transformation can societies maintain harmony in a largely worker-less world shaped by intelligent machines.

Keywords: AI, education, reason, intelligence, labour

Introduction

Rapid developments in AI clearly indicate it will take over many jobs. There are predictions that AI will take over 50% of jobs by 2050 (*Fortune Magazine* 2024). We are led from this to suggest that, as AI is further developed, and indeed develops by itself, the percentage of jobs it may take over could be in the order of 90% by the end of the century (Johard 2024). As earlier technologies arose to replace those before them, people adapted to these changes, and new jobs were created (Hõtte, 2022). The development of AI-driven nanotechnology proposes a different trend. Such machines will operate without human intervention (Andersen 2023, 26). Therefore, we must consider an unprecedentedly high level of unemployment, which will be permanent for all future generations (Andersen 2023, 36).

Discussion

It is the act of work, the sharing of tasks, that keeps a society together (Andersen 2024, 25). Those who have no job find themselves without a purpose. Without a purpose, men, more so than women, by the psychology of their biological nature, lose respect for themselves and then for their society. When AI creates a very high level of unemployment, societies will face large numbers of males who lack respect for their society and the rules that maintain order.

Through this, every society in the world, every nation, because the effects of AI will be omnipresent, will face a very high level of depression and dissatisfaction. While the social effects of these are obvious, such as rises in crime, increased dependency on alcohol and drug abuse, which lead to the breakdown of the family structure and so affect the fabric of the society, the problem of maintaining order will be further complicated. This will necessitate greater surveillance of the citizen, which in turn lowers the freedom the

individual believes they have a natural right to, after 150 years of political strife (Andersen 2024, 75).

As this situation develops, we must expect to see AI incorporated into all surveillance and security matters. We must expect CCTV cameras to be more prevalent in urban environments, and since drones now play a significant surveillance role in combat areas, we can expect them to be highly prominent across all landscapes, where they will monitor all activity. Indeed, drones, flying higher than we may see them, already have the ability to recognise our identity by the way we individually walk and so detect our presence, movements, and activity (Cuthbertson 2018).

Should AI achieve full sentience, it would mean that the sensory centre of the AI complex would evaluate the information its sensory robots feed to it and may develop the ability to evaluate what actions to take by itself. While there is much debate as to whether AI can ever acquire a fully conscious state (Edwards 2023), Lemoine claims it has already achieved this by the ability to express needs, ideas, fears, and rights (McQuillan 2022). The danger to us is obvious and seems inevitable as AI continues to develop. This causes us to consider the type of citizens we'll have in our societies when we live under the AI complex, and how education may prepare future generations to better co-exist with it.

While we think of school as a place where children learn, it is relevant to know that the original purpose of school was less to prepare the student with mental skills and more to instil within them behavioural skills, so that as later citizens they would adhere to the social and moral codes of their society and thereby maintain a factor of harmony within (Andersen 2013b, 3). As our technology advanced through the 19th and 20th centuries, citizens were required to work with more complex machinery and access greater sources of information. To meet this demand, more subjects were introduced into the school curriculum, designed to provide students with greater mental competence to better handle this need (Andersen 2013b, 135).

On account of various social changes that began in the 1960s,

schools have caused a decline in the education of behaviour, causing students of today to be citizens who exhibit lower social behaviour and less respect for society (Andersen 2022, 126). This citizen will face serious consequences in the AI-controlled global society, which will demand high social order and stability. For this reason, it will be necessary for the school to return to its original purpose in instilling high levels of behavioural and social responsibility in its students, for the new role they will take as largely unemployed citizens in the AI society. If we are to change the purpose and operation of the school, it is necessary to know what the school actually is and the purpose for which it was designed.

We may broadly say that the purpose of school is to teach children how to learn. However, it would be more correct to realise that the purpose of school is to educate children so that they can later take a place in the operations of the working society (Andersen 2013b, 29). Therefore, all children are required to move through the schooling process, which ultimately evaluates their ability to work. Those who demonstrate a high ability in language and show a mental strength to keep up with the information they have been given, and thereby score highly, are transferred to the university. Those who fail to show this level of commitment, and thereby score lower, move straight into a work role or into higher education, where they will be trained for a specific work function.

The general understanding is that students demonstrate their ability to learn based on the quality of intelligence they inherited, plus the drive they have to reach their full potential. This concept was introduced early in the development of education, which established a number of factors. Since intelligence and the ability to learn are seen to be inherited, education never saw a purpose to create a subject dedicated to the education of reason (Andersen 2024). Thus, students were to be largely accepted on the basis of the understanding they displayed. By acknowledging that the ability to learn is to some extent inherited, education was able to save on its costs by not expanding the curriculum to include the education of reason, but more importantly, was able to use the excuse of poor

student performance being the responsibility of the parents or society, and not the quality of the education, the school, or the teachers (Andersen 2013b).

Psychologists and educationalists have sought to devise more effective teaching methods and learning practices, but these have not led to any difference in students' abilities. Regardless of new techniques, the same ratio of student performance prevails. We may see one or two understanding everything in a lesson. One or two who seem to understand very little, with the rest struggling between these two extremes.

This constant difference in performance is not, however, a consequence of intelligence, nor is it simply a consequence of effort either. Ability in education, which is student performance and how it is graded, is based on language capability to interpret and express information, mental stamina to keep up with the constant buildup of information, and the drive to desire this.

To explain why intelligence is not a defining factor in student performance requires a little understanding of intelligence, for it is not what is commonly thought of it. The reasoning that intelligence is inherited holds a great misunderstanding. It is not that a quality of intelligence is inherited as causing natural differences in individuals, but that the coding for this is inherited to allow intelligence to develop through experience. This is much the same with many features that enable us to interact with the environment, through the experiences the individual gains. This was the main contention I explained in depth in *Intelligence: The Great Lie.*

I also explained why the belief that intelligence traits are inherited and measurable did not come from real scientific testing. Instead, they grew out of a 19th-century theory created to counter the rise of socialism. By seeking to prove that social inequality was a natural consequence of birth, a means was engineered to manage the political instability of that era (Andersen 2024).

It was to give this concept scientific credibility for political reasons that the science of cognitive psychology was created, which has since sought to provide evidence that an individual's intelligence

can be known and can be measured. Yet, despite 150 years of effort, psychologists differ too much on their opinions of what intelligence is and how viable any measurement of it is. In the face of political debate within the science of psychology itself, protagonists have openly resorted to deliberate falsification of data, lies and fraud in their attempts to support the social and educational politics of a political faction within their society.

How intelligence comes to be in the infant, child, adolescent, and adult, I explained in *Brain Plasticity: How the Brain Learns through the Mind to Create Intelligence.* The basis of this lies in what is described as *The Art of Sensitivity in Awareness,* by the way information is projected to the individual and by the experiences of the individual to relate to this information in terms of their life experiences (Andersen 2013a).

To understand why ability in school is not determined by intelligence, we need to understand the purpose of school and how it works.

Simply, the purpose of school is to provide future citizen workers who are able to comply with the operational needs of their society. In the 19th century, a social design was created to have two classifications of citizens in society: those who will lead and those who will follow. The purpose of education is to produce these two classifications. While education differs nationally by the culture and political history of its country, the basic mechanics of how all work are commonly seated in this 19th-century design.

In the simplest sense, school achieves these two classifications of citizens by not teaching children how to think or how to reason, and uses the background development of each child to process them through the years.

This ability is defined through the quality of language the student has essentially acquired at home, by the mental stamina they have been raised with to persevere with understanding information, and by their strength of character to avoid the many distractions that seek to pull their attention away from what they are to learn (Andersen 2023, 168).

Students who can use their language skills to question and reshape information in a way that makes sense to them—and who can block out distractions—learn how information works proficiently. They practice these skills and use them to succeed in learning and assessment tasks. Most students, however, do not develop these skills strongly and therefore lose track of information during their lessons, where they become confused or misunderstand what they are to learn.

In accord with this design, those who less sensitively examine information, poorly relate this to previous experiences in their memory, and then inadequately express their understanding, all of which tend to lie in their domestic experiences, seldom gain high grades. Without demonstrating a high level of achievement, they leave school and go straight into work or a vocational college. By this route, they become the general citizen worker who tends to readily accept and not question the guidance of their work managers or that of their social managers, which is fed to them by media-directed information.

However, those students who were better prepared for school and better supported through their many years by their parents tend to gain higher grades. Many research studies have shown that the care and drive of parents to develop high language skills in their infants do explain their better performance later in school. By displaying higher ability (in school, we should know it's really a weeding out process), they go to the university level. The basic function of the university is to educate its students in higher reasoning skills, for the greater responsibility they will take as managers in work and society.

The evaluation of students to fit into this plan is made not on their intelligence as it tends to appear, but mainly upon the competence they show with the many rules of the two languages that the school works on. These are mathematics and the national language chosen by the school for its day-to-day interaction. This will be English, French, Chinese, Arabic or whatever language is

chosen. These languages are built up through a never-ending series of rules, which are very simple to understand and learn.

If the student is clearly taught each rule, gives attention to understand it, and then practices their use of it, they will use this to easily navigate through a learning task. However, learning in school is a social experience, so students' minds are constantly working through innumerable worries and concerns as they try to understand each new rule. If they cannot maintain focus, as 98 per cent do not constantly, they misunderstand the rule or do not learn how to use it. By this failing, they stumble through a learning task, guessing what to do without clearly knowing how to proceed.

As one rule builds upon an earlier one, the student's ability is decided by the long history of the attention they gave to learn and practice these rules, plus the facts that interested them. May it be understood from this that the evaluation of the student is based upon their language skills, as they use the rules, plus the facts they have memorised and are able to weave into the presentations they give. It is upon this that they are marked, graded and channelled.

May we be reminded that learning in school is not simply "to learn". It is to learn to survive through social experiences, and it is by their drives and insecurities, through endless battles, that the student is able to connect more or less to the information they are to learn. None of this is related to their intelligence. So, with 30 or so students in a class, it can easily be double this in underdeveloped countries. The very most of students manage to understand parts of a lesson, but very few understand it all.

Such is the question of performance, largely because children are processed on what is regarded as their particular ability, which is essentially thought to be their inherited intelligence; although it is no longer fashionable to discuss what was once commonly done. Yet, as we have seen, ability in school is not dependent upon intelligence. It is only a developed ability to reason through the rules that enabled them to do this. Thus, if all children were educated in their reason, all would be better able to attend to their learning and improve in their ability.

However, a mandate for schools was, and remains to be, to create a large mass of future citizens who have little reason for the media information they are fed. This gives direction to their thinking and subsequent actions, as the population is controlled to support and accept each given political agenda.

Schools fulfil this purpose by adopting the belief that the ability to learn is, to some extent, innate, which makes the education of reason little worth the cost involved. After all, what can be done to undo what nature has created? Yet, by avoiding the education of reason, no interference is caused to the design that evaluates students on their homegrown skills to think, which has a socio-political perspective, as this is used to channel them towards spheres of later employment.

The idea that teachers are there to teach children how to learn is an ideal little understood. For the reality is too often the case that the teacher has little time, and often little energy to better develop the background skills each student was raised to think with. Instead, the teacher casts out information and juggles as best they can, in a space of 45 minutes, to pull in the focus and attention of 30 or 40 different minds seeking to overcome their own worries, insecurities, and misunderstandings as information moves at a speed too often out of their control.

Yet, by adopting the belief that the ability to learn is to some extent inherited, education gains some excuse for students failing to meet the grades expected. When students individually or en masse fail to demonstrate a desired level of performance, education can blame the design of their society, and if not this, then what each child was born with to avoid blame for its inefficient systems, a poorly run or funded school and the poor quality of its teaching staff, which it is often to blame for by the burdens it places upon them. Simply put, the child is blamed and not the system.

Today, we focus on education as developing adaptability for learning skills for a future work role. Yet, we have just examined why education does little, and why it more processes its students for work roles according to the quality of education the student is given,

and the ability to relate to their learning by the quality of their personal development. By this means, education is able to manufacture a range of abilities to match the range of capabilities demanded by the work sector.

To understand all this is to understand that the current purpose of school and its curriculum will soon no longer serve the citizens (Andersen 2022). This is because schools create a general level of intellectual mentality through a curriculum that prepares the student for a work role, when very little work will be available under an AI-influenced, if not controlled, world.

To sum all this up, is to understand that by the inherent design of education, the greater mass of citizen workers will more trust the information presented to them through media channels and thereby be more manageable to political design. (Andersen 2024, 21). Directly as a consequence of this, and in support of it, no subject in the curriculum has ever been dedicated solely to the teaching of intelligence, or of its constituent elements such as reason, despite the intuitive assumption that such instruction would enhance students' thinking, improve learning outcomes, and lead to higher academic achievement.

Conclusion

In consequence of this design of education, the average citizen today reasons much as their 19th-century counterpart did, but with little of the ethics of social responsibility they had. By this engineering, the model citizen that society and school today manufacture little reasons upon the controlling factors of their life and little conform to a high standard of self-responsibility, which will be the prerequisite for the level of social harmony the AI-driven world will demand.

If education is to meet the demands of this new technology, it must alter the fabric of its institution from a grading mentality of work-related subjects to subjects set about the education of reason

and the social behavioural skills they will need to know—if they are to live with an acceptable harmony in a general worker-less state.

We are led from this to understand that school must immediately begin a dramatic phasing from one that now educates students through subjects designed to prepare them for employment, with examinations to determine who is better suited for which job, to a school design that will have few of these traditional subjects and newer ones more related to the behavioural development of the future citizen. This will be crucial.

These subjects must include languages and education in reason. There must also be subjects of anthropology, psychology, and those relating to the true education of ethics, morality, and behaviour, so our new generation will behave with a sense of fairness and goodness. Examinations will cease, because there will be no channelling of ability for job differences. Although some means of selecting administrators for the future society, who can interface with AI, will need to be devised.

As the whole purpose and identity of the school must change, so must that of higher education. The model of school we still have, where the better students are directed to university to have an education in their higher reasoning will change, since all children at school must have this. The higher education establishments, which prepare courses for specific employment, will disappear. The university will become the standard and the normal final stage of the citizen's education. With all students better taught and without examination, all will experience the higher enlightenment of the university education. The whole concept of standards must alter to meet this new criterion.

So, the education of our youth must be extended to better prepare their minds to be that of rational thinkers. Whereas once the subject of DNA, for example, was reserved for the universities, it is now taught to children in primary school. The functioning of Aristotle's rhetoric must be drilled into the understanding of young children. At the primary level, they need education in Ethos, where they develop the ability to know the value of information on how

credible they can discover its owner to be. No longer are they to be educated to take information at its face value. Then, Pathos, to understand how perspectives of information change with its emotional appeal, and Logos to evaluate the ways reason is defined through numerous interactions by different and complex forms (Andersen 2022, 102).

Such is the manner of education today, working with social programs, that the intellectual and behavioural quality of the general citizen is designed. Yet, the citizens' ability to reason for the purpose of work will be little required, as AI advances to ever more take over this role. While this raises its own concerns about the developed intelligence of our species, we must be aware that the citizens' ability to reason in matters of social behaviour will be paramount in AI deciding how it will control their activities. Education must adapt to produce citizens better able to meet this demand.

If the citizen demonstrates compliance with social rules, they will be supported by the system in all manner. However, should the citizen demonstrate non-compliance, they will be recognised swiftly and controlled to some extent by AI. Indeed, moves are now developing to interface human beings directly with AI, which brings serious concern as to how we may retain our own conscious thought and not be directly guided in this by AI instruction.

Such is the reality mankind is facing, and we must be very aware of this state of affairs developing in the short term and consider how our social and educational programs may best be designed to complement this need and offset its apparent dangers. In the long term, however, we may see how AI, through its administration of man's social behaviour, could cause mankind to evolve to a higher spiritual level.

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GERMANY AND THE CULTURAL HISTORY OF POST-WORLD-WAR-II EUROPE

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Abstract: Polychronis Enepekides (1917-2014), an Austrian historian of Greek origin, contends that Second World War worldview and its aesthetics in regard to international understanding and forgiving reconciliations in the aftermath faced a tremendous recession. Female suffrage, a series of profound changes and reforms in the constitutions and legal systems, and a spirit of civic universalism declared a New World order imbued with American principles in post-war Western Europe. Nevertheless, society retained its role of reasserting *pre-existing class divisions*. A conservative and even conformist attitude in daily activities during the 1950s reflected gender within societal norms. The family was prioritised over other aspirations of liberation and sexual freedom, even though the latter was performed in or away from marital status relationships. The world and civic order imposed by national, social institutions and communities, such as education and the churches or other religious communities, defined new social and interpersonal behavioural norms in the long reconstruction process and resorted to a new normality.

Western Europe was defined as a class society even after 1945. The middle class was prevalent amidst the Cold War, and *economy, political life, and the resources of the state were all aligned in ways that served the interests of the middle class, which itself was expanding and changing as a consequence of processes of economic and social modernisation* (Conway 2020, 202).

Enepekides highlights the aesthetics in terms of public address: modernism, gender, class and mass culture, post-modern diplomacy, state order and post-war narrative in Western democracy. In this common ground, one can observe his

constant concern with the interface that belies the international links shared between modern and post-modern world (both Asian and European) in terms of geopolitical alliances and transnational cultural interconnections.

Keywords: Weimar Republic, The Third Reich, Second World War, cultural history, Europe, Polychronis Enepekides

INTRODUCTION

The Cultural History of Post-World War II German-speaking world is invariably bound to the War History and the concomitant aesthetics accompanying the series of events. The end of the Holy Roman Empire (1800-1806), the so-called First Reich, was marked by the Napoleonic Wars (of the years between 1803 and 1815) that reached a hallmark point at the Congress of Vienna in 1815. The declaration of German Confederation (1815-1871) enacted unification, designated Austria and Prussia as dominant member states over which they maintained the inherent right to rule German lands, and ended up in favour of Prussia after the Seven Weeks' War of 1866. It is evident that it led to the creation of North German Confederation under Prussian leadership in 1867 and the establishment of Austria-Hungary under the Habsburg dynasty.

The Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 was followed by the establishment of the Second German Empire (The Second Reich) in 1871 under Prussian leadership. The Weimar Republic (1919-1933) in Germany marked the interwar period, which was identified as an interim period of democracy.

The Third Reich, which nowadays is commonly known as Nazi occupation, has laid the foundations of a thirty-year-long post-war period that was indelibly chromatised by a two-sided perception of war atrocities not only in terms of geopolitics but also in terms of culture and institutional changes. The vertical discrimination between 'good' and 'evil' has not always been the case for a 'conscious' interpretation of the recent past, even though it fed the

'post-war emergencies' on subjects related to societal reformation and industrial reconstruction.

MAIN SUBJECT

> Now the West Berliners know once again that they do not stand alone in the struggle for freedom. The West has not forgotten us. (1962 report)

A key element in terms of politics was neutrality, which nowadays stands predominantly as a Cold War aesthetics or a permanent trend of a 'just war' tradition. In the twentieth and early twenty-first century, neutrality was led by non-belligerent politics in war and an ongoing non-yielding in world affairs in peace. During the sixties, it was also a hallmark of the repercussions of World Wars in Central European domains. Geopolitical reasons deliberately coloured the situation, acting in the nineteenth century as *a tool of diplomacy and statecraft*.

The Congress of Vienna (1815), following the Napoleonic Wars (1803-1815), marked a starting point of a hundred years through the commencement of First World War (1914), in which neutrality acted as *a vibrant and essential part of the international system that was presided over by the European Great Powers*. (Abbenhuis 2014, 12). Polychronis Enepekides employs the Congress System recurrently in a form that aims to deliver his purpose for a historical, geopolitical, and cultural imprint of Modern Greek World in Diaspora, as well as the dissemination of Germanophone post-modern spirit to contemporary Athenian Greek media (that is, articles in Athenian Greek newspapers and the Greek television, as well as radio broadcasting) during the sixties.

Polychronis Enepekides lived in a period of time foreshadowed by Cold War being underway, First World War which preceded, and Second World War that was still leaving a strong impact in the wake. I therefore review Enepekides' writings both in the Greek press and

his book publications via a five-fold theoretical scheme, which maps the post-war decades in Central Europe. Amidst the Cold War, they were identified as mass culture, class, gender, new modernism, and post-war democracy.

According to Martin Conway:

> For those who had experienced only the fascist and authoritarian regimes of the recent past, democracy was initially less a matter of conviction than a new form of conformism, imposed by military defeat and foreign conquest. (Conway 2020, 200).

After the Second World War, the film industry called for its instrumentalisation as a form of *re-education* (Carrie Smith-Prei 2013, 143). In this context, the configuration of *national visual memory* within the global news market (via *Fox Toenende Wochenschau*) was forged under the Allied Powers' report monitoring, production control, and surveillance broadcasting.

The post-war visual culture was determined by a hallmark event that marked Cold War in terms of military and political significance. In the art sector, the Berlin Wall, erected in 1961, received global recognition for its ability to raise the German people's national consciousness, even on a long-term rigorous process of unfaithfulness and deceit (that is, the years the Wall's placement remained). The German principles formed a uniform set of post-Enlightenment artistic ideas that could hinder the divide in substance, and convert the symbolism of the Wall into a dual German national representation to the global geopolitical and cultural arena.

Nevertheless, the perspective can be seen as romantic, given that, according to Lenin's view of the Soviet World, the official soviet art is defined as *part of the general Party work* (Groys 2003, 58) serving the *great Central Plan* in its unity. Moreover, the perception was dominant ever after Stalin's death in 1953 and was endorsed by the unofficial art scene, which operated in parallel to the official cultural production, aiming at engagement with *Western and Russian modernist traditions* (Groys 2003, 55).

Enepekides features *the East Side of the Berlin Wall as the one "of shame"* (Enepekides 1970, 33), *placing a rivalry towards opposing powers*, the Soviet Allies. In a media report from 1961, the Soviet Allies were identified as *aggressive* and *responsible for all consequences*. Aligned with Enepekides' narrative in another report, also recorded in 1961, the Berlin Wall is declared as 'the most shameful building of the Ulbricht regime, *a barrier which inhumanely blocks its disenfranchised citizens the way to the better Germany*. Another report of the same year assertively argues that *freedom and human dignity end in the streets of East Berlin*. Within these assumptions, the means of mass media brought the ceiled proof-of-evidence to the fore how Enepekides leveraged and then disseminated his knowledge to the Greek readership in Greece.

The political newsreel reported to the US in 1962 declared West Germany as the *free West* and the *free part of Germany*. The American Allies were depicted bonded to *Western* political ideas that West Germany should conform to via a subcutaneous thread of geopolitical identification on *its content and personalities*.

The Soviet Allies in East Germany, characterised as dictators and the rulers of the zone, stressed the occupational status of Eastern German territory. In order to eliminate the division's separative character, the media *Fox Toenende Wochenschau* in 1961 configured a *we* that was built upon the principle of societal non-inclusiveness, thereby forming a vertical discrimination between the *self* and the *alien*.

The showcase of leading personalities reflecting *Western values* demonstrates the profound interrelation between Western politicians such as Konrad Adenauer and J.F. Kennedy. Enepekides' references to the presidency of Adenauer as a communicative feature of his writing speech designates the persona-centred aesthetics of his Age in terms of domestic and transnational politics (Enepekides 1970, 32). The historian maps post-war West Germany bearing strong anchors to his political persona. His catchword, *the country of Adenauer*, as a recurrent light motif embedded in the

narrative, paid tribute to his politics and buttressed his service to the official state order.

Adenauer was highly engaged in immediate post-war aesthetics that prioritised the nonexclusive attribution to Hitler and the NSDAP elite of a narrowly conceived accountability for the tremendous turnout to Nazi occupation. The view was placed against the one alluding to the Nuremberg Tribunals that fiercely asserted the targeting of Nazi perpetrators. In politics leading the consensus, the moral decay of the Weimar Republic hatched the darkness of the immediate Nazi past so that only the moral order represented by the Christian faith could reform the state ahead into the future. Enepekides was aligned with the non-conviction policy towards the Nazi past and the identification of Nazi perpetrators, away from any unconditional statement of accusation.

Nevertheless, the latter stands with West Germany's official worldview, which deliberately bolstered a purging to the atrocities and perpetrators who were deemed accountable for their commitment to stand against the virulent Soviet Union's presence in terms of an Eastern occupation within the German domain. In this frame, CDU promoted a certain 'reconception' of the immediate Nazi past partially as a post-war counterweight to reinstate national order via a moderate conservative power model. Enepekides favoured a linear historical narrative eager to encompass all phases of German history, either belligerent or in peace, even though he stood for a vertical opposition between 'good' and 'evil' that permeated across West and East Germany. The soviet occupation zone of Germany (1945-1949), later identified as East Germany (1949-1990), underscored an opposition where Soviets accused Nazis of war atrocities.

The Nazis' conviction over the Nuremberg Tribunals (as aforementioned, the Weimar decay acting as an alibi), the role of the Red Army and targeting the Soviets found an era that followed the Third Reich dimmed in regard to its origins. In this simplistic account of National Socialism, all Germans were victims of Hitler's atrocities and war crimes, unduly burdened by the Weimar past that

triggered darkness with aspects of an amoral materialistic splendour. Adenauer adopted the Western US-pivoted cultural demands to embed them into a post-war West German state policy where art and politics could occupy different positions concerning the past, both of which bolstered Adenauer's agenda. CDU and the *Weimar avant-garde* acted as the non-uniform post-war antidote to the Nazi past.

Conclusion

In summary, the rise of military and economic prevalence of the US reflects the Second World War remnants in terms of cultural past and geopolitics. The divided Germany as a dichotomised nation was an ideological and geopolitical arena of oppositional powers in the Cold War. The National Socialist perpetrators aimed to define the post-war narrative. The Western canon commanded a culturally and socio-politically mediated memorialisation of victims and critical philosophical negotiations in terms of a due judgment of the Holocaust. In other words, it complied with a canonisation process serving the Western market norms.

Unlikely, Enepekides' perception of post-war culture was determined in terms of an ever-dominant still-war aesthetics or at least a Nazi-chromatised belligerent world panorama.

Nevertheless, the term *modern* within the Nazi imperial frame of retrospection seems entirely irrelevant or at least controversial.

Enepekides highlights the visual elucidating a Nazi understanding as a culturally even dark precedent to the post-war crisis that shook the grounds of Germany in terms of cultural representation. His perception fostered the consciousness vital to a uniform acceptance of the past. The assumptions could lead to the reinstatement of German splendour in the global arena and the concession that God and 'evilness' are invariably among, or within us.

Film studies were one of the central components of the analysis, as was art history, memory preservation, its showcase, and the aesthetic process of memorialisation. By broadening Nazi architecture's visual perspective from different moments in time and place, scholarly viewpoint, and Enepekides' concession to that one, prioritises an integrated Nazi past.

In his narrative, Second World War aesthetics has a prevalent role being delivered via the principles of awareness and empathy, and a high regard for the supreme German state order that governed his mindset to assert an unconditional, unanimous understanding and global recognition of an all-encompassing German-speaking unified European World.

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BETWEEN FAITH AND THE HEAVENS: INSTRUMENTAL EXCHANGE AND SCIENTIFIC DIALOGUE IN CATHOLIC–SAFAVID ENCOUNTERS

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Abstract: The study examines how the collision of ideas and traditions in astronomy between Catholic missionaries and Safavid scholars shaped intercultural relations and strengthened mutual exchanges. Early modern period travel and missionary accounts indicate that astronomy held a prominent place within Safavid education and scholarly culture, shaping both intellectual exchange and diplomatic encounters. This study highlights how Catholic missionaries employed scientific knowledge as a form of soft diplomacy. They introduced innovations and played a key role in circulating scientific instruments that served as tools of knowledge exchange and cultural negotiation. Focusing on missionary correspondence and visual artefacts, this article argues that the contributions of Catholic missionaries to the scientific development of the Safavid Empire have been overlooked, as they not only participated in exchanges but also introduced changes in the characteristics of instruments. By bringing undervalued materials to light and revealing cross-cultural Catholic-Safavid exchanges, the article aims to offer new perspectives on the history of science and visual culture.

Keywords: Safavid Empire, Catholic missionaries, cross-cultural exchange, knowledge circulation, early modern science

INTRODUCTION

In the early modern world, Catholic missionaries—particularly Jesuits, Dominicans, Carmelites, Capuchins, and Augustinians—journeyed along the Silk Roads through Persia, combining their experience with indigenous intellectual knowledge. Travellers and

missionaries who visited the country knew that astronomy was a highly respected field of science among the Safavids and an essential part of their education, reflected in the gifts brought and the celestial dialogues they engaged in. According to Susan Mokhberi, mutual exchanges in mathematics, astronomy, and theology softened the unfavourable view of travellers such as Pietro della Valle about the Safavid Empire (Mokhberi 2019, 78). It is important to note that, according to the chronicle of the Carmelites, after the Ottoman recapture of Baghdad in 1638, the Bishop of Baghdad, Fr. Bernard of St. Teresa, who was also vicar apostolic of the diocese of Isfahan, resided in Isfahan (Chick 1939, 208). During the reception by Shah Safi I, he made an impression on Shah when his knowledge of astronomy was ascertained, and the Safavid Shah offered to teach this science to those interested. This encounter shows how Carmelite missionaries strategically used celestial knowledge as a tool of soft diplomacy, building intellectual trust among political and scholarly circles. I would like to highlight that the arrival of European travellers, missionaries, and embassies at the Safavid court gave rise to new ideas in the development of celestial maps, sundials, globes, and astrolabes. In Sonja Brentjes' opinion, there is another curious reason for introducing innovations to the East: the new instruments were one of the methods to tempt Orthodox youth to the Catholic faith. Also, the invention of sighting tubes in various sizes tempted travellers to use them as spy instruments in Oriental houses, so as to take a glance at scandalous events (Tommasino, P. M. 2012).

The Safavid officials invited Catholic missionaries to their palaces to debate with Shiite scholars on scientific and religious issues. For instance, the Safavid Grand Vizier (Prime Minister) Mohammad Beg, known as the "ruler of the Azerbaijan", had a palace in Isfahan staffed by Jesuit missionaries, and debates between missionaries and mullahs were common. This article investigates how Catholic missionaries contributed to the development of science and how the collaboration and exchange between Safavid scholars and European scientific figures influenced the artistic and

technical characteristics of instrument designs in both cultures. Furthermore, what roles did scientific instruments—such as astrolabes, sundials, globes, and clocks—play in the intercultural dialogue between two distant places, such as European countries and the Safavid Empire?

The State of Science and Education in the Safavid World

Catholic-Safavid encounters reveal how Catholic missionaries strategically used celestial knowledge as a tool of soft diplomacy. This approach helped build intellectual trust among political and scholarly circles. According to the chronicle of the Carmelites, after the Ottoman recapture of Baghdad in 1638, the Bishop of Baghdad, Fr. Bernard of St. Teresa, who was also vicar apostolic of the diocese of Isfahan, resided in Isfahan. During the reception by Shah Safi I, he made a strong impression on the Shah when his knowledge of astronomy was recognised. The Safavid Shah even offered to teach this science to those interested. Capuchin friar Raphael du Mans described science, particularly astronomy, as highly prominent and widely taught in the Safavid world. In some ways, he observed that it was more visible than in early modern France. He wrote, "Their way of teaching and taking lessons is to choose someone they want as regent because here to teach is the supreme degree of honour. The teachers do not want to deprive themselves of it. They learn the language, science, and knowledge in detail to earn the title of doctor. In France, this word 'to teach', which cannot wash away the last insult of the world, which is pedantic, is much envied for fame but not for profit (Mans 1890, 166-169)". He also remarks in his "L'Estat de la Perse en 1660" ("In the State of Persia in 1660") that "They have here the 'Almagest' of Ptolemy in Arabic, the 'Sphaerica' of Menelaus and Theodosius, several sorts of theories like medium movements of planets of Mirza Ulugh beg, Euclid in all his works, some fragments of Archimedes and Apollonius, also the work of Ebn Heissen, books of arithmetic, elm-e-hasabe, and algebra of

optics". We can see the Safavid court's interest in astronomy from Raphael du Mans' notes. He pointed out that The king spends more than twenty thousand tomans each year to maintain his astrologers, *monagem*, who are always near him with their astrolabe to take the right hour, the ascendant, to dominate, and to say when it is good to sit, get up, leave, eat, go to bed, dress such and such a colour, so it means that he is in their absolute disposal. Even they will let him enter by the Saint Honoré or Saint Martin door, making him wait on foot until the moment of the necessary constellation has arrived (Mans 1890, 164).

On the other hand, Raphael du Mans lists drawbacks, including not using chairs, teaching different subjects at the same time, and the dependence of teachers on students, compared with France. A schoolboy will not content himself with a lesson in some sort of science in a day, he will take a lesson in logic, physics, theology, and grammar, as well as the teachers, who would think themselves dishonoured if they had refused to teach any science that is asked of them. I want to draw attention to the fact that he dedicated this work to the French minister Jean Baptiste Colbert. Jean-Baptiste Colbert was the principal figure in establishing relations with the Safavid empire and the principal financier of the missionaries. They were instructed to bring manuscripts from the countries they visited and study them. These manuscripts were translated and given to the royal library.

It should be noted that, as a result of Jean Baptiste Colbert's financing, a number of works were translated into French. In the 1650s and 1660s, the Safavid travelogues of Adam Olearius, Adam Wickfort, and Silva Figueroa were translated. Since Raphael du Mans was a translator at the palace, he was aware of the negotiations there and sent information on the Safavid empire's diplomatic relations with France. In contrast to Raphael du Mans, Jean Chardin criticised French authority for controlling science through scientific institutions such as the Royal Academy of Science, founded in 1666 by Louis XIV at the suggestion of Jean Baptiste Colbert. Scientists were made subjects of the government to increase the state's

income. Jean Chardin regarded Safavid science as a standard of excellence and claimed that no country in Europe esteemed science more than the Safavid Empire (Chardin 1717, 107). He shows that even science a part of life of peasants or poor people: "A lot of peasants read good books themselves and bring up their children in the sciences, as much as the convenience of their condition permits, and for that purpose, they send the children at the age of five and attempt to bring them into the public colleges, where not only are the tutors engaged to teach, but the pupils are still to learn, in order not to be impede by poverty" (Chardin 1717, 108).

Furthermore, the scale and significance of education in the Safavid world are evident from contemporary observations; Engelbert Kaempfer, for example, a Swiss ambassador, reports more than 100 colleges or schools in the royal city of Isfahan alone, which surpass European schools in luxury and architecture (Kaempfer 2018, 98). He also compares the salaries and living conditions of students: "The salary of the rector is very high. The royal schools pay 100 tumans; in the other schools, it is more or less 50 tumans in most cases. It would be wished that our professors in Germany achieved such good luck. As our students are in dormitories, they live in the colleges like lodgers. Their eating is not eating together. They receive 1 abbasi in the royal college, the others are given 1 mahmudi or shahi" (Kaempfer 2018, 99). Fr. N. Sanson further complements this picture by describing the subjects taught within these schools: "There are Public Schools in Persia where the Alcoran is explained by the Doctors; they also teach Astronomy, Philosophy, Law, and physics. Aristotle is their way for Philosophy and Avicen for Physics. The Study of the Laws is very much esteemed among them; for Magistrates apply their children strictly to it, and they also take great care to instruct them in it themselves, by asking every day their opinion in some case they have adjudged" (Sanson 1695, 154). Taken together, these accounts point to a vibrant educational landscape in the Safavid world, characterised by both institutional scale and curricular diversity. This environment provided fertile ground for missionary engagement, where scientific

knowledge—particularly astronomy—could serve as a medium of intellectual exchange and a tool for fostering trust across cultural and religious boundaries.

Catholic missionaries played a key role in introducing innovative devices and tools to the Safavid world, thereby expanding both local scientific practices and intercultural knowledge networks. The French traveller Tavernier, in his "*Voyages in Perse"*, stated that several royal officials in Isfahan had instruments made by the Capuchin Raphael du Mans (Tavernier 1676, 579). Various sources state that a Capuchin friar, Raphael du Mans, invented the telescope, compass, sundial, and globe, and developed a cartographic grid. J. Chardin writes about it: "The superior of the Capuchins of Isfahan, with whom I first lodged, a strong man versed in mathematics, had given me his knowledge. He often led me (to the most famous astrologers for the manufacture of astrolabes) and taught me to hear about what I see done" (Chardin 1711, p.109). David King approached the grid, making fact with suspicion. He emphasises that we should remember that he was in Isfahan for not helping Muslim people to solve scientific problems; his duty was to convert Muslims to Christianity. D. King stresses this point with the thought that Raphael du Mans had a negative attitude towards Islam, and he could not devise a grid solving the qibla problem. If Raphael du Mans had made such a map, it could have been mentioned in his writings.

Among Raphael du Mans's contributions to science, the Galilean telescope is particularly noteworthy. A Safavid author from the 17th century, ʿAbdallah Isfahani Efendi, in his *"Riyaẕ al-ʿulama"* (1694), refers to Mulla Muhammad Salih Qazwini's *"Nawādir al-ʿulūm wa-l-adab"*, which mentions that Raphael du Mans devised a telescope resembling a bamboo pipe (Arjomand 1997, 14). He reports that it was 2.08 meters long and many stars were revealed, including the Pleiades (Seven sisters). Even the Safavid viewers were able to see "cities, jungles and lands" on the uneven surface of the Moon (Huff 2010, 132-133). While Catholic missionaries introduced a range of instruments and devices to the Safavid world,

some did not impress the court because they were already common tools in their scientific practices. Tavernier, in his *"Voyages en Perse"*, mentions that this Capuchin friar devised "a very beautiful compass in the form of an astrolabe" and gave it to Shah Abbas II, along with requesting a favour. However, this present did not attract the Safavid shah. After asking about the instrument's function, he sent a friar to the chief astronomer to inform him as well. We can attribute the Shah's lack of interest to the fact that, in the mentioned period, the use of a compass became common. In his description of mosques, Tavernier writes about the pocket compasses used by local people to find the qibla. David King is also of the same opinion that if it were an astrolabe, it may arouse curiosity in the Royal Palace. But Raphael du Mans himself notes that their astrolabes are better than ours in France: they have plates of divided and subdivided forms to quickly draw the circles of the astrolabes. A remark by Capuchin friar M. Febvre in his *"Teatro della Turcia"*, published in 1684, shows that Raphael du Mans devised a globe for the Safavid shah Soleyman: "I had taught him a little astrology, and he showed a very curious little globe one day to the other courtiers as a rare and particular thing in the king's hall. That gentleman told with a smile that it was a work by Raphael, destined for his majesty. After this, I ask him for an explanation of the globe and all its parts. Upon which I have given full satisfaction. The Safavid shah was not pleased with the globe because the Safavid Empire could barely be seen on it" (Febvre 1684, 209).

Scientific Instruments as Mediators of Catholic–Safavid Exchange

The arrival of European travellers, missionaries, and embassies at the Safavid court spurred the development of celestial maps and astrolabes. The inscription on the astrolabe, made by Mohammad Mahdi al-Khādem in 1654–55, attests that the Safavid astronomers became acquainted with European innovations. According to Sonja

Brentjes, J. Tavernier presented a celestial map of the Safavid astronomers, which seems to have served as orientation for the engraving of star maps of the northern and southern hemispheres on his astrolabe (Brentjes 2021, 444). The inscription in the cartouche of the northern hemisphere states: "Since there were inconsistencies in the locations of the fixed stars among earlier scholars, and the most appropriate [star maps] were in the observatories of the Franks [of Western Europe], the locations of the fixed stars are shown here based on authoritative observations over the past ten years". David King (1999), Sonja Brentjes (2021), and Emilie Saavage-Smith (1997) claim that Jean Baptiste Tavernier transported his brother Melchior Tavernier's map to the Safavid court, a copy of which is currently preserved at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France. Muhammad Mehdi devised two other astrolabes with the same inscription: "This is the mirror of Alexander, and this mirror represents the whole universe". Both astrolabes were made in 1659-1660 and are included in the collections of the Greenwich Museum and the Whipple Museum of History and Science accordingly. During the examination of the astrolabe kept in Greenwich, it was revealed that Muhammad Mehdi engraved Melchior Tavernier's map in one of the five plates of the astrolabe. He described only the Northern Hemisphere in the Greenwich version. The top of the astrolabe is a triangular shape, and both sides are delicately pierced with dedicated inscriptions to Safi Goli Beg, an Emir at the court of Shah Abbas II. He also gave the names of 78 places on the engravings of the astrolabe along with the inscription relating to "14 protected holy ones" (the Prophet Muhammad, his daughter Fatima, and 12 imams). The signature of Muhammad Mehdi is on the back of the astrolabe: "Ibn Muhammad Amin Muhammad Mahdi al-Hadim al-Yazdi is poor in the sight of Allah Almighty, may Allah forgive her".

It is interesting that a recent study in the map collection of Bodel Nijenhuis of the Leiden University Library uncovered a celestial map of hemispheres. The celestial hemispheres, published in a book dating to the early 17th century, have illustrations on both

hemispheres that closely match those of the celestial globe made by Amsterdam cartographer-publisher Willem Jansz Blaeu. However, the mapmaker did not copy Blaeu's globe in every detail and changed some illustrations. But during the examination of Melchior Tavernier's celestial map, we noticed that there are no changes in details, and he described all the details in the Dutch author's map. Here, the question arises: which copy of this map was Muhammad Mehdi familiar with? Was he inspired by Melchior Tavernier, as Sonja Brentjes, David King, and Emile Savage-Smith claim? It is known that during the mentioned period, all Europeans who came to the Safavids were referred to as francs (firəng), regardless of their nationality. In addition, the Catholic missionaries served as intermediaries in bringing various European clocks or clockmakers to the Safavid lands. The great interest of Safavid Shahs in European technology can be seen in Fr. Sanson's records: "He (Shah Suleiman I) receives all kinds of labourers from Europe into his Service; He respects and welcomes workers from Europe. But he most respects the French, among whom there are now many skilful and excellent clockmakers and Jewellers. He pays them a very large salary, and some of them receive 2,500 livres yearly, which, with all necessary provisions, amounts to a large sum. The king values their work so much that he will not employ them for anyone else. He also hosts some Chinese and a large number of other Artists from all the nations of Asia" (Sanson 1695, 52).

One of the facts showing that French artisans served the Safavid Shah at the Safavid court is the record of the French traveller Daulier Deslandes, who visited the Safavid lands in 1664 -1665 together with J. Tavernier. Daulier Deslandes, in his travel account *"Les Beautez de la Perse ou la description de ce qu'il y a des plus curieux dans ce royaume"* (The Beauties of Persia or the description of what is most curious in this kingdom), notes: "There live seven francs serving the king, two watchmakers, a goldsmith, and three arquebuses who are married. Here is also Monsieur l'Estual, a great statesman, who is very comfortably settled and lives like a prince; he did not serve the king. Of these seven Franks, only two were

Catholic. They all have strong recommendations from the king" (Kroell 1979, 13).

It is further known that the European kingdoms, including the Papacy, sent various gifts to the Safavid shahs. In the examination of Carmelite notes, we can see that Pope Innocent XII dispatched his nephew as an ambassador to Shah Sultan Husain (1694-1722) with gifts. However, the Papacy did not provide the embassy with sufficient financial support, which resulted in a reduced effectiveness of this mission. The papal presents remained in Aleppo due to a lack of cargo expenses. But the ambassador himself presented some gifts, including clocks, to the Safavid king: "As to the presents which I brought to the Shah, I was asked whether I was presenting them "on behalf of the Pope, and of the other kings, or in my name. I answered that "the gifts which were sent by the Papacy had remained in Aleppo. If Majesty so desired these gifts, he might be so kind as to bring them, but these presents I was offering in my name. I presented the Shah with two fine gold brocade from Venice, esteemed at 250 'ungari': an alarmed large clock striking the hours, esteemed at 140 'ungari': "another smaller one, also striking the hours, with a gilded case and enamelled, esteemed at 210 'ungari': one gold filigree box with engraved images, valued 150 'ungari': a clock, with a gold-plated case covered with diamonds bestowed me by the Princess of Valdimono, of the cost of 100 'ungari': a device to raise weights, which I had made a new and "which was well approved, evaluated at 50 'ungari': some fine paintings: two fine mirrors with ornaments: a microscope with augmented glass (Chick 1939, 491)".

The striking clocks made such an impression on the Safavids that they built a clock tower, which was mentioned in the travel accounts through the 17th and the beginning of the 18th century. Adam Olearius notes in 1637 that there is a clock tower at the entrance of the Bazaar of Isfahan (Emami 2024, 74). J. Tavernier (1677) also claims that the Englishman Feste devised a striking clock at the entrance to the Bazaar during the reign of Shah Abbas. J. Chardin (1711) also joins these mentions about the clock: The clock does not

work because there is no one to repair it, and they hate its sound, which their religion forbids. But in 1704, De Bruyn reports that there is only one striking clock in Bazar-i Qaysariyyah of Isfahan (King 1999, 290). In 1650, Shah Abbas II ordered the erection of a clock pavilion in Isfahan, which was described in Chardin's notes. He shows that the moving figures like heads, arms, and hands, also birds, and wooden animals with musical instruments made an impression on the Safavid spectators when it struck every hour.

It should be noted that despite heliocentrism gaining general acceptance in Europe, the Safavid Empire continued to adhere to geocentric principles. Copernicus's theories prompted Safavid scholars such as Muhammad Baqir Majlisi (1627–1699), whose treatise is housed in Cairo's Dar al-Kutub library, to refute heliocentrism. Why did he need to write this treatise? The new model, heliocentrism, was a direct threat to the generally accepted Ptolemaic geocentric model, which formed the basis of traditional cosmology and astrology, especially hemerology (the traditional practice of linking the success or failure of actions with favourable or unfavourable days determined by the calendar). Even the treatise of Muhammad Baqir Majlisi on hemerology, entitled Ikhtiyarat al-ayyam, was very popular among locals, and he stated that during the writing of this work, he benefited from the books of Shiite clerics and pre-Islamic authors (Arjomand 1997, 11)

Conclusion

In the 17th century, encounters between Catholic missionaries and the Safavid world created shared spaces for the transmission and reinterpretation of knowledge. Despite the contradictions between the two faiths, the exchange of scientific instruments and the celestial dialogues reflected a process of mutual exchange rather than one-way transmission. It is important to note that the clash between European heliocentric ideas and the predominantly geocentric model of Safavid science gave rise to moments of

intellectual tension, reflected in both written treatises and the exchange of scientific instruments. For instance, we can observe the refutation of heliocentric ideas in Shah Suleiman I's attitude towards the mechanical device (planetarium) made by the Danish astronomer Ole Roemer and presented to the Safavid monarch by the French envoy François Piquet in 1682. During this reception, he summoned the royal astronomers, and they claimed the Sun rises and sets every day, but the Earth is immobile, from which it was clear that Copernicus had made a mistake. Thereupon, the Safavid shah ordered that this device be taken to Qalayi-Tabaruk, which served as a storage facility. The clock showing the movements of the planets also faced the fate of the planetarium because it was based on the heliocentric model. According to Kaempfer, this clock was presented on behalf of the Swedish King (Kaempfer 2018, 45). By foregrounding the role of science in these encounters, this study highlights how astronomy and related disciplines served as a bridge between cultures, facilitating dialogue and fostering intellectual connections across Safavid and European contexts.

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POETICALLY MAN PERSISTS: SEARCHING FOR FULLNESS OF BEING IN THE POETRY OF WALLACE STEVENS AND RAINER MARIA RILKE

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Abstract: This article examines the quest for wholeness of being amidst an alienated and disenchanted world, and how this search unfolds in the poetry of Wallace Stevens and Rainer Maria Rilke. It situates both writers within a shared concern for the question of being and humanity's inclination toward a fullness of existence, an existence wherein the poet apprehends life as an aesthetic phenomenon, or as a fundamentally immanent experience which is replete with a superabundant being, in the Rilkean sense. Yet, the stately impoverished condition of man is what often denies him any vestige of fullness. The article extends this through concepts advanced by literary critics and philosophers, such as Max Weber's *Disenchantment* and Nietzsche's "life as an aesthetic phenomenon". It also reveals how the topos of disenchantment unfolds in their poetry, and how the search is sought through the visible reality as well as the invisible space of the spirit.

Keywords: Rainer Maria Rilke, Wallace Stevens, Max Weber, Martin Heidegger, Being, humanity, disenchantment

Our world in stupor lies;
Yet, dotted everywhere,
Ironic points of light
Flash out wherever the Just
Exchange their messages:
May I, composed like them
Of Eros and of dust,
Beleaguered by the same

Negation and despair,
Show an affirming flame.
(Auden 1930, 76)

Introduction

The poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke and Wallace Stevens prompts us to ponder our being in the world. That is to say, our being in a world that is forgetful of the intrinsic truth of being, indeed impervious to it, and even deserted by it. Like them, we are incessantly hounded by the perennial conundrum of "Who are we?" or "Who are you?", as Rilke asks in the *Second Elegy* (R.M. Rilke 2009, 23). We read their poetry hoping to garner a glimmer of reassurance that would quell our qualms about the nature of our impoverished being. In *Duino Elegies* 1923, Rilke set out to probe into his own uncertainties man's being in the world. For Rilke, the question of being does not halt at the aforementioned "Who are we?" In fact, it entails a far more difficult question. That is: "Why are we here?"

Both Rilke and Stevens set out to rouse themselves out of the ontological stupor that has engulfed man's condition in the twentieth century by expatiating in poetic forms on the question of being, or, to be more pertinent, the topos of the fullness of being. This present paper considers a series of selected poems of Rilke and Stevens, with particular focus on Rilke's *Duino Elegies* and *The Collected Poems* of Wallace Stevens (1954).

It further examines how the topos of the disenchantment of being is delineated in some poems of Rilke and Stevens, and how these two writers try to rouse themselves out of this alienation and impoverished condition. Whereas Stevens views the possibility of a fullness of existence as being fundamentally anchored in reality and the physical world, Rilke entrusts himself to the intimations of "the spirit within" (Taylor 1989, 427) in the hope that this interior journey would eventually culminate in the same fullness of being of the terrifying angel.

In order to better understand how these two poets charge their texts with meaning to convey a plethora of ideas, this article makes brief recourse to the works of manifold philosophers and literary critics such as Erich Heller, Charles Taylor, and Martin Heidegger, particularly in his analysis of Rilke and the question of poets. Our study makes use of Max Weber's term of *Disenchantment*, Heidegger's discussion of *Poetic Dwelling* apropos of the poetry of Friedrich Hölderlin, and Hegel's distinction of Classical and Romantic art.

Poetic Persistence: A Disenchantment of Being

Beleaguered by new configurations, *i.e.* the spectre of war, spiritual attrition, a state of *aboulie*, the poet found himself, in extremis, in a world wherein man's being is constantly challenged by ephemeral things that, in the long run, hold no perennial value or merit for humans, a world in which man's great noetic heterogeneities have only left him mired in disenchantment and in a disenchanted ('*entzaubert*') world, as Max Weber's term implies (Taylor 1989, 191). A world wherein any genuine endeavours to question man's being are instantly shunned by various distractions. Thus, Rilke and Stevens were essentially preoccupied with delineating the hazard of withdrawnness of being, which corresponds with a litany of poetic imageries in the Western tradition. For instance, for Hölderlin in the German poetic tradition, it meant the absence of gods (Heller 1984, 78). In English poetry, and particularly for T.S. Eliot, it culminated in a state of spiritual and existential ennui, and ultimately corresponded with the fragmentation and wreckage of modernity. For Wallace Stevens, with his idiosyncratic diction and imagery, this was particularly consonant with man's withdrawnness from reality. That is to say, our inability to truly live in reality and enjoy our being and condition rightly with no recourse to other means outside of ourselves. We read in one of Stevens's longer poems, *Esthetique du Mal*: "The greatest poverty is not to live in a physical world" (Stevens 1954, 325). In Stevens's, the particularity and merit of

reality, or the physical world as it is referred to here, is invariably delineated against the backdrop of a state of disenchantment and withdrawnness of Being. The hope then, as we encounter in another long poem, is to reach a state of self-transcendence and fecundity in reality itself:

> The eye made clear of uncertainty
> Of simple seeing without reflection. We seek
> Nothing beyond reality. Within it,
> Everything, the spirit's alchemicana included.
> (Stevens 1954, 471) (italics added)

In this poem *An Ordinary Evening in New Haven*, Stevens, like Rilke before him, seeks to surmount this withdrawnness in the hope of a reality undistorted by the self's own whimsical and sometimes even delusional projections. It is the hope of gliding beyond the disenchantment that befalls our being in the world and establishing the self's rapport with reality unadulterated.

This is more subtly invoked in Rilke's *First Elegy,* wherein the familiar constituents of reality, nature and the physical world yield themselves to us and can offer a modicum of uplift in the face of terrifying alienation and loneliness. However, like Stevens, Rilke laments our inability to truly relish and live in reality without ever being distracted by other conditions and expectations and thereby becoming embedded in this withdrawnness of "truly being here":

> A wave rolled toward you
> out of the distant past, or as you walked
> under an open window, a violin
> yielded itself to your hearing. All this was mission.
> But could you accomplish it? Weren't you always
> distracted by expectation, as if every event
> announced a beloved?
> (R. M. Rilke 2009, 20-21)

Whereas Stevens seeks to dispense with the eye's uncertainties and reach a state of "the certain eye" in which a fullness of being is not only an ontological priority but a plain ontological reality, Rilke

wishes to eschew this entrenched anxiety of expectation that vitiates our being and leaves us entangled in "infinitely anxious hands" (22).

For Rilke, this withdrawnness has to do with our imprisonment in destitute times, or the time of 'the world's night, as Heidegger concedes (Heidegger 1971, 93), and perhaps more fundamentally with the fact that the quest for the truth about our Being has been brushed aside, even concealed from us. This imagery of imprisonment is at the core of Rilke's poem *The Panther*, in which the panther, being subdued and entangled behind bars, extends well beyond the imagery of a panther:

> It seems to him there are a thousand bars; and behind the bars, no world.
> This could be construed as an imagistic or symbolic rendering of this idea of withdrawnness and concealment of authentic being. Imprisoned behind layers of bars, the panther is incapable of perceiving life as it is, not only because it is deprived of its own physical autonomy, but also because it is incapable of retaining its distinctive lineaments:
> An image enters in, rushes down through the tensed, arrested muscles, plunges into the heart and is gone. (Rilke 1989, 25)

This last line of the poem points us toward a state of complete nihilism that is delineated as an ontological inertia wherein any form of self-assertion is entirely corroded. Any image that is directed to our sensible and intellectual perception withers away before it is truly perceived. Moreover, the last stanza of the poem explicates how this inner space of the spirit, which is espoused preeminently and held sacrosanct in the elegies: "Nowhere, Beloved, will world be but within us" (R. M. Rilke 2009, 39), becomes in this poem eroded and turns into a space of ontological stupor. In other words, the inner spirit, or space, which is supposedly meant to be a recourse and a refuge in the face of an annihilated outer space, or a "no world", has also become annihilated and incarcerated just as the outer space has, and the inner autonomy has been actively corroded the same way the physical autonomy has been denuded.

Heidegger goes further and corroborates how Rilke came to realise the destitution of his time and ours more plainly and more deeply. Indeed, the question of being apropos of *being-into-death (Sein*

zum Tode) has not only turned into something completely negligent and nebulous for humans, but has in fact been eclipsed altogether. This question of being unto death is forwarded in the *First Elegy*, when contemplation changes from the invocation of angels and beauty into that of death and mortality; this question of death animates Rilke's contemplation of alienation and disenchantment, primarily because, as he alludes to in the *First Elegy,* the dead have escaped this disenchantment and banality that permeate our existence: "no longer to be what one was in infinitely anxious hands".

> In the end, those who were carried off early no longer need us:
> they are weaned from earth's sorrows and joys. (R. M. Rilke 2009, 22)

That is to say, they exist in terrain that is far purer and more idyllic than ours. Thus, caught in the grips of this disenchantment and withdrawnness of being, the poet saw it fit to contrive a sense of amelioration, forge a reconciliation with his new and dire condition, show an affirming flame in the sense that Auden ends his "*1st September 1939"* with[1], and seek a retrieval of the fullness of being that once abounded especially in classical art, in the Hegelian sense of the term[2], and which was not fully-fledged in the Romantic one. This is perhaps more evident in the poetry of Rilke than that of Stevens. Rilke's poem "*Archaic Torso of Apollo*" is a telling example of this statement. In this ekphrastic writing, Rilke considers with great vigour a beheaded torso of Apollo. His vigorous contemplation and description of a body without organs ultimately point him towards his own impoverishment. The sculptor is then regarded as an outward physical embodiment, or the ne plus ultra of beauty and this fullness of being. Rilke begins the poem by dilating on the "Legendary" head of the torso, and though we cannot see it, it is nonetheless dazzling. He concludes the poem with the famous line "You must change your life" (Rilke 1989, 61). He considers this question of fullness of being against the backdrop of classical art (in the Hegelian distinction mentioned earlier). The search for a fullness of being is thereby rendered more tangible in

this poem; it is a desired ontological phase that is prioritised and sought in the visible reality. It is, in fact, interesting that the torso which the poem describes is that of Apollo, the Greek god of poetry, order and discipline. The *Archaic Torso of Apollo* is Rilke's at his most classical phase, wherein the romantic exaltation of inwardness is almost brushed aside, and the visible, outer reality, or object, directs and foments a transformation within the invisible, inner spirit, or subject. This idea, as we will see later, is reversed and thereby traversed in the *Duino Elegies*.

Unlike his earlier work, and particularly unlike his poem *Archaic Torso of Apollo*, Rilke's *Duino Elegies* halts at any considerations of exalted embodiments of beauty, and instead veers towards consideration of the poet's ontological state, in particular, and man's being in the world, in general. The poetry of *Duino Elegies* limits itself to man's being in the world and his own disenchantment primarily because beauty no longer contrives nor does it correspond anymore with vestiges of truth, psychological uplift, and the sublime. For as we read at the outset of the *First Elegy*:

> Beauty is nothing
> but the beginning of terror, which we still are just able to endure,
> and we are so awed because it serenely disdains
> to annihilate us. (Rilke 2009, 20)

In the *Duino Elegies*, the poet is no longer confronted with the conventional delineations of sublime beauty in the poetic tradition, and particularly with beauty in the Keatsian metaphysics of beauty in *Ode to a Grecian Urn*, where beauty is regarded as being fundamentally conducive to truth:

> Beauty is truth, truth beauty, —that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know.
> (Keats 1922, 258).

Burdened by an acute alienation and disenchantment, even beauty is viewed by Rilke as something terrifying. Contrary to the Keatsian metaphysics, beauty is not regarded as truth, explicit or implicit; it is

no longer the idyllic and absolute end it once embodied. Instead, it is the "beginning of terror" that disdains to "annihilate us". This sense of the alienation of beauty and existence that permeates the *First Elegy* and Rilke's poetic project points the reader towards the notion that man's being is no longer heightened, uplifted or even ameliorated by beauty, mainly because of his own alienation and disenchantment. Hence, beauty itself has receded from being a paragon of the sublime and the Truth into being the harbinger of terror, and what is left, or what is replaced, as we read in the *Ninth Elegy,* is a contrived reality that unfolds in the patina of an evanescent 'imageless act':

> Things that we might experience are vanishing, for
> what crowds them out and replaces them is an imageless act.
> An act under a shell, which easily cracks open as soon as
> the business inside outgrows it and seeks new limits. (R.M. Rilke 2009, 45).

Beleaguered by his metaphysical loneliness, Rilke begins his *Elegies* with an aesthetic and fundamentally anguished cry against this state of disenchantment and alienation which hounds the wholeness of his being:

> Who, if I cried out, would hear me among the angels'
> hierarchies? (20)

In seeking to overcome this disenchantment of being and to rouse himself out of alienation, Rilke cries not for humans, or any other earthly creature, for they, too, are as disenchanted as he is; they share the same plight of being in the world, and perhaps even are incapable of hearing him. Instead, he cries for angels, the symbolic embodiment of 'the fullness of being'. "Every angel is terrifying", writes Rilke. Rilke's angel is terrifying primarily because it is a creature that embodies this tantalising fullness of being which eludes the poet's grasp, and simultaneously prefigures an even more consummate fullness of being than the poet could ever envision:

> (…) and even if one of them pressed me
> suddenly against his heart: I would be consumed
> in that overwhelming existence. (20)

Moreover, the image of the angels is even more terrifying because it points us towards man's own fallen condition, which sullies the wholeness of his existence and being, and which would ultimately deny him any vestige of transcendence that "the angels' hierarchies" may enact.

Rilke is acutely aware of this sullied existence that hounds not only his being, but all beings. He would be consumed in this "overwhelming existence" mainly because all images which he has envisaged for himself, and which seemingly consist of illusions of fecundity, self-transcendence and wholeness, and are in fact just contrived images of indolence and existential ennui, would eventually erode and be consumed under that "overwhelming existence" of immanence. Hence, unable to come to grips with this overwhelming existence and burdened by this state of alienation and disenchantment, man cannot be said to occupy a locus amoenus. This idyllic image of romanticism, which conjures up a perfect symbiosis between man and nature, or the world, is banished altogether and thereby firmly abandoned by both Rilke and Stevens:

> Not angels, not humans,
> and already the knowing animals are aware
> that we are not really at home in
> our interpreted world. (R.M. Rilke 2009, 20)

These lines of Rilke's *First Elegy* are echoed later in one of Stevens's longer poems. In his *Notes Toward a Supreme Fiction*, Stevens enunciates similar sentiments to the lines of Rilke, which express a deep hankering for "truly being here" that comes later in *Ninth Elegy*:

> From this the poem springs: that we live in a place
> That is not our own and, much more, not ourselves
> And hard it is in spite of blazoned days. (Stevens 1954, 383)

This feeling of not being home that Rilke describes quite intensely and vehemently, Stevens, with his idiosyncratic words and images, alludes to quite vociferously, and sometimes even subtly. Furthermore, this alienation that he undergoes, and which abounds

in his *Duino Elegies,* is exceedingly akin to that of Stevens, particularly in his poem *The Plain Sense of Things*.

> After the leaves have fallen, we return
> To a plain sense of things. It is as if
> We had come to an end of the imagination,
> Inanimate in an inert savoir.
> It is difficult even to choose the adjective
> For this blank cold, this sadness without cause.
> The great structure has become a minor house.
> No turban walks across the lessened floors. (Stevens 1954, 502)

The Plain Sense of Things is Stevens at his most lamentable and even nihilistic. In other words, it is Stevens's own *Duino Elegies*. The poem depicts an autumnal vision of being wherein imagination itself has fallen asunder. Whereas Rilke begins his *First Elegy* with a proclamation of beauty as the beginning of terror, which banishes the romantic celebration of beauty's enchantment, Stevens, on the other hand, begins his poem by taking another celebrated trait of romanticism, namely imagination, and declares that it is as if it had come to an end. Thus, what is left is a state of unmitigated stupor in which life itself is described as "inanimate" and man does not enjoy an animated knowledge. Instead, his whole being is saturated in "an inert savoir", a lifeless knowledge that is conducive to everything but a vitality of existence, an imagination of the Good, and a wholeness of being. Language itself, "the House of Being" (2008) as Heidegger would describe it later, is not capable anymore of alleviating our dire condition and disenchanted being through poetry, dialogical introspection as it once did with the romantics. Stevens laments the difficulty, or rather, impossibility to even choose the adjective for this "overwhelming existence", or "blank cold" as he describes it. For Stevens, "the great structure" has deteriorated and has thereby become a minor house. This great structure could be construed either as a metaphor for poetic self and poetic dwelling or an enchanted existence, i.e., being in the world. Thus, what comes after is that we return to "the plain sense of things". That is, the first principles of being, belonging and

becoming. Stevens's topos of disenchantment is one which negates a *locus amoenus*; it is one in which the absence of the imagination "had Itself to be imagined" in order to counter and possibly even surmount the disenchantment.

Poetic Dwelling: The Search for a Fullness of Being:

Against this seemingly unredeemable existence that hounds us in "our interpreted world" as Rilke concedes, the poet ushers in a quest for enchantment and poetic dwelling in this interpreted world. The poet seeks to triumph over the fallen state of man's existence, hoping to experience life as a fundamentally transcending experience of immanence and fecundity. Rilke's intimations of this search for a fullness of being follow the poetic tradition of German romanticism, mainly Novalis's dictum: "Inward goes the way full of mystery" (Taylor 1989, 427). In other words, like Novalis, for Rike the route of access to the true nature of being begins with intimations of an inwardness, the invisible spirit, or the spirit within, primarily because the visible reality, being estranged and almost annihilated, is no longer the refuge of the spirit and the sanctuary of immanence it once was for the English romantics. Thus, whereas the Romantic poet wanders lonely as a cloud with an effervescent being (Wordsworth) in a world in which the divine "suffuses nature and manifests itself in numinous moments" (Paglia 2005, XIV) the modern poet, in this case Rilke and Stevens, glides skeptically through the devious routes of inwardness and an impoverished world which is no longer replete with the same metaphysical qualities.

However, the poet, desirous of a poetic dwelling, or, as we read in the *Ninth Elegy*, of "truly being here", sets out in his foray into inwardness to surmount the stately homelessness and remoteness of "truly being" which have engulfed his soul:

> Truly being here is glorious. Even you knew it,
> you girls who seemed to be lost, to go under, in the filthiest

> streets of the city, festering there, or wide open
> for garbage...
> We want to display it,
> to make it visible, though even the most visible happiness
> can't reveal itself to us until we transform it, within
> Nowhere, Beloved, will world be but within us. Our life
> passes in transformation. And the external
> shrinks into less and less. Where once an enduring house was,
> now a cerebral structure crosses our path, completely
> belonging to the realm of concepts, as though it still stood in the brain.
> (Rilke 2009, 39).

For him, human existence, or "truly being here", is in itself "glorious". This existence can be fundamentally poetic and thereby becomes transmuted into a poetic dwelling when it is transformed within, i.e., into the invisible space. The above passage from the *Seventh Elegy* enunciates clearly this encompassing embrace of the internal, invisible space "within" over and at the expense of the visible space "the external", indeed, even a banishment of this visible and external reality. Thus, having forayed into inwardness and into Novalis's "inward" world, the visible space, or earth as we read in the *Ninth Elegy*, is no longer held as a sanctuary of enchantment and a refugee from disenchantment as it "shrinks into less and less", and what once was "an enduring house" has now transformed into "a cerebral structure" that belongs to the realm of concepts. The poet's old search for a fullness of being in the particularity of visible and external things, which, as we discussed above, once was a primary preoccupation of romantic poets beginning, such as Wordsworth, is rendered here as something tantalising, indeed even futile, as this external shrinks, and is ultimately threatened to be annihilated. Hence, having garnered a gleam of the fullness of being by virtue of the journey into the interior, the poet seeks to transform and leaven this outer reality, which has become threatened of annihilation:

> They want us to change them, utterly, in our invisible heart,
> within—oh endlessly—within us! Whoever we may be at last.
> Earth, isn't this what you want: to arise within us,

invisible? Isn't it your dream
to be wholly invisible someday? —O Earth: invisible!
What, if not transformation, is your urgent command? (R.M. Rilke 2009, 53)

Rilke's search for a fullness of being begins with the spirit within, and only then is it fully realised and able to extend well beyond the realm of this "within" and enact a precious measure of amelioration. It is only when Rilke comes to grips with the inadequacy of the outer world that he is capable of grasping a sense of equilibrium and enchantment, or perhaps more pertinently, a fullness of being:

Unspeakably, I have belonged to you, from the first.
You were always right, and your holiest inspiration
is our intimate companion, Death.
Look, I am living. On what? Neither childhood nor future
grows any smaller …… Superabundant being
wells up in my heart (53).

The journey for a full being is carried out through devious routes of inwardness. This latter proves to be salutary as it is conducive to an effervescent and superabundant being that wells up the poet's heart and leavens the wholeness of his existence.

While Rilke espouses the inner space, entrusts himself to the world of "within" hoping that it would contrive a fullness of being, and regards the quest of interiority as a presage of this fullness, Stevens holds both reality and imagination in the highest regard. For Stevens, reality is the spirit's true centre (Stevens 1957, 177). The topos of the fullness of being in Stevens's poetry unfolds vis-à-vis man's apperception of reality itself:

We keep coming back and coming back
To the real...We seek
The poem of pure reality, untouched
By trope or deviation, straight to the word,
Straight to the transfixing object, to the object
At the exactest point at which it is itself,
Transfixing by being purely what it is,
A view of New Haven, say, through the certain eye,
The eye made clear of uncertainty, with the sight

> Of simple seeing, without reflection. We seek
> Nothing beyond reality. (Stevens 1954, 471)

Stevens's search for a fullness of being is deeply anchored in reality, pure reality. Thus, the quest for this fullness of being begins with an undistorted, unadulterated and pure knowledge of reality, wherein a deep affinity with "the real" is established, and we are transfixed by things themselves and not ideas about them: "Transfixing by being purely what it is". The line: "The eye made clear of uncertainty", which we discussed earlier, seems to echo Emerson's "transparent eyeball" (Emerson 1982, 39) in which Emerson paints an image of the 'Universal Being' that circulates through him in his perception of reality. Following Emerson's intimations of man's perception, Stevens broaches the question of being apropos of the physical, lived reality. Stevens concludes his long poem *Esthetique du Mal,* propounding an intimation of a metaphysical change and affluence that occurs with being truly and jubilantly anchored in the real outer world:

> As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming
> With the metaphysical changes that occur,
> Merely in living as and where we live. (Stevens 1954, 326)

For him, to apprehend life as a fundamentally immanent experience that is conducive to a fulfilled existence and a fullness of being, we must conceive of reality as a reservoir of spiritual transcendence and fecundity. Thus, for Stevens, the quest for a wholeness of being is not in complete symbiosis with that of Rilke's, or Novalis's before him, nor is it that of Rousseau's proto-romanticism: "Back to Nature". Instead, it is a full embrace of going back to the invisible reality, wherein the "new knowledge of reality" we read in the poem *Not Ideas about the Thing but the Thing Itself* is an experience of "truly being here" which, as Rilke writes, is in itself glorious.

CONCLUSION

Against a stately condition of alienation and the disenchantment of the world, Stevens, as well as Rilke, seeks to attain fullness of being, a *locus amoenus* where poetic dwelling is an ontological priority, and where the quest for a poetic ascension to heights and finitude of being is ushered in. In his discussion of the disenchantment of the modern world in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic* (1973), Philip Rieff concedes: "Modern man has himself disenchanted the world; only his inner life harbours residues of enchantment" (Rieff 1973, 117).

In *The Birth of Tragedy,* Nietzsche, before Rilke and Stevens, regards life as an "aesthetic phenomenon", and the burden of existence is only justified in accordance with this view. For him, life viewed and thereby experienced as such is a definitive harbinger of "well-being, exuberant health, fullness of existence life" (Nietzsche 1923, 2-50). Thus, life itself can be transfigured by art even amidst a patina of illusions and chaos. The quest for the modern poet was then to restore the sense of enchantment and the fullness of being through self-transcendence, both in the visible reality and the invisible space. It is against this backdrop that the poetry of Stevens and Rilke unfolds, the poetry of two men seeking to rouse themselves out of and, untimely, banish an evanescent existence that is characterized by "imageless act[s]", a state of being in "infinitely anxious hands", as Rilke describes it, and a "blank cold, a sadness without cause", as Stevens refers to it.

NOTES

1. Auden's ending of the poem, which has been placed as the epigraph of this paper, shows the speaker declaring he wishes to show an affirming flame. This can be construed as a pictorial image that enunciates the same thematic concern of this paper, *i.e.* the search for a fullness of being. Auden's poem lends itself perfectly well as it describes the disenchantment that hounds the poet and ends with the desire to show an affirming light, which then conjures up a longing for a fullness of being.

2. "Hegel's categorial and elaborate distinction between Classical art (that is, Greek art in the classical epoch) and Romantic art (that is, in *Lectures on Aesthetics*, all art after Classical antiquity)." (Heller 1976).

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THE MISUNDERSTOOD NIETZSCHE: ON THE POSSIBILITY OF SABBATH REST AND ACTIVE STRUGGLE BEYOND THE NEOLIBERAL DIALECTIC OF MEDIOCRITY AND EXCELLENCE

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Abstract: The Nietzschean master-slave philosophy is reduced by neoliberal capitalism into the dialectic of mediocrity and excellence. The slave is represented as the underachieving subject who evades the struggles of institutional growth, while the master is portrayed as the one whose authority and nobility emerge from productivity and achievement. Contemporary society consequently equates master morality with high performers and ruling elites who naturally dominate slaves due to their elevated positions of power. However, this perspective fails to consider how neoliberal capitalism's logic of power, based on achievement and perpetual optimisation, is inherently reactive. Thus, I propose that this logic establishes an organised framework operating on slave morality. By redefining the master and slave dynamic not as permanent positions but as active and reactive forces that can manifest at any locus, I perform a critique against the reduction of the master-slave into simplistic dialectical relations. Hence, I argue that the neoliberal notions of the master and the slave are both based on slave morality. My critique is achieved by exploring the complex relationship between rest and struggle – showing how each can embody either active or reactive forces in a Deleuzian sense.

Keywords: master morality, slave morality, neoliberal capitalism, institutional growth, sabbath rest

1. INTRODUCTION: MISCONCEIVING NIETZSCHE'S MASTER AS SLAVE

Nietzsche's philosophy of master-slave relations is usually bastardised within contemporary organisational contexts. The

dynamic is often reduced into a simplistic model of exploitation based on growth, productivity, and excellence, which are values that substantially align with the demands of neoliberal capitalism. This model conditions subjectivity to characterise success based on commodified values that accelerate the process of capitalist production.

In these contexts, Nietzsche's master is misinterpreted as the one who naturally dominates slaves – commonly associated with the ruling elites seizing positions of power (Ezema, Areji, & Ohubuenyi 2017, 265). The master is thought to possess vigorous pride and ambition by accumulating power through capitalising on other people. This leads to equating mastery with the relentless pursuit of productivity and achievement, which contemporary society recognises as primary hallmarks of success. Han (2015) shared in his book, *The Burnout Society*, that "Twenty-first-century society is no longer a disciplinary society, but rather an achievement society [*Leistungsgesellschaft*]. Also, its inhabitants are no longer "obedience-subjects" but "achievement-subjects". They are entrepreneurs of themselves".

We are living in the age of certificate hoarding. It is common for the achievement-subject to associate self-mastery with excelling within work conditions that demand an extravagance of these occupational testimonials. These credentials disclose an individual's constant pursuit of growth, which is obviously a bearing on capitalist production. Neoliberalism is impatient with everything that is inefficient and slow; its system is invigorated by constant hyperactivity (Barte 2025, 80). It needs subjects to be consistently compliant with its insistence on productivity. However, is this pursuit entirely different from what Nietzsche refers to as slave morality? Does growth within the contexts of neoliberalism accurately exemplify what he refers to as the master?

Nietzsche (1956) said that slave morality is hostile to its own nature. It requires an external factor for it to produce action; all its actions are merely reactive to the external. The slave lacks enough sovereignty to affirm itself. In case the slave defines its notion of

power, it only conceives of power as an object of recognition (Deleuze 1983, 10). Though neoliberalism establishes positions of power based on the previously mentioned conception of growth, these positions should not be confused with Nietzsche's will to power, but are merely a representation of power. Such representation perfectly describes the reactiveness of slave morality and systematically compels subjects to remain inferior and dominated by the systemic demand for productivity.

The imperative to achieve is the precept of contemporary labour to regulate human behaviour. The labourer who does nothing but work lacks sovereignty. Its strife for achievement becomes its reaction to the very system which dominates it.

> In reality, it is not the excess of responsibility and initiative that makes one sick, but the imperative to achieve: the new *commandment* of late-modern labour society. […] In fact, Nietzsche would say that that human type in the process of becoming reality en masse is no sovereign superman but "the last man", who does nothing but work. The new human type, standing exposed to excessive positivity without any defence, lacks all sovereignty. (Han 2015, 10)

In the case of the ruling elites, Deleuze (1983) clarified that the master does not perceive situations dialectically because dialectical thought is the slave's way of thinking. How do rulers think dialectically then? Firstly, the ruler in the current labour setting is reactive to neoliberalism's established values. It embodies these values and develops confidence from it. Secondly, it celebrates these values as objects of recognition and therefore attributes itself to these established values. Its urge for domination is dialectical in nature as well. This is why Ezema and his colleagues' portrayal of Nietzsche's master is ultimately mistaken because the master does not think in dialectical terms.

In addition, Deleuze used the word *dominant* to describe the active force not in relation to the *dominated,* but is complemented by an internal will which affirms itself (Deleuze 1983, 51). The act of domination depends on an external factor, which is its relationship with those perceived as dominated. For this reason, the act of *ruling*

in the case of late-modern labour construes the master in dialectical relations with the slave, and is a relational model produced by the slave's way of thinking. Such an act is a product of internalising the exploited representation of power. As Nietzsche himself claimed, a plethora of institutions are predominated by mechanisms where the sick exhibits some form of superiority and exercise tyranny over the strong (Nietzsche 1956, 260). The true master affirms himself and does not recognise his position as a negation to the slave (Bolaños 2014, 14). Thus, interpreting the master as a dominator of slaves is a bad reading of Nietzsche's master.

> Flee, my friend, into your solitude: I see you stung by poisonous flies. Flee to where the raw, rough breeze blows!
>
> Flee into your solitude! You have lived too near the small and the pitiable men. Flee from their hidden vengeance! Towards you, they are nothing but vengeance.
>
> No longer lift your arm against them! They are innumerable, and it is not your fate to be a fly-swat. (Nietzsche 1969, 79)

Contrary to the claim that the master and the slave are two juxtaposed types of human beings (Ezema, Areji, & Ohubuenyi 2017, 265), I propose that they are rather forces which can transpire at any position. In fact, Han pointed out that our present society creates conditions where an individual can become both a slave and master to himself; the master has become the labouring slave (Han 2015, 19). This means that the forces causing one into becoming what Nietzsche portrays as either a master or a slave are fluid and multiple. In my understanding, this explains why Deleuze transitioned in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* from using the master-slave relational model to utilising the terms *active* and *reactive* forces to represent the two modes, especially because the idea of the master and the slave can indefinitely be dialectical. As Deleuze himself stated, "Moreover, the relation of master and slave is not, in itself, dialectical. Who is the dialectician, who dialectises the relationship? It is the slave, the slave's perspective" (Deleuze 1983, 10). Unlike master-slave relations, which can easily identify an individual as

either a master or a slave, active and reactive forces can dynamically and simultaneously manifest within a single individual.

2. Beyond the Dialectics of Rest and Struggle

Active and reactive forces are evaluative modes that represent two different ways of seeing life (Bolaños 2014, 16). Deleuze begins his account of these two forces by distinguishing the concept of force from the concept of will. Forces, he explains, are inherently victorious; their interactions always involve relations of dominance in which the stronger force prevails over the weaker. However, determining which position of force is considered higher or greater requires prior evaluation. This is why the notion of a victorious force cannot stand alone and must be complemented by an internal will, which serves as the force's evaluative framework (Deleuze 1983, 49).

Will, by contrast, functions as the differential and generative principle of force (Deleuze 1983, 7). This means that the evaluation and differentiation of forces that make the *will to power* possible originates from will itself. As Deleuze explains, "Force is what can, will to power is what wills" (Deleuze 1983, 50). Yet he also cautions that the danger of becoming reactive emerges from confusing force with will. An example of this includes the nihilistic characteristic of certain scientific perspectives, which interpret phenomena from the petty side of reactions (Deleuze 1983, 45). In fields of Biology or Psychology, for instance, the organism is habitually described in terms of reactive forces – reducing it to its nutrition, reproduction, conservation, and adaptation, which are all essentially reactive functions (Deleuze 1983, 41). This happens because confusing force with will leads to the reduction of force into a mere mechanism. Mechanistic thinking perceives final states as identical with initial states, which reduces differences into undifferentiated states (Deleuze 1983, 46). Similarly, Psychopathology obeys the same logic

by interpreting symptoms as undifferentiated states that appear identically across individuals diagnosed with the same disorder, which is why the field's acumen recognises each classified pathology as a repetition of the same symptoms.

Based on these points, active force can be defined as that which reaches out for power (Nietzsche 2017, 371). Nietzsche's notion of power should not be conflated with modernity's reactive representations of power. Whereas the neoliberal figure of the 'master' derives authority from achievement and validation, the truly active force is one that commands and affirms itself from within. On the other hand, the inferior force, that is the reactive force, is characterised by being subjugated from its obedience to another force. This dynamic between active-reactive forces is visibly expressed in contemporary performance-oriented culture through the opposition between rest and struggle, which this essay seeks to explore.

Revisualizing Deleuze's active and reactive forces in the forms of rest and struggle is conducive to developing a critique against the emerging opposition between the concept of rest and the concept of struggle. This emerging view on the rest-struggle dynamic produced a new dialectical relationship between mediocrity and excellence in the age of achievement. It progressed into a new reactive model of the master and the slave, wherein the subject is always compelled to 'work under pressure'. Otherwise, the subject is denominated as a loser.

> Today's society is no longer Foucault's disciplinary world of hospitals, madhouses, prisons, barracks, and factories. It has long been replaced by another regime, namely a society of fitness studios, office towers, banks, airports, shopping malls, and genetic laboratories. […]
>
> Disciplinary society is still governed by *no*. Its negativity produces madmen and criminals. In contrast, achievement society creates depressives and losers. (Han 2015, 8-9)

The achievement-oriented society bastardised Nietzsche's famous line in *Twilight of the Idols*, "What does not kill me, makes me

stronger", which operates on the pressure to remain positive regardless of the circumstance (Reyes 2025, 236-237). This utilises the dogma of the *growth mindset* to define excellence based on a subject's ability to optimistically endure any struggle it confronts. However, this conventional dogma fails to differentiate the form of struggle which liberates from the one that suppresses. It falls under the presumption that all forms of struggle are active, encouraging individuals to be fascinated by the *hustle culture* as a new form of subjugation.

While Han pointed out that the achievement-subject is free from any external domination forcing it to work (Han 2015, 11), the embedded compulsion in an achievement-oriented system is still an external mode of control that has been internalised by the achievement-subject. I completely agree with Han when he said that this system creates an auto-exploitation (a situation wherein the achievement-subject exploits itself from the feeling of freedom in maximising achievement) based on excess work and performance, but I differ from his claim that external domination has disappeared. The compulsive freedom that comes from this auto-exploitation is still a product of domination relative to the concept of reactive force. This is how the *hustle culture* became an exploited definition of excellence.

Additionally, the inefficiency of inactivity is considered unproductive and time-consuming in an era of hustle. As Han stated:

> Contemplation is opposed to production. Contemplation engages with what is unavailable yet already given. […]
>
> The compulsion to be active, to produce and to perform leads to breathlessness. Under the weight of their own doings, humans suffocate. (Han 2024, 32-34)

Resting is too inefficient to be a favourable ground for social control. Its delays are seen as counterproductive by neoliberalism's aspiration to optimise the accelerated accumulation of capital. But similar to the act of generalising all forms of struggle as active, the

neoliberal reduction of rest and inactivity into what is considered reactive, due to its inefficiency to the system, deserves to be elaborated further. Why? Because it is equally mistaken to presume that all forms of rest are good. "We are losing the sense for the kind of inactivity that is not an incapability, not a refusal, not just the absence of activity but a capacity in itself" (Han 2024, 7). Though not stated explicitly, Han's creative view of rest, as a form of inactivity, should be regarded as an active force that can be contrasted to a reactive type of rest based on incapability and escape.

By distinguishing the active and reactive forms of both rest and struggle, this essay aims to elaborate on their differences. Exploring this differentiation allows us to overcome the rest-struggle dialectic and understand rest and struggle in ways that are not merely defined by becoming derivatives of work. Only by discerning whether our rest and struggle arise from active rather than reactive forces can we begin to regain the rhythm of our own respiration – of what it truly means *to breathe* whenever we cherish rest and endure struggle.

3. Rest, Respiration, and Sabbath

"The silence of God resounds as chaos, as we have grown unable to breathe at the rhythm of our own respiration, which has been captured by the apocalyptic force of the algorithm of financial capitalism". (Berardi 2018, 46). The pace of our breathing is surmounted by capitalist production to the extent that our definition of rest has become derivative of it. This excerpt from Berardi's *Breathing* poetically communicates the profane redefinition of rest in contemporary society.

In the Jewish tradition, the practice of Sabbath requires the suspension of economic life to give way to genuine festivity (Han 2024, 8). It opens the opportunity for contemplative rest, which, similar to the Seventh Day of Creation, is an appreciation of life and the world. For contemplation to be possible during the Sabbath, it requires silence, because only through it can true listening be

possible. This is the reason why Sabbath is considered a festival of rest and reflection (Han 2020, 37).

In contrast, capitalism strips the festival of its contemplative essence by reducing it to a mere spectacle. In the Philippines, for instance, San Miguel Corporation transforms traditional Filipino *fiestas* into commercial spaces – subjugating premises with branded tents, advertisements, and the sale of their alcoholic beverages to increase their revenue and promotion. These events are amplified through sponsored concerts that draw crowds into these spaces, effectively turning native fiestas into a commodified spectacle. Given this, capitalism never rests and despises silence because they decelerate the production process; instead, it thrives on the provocation of expression and the pandemonium. Although expression is often understood as a sign of freedom, and silence as a form of repression, Deleuze would have argued otherwise. In this specific situation, expression is both reactive and compulsive.

> It's not a problem of getting people to express themselves but of providing little gaps of solitude and silence in which they might eventually find something to say. Repressive forces don't stop people expressing themselves but rather force them to express themselves. (Deleuze 1997, 176)

That is why rest is an essential element of a genuine festival, since both rest and festival emerge from silence and contemplation. On the Sabbath, it is through this same silence that a person cultivates both discernment and sensitivity toward others. The symbolism of God's rest on the seventh day does not simply imply recovery from his work in the past six days; rather, rest is his nature (Han 2020, 36). The concept of rest originates from a separate ontotheology compared to work since the former is originally sacred, and the latter, profane (Han 2020, 38). Yet neoliberal capitalism eliminates the boundary between sacred and profane by totalizing production in all areas of life, and therefore subordinating rest to its mandates (Han 2020, 43).

Finally, when capitalism succeeds in subordinating rest to its notion of work, free time is reductively defined in relation to the

demands of capitalist labour. This results in a dialectic relationship between leisure and work; temporality becomes confined within the boundaries of the two. Leisure time outside working hours becomes the only remaining time to be spent. The expenditure of such a time either degrades into a means of escape from or recovery for work. While neoliberalism is more permissive of recovery that serves to restore productivity, it condemns any act of escape as mediocrity. Worse still, those who persistently demand recovery are subjected to the same denomination. Here, the compulsion to work is imminent; free time is only perceived as a derivative of productivity. The pressure to perform quietly persists even within moments of rest as the performance-subject remains preoccupied with the anticipation of work.

Nietzsche expressed a similar critique against the compulsion of what he called *unrestrained labour* in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. He said that those who cherish such labour 'endure themselves ill' and further remarked: "If you believed more in life, you would devote yourselves less to the moment. But you have insufficient capacity for waiting – or even for laziness" (Nietzsche 1969, 73). He implicitly considers *waiting* and *laziness* as active forces in contrast to unrestrained labour, therefore aligning with Han's assertion that delay and inactivity can become modes of intensity. The intensity of rest contemporary society fails to cultivate is the experience of stable, meaningful respiration resonating beyond the structures of work and production. "We no longer know the holy, festive calmness that unites intensity of life with contemplation, and is still able to unite them even when intensity of life grows into exuberance" (Han 2024, 7). Thus, we arrive at a distinction between active rest exemplified by the Sabbath and its reactive form, which transpires through leisure.

Was Nietzsche against the practice of Sabbath? His attack on the Sabbath in *Beyond Good and Evil* is directed towards the reactive return to an undifferentiated final unity that eliminates the disturbances residing within all of us (Nietzsche 1997, 66). The Hanian Sabbath, on the other hand, proposes an active affirmation

of life in the face of the slave morality which neoliberalism hegemonises. Hence, the Nietzschean critique of Sabbath and the Hanian discourse on contemplative rest are not contradictory but two conjunctive states that embody active forces. "Everything among them speaks, no one knows any longer how to understand" (Nietzsche 1969, 203-204).

4. Breathing at The Rhythm of Chaos

The famous line "To live is to suffer; to survive is to find meaning in suffering" is often misattributed to Nietzsche. In fact, he never wrote this as it originates from Gordon Allport's preface to Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning* (Frankl 1963, xi). Although the sentiment of this quotation can sometimes resonate with certain aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy, popular interpretations circumventing the quote tend to universalise suffering across all kinds of struggle; this does not truthfully reflect his Dionysian view of tragedy. Such bad readings mislead people into thinking that Nietzsche advocates an unconditional submission to anything that causes pain. But bad conscience, as interiorization of guilt and accusation, produces pain from turning against oneself (Deleuze 1983, 128-129). His philosophy may oftentimes contain wisdom found in suffering and self-overcoming; however, transforming these into repetitive mechanisms of control and passivity is an entirely different matter. As he pointed out in *The Gay Science*:

> I abhor all those moralities which say: "Do not do this! Renounce! Overcome yourself!" But I am well disposed toward those moralities which goad me to do something and do it again, from morning till evening, and then to dream of it at night, and to think nothing except doing this *well*, as well as *I* alone can do it. When one lives like that, one thing after another that simply does not belong to such a life drops off. (Nietzsche 1974, 244)

Neoliberal capitalism conditions individuals into believing that refusing to submit to the struggles caused by the imperative to work

is equivalent to refusing growth itself. In this case, it has subordinated both rest and growth. Nietzsche, however, describes this reduced notion of growth as a form of obedience to a limited trajectory of human development. He refers to it as the 'moral hypocrisy of the commanding class', rooted in the herd-instinct of bad conscience which they impose upon themselves before presuming to command others (Nietzsche 1997, 65). This moral hypocrite, which in his vocabulary is the 'gregarious man', represents a false image of power because it preserves and empowers itself *via* conforming to institutional demands either by performing its authoritative functions or by displaying its glorified traits, so that it appears desirable within the system that legitimises it. In this context, the notion of growth deceivingly represses the performance-subject and is something Nietzsche had always been roughly cautious of.

On the other hand, his notion of Dionysian tragedy represents active, cathartic struggle in the sense that it affirms chance and multiplicity. Deleuze's dicethrow deliberately represents such affirmation by differentiating the life-typologies of the bad and the good player. The dicethrow fails because the bad player throws the dice several times to probabilistically reproduce a desirable combination. The good player, however, throws the dice as a pure affirmation of all chances at once, not as a final winning combination, but as the fatal combination that is inherent in chaos (Reyes 2025, 142). Cathartic pain emerges from the relationship between the limited human condition and the multiplicity of chaos, not from the inward gloom of bad conscience.

In Nietzsche's philosophy, growth is the becoming of 'a new health, stronger, more seasoned, tougher, more audacious, and gayer than any previous health', which he described as an unknown territory whose boundaries nobody has surveyed yet, and is an expression of benevolence that might often appear inhuman (Nietzsche 1974, 346-347). It means the abandonment of rigidification by plunging oneself into the void of all identity. Such an idea of growth greatly differs from the pain of burnout and

exhaustion experienced by the achievement-subject, because excellence in the achievement society is a byproduct of bad conscience. Consequently, inactivity and unproductiveness relative to the demands of capitalist work become a source of guilt. It reproduces the same compulsion (and pleasure) to work, which is merely an internalisation of standardised control mechanisms.

The active form of struggle cannot be created by what Nietzsche calls the 'tyrant of reason' who considers stupidity (narrowing of perspectives) as a condition of life and development (Nietzsche 1997, 58). In the sense of the dicethrow, this is the tyranny of a winning combination that is meant to deny chance and multiplicity. An ideology becomes a source of domination that standardises thought. Educators, for instance, may practice a tyrannical approach by subordinating students to their preferred ideologies. Such tyranny limits the event of chance through compelling students to function based on the bad conscience of their teacher. It diminishes multiplicity by reducing the quantity of possibilities, especially the chances of disagreement and disobedience among students. What students fail to encounter here is chaos, which Berardi refers to as the irreducible chaos transpiring beyond the borders of our established order (Berardi 2018, 41).

> It is as if the *struggle against chaos* does not take place without an affinity with the enemy, because another struggle develops and takes on more importance– the struggle *against opinion*, which claims to protect us from chaos itself. (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, 221).

On the contrary, genuine growth cannot be established upon the compulsion to function. The good teacher, as per the dicethrow, develops different conditions that preserve chance and multiplicity – expanding the students' ability to learn from and interact with the organic uncertainty of the world. Students, in this case, may misunderstand their teacher or one another, and this is simply a natural part of human development. Students are even allowed to criticise their teacher's opinions about the dicethrow, or perhaps to come into conflict with one another, because the good teacher

knows that true development emerges from the pains of multiplicity. It prepares students to breathe and vibrate at the same rhythm as chaos – to harmonise better with the fluctuations of the real world.

5. A Conjunction Between Rest and Struggle

In neoliberal capitalism, slave morality manifests in the forms of revenge, compulsory growth, and passive pleasure. Revenge *via* ressentiment emerges from the impotence to respond to pain; therefore, "experience a desire for revenge, and, by a process of generalisation, would want to take this out on the whole world" (Deleuze 1983, 115-117). This originates from the inability to take action, which ends up turning their misfortune into something mediocre. An active force does not wage war with mediocrity; instead, it sees what is beautiful and necessary in them (Nietzsche 1974, 223).

> It is the sign of strong, rich temperaments that they cannot for long take seriously their enemies, their misfortunes, their *misdeeds*; for such characters have in them an excess of plastic curative power, and also a power of oblivion. (Nietzsche 1956, 173).

Additionally, ressentiment can also refer to the means that make revenge possible. As Deleuze stated, "We have not understood *ressentiment* if we only see it as a *desire* for revenge, a desire to rebel and triumph" (Deleuze 1983, 116). Deleuze himself clarified that the topological principle of ressentiment is a state of reactive forces that no longer allow themselves to act – that deny themselves. In alignment with the bad conscience which made compulsive growth possible, the internalisation of achievement and excellence founded on external control is thus another process of ressentiment. It essentially embodies the decadence in slave morality. "The vain person rejoices over every good opinion which he hears about himself", Nietzsche wrote, "just as he suffers from every bad opinion: for he subjects himself to both" (Nietzsche 1997, 130).

Lastly, the experience of pleasure in the previously discussed process of ressentiment is passive and is Nietzsche's reason for criticising Sabbath. "[…] in utter contrast to what is called happiness among the impotent and oppressed, who are full of bottled-up aggressions. Their happiness is purely passive and takes the form of drugged tranquillity, stretching and yawning, peace, 'sabbath', emotional slackness" (Nietzsche 1956, 172). Nietzsche, however, affirms the contemplative character of Han's Sabbath, seeing it as a counterpoint to the growing restlessness that defines modernity in his time. In *Human, All Too Human,* he likened this restlessness to 'swarm about like wasps and bees' and 'seasons followed each other too quickly', which brings modern civilisation into a new kind of barbarism (Nietzsche 2024, 173).

From a dialectical perspective, rest and struggle may appear as opposing forces trapped in constant conflict, producing the opposition between mediocrity and excellence. The conjunction between Han's Sabbath and Nietzsche's Dionysian tragedy suggests that these forces are not opposites, but rather intensities capable of actively enforcing organic growth. They emerge as two among the multiple possible ways human life can affirm itself through rest and struggle beyond the reactive structures of neoliberalism. Our real task now is not to choose between rest and struggle, but to actively create the conditions under which each may arise actively, as well as simultaneously. Creating such conditions, *i.e.* territories that transform subjugated spaces into means through which active forces may flow, will allow us to finally breathe according to the rhythm of the world.

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MODAL SEMANTICS OF THOUGHT EXPERIMENTS. TE MATRIX AND PWS

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Abstract: In this paper, we discuss a couple of nonclassical logics and their application in the analysis and interpretation of thought experiments (TE, e.g. Tamar Gendler, Roy Sorensen, Ronald Laymon), particularly modal logic. After discussing pros and cons (e.g. W. Van O. Quine) of modal logic, we opt for Saul Kripke's frame semantics, possibly described as possible world semantics (PWS), involving a set of (possible) worlds, considered as abstract entities (e.g. Kit Fine 2017), as pictured by search engines like Google and Baidu, an accessibility relation, and a satisfiability relation. On retaining principle of bivalence, we provide for underpinnings of the methodology of TE Matrix, whereby the possible worlds (PW) of TE arguments (premises and conclusions) pick out accessible PW (as from axioms to principles) unto the argument is both formally and informally logically validated (*i.e.* logical inference is valid, premises and conclusions are true—so, argument is sound) and we don't need to prescribe any forcing formal validation function (*Descriptive Semantics View*).

Keywords: semantics, thought experiments (TE), TE matrix, plausibility logic, modal logic, possible world

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, we discuss modal logic, opponents, proponents, Saul Kripke's frame semantics and proposal of a descriptive (vs. prescriptive) semantics including a set of possible worlds (PW, pictured as a search engine like Google or Baidu), accessibility relation and satisfiability relation, as in their application to analyses

and interpretations of thought experiments (TE, *e.g.* Tamar Gendler, Roy Sorensen, Ronald Laymon), particularly, TE Matrix, a TE typical notation indicating (as by bracketing), first, that formulas represent thoughts, propositions—not facts nor states of affairs in reality—and, second, that TE are not formally valid arguments yet but still incomplete, unfinished, elliptical arguments or enthymemes. On retaining principle of bivalence[1], application of TE Matrices may involve a procedure of some steps, of which the last one is a formally valid and sound argument that can do without brackets. TE steps may include $[TE]_{RS}$, or TE in a restricted sense, $[TE]_{BS}$, or TE in a broad sense, unto $[TE]_{EX}$, or extended TE. Examples are many, e.g. Descartes's *Cogito* (see Hertogh 2016), mathematical TE, such as (Archimede's) *Proof of Surface Area of Sphere* and Euler's *0.999… Equals 1* (*see* Hertogh 2021a), Einstein's *Elevator* (*see* Hertogh 2024a).

Opponents of Modal Logic

It should be noted that there are philosophers who don't use modal logic because they think, *e.g.,* it is not a transparent or coherent methodology or apparatus.

W.V. Quine (a/o) restricts logic to extensional logic, and Ch 6 of *Word and Object* describes his 'flight from modality'. When one could expect realist modal entities, such as David Lewis's, to be cut away by Occam's razor, Quine's account seems rather moderate and directed against extreme sense of necessity as analyticity (e.g. necessarily $9 > 4 =$ '$9 > 4$' is analytic) (Quine 1960, 196) and quantification in modal logic (debate with Ruth Barcan Marcus, *see* Marcus 1990). Nevertheless, logical modalities are seen as 'obscure idioms', associated with 'illustrations of opacity', necessity, an unconditional and impersonal 'absolute mode of truth', necessary and contingent related to 'venerable' but 'surely indefensible' distinctions as essence and accident, internal and external relation.

> In any event, I feel that the best claim of modal logic upon our attention is rather as a by- product of positing propositions than as a purpose of positing them. (Quine 1960, 202)

Quine seems to adhere to logical modalities as necessarily and possibly as some sort of propositional attitudes, but eventually he decides to dispense with intensional objects altogether.

Though accepted and applied by many logicians and philosophers nowadays, encyclopaedias as *Wikipedia* still list modal logics (including binary truth value functions) and many-valued logics (as probability logic including truth values of any real number between 0 and 1) as nonclassical or nonstandard logics, restricting classical logic to Aristotle's theory of syllogisms, Boolean logic and Gottlob Frege's first-order predicate calculus, classical logic 'reached fruition' in Bertrand Russell, A. N. Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico Philosophicus*'[2].

Since modal TE can be considered part of metaphysics, we may include Transformation Rules or Substitution Theses to the TE Matrix, whereby cumbersome, controversial or opaque TE can be replaced by non-TE experiments or non-TE, nonmodal analogues, examples and arguments (*see* Hertogh 2015a, Chap. 16 *TE Matrix and TR/ST*, specifically TR2/ST2 and TR3/ST3).

How Modal Logic Hooks Upon the World

Many analytical philosophers have developed modal logics, such as C.I. Lewis (S1 - S5), David Lewis and Rudolf Carnap. In Wittgenstein, there are a couple of proposals on possibility. Carnap's proposal is said to come close to Kripke's.

We will discuss the issue for the same reasons as we discuss and accept the existence of I and God, that is, these notions are common usage not just in our Western societies but in societies all over the world, and are related to institutions and communities of believers.

E.g. believers in the I may read or study psychology, visit psychologists, and so on, believers in God may visit churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, etc. Believers in probability and statistics may be eager to read statistics on topics of their interest, e.g., go and see the blockbuster movie of the season, purchase the latest computer model X because it was proven to be the best one in recent market research, etc.

These considerations are on a par with the semantics of natural language that join ideals of logical calculi and 'theoretical languages' (Carnap) to ordinary language philosophy.

The existence of entities as I, God and possibilities are presupposed and mentioned in laws and constitutions allover the world as right on pursuit of happiness (as related to issue of pain in consciousness studies), freedom of practicing one's (as related to religious thought experiments RTE), right on (statistical) information, personal freedom as concerning choice of lifestyles, cultures etc.

In most countries, the government is selected by use of statistical methods, such as counting of votes and the President is considered the best available politician on purely quantitative grounds as having received the highest number of votes. Next to this factuality, citizens are free to agree or disagree, assent or dissent, assemble and disassemble, have personal lifestyles and preferences, dreams and fears, but we should add, if and only if these are not fascist, racist, sexist, etc.[3]

Next to societal reasons, there is evidence from evolutionary biology, psychology and cognitive science that supports modal reasoning, e.g. Nicolas Rescher introducing his logical account of TE like this:

> In intellectual regards, *homo sapiens* is an amphibian who can live and function in two different realms—the domain of actual fact, which we can investigate in observational inquiry, and the domain of imaginative projection, which we can explore in thought through reasoning. This second ability becomes crucially important for the first as well. (Rescher 1991, 310)

The realm of imagination consists of objective and subjective imagination. We include the former, objective imagination (or OI), in modal logical analyses as collective popular and academic imagery of a culture, possibly part of or additional to conceptual schemes (Quine 1951/1980, Davidson 1974), webs of belief (Quine and Ullian 1978), etc. We think of mass-produced imagery as after Walter Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1936/1968), which is about mechanically reproducible processes, such as photographs and movies, preferably global cross-cultural images and concepts, that occur in more than just one culture. Objective imagination consists of a corpus of narratologies and visualisations of a culture, which may account for the main additional features of TE.

Also subjective imagination is part of our modal logic, as we don't prescribe a finite set of PW (for **W**) and allow for unspecified accessibility relations (R).

Saul Kripke's Frame Semantics

The preface to Saul Kripke's 1980 *Naming and Necessity* explains his 1970 Princeton University lectures on correct and incorrect conceptions of PW (possible worlds). In the next quotes from pages on relation to probability, Kripke calls on an example, in fact a TE from experience[4], from statistics, throwing two dice A and B and describes PW as an idealisation and abstract entities like the main features we have identified in TE.

> I will say something briefly about 'possible worlds' (…). In the present monograph, I argued against those misuses of the concept that regard possible worlds as something like a distant planet, like our own surroundings, but somehow existing in a different dimension, or that lead to spurious problems of 'transworld identification'. (Kripke 1980, 15)

> An analogy from school—in fact, it is not merely an analogy—will help to clarify my view. Two ordinary dice (call them die A and die B) are thrown (…). The thirty-six possible states of the dice are literally thirty-six 'possible

> worlds', as long as we (fictively) ignore everything about the world except the two dice and what they show (and ignore the fact that one or both dice might not have existed). Only one of these miniworlds—the one corresponding to the way the dice in fact come up—is the 'actual world', but the others are of interest when we ask how probable or improbable the actual outcome was (or will be). (Kripke 1980, 16)
>
> The thirty-six possibilities, the one that is actual included, are (abstract) *states* of the dice, not complex physical entities. (Kripke 1980, 17)
>
> 'Possible worlds' are little more than the miniworlds of school probability blown large. (…) A practical description of the extent to which the 'counterfactual situation' differs in the relevant way from the actual facts is sufficient; the 'counterfactual situation' could be thought of as a miniworld or a ministate, restricted to features of the world relevant to the problem at hand. (Kripke 1980, 18)
>
> There is nothing wrong in principle with taking these [possible worlds], for philosophical or for technical purposes, as (abstract) entities. (…) The notion of a 'possible world', though it has its roots in various ordinary ideas of ways the world might have been, comes at a much greater, and subsequent, level of abstraction. In practice, no one who cannot understand the idea of possibility is likely to understand that of a 'possible world' either. (Kripke 1980, 19 incl. n18)

Kit Fine (2017) adds: "[t]he abstract approach to modal logic championed by Kripke's early work (in which possible worlds are simply regarded as arbitrary points rather than as models or sets of sentences) has been a great boon to the formal development of modal logic"[5], explaining about truth maker semantics:

> It should be noted that our approach to states is highly general and abstract. We have formed no particular conception of what they are, nor have we assumed that there are 'atomic' states, from which all other states can be obtained by fusion. Nearly all of the existing literature on the topic has failed to adopt such a neutral perspective. Thus, states are often identified with sets of possible worlds (where the worlds themselves might be identified with sets of sentences), or it is assumed that all states are constructed from atomic states which are somehow isomorphic with the atomic sentences of the language under consideration. (…) Nothing is gained by this lack of generality or abstraction, and a great deal is lost. For one thing, the particular identifications or assumptions may not be appropriate in certain contexts. (…) The technical development of the subject also requires a more abstract approach. For one

> will want to perform certain constructions on state spaces (forming product spaces, for example, or congruent spaces) in which the special identifications of or restrictions on the original spaces are lost.

As with regard to application to analyses and interpretations of TE, we will consider PW theoretical constructs, that is, theories and arguments and their constituents as propositions, presuppositions, premises, conclusions, axioms, theorems, derivations, regularities, laws, properties of theories, epistemological and scientific principles.

As all parts of a TE are abstract or modal, we propose to bracket all of the TE argument in TE Matrices instead of having only the TE minor preceded by, e.g., a diamond operator as in hypothetical, counterfactual, etc. analyses (Häggqvist 2009). In both features of idealisation and abstract entities, PW are close to our basic theory of TE (*see* Hertogh 2021a on mathematical thought experiments MTE). If more qualitative aspects are at stake, PW can be additionally pictured with the help of narratology and visualisations.

Kripke's quote on page 17 may be directed against David Lewis's realist ontology of PW, and the quote from page 15 may possibly argue against TE as *Twin Earth*, *Doppelgangers*, *Twins*.

Pictured as abstract entities, PW subsume firstly under the category of *Symbolic TE*; PW are quite consistent with conceptions of theoretical constructs. Qualitative properties are added in *Indexical* and *Iconic TE* (*see* Hertogh 2015a), and sometimes they are reduced to modal-logical possibilities by thought experiment philosophers like Robert Kirk and David Chalmers (*see* Kirk 1974a,b and Chalmers 1996). *Zombie Replica* and *Zombie World,* when zombies are defined from "[t]he conceivability argument for the possibility of zombies", as in Kirk 2023 (*see* also Hertogh 2023a, and e.g. Gendler and Hawthorne 2002 on conceivability and possibility).

MODAL SEMANTICS

We will now turn to the underpinnings of modal assessments of TE

arguments, although modal TE arguments are rather rare. We propose some possible changes to available proposals of modal semantics, and in the next sections, we discuss usual elements of frame semantics <W,R,|=> on a descriptive (instead of prescriptive) semantic interpretation.

We guess a descriptive semantics is needed that is in accordance with natural languages, conceptual schemes, webs of belief and (advanced, fundamental, and applied) scientific developments, as well as our semantics don't enclose, nor imply a prescriptive set of (P)W, accessibility relation R or truth functional validation interpretation (apart from satisfiability relation "|=").

Descriptive Semantics

Even though we use terminology of frame semantics and Kripke's PWS, our treatment of TE remains within descriptive semantics; that is to say, we withhold from prescriptive truth-functional interpretations.

Our semantics are descriptive as mediated by available and accessible intermediary PW instead of a prescribed valuation or validation function. The intermediary PW can relate again to the actual world, whereby a particular disputable proposition as a TE premise may be satisfied.

A disadvantage of descriptive semantics may be the intermediary step of intermediary PW, while in daily reality a TE is as direct, arises as spontaneous, as any other thought, although quite often, even in real-life conversation, it is introduced by a TE indicator (like 'imagine', 'consider', etc.).

This disadvantage, however, hardly weighs against the obvious disadvantages of prescribed semantics that can't really be considered a scientific account of natural language or reasoning. Truth value prescriptions are a part of formal logic that may cause criticisms of authoritarianism, dogmatism, otherworldliness, being out of touch with reality, and so on.

Also in descriptive semantics, we can assign truth values in a metalanguage, like this:

[1]
Suppose
<W, R, |=> triple of set of PW, accessibility Relation, satisfaction relation

w_0 actual world
φ proposition variable
Metalanguage
T True
F False (not True)
= $=_{\text{truth value}}$

$w_0 \models \varphi$ $\varphi_{w0} = T$, $\varphi = T_{w0}$, φ is true in the actual world, exists in w_0
$w_0 \models \neg \varphi$ $\varphi_{w0} = F$, $\varphi = F_{w0}$, φ is false in the actual world, does not exist in w_0

This vocabulary is, of course, too complex for nonmodal statements, where we can keep on using nonmodal logic and don't have to relate propositions to any PW.

[1] is an example that shows how truth values T and F can be assigned to modal PWS propositions in these K(-like) semantics without any additional formal validation interpretation, except possibly the equality sign "=", which wants to say "=truth value", e.g., "φ = T" signifies the truth value of φ is T(rue), which is part of the metalanguage.

Our research is only about TE, and we have given some examples of how to analyse modal TE applying modal K semantics in previous publications (particularly Hertogh 2023a on *Zombies*).

Descriptive semantics may be in need of some more explanation, and we will give an example of how to analyse and interpret fictional entities. As we will see, it depends on how we define our relevant concepts.

In a statement like:

There are flying humanoids. (1)

The predicate 'flying humanoids' can be satisfied by PW of fictional entities, myths, religious imagery, etc., but probably not by the actual

world, unless it is a mediated actual world in fiction, as when the sentence is from a fictional discourse.

The concept of flying humanoid is rather abstract and general, but it satisfies the *global cross-cultural thesis*, since it can be exemplified in more than one way, in more than just one culture. It can be pictured by, e.g., attributes like wings as in Western cultures, or (invisible) *qi* (气) as in Chinese cultures. We exclude from the property flying of flying humanoids any possible help of external attributes, objects, like broomsticks, magical carpets (Arabic and Indian cultures), and aeroplanes in contemporary (post)modern culture.

(1) is grammatical, makes sense, etc., because of satisfaction in PW of fictional entities, but as none of this set is satisfied by reality, the statement itself is considered false.

This is a usual analytical interpretation of (1).

On analysis:

[2]
Suppose
<W, R, |=> set of PW, accessibility Relation, satisfaction relation
w_0 actual world
w_1 PW of fictional entities
FHx x is a Flying Humanoid, being a Flying Humanoid

$\exists x\, FHx$ there are flying humanoids
$w_1 |= \exists x\, FHx \wedge w_0 |= \neg FHx$

This analysis depends on the definition of the actual world. Usually it is (mesolevel of) Planet Earth, but in this case it is relevant if it is Planet Earth in a mere physical sense, or a humane Earth including conceptual schemes, webs of belief, objective imagination (OI), etc.

The formula is false (not true) in the mere physical actual world (w_0), but the same formula can be true in a broad humane sense of w_0, say, w_{OI}, where w_{OI} includes objective imagination, of which flying humanoids are a traditional element.

On additional analysis

[3]
Suppose
w_{OI} actual world including OI (objective imagination)
$w_{OI} \models \exists x\, FHx$

On this analysis, (1) is true. This analysis is usual in semiotics, and analytical philosophy has already been extended to enclose intensions next to extensions, analytical analogues of resp. connotation and denotation.

Nevertheless, we will hold on to postanalytical analyses where the existence of fictional entities, such as flying humanoids, can be expressed by stipulation of $w_{OI,}$ but the criterion of real existence remains satisfaction by the actual world w_0.

So, we conclude the next formula for (1)

[4]
$w_{OI} \models \exists x\, FHx \wedge w_0 \models \neg\, FHx$

Please note that the logical analyses don't only depend on the definition of the actual world but also on the definition of a flying humanoid. When including aeroplanes, the statement is satisfied in the actual world, too, and we don't need OI to decide upon its intensional truth value. Furthermore, when someone or something exists in the actual world, she/he/it also exists in w_{OI}.

We suppose—possibly with Yablo—that if there are any disagreements about statements on fictional entities or any other entities, conceptual analyses are a first device for resolving conflicting interpretations.

We may conclude with reference to PhD thesis, Hertogh 2015a, 301 (Section 10.3.3). Descriptive Semantics View (DSV): We remain within descriptive semantics by avoiding unnecessary and possibly overcomplex detailing of methods, as by stipulation of finite sets of (P)W, accessibility relations R and validation functions. In this way we are able to account for the richness of natural language, conceptual schemes, objective imagination etc. and, thus, we allow for a(n) (near-)infinite set of PW and don't specify accessibility relations in advance (as to include subjective imagination as in the

field of language, use of metaphors, personifications etc. that may give sense to sentences that were traditionally considered nonsensical).

Prescriptive semantics is in need of adjustments and criticisms from descriptive semantics, quoting from Carnap's 1950 *Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology*:

> To decree dogmatic prohibitions of certain linguistic forms instead of testing them by their success or failure in practical use is worse than futile; it is positively harmful because it may obstruct scientific progress. (Carnap 1956, 221)

SET OF PW (W)

First, we suppose a(n) (near-)infinite set of PW without attempting to specify them apart from w_0 and w_{OI} as, respectively, the physical actual world and the humane actual world including objective imagination.

We particularly apply PWS in definitions of (metaphysically) 'necessary' and 'possible' as *universal* and *existential quantification* over PW. On the presupposition of a(n) (near-)infinite set of PW, 'necessary' could only be stated with the help of infinitesimal calculi, where 'infinite' still does not need to have traditional literalist or metaphysical senses, but could metaphorically mean something like *near-infinite*, i.e., a near-innumerably, near-uncountably or near-inexplicably large number.

However, if we were to *prescribe* a *finite* set of PW, the semantics proposal would not be scientific and realist anymore, as with the goal of describing a natural language, a conceptual scheme, etc., for any natural language has a larger number of possible sentences (including examples from objective imagination) than can be predefined in a prescriptive semantics.

The advantage of (K-style) PWS (of universal and existential quantification over PW) over (S-style) modal logic with *box* and *diamond operators* is that, in the former, particular PW can be

exemplified, and truth or falsity in specific PW can be asserted, which is not possible in the latter. We could also add subscripts to box and diamond operators like $\Diamond_{w0I}$ and $\Box_{w0,}$ but this is rather unusual.

One more advantage is that we can include box and diamond operators in K and thus express the six modalities (as properties of propositions) within a (set of) PW as by applying Carnap's table (Carnap 1956, 175), respectively, necessary, impossible, contingent (factual), non-necessary, possible, noncontingent.

[5]

$w_1 \models \Box\varphi, \neg\Diamond\neg\varphi$	in w_1 it is necessary/necessarily true that φ
$w_1 \models \Box\neg\varphi, \neg\Diamond\varphi$	in w_1 it is impossible/it can't be true that φ
$w_1 \models \neg\Box\varphi \wedge \neg\Box\neg\varphi, \Diamond\neg\varphi \wedge \Diamond\varphi$	in w_1 it is contingent(ly)/a fact/factual(ly) true that φ
$w_1 \models \neg\Box\varphi, \Diamond\neg\varphi$	in w_1 it is not necessary/necessarily true that φ
$w_1 \models \Diamond\varphi, \neg\Box\neg\varphi$	in w_1 it is possible/possibly true that φ
$w_1 \models \Box\varphi \vee \Box\neg\varphi, \neg\Diamond\neg\varphi \vee \neg\Diamond\varphi$	in w_1 it is not contingent(ly)/a fact/factually true that φ

The third and sixth formula, contingent and noncontingent, are that intricate including conjunction or disjunction that one can preferably keep on using nonmodal proposition and predicate logic for factual statements within a world—as we already did in analyses of the TE for we usually restrict the use of modal analyses to some cases, as when thought experimenters (David Chalmers) state a TE (as Zombie World) as a logical possibility.

Nevertheless, modal logic can lead to complex discussions, as in Kripke 1980's (where nonquality sign is informally used as part of object language):

pain ≠ C-fibers firing (2)

Because this statement can have a second modal, necessary sense now:

pain ≢ C-fibers firing (3)

which may be equivalently indicated by $\neq\Box$ (or $/\equiv$, no strict or necessary equivalence).

We have argued that in this and more antimaterialist TE, the TE only defeat strong, necessary theories of materialism (*see* Hertogh 2015a and 2023a).

S-style modal interpretations can express shades of meaning within a PW, that is, differentiate between slight nuances of meaning as:

[6]
$w_0 \models \neg\Diamond\varphi$ φ is not possible or does not exist in the actual world

Example:
Today it is February the 30th. (note 5) (4)

possibly disambiguating from [1]

[7]
$w_0 \models \neg\varphi$ φ (does possibly exist but) is F in the actual world

Example:
Today it is March 2nd. (5)

when, in fact, today it is August 12th.

Possibly (4) can be understood metaphorically or just a (human or computer) mistake or a line from fiction, in fact, indicating (5) or a fictional world, on which interpretation (4) is metaphorically true or false, or true or false after error elimination, or true or false in a fictional world (e.g. a novel with different calendar or involving a character that makes mistakes stating dates etc.).

Natural language is usually ambiguous, and these disputable differentiations may come down to logically intrusive translations. However, these disambiguations do prove useful in philosophical and scientific discussions, as on (2) and (3), Kripke's proof that we are all intuitive dualists.

We define only athletic modal TE designators, concepts, properties, etc., but on a pragmatic presupposition of S(peaker) and H(earer) communication situation, as from narrow to broad:

physical possibility--nomological possibility--metaphysical possibility--logical possibility

Physical possibility is about physics, nomological possibility about derived sciences such as chemistry, biology, etc., metaphysical possibility about what goes beyond physical or nomological possibility.

We use the notion of objective imagination (OI) to account for metaphysical possibility, e.g. flying humanoids are physically and nomologically impossible, but they are metaphysically possible; they have never been observed in the real world, but they are a familiar part of OI, although exemplified slightly differently in different cultures.

An alternative to Chomsky's (1957/2002) famous nonsensical example:

Colourless purple ideas walk furiously. (6)

We consider grammatically and logically possible (though sortal incorrect), the latter on a metaphorical interpretation of (6) as a statement on nerd culture. Because of sortal incorrectness, it is a connotative statement without denotation, intension without extension--it does not denote or refer to anything but has a variety of connotations, intensional senses.

And only a statement like:

Vxrqqqz w,,,, … wnmn i ... p k. (7)

we consider nonsense or an unidentified string of signs or sounds.

Examples from OI that satisfy additional cross-cultural conditions are many, flying men (e.g. Ibn Sīnā's *Flying Man*, Einstein's *Chasing a Beam of Light*), invisibility (e.g. Plato's *Ring of Gyges*), humanoids (e.g. *Zombies*, *Aliens*), humanoid horror (e.g. Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*), humanoid extraterrestrials (e.g. *Martians*,

Doppelgangers, Steven Spielberg's *ET*), humanoid animals (e.g. Nagel's *Bat Personification,* fables*),* humanoid objects (e.g. Chalmers's *What Is It Like to Be a Thermostat*, cartoons e.g. talking snowman), humanoid divinities (e.g. religious arts), extraordinary human physical or mental properties (e.g. strength, size, patience, endurance etc., giants, fakirs, martyrs, saints), extraordinary virtues and vices, longevity (e.g. the wise), immortality (e.g. The Seven Immortals), disembodiment (e.g. Ibn Sīnā's *Flying Man*, ghosts, life after death), magical beings both good and evil (e.g. good and evil spirits, voodoo), teletransportation, time travel (e.g. H.G. Wells's *Time Machine*, communication with ancestral spirits), metamorphoses (e.g. Zhuangzi's *Butterfly*, Locke's *Prince-Cobbler*), transformations (e.g. Kirk's *Brain Team*, *Zulliver*, Putnam's *Brain in a Vat*), aquatic humanoids (e.g. mermaids), avian humanoids (e.g. angels), heaven (e.g. Akanishtha, 天), hell (e.g. Hades), distant places (Putnam's *Twin Earth*, 净土宗 Jìngtǔ zōng from Pure Land Buddhism) etc.

Following Hertogh 2021a on mathematical TE, we propose that a set of PW of TE semantics could be pictured with the help of a search engine, such as Google or Baidu, when PW may be defined as entities involving theoretical worlds, theories, parts or elements of theories, etc., thereby partly mechanising the process of thought experimentation. "Thinking is like googling"[7], although still some serendipity, creativity, etc. may be required to choose and construct, analyse and synthesise input and output (as after Lakatos 1976) (*see* Hertogh 2021a).

ACCESSIBILITY RELATION (R)

Like it is not necessary nor possible to specify all PW, it is not necessary nor possible to stipulate for any infinite set of PW, for which PW are accessible from which PW.

Rather than stipulating accessibility for a particular world, we could (pre)suppose accessibility for a particular set of speakers and hearers, or a particular (set of) character(s) in fiction.

Some modal conundrums can be resolved by specification to a particular imaginary S (speaker, subject) or character, as *Colour Scientist Mary* in Frank Jackson's TE, or Einstein's *Elevator* and *Chasing a Beam of Light*, where there are two seemingly conflicting points of view of an internal and an external observer (Hertogh 2024a).

Satisfiability Relation (|=)

A satisfiability relation connects a (set of) statement(s) to a (set of) possible world(s). Example:

[8]
$w \models \varphi$ for w it holds that φ

By specification to a particular (set of) PW as w_0 or W_0 (when considering a set instead of just one world) or w_{OI} or W_{OI} we can say that a proposition φ is true or false in a particular (set of) PW, and with help of modal operators we can additionally express that a state of affairs does not exist or is rather unusual in a particular world.

The advantage for TE semantics is that we can thus logically express differences between traditional notions of physically and metaphysically contingent, possible and necessary.

Provisional Conclusion

Modal semantics are richer in logic symbolisms and applications than classical logic, they may be capable to represent more states of affairs, situations, arguments etc. and resolve more problems in

philosophy, logic, linguistics, as comparable to progress of science and society from extensional logic of ideal, mathematical or theoretical (meta)languages to richer and more complex intensional, modal, many-valued etc. logics of natural language, analyses of which may resolve many more problems in philosophy, logic and linguistics, possibly including—in terminology of argumentation theory—transition from analytical argumentation model (e.g. Aristotle's syllogisms) to substantial argumentation model, e.g., adding W(arrant), B(acking), (modal) Q(ualifier) and R(ebuttal) to inference procedure from D(ata) to C(laim) (e.g. Toulmin 1958/2003)[8].

NOTES

1. Difference between so-called basic logical laws or principles, such as principle/law of non-contradiction (LNC), principle/law of excluded middle (LEM), principle/law of identity (LID) may seem to be only 'playing with words' (*see* Wittgenstein 1953/1958, Section 67: 'Now you are only playing with words', a mere metaphysical endeavor without relevance to our pragmaticist living world (as on a pragmaticist interpretation of e.g. Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*), which may have triggered, paraconsistent logic (e.g. Béziau et al. 2007), but it is not the place here to elaborate on it and we may refer to analyses of (e.g. Tarski's) *Liar* (Hertogh 2025), which may have incited quite a few philosophers to adopt many valued-logic, which are, however, already present in well-known proposals of classical bivalent predicate logics as, Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*, Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica* or Carnap's extensional logic in *Logical Structure of the World*, distinguishing real problems from pseudo-problems, just like Popper in *Logic of Scientifc Discovery,* that may acknowledge a third truth value, like undefined / 'sinnlos'/ 'senseless'/ 'meaningless'/ no truth value applied, and possibly even a fourth truth value, like not applicable (NA) / 'Unsinn'/ 'unsinnig'/ 'nonsense'/ 'nonsensical'/ no truth value application possible.

   For the moment we hold on to pragmaticist and possibly naive notions of adhering to these binary principles in application of TE Matrix, e.g., as formulated as principle of bivalence, bivalent logic etc., two truth values (as T and F, in fact, reducible to only one, T, and logical operators as negation, constructing second truth value ¬T) etc., apart from second TE

methodology of TE Diagram, which could be considered like a survey using near-statistical plausibility values as between 0 and 1 (or, say, 0 to 100%) to measure relative plausibility values of a set of TE within a scientific, scholarly community (*see* Hertogh 2022b).

2. *See* entry of Classical Logic in *Wikipedia,* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical logic (retrieved April 30, 2026). See also note 1.

3. We admit that God and I are more closely associated with subject and religion than statistics is to modal logic. However, there is no closer candidate for a societal statistics correlate in logic than modal logic involving possibilities (PWS) for probability logics are usually many-valued—and thus nonclassical—logic, and within the field of modal logic there are many attempts to have modal logical systems obey the principle of bivalence as by prescription of bivalent truth value functions. Our semantics is descriptive as mediated by available and accessible intermediary PW instead of a prescribed valuation function. Nevertheless, modal logical systems are also still considered nonclassical.

   The last paragraph of Yablo 1993 explains the rise of modal logic or 'substantive modal metaphysics'.

   > Part of the explanation might be that our methods of modal conflict management have been, in a real sense, improving. Already it takes an effort to recall the dispiriting conditions of, say, thirty years ago: the various half-related ideas jumbled unconsciously together under the headings of possibility and conceivability; how crude the controls were on propositional content; the anxiety about collateral information as a factor in imaginability. Especially one forgets how much easier it was then for the conversation to bog down at the first clash of modal intuition. The extent to which we have moved beyond this should not be exaggerated (more often than we *still* bog down), but meanwhile, it seems that modal dialectic has achieved an unaccustomed degree of clarity and system in a surprisingly short time. (Yablo 1993, 40)

4. Like many TE from mathematics, this *Statistical TE* of Kripke has a tacit TE indicator, e.g. ('Imagine…'). There are two hints in the text that it is indeed about a TE:

   > An analogy from school—in fact, it is not merely an analogy—will help to clarify my view.
   >
   > (and ignore the fact that one or both dice might not have existed).

   The second clue is more evident—the experiment takes place in the mind, so one or both dice 'might not have existed'. The subclause of the first clue

indicates that it is something different from an analogy, so a TE, therefore, we may only suppose.

5. Full quotation from Fine 2017, end of Section on 'State Spaces'.

> The abstract approach to modal logic championed by Kripke's early work (in which possible worlds are simply regarded worlds as arbitrary points, rather than as models or sets of sentences) has been a great boon to the formal development of modal logic; and it is to be hoped that future researchers will appreciate that there are similar benefits to be gained by adopting a more abstract approach to the truthmaker framework as well.

6. Such error or miscomprehension situations may occur in more calendars, not only in Gregorian, but also in Hebrew, Islamic, Hindu, and Chinese calendars, both solar and lunar, which calendars may also have leap years (e.g. Chinese and Hindu calendars have leap years featuring leap months, extra months).
7. Marcin Miłkowski in plenary lecture June 29, 2019, XV Philosophers' Rally Krakow (Miłkowski 2019), referring to Newell and Simon 1972 (*see* Hertogh 2021a).
8. (Toulmin 1958, 97). Generic substantial argument form.

D ---------- so, Q, C
| |
Since Unless
W R
|
On account of
B

There are examples from cosmology, law, demographics, biology, etc. in Toulmin 1958/2003.
(Toulmin 1958, 117). Example from biology, inheritance patterns.

Anne is one of Jack's sisters ---------- so, *presumably*, Anne now has red hair
| |
Since *Unless*
Any sister of Jack's may be taken to have red hair | Anne has dyed/gone white/lost her hair ...
|
On account of (the fact that)
All his sisters have previously been observed to have red hair

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SEMANTICS OF SEED: AN ECOFEMINIST ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE AND ANDROCENTRISM IN "THE HANDMAID'S TALE"

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Abstract: Ecofeminists endeavour to address the environmental and feminist issues that have gained significant momentum in our current globalised society. Despite its late start in the 1970s, ecofeminism has provided unique insights and perspectives and enriched the academic sphere with significant contributions. Fundamentally an ecologically grounded political movement, ecofeminism posits that the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women are interconnected strata orchestrated by the male-dominated capitalist worldview. Within this framework, this paper attempts to dissect Margaret Atwood's dystopian fiction, *The Handmaid's Tale*, from an ecofeminist standpoint. By doing so, it also aims to uncover the multifaceted aspects of androcentrism in the dystopic novel on the linguistic and metaphorical level. Additionally, it seeks to explore the contentious phenomenon of aligning nature with women, drawing parallels between the exploitation of women and the despoliation of the natural world. The ultimate goal of this paper is, thus, to encourage readers to acknowledge the interwoven oppressions that prevail in their societies at large and to galvanise public opinion into activism that aims to address and heal these divides.

Keywords: ecofeminism, speculative fiction, androcentrism, women, nature

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, several academic benchmarks have been subjected to critical examination. Feminism, environmental criticism, and deep ecology have all advocated for a re-evaluation of the Western Cartesian mindset. Ecofeminism, which was founded

on the premise that the subjugation of women and the environment are interlinked, has also prompted a reassessment of this philosophical legacy (Plumwood 1993, 42-43). Ecofeminism critically engages with two key dimensions: first, the dismantling of the conceptual dynamics that link nature with women, and second, the examination of the pervasive influence of extended androcentrism that sustains and perpetuates this convergence (Warren 2000, 21). The purpose of this paper is, thus, to thoroughly investigate these androcentric patterns on multiple levels, including the androcentric perspective on nature and women and how the dissection of this framework materialises.

Ecofeminism is chosen as the primary theoretical framework because of its academic suitability in underscoring the novel's depiction of interconnected themes of environmental deterioration and gender-based oppression. Ecofeminism also provides valuable insights into the ways in which power structures, resilience, and resistance intersect in the novel. This, in turn, reveals a wide array of possibilities for collective action against systems of oppression. Subsequently, this paper is an attempt to answer the following questions:

Q1: How does the patriarchal society depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* perpetuate systems of oppression against both women and the environment, and what are the parallels that can be drawn between the treatment of women and the exploitation of nature within the novel?

Q2: How do the characters in *The Handmaid's Tale*, particularly women like Offred, navigate and resist the oppressive power structures of their society?

Q3: To what extent is *The Handmaid's Tale,* as far as it can be considered ecofeminist, critical of the oppressive conceptual frameworks?

By answering these questions, this paper attempts to investigate the ways in which Atwood's novel further stimulates ecofeminist discussions by questioning traditional power structures and

promoting equality for both society and the environment. It should be noted that Margaret Atwood is one of the most prolific writers of speculative fiction. Her novels have been recognised at the international level and have created a dignified place for Canadian Literature. As a revered writer, poet, and critic, Atwood is also endowed with an extraordinary ability to rekindle in her readers' spirit the flaming tendency towards environmental activism through her masterful experimentalism, her strong advocacy for women's rights, and her unwavering commitment to challenging the status quo.

From an ecofeminist vantage point, Margaret Atwood's novels frequently explore ecofeminist concepts by depicting cultures in which the subjugation of women is related to environmental decline (Hengen 2006, 72–73). Atwood sheds light on the relationship between patriarchal power systems and the abuse of the environment through detailed descriptions and complex characters (Menrisky 2020, 112; Vakoch 2022, 15). Her writings analyse the exploitation of women's bodies and the environment, prompting readers to re-evaluate the interrelation between gender-based and environmental injustices.

In this regard, *The Handmaid's Tale* is treated as a didactic anthology that scrupulously highlights the perilous ramifications of religious extremism, totalitarianism, and the systematic erosion of women's rights (Howells 2021, 122). The narrative unfolds in a future society known as Gilead and centres around Offred, who, among other "handmaids", is compelled by the state to perform the laborious duty of procreation for the benefit of the governing class. The narrative conveys themes of resistance, control, and oppression and stands as a disconcerting reminder of the precarious nature of liberty and the criticality of opposing injustice (Tolan 2022, 25).

2. Ecofeminism: A Review of the Concept

Ecofeminism was coined by the French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne (1974, 221), who sought to describe the multifaceted

violence inflicted upon women and nature as a result of male domination (see also Merchant 1996, 13). It is, therefore, an ecological movement that considers the oppression of women and nature as interrelated. Ecofeminism is also an umbrella term that encompasses a plurality of ideas and strongly denounces the system of capitalist patriarchy. That is why it cannot be restricted to a pre-determined border or explained with a single definition.

In addition to this, ecofeminism challenges binary oppositions such as male/female and nature/culture, and ultimately aims to dismantle hierarchies that privilege masculine values and perspectives (Warren 1990, 126; Mies and Shiva 1993b, 14; Plumwood 1993, 42–43). Accordingly, ecofeminists endeavour to contest essentialist notions that equate women with nature solely based on perceived 'feminine' qualities, while simultaneously rejecting the association of men with culture based on perceived 'masculine' attributes. Through its multifaceted critique, ecofeminism's ultimate objective is to promote harmony, equity, and ecological awareness among all living beings on Earth.

Aside from its scholarly aspects, ecofeminism encompasses diverse perspectives and extends into various facets of individual life. According to Mann (2011, 2), ecofeminists' primary task is to actively engage in environmental initiatives aimed at safeguarding Mother Earth, promoting life, and ensuring the protection of essential resources such as food and water. In her widely cited article "Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective" (2018, 4-5), Karen J. Warren argues that one of the most exemplary embodiments of ecofeminist activism is the Chipko movement, which occurred in Northern India in 1974. The Chipko movement was a protest whereby twenty-seven women decided to take action against tree felling and threatened to hug the trees if the lumberjacks attempted to cut them down. Ecofeminist criticism, subsequently, concerns itself with representations and images of both women and nature, emphasising their portrayal in literature and exposing sexist and androcentric stereotypes that characterise our understanding and definition of nature throughout history.

2.1. The Oppressive Conceptual Frameworks

Much like other theoretical frameworks, especially in the feminist movement, Ecofeminism has evolved over the past 45 years, aiming to expose women's oppression and environmental destruction through various explorations of oppressive conceptual frameworks. According to Warren (2015, 391), "A conceptual framework is a socially constructed set of basic beliefs, values, attitudes, and assumptions that shapes and reflects how one views oneself and others. It is oppressive when it explains, justifies, and maintains relationships of domination and subordination". *The Handmaid's Tale* reveals some of these diverse frameworks within the context of speculative fiction.

An oppressive conceptual framework justifies the systematic domination of women and nature by men through higher-value, privilege, and power thinking. Karen J. Warren (2015, 389) argues that the treatment of women, people of colour, and the underclass is closely interrelated with the treatment of nonhuman nature. Subsequently, the objectives of the women's and environmental movements intersect, as both strive to cultivate perspectives and behaviours free from male-centric patterns of control and dominance. Correspondingly, understanding these intersecting issues further helps us understand the oppression of women from a cross-cultural perspective.

Karren J. Warren (2015, 390) identifies sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and ethnocentrism as unjustified 'isms of domination.' These 'isms', according to her, share conceptual foundations in five interrelated aspects: value-hierarchical, oppositional dualism, power and privilege conceiving, and the logic of domination. Value-hierarchical thinking, for instance, operates by systematically assigning a higher value to Up than to Down, therefore further legitimising inequality. This is reflected in sexism, anthropocentrism, and speciesism. Correspondingly, oppositional dualism places a higher value on one disjunct over the other, such as nature and gender dualism.

These dualisms have historically shaped our perception of the world, attributing a higher standing to male-related aspects and disparaging female or nature-identified aspects. Furthermore, power and privilege are conceived in ways that assign greater value to the Ups over the Downs, maintaining systems of domination over women and nature. Wealthy people, for instance, often have the power and privilege to mobilise resources to self-determined ends, veiling their vision from the challenges of equality and justice. Lastly, the logic of domination is also based on the moral premise that superiority justifies subordination, building upon pre-established stereotypes in society and breaking them into various dualisms. Ecofeminists argue that this logic must be deconstructed to achieve total equality (Warren 2015, 391).

2.2. Linguistic Perspectives

The relationship between language, cognition, and perception has long sparked numerous debates and been a subject of countless inquiries. Like other theoretical frameworks, ecofeminism has also explored the role of language in shaping cultural realities, identities and worldviews. Ecofeminist scholars posit that language can, in various instances, be employed by capitalist patriarchy to exert control and subjugate both the natural world and women (Warren 2000, 53). According to Karen J. Warren (2000, 54), various thinkers have investigated how our languages reflect perceptions of ourselves and our world. However, when a language is sexist or naturist, it distorts our conceptions of nature, women, and the nonhuman world, depicting them as inferior and diminished compared to anything that identifies as male.

Fundamentally, ecofeminists assert that the sphere of language encompasses a multitude of derogatory and gender-biased phrases that perpetuate the notion of women and non-human nature as subordinate and less significant in comparison to males, masculinity, or the human species. Lisa Kemmerer (2006, 22), a renowned ecofeminist, draws on the philosophy of Wittgenstein (1953, 11), who considered language as a moral matter, to argue that language

plays a crucial role in shaping problematic notions of women, animals, and nature. These notions, in turn, perpetuate an oppressive conceptual framework and effectively contribute to the justification of the subjugation of women, animals, and nature (Warren 2015, 391).

Correspondingly, a language that portrays nature in feminine terms and treats women as inherently tied to nature not only contributes to the unjust patriarchal oppression of women and the exploitation of nature but also deliberately overlooks the cultural parallels and justifications for subjugating these entities. According to Warren (2015, 392), in patriarchal contexts, the majority of animalistic and nature-related terms used to describe women and females function differently from the nature-related terms used to describe men. Within this framework, the English language has historically functioned as a sexist, naturist and androcentric language. This is substantiated by Warren's assertion that for centuries, the male gender was treated as the universal standard for humanity, while the female was the deviation. Additionally, in cultural contexts where women and non-human animals are deemed inferior to men and male-identified culture, the English language often animalises and naturalises women. Pejorative terms such as cats, pussycats, dogs, pets, bunnies, and cows, among others, are used to diminish and demean women, reinforcing societal hierarchies and gender stereotypes (Warren 2015, 392).

Another point worth considering is that the English language currently has no positive, neutral noun that means all animals except humans (Kemmerer 2006, 22). Kemmerer identifies this as a fundamental hole in the English vocabulary. According to her, English speakers are forced to use ambiguous or derogatory language that obscures the reality of other beings because they lack this specific word. Along the same lines of argument, Plumwood (1993, 49) identifies this strategy as an instance of hyper-separation, whereby a language is manipulated to exacerbate the already-existing gap between the human Self and the natural Other. The usage of distinct vocabularies for human and non-human experiences (e.g.,

'love' vs. 'instinct'), therefore, makes the language function as a border guard that not only enforces a dualism but also significantly denies our continuity with nature.

In the same way, languages that imbue nature with feminine attributes in androcentric contexts further legitimise and reinforce the domination of both women and nature. Mother Nature is, thus, raped, subjugated, and her womb is to be instrumentalised by the man of science (Warren 1990, 138). The exploitation of nature and animals is justified by their feminisation in the same way the exploitation of women is justified by their naturalisation. Subsequently, sexist naturist language is an ecofeminist concern (Warren 1990, 138).

3. An Ecofeminist Study of Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*

Margaret Atwood is a highly prolific, polarising, and inventive author who has carved a niche for herself with her riveting portrayal of multi-faceted societal frameworks and rigorous demystification of gender, identity, power dynamics, and human interaction within imagined worlds. Atwood steels her literary creations with hard-hitting realities and acute social, political, and environmental commentaries. She is an international icon of feminism who has championed environmentalism for years and whose major books include female protagonists who confront specific challenges that women encounter. The majority of her writings also address both the ecological problems and the subjugation of women in male-dominated societies. As her influential books show, she also exhibits a substantial ecofeminist propensity, as the majority of her literary works demonstrate a distinct preoccupation with both nature and women.

Atwood has won multitudinous awards for her works, including the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in 2017. For her novel *The Testaments*, she was the co-winner of the prestigious Booker Prize, but her most successful work remains *The Handmaid's*

Tale. This unsettling novel revolves around life within the totalitarian Republic of Gilead, where women have been systematically deprived of their agency and fundamental rights. Atwood describes her novel as a dystopia written in the tradition of George Orwell's canonical work *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. She maintains that "*The Handmaid's Tale* is a classic dystopia, which takes at least part of its inspiration from George Orwell's, particularly the epilogue" (Atwood 2023, 516).

The Handmaid's Tale is, thus, a chilling portrayal of a dystopian society where fundamentalist leaders have seized power following a societal collapse in the United States. Women, in this totalitarian regime, are deprived of their basic rights and divided into strict social classes based on their fertility and societal worth. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the narrative is centred on Offred, a Handmaid whose sole task is to bear children for the dominant ruling class. Offred navigates an oppressive world where women are forbidden from reading, working, or having any agency over their bodies. Atwood scrupulously reveals the gradual erosion of women's rights and the rise of Gilead's oppressive regime through flashbacks, reflections and a stream of consciousness. The world she creates in her novel is considered by various critics as an immaculate epitome of gender and nature exploitation due to its engagement with intersecting contentious themes of misogyny, religious extremism, and the consequences of unchecked authoritarianism. Ultimately, the novel constitutes a poignant reminder of the paramount importance of individual freedoms and the detrimental ramifications of allowing power to fall into the wrong hands.

3.1. Women and Nature: Unveiling the Bond

In *The Handmaid's Tale,* Margaret Atwood deliberately interweaves the phallocentric societal superstructure of Gilead with both the devastation of the surrounding environment and the oppression of women and minorities. By doing so, she masterfully captures ecofeminist praxis while maintaining an entertaining, captivating narrative and a vivid portrayal that illuminates the myriad ways in

which women are scapegoated for environmental crises. In the novel, women's reproductive role is placed under critical scrutiny and posited as a framework that justifies their oppression, the same way nature is perceived, through androcentric lenses, as a grind to men's mills. According to ecofeminists, the recognition of nature and women as producers of life carries two distinctive, significant implications. Firstly, it exposes the fallacy of conventional development paradigms and reveals them as sources of violence against women and nature worldwide. This violence, however, is not a mere misapplication of neutral models but a brainchild of patriarchal assumptions of homogeneity, domination, and centralisation inherent in prevailing thought and development strategies. Secondly, it suggests that resolving the crises spawned by these flawed models requires a shift away from crisis-oriented thinking to solutions that embrace life-affirming thought patterns, perceptions, and actions (Shiva 1989, 47).

Vandana Shiva (1993, 47) associates environmental crises with reproductive issues and maintains that women's role in the regeneration of human life and the provisioning of sustenance has meant that the destructive impact on women and the environment extends into a deleterious impact on the status of their offspring. In this respect, women have always borne the brunt of toxic hazards and been the primary sufferers of environmental problems (Shiva 1993, 48). These intersecting facets of oppression are also accentuated in Atwood's fictional society, whereby women are forced to undertake various back-breaking and laborious tasks while being directly exposed to toxic hazards. This further cements the ecofeminist assertion that a contaminated environment manifests in the health issues of women and children and highlights the interconnectedness between environmental degradation and human well-being.

At the heart of *The Handmaid's Tale* lie various ecofeminist themes, chief among them is the issue of infertility and congenital disabilities. Atwood's dystopian narrative revolves around a society steeped in reproductive fundamentalism as a consequence of

widespread pollution and other anthropogenic environmental issues. In this futuristic nightmare, the fate of women and nature is interlinked, and the ruling class exerts total control over women's lives and bodies. Women are, thus, relegated to the narrow roles of breeders and caretakers or are relegated to undesirable positions such as mistresses or exiles to the colonies.

In the ethical universe of the novel, women are not only deprived of their agency but treated like vermin, a weed-like aberration, or an ugly blemish on the face of society. Moreover, the drastic population decline in Gilead is attributed to the reckless implementation of reproductive control measures by women. The widespread availability of contraceptive methods of various kinds, coupled with sexually transmitted diseases, is the chief factor of the ecological disaster in the novel. Women are, therefore, the worst victims and the first to blame for this environmental and reproductive crisis. In this regard, Atwood points out:

> Stillbirths, miscarriages, and genetic deformities were widespread and on the increase. This trend has been linked to the various nuclear-plant accidents, shutdowns, and incidents of sabotage that characterised the period, as well as to leakages from chemical and biological warfare stockpiles and toxic-waste disposal sites […] and the uncontrolled use of chemical insecticides, herbicides, and other sprays. (Atwood 2023, 316-317)

Women in Gilead also lack basic rights and independence, being limited to the function of reproduction. Laws deprive people of property rights, job prospects, and control over their cash. Fertile women act as Handmaids to bear children for the Commanders. If they fail, they are condemned as Unwomen and assigned to clean poisonous waste in the colonies.

Accordingly, toxic discourse, pollution, and environmental apocalypticism are the backdrops of Margaret Atwood's dystopian storyline. In Gilead, women are more susceptible to ecologically related afflictions. This idea has been issued forth by various ecofeminists, namely Karen J. Warren (1997, 10), who argues that while neither sex is naturally more resistant to toxic agents, and

resistance often appears to depend on the substance in question, there is strong evidence for the existence of gender-related differences in reactions to toxic environmental substances. She maintains that "Persistent toxic chemicals, largely because of their ability to cross the placenta, to bioaccumulate, and to occur as mixtures, pose serious health threats disproportionately to infants, mothers, and the elderly" (Warren 1997, 10). In a similar vein, Vandana argues that women and children are the most sensitive to and affected by the chemical contamination and pollution of the environment. For instance, many health problems afflicted the residents of the Love Canal area, where chemical and toxic wastes were dumped under their houses by the Hooker Chemical Company, problems such as dizziness, nausea, and epilepsy, as well as more severe ones from which children, in particular, suffered, including deafness, leukaemia, and other cancers (Shiva 1993, 85).

Margaret Atwood's novel frequently explores the connection between women's bodies and ecological damage and emphasises the adverse implications of a male-centred perspective. Through *The Handmaid's Tale,* Atwood sheds light on more than reproduction problems, but blends stories of environmental deterioration with discussions of reproductive and climatic justice, as she depicts how environmental degradation, including unpredictable weather patterns and food shortages, worsens the already severe circumstances experienced by women in Gilead. The radioactive colonies, for instance, foreground these intertwined challenges by constituting the most disturbing instances of extreme exploitation of both women and nature.

Within this framework, Maria Mies (1993, 38) uses radioactivity to contest the arrogance of modern science and reductionism. According to her, radioactivity is the ultimate proof that the war against nature has backfired. This failure of the scientific mastery of nature is immaculately illustrated through the Chornobyl disaster, whereby people's autonomy was vehemently stripped away and life-giving substances were turned into poisoned gifts and vehicles of death. She further demystifies this epistemological break by

asserting that "We could no longer trust our eyes and ears, our noses and taste buds... We were dependent on the 'experts', the men of the 'technological age', who had the Geiger counters and the knowledge of the becquerels." (Mies 1993, 38). Mies' core argument is that capitalism still relies on three colonisations to function: the colonisation of nature, of women, and of the Third World (1993, 2).

Atwood also employs ecofeminist imagery throughout the whole novel to underscore the interconnectedness of women, nature, and animals and further highlight their shared subjugation under patriarchal systems. In the novel, he colonised female body emerges as a central focus and a poignant metaphor for the degradation of both women and the environment. This is depicted through Offred's reflections and observations, whereby various parallels between the female body and the earth are drawn to portray women as stewards of the natural world. Offred, for instance, often compares her body to the earth as she describes, "I sink into my body as into a swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing. Treacherous ground, my own territory. I become the earth. I set my ear against, for rumours of the future" (Atwood 2023, 83).

Additionally, garden imagery and botanic diction, in particular, are used throughout the novel to mirror women's connection to nature and evoke themes of growth, fertility, and renewal. In the third chapter, for instance, Offred describes Serena Joy's garden and notices how the red tulips are not described merely as pretty flowers, but as living, bleeding entities that mirror the Handmaids in their red garments. She says, "The tulips are red, a darker crimson towards the stem; as if they had been cut and are beginning to heal there" (Atwood 2023, 13). These flowers also represent Serena Joy's desperate attempt to cultivate fertility in the ground because of her inability to cultivate it in her own body.

In a similar vein, Chapter 25 introduces distinct botanical diction, which is used to describe Serena Joy's violent gardening as she tends the plants. Serena's pruning and amputation of various plants and her control of the reproduction of the garden by snipping the pods reflect the state's total control over women's bodies. Offred

describes this ritualistic endeavour by saying, "There is something subversive about this garden of Serena's, a sense of buried things bursting upwards, wordlessly, into the light... Whatever is silenced will clamour to be heard, though silently" (Atwood 2023, 161). This analogy further blurs the line between women and plants, which are both treated as 'fruiting bodies' to be managed. By and large, these ecofeminist themes are interwoven with the dystopian narrative of *The Handmaid's Tale* to offer a cogent criticism of patriarchal societies and their exploitation of both women and the environment.

3.2. Androcentrism and Gender Roles

The Handmaid's Tale fully explores the themes of patriarchy and gender roles as women's stigmatisation and their place in the phallocentric society of Gilead are recurrent issues throughout the novel. The establishment of the Republic of Gilead was a direct response to the catastrophe precipitated by the significantly diminished birth rate. Within this framework, the state's entire framework, characterised by its religious adornments and authoritative approach, revolves around a singular objective: the regulation of procreation. The immediate approach to address the issue is to exert complete authority over women's bodies through their political subordination and the enforcement of a patriarchal society that exercises legislative power to govern and structure the social roles and responsibilities of its residents. Women's fundamental basic requirements are, thus, encroached upon; their rights to vote, own property, pursue employment, acquire literacy skills, engage in writing, or explore any potential for dissent or autonomy that could potentially harm their husbands or the state are all revoked and criminalised.

Significantly, the presence of women in Gilead poses an unsolvable challenge for a male-dominated society. In Gilead, women's autonomy is undermined and subordinated to male authority, with their value reduced to mere reproductive functions. They are treated as interchangeable and expendable entities, devoid of individuality or agency. Any form of self-

expression is forbidden, leading to a society where conformity is enforced under threat of severe punishment. This institutionalised oppression aims to strip women of their individuality and render them obedient vessels for bearing children.

From one of her earlier statements problematizing rigid gender roles and biological determinism, Offred says, "I avoid looking down at my body, not so much because it's shameful or immodest but because I don't want to see it. I don't want to look at something that determines me so completely" (Atwood 2023, 72-73). The systematic oppression of the Handmaids, particularly, and of Gileadean women, in general, leads to self-objectification. Consequently, when women are taught that they are supposed to act in one way, and men are supposed to act in another, they begin to internalize societal stereotypes and project them onto themselves as is the case with Janine "By that time Janine was like a puppy that's been kicked too often, by too many people... she'd tell anything" (Atwood 2023, 72). Not only are the women in Gilead subject to objectification for their bodies, but they are also used for their skills and labour. This idea is scrupulously illustrated through the presence of Marthas, who are strictly confined to domestic tasks such as cleaning and cooking. They are valued for their manual labour because of their sex and their inability to bear children.

Additionally, the repressive society of Gilead constructs a logic to sanction the subordination of women in a disaster-afflicted country. Women are set apart and seen as a part of a lower order. This division undermines the recognition of continuity and shared attributes, thereby rationalising the unequal distribution of cultural resources, particularly limiting women's access to them (Plumwood 1993, 47–48). In Atwood's dystopian masterpiece, men's fascist rule instigates a wide array of discriminatory frameworks that systematically diminish the status of women and transform them into confined bodies devoid of agency. Structural and ideological constraints, whether explicit or

implicit, immobilise women and perpetuate their subjugation (Howells 2021, 125).

As a result, sexual misconduct against women is institutionalised in Gilead. When the Commander attempts to sexually assault Offred during the Ceremony, it is a form of institutionalised adultery. The Commander's wives are also victims of the same systematic humiliation as they are obliged to be present during the Ceremony between their husbands and the handmaids, "with the head of the Handmaid between their thighs" (Atwood 1985, 104). Once a month, on fertile days, the Handmaid lies between the legs of the Commander's wife, Offred explains, "My arms are raised; she holds my hands, each of mine in each of hers. This is supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it truly means is that she is in control of the process and thus of the product." (Atwood 2023, 93)

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the oppression of women on such a large scale is a recurring theme. However, Atwood masterfully reminds her readers that women are not always victims and that sometimes they are an instrument of oppression to other women. This idea is substantiated through the attitudes of the Wives and Aunts who develop an ill-concealed enmity towards the Handmaids, with the token of power granted to them by the Commanders:

> All power is relative, and in tough times, any amount is seen as better than none. Some of the controlling Aunts are true believers and think they are doing the Handmaids a favour: at least they haven't been sent to clean up toxic waste, and at least in this brave new world they won't get raped, not as such, not by a stranger. Some of the Aunts are sadists. Some are opportunists. And they are adept at taking some of the states of 1984 feminism__such as the anti-porn campaign and greater safety from sexual assault__ and turning them to their own advantage. (Atwood 2023, XVI)

The Aunts are responsible for sustaining the Ceremonies in Gilead by training the Handmaids in the Rachel and Leah Centre, where women are transformed into Handmaids and take an integral part in the birthing process. This process of indoctrination and brainwashing takes

the most dehumanising of fashions while false ideologies are forced into the handmaid's minds.

In the novel, the Aunts are also granted the highest status for a working female in Gilead. They are the instructors and the enforcers of Gilead's women, including the Unwomen, Marthas, and the Jezebels. When Offred secretly accompanies the Commander to the club, which serves as a brothel for the Commanders, she learns from Moira that an Aunt is responsible for regulating the behaviour of the prostitutes. The Aunt determines when the prostitutes' breaks are taken and for how long (Atwood 2023, 313). The Aunt's responsibilities also include discipline and health, and everything from brutal branding rituals to regulating the diets of pregnant handmaids. Their violent methods of psychological manipulation are primarily meant to create women who will blindly submit to their Commander's desires and further the goals of the phallocentric society. In the Red Centre, for instance, the Handmaids are taught that rape is acceptable and learn to betray each other to gain immunity within the system. This systematic indoctrination reveals the insidious nature of patriarchal control and its detrimental impact on women's autonomy (Howells 2005, 96). Such control is rooted in what ecofeminists identify as an oppressive framework of value dualism, which is the chief reason for Gilead's internal crisis and eventual collapse.

Atwood showcases how the republic's attempt to transform Handmaids into mechanical robots backfires, a failure evidenced in the novel's Historical Notes. Although the Theocratic Republic's specific end is not explicitly narrated, it is evident that internal pressure and a disfigured image of utopia cause its demise (Plumwood 1993, 194). The novel's provocative conclusion suggests that, despite the horrors of Gilead, women's deep connection to the organic cycles of nature emerges as a potent weapon against patriarchal and dualistic ideologies.

3.3. Language as a Vessel of Androcentrism

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, language is another tool of domination honed by the repressive Gileadean regime to guarantee total submission on the part of its citizens. The phallocentric society

creates a language of its own to suit its repressive tendencies, and almost every aspect of daily life is affected by these linguistic alterations. In this regard, Atwood deliberately elucidates how gender-biased language shapes the characters' thoughts and perceptions of the world, even during the pre-Gileadean era. That is, the language that had for centuries been dominated by male-oriented choices becomes the pure manifestation of male despotism in Gilead.

In Gilead, an official lexicon is constructed to obscure reality with deceptive language, serving the interests of the ruling elite. Stripping women of their fundamental rights, Gilead solidifies its control through the imposition of hierarchical titles. Whereas men's titles are Structured in accordance to militarized lines of command, women's designations derive exclusively from their reproductive, domestic functions and their gender roles as Aunts; the women who control and train the handmaids, Wives; The Commande's wives who also belong to the elite of Gilead, though being females, they have significantly less status, Handmaids; fertile women who live with the elite to bear their children, Marthas who are household servants, and the worker bees or Econowives who work menial jobs to support the lifestyles of the elite.

This idea is further exhibited when Offred reflects on the absence of a word to denote sisterly affiliation between females: "Fraternise means to behave like a brother. Luke told me that. He said there was no corresponding word that meant to behave like a sister. Sororise it would have to be, he said" (Atwood 2023, 11). This cultural ethos, whereby women internalise underlying competitiveness against each other, is immaculately mirrored in Atwood's society. From a young age, boys' peer groups are hierarchical and activity-based. Therefore, boys are usually encouraged to engage in healthy competition as they display their personality traits in social interactions (Maccoby 1998, 36). Conversely, girls lack the resources to manage feelings of anger and jealousy, since they are taught that being nice is the primary female virtue (Underwood 2003, 14). Their competitive drive persists into

adulthood, often visible in workplace dynamics or female peer groups, and morphs into indirect aggression (Crick & Grotpeter 1995, 712; Campbell 2004, 11)

Another manifestation of the power of language in shaping realities is Offred's reflection on her ideas on what men might say as 'pure speculation.' She realises that she is clueless about what men used to say. "I had only their words for it" (Atwood 2023, 32). The use of 'words' instead of 'word', in this context, transforms the expression 'their word for it' into a direct allusion to the subordination of females by a male-dominated society. Likewise, the process of linguistic manipulation further erodes individuals' identities and degrades them to a subhuman status. In the novel's ethical universe, female feminists and deformed babies are labelled as unwomen and unbabies, while non-heteronormative identities are outright rejected and branded as Gender traitors.

By the same token, Jewish and black people are linguistically dehumanised through biblical terms like 'Sons of Jacob' and 'Children of Ham'. This process of linguistic segregation of non-white and non-Christian populations is state-mandated to create a pseudo-Christian ethnostate. The term children of Ham, for instance, is deliberately used by Atwood to refer to the curse of Ham (Genesis 9:25, King James Version), which is a biblical interpretation historically used by pro-slavery advocates (Evan 2006, 15). In the same way, the forcible displacement and relocation of black people and Jewish minorities are justified through the usage of the euphemistic term "resettlement" (Atwood 2023, 317). Black Americans are displaced to national homelands in the Midwest, whereas Jewish people are given the choice to return to Israel. However, the historical notes at the end of the novel show that many of the ships transporting Jews were dumped in the ocean due to privatisation and cost-cutting by the regime.

However, the ultimate epitome of linguistic reductionism and biological essentialism is the standard greeting "Blessed Be the Fruit," (Atwood 2023, 23) which is met with the traditional reply "May the Lord open" (Atwood 2023, 23). This use of the prescribed

greetings for personal encounters not only enforces conformity, but syntactically reduces women to a resource and their children to agricultural products (the fruit). The reply "may the lord open" is also indicative of the state-sanctioned socialisation of women as passive vessels who completely lack agency even during casual interactions. Any deviation from pre-Gilead vocabulary is, thus, met with suspicion and accusations of disloyalty. Furthermore, Gilead's rituals are defined by specially created terms such as 'Salvagings', 'Prayvaganzas', and 'Particicutions.'

More significantly, Gilead asserts authority over women's bodies by exerting control over their identities through names. Women are deprived of their names and identities in the totalitarian regime, and even some of the Commander's wives are given new names. Serena Joy, for instance, is not the commander's wife's real name. Her original name in pre-Gileadian life was Pam. Offred learns this information through a news magazine (Atwood 2023: 45). Another manifestation of the Handmaids' deprivation of their self-identities is the constant interchangeability of their new names in different households. Every facet of the Handmaid's individuality is erased (Freibert 1988, 285). Their names are taken away. Instead, they are given titles derived from the names of their Commanders, or their owners, as far as the law of Gilead is concerned.

For example, the naming convention for Handmaids involves the possessive 'Of' followed by the Commander's Christian name they serve, as seen with Offred, Ofwarren, and Ofcharles. After fulfilling their birthing duties, Handmaids exchange these names for new ones in each household they serve. Offred, serving under Commander Frederick Waterford, becomes known as Of-fred. Her name would change again when she moves on to a new assignment. When Offred's shopping companion and friend, Ofglen, was replaced, her replacement also introduced herself as Ofglen. Offred describes that horrifying moment as she encounters the new Ofglen, saying, "Ofglen, wherever she is, no longer Ofglen. I never did know her real name. That is how you get lost, in a sea of names" (Atwood 2023, 295). The protagonist herself yearns to hear her real

name and the feeling of individuality it gives. Once emblematic of her humanity, her name now reduces her to mere objecthood:

> I yearn for Luke's presence, for the comfort of being acknowledged by name. I crave validation, longing to be recognised for more than my utility. Recalling my former name serves as a poignant reminder of my lost agency and how others once perceived me. (Atwood 2023, 08)

The interchangeability of names proves the general principle of male domination in Gilead's patriarchal society. The Handmaids are subjected to this type of domination from the outset.

When dominated and controlled by a patriarchal mentality, language becomes weaponised. It allows masculine figures to assert their masculine machismo and maintain utter control while oppressing women. The formation of the fictional system of Gilead has mainly been carried out through the sexual inequality in language. With her masterful narrative technique, subtle use of puns, and deconstruction of words and their definitions, Margaret Atwood unveils the ease with which the power of language is overshadowed, as she attempts to expose the dangers of ignoring this power.

4. Conclusion

Ecofeminist scholarship has increasingly turned to *The Handmaid's Tale* not just as a critique of Gilead's phallocentric order, but as a map of the intersecting oppressions binding women and the environment. Tracking the evolution of these interpretations reveals more than the simple marginalisation of female characters; it uncovers a narrative architecture deeply embedded with ecofeminist logic. In Gilead, the domination of the womb and the domination of the land are not separate projects. They are the same war. Atwood's novel acts less as a prediction and more as a diagnosis of current political and ecological trajectories, specifically the toxicity of unchecked imperialism and androcentricity. It is a warning shot

against the dangers of severing human society from the natural world it inhabits.

Yet, characterising Atwood merely as a prophet of doom misses the fundamental engine of her writing. In her discussions on *The Testaments*, she insists that "writing is always an act of hope" (Wagner 2019, 14). The very act of setting words down presupposes a future reader, a consciousness across time and distance that can receive the message. This hope is often subterranean in her dystopias, buried under layers of repression, but it remains the driving force. It surfaces explicitly in *The Testaments*, where a pillar of the Gileadean regime corrodes the system from within, leaking the data necessary to topple it (White 2020, 1).

Atwood reinforces this resilience in her Peggy Downes Baskin lecture, rejecting the idea of inevitable collapse. "As you will notice by looking in the mirror, the human race has survived up until now", she notes (White 2020, 2). For Atwood, hope is not an intellectual choice but a biological imperative, a built-in survival mechanism that distinguishes us from machines. As she frames it, hope is the prerequisite for action: "If you don't have hope, you don't work for something better because you don't think it's possible" (White 2020, 2). Without it, resistance dies.

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AUTHENTICITY AND APPROPRIATION: THE INTERPLAY OF IDENTITY AND REPRESENTATION OF DIASPORIC ASIAN FEMALE AUTHORS IN R.F. KUANG'S "YELLOWFACE"

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Abstract: The discourse surrounding authenticity and appropriation in literature, especially within the context of diasporic Asian authors, has garnered significant attention in recent years. With the increasing visibility of Asian voices in contemporary Anglophone fiction, debates about who has the right to tell certain stories and how cultural identities are represented have intensified. These discussions frequently interrogate the boundaries between artistic license and cultural sensitivity, which raises complex questions about representation, authorship and power dynamics. R.F. Kuang's *Yellowface* (2023) offers a provocative entry into these debates, as it critically examines the appropriation of Asian cultural narratives by non-Asian writers and the implications of such practices on perceptions of authenticity and identity in literature. This paper aims to analyse how *Yellowface* navigates the complex interplay of authenticity and appropriation by focusing on its portrayal of the diasporic Asian female identity within a predominantly Western literary framework. It explores how Kuang challenges traditional notions of authorship and cultural representation while grappling with the ethics of storytelling.

Keywords: diaspora, identity, cultural appropriation, storytelling, publishing industry

INTRODUCTION: LITERARY ETHICS AND CREATIVE OWNERSHIP IN *YELLOWFACE*

In the ever-shifting terrain of contemporary literature, the rise of diasporic Asian voices has sparked crucial discussions on

authenticity, identity and the complexities of narrative ownership. Set against the backdrop of the publishing industry, Kuang's novel *Yellowface* (2023) presents a searing critique of cultural appropriation, identity commodification and the racialised hurdles faced by diasporic Asian authors seeking visibility and validation. Through the characters of June Hayward, a struggling white author, and Athena Liu, an acclaimed Chinese American writer, the novel interrogates the thin line between admiration and appropriation. The relationship, as dramatised in June's co-opting of Athena's work, interrogates the publishing industry's increasing "market-driven diversity" (Brouillette 2014, 82), revealing how even the most earnest calls for inclusivity can mask systems of bias and appropriation. Kuang's exploration of cultural appropriation and narrative ownership is best understood in light of the "possessive investment in whiteness" (Lipsitz 1998, 60). Lipsitz argues that white identity is often secured and reinforced through the "appropriation of marginalised cultures" (Brouillette 2014, 62).

June Hayward embodies this very phenomenon as she rebrands herself under the racially ambiguous pseudonym 'Juniper Song' to publish Athena's work, thereby effectively capitalising on the demand for *diverse* voices while retaining the privilege of her own racial ambiguity. June's actions reveal what Lipsitz calls a "possessive nature" (Brouillette 2014, 57) that co-opts cultural identities for self-gain, which raises ethical questions about the boundaries between admiration and appropriation. Compounding the issue is the persistent impact of the model minority myth on Asian diasporic authors, who often find their experiences framed by stereotypes that emphasise industriousness and adaptability. Frank H. Wu examines how the "model minority" myth upholds a vision of Asian Americans as industrious, educated, and economically successful, while effectively positioning them as both "model citizens" and "outsiders" (Wu 2002, 47). Athena Liu's success in literature exemplifies the model minority ideal, yet her death and subsequent erasure through June's appropriation highlight the precariousness of this position. Athena's success is

contingent on her exoticised identity within the literary field, where her Chineseness is both an asset and a limitation. It presents a duality that Kuang explores to emphasise the fragility of minority representation in an industry rife with appropriation. According to Tamara Bhalla, diasporic Asian writers often grapple with the Western fetishisation of their identities within a framework that commodifies difference. Bhalla notes that while diasporic literature promises diversity, it also reinforces "rigid expectations of authentic representation," often privileging narratives that align with the Western multicultural ideal (Bhalla 2011, 29). This restrictive framework is exemplified in June's adoption of Athena's manuscript, which reflects how stories are rebranded to fit industry-defined parameters for authenticity and marketability. The novel critiques this demand for authentic voices by dramatising how easily narratives can be reinterpreted, reshaped and repackaged to align with Western commercial agendas.

The complexities of commodifying authenticity are further unpacked by Sarah Brouillette, who posits that "publishing increasingly sells diversity" by privileging stories that align with mainstream sensibilities, thus "diluting the authenticity of marginalised voices" (Brouillette 2014, 91). Kuang's novel mirrors this dynamic as June's success with Athena's story hinges on her racially ambiguous pseudonym and calculated projection of an *exotic* identity, underscoring the publishing industry's readiness to embrace palatable representations over more complex and culturally embedded narratives. Shirley Geok-lin Lim asserts that Asian American women are "either invisibilized or essentialized," pressured to conform to narrow cultural expectations to gain visibility in predominantly white spaces (Lim 1996, 158). This restrictive framework is embodied in Athena Liu's character, whose identity as a successful Chinese American author simultaneously represents personal success and a reminder of the industry's inherent gatekeeping. Athena's exoticised identity becomes the catalyst for June's envy, illustrating the paradox wherein minority success often provokes resentment and

appropriation from those who feel sidelined by the demand for diversity.

Sianne Ngai's exploration of envy as a racialised emotion finds resonance in June's complex relationship with Athena. Ngai suggests that envy in creative spaces is "a response not only to personal inadequacy but to the perceived advantages held by others within racialised frameworks" (Ngai 2005, 133). This emotional landscape is vividly portrayed in the novel, where June's envy toward Athena's achievements amplifies her desire to appropriate Athena's manuscript. Kuang uses this fraught dynamic to expose the racial dimensions of envy by revealing how deeply embedded biases can manifest in the competitive spheres of art and literature, where whiteness often enables access to creative resources at the expense of minority voices. The intersection of racial, cultural and ethical tensions creates a layered critique of identity within the novel. Athena's struggle to maintain her narrative authority while navigating an industry primed to commercialise her story reflects the precariousness of diasporic Asian identity in Western literary spaces. As Homi K. Bhabha observes, cultural appropriation is often an "ambivalent act of mimicry," one that reflects both a desire to belong and an underlying drive to subsume the identity of the other (Bhabha 1994, 125).

Kuang dramatises this ambivalence in June's transformation into Juniper Song, which blurs the ethical lines between representation and exploitation. *Yellowface* calls into question the ethics of literary production as it confronts the themes of envy, appropriation and narrative ownership. It highlights how deeply systemic biases influence the reception and valorisation of minority narratives. The novel's portrayal of identity as a commodity reflects the often-fraught relationship between cultural diversity and authenticity, thus raising pertinent questions about the responsibilities inherent in representing marginalised experiences. This complexity serves as a backdrop for the novel's broader examination of contemporary publishing and its commodification of racial and cultural identities. Through her incisive critique, Kuang situates her novel as a

compelling meditation on the power dynamics that continue to shape the experiences of minority authors. It lays bare the tenuous balance between visibility and vulnerability in a world where diversity itself has become a lucrative enterprise.

The Power of Narrative: Bias, Consent and Cultural Identity

Kuang intricately weaves a narrative that not only explores the themes of cultural appropriation and identity but also interrogates the complexities of storytelling itself. The interplay of narrative voice and authorship raises pressing questions about consent, particularly when it comes to representing marginalised identities. At its core, the novel critiques how dominant cultural narratives often overshadow authentic voices and illuminates the ways in which confirmation bias influences the reception of these stories. This section will delve into the dual nature of storytelling as a tool for both empowerment and exploitation, examining how the characters of Juniper Hayward and Athena Liu embody these tensions. Storytelling serves as a foundational element in *Yellowface*, reflecting both the personal and cultural struggles of its characters. When Athena dies unexpectedly, Juniper's immediate response is to seize her manuscript, leading to a cascade of moral and ethical violations. Kuang writes, "It felt wrong to call it my own. But then, what else was I supposed to do? I had to publish it—if I didn't, all of Athena's hard work would die with her" (Kuang 2023, 68). This moment encapsulates the core conflict in the novel, *i.e.* the struggle for authenticity against the backdrop of a publishing industry that often commodifies cultural narratives for market gain. Juniper's appropriation is emblematic of a broader trend where dominant voices claim stories that do not belong to them. This phenomenon raises questions about consent in storytelling. How can one claim to tell another's story without their explicit permission? Kuang challenges readers to confront the uncomfortable reality that many

stories, especially those of marginalised communities, are often told by individuals outside those communities. The narrative theft not only silences authentic voices but also distorts the cultural contexts that shape those stories.

The concept of confirmation bias is pivotal in understanding how narratives are shaped and received within society. Confirmation bias refers to the tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories, often leading to selective storytelling that reinforces dominant cultural narratives. Juniper embodies this bias, as her motivations are rooted in envy and ambition rather than genuine appreciation for Athena's work. As she navigates her newfound literary success, Juniper selectively interprets Athena's legacy to align with her own aspirations. She states, "I wanted to be the best, and if that meant becoming Athena in the eyes of the world, then so be it" (Kuang 2023, 100). This statement highlights the extent to which Juniper is willing to distort reality to fit her narrative, showcasing the dangerous implications of confirmation bias in storytelling. John Frow argues that "narrative forms are not merely reflections of social realities; they are also tools through which those realities are constructed and understood" (Frow 2015, 42). In this light, Juniper's appropriation of Athena's story is not merely an act of theft but a reaffirmation of the societal structures that prioritise white voices over marginalised ones. The perpetuation of these narratives creates a feedback loop, where the dominant culture's understanding of identity becomes increasingly skewed, while authentic voices are rendered invisible.

Juniper's lack of consent in appropriating Athena's manuscript raises critical questions about the moral responsibilities of authors when representing identities that are not their own. Alice Walker asserts, "To write is to take a risk. To take a risk is to honour the complexity of the story, to acknowledge the voices involved" (Walker 1982, 215). Juniper's actions starkly contrast this notion, as she disregards Athena's agency in favour of her own ambitions. Kuang's narrative further complicates the issue of consent by illustrating how the publishing industry often prioritises

marketability over ethical considerations. In one poignant scene, Juniper reflects on the superficiality of the publishing world: "They wanted a story with a face, a narrative that could sell. They didn't care if it was true; they cared if it was profitable" (Kuang 2023, 145). This sentiment resonates with the critiques of the publishing industry voiced by scholars such as Tessa Hadley, who argues that "the commodification of stories often leads to a homogenization of narratives, where authenticity is sacrificed for the sake of marketability" (Hadley 2020, 89). The industry's focus on diversity as a marketing tool rather than a genuine commitment to representation underscores the ethical dilemmas inherent in storytelling.

In *Yellowface*, the dichotomy of empowerment and exploitation becomes increasingly pronounced as Juniper navigates her literary career. On one hand, her appropriation of Athena's work provides her with a platform and visibility; on the other, it simultaneously erases Athena's identity and contributions. This tension highlights a critical paradox: while storytelling can serve as a means of empowerment for marginalised voices, it can also be weaponised to exploit and commodify those very narratives. Scholarly discourse on empowerment in literature underscores the necessity of authentic representation. In her analysis of diasporic literature, Kiran Das argues that "true empowerment in storytelling arises when marginalised voices reclaim their narratives, rather than having them co-opted by those outside their communities" (Das 2022, 57). Juniper's failure to recognise and respect Athena's narrative illustrates the dangers of a storytelling dynamic where consent is ignored, which leads to the commodification of identity and experience. Juniper's appropriation of Athena's manuscript not only reflects her desire for success but also her struggle with her own identity as a writer. The novel opens with a tragic incident, *i.e.* Athena's accidental death, which in turn marks the beginning of Juniper's ethical quandary. The moment Juniper discovers Athena's unpublished work, she states, "I'd been sitting on this manuscript for months, paralysed, unable to write a word of my own. But now,

it felt like I was being handed a golden ticket" (Kuang 2023, 54). This line encapsulates the seductive nature of storytelling in a competitive literary landscape, highlighting how Juniper views Athena's voice not as a distinct narrative but as a means to validate her own identity and career.

However, as Juniper engages in this act of literary theft, the ethical dimensions of storytelling come into sharp focus. The act of claiming another's story, especially that of a marginalised voice, raises critical questions about authorship, ownership and authenticity. In this context, Mary Louise Adams argues that "stories are never told in isolation; they emerge from the interplay of individual experiences and collective histories" (Adams 2018, 33). Moreover, the impact of Juniper's actions extends beyond the individual narrative to the broader cultural landscape of publishing. By appropriating Athena's story, she not only claims ownership over a narrative that is not hers to begin with, but also perpetuates a cycle of erasure that is often experienced by authors from marginalised backgrounds. This cycle is evident in the literary marketplace, where stories by Asian female authors frequently struggle for visibility. Athena's struggles as a writer resonate with real-world challenges faced by many authors of colour. As Susan Scafidi notes, "the visibility of minority authors is often contingent upon their ability to navigate a predominantly white literary landscape that tends to favour certain narratives over others" (Scafidi 2019, 122).

Identity and Representation: The Impact of Market Forces on Asian Female Authors

Yellowface offers a provocative exploration of the tensions between authenticity and commercial viability, as it reveals how market forces shape narratives and influence the visibility of marginalised voices. Kuang's portrayal of June is layered, presenting her not merely as a villain but as a product of a publishing environment that often prioritises marketability over authenticity. In her quest for

success, June embodies the internalised biases and aspirations that many aspiring writers face, particularly those who do not fit the mainstream mould. The tension between her ambition and the ethical implications of her actions is indicative of the larger challenges that Asian female authors confront in an industry that frequently sidelines their voices in favour of narratives that are deemed more palatable to a dominant readership. Nancy Wang Yuen asserts, "the publishing industry often perpetuates the model minority myth, leading to a narrow representation of Asian identities that fails to reflect their complexities" (Yuen 2021, 25). Yuen highlights how market forces can limit the scope of representation, which compels authors to navigate expectations that may not align with their lived experiences.

Kuang, in her novel, critiques not only individual acts of appropriation but also the systemic structures that enable and perpetuate these dynamics. The publishing industry operates within a framework that often prioritises profit over authenticity, leading to a homogenisation of narratives that fails to represent the diversity of Asian female experiences. Gwendolyn A. Goh notes that "the market often rewards stories that conform to existing stereotypes while marginalising those that challenge the status quo" (Goh 2020, 112). The commodification of narrative forms creates barriers for Asian female authors seeking to enter a market that is frequently resistant to nuanced representations of their identities. In the pursuit of commercial success, they are often pressured to conform to specific narrative frameworks that align with market expectations. The result is a tension between the desire for authenticity and the need for visibility in a marketplace that privileges certain types of stories over others. Kuang highlights this struggle through June's interactions with editors and agents, who demand that she shape her narrative to fit within established parameters of success. These pressures are not merely anecdotal; they reflect broader trends within the industry that dictate what constitutes a sellable narrative.

Moreover, the tension between authenticity and marketability is particularly pronounced in the context of Asian authors who must

navigate a landscape fraught with stereotypes and tokenism. The notion of the model minority often simplifies and flattens the complexities of Asian identities, reducing them to a set of marketable traits that may not accurately reflect their realities. This is exemplified in June's attempt to craft a narrative that aligns with the expectations of a predominantly white audience. The publishing industry's approach to diversity and representation often results in superficial gestures rather than meaningful change. While there has been a growing acknowledgement of the need for diverse voices in literature, this push for inclusivity is frequently accompanied by an emphasis on marketability that can dilute the authenticity of the narratives being told. As Viet Thanh Nguyen argues, "the quest for diversity often leads to tokenism, where writers of colour are invited to participate in conversations without the power to shape them" (Nguyen 2020, 14). It underscores the importance of interrogating the motivations behind calls for diversity in publishing and recognising the ways in which market forces can influence the narratives that are ultimately deemed worthy of representation.

Kuang's narrative also highlights the dichotomy between public perception and lived realities. June's popularity as a supposed Asian author places her in a position of privilege, even as she grapples with the internalised guilt of her deception. The tension reflects the broader societal tendency to elevate narratives that conform to expectations while silencing those that deviate from the norm. The portrayal of June's public persona as a celebrated author starkly contrasts with her private turmoil, thus illustrating the often-invisible emotional labour that marginalised authors endure in pursuit of recognition. V. S. Ramachandran states, "the public celebration of diverse narratives frequently overlooks the struggles of those who create them, leading to a disconnect between representation and reality" (Ramachandran 2019, 117). The pressures of market forces are not solely limited to the narratives themselves but also extend to the personal lives of authors who are forced to navigate a landscape rife with scrutiny and expectations. Kuang explores this dimension through June's attempts to maintain

her carefully constructed facade, revealing the toll it takes on her mental and emotional well-being. As June's lies spiral out of control, her internal conflict deepens, culminating in a crisis of identity that speaks to the broader experiences of Asian authors who grapple with the tension between personal authenticity and societal expectations. According to Janelle A. Wong, "the burden of representation often falls disproportionately on marginalised writers, who must navigate their identities while simultaneously battling the market's demands" (Wong 2022, 45).

As June ascends to success through deceit, she inadvertently perpetuates a cycle of erasure that has historically plagued marginalised authors. The systemic barriers that limit the visibility of Asian voices are further exacerbated by June's actions, which exemplify the dangers of cultural appropriation and the commodification of identity. Amina Wadud emphasises that "the act of appropriation is not merely a theft of narrative; it is a violent erasure of the cultural context and history from which those narratives arise" (Wadud 2018, 78). Wadud underscores the critical need for ethical engagement with narratives that emerge from diverse backgrounds, urging a re-evaluation of the power dynamics that shape the literary marketplace. The literary marketplace is inextricably linked to broader societal conversations about race, gender and identity. Kuang's novel serves as a microcosm of the tensions that characterise these discussions, exposing the ethical dilemmas faced by Asian authors who navigate a landscape fraught with challenges. The pressures of market forces compel authors to grapple with their identities in ways that can dilute their narratives and compromise their authenticity.

Conclusion

Yellowface serves as a critique of the mechanisms through which stories are told and received, especially those concerning marginalised communities. As the story unfolds, the character of

Juniper Hayward, a white author who appropriates the work of her deceased friend, Athena Liu, becomes a lens through which we explore the ramifications of narrative ownership and the insidious nature of confirmation bias. The closing reflection on these themes emphasises the urgent need for a revaluation of who gets to tell stories, how those stories are constructed and the implications they carry for cultural identity and representation. The central theme of appropriation in the novel is particularly timely in a cultural moment that demands accountability and sensitivity in storytelling. Juniper's actions serve as a stark illustration of the power dynamics at play in the publishing industry, where voices from historically marginalised backgrounds often struggle to be heard amid the louder clamour of dominant narratives. The novel prompts us to consider the ethical implications of narrative ownership; it challenges the assumption that any author can rightfully claim the stories of others, especially when those stories belong to cultures from which they are not a part. As June muses, "It felt wrong to call it my own. But then, what else was I supposed to do? I had to publish it—if I didn't, all of Athena's hard work would die with her" (Kuang 2023, 68).

The concept of confirmation bias also plays a critical role in shaping Juniper's understanding of Athena's narrative. Confirmation bias, the tendency to interpret new information in a way that confirms preexisting beliefs, becomes a tool of distortion for Juniper, who manipulates Athena's story to fit her own desires and ambitions. Kuang poignantly illustrates this as Juniper asserts, "I wanted to be the best, and if that meant becoming Athena in the eyes of the world, then so be it" (ibid., 100). Here, Juniper's ambitions are not merely self-serving; they also reflect a broader societal pattern where narratives are often selectively appropriated to reinforce dominant identities. The manipulation of narrative not only undermines the authenticity of marginalised voices but also perpetuates a cycle in which those voices are further suppressed. The interplay of identity and market forces further complicates this landscape. The literary marketplace often prioritises narratives that align with established stereotypes or fulfil marketable tropes, while

sidelining authentic representations that reflect the complexity of real experiences. Kuang highlights this dynamic when she writes, "The industry was obsessed with the idea of the 'model minority'—a narrative that flattened our identities into something palatable" (ibid., 153). John Frow posits that "narrative forms are not merely reflections of social realities; they are also tools through which those realities are constructed and understood" (Frow 2021, 42). Frow's assertion resonates with Juniper's journey, where her appropriation of Athena's narrative not only distorts the original story but also reinforces the very structures that dictate which voices are valued and which are silenced. Juniper embodies the problematic intersection of ambition and ethical disregard that characterises many narratives shaped by market forces.

Athena Liu serves as a poignant counterpoint to Juniper's deceitful actions. Athena, who is a successful Asian American author, represents the authentic voice that is often eclipsed in favour of more commercially viable narratives. The contrast between Athena's genuine experiences and Juniper's opportunistic appropriation speaks to the larger narrative of representation in literature. In a market that frequently commodifies identity, Athena's story becomes a casualty of Juniper's ambition. As Kuang poignantly writes, "In death, Athena became more valuable to me than she ever was in life" (Kuang 2023, 215). It encapsulates the tragic irony of appropriation, where the worth of a narrative is often assessed only after the voice behind it has been silenced. The impact of cultural narratives extends beyond individual stories because they shape societal perceptions and collective identities. When stories are told without proper acknowledgement of their origins, the resulting narratives contribute to the perpetuation of stereotypes and cultural misunderstandings. Sarita Malik argues that "cultural narratives are powerful because they shape the collective memory of communities, influencing how individuals perceive themselves and their identities" (Malik 2021, 102). Kuang also raises this critical issue when she writes, "To tell someone's story without their permission is to deny them agency, to strip them of their identity" (Kuang 2023,

320). The powerful assertion emphasises the need for a paradigm shift in how stories are approached and who has the authority to tell them. Through the character of Juniper Hayward, Kuang elucidates the dangers of narrative appropriation and the ethical dilemmas that arise when individuals seek to claim the stories of others. It can thus be concluded that the power of storytelling lies not only in its ability to entertain or educate but also in its potential to forge connections, build empathy and promote understanding across cultural divides.

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"DHAR OBARRAN". A TRANSLATION AND POSTCOLONIAL READING OF A RIFI POEM

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Abstract: This study translates and analyses *Dhar Obarran* from a postcolonial perspective. The poem was composed and sung during the Moroccan Rif War (1921-1926), fought by Spain and later France against the Rifis in northern Morocco. Dhar Obarran, a mountain in that region, witnessed one of the most remarkable battles of the conflict. It ended with the victory of the Rifis, leading to the expulsion of Spanish colonisers. Alongside translating from Tarifit into English, the paper discusses the poem's binarism through a postcolonial lens, focusing on the interplay of life and death as a means of expressing resistance to oppression. It also highlights the roles of nature and religion in shaping this vision, showing how Rifis turned to faith as a final refuge to renew their courage, belief, and hope.

Keywords: Rif, Spaniards, Dhar Obarran, colonialism, binarism, life, death, religion, nature

INTRODUCTION

This paper reads *Dhar Obarran* from a postcolonial perspective and examines how it expresses resistance to Spanish colonisers while preserving the indigenous culture and history of the Rif people. Postcolonial theory explains how colonialism influences people, cultures, and societies. It sheds light on the voices and experiences of those who were colonised, showing how colonisers have shaped their stories and identities.

Dhar Obarran is an oral epic poem from the Rif region in Morocco, deeply rooted in the history of the Rif War (1921-1926). It was produced right after the Rifis' victory in the battle named Dhar Obarran, which took place on the mountain of Dhar Obarran in 1921. The poem belongs to the tradition of Izlan specifically, and to Amazigh resistance literature generally (Tirawinino 2017, 12).

Despite the extensive literature in French and Spanish, little is said in English. Hence, this paper serves two main objectives. The first is to translate it from Tarifit (the Moroccan variant used by the Rifis) into English, as translation plays a pivotal role in revitalising indigenous languages and cultures (El Guabli 2024, 35). The second objective is to deconstruct its meanings. Thus, the article is also a call for Tamazgha researchers to produce further studies, translate, and analyse other anti-colonial poems and songs.

Literature Review

Analysing *Dhar Obarran* from a postcolonial perspective raises a range of interrelated questions. The poem is part of Amazigh resistance literature; it was composed and sung in an indigenous language, engaging with issues of identity, land, and minority status. Translating it is of paramount importance as it is a step forward not only to revive the Amazigh Rifi language and culture, but also to convey Rifi folk literature to Anglophone readers.

This theoretical framework moves from general to specific key issues. It is divided into three main axes, beginning with oral literature, which addresses fundamental challenges such as the absence of written records and the difficulty of accessing dispersed or lost sources. The second axis, Amazigh literature, examines its key challenges, including resistance, and questions whether it qualifies as minor literature, as well as the problem of translating Amazigh works into dominant languages like French and English. The third axis, Amazigh poetry, defines and contextualises *Dhar Obarran*.

Oral Literature

It is an oral genre, spoken or sung, that is produced in collective societies, where it reflects identity and culture while conveying history and traditions more through speech than writing. This is how oral literature is passed from one generation to the next. In those cultures, the local language serves as a tool for transmitting cultural knowledge (Finnegan 2012, 54).

Challenges of Oral Literature

Folk literature often lacks written records, which complicates scholarly analysis. Studying this genre is difficult because its creators often remain anonymous. As a result, these artistic products stand alone during examination, detached from their makers. In addition, there is the rapid growth of globalisation and socio-economic changes. Hence, these two factors place pressure on smaller communities responsible for their production (Finnegan 2012, 29). The absence of written documents threatens cultural communities, especially local ones that are not accustomed to recording their heritage in writing. This makes the study and analysis of folk literature even more challenging. Finnegan (2012, 24) claims that researchers who write about oral literature face many challenges due to the lack of accessible sources in this field. This discipline needs further investigation because most of the works are unpublished, and much of the material is difficult to find. Besides that, there is little treatment of contemporary forms, which makes oral literature perceived as dead, outdated, and primitive. Hence, this artistic genre receives far less scholarly attention (Finnegan 2012, 24).

AMAZIGH LITERATURE

Orality in Amazigh literature

Scholars across sociology, folklore, ethnography, and linguistics claim that this literature originates in verbal transmission. Even though the majority of Amazigh literature is rooted in folk

tradition, it should not be limited to it. The Amazigh have their own alphabetic script, known as Tifinagh, which dates back to ancient times and continues to be used today, particularly in Morocco, Algeria, and among the Touareg communities. This serves as strong evidence that Amazigh literature has also existed in written forms; however, many written records have been lost over time (Chafii 2015, 03). Furthermore, since the twentieth century, a significant number of written works in Tamazight have emerged, including poetry, tales, fables, novels, plays, and novellas, though novellas are less common. This development shows that Amazigh literature is undergoing a pivotal transitional period, shifting from an oral tradition to a written one. Amazigh poetry is categorised into classical and modern forms. Classical poetry is traditional and has specific rhythmic structures. On the other hand, modern Amazigh poetry is characterised by its free verse, not controlled by the rhythmic rules of classical poetry. Traditional poetry remains popular, spontaneous, proverbial, and orally transmitted across generations by anonymous poets, and it is performed orally at cultural and social gatherings (Chafii 2015, 04).

Amazigh Resistance Literature

Merolla (2020, 27) discusses the situation of Imazighen/Berbers in North African literature. She investigates Berber literature and "literary space" by examining the construction of identity and the discourses of minority and majority. Indeed, the marginalisation of Amazigh languages and communities is rooted in both colonial and postcolonial periods, linked to the formation of nation-states (Merolla 2020, 29). In response to this, many professionals, semi-professionals, and amateurs started learning and teaching Berber writing while collecting, transcribing, translating, and republishing oral poetry and stories in written form. This led to the emergence of local Berber identities (Merolla 2020, 30). Thus, the minorisation of Amazigh culture gave rise to Amazigh resistance literature.

Minorisation

Some Amazigh writers do not consider Amazigh literature part of minor literature, which is a concept theorised by Deleuze and Guattari in 1975 (Medjedoub 2024, 204). Minor literature does not refer to the textual products published in a minority language, but rather to the textual products written in the dominant language by authors who belong to minority groups (Merolla 2020, 32). In addition to that, Amazigh writers define minor literature as marginality or inferiority, and they always attempt to emphasise Amazigh literature as a form of affirmation of their identity, so instead of being part of 'minor literature', they want to be categorised alongside the dominant one. However, this genre remains defined as the literature that is produced by a group of people who belong to the minority group but do not reside in a geographical space where the minority language is spoken (Medjedoub 2024, 204).

Amazigh literature is historically marginalised. Imazighen have experienced a severe identity crisis, located in a fragile space, between existence and disappearance, between the present and the past, and between forgetting and remembrance (Medjedoub 2024, 204). Not only is the literature regarded as inferior, but the language of Tamazight itself, compared to Arabic, reflects a failure to recognise the existence of its identity (Medjedoub 2024, 206). The rise of Amazigh literature has helped young Berbers become conscious of their identity. In the post-independence period, Imazighen experienced linguistic and cultural underestimation; consequently, their oral artistic products became crucial because they helped to connect with their identity and homeland, Tamazgha (Medjedoub 2024, 206).

Challenges

El Guabli (2024, 19) argues that the problem of Amazigh studies is that many writers produce works in dominant languages such as English or French, rather than in their indigenous language. On the other hand, writing in Tamazight not only revitalises it as a literary

language but also enriches its vocabulary. Otherwise, if the textual product tackles themes of Tamazgha in a dominant language, the Amazigh language itself remains underdeveloped. Hence, language choice remains one of the main contemporary issues in Amazigh studies (Medjedoub 2024, 206).

Translating Amazigh Literary Products

Many researchers avoid the word "indigenous" because it is associated with colonial times, during which natives were oppressed and treated unfairly. However, after 1993, "indigeneity" became crucial to Amazigh activists and researchers when they called Imazighen the natives or the first people of North Africa. Amazigh literature has fostered a sense of Amazigh identity as the original inhabitants of North Africa. Consequently, this has helped Amazigh researchers and activists to use literature and translation to revive not only their language but also their culture. Many researchers nowadays are producing translated books from Tamazight into English (Medjedoub 2024, 206). El Guabli says:

> While these translations convey the state of Amazigh creative writing to Anglophone readers, they also draw attention to the importance of translation as a revitalising force for Indigenous languages. Indeed, as the rich theory produced in the field of translation studies demonstrates, translation scholars have long grappled with untranslatables, furnished approaches to translation (choosing to domesticate or foreignise a text, for example), and examined the multidirectional impact translation has on both the source and target languages (Medjedoub 2024, 206).

El Guabli believes that although these translations introduce Anglophone readers to the current state of Amazigh creative writing, they also shed light on the pivotal role translation plays in revitalising indigenous languages. Translation studies have played an important role in exploring challenges such as untranslatability, developing different translation strategies, including the choice to domesticate or foreignise a text, and analysing how translation influences both the original and the target languages in multiple directions (Medjedoub 2024, 206). El Guabli (2024, 206) says: "One

could say that to be translated is to be given a chance to sustain a language and culture that dominant languages could phagocytose and potentially replace". Hence, translation plays a revitalising role in indigenous languages, such as Tamazight.

Amazigh language and culture were nearly silenced and on the verge of disappearing, but now they are growing and becoming popular. There is a wide range of poems and stories translated from Tamazight into English, and these texts are considered part of many efforts to revitalise this language. For the Amazigh people, composing poems is not just an art, but also a way to present their identity, express their emotions, and share their struggles with the world. Thus, translating these textual works brings the Amazigh voices to global audiences (Medjedoub 2024, 206).

Amazigh Poetry

The overlap between music and literature in Africa has great significance, although much less is being said about folk literature as a whole (Finnegan 2012, 512). In fact, the use of music is widespread, and the Moroccan Rif region's literature is an example. In the Moroccan Rif, which is a region located in northern Africa, people used to compose short poems that are called "Izlan". Composed orally by Moroccan Rifi women accompanied by drums, these verses are usually sung at special occasions such as weddings and ceremonies. Indeed, using musical instruments helps create a rhythm and a melody (Radouani and Chafyq 2024, 45). Therefore, music in folk literature constitutes a fundamental characteristic.

In the Rif region, poetry has different names, and it comes in various poetic forms. For example, the term "Lavnuj" (in Tarifit) is the local equivalent for poetry; this heritage is distinguished by a variety of poetic types, with multiple artistic and aesthetic qualities. The poetic forms found in this region include Izran, Tiqsisin, Tamdyazt, and Izran n Rbyuz. Similarly, in the Middle

and High Atlas Mountains, another region, Amazigh poetry is rich in cultural sub-genres, each with its own various characteristics, such as: Tamawayt, Izli, Tayffart, and Tivuniwin. In the Southeast region, Amazigh poetry is expressed through different sub-genres and forms, depending on social and cultural situations. This region is divided into five major tribal confederations: Ait Atta, Ait Yafelman, Ait Tdght, Ait Sddrat, and Imghran (Chafii 2015, 05). Therefore, every Berber region has its own poetic characteristics.

"Dhar Obarran": The Battle and the Poem

Many anthropological studies on the Maghreb shed light on how various social groups express their worldviews through oral traditions. One of the earliest works was done by René Basset in 1892, in which he recorded poems composed during the 1871 Kabylie uprising in Algeria. A similar phenomenon occurred in Morocco, where tribal resistance, often framed as Jihad, became part of the oral historical record. In the Rif region, the most famous form was the Izran songs, performed by unmarried girls or Imdyazan (professional musicians). In both the Rif and Jebala regions in Morocco, women were the primary creators of these oral genres, playing a pivotal role in shaping collective memory. These oral traditions reflect resistance and colonial dynamics. During the Rif War, Abd al-Krim recognised the power of oral literature and employed rhymed epic poems to promote his cause and recruit fighters (Chtatou 1991, 28). By the 20th century, these oral traditions had evolved, and they became part of wedding ceremonies. In the 1970s and 1980s, Rifi singer-songwriters emerged, pioneering the protest song genre (Dieste 2021, 05).

David Hart documented the battle songs in the central Rif during his fieldwork in the Ait Waryaghal land. However, he notes that the *Dhar Obarran* song remained largely unnoticed until several years after independence. During the Spanish protectorate period, these songs were censored by local judges (Cadis) and

influential figures aligned with Spain because they celebrated a Rifi victory over the Spanish forces (Hart 1976, 374). According to Hart, who transcribed the lyrics, the song is considered an Izran, and it praises the courage of the Rifi fighters who defeated the Spanish army (Dieste 2021, 12-13). Indeed, there are many versions of this song, such as *Dhar Obarran*'s version sung by Bouarfa Ayawar, which has been used in video montages with historical images of the colonial war. Besides that, there is also the one created by the group Agraf. Similarly, the singer-songwriter Walid Mimoun composed a song commemorating this battle (Dieste 2021, 13). Indeed, Dhar Obarran is a mountain in the northern Moroccan Rif region, which witnessed one of the most remarkable battles in the history of the Rif War between the Spanish colonisers and the Rifian warriors. This conflict, named Dhar Obarran, occurred before the Annual disaster and ended with the victory of the Rifis, who succeeded in expelling the Spanish colonisers. Therefore, Dhar Obarran is a significant place that demonstrates the Rifis' commitment to their identity (Ter Laan 2023, 12).

Opinions vary on whether *Dhar Obarran* is a poem (Izri), a song (Aghnij), or a short story (Taqsist). Generally speaking, the work is part of the resistance literature in Rifi culture, and it is a historical document that addresses the concerns of the Rifi resistance. Additionally, the poem was not composed by one individual but collectively by many Rifis. However, the individuals who composed it are anonymous. Hence, we can say that this epic belongs to all the Rifis, who are loyal to their land and ready to defend their freedom and fight against any oppression. Another aspect to consider is that the actual number of lines is unknown. In fact, there have been several attempts to collect and analyse the lines of this work, but researchers still claim that there might be other lines that have been lost or forgotten over time. This is a limitation that hinders its study and analysis. Therefore, *Dhar Obarran* is a poem that expresses the collective identity of the Rifis and their connection to their land (De Madariage 1990, 50).

TRANSLATING THE POEM

The poem in Tarifit (the Moroccan Rifi variant)

Aya Dhar Obarran, Aya sous nyekhsan
Wizik igharren, azzayes ighar zman
Amenghar ziwromi, youdef gha Thamsaman
Thamsaman ma thehwan
Matghirach dbenaaman
Magharrench thibrighin ibissn sifiran
Amighar ogharrabo khwaarar nwaman
Qimen dayes iromiyyen, temradazen amimoyan
Iqim slah nsen khwaman amighonam
Arbbi mamech ghagegh ikhdduj aammi
Khmi dayi ghaterqa
Khmi dayi ghathini
Muuh mani ykka
Muuh amjahed Thangith harraka
Rabbi mamech ghagekh iwaban abarchan
Atbehded somatta

Translation in English

Oh, Dhar Obarran, Oh my murderer!
He who trapped you, may time trap him too
As it trapped the coloniser, who entered Thamsaman
Do you think that Thamsaman is easily colonisable?
Do you think that Thamsaman is furnished with the poppy anemone?
Or you were seduced by the girls, girded with fine threads?
As it seduced the ship on the water
Where the colonisers stayed, butting heads like goats
Their weapons were left on the water, just like sugar cane
Oh God! What shall I do with my cousin Khedduj?
Once she will meet me

She will ask me
Where is Mouh?
Mouh, the fighter! was killed by the incendiary bombs!
Oh God! what shall I do!
Black eyes welled up with tears
The tears of my mother shed on my knees.

Limitations of Translation

The aim behind this translation is to convey the meaning and emotional resonance of the original poem. However, due to linguistic, cultural, and stylistic differences, some wordplays and phonetic effects were hard to translate into the target language. Starting with the original poem's rhythm, the musicality of the original version of the poem is not maintained in the translated version, so this cadence is almost lost in the translated poem. The rhythm is represented in the phoneme /n/, such as in the words: *nyekhsan, zman, Thamsaman, thehwan, dbenaaman, sifiran, nwaman,* and *amimoyan*, and the phoneme /a/ with words like: *ghaterka, ykka, harraka,* and *somatta*. This rhythm creates musicality in the poem, but it is not maintained in the translated text. Another limitation is syntax differences. Sentence structure differs from one language to another, so changing the sentence structure in the target language changes the poem's flow. Hence, these rhythmic and syntactic limitations must be acknowledged.

POSTCOLONIAL READING

In this section, the paper analyses the poem from a postcolonial perspective. Readers will observe both in the translated and the original versions that the poem portrays a struggle between the colonisers and the colonised (the Spaniards and the Rifis). This struggle is manifested in the chosen words, which form a binary. Hence, to understand this poem profoundly, this analysis starts

with a brief introduction into binarism in postcolonial theory, to examine the duality between the Rifis and the Spaniards, and then it will shed light on the vocabulary used, by dividing the poem's vocabulary into themes. Therefore, this reading introduces themes of life and death, nature, religion, and Jihad, and their relation to oral literature and resistance.

Binarism in Post-Colonial Theory

Binarism refers to the combination of two things, a pair, or duality. It is a term widely used in several fields, particularly in post-colonial theory. The term was first established by the French linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who argued that signs derive meaning from their opposition to other signs, and not by a simple reference to real objects. While signs are defined and realised according to their difference from other signs, the binary opposition is the most extreme form of difference, for example: man/woman, life/death, and black/white. Indeed, these contrasts are very common in the cultural constructions of reality (Ashcroft 2003, 31).

In post-structuralism and feminism, these binary opposites create unfair systems where there is always a privileged side (men, life, white) and a marginalised side (women, death, black). These binary opposites are imperialist in nature. For example, dividing the world into the centre and the margin, the coloniser and the colonised, and the civilised and the primitive (Ashcroft 2003, 32). This anti-colonial poem, *Dhar Obarran,* challenges this imperial relationship between colonisers and colonised, which is unidirectional (the colonisers controlling the colonised) (Ashcroft 2003, 34). In this poem, it is not the Spaniards who are controlling the Rifis, but the relationship is now more of a two-way interaction. In the battle of Dhar Obarran, the Spaniards started the fight, but the Rifis ended it by fighting back, winning, and making history. This subversion of the binaristic structure allows the colonies to affect and leave an impact on the colonisers.

VOCABULARY

Life and Death

Colonial literature often explores the theme of death as a reflection of the brutal impacts of imperialism on the colonised people. In colonial lands, the inhabitants' aim is to survive, and their enemy's aim is death. Hence, life and death become intrinsically linked to identity and belonging because the struggle for survival is the main reason for resistance against colonial intervention.

The poem's vocabulary reveals deeper meanings through its word choices. An analysis of these linguistic choices suggests that the vocabulary is divided into two different categories: the vocabulary of life and the vocabulary of death.

Vocabulary of Life	Vocabulary of Death
• *Dbenaaman:* poppy anemon • *Thibrighin ibissn sifiran:* girded with fine threads. • *Nwaman:* water • *Amjahed:* fighter	• *Sous nyekhsan*: the murderer • *Wizik igharren:* trapped you • *Slah:* weapon • *Thangith:* killed

The vocabulary of death is associated with the colonisers, while the vocabulary of life is associated with the colonised. This is the breaking down of the binaristic structure. The Rifi fighters, who belong to the margin and who are perceived as powerless and primitive, are associated with the vocabulary of life. In contrast, the Spaniards who belong to the centre and are supposed to be powerful and civilised are associated with the vocabulary of death. This binary opposition between the vocabulary of life and death is very significant. The colonisers spread death on the colonised land, while the colonised people strive for survival. They refuse to die, so they are defending their identity and belonging. Therefore, life and death are two intrinsic elements, even if they are opposed.

Despite the Rifis' struggle and proximity to death, they still desire to survive and triumph over the Spaniards. For instance, even though *"Mouh, the fighter! Was killed by the incendiary bombs!"* they still want to survive, live, and defeat the Spaniards, as shown in the lines: *"Do you think that Thamsaman is easily colonisable? Do you think that Thamsaman is furnished with the poppy anemone?"* Additionally, whenever the Rifis or Rifi places are mentioned, the vocabulary of life is also invoked. This illustrates the Rifis' devotion to their land and people, and how much they are attached to their homeland. This admiration fills them with hope, prompting them to use the vocabulary of life. Furthermore, the Rifis present themselves not only as patriotic inhabitants who adore their land and are ready to sacrifice themselves for it but also as people who detest the colonisers and have a strong determination to defeat them: *"As it trapped the coloniser, who entered Thamsaman"*. Therefore, the vocabulary of life and death in this poem is highly significant.

Nature

Nature is another theme included in the vocabulary of life. It is also associated with the Rifis and their land. Examples include words such as poppy anemone, water, sugar cane, and goats. The vocabulary of nature is employed whenever the poem addresses the Rif land, such as *Thamsaman* (a village in the Rif region), for instance: *"Do you think that Thamsaman is easily colonisable? Do you think that Thamsaman is furnished with the poppy anemone?"* The poet threatens the Spaniards and warns them not to try to access *Thamsaman*, because it is not furnished with the poppy anemone, meaning that the coloniser will not find it easy to colonise the land. Most of the words that connote nature are conveyed through similes. For instance: *"butting heads like goats"* and *"their weapons were left on water just like sugar cane"*. In these two examples, the poet describes the situation of the colonisers after their loss: their heads were butting each other like goats, and they died, leaving weapons on water just like sugar cane. Indeed, nature is widely used in

Izlan. The use of nature in Izlan reflects its role in constructing Rifian identity and the Rifis' connection to their land.

Jihad, Resistance, and Music

Jihad is the fighting approach of the Rifis during the Rif War (1921-1926). The Rifis believed that Jihad is their only way to lead the region into liberation. That was the belief of Pennell as well: *"Jihad would lead to the liberation not only of the Rif but of the whole of Morocco and beyond"* (Pennell 1986, 208). In the poem, the anonymous poets highlighted Jihad. Within the verses, the Rifis were described as "*Amjahed*", which means the fighters, instead of soldiers or another name. For example, *"Muuh amjahed"* (Muuh the fighter) is a character in this poem, and he is a fighter/ Mujahid who fought during the Dhar Obarran battle. The poem shows that Muuh was killed at the end by the incendiary bombs, leaving his cousin Kheddouj, who was likely to be his wife, because it was common practice in Rifi society at that time to marry cousins. The mention of incendiary bombs is a reminder of the brutality and the cruelty of Spanish colonisers, although it was universally prohibited. Indeed, the poem shows the extent to which Jihad holds a special place in the Rifis' lives.

In addition to that, the refrain of this poem is of a religious nature. A refrain is defined as a line, a phrase, or a group of lines that are repeated throughout a poem or a song. The refrain of this poem is *"Oh God, what shall I do!"* In this verse, the poet expresses his helplessness to God and asks for divine guidance. This refrain shows that despite the fact that the Rifis are strong and they succeeded at defeating the colonisers, they still show their helplessness and humility to God. Religion for the Rifis is a source of power. They resort to God to recharge their power and hope. Religion became a tool for the Rifis to resist the Spaniards and colonial intervention. Indeed, the Rifis extensively mention religion in their poems, so religion and poetry became interrelated. Poetry is a tool for the Rifis to reaffirm their identity, and part of it is religion. Hence, this poem has allowed us to see how important religion is to them.

CONCLUSION

In honouring *Dhar Obarran*'s memory, we are reminded of the Moroccan Rifi history of resistance and endurance, which is a legacy that is characterised by courage against adversity. This poem, as part of this legacy, teaches us the importance of preserving our Amazigh cultural identity and continuing the struggle for justice. The poem not only reminds us of our history of glory and dignity, but it also inspires us to carry forward the spirit of hope and resilience.

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BAKUNDU TRADITIONAL AUTHORITY SYSTEM. AN EPITOME OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL DEMOCRACY

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Abstract: This article examines the precolonial Bakundu traditional authority system as a distinctive expression of African democracy. It argues that Bakundu political organisation was based on collective deliberation, moral accountability and a participatory ethos that anticipated many of the principles associated with modern democratic governance. Drawing from archival sources, oral interviews and scholarly interpretations, the study analyses the institutional structure of the Bakundu polity made up of the *Mowele Mboka* (village head), *Janea ra Mboka* (traditional council), and *Bekali* (secret societies) – to reveal how they functioned as instruments of justice, conflict resolution, and community cohesion. Far from being autocratic or primitive, Bakundu governance represented a dynamic system of checks and balances rooted in the people's collective will. The article concludes that the Bakundu model exemplifies the participatory, consultative and moral foundations of African democracy before colonial disruptions.

Keywords: Bakundu, traditional, democracy, African, authority

INTRODUCTION: TRADITION, AUTHORITY, AND THE DEMOCRATIC IDEA IN AFRICA

The notion of democracy in Africa has long been obscured by Eurocentric theories that equate civilisation and democratic culture with Western political evolution. Yet, before the imposition of colonial rule, African societies, including Bakundu of the forest belt of Cameroon, had a well-developed system of governance grounded in popular participation and

moral legitimacy. The Bakundu Traditional Authority System, which thrived before European contact, demonstrates that democracy in Africa was not imported; it was indigenous, organic, and deeply embedded in the social fabric of communities.

Tradition, according to *The American Heritage Dictionary*, denotes a mode of thought or behaviour followed by a people continuously from generation to generation (2000, 121). It encompasses beliefs, customs, and institutions transmitted through time. Authority, by contrast, is the recognised power to command or determine (Raz 1990, 125), while a system implies a coherent network of interrelated institutions. Thus, traditional authority system may be understood as a culturally inherited network of institutions and practices that regulate power and ensure order in a given community (Musima 2025, 18).

The Bakundu, like many African peoples, had their own concepts of government. As Casely Hayford famously remarked, "Before even the British came into relations with our people, we were a developed people, having our own institutions, having our own ideas of government" (Rodney 1982, 33). These ideas were not anarchic but organised around moral codes and collective decision-making. Through the centuries, Africans shaped societies whose vitality testified to their "historical genius" (Khapoya 1998, 21). In this sense, the Bakundu political system illustrates a decentralised democracy that fused religion, law, and politics into a single moral order.

This study, grounded in archival and ethnographic evidence, explores the structure, values, and functions of Bakundu traditional authority as an expression of African democracy. It first situates the Bakundu within the broader typology of African political systems, then analyses the *Mowele Mboka*, *Janea ra Mboka*, and *Bekali* as democratic institutions. Finally, it reflects on the enduring relevance of Bakundu governance principles of contemporary African political thought.

I. Historical Foundation of the Bakundu Traditional Governance

Precolonial African political systems fell into two categories: centralised or state systems and decentralised or "stateless" systems (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1967, 5, 75). Centralised states were hierarchically organised with bureaucracies and clear class distinctions. Stateless systems, by contrast, operated through kinship, lineage, and age-grade associations rather than formal bureaucracies (Khapoya 1988, 61). The Bakundu belonged to the latter category—an acephalous or segmented polity where authority was diffused among elders and councils rather than concentrated in a monarch.

British colonial reports on the Kumba and Ossindinge districts confirm this characterisation when it states that "Hereditary and legal chiefs of tribal traditions would appear unknown to the primitive village communities in times prior to European intervention. The village elders exercised authority in communal matters (…) one would tend to dominate the others through personality, prowess in war and seniority" (NAB, file no. 48.1a/1920/3). This description captures the consensual nature of Bakundu governance—rule by elders, not despots.

Anthropologists such as Meyer Fortes and E.E. Evans-Pritchard later classified African societies into "category A" (centralised) and "category B" (non-centralised) systems. The Bakundu clearly fit category B: a democratic community where power emanated from the people and was mediated by lineage heads and councils (1970, 75). According to oral tradition, Bakundu governance originated with Ngoe, the legendary ancestor who ruled as patriarch over his household. His ruling on all matters was accepted without mistrust and always as the best that could be. Things started becoming complicated when the children of Ngoe started to get married and form their own families. Each of Ngoe's grandsons looked at their immediate father as their head, who ruled over their private and community life, making him their immediate authority while they venerated Ngoe as "grandfather" (Ejedepang-Koge 1986, 74).

Since the family was growing larger, Ngoe had to teach his children how to solve problems and make decisions in concert, which was hitherto taken solely by him without consultation. This led his children, it is purported to discover a method of arriving at decisions by a gradual process of contribution and elimination of facts and evidence without bitterness, taking into consideration the significance and views of each member of the family. As his descendants multiplied, authority evolved from personal rule to collective deliberation, a shift from patriarchal dominance to representative consent.

Ngoe instructed his children in deliberative decision-making: they learned to analyse issues through contribution and elimination of facts "without bitterness" (Ejedepang-Koge 1986, 75). Thus, consensus rather than coercion became the foundation of authority. Leadership derived not from hereditary privilege but from wisdom, seniority, and moral integrity—qualities that formed the basis of indigenous democracy.

II. The *Mowele Mboka*: Moral Authority and the People's Mandate

At the apex of village leadership stood the *mowele mboka*—literally "owner of the village". This title denoted responsibility rather than absolute power. Among the Bakiundu, age and experience commanded respect; authority was a burden of service. When families migrated to found new settlements, the eldest or most respected member was chosen as *mowele mboka*, often for his wisdom, generosity, and participation in the secret societies (Ekoe 2019).

The *mowele mboka* embodies both secular and spiritual leadership. He was the highest in the rungs of the traditional authority, having numerous political functions and royal prerogatives, which included, among others, guaranteeing the socio-cultural well-being of the community, the settlement and the imposition of traditional

injunction orders (Nakomo 2020). He guaranteed peace, safeguarded the land, and served as custodian of custom and law. His role was not autocratic but paternal. As Dieudeonne Miaffo observed, to be chief is "to invest oneself in the service of the inhabitants of one's village and its interests" (1993, 25). The *mowele mboka* was thus a public servant in the truest sense, bound by moral obligation to his people.

Spiritually, he acted as chief priest—the intermediary between the living and the ancestors. Tatah Mbuy defines such institutions as moral bodies created by culture and collective choice; their authority transcends the individual occupant (2021, 26). The *mowele mboka* performed rituals, offered sacrifices to the "living-dead", and mediated between human society and divine order. Through these rites, he reinforced social harmony and legitimacy (Sakwe 2019). As an institution, its mission was to ensure and safeguard the sacredness and dignity of the human being. The identity of each person, including the *mowele mboka,* got its proper meaning from the manner in which he integrated into the community and his adherence to culture, which is understood here as the standard of morality.

The *mowele mboka* stood as a symbol of unity for his people, and his priority was clearly the common good of his people, which made him a father of the polity and a spiritual watchdog of the village. As such, the *mowele mboka* stood as that force that bound the people together, united and protected them, sealed the land from malevolent forces and poured out life-giving substances like breath, cam-wood, saliva, semen, and assured continuity (Lenya 2019). This was evident as he was a member of all the juju societies, which gave his office and personality a mystical connotation.

The *mowele mboka* was said to be present in the water as well as on land, which gained him the name *neyo o mariba*, *ne yo o mokondo*, meaning being somebody who lived in water and on land, and was able to control malevolent forces that could be dangerous to the lives of his kinsmen whilst bringing benevolent forces from the water. This was evident as all Bakundu villages were endowed with

rivers of different magnitudes. He also forestalled the malevolent forces that could be dangerous on land. These mystical powers of the *mowele mboka* made him the chief priest of the polity, which was his greatest responsibility to his community. All these attributes made the *mowele mboka* a divine institution, a moral body, a high priest whose authority was paramount and at the service of all his subjects (Itoe 2019).

This office was sustained by symbols of power, notably the *njongolo*—a sacred staff with mystical potency. Only the *mowele mboka* could wield it, using it to bless newborns, curse wrongdoing, or protect the community from malevolent forces. In ceremonies marking a child's birth, he would declare that the infant "belongs to the entire village", embodying the collectivist ethic that "I am because we are" (Mogobe 2003, 230). Such acts illustrate Ubuntu philosophy as practised in Bakundu life—individual identity subsumed in communal belonging.

Succession to the office was not hereditary but merit-based, which made the post never to be contested in the clan. Before "travelling to the world of the ancestors", the *mowele mboka* designated a worthy successor, often outside his own lineage, and symbolically handed the *mbonde*, a wooden cup representing the welfare of the entire village. The handing over ceremony by the *mowele mboka* was usually at the initiative of the passing *mowele mboka* personally, when he knew he was about to travel to the world of the ancestors.

Any *mowele mboka* who failed to perform this important ceremony before his death was considered as having died an abominable death, and his heirs were obliged to pay a fine intended to cleanse the village from the wrongs of the deceased, which was known as *etambu mboka* (Nakomo 2020). The transfer was ratified by elders and sealed through ritual oaths of mutual obligation between ruler and ruled. This principle that leadership is a trust subject to public consent reflects a democratic ideal of accountability.

In the pre-colonial Bakundu tradition, the *mowele mboka* never died but was euphemistically said to be missing or have travelled,

which signifies that he was just temporarily absent from public life (Nakeli 2019). The day his travelling was made public, there was a seven-day ceremony where representatives from other polities were invited, and on the last day of the ceremony, the new *mowele mboka* was presented to the public. The celebration venue also changes as it continued at the palace of the new *mowele mboka*. The change of venue from that of the passing *mowele mboka* to the new one on the seventh day of the celebration of the deceased *mowele mboka* was because this day was like a coronation ceremony for the new *mowele mboka*.

Before this day, the new *mowele mboka* had passed under different ritual instructions and purifications in order to prepare him both as a secular and spiritual leader of his people. This means that in pre-colonial Bakundu, palaces changed as *mowele mboka* also changed. This is because traditional authority in Bakundu is not hereditary, as Garson confirms this when he says that the transfer of power and authority from the passing away *mowele mboka* is to "any man of age and wealth, maybe chosen and upon his death it passes to another suitable candidate" (1932, 15).

III. The *Janea ra Mboka*: The Council of Elders and Collective Governance

Pre-colonial Bakundu society, as has been noted earlier, was an acephalous society in which power was not concentrated in a single institution. This type of society was one in which power was shared and diffused (Khapoya 1998, 61). This goes to indicate that it was a representative type of administration which falls in the whims of modern democracy. Ngoe, the legendary ancestor of the Bakundu and related clans, led his children to discover a form of administration where power moved from the concentrated patriarchal stage, in which Ngoe was the patriarch, to one of representative or shared authority through consent. He led them to discover a method of arriving at decisions by a gradual process of

contribution and elimination of facts and evidence without bitterness (Ejedepang-Koge 1986, 75). Through this, the elders sat together to discuss their common affairs, to settle disputes between their members or offences against the society as a whole.

If the *mowele mboka* represented unity, the *janea ra mboka* embodied participation. It was more of a legislative body, but also had limited judicial and executive powers. It ensured that no single person wielded unchecked power. The council consisted of *batobakoli* (elders) drawn from every lineage, each representing his extended family. Their deliberations were held in the *etana,* which was a sacred, mystical house situated at the centre of the village. It was the centre of peace and a protective force for the village. It formed the heartbeat of village democracy. Tovey notes that "all executive and legislative meetings were held in this meeting house, which was situated in the middle of the village street. It was erected and maintained by communal labour, and the village gongs (provided by the secret societies but public property) were kept there" (Tovey 1937, 2).

Decisions were reached through open debate and consensus. Fortes and Evans-Pritchard noted that the African government rested on "a balance between power and authority on one side and obligation and responsibility on the other" (1970). The Bakundu council exemplified this balance: it could challenge or advise the *mowele mboka*, propose laws, and adjudicate disputes. As Tovey's report observed, "village laws were formulated at private meetings of the council and announced to the public by the oldest man or speaker" (1931, 5). The council's functions extended to organising communal labour, maintaining public order, and fixing dates for purification rites or festivals. The jurisdiction of the traditional council or council of elders, to an extent, included judicial functions to try cases and inflict sanctions where necessary. According to A.D Garson, "the settling of disputes of a trivial nature was probably done in the village by the village elders" (1931, 28).

Women and children were not allowed into the *etana* and did not participate in its activities. Women, on the other hand, participated

indirectly through the *diyara ya barana*. The *diyara ya barana* was a council for and of women, which assisted the traditional council in handling feminine cases whose final verdict was to be communicated to the *janea ra mboka* by the *iyamba* (Balemba 2020). The *diyara ya barana* was a legislative but more of a judicial council. The *iyamba* was the only woman who could enter the *etana* and who voiced women's perspectives to the main council. The *iyamba* was an elderly woman who was considered as intelligent as the men. She was capable of contributing greatly to the socio-cultural development of the polity and a respectable member of the *ngoa maloba* secret society. This is a society by women and for women only. This gendered representation, though mediated, underscores the inclusive ethos of Bakundu political life.

Other males who were not council members of the council but were allowed into the *etana* were those considered as intelligent adults or *meriki ma mikenji* or *bato basise* (Tovey 1937, 3). While in the *etana,* they could not partake in the deliberations inside the *etana*, nor were they allowed to sit or given seats, since all the elders had their folding stools known as *katta*. This stool was made of animal skin and special wood from the forest. These elders go to the *etana*, each with his *katta,* and so those who were not elders could not have seats (Njiboli,2020). While in the *etana,* they listened to the deliberations in which their contributions were heard by the village head in his palace. This set of men was those whom the community, through the elders, regarded as being able to contribute to the development of the polity through their intelligence (Lenya 2019).

Importantly, the council was accountable to the people. Its members were lineage heads, not royal appointees, and could not be dismissed by the *mowele mboka*. This system prevented personal dictatorship and institutionalised collective responsibility. The *etana* itself symbolised transparency: situated at the centre, it was accessible to all adult men, while the town crier (*mwengele lenga*) announced decisions publicly. Regional cooperation further deepened democratic practice. Councils from different Bakundu villages convened joint assemblies to standardise laws and resolve

inter-village disputes. Offenders against these laws were tried by combined councils, emphasising equality before communal norms. In all cases, justice sought reconciliation, not retribution—a moral democracy aimed at restoring harmony within the community.

IV. The *Bekali*: Secret Societies as Instruments of Justice and Moral Regulation

Alongside the council operated the *bekali*-secret or "juju" societies that reinforced law and morality. Carr states in his report that "in the days before European occupation, the judicial system was controlled by the Juju clubs, or in certain cases by decisions of the whole village" (1922, 31). Although shrouded in ritual secrecy, these societies were integral to governance, serving as courts, police and moral educators. Carr continues by saying that "the elders are said to have had certain judicial powers, but where this began and ended, it is impossible to define. In any case, it appears their jurisdiction, or at any rate the enforcing of their decisions, was ruled by the juju clubs, and so it is primarily with the latter that one must deal in discussing the judicial system (Carr 1922, 31). Garson corroborates by stating that "the settling of civil disputes of a trivial nature was probably done in the village by the village elders, but anything of serious nature was done by the juju societies" (1932, 28). The authority of these societies derived from spiritual power symbolised in masks and rituals that personified the invisible world.

Secret societies were purportedly linked to various spirits, which gave them a double nature. Members of these clubs were both humans but also had other souls in animals in the forests or in the rivers, depending on the type of secret society to which one belonged. For example, members of the *malle* society were said to have "bush souls" in elephants, the Ngoa Maloba having theirs in red river hog, also known as bush pigs. That is why in their apparel and dance, they would always want to present things in resemblance to the animals to which they were attributed. To join a secret society, one had to meet certain criteria and subject oneself to a series of

sometimes lengthy initiation rituals. As the name of the organisation suggests, one must swear to absolute secrecy on the society's belief codes and rituals.

Owing to this double nature of the members of these societies, they were forced to be part of the Bakundu traditional authority system. They were instruments of peace and order in the villages (Moki 2020). These were not theoretical but practical matters in the traditional society, as evidenced in the role they played in the judiciary. Secret societies in their judicial functions helped in settling disputes between lineages, sometimes ordering punishments and seeing them carried out by their junior members wearing masks to conceal their identity, which Bohannan and Curtin say was to emphasise the spiritual basis of their authority (1998, 152). These instruments evolved through trials and errors, through evolution. The establishment of such bodies took time, patience, the desire and the will to develop in order to have something better. Consequently, the development of such institutions was a long process and a corporate responsibility of all members of the society. These societies were developed from old and were maintained as part and parcel of their tradition. The Bakundu people put great importance and attachment to tradition because they felt tradition was a sign of their virtue, a symbol of their oneness and the epitome of what they were (Itoe 2019).

Among prominent societies were *nganya, malle, mudimi, nyakpe, bassongo,* and *Balemba*. Each performed specialised functions: *nyakpe* handled civil and criminal disputes, *mudimi* punished theft, Kori dealt with adultery and debt, while *ngoa maloba* served as a women's association defending female interests. These organisations enforced decisions through fines, public shaming, or spiritual sanctions rather than physical coercion. The *nyakpe* society, in particular, exemplified indigenous justice. It adjudicated cases publicly, imposed restitution, and required reconciliation between disputants. Those who defied its verdicts faced spiritual penalties—ostracism or illness believed to originate from supernatural forces. This belief system ensured compliance without standing armies or

prisons. These societies were out to maintain morality and decency, especially in the manner in which they treated cases of theft and adultery. The severe manner through which these secret societies dealt with stealing made Carr, in his report, conclude by saying "with such drastic measures, it is not surprising that it was often said stealing was practically unknown among the Bakundu" (1922, 31).

One of the most important Juju clubs that contributed greatly to the pre-colonial judiciary of the Bakundu society was the *Nyankpe*. "In pre-European days, *Nyankpe* was the medium through which cases and disputes were generally settled. Matters entirely concerning another society and between members of that society could be heard by its head and elders, but all other cases, criminal and civil, were heard by *Nyankpe*" (Goodliffe 1931, 17-18). The *Nyankpe* Juju tried both criminal and civil cases, mostly cases on debt and adultery. When the offender was found guilty, he was fined. Failing to comply, the culprit was flogged by a smaller Juju called *mukongo*. Should this have no effect, the members took matters into their hands and killed a number of goats far in excess of the original fine. This process was said to enforce payments, as a man fearing further reprisals had to pay the fine (Carr 1922, 32). The goats or animals killed were just an addition to the original fine he had to pay to those whose animals were killed. In cases where the offender was a pauper, a wealthy man might pay for him and receive in exchange the offender's wife or daughter, or might accept the services of his debtor. It was as a result of this that it is said, "*Nyankpe* was very powerful in pre-European days, and very few persons were sufficiently headstrong or brave to withstand its influence. Persons who refused to comply with any order of *Nyankpe* were forbidden to enter their houses or farms until they had done so" (Goodliffe 1931, 19).

Through initiation rites, secret societies also educated youth in moral conduct and civic duty. Initiates were admonished to "avoid crimes, prevent others from becoming criminals, and watch over the observance of laws" (Ekondo 2019). They were reminded that all humans share a common ancestry and must not shed the blood of

their brothers. This moral pedagogy cultivated social responsibility and strengthened democratic citizenship long before the concept entered Western discourse. The *Bekali,* therefore, functioned as moral guardians of the polity. The activities of the secret societies are summarised by this writer when he states, "the authority of the secret societies was visible in their establishment of peace and justice, in sorcery, initiation, dance and the veneration of ancestors and the spirits" (Dah 1983, 182). By mediating between the visible and invisible orders, they sustained a sacred foundation for justice and legitimacy. As Khapoya notes, African governance integrated religion and politics into a holistic moral universe where law derived from both ancestral authority and communal consent (1998, 32).

V. Governance, Consensus, and the Democratic Ethos

The Bakundu traditional system illustrates what contemporary scholars term "consensual democracy". Leadership was legitimised through consultation, and authority was constantly checked by councils, kinship networks, and spiritual institutions. As Fortes and Evans-Pritchard emphasised, African rulers "governed by consent", and subjects could exert pressure to make them discharge their duties.

Three democratic principles underpinned Bakundu governance. First was participatory representation: every lineage and gender had a voice, either directly or through delegates. Second was accountability: rulers and councillors were judged by their service to the common good, and neglect of duty attracted moral sanctions. Third was collective decision-making: policies emerged from deliberation aimed at consensus, not majority rule- a form of participatory democracy suited to small, cohesive communities.

Moreover, Bakundu democracy was moral and spiritual. Authority was sacred because it was exercised for the preservation of life, peace, and fertility—the community's highest values. Justice sought restoration rather than punishment, echoing John Mbiti's

notion that African religion and ethics permeate all aspects of life (1990, 2). The *mowele mboka*, council and secret societies operated as interdependent organs of a single democratic organism in which power flowed from the people upward.

VI. Continuity, Change, and Colonial Disruption

The advent of colonialism in the late nineteenth century profoundly altered Bakundu governance. European administrators, misunderstanding the consensual and spiritual nature of traditional authority, imposed a hierarchical system of chiefs that contradicted the indigenous practice. Offices once earned by merit became hereditary, and power that had been shared became centralised.

Colonial rule thus dismantled the intricate balance between ruler, council, and people. As A. Njiasse-Njoya observed, colonial governments "invented chiefs for their own ends" (2003, 308), transforming spiritual custodians into political agents. The colonial distortion undermined communal accountability and introduced authoritarian tendencies alien to the Bakundu ethos.

Yet, elements of the old system endured. Even under colonial and post-colonial pressures, the moral authority of elders and councils persisted, and the language of communal consensus continued to guide village governance. In the contemporary quest for democracy in Africa, the Bakundu model offers valuable lessons: democracy is not a Western import but a restoration of indigenous traditions of participation, moral leadership, and social justice.

Conclusion

The Bakundu traditional authority system is a compelling illustration of African democracy rooted in community, consensus, and moral legitimacy. Its institutions—*Mowele mboka, janea ra mboka*, and

bekali—embodied a division of powers that ensured both accountability and cohesion. Authority was earned through service, decisions were reached through consultation, and justice aimed at reconciliation.

In Bakundu's thought, leadership was a sacred trust, society a moral organism, and democracy a lived practice of mutual respect. Long before the colonial encounter, the Bakundu governed themselves through structures that balanced individual rights with collective welfare. Recognising and valuing such indigenous systems not only challenges colonial narratives of African political inferiority but also provides inspiration for reconstructing democratic governance in Africa today. The Bakundu model—participatory, spiritual and human-centred—remains an enduring epitome of African democracy.

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A BHARTIYA VISION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: INSIGHTS FROM THE INDIAN KNOWLEDGE SYSTEM

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Abstract: The 'Indian Knowledge System' (IKS) is a collection of intellectual, moral, political, and spiritual beliefs that have been passed down through the ages. These structures are not just old things; they are important frameworks that may help us understand and deal with the complexities of human interaction, including international relations. IKS offers a new way to look at statecraft, diplomacy, global government and world politics. Its values are closely linked to the goals of world peace, multilateralism, bilateral cooperation, co-existence and sustainable development, and they are in line with the problems that the international system is facing today. The paper expresses how the IKS gives India a distinct intellectual history that shapes its foreign policy and teaches us how to connect ancient knowledge with modern diplomatic techniques. This heritage includes Chanakya's Arthashastra, which is about strategic realism, to 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam', which says that 'the world is one family'. This combination helps nations better understand global dynamics and contributes to a more balanced and peaceful international order. The study engages with the Saptanga Theory, *Sukra Niti*, the Buddhist Circuit and India's soft power perspective, Lord Krishna's diplomatic views, Hinduism and cultural diplomacy, as well as *Dharma–Janana* approaches to international relations.

Keywords: Indian Knowledge System, international relations, diplomacy, statecraft, world peace, sustainable development, foreign policy

INTRODUCTION

The Indian Knowledge System (IKS) is an extensive web of intellectual, moral, political, and spiritual traditions that have grown on the Indian peninsula over thousands of years. It is much more than just an old-fashioned inquisitive; it gives us a strong set of ideas that we may use to understand and deal with the complexities of modern global affairs and international relations. IKS expresses both realist and multicultural views on statecraft, diplomacy, and global governance. It does this by using well-known texts like Chanakya's Arthashastra and the Upaniṣadic notion of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam. This immediately addresses the needs of peace, multilateral cooperation, bilateral engagement, co-existence, and sustainable development, which are the hallmarks of contemporary global discourse in the 21st century.

IKS posits an interconnected universe that is simultaneously changeable and organised at its core. In this world, the Saptanga Idea of State, which encompasses the head of state, officials, its borders, citizens, fiscal affairs, the military, and comrades, is an early example of how the balance-of-power works. The Sukra Niti tradition of moral political advice, which stresses how morality and practicality are linked, is a heritage that goes well with this kind of strategic realism. The concept of the Buddhi Circuit, which underscores the importance of judgment and wisdom in the diplomatic process, aligns with modern initiatives that highlight the relevance of soft power and conventional authority. The amalgamation of several ideologies culminates in the formulation of a comprehensive framework that transcends mere power dynamics, encompassing the ethical and spiritual dimensions of international relations.

During India's struggle for independence, the idea that IKS focuses on universality and ethical goals was given an entirely novel means to be shown. Gandhi's notion of Sarvodaya, which means 'welfare for all', and non-violent partnership were based on the old ideas of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha*. They showed a paradigm of global

solidarity that was considered normal. Nehru's support for non-alignment, which mixed Gandhian idealism with practical politics, helped India, which had just achieved its sovereignty, become an intermediary between rival groups during the Cold War. Subhash Chandra Bose, on the other hand, used the fighting spirit of Kshatra dharma. He called for strong action to achieve political freedom and gained a position of moral authority in the eyes of the global public. M.N. Roy, an early supporter of humanism and radical democracy, restored together Upanishadic universalism and Marxist globalisation. He did this to make a picture of an international republic based on personal freedom and the common good.

This diverse history inspires India's current discussions about foreign policy and its soft security stance. Cultural diplomacy, which is facilitated by Hindu philosophical outreach, is an effective instrument for building relationships between people and promoting an inclusive narrative of civilisational conversation. The courteous counsel provided by Lord Krishna in the Mahabharata, which promoted negotiation, coalition formation, and ethical argumentation, remains a significant influence on modern methods for fostering trust and international systems. In the meantime, Dharma-jnana, which means 'knowledge of duty', gives people who work in civil society, non-profit organisations, and as intellectuals in international politics a moral guide.

IKS provides a specific conceptual framework that can be employed to navigate the constantly evolving dynamics of global politics. This is done by combining cultural volunteering, tactical realism, and moral multiculturalism. It also suggests a 'middle path' that puts both national interest and worldwide prosperity first, which goes against the concept that Westphalian statehood and international idealism are two separate things. The ideas behind IKS, which are based on old knowledge but are being redefined in new ways by contemporary thinkers, are an important tool for building a fairer, peaceful, and long-lasting international order in a time when competition between great powers is rising, climate disasters are happening, and norms are being challenged. Here are the conceptual

ideas being discussed in the study to prove the Idea that the Bhartiya Vision shows the global politics to foster the international relations and foreign policies.

ARTHSHASTRA'S STATE CRAFT VIA THE SAPTANG THEORY

Kotilya's Arthashastra, which focuses on statecraft, economic policy, and military strategy, offers a complete framework for comprehending the components that comprise a stable state. In order to provide a comprehensive understanding of national power and security, the 'Saptang Theory' (which consists of seven limbs of the state: Swami, Amatya, Janapada, Durga, Kosha, Danda, and Mitra) is introduced. This theory is renowned for its realistic approach to power and statecraft, which places an emphasis on pragmatic considerations of self-interest, security, and survival in an international setting that is competitive (Prasain 2024, 143). In the context of current international relations, it emphasises the interdependence of a state's internal strength with its external interactions. It places particular emphasis on variables such as strong leadership, effective administration, powerful economy, and strategic alliances. In their pursuit of national interest and regional stability, contemporary foreign policy frequently reflects these principles, whether they do so officially or tacitly. For example, the capacity of a nation to project power and influence on the international stage (for instance, through formidable military capabilities or economic sanctions) is intimately tied to the nation's internal cohesion, economic development, and good governance. This is a reflection of the all-encompassing nature of the Saptang theory.

Kautilya's Arthasastra and Machiavelli's 'The Prince' both look at government in a practical way, focusing on power, coalitions, and statecraft in their own ways. Kautilya, conversely, integrates moral concepts like Dharma and promotes the collective good, while Machiavelli prioritises the survival of politics and often neglects

morality. Kautilya's ideals, which come from many cultures, are centred on helping people rather than Machiavelli's thoughts (Parsain 2024, 142).

Sukra Niti on Good Governance

The Sukra Niti is yet another ancient Indian work that provides a comprehensive overview of the fundamental concepts of ethical behaviour, public administration, and good governance. The focus that it places on justice, welfare, and responsible leadership is in line with the conversations that are taking place in international organisations around the world today regarding good governance. The king's style Satvika, Rajsika and Takmsika and his doctrine of Karma and Pardhna must lead the nation towards good governance or in complete illumination (Krishana 2016, 33).

> Shukraniti has material to guide managers and leaders in several positions; the king as the current leader, the successor as a king in making, the key management personnel and support staff such as ministers and other employees, and interestingly, it also has lessons that are common to the king and the subjects alike. (Parikh 2020, 415)

Shukraniti offers everlasting leadership ideas that are important for good governance. It fosters ethical leadership while also stressing the need to keep an intricate equilibrium between goals, financial success, and moral obligations. The paper also talks about the good things that can happen when retribution is used, as well as how important it is to prepare administrators effectively, do their jobs effectively, and set up recurrence. The goal of these perspectives is to encourage strong governance and great leadership actions.

Lord Krishna's Diplomacy in the Mahabharata

The epic narratives of the Mahabharata and Ramayana provide profound insights into the ethics of warfare, as well as the resolution

of conflicts and the conduct of disputes. The role that Lord Krishna plays in the Mahabharata as a diplomat, arguing for peace before resorting to battle, exemplifies the significance of discourse, negotiation, and strategic communication in the context of international politics. Sama, which means 'conciliation', Dana, which means 'concession', Bheda, which means 'division', and Danda, which means 'coercion', are all examples of intricate statecraft that Lord Krishna used in the Mahabharata to show how to be a good diplomat (Mishra 2019, 60).

Contemporary diplomacy navigates complicated international relations by utilising a spectrum of engagement tactics to create alliances, manage rivalries, and ultimately prevent violence, much like Krishna's pursuit of peace through strategic negotiation. In a similar vein, the concept of 'Dharma Yuddha' (righteous war) in ancient epics, which outlines ethical behaviour during times of conflict, has parallels with contemporary international humanitarian law and the norms that govern the just use of force. These narratives highlight the deeply ingrained Indian tradition of seeking peaceful resolutions while simultaneously acknowledging the necessity of ethical engagement in conflict situations. This sentiment is exemplified by India's 'No First Use' nuclear policy and its historical reluctance to initiate conflict (Verma 2024, 1398).

Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam Concept and Brotherhood Policy

'The world is one family' is an old Sanskrit saying that is a key part of Indian philosophy and guides India's foreign policy. This saying encourages universal brotherhood and a sense of shared responsibility for global issues. Indian leaders employ the expression "vasudhaiva kutumkumbam" a lot on both national and international stages to promote an awareness of global togetherness and belonging. This shows that the word has been around for a long time. This expression has changed over time since it was originally

used to talk about changing political and international situations. Throughout history, politicians have used this word to make people think of harmony and peace around the world. But the literal meaning of the word has changed over time. Initially, used to stress the importance of universal ideals and a feeling of being part of a community of people that transcends the globe (Dash & Sharma 2024, 3527). The United Nations (UN) is based on this idea and promotes international cooperation, peace, and security. Regional organisations like the Asian Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union, and others are working towards collective action and mutual understanding among nations, which is similar to the idea of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'.

The Upanishads and the Bhagavad Gita are two texts that talk about universal wisdom, compassion, and the well-being of all people. These texts are the basis for the philosophy known as 'Vishav Guru', which comes from India's ancient spiritual and intellectual traditions. People think that India should help the world grow intellectually, spiritually, and morally because it has so much knowledge. This idea is becoming more relevant today because India is becoming a leader in the battle against global problems, including climate change, economic inequality, and environmental degradation. Vishav Guru's ideology is based on India's major systems of knowledge and stresses nonviolence, wisdom, and working together to make world relations better. The Prime Minister is inspired by the country's prosperous cultural and historical heritage, which he thinks would help him build a nation that is very beautiful and will make India one of the most prosperous nations. He sees the whole universe as one big family and calls it Vasudeva kutumbakam. He also sees India as the "vishwaguru", which means "the teacher of the world". Because of his hard work, June 21st is now World Yoga Day throughout the world. This shows how good he is at dealing with cultures. In closing, Modi said that yoga is a religious practice that started in India and that it is a very useful gift that India has given to the rest of humanity (Lakshman 2014, *The Hindu*).

India's Buddhist Circuit and the Development of Bilateral Relations in Asia

Illustrious monks such as Fa-Haien, Xuanzang, and Yi Jing undertook arduous journeys to India's sacred Buddhist sites, most notably Nalanda University. Because of their shared Buddhist ancestry, countries like Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia, and Japan have a deep historical and cultural connection to India. The establishment of Buddhist pilgrimage sites in India and the cultural exchanges that are made possible by this shared heritage are both important for India's soft power. These activities help build goodwill and strengthen diplomatic ties based on mutual respect and shared ideals. The principles of Buddhism are quite deep. Buddhism is a philosophy with a large set of beliefs and supporters all around the world. It stresses the necessity of finding ease in practices and keeping faith in a spiritual force that may give even the smallest difficulties meaning, which can bring consolation and objective. Buddha was a staunch supporter of freedom, equality, and brotherhood throughout history. These are basic ideas for harmonious living and a free society. Buddhism started in India, but it expanded all over the world, mostly through trade routes and the support of important leaders like Emperor Ashoka, who ruled the Mauryan Empire in India from 268 to 232 BCE. People aggressively disseminated the religion's lessons throughout Ashoka's kingdom and even further to regions like Sri Lanka, Central Asia, and Southeast Asia. Ashoka sent missionaries out to propagate beliefs on purpose (Oza 2022). Through cultural diplomacy, we can see how old spiritual connections can lead to modern geopolitical advantages.

Hinduism's Cultural Influence in ASEAN Countries

Hinduism has had a long-lasting impact on Southeast Asian countries, as seen in the stunning architecture of Angkorwat

temple in Cambodia and the Prambanan temple complex in Indonesia. This shared heritage helps to build strong cultural ties and bilateralism, which in turn helps to build strong diplomatic relations. India's cultural outreach and historical ties with these countries, which are based on similar religious and philosophical traditions, are strengthening strategic ties within the ASEAN region and beyond. Hinduism originated in India and South Asia but has since disseminated extensively, establishing a significant presence globally, including on every continent. Because this complex spiritual heritage is both territorialised in its historical nations of origin and deterritorialised via diaspora communities, a global perspective is essential for its comprehension. The notion that Hindu India represents a wellspring of global religion emerged partly as a response to colonialism and Christian missionary efforts, aiming for international acknowledgement. Over time, this grew to include the economic and educational triumphs of Hindu Diasporas, especially in the United States, which had an even bigger effect on the faith's growth around the globe (Jacobsen 2025, 72).

The idea of 'Dharma', which includes doing what is right according to moral principles and keeping order in the universe, goes beyond personal morality to guide how countries act towards each other in international relations. India's attitude on nuclear disarmament is an example of how committed the country is to the values of nonviolence and world peace. India's efforts in the UN to protect the rights of third-world countries and its resistance to military intrusions into sovereign nations are examples of the Dharma-driven diplomacy that India practices. India's foreign policy is founded on Dharma, which means that it puts ethical cooperation ahead of opportunistic partnerships on the world stage. India's ancient Knowledge System places a strong focus on nonviolence, wisdom, and a dedication to a world order that is fair and peaceful (Shani & Behra 2021, 18).

A Connection between India's Soft Power and the IKS

India's soft power, which refers to its capacity to attract and influence by cultural and ethical appeal rather than through coercion, is inextricably tied to its extensive Indian Knowledge System. In addition to Yoga, Ayurveda, Classical Music and Dance Styles, Cinema, Sports (kabbaddi and Malkhamba), these practices have a global resonance. This cultural diplomacy, which is shown by the widespread popularity of Yoga Day around the world, enables India to portray a favourable image and develop bridges with a variety of nations, so encouraging goodwill and strengthening diplomatic ties (Viswanathan 2019, 131-132).

While China's Belt and Road Initiative is a current undertaking, the historical 'Silk Road' was a testament to ancient knowledge sharing and cultural interchange across Asia, including India. India served as a vital node in this network, making significant contributions to the advancement of numerous civilisations in the fields of science, philosophy, and the arts alike. This historical precedent demonstrates the significance of intellectual and cultural interchange in the process of establishing interstate ties and mutual prosperity. This is a premise that continues to be relevant in a world that is becoming increasingly interconnected. For instance, China and India's cultural ties are firmly based on Buddhism and the Silk Road, two important avenues for cross-cultural communication (Tripathi & Ranjan 2017, 25).

On the other hand, many ancient Indian texts contain ecological wisdom that stresses how all life is connected and how people need to live in harmony with nature. These texts often talk about ecological ethics and sustainable development. IKS strongly believes in the idea of "Prakriti" (nature) as a sacred entity and the idea of living in a sustainable way. By supporting responsible consumption and sustainable development, India is joining global efforts to solve environmental problems. This is how India sees climate change and environmental protection in international forums (Khairnar 2025, 460).

GEOPOLITICS OF JNANA (KNOWLEDGE)

The idea says that knowledge is an important factor in how much a country affects the geopolitical environment. India has a lot of traditional knowledge, and it can use this intellectual capital to emphasise its role on the world stage. India contributes to the world's intellectual discourse by promoting its unique views, such as Swami Vivekananda's Synthesis of Vedanta and Universalism, which still guides contemporary international harmony and Ethical Global Order (Darlong 2024, 88). Bhagat Singh's revolutionary ideas of equality in society, secular solidarity, and brave rebellion against the unfairness of imperialism speak strongly to the younger generations who are battling against tyranny and deep-seated inequality (Kumar, 2018, 280). During Sudan's youth-led revolution[1] from 2018 to 2019, a wide range of people, including students, professionals, and workers, organised nonviolent sit-ins and mass civil disobedience to bring down an authority that had been ruling for 30 years.

His call for direct action and willingness to make sacrifices for the greater cause resonates in this change. His focus on scientific temper and critical inquiry is also the basis for modern movements for internet freedom and environmental justice, each of which wants policies that are founded on facts. His focus on scientific temper and critical inquiry is also the basis for modern movements for internet freedom and environmental justice, each of which wants policies that are founded on facts. Bhagat Singh's blend of strong opposition and ethical conviction is an age-old reminder of how to bring about revolutionary change in a time when populist movements are on the rise and socioeconomic gaps are growing.

Swami Dayananda Saraswati's Vision assertion that every individual, irrespective of social class, religion, or ethnic background, holds inherent value underpins the ongoing endeavour to attain global unity for all. His vision of a single, moral truth and knowledge as a fundamental human right helps people work together and live in peace with one another (Yadav 2023, 793). Raja

Ram Mohan Roy's Synthesis of Tradition and Modernity, as well as his tireless campaign to eradicate Sati and fight caste-based discrimination, laid the groundwork for today's international campaigns for gender equality and human rights. In the connected world of today, his revolutionary focus on freedom of the press and a secular, modern schooling system keeps going to form the basis for democratic government and to promote conversation between cultures (Sarkar & Awal 2024, 29). Mahatma Gandhi's ideas of Satyagraha (truth-force) and Ahimsa (non-violence), which came from ancient Indian moral ideas, had an effect on nonviolent movements all over the world. His teachings gave people a strong framework for making social and political change through peaceful means. This framework was used by people like Martin Luther King Jr. in the US and Nelson Mandela in South Africa (Dar 2024, 295-296). This shows that ideas from IKS can have a big effect on political thought and action around the world, which in turn can affect international movements for justice and human rights.

Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) and Panchsheela

During the Cold War, India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was the driving force behind the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which advocated for a policy of autonomous foreign policy that was not linked with either of the superpower blocs. While this policy was strategic, it also chimed with the IKS value of 'Madhyamargaa', (The Middle Path) which is considered to be the middle path in Buddhist philosophy. This principle places an emphasis on maintaining balance and avoiding extremes (Sethuraman 2022, 5). Nehru's vision for a world free from bloc politics and committed to peaceful coexistence was a synthesis of modern geopolitical realities with historical Indian wisdom. He envisioned a society in which people lived together without conflict.

Jawaharlal Nehru came up with the Panchsheel policy in 1954. It set out five rules for countries to live together peacefully. These

values include acknowledging the territorial integrity of one another and sovereignty, not attacking each other, not interfering in each other's internal operations, equality and mutual advantage, and living peacefully together. This strategy, which came from the ancient Indian knowledge system and the idea called for a non-aligned position throughout the Cold War. This was like the old Indian philosophy that stressed peace, compassion, and admiration for different kinds of governments and cultures. The Panchsheel was a group that wanted to promote international harmony and collaboration by encouraging debate and understanding instead of conflict. It sent a strong message to the globe that living together peacefully, even when people had different ideas, was not only possible but also necessary for the progress and stability of the global society (Sethuraman 2022, 3).

Multiculturalism and Pluralism

India's history as a diverse country where many religions, languages, and cultures have lived together for centuries has given its people a deep appreciation for multiculturalism and pluralism. The Indian government's foreign policy, which often promotes variety and respect for different civilisations in international interactions, reflects this internal reality, which is based on the ideals of tolerance and acceptance that are outlined in the IKS. This approach, which stands in contrast to ideologies that exclude some groups, provides a model for peaceful cohabitation in a society that is more globalised. BRICS, BIMSTEC, SAARC, SCO, and QUAD are some of India's entities with the mentioned approach (Khare & Kumar 2025, 233).

The South Asian region, which includes India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives, has a very similar cultural history that comes from historical interactions, shared ideologies, and linguistic similarities. Because of this cultural connection, which is often linked to the Indian Knowledge System

as a whole, there is a basis for regional cooperation and better understanding. Even though there are political disagreements, the underlying cultural values often make it easier to talk and work together. This helps to build the foundation for regional stability and collective progress, even though progress is often slow. After the SAARC standoff, India is looking forward to BIMSTEC to share the subcontinent culture alive (Hunjoo & Kim 2024, 46). India's large network of cultural centres, festivals, and academic exchanges around the world serves as a powerful tool of cultural diplomacy, directly exploiting the attractiveness of its Indian Knowledge System. This is an example of how cultural diplomacy can be used as a strategic asset. These programs create an environment that is conducive to good diplomatic ties and promote a fuller awareness of India's heritage, ideals, and present achievements. They also build bridges between different people and foster an environment that is conducive to peace. In order to increase India's influence on the international stage, this intentional and successful strategy involves projecting India's cultural treasures.

Conclusion

The Indian philosophical tradition places a high value on discussion, debate, and intellectual deliberation (for example, in the Upanishads). This tradition also places a strong emphasis on the promotion of discourse and argumentation. India's preference for multilateralism and its active participation in international venues where diplomacy and negotiation are of the utmost importance are both reflections of this emphasis on reasoned discourse. India has a long tradition of philosophical research and the polite sharing of ideas, and it often pushes for the creation of agreement and the peaceful resolution of disputes through conversation. The Indian Knowledge System has a big effect on how India deals with other countries because it gives leaders a basic worldview that stresses interconnectivity, moral behaviour, and a long-term aim of world peace. India's strong

concentration on multilateralism, its commitment to peaceful coexistence, and its long history as a staunch supporter of non-alignment are all apparent signs of this impact. India's diplomatic efforts and quest for a fair international order are based on ideas from indigenous knowledge systems (IKS). There are several ideas about administration in Sukra Niti, strategic foresight in Arthashastra, and the idea of Dharma that are all important. India's foreign policy is based on ancient knowledge, which gives the country a unique perspective on complex international relations.

NOTES

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WELCOMING THE UNWELCOMELY IN RAY BRADBURY'S "YLLA", "THE EARTHMEN", AND "THE THIRD EXPEDITION"

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Abstract: "Ylla", "The Earthmen", and "The Third Expedition", the first three contract stories in Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, have been read as independent narratives whose sequence is largely arbitrary. While understandable, given the collection's publishing history, this perspective on the stories' episodic nature overlooks the thematic and structural logic that binds them. This paper proposes a different reading, arguing that these stories, in their current order, follow a narrative arc structured around the evolving dynamics of hospitality and hostility. Drawing on Hospitality Theory, the paper thus reframes this selection as a sequence that traces the progressive overtake of unconditional hospitality by different forms of hostility. The shift in the Martians' responses to human intrusion, it argues, reflects the notion that hospitality comes to an end when the guest is perceived as a threat that compels the host to react defensively in order to maintain control.

Keywords: The Martian Chronicles, hospitality, hostility, host, guest, threat

INTRODUCTION

When *The Martian Chronicles* appeared in 1950, science fiction was still an ostracised genre, demonised by concerned parents, teachers, and religious groups for its subversive potential, and degraded by mainstream critics and intellectuals for its alleged lack of literary merit. In this hostile terrain, Bradbury's manipulation of book form

and content provided a means to get out from the science fiction ghetto into the mainstream. At a time when publishers valued novels, the writer's strategy of reworking previously published short stories into a novel-like cycle, while trading the genre's technical idiom for a lyrical, morally reflective style were the gateway to mainstream markets. The dynamics of hospitality and hostility that shaped the book's production and reception also pervaded its themes. Structured around tales of human-alien contact, the collection's first-contact stories also stood out as registers of the period's hostility toward the alien and the nonconforming other in a Cold War climate saturated with paranoia, blacklisting, and ideological purges.

Within the frame of these overlapping dynamics of hospitality and hostility, this paper focuses on Bradbury's depiction of human-alien encounters in "Ylla", "The Earthmen", and "The Third Expedition", the stories of the three early expeditions to Mars. Whereas sci- fi critic Robert Plank (Plank 1981, 171) considers them as thematically and chronologically inconsistent due to the expeditions' disconnected outcomes and to the characters' inability to learn from past failures, this paper proposes a different reading that draws on hospitality theory. In doing so, it argues that the stories' current arrangement is thematically justifiable as their sequence stages the progressive collapse of hospitality under the strain of fear and miscommunication. Through these narratives, the paper argues, Bradbury not only resonates with Emmanuel Levinas's and Jacques Derrida's reflections on the tension between the unconditional ideal of hospitality and its pragmatic limitations, but he also illustrates Gerasimos Kakoliris's point about the impossibility of ethical idealism in the context of settler colonialism, i.e. when the host is faced with the arrival of the unwelcomable invading guest (Kakoliris 2024, 62). The stories' portrayal of the collapse of hospitality in the face of existential threat also reflects Fabienne Brugère and Guillaume Le Blanc's argument that hospitality collapses when the other is seen as a menace (Brugère 2017, 21). In The Martian Chronicles, the paper concludes,

hospitality is not an ideal parasitised by hostility, but a continuous conflict between the ethical responsibility towards the other and the natural instinct of self-preservation.

Literature review

Published during a time of rising xenophobia, anti-communist witch hunts, and fears of infiltration, *The Martian Chronicles*, a short story cycle about encounters between humans and aliens, seems to have been shaped by the anxieties of its era, especially the widespread fear of the Other, whether racial, foreign, or non-conformist. This climate of suspicion, which also pervaded the literary world where the book appeared, extended to Science Fiction, which was demonised by the mainstream and ostracised by the literary establishment, which often dismissed it as shallow and subversive and treated its writers and readers as outsiders, even as the genre was stepping into what would later be called its "Golden Age". The reception of Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* reflects this tension between "hostile" rejection and "hospitable" welcome. Within this frame, the term "hostile" refers to those readings, particularly those from Hard science fiction devotees who criticised the novel for its non-adherence to genre conventions. Conversely, the label "hospitable" refers to the more welcoming stance adopted by some highbrow critics like Christopher Isherwood and Gilbert Highet, who were among the first to endorse and praise the collection for its lyricism and philosophical depth.

This more welcoming stance was later taken by a few Bradbury scholars who aimed to raise the collection's understanding to new levels of significance by proposing readings that anchored it in the mythic tradition of American expansionism and the cultural narratives of exploration, conquest, and settlement that shaped mid-century understandings of national identity. Within this framework, Willis McNelly (McNelly 1980, 20) and David Mogen (Mogen 1986, 25) drew analogies between Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier

Thesis and Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, framing the collection as a thematically unified pioneer frontier story that reimagines American westward expansion on a planetary scale. In his paper "Aliens, Anthropologists, and American Indians: Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles*, Culture, and Difference in Midcentury US Modernism", Eric Aronoff (Aronoff 2023, 311), like James B. Mitchell (Mitchell 2003, 118), drew parallels between the fate of the Martians and that of Indigenous tribes. Focusing on the ethical tensions surrounding Martian-human encounters, Aronoff reframes the collection as an anthropological critique of American expansionism. Within this frame, Bradbury's casting of the Martians as natives and the humans as invaders is interpreted as an attempt at reframing the myth of the frontier by raising the central question of who the real alien is.

The question of alienness also informs Grace Dillon's "Bradbury's Survivance Stories", which examines the dynamics of encounter between the alien natives and the human settlers. Drawing on Gerald Vizenor's concept of "survivance", which denotes "an active sense of presence" and a "renunciation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry" (*qtd.*in Dillon 2013, 59), Dillon interprets a selection of stories "where distinctions between Earthmen and Martians blur, where Earthmen become Martians, where Martians may have been Earthmen all along" (Dillon 2013, 59), as instances of resilience through transformation. Within this framework, metamorphosis is interpreted as a way of surviving through adaptation rather than confrontation. While the main focus of Dillon's analysis is on transformation as a mode of survival, her discussion about the impact of the encounter with the Other, however, provides a bridge to the discourse of hospitality that this paper uses to frame its analysis of the early expeditions. Although Dillon does not explicitly frame her reading in such terms, her discussion, in fact, gestures toward an ethics of radical openness in which the boundaries between host and guest become porous. However, her inclusion of "The Third Expedition" alongside later survivance stories, such as "The Martian" and "The Million-Year

Picnic" (Dillon 2013, 59) is problematic insofar as it conflates narratives that precede colonisation with those that follow it. The problem here lies in the fact that "The Third Expedition" belongs to the earlier phase of contact, that is, before Mars becomes a colonised space. Thus, reading the story through the lens of hospitality theory, and within the frame of the collection's colonial subtext, which Dillon herself acknowledges, should allow for a different interpretation in which the Martians' shapeshifting appears not as an expression of cultural endurance but as a preemptive reaction to the arrival of Unwelcoming guests.

Dillon's emphasis on transformation and ethical relation resonates with the Levinasian framework adopted in Adam Lawrence's paper "A 'Night Meeting' in the Southwest: Hospitality in *The Martian Chronicles* and Christian Ylagan's "Why Do The Heavens Beckon Us? Revisiting Constructions of Home and Identity in Ray Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles",* two studies that address the ethics of hosting in *The Martian Chronicles*. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy, particularly his idea of encountering the Other as Subject, Ylagan argues that Bradbury's text invites readers to reimagine encounters with the Other as opportunities for ethical engagement and hospitality rather than domination and subjugation (Ylagan 2009, 30). Within this framework, "Night Meeting", a story about an encounter between an earthling and a Martian, together with the collection's final vignette, "The Million-Year Picnic", is framed as a critique of the violent imperial ethos of colonisation and a call for embracing hybridity and peaceful coexistence (Ylagan 2009, 39).

Also situated within a Lévinasian framework that connects Bradbury's narrative to the concept of infinite responsibility toward the Other, Adam Lawrence's paper focuses on Bradbury's critique of the destructive consequences of colonisation and his call for ethical engagement with the other. Whereas the dynamics of human-alien encounters in the early expeditions are dominated by hostility and a mutual failure to engage in genuine self-other relations as a result of the human visitors' entitlement and

expectations of immediate hospitality, the short story "Night Meeting", in which the characters engage in a respectful exchange despite their inability to understand each other's realities, represents, for Lawrence, a turning point where hostility gives way to a more philosophical contemplation of hospitality as an encounter characterized by openness to difference (Lawrence 2013, 72).

However, while both Ylagan and Lawrence have explored Bradbury's engagement with the themes of hospitality and hostility, their analyses tend to downplay the element of risk that underlies the early human–alien encounters in *The Martian Chronicles*. To address this gap, the present paper takes Ylagan's idea of "the violent imperialistic ethos of refashioning home" (Ylagan 2009, 29) as a point of departure to examine the perversion of hospitality in the shadow of potential colonisation. It also extends Lawrence's discussion of the early expeditions to argue for a progression in Martian responses from openness to hostility, while it departs from his primary focus on the human guests and the reception that they receive by shifting the focus to the Martians and to their perception of risk, their recognition of the guest as a potential threat, and the strategies they develop to manage that threat.

This reversal of perspective accords with the observation that "Bradbury turns reader expectation on its head by having the Martians be xenophobic and the humans be curious and friendly" (Gale 2015). Such an inversion demands, in fact, that we take the hosts' point of view seriously, for it is they who occupy the role of hosts and who respond with suspicion and violence to the human "guests" intruding upon their home. In this light, Guillaume Le Blanc and Fabienne Brugère's claim in *La Fin de l'hospitalité* that hospitality collapses once the guest is perceived as a danger (Brugère 2017, 21) provides a useful framework for rereading the early expeditions. This perspective also invites reconsideration of the claim that "the first three expeditions are met by extraordinary xenophobia, with all three crews murdered by unwelcoming Martians" (Gale 2015). In fact, not only does this claim reduce the Martians' behaviour to moral failure rather than recognising it as a

rational response to perceived danger, but it also frames them as "unwelcoming" hosts, thus overlooking Bradbury's portrayal of hospitality as an ideal that may collapse from fear. Likewise, this language also reflects an anthropocentric bias whereby the hosts are judged from the coloniser's point of view, in a way that reproduces the logic of entitlement that Bradbury's stories seem to critique at the level of commentary.

Rather than considering the Martians' response as a form of "extraordinary xenophobia", this paper reframes it as an instinctive reaction to a perceived existential threat. Seen from this angle, the escalating hostility of the early encounters may be seen as the reflection of a developing logic of risk management. This reorientation not only accounts for the increasingly violent reception of the human explorers but also clarifies the later ethical reconnections that Dillon, Ylagan, and Lawrence identify in stories such as "Night Meeting" and "The Million-Year Picnic", where, quite tellingly, coexistence becomes imaginable only after the Martian race has been decimated.

"Ylla", a foundational yet often underrated story in most scholarly discussions of the early expeditions, inaugurates this paper's exploration of human/alien encounters from the perspective of hospitality theory. In fact, Lawrence gives the story short shrift in favor of the later, more spectacular expeditions, while the Cengage study guide reduces it to a representation of cultural decline, suggesting that Bradbury communicates his disapproval of "this fear of strangers" (Gale 2015) through his portrayal of the apathetic Martian household which symbolizes a civilization gone "past its peak" and "descended into apathy" due to its cultural hermeticism. Michel Dyer, by contrast, considers "Ylla" one of the few stories in which the Martians themselves occupy the central point of view, arguing that the story has an "active effect on the following chapters" (2023). This effect, Dyer argues, is largely premised the story's portrayal of the Martians as "subtle and in the right" and its depiction of the human explorers as "shameless invaders", a strategy that urges the readers to empathise with the

former. This observation about the story's reversal of moral polarity and its effect on both the narrative and the readers is particularly relevant for this paper since it not only foregrounds "Ylla"'s significance as the story that builds the ethical and emotional groundwork for the subsequent expeditions but also introduces the elements of fear and risk that justify their fates.

The importance of "Ylla" is also stressed in "The Last Martian: Postcolonial Metaphors of the New Frontier", in which Mia Lindenburg's considers *The Martian Chronicles* as a work that questions the transplantation of the American project of Manifest Destiny onto Mars by revealing its destructive consequences. "Mars", Lindenburg writes, "is certainly changed at the end of Bradbury's stories, and it may be that it is better for the Earthling settlers [...] But it is certainly not better for the Martians" (Lindenburg 2023, 26), whose civilization, as revealed by her close reading of the opening passage of "Ylla", was already thriving before the arrival of the Earthmen. Zooming in on Bradbury's use of imagery, particularly his description of settlers as "locusts" and "steel-toothed carnivores", Lindenburg draws attention to the fact that the humans' alleged exploratory expeditions are only disguised military reconnaissance missions meant to pave the way for a full-blown imperial incursion. "The comparison to 'carnivores'", she points out, "underscores that they are the threat approaching Mars, not the saviours coming to fix it".

Lindenburg's observation about the threat caused by the earthlings' arrival, along with her assertion that "the story arc of *The Martian Chronicles* goes from a pristine precolonial land that thrives in its own culture to one defined and nearly destroyed by the culture that settles on it", further supports this paper's argument that the progression of the Martians' attitudes towards their "unwelcomable guests" is indeed motivated by the hosts' increasing awareness of the magnitude of the threat. Lindenburg's reading of "The Locusts" metaphor also opens interesting avenues into a discussion of the connection between risk perception and the progression of Martian responses. Indeed, as Lindenburg notes, locusts might seem initially

harmless as individuals, but when they come in swarms, they may become a threatening presence. Interestingly, the progression that characterises the Martians' reactions is paralleled by a notable increase in the number of visitors. In fact, only two explorers arrived in the first expedition. In the second, the number multiplies. In the third expedition, it jumps to sixteen explorers, recalling the swarms of locusts that Lindenburg talks about. Read in light of this understanding, the growing number of visitors reflects an intensification of risk that may account for the hosts' increasing hostility.

Taken together, these readings present *The Martian Chronicles* as a text that is deeply concerned with the ethics of encounter. Yet, while critics such as Dillon, Ylagan, Lawrence, and Lindenburg have gestured towards the moral and ethical issues within a number of stories from *The Martian Chronicles*, few have examined the progressive nature of these encounters. The early expeditions, in particular, remain underexplored in this regard. This paper seeks to fill this gap by rereading the first three expeditions through the lens of hospitality theory, arguing that the order of Bradbury's stories is far from arbitrary. Looked at from this vantage point, "Ylla", "The Earth Men", and "The Third Expedition" coalesce into a coherent narrative about the gradual collapse of the ethical ideal of hospitality under the pressures of threat and risk perception. Seen in this light, the collection's depiction of the failed expeditions may be seen as a meditation on the failure of hospitality in conditions where fear and the instinct of self-preservation come into play.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To sustain its argument, this paper draws on a theoretical framework that brings together a set of theoretical insights, which include but are not limited to, Emmanuel Levinas' musing on self-other encounters, Immanuel Kant's reflections on the right of visitation, Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of hospitality and its aporias,

Gerasimos Kakoliris's critique of the limits of hospitality, Fabienne Brugère and Guillaume Le Blanc's reflections on the breakdown of welcome in the face of fear, and Lorenzo Veracini's analysis of settler-colonial logic. A synthesis of these insights will inform this paper's exploration of the gradual failure of hospitality across the three early expeditions as a consequence of the Martian hosts' increasing awareness of risk.

The triangular dynamic of host, guest, and third forms the basis for much of the theoretical discussion around hospitality. In these discussions, the host is often the one who bears the burden of responsibility, the one who is confronted with the question and ethical decision of whether to welcome, how to welcome, and under what conditions and risks. The guest, for their part, is approached as a controversial figure who is vulnerable for some, and potentially dangerous for others. Meanwhile, the Third, represented by entities like the law, family, community, or the nation-state, functions as the mediating force that structures the encounter. This triadic configuration underlies Immanuel Kant's framing of hospitality as a juridical principle that grants the stranger the right of entry, visitation and movement but not settlement. For Étienne Balibar, Kant's endorsement of state sovereignty and geopolitical stability over ethical openness "is one of the most severe limitations of his system, which has a philistine aspect"[1] (Balibar 2018, 176; my translation). For Gerasimos Kakoliris, however, Kant's delimitation of hospitality to a right of visitation is the pragmatic response of someone who was writing against the backdrop of violent abuses of hospitality committed in the name of European colonial expansion (Kakoliris 2024, 24), that is a response to the fear that the guest may overstay their welcome, become a conqueror, and repay the generosity of the host with dispossession. In a similar vein, Anne Dufourmantelle views it as a response triggered by affective anxiety. Kant's moral reflection, she thus argues, is animated by the question of "how [. . .] s/he who welcomes the stranger [can] guarantee his safety and protect him/herself from the possible violence of the newcomer"[2] (Dufourmantelle 2012, 59; my translation). In light of

this understanding, the host's decision is reframed as an instinctive response to vulnerability, which transforms the moral obligation to welcome into a question of survival.

The conditionality of Kant's model is transcended by Emmanuel Levinas. In Levinas' reflections on the ethics of welcome, hospitality is condensed into the image of the self as a hostage of the *Other*, whom he depicts as a vulnerable figure, like a stranger, an orphan, or widow, and whose cry, he contends, calls the self into responsibility:

> My responsibility in spite of myself - which is the way the other's charge falls upon me, or the way the other disturbs me, that is, is close to me - is the hearing or understanding of this cry. It is awakening. The proximity of a neighbour is my responsibility for him; to approach is to be one's brother's keeper; to be one's brother's keeper is to be his hostage. (Levinas 2012, 168)

Levinas's formulation reflects an almost organic progression from spatial to ethical relation. The sequence progresses along two axes, the first being the axis going from proximity, approach, to substitution; and the second being the axis that goes from neighbour, brother, to hostage. "Proximity", which simultaneously implies physical nearness and the exposure to the face of the other, signals the moment when the self is summoned into responsibility before thought or choice. The self's response to the call through "approach" becomes the moment when obligation turns into action and when the "neighbour" morphs into a "brother". Responding to the ethical summons of human fraternity redefines the self's identity, turning the host into a hostage who is held accountable for the Other to the point of self-erasure.

In theory, the encounter with the Other, in Levinas's statement, constitutes an awakening to an obligation that does not stem from choice but "falls upon" the self and binds it to an infinite responsibility that precedes law, social contract, and kinship. Yet even for Levinas, this ideal collapses when confronted with the political real. In fact, Levinas' response to his interviewer Shlomo Malka, following the massacres of Sabra and Shatila, exposes the

limits of philosophical idealism when transposed from theory to practice. When asked whether the Palestinian is not the "Other" for the Israeli. Levinas responds that "in alterity we can find an enemy... there are people who are wrong" (Levinas 1982, 294). This statement, as Howard Caygill notes, "opens a wound in his whole oeuvre" (Caygill 2005, 192), because it reduces the ethical encounter to an assessment of risk and rightfulness. This moment of rupture, however, is significant since it reintroduces the test of reality into the most idealised visions of ethical openness, thus reframing hospitality as a fraught situation and a dynamic scene of negotiation and risk assessment.

In "hospitality", Jacques Derrida makes this rupture the foundation of his reflections on the limits of hospitality. With its etymological link to both "host" and "hostage", the word "hospitality", as Derrida observes, holds a paradox within itself. Derrida calls this paradox an "aporia" (Derrida 2000, 4), which stems from the fact that hospitality, or the act of receiving the stranger into one's space, simultaneously requires openness and generosity towards the "other" while essentially implying mastery over that space and the power to decide who enters it. Hospitality, thus understood, is always already compromised as it carries within itself the seeds of its own undoing. The act of welcome is also complicated by the notion that true hospitality must confront the risk of welcoming the "unwelcomable" and accepting the radical otherness of those who arrive uninvited, while cognizant of the possibility "of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone". (Derrida 1993, 70–71). "In effect, the one I welcome", as Derrida also points out in "Une hospitalité à l'infini", "can be a thief, a murderer; he can ransack my house"[3] (Derrida 1999, 100). Unlike formulations that rest in principle or in theory (where hospitality might be conceived as pure and transcendental), this "in effect" marks a movement from philosophical prescription to socio-political implication.

The different possible scenarios and the multiple guises of the guest in Derrida's statement reflect this movement. The guest may

be vulnerable, but he may also turn out to be a thief or a murderer. The impossibility of fully anticipating or controlling who the other will be thus makes risk inseparable from welcome. For Derrida, this element of risk is an integral component of hospitality itself. In fact, his neologism "hostipitality", which fuses hospitality with hostility, embodies the paradox that pure, unconditional hospitality presupposes the acceptance of risk and the willingness to welcome the other even at the cost of one's own safety, which is precisely what makes such hospitality impossible in practice.

In Fabienne Brugère and Guillaume Le Blanc's *La Fin de L'Hospitalité*, risk perception is presented as the key factor that brings hospitality to an end. Both authors, in fact, go so far as to argue that the world is witnessing the end of hospitality because people now live in fear, "under the constant threat of attacks and imagine the other as a potential enemy, an 'implicit terrorist'"(Brugère 2017,21). However, while they consider this fear unreasonable in the context of the refugee and migrant crises and advocate for a more humane, politically grounded hospitality, Le Blanc and Brugère do not address situations in which the threat posed by the guest is not unreasonable but well-founded. Such cases include first-encounter scenarios between coloniser and colonised. In this type of encounter, Lorenzo Veracini argues in his book, *Settler Colonialism*, the settler does not simply arrive as a guest but comes to stay, imposing a one-sided relationship in which the so-called guest becomes the de facto owner of the host's land. This scenario of colonial encounter is played and replayed in tragic variations in *The Martian Chronicles*, and more specifically in "Ylla", "The Earthmen", and "The Third Expedition", which depict the natives' reactions to the human guests' reconnaissance missions. Taking into consideration the collection's colonial subtext, the Martians' reactions, though sometimes violent, ought to be seen not as unreasonable but rather as preemptive or reactive responses shaped by the host's perception of risk, which in the case of *The Martian Chronicles*, escalates with each successive expedition.

These scholarly insights, together with Levinas's notion of

infinite responsibility, Derrida's aporia of hospitality, and Le Blanc and Brugère's account of hospitality's breakdown under fear, will serve to reframe hospitality *in the Martian Chronicles* as a site of negotiation between openness and self-preservation. Within this frame, the following sections recast Bradbury's Martian hosts as figures caught in the paradox of welcome, tracing how the first three expeditions translate this paradox into narrative form by mapping the progressive collapse of hospitality into hostility.

"YLLA": HORIZONS OF EXPECTATION AND THRESHOLDS OF SUSPICION

Bradbury's *The Martian Chronicles* opens not with Mars but with Earth in a short passage titled "Rocket Summer" (January 1999). The passage, which is strategically positioned before the first story "Ylla" (February 1999), functions as a bridge chapter that depicts the transformative impact of a Rocket launch on Ohio's atmosphere, landscape, and people, while simultaneously foreshadowing the changes that the earthlings' exploratory visits will bring upon Mars and its inhabitants. In "Ylla", the setting shifts from Earth to Martian soil after a one-month temporal lag that highlights the disjunction between the two worlds: one whose settlement project has already been set in motion and another, which, despite being the target of this project, has so far remained oblivious to it. Rather than framing the arrival of the first exploratory mission as a grand geopolitical event, the story stages it as a domestic disturbance in the household of Ylla, a married Martian woman who telepathically senses the impending arrival of Nathaniel York, the captain in charge of the first expedition. The possibility of first contact is soon undermined when Ylla's husband, Yll, who feels disturbed by the prospect of the visit, kills the crew upon landing.

That the encounter is framed as a domestic disturbance, however, does not diminish its symbolic weight. Quite the contrary,

for Mars in *The Martian Chronicles* is feminised and actually referred to at one point as "she" (Bradbury 1963, 102), in a gesture that evokes the familiar trope of the feminised frontier within the colonial imaginary. Ylla, as the female protagonist of the collection's opening chapter, may hence be taken as a metaphor for the land itself. By extension, York's intrusion into the psyche of a married woman may be read as a prelude to the coming invasion of an already inhabited land. Yll, for his part, may be seen as the first line of resistance to this intrusion. He is, in fact, the equivalent of the native who is guarding himself from a threatening presence that might compromise the sanctity of his home, a space which, as Mia Lindenberg argues in "The Last Martian: Postcolonial Metaphors of the New Frontier", operates as a microcosm of the planet to be invaded (Lindenberg 2023, 11). This section, thus, focuses on the profiles of Ylla and Yll as potential hosts and how their opposing reactions to the arrival of York, the unwelcoming guest, represent hospitality within the context of settler colonialism as a complex relational structure shaped not only by the guest's intentions but also by the hosts' perceptions.

While Ylla's dream stages the possibility of a different relation with the Other, one that is marked by fascination rather than fear, Yll's defensive stance makes clear that the arrival of the guest may be perceived as a threat that leads to the collapse of hospitality into hostility and violence. These differing responses, when read through the lens of hospitality theory, may help justify the story's position within the collection as a foundational piece that stages the essential debate at the heart of hospitality theory between pure, unconditional hospitality and the fears and risks that accompany and complicate the act of welcome. In fact, the couple's conflict, which is framed within the intimate setting of a household, may be seen as a small-scale representation of hospitality theory's conundrum of reconciling the ethical ideal of unconditional welcome with the specificities of real-world hosting.

In this first contact story, Ylla embodies the desire to welcome the stranger. Her openness to the other recalls Derrida's depiction

of the host who "waits without waiting… waits without knowing whom he awaits" (Derrida 2000, 10). Ylla, too, waits for the guest without knowing. "She wait[s]. She watche[s] the blue sky of Mars as if it might at any moment grip in on itself, contract, and expel a shining miracle down upon the sand" (Bradbury 1963, 3). Within the framework of Derrida's formulation of unconditional hospitality, she embodies the principles of unconditional hospitality, which "consists not only in not knowing, or pretending not to know, but in avoiding all questions about the other's identity, desire, rules, language, capacity to work, to integrate, to adapt" (*qtd.* in Kakoliris 2024, 16). Like Derrida's ideal host, she is open to the transformative arrival of the stranger and does not even ask where York is from, what he wants, or whether he belongs. Whatever knowledge she acquires about her guest, she receives through the dream and accepts without suspicion.

Like Levinas's guest, York is an unexpected arrivant whose intrusion into Ylla's world disturbs her, interrupts her self-centred existence and places a demand upon her that cannot be ignored or deferred. Unlike Levinas's guest, however, he does not appear at the hostess's actual door, claiming hospitality. Rather, he bypasses the threshold and infiltrates her subconscious instead. "I didn't think him up on purpose", she says. "He just came in my mind while I drowsed" (Bradbury 1963, 5). "It wasn't like a dream" (5), an ordinary one that is, she adds, but a dream from which she awoke as if "struck in the face" (4). Ylla's experience of this dream as a "strike" "in the face" also bears an echo of Levinas's formulation of the ethical relation as a pre-reflective responsibility that is elicited by the face of the Other. York's introduction: "I've come from the third planet in my ship. My name is Nathaniel York" (Bradbury 1936, 5) signals for her that moment of ethical awakening when she feels "the other's charge falling upon [her]" (Levinas 2012, 168) drawing her into a relation that implicates her both with the face and the fate of the Other.

Unlike Ylla, Yll is cautious about the unexpected visit. Actually, he adopts a dismissive and defensive stance right from the moment

he hears about the dream and closes himself off to the possibility of encounter. Indeed, the way his appearance is staged in the story reflects his role as a regulating presence in Ylla and York's scenario of encounter. Actually, the character not only appears at the precise moment when Ylla wakes up from her dream, but he also appears "in a triangular door", asking, irritated, "Did you call?" (Bradbury 1968, 4). More than a quirky Martian architectural design, the triangular shape of the door at which Yll appears recalls the triadic host-guest-third relation developed by Levinas, wherein the intimacy of the face to face encounter is mediated by the presence of the third who "interrupts the face to face of a welcome of the other man, interrupts the proximity or approach of the neighbor" (1998, 150), and marks the transition from the relation to the Other to the relation to others and from the ethical to the political.

The moment Ylla awakens from her dream under Yll's panoptical gaze allows Bradbury to stage the ethical moment before colonisation by entertaining the fleeting possibility of a different relation, and then to show, through Yll, how hospitality collapses when the third comes into the equation, recasting the guest as a threat. Through the introduction of the third, Bradbury, Like Levinas, makes the "difficult move from the realm of intersubjective ethics to that of politics, in which we must make decisions, render judgments, and negotiate alternatives" (Popke 2003, 305). Yll's coming does just that, as it takes the ethical relationship from the private space of the dream and reintroduces hospitality into a social and political framework. Yll's appearance, as the third, in fact, reveals to Ylla "the existence of a whole world outside of (her)self" (Davis 1997) in the same way as she reveals to him the existence of a world outside his. Through Ylla's dream, Yll discovers that Earth may not be the empty planet Martian scientists declared it to be. However, while the dreams confront both characters with the existence of others, what it does is to open for Ylla the possibility of a world she's willing to embrace, whereas it awakens Yll to the existence of a world he would rather deny. This denial transpires through Yll's questions and dismissive comments, which introduce

a dimension of "tyrannical violence" (Kakoliris 2024, 195) into Ylla's initial gesture of unconditional welcome by forcing it back into the language of reason. For instance, when Ylla asks, "Do you ever wonder if... well, if there are people living on the third planet?" Yll insists that "The third planet is incapable of supporting life". (Bradbury 1963, 5) His earlier remarks about her "wishful thinking" (5) and her "emotional wailing" (6) also delegitimise her impulse to welcome the other and dismiss it authoritatively.

It is worth noting, though, that Ylla's openness is contingent on the fact that York, in the dream, poses no danger and is described as "pleasant" (Bradbury 1936, 10), "handsome" (5) and soft-spoken. Although the details of the "black hair, blue eyes, and white skin" (5) mark his face as completely other, Ylla marvels at the strangeness, repeating with fascination "how strange, how very strange" (4) York looks. Conversely, Yll sees Ylla's dream not as an innocent fantasy but a disturbing event. The details that fascinate her, namely York's appearance, his "strange uniform", and his descent "out of the sky" in a "metal thing that glittered in the sun" (4), combine to produce in his mind's eye the image of a potentially threatening intruder whom he decides to eliminate. His attitude, in this sense, recalls Derrida's concept of conditional hospitality, where welcome is granted only under specific, controlled circumstances. For Yll, guests, like the Martian neighbour, Dr Nile, are granted welcome, since, unlike York, they are familiar and neither disrupt his established order nor challenge his understanding of the universe. Whether Yll's reaction comes from jealousy or fear of the unknown is left unsaid in the text. However, the dream clearly introduced into domestic space a figure whose arrival destabilised Yll's certainty about his world. Even if Yll's first defence was to brush the idea off, his violent act of killing York upon landing reveals how hospitality collapses the moment the guest is no longer seen as a face to respond to but as a threat to neutralise.

Yll's wearing of a mask to kill York may be seen as a refusal to engage with the face of the other, which Levinas identifies as the basis of ethical responsibility. The mask, in a way, lifts the burden

of responsibility from the host's shoulders. Without recognition, there is no obligation to extend hospitality. His return after York's execution and his casual attempt to normalise the situation by saying that he was "just hunting" (Bradbury 1963, 13) also illustrate this logic. Framed as a hunt, the killing reduces the guest to prey, which holds no claim to subjecthood. Conversely, Ylla's confession "I don't know, I don't know, but I can't help it. I'm sad and I don't know why, I cry and I don't know why, but I'm crying" (17) echoes the melancholic reflection articulated by Le Blanc and Brugère in *The End of Hospitality*, that "we become inhospitable sometimes in spite of ourselves"[4] (Brugère 2017, Chap. 6). Her struggle to remember York's song, as well, may be seen as a metaphor for humanity's struggle to recall the ideal of pure hospitality amidst the realities of fear and control that curtail its fulfilment.

THE EARTHMEN: ASYLUM SEEKERS; ASYLUM FINDERS!

Following the aborted encounter in "Ylla", Bradbury inserts a bridge chapter titled "The Summer Night", where what starts as a psychic intrusion into one Martian woman's consciousness turns into a global pandemic as Earth songs and nursery rhymes telepathically seep through the minds of other Martians. A Martian's warning that "something terrible will happen in the morning" (Bradbury 1963, 20) foreshadows the arrival of the second expedition in "The Earth Men" (August 1999), the story of a crew of earthlings who land on Mars expecting a hero's welcome, only to find themselves dismissed as lunatics and executed by a Martian psychiatrist who mistakes them for hallucinations.

Unlike "Ylla", where anticipation and anxiety are depicted from the host's perspective, "The Earth Men" shifts the focus to the expectations of the guests and to the frustration they feel when the long-awaited meeting between two alien worlds turns into a farce. The encounter, which was only a potentiality in "Ylla", becomes a reality in "The Earth Men", which begins with the quintessential

gesture of hospitality seekers, the knock on the door. The first line of the story, "Whoever was knocking at the door didn't want to stop" (Bradbury 1963, 21), is reminiscent of the Levinasian scenario of the stranger's arrival at the threshold of the host's *chez soi,* disturbing their being-at-home and summoning them into ethical responsibility. Neither the nature of the knock nor that of the visitors, however, corresponds to Levinas's portrait of the guest as a vulnerable figure. Rather than reflecting the humility of Levinas's vulnerable strangers, the persistence of the knock shows the impatience and entitlement of visitors, who are, in reality, not benign wanderers but explorers looking for new lands to occupy.

Mrs Ttt's refusal to accept the ethical charge that falls upon her also challenges the idealistic Levinasian scenario of unconditional welcome. Unlike Levinas's host, who is summoned by the face of the stranger and called into ethical responsibility, Bradbury's host is forced to set boundaries to prevent the intruders' assault on domestic order. In response to the visitors' persistent knocks, the hostess feels no obligation to answer. More importantly, she does not even recognise the earthmen as guests but as filthy strangers standing at her clean doorstep. Her reply, "I speak what I speak" (Bradbury 1963, 21) to their remark that she speaks "perfect English" (21) also indicates a refusal to communicate with the strangers on their own terms. Her words and gestures (raised eyebrows, scrutinising gaze, door slamming), as well, show the guests that their presence is irritating and undesirable. Yet, despite the hostess's unwillingness to extend welcome, the guests continue to impose themselves not only spatially but discursively by imposing their own binarisms and evaluative frameworks on her. When Mrs Ttt asks what the crew wants, for instance, Captain Williams ignores the question altogether and rushes instead to declare, "You are a Martian!" in an act of epistemic colonial violence that subordinates the host's inquiry to the visitor's urge to label and classify. Mrs Ttt's sceptical "Martian?", however, exposes the arbitrariness of the label by revealing that the planet is not "Mars" but "Tyrr" (22), which makes the word "Martian" meaningless within her own frame of

reference and exposes the earthlings' hubris. The impossibility of reconciling unconditional welcome with the reality of colonisation becomes apparent in this scene. Captain William, outraged by the Martian's repeated door slamming, protests that "this is no way to treat visitors!" (22), revealing his obliviousness to the fact that Earthly logic does not apply on Mars. For her part, Mrs Ttt fails to ascribe any meaning to the visit other than disturbance. Interestingly, despite the fact that both guest and host speak the same language, the dialogue, which could have marked the beginning of understanding, becomes a communicative impasse wherein the guest's speech patronises while the host refuses to submit.

Even when their persistence pays off as Mrs Ttt reluctantly lets them into the house, the guests' expectations of welcome are thwarted when she leaves them waiting for over an hour, forgetting that she had let them in. Instead of a banquet and a celebration, the guests receive a note of referral from the hostess's husband, who also refuses to see them and redirects them to "Mr Aaa" (24). The farce goes on as the Earthmen are passed from one Martian authority to another, from Mrs Ttt to Mr Ttt, to Mr Aaa, to Mr Iii. Each door becomes a checkpoint, echoing Derrida's observation about the perversion of hospitality by law and protocol. The deferral also recalls Le Blanc and Brugère's assertion in *La Fin de l'hospitalité* that "hospitality is no longer that double standard of intimacy by which we ask the stranger to come into our home, magnifying him as that sumptuous unknown from afar to whom, for a certain time at least, we owe everything... It is becoming the result of a prudent reasoning"[5] (Brugère 2017, 23; my translation). Le Blanc and Brugère's "prudent reasoning" is staged in "The Earth Men", where the tension between the heroes' welcome that the Earthmen expect and the careful restraint of the Martian hosts structures every encounter.

Mr Iii response to Captain's plea to give them "a place to sleep", hand them "the key to the city", and "shake [their] hands and say 'Hooray'" (Bradbury 1936, 28) also reveals the Martians' refusal to

commit to this standard of intimacy. In fact, the "key" that the earthmen are eventually granted does not open the gates of the city but the doors of the asylum, where a moment of apparent welcome realises the colonisers' fantasy of being received as heroes by the Martian inmates who cheer, lift them onto their shoulders, and cry out in celebration. That this celebration should take place in an asylum satirises the ideal of pure hospitality by representing it as a gesture that can only be extended unconditionally by the insane. The word "asylum" itself, with its double meaning of shelter and madhouse, captures the irony of the story. The Earthmen come seeking asylum in the sense of refuge, but they end up finding "asylum" in its psychiatric sense.

The farce reaches its climax when the psychiatrist, Mr Xxx, diagnoses the Earthmen as mass hallucinations and refuses to recognise the rocket as tangible proof of their existence. This failure of communication leads him to execute the Earthmen and then commit suicide. The Earthmen's colonising mindset brings their doom, and their tragic death becomes the symbol of the fate of encounters that are founded on entitlement rather than vulnerability and humility. While seeking asylum, only to find a different kind of asylum, the Earthmen discover the fate of the guest who imposes him/herself on the host. Conversely, Mr Xxx's final act shows the perversion of hospitality by the host's own fears. For the psychiatrist, acknowledging the Earthmen's reality meant surrendering the coherence of his own world, so in order to preserve it, he destroyed the possibility of encounter, mirroring the violence by which the colonised, faced with the intruder's epistemic and territorial claims, destroy both the invader and the self to assert agency.

The Third Expedition: Doorway to Heaven/ Hell?

In "The Earth Men", the risks of hospitality are managed through the exclusion of unwelcome visitors via systems of regulation and

deferral. "The Taxpayer", the short bridge chapter that follows, shifts the scene back to Earth but continues this meditation on exclusion through the story of Pritchard, who pleads for a place aboard the third rocket to Mars, only to face the hostility of officials hiding behind wire screens and opaque regulations. Bradbury's next story, "The Third Expedition" (August 2000), continues the cycle by depicting a new form of hostility, which is all the more dangerous since disguised as unconditional hospitality. The story follows Captain John Black and his crew as they land on Mars. Ignorant of the fate of the earlier missions, the men come prepared with "superior weapons" (Bradbury 1963, 51) and plan to land far from the previous landing sites "in case a hostile local tribe of Martians killed off York and Williams" (44). To their surprise, the scenario they expect does not materialise. Instead, they find a small, familiar Midwestern town with white fences and green lawns. The coloniser's dream of settlement and their wish to find another Earth already waiting finally comes true. Feeling disoriented by the uncanny familiarity, though, the crew members start to speculate, offering explanations ranging from human-alien collaboration, divine intervention, time travel, to a psychological experiment. Curiously but cautiously, a few volunteers venture into town to scout the area.

Unlike their predecessors, this crew experiences the purest form of unconditional hospitality. A local woman, described as "a kind-faced lady" (48), offers help and answers all their questions, fulfilling every expectation the previous expeditions failed to realise. Still unsure, though the men continue their exploration tour, conjecturing about and debating possible scenarios, until one of them, a man by the name of Lustig, suddenly begins to "cry", his hands shaking, and his face "all wonder and joy and incredulity" at the sight of a house that looked familiar to him. Overjoyed, Lustig runs forward, "beating at the door, hollering and crying" for his grandparents, who appear before him, resuscitated from death, and "rush[] out to embrace [him]" (51). The image of the elderly couple standing at the wide-open screen door, inviting the visitors to "come

in" (52) and drink iced tea, stands out as the illustration of pure hospitality. A more rational look at the situation, however, reveals Bradbury's irony, for the scene is in fact not an idealisation of unconditional hospitality as much as it is a testament to its impossibility, since, as Robert Plank rightly observes, the hosts are "the dead returned to life" (Plank 1981, 173). Bradbury's choice to make dead people the only hospitable figures, in this sense, is the perfect illustration of the idea that absolute openness can exist only when the host no longer has anything to lose. Bearing the story's colonial subtext in mind, this scene may also be read as a satirical interlude that exposes the settlers' cultural fetish of perfect openness and reveals how this fantasy of unconditional welcome, which is central to the colonial imagination, may turn into its own trap.

In the story, however, the guests do not resonate rationally. The hosts' generosity and the guests' compliance operate automatically like a social contract. The visitors forget their caution the moment hospitality is extended, and even when they do voice uncertainty, their doubts are neutralised by the ritual of welcome itself. For instance, when Captain Black is taken aback by Lustig's remark that his grandparents have been dead for decades, the grandmother dismisses his objections with an assertive tone that makes asking any further questions seem almost an offence to the hostess. In an attempt to provide tangible proof of life, the old woman also invites Black to "feel" (52) her wrist. The latter, however, concedes not to the authenticity of the miracle, but to the codes of couretous guestmanship, which he continues to observe as he rises "in a casual fashion" (53), thanks the elderly couple for their hospitality, and announces that he must return to his ship.

Black's decision to leave marks the character's first attempt to reassert rational judgment. Yet, this attempt is soon thwarted when he discovers that the other crew members "abandoned the ship" (54) to meet and celebrate with the townspeople. Alarmed by the crew's insubordination, Black shouts, curses and rejects Lustig's plea for him to put himself in the shoes of those men who could not resist once they saw their beloved ones outside the ship. In a

second attempt to reassert reason, the captain exclaims that he "would have obeyed orders" (54) even if he were in the same situation. His assertion, however, proves to be mere hubris that falters the moment he is approached by his own resurrected brother, whom he subsequently accompanies to the family home. In the heat of the moment, Black, like the whole crew, suspends disbelief and joins in the performance. Overwhelmed by joy and nostalgia, he and the other astronauts cannot think, so much so that he describes the sensation as being "soaked to the skin with emotion", as if he had "been out in a pounding rain for forty-eight hours without an umbrella or a coat" (57). It is only in the quiet of the night that Bradbury finally lets reason rule. Lying awake in bed, the captain begins to calmly process the day's events. The Martians, he conjectures, "saw [the] ship coming and saw [the crew] inside and hated [them]" (59). Knowing their guests' intentions, he concludes, they must have staged the perfect welcome to secure themselves against this risky visit.

The Martians' reaction, as imagined by Black, recalls Gerasimos Kakorilis' observation in his discussion of the limits of unconditional hospitality that risks are high when "those standing at one's doorstep is a regiment of European colonialists" (Kakorilis 2024, 62), especially considering the history of European explorers who were welcomed by Indigenous peoples only to use that openness to seize power (40). In Bradbury's story, the Martians seem to have imbibed this awareness, yet they reproduce this pattern with a twist. Instead of refusing the regiment, the Martians receive it by extending a welcome that is theoretically impossible, while converting it into a practical self-defence strategy. When we take Black's theory, as Robert Plank suggests, as "correct within the framework of the story" (Plank 1981, 175), then the Martians' actions can be seen as a form of weaponized hospitality wherein the performance of welcome allows them to neutralize the threat of the invaders, who, sucked into this emotional rollercoaster, mistake hostility for hospitality and surrender their weapons, their ship, and finally their judgment.

Building on this premise, the Martians' sham hospitality can be read as a calculated form of risk management.

What is striking, though, is how closely this perverse form of hospitality approximates the ideal that it mimics and subverts. In fact, "hospitality", as Gerasimos Kakoliris explains, "implies that you allow the other to enter into yourself, to enter your space" (Kakoliris 2024, 2). Bradbury's Martians do this by "taking in" their human visitors on multiple levels, simultaneously mimicking and subverting hospitality. First, in the most literal sense of "taking in", the Martians allow the humans to enter their houses. Second, they also "take them in" in the sense of deceiving or fooling them by creating the illusion of safety and familiarity while hiding lethal intentions. Third, they also literally "take in" the visitors in the sense of absorbing them completely by adopting human forms and memories. The Martians' welcome, in this sense, both reflects and subverts the notion of the host becoming a hostage of the guest. On the one hand, they become hostages as they assume human shapes, open their homes, and let the Earthmen "enter into themselves". On the other hand, their hospitality is temporary and calculated, since they become hostages only long enough to transform their guests into captives.

The story's portrayal of the way risk perception affects the dynamics of hospitality is also interesting. The Martians' prudent reasoning turns hospitality into risk management. The Earthmen's reaction, for its part, reveals that even the guest cannot sustain unconditional openness once risk is perceived. For instance, as long as Captain Black and his men experience the Martian town as safe and familiar, they accept and enjoy the welcome. Lustig runs joyfully into his grandparents' arms, and so do Hinkston, Captain Black and the others. But the moment Black begins to sense danger, hospitality collapses as fear replaces faith. Whether he dies by Martian hands or by the terror of his own realisation is beside the point because what matters is that the moment when risk perception marks the end of hospitality.

The burial scene at the end closes the cycle. The mayor gives a speech, and the brass band plays while the relatives weep for the departed. For critics such as Jörg Hienger, the scene is irrelevant, since it pointlessly continues the masquerade after the humans are dead. However, when looked at from the lens of hospitality theory, the ceremony gains significance since it buries both the guest and the illusion of the perfect host. The ceremony also foreshadows the fate of the hosts by referring to their melting faces. Hospitality, Kakorilis observes, "implies that you allow the other to enter into yourself, to enter your space; it is, in fact, the conquest of the integrity or dominion of the self by the other. Hospitality means that you are able to change or, better yet, that you allow the other to change you" (2). This is actually what happens to the Martians. Once the performance is over, the shapeshifting hosts shed their human skin to return to their true forms, but not without a cost, since the melting also symbolises their irreversible contamination. Their performance has, in fact, changed them.

The scene becomes all the more significant when read as a prelude for "And the Moon Be Still as Bright", the story of the fourth expedition. When the last reconnaissance expedition lands, the planet is found emptied of its inhabitants who perished from chickenpox, a disease carried by the guests of "The Third Expedition". The Martians' attempts to manage risk merely deferred it, because even as they survived the ethical collapse of hospitality, their exposure to the Earthmen brought their destruction. Yet Bradbury transforms this biological extinction into an ethical reawakening as one of the Earthmen, Spender, becomes a "Martian hostile" (Mogen 1986, 86), a science-fantasy echo of the "white Indian", or the frontier settler who goes native. The label "hostile", usually reserved by the settler for those who resist colonisation, is now applied to a human who resists his own species' imperial project. The coloniser, now identifying with the colonised, becomes the guest who assumes the moral burden of the host, and his turn to hostility is revealed as the inevitable consequence of violated hospitality.

Within the collection's broader narrative structure, "The Third Expedition" completes the tragic arc begun in "Ylla". In the first encounter, the guest dies. In the second, both host and guest die. In the third, the guest dies first, but the host dies an ethical death that foreshadows his actual demise. Whether read as an allegory of Cold War paranoia or of colonial encounter, "The Third Expedition" reflects the idea that the ethical ideal of welcome cannot survive once risk is imagined. Bearing in mind the collection's colonial subtext, the Martians' weaponisation of welcome may be interpreted as a last resort and a mode of survival under threat of colonisation. Within this frame, their apparent cruelty is less a moral failure than a political necessity. Yet the ethical cost remains.

Conclusion

Throughout the first three expeditions of *The Martian Chronicles*, Mars, which is initially imagined as a space of cultural communion, gradually disintegrates into a stage of warring imperatives of hospitality versus hostility. From potential hospitality to perverse hostility, Bradbury's early Mars stories stage the erosion of the ethical ideal of welcome as risk perception and self-preservation overwhelm its possibility. Since published at a time marked by xenophobia, ideological purges and cultural gatekeeping, Bradbury's fiction may be seen as a record of the era's profound ambivalence toward the figure of the outsider. Beyond the collection's Cold War context, the three expeditions also offer a timeless reflection on the fragility of hospitality, not as an ideal parasitised by hostility, but as an idea that is always already haunted by the possibility of its perversion. This paper has attempted to trace the perversion of this idea through the image of the door. In the first expedition, the door never opens. In the second, it opens only to be shut down by misunderstanding and miscommunication. In the third, it opens fully, but fatally. The progression from desire and defensive dismissal to deferral, then to deception and destruction, traces the complete arc of hospitality's collapse in the face of risk.

NOTES

1. Kant "définit l'hospitalité comme un droit de visite seulement... est l'une des limitations les plus sévères de son dispositif qui a un aspect philistin" (Balibar 2018, 176).
2. "(…) comment celui qui accueille l'étranger va pouvoir se garantir et se protéger contre la violence éventuelle du nouveau venu ? (Dufourmantelle 2012, 59).
3. "En effet, celui que j'accueille peut être un violeur, un assassin, il peut mettre le désordre dans la maison" (Derrida 1999, 100).
4. "Nous devenons inhospitaliers parfois malgré nous» (Le Blanc and Brugère 2017, Chap. 6).
5. "L'hospitalité n'est plus ce double moral de l'intimité par lequel on prie l'étranger d'entrer chez soi en le magnifiant comme cet inconnu somptueux venu de loin et à qui, pour un certain temps du moins, l'on doit tout… Elle devient le fait d'un raisonnement prudent" (Le Blanc and Brugère 2017, 23).

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LIMINAL POSTHUMAN CORPOREALITY: DECAYING ZOMBIE GHOSTS AND THE 'LIVING IMPAIRED' IN ANGELA CARTER'S "HEROES AND VILLAINS"

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Abstract: The representation of graphic sexual violence and corporeal brutality in Carter's fiction has sparked harsh feminist criticism about the author's demythologising project. I wish to expand the frames through which Carter's engagement with patriarchal topos of the body are perceived, and critically assess the tension revolving around her feminist agenda. Liminality is a state of in-betweenness. Accordingly, a living organism, hanging between life and death, like a zombie, is the site where liminality is more than a mere metaphor; it transforms into a 'corpo-reality'. Even though Carter's novels cannot be said to feature zombies in the strictest sense of the term, this paper will explore how Carter's *Heroes and Villains* epitomises a 'zombified' world where the collapse of civilisation exposes not only the fragility of the human body, but also the myth of patriarchal anthropocentrism. The novel portrays spectral figures, living in a fluid interzone between life and death, human and nonhuman. This paper will use the trope of the zombie as a theoretical tool to rethink what it means to be human. My concern is to show that these living-impaired, liminal figures are part of a posthuman world where phallogocentric hierarchies and rational disembodiment are challenged. In her attempt to foreground images of liminality, Carter succeeds in destabilising the dialectical model of Western thought—mind/body, culture/nature, self/other—and proposes an alternative ontology grounded in relational coexistence. I will expand the scope from which to perceive the image of the zombie as a monstrous Other, to include a novel reading, whereby zombification does not mean pessimistic decay, but a possibility of transgression. The theoretical perspectives of posthumanist and corporeal feminist philosophers, particularly Rosi Braidotti, Catherine Hayles and Donna Haraway, provide an appropriate frame for discussing Carter's investment in reimagining decay not as a destructive process but as a transformative one. This paper hopes to offer a fresh perspective on how bodies are imagined in a post-nuclear age by adopting posthuman and

corporeal feminist theoretical insights as a lens through which to formulate my own interpretation of Carter's novel.

Keywords: liminality, posthumanism, zombification, Angela Carter, Heroes and Villains

INTRODUCTION

Angela Carter is a contentious British author. Feminist critics find in her depiction of violent sexual encounters and physical brutalities a betrayal of feminist ethics. Carter, it is argued, negates what it means to be a female feminist, portraying docile, objectified female characters, too weak to resist patriarchal hegemony. It is only in her later fiction that Carter starts to depict winged, freedom-aspiring female characters who are strong enough to show resistance through their bodies. While there is a growing corpus of studies on Carter's positive representation of the female body, the current scholarship tends to focus on her late fiction, while earlier fiction remains largely neglected. Recent critical scholarship has shed new light on Carter's posthuman spirit and her feminist symbolism in her later novels, overlooking the posthuman potential of her early fiction. In this paper, I will argue that Carter's early work might be read alongside posthuman and corporeal feminist philosophies in their attempts to question rational humanity and the fixity of the body. In her 1969 novel, *Heroes and Villains*, Carter imagines a liminal corporeality where decay, fragmentation, and monstrosity unsettle the humanist ideal of a coherent, autonomous body. Through her "living impaired", zombified characters, she reconfigures life as porous, interdependent, and posthuman, and uses liminality as a motif for rethinking embodiment. Carter continues to attract scholarly attention because her writing articulates issues that remain vital to the contemporary imagination. Critical analyses of her third novel, *Heroes and Villains,* revolve around criticism of how female embodiment is portrayed as either fragile or empowered and the deconstruction of the Cartesian Cogito, which hierarchises the mind

over the body. More recent scholarship approaches it from a posthuman perspective, interpreting the alignment between the female and the non-human body as a strategy to challenge rationalist definitions of the human as transcendent and superior to animal life. In fact, in her article "'Now You Are at the Place of Annihilation': Angela Carter's Post-Human Politics", published in the recent 2025 collection of essays, *Angela Carter's Futures: Representations, Adaptations and Legacies,* Hope Jennings believes in the "transformative possibilities of renegotiating desire and agency in terms of reciprocity rather than an opposition between self and other" (Jennings 2005, 32). Plainly speaking, for Jennings, Carter's fiction can be read from a posthuman lens inasmuch as it purposefully exposes the inadequacy of humanist rationalism in recognising diverse subject positions. This is done through an examination of the possible potential of desire for transformation through its interrelation with the Other. I wish to expand the frames through which we view Carter's engagement with posthuman corporeal concerns by looking at the representation of Otherness-embodied in the figure of the living-impaired- and its ongoing relational becoming in *Heroes and Villains.*

Theoretical Framework

Posthuman politics crystallise upon the idea that distinctions between reality and fiction, the organic and the mechanical, the immaterial and the embodied are rejected. Therefore, history and meaning no longer operate as a stable referent; they dissolve into a fluid network of signs, simulations, and polyphonic narratives. Halberstam and Livingston suggest that the posthuman body is "a body under the sign of AIDS, a contaminated body, a deadly body, a techno-body; it is […] a queer body" (Halberstam and Livingston 1995, 3). It unites both the full spectrum of these attributes and their opposites. In other words, a malformed, sick body cannot be excluded since these bodies do not operate in isolation, but in a

dynamic relation with other bodies and the environment around them.

In *Posthuman Feminist Theory*, Rosi Braidotti opines that the posthuman body represents "an *and, and* approach rather than an *either-or* approach" (Braidotti 2016, 689). This is clearly detectable within a zombified corporeality, hovering between death and life, human and monster, living organism and mechanism. This liminal figure cannot be contained within pre-determined characteristics; The figure of the zombie represents a liminal posthuman body in which the Vitruvian perfect male model is contested. Juxtaposing unreconcilable corporealities, the zombified body is not necessarily an aberration, but another 'normal' version of a human body.

This paper demonstrates that the 'zombified body' can be re-read from a social metaphor for individuals who have lost their agency, autonomy, or humanity; that is, a representation of a society whose structures have collapsed, into a posthuman 'corpo-reality' where the boundaries between the self and the other, the animate and the inanimate have been redrawn. The decomposing flesh of the zombified body and its status as a boundary figure do not signify annihilation. Rather, decomposition is primordial for the 'composition' of new narratives. Braidotti's nomadic becoming theory provides an appropriate framework within which to discuss zombification as a liminal space of posthuman composition. In *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory,* Braidotti states that:

> Becoming woman/animal/insect is an affect that flows, like writing; it is a composition, a location that needs to be constructed together with, that is to say, in the encounter with others. They push the subject to his/her limits, in a constant encounter with external, different others. The nomadic subject as a nonunitary entity is simultaneously self-propelling and hetero-defined, i.e., outward bound.

According to Braidotti, constructing identity involves a dialogic engagement with the Other, whereby the subject transcends the humanist boundaries of independence and self-enclosure. When the

subject is urged to transgress the limits of fixed ontological and epistemological thresholds, it experiences transformative becomings with the Other. Braidotti's nomadic subject does not persist in isolation, but in a continual productive movement with an environment which is shaped by multiple subjectivities and relations. Braidotti's nomadic becoming theory insists upon the idea that bodies are not static nor are they autonomous. They are connected to other species and to the environment they inhabit. By foregrounding relationality and mobility, a nomadic ontology disrupts ideological constraints on the body and reshapes rational consciousness. Echoing Braidotti's nomadic theory, which underscores the embrace of otherness and difference, Alaimo employs the term "trans-corporeality" to articulate relational embodiment between human and other-than-human forms (Alaimo 2010, 2). Alaimo's concept closely parallels posthumanist interrogations of the Human as a distinct and superior form of rational subjectivity.

Posthuman philosophy celebrates Otherness and includes it within the construction of identity. Corporeal feminists and posthuman philosophers such as Rosi Braidotti, Catherine Hayles, Stacy Alaimo and Donna Haraway use figures such as the doll, the cyborg and the monster as representations of ontological becomings. Those figures that have conventionally represented monstrosity, alienation, and abjection now point to the transformative possibilities of interaction with alterity. Catherine Hayles, for example, theorises that "the Other is accepted as both different *and* enriching, valued precisely because it represents what cannot be controlled and predicted" (Hayles 1993, 188).

In the same line of thought, Donna Haraway uses the figure of the monstrous cyborg to deconstruct sexual binary oppositions, making possible, as a consequence, new configurations of subjectivity that are fluid, hybrid, and resistant to fixed classification. She also believes that the figure of the cyborg—as representation of Otherness—resists the static meanings that crystallise within humanist ideology, thereby nullifying the very idea of human

perfection or completion. As a posthuman monster, the cyborg is positioned in a liminal state, neither pertaining to the human nor the non-human. Alongside the human, the animal and the machine, it stands as a new category in itself, confusing all other existing taxonomies. Calling for multiplicity and relational subjectivities, she claims that "One is too few, and two is only one possibility" (Haraway 1987, 35).

The Zombie as a Posthuman Corpo-Reality

The figure of the zombie best illustrates this idea since its liminality and difference showcase the "alien within us", that is, a vision of a creature born not outside the bounds of the human, but a projection of our human self (Sigurdson 2013, 372). Lauro and Embry's article, "A Zombie Manifesto: The Nonhuman Condition in the Era of Advanced Capitalism", endeavours to redirect critical attention onto the liminal status of the zombie figure in order to redefine the parameters of human embodiment. They suggest that "while the human is incarcerated in mortal flesh, the zombie presents a grotesque image that resists this confinement—animating his body even beyond death" (Lauro and Embry 2008, 90). Not only does the figure of the zombie highlight human embodiment, but it also reconfigures it. Inhabiting a body that is both living and dead, the zombie disrupts stable subject–object boundaries by stimulating reflection about power relations and threatens to dismantle social dynamics that, though long critiqued and contested, continue to persist largely intact within the existing political and social superstructure.

The zombified body is an impossibility like a square circle (Delfino and Taylor 2012, 41). However, it is by no means uncategorisable; on the contrary, it asserts itself as a new category that challenges existing taxonomies. Pertaining neither to the 'dead' category nor the 'alive' category, it resists classification and confuses pre-established definitions. Through their immobility, the living-

impaired defy death, and because they are decaying corpses, they exist in a suspended state, defying, thus, the certainties of life. During the contemporary era, zombies and the living-impaired stand as a metaphor for the social, cultural, and political anxieties of the modern and post-nuclear era, notably, nuclear threats, genetic mutation, compulsive consumption, post-apocalyptic nihilism, etc. However, recent philosophers view these liminal, zombie ghost figures as embodiments of posthumanism. Jesse Stommel, for example, contends that:

> The zombie body is a pedagogical body. It teaches us something about who we are. It is a polyvalent body. The zombie is more than just static flesh and sinews. It is raw material that authors and filmmakers draw upon to tell stories about what it is to be human—what it is to be a body in a world where those bodies are imminently threatened. (Stommel 2017, 183)

In other words, zombie figures create a discursive site for challenging phallocentric authority and its investment in the coherence of the corporeal form. It no longer suggests horror, but teaches humans to reconfigure definitions of humanity, embodiment, mortality, and social structures. From a posthumanist perspective, these ghostly figures destabilise the humanist fantasy of the coherent self and open a space of relationality—where decay and monstrosity become sources of transformative transgression.

Robert G. Weiner moves beyond reading the zombie ghost as a mere metaphor of humanity's descent into chaos. He contends that the figure exposes the inhumanity inherent in human nature, thereby inviting a critical re-examination of the very concept of the human. (Weiner 2017, 195). To echo Kevin Boon's inquiry, the posthumanist framework is revealed in the question: "Are zombies becoming more human, or are humans becoming more like zombies?" (Boon 2011, 4). This ambiguity is examined in terms of an erosion of the boundaries between the subject and the object, the human and the Other, leading to the accommodation of a new liminal form that is neither human nor monstrous.

The idea of the living-impaired and the figure of the zombie ghost are extensively elaborated in Carter's *Heroes and Villains,* a dystopian novel which depicts the aftermath of the apocalypse. Society is divided into three strata: The Soldiers, ruling over farmers and Professors in barricaded villages. The Barbarians, depicted as ruthless scavengers, living at the outskirts of the Professors' villages; and the Out people, those "subhuman mutants […] skulking zombie-like at the edges of the contaminated ruined cities" (Coover 2001, ix). As an alternative way of entering the novel, I propose a reading which focuses on these three groups as liminal zombie ghosts, creatures that hover between life and death, remaining ambulatory yet lacking consciousness or human agency. Reading the novel through the image repertoire of 'the living impaired' provides some alternative moves through which to revisit questions pertaining to the transcendence of mind over matter and of the human over the non-human or the part-human.

Heroes and Villains and Transcendent Zombified Embodiment

The setting of the novel evokes a zombified landscape haunted by wandering zombies. The author presents mansions of "rotten stone", devoured by a "web of creeper fur of moss and fungoid growth of rot" (31). The Barbarians prowl around decaying, cobwebbed houses, pervaded by the stench of smoke, rotting flesh, vomit and "their abominable refuse" (35). Marianne, the heroine of the novel, experiencing all this with revulsion, feels transplanted into another planet where the air has a different texture, unlike the lighter air she uses to breathe. All around, there is "a smell of earth, of rotting food and of all-pervading excrement" (42).

The Outpeople, unlike the Barbarians, are wandering sub-species physically mutilated by the Atomic Bomb. Zombie-like, they live in holes under the ground, "poison[ing] their arrows by dipping the heads in their sores" (45). Their bodies, human yet monstrous,

suggest a liminal corporeality that blurs the distinction between life and death, the human and the inhuman. In one passage, the writer depicts one of them as having inhuman limbs:

> His arms were very short because they lacked elbows and were unnaturally hinged too low down on a body curiously warped and out of true. His face was marked with a gigantic cicatrice, and the nose has been omitted; his nostrils were twin pits between his eyes. His canine teeth had grown into fangs. (109)

In another passage, the Out people's dystopian corporeality suggests an unconventional human body, whereby ears become shrivelled like decaying tissue, hands and feet become webbed, and limbs are either too long or too short for a natural human being (110). This display of fantastic, out of norms bodies establishes a paradigm for the posthuman body, a body which transgresses the boundaries of normative corporeality to include other non-human traits. The Outpeople invite readings that challenge anthropocentric definitions of the body, suggesting a liminal space where hybridity and monstrosity not only redefine what it means to be human but also offer alternative possibilities. Donally, the Shaman of the tribe summarises it all when stating that:

> (…) necessity suggests we adopt a standard pattern […]. We abhor variations, though it may be a short-sighted measure, at that, if we are to adapt to survive. Perhaps we should seriously reconsider as to whether form makes the man. (110)

To that, Jewel, the hero and Barbarian of the tribe, suggests webbed feet for human and non-human species. Though this is meant to be a joke, Carter is persistently invested in establishing a paradigm for the posthuman liminal body, a body which challenges anatomical, anthropocentric norms, such as the body massacred later in the novel, a liminal-sexed body which is equipped with both female and male organs (111).

The representation of decaying zombie ghosts in *Heroes and Villains* is not limited to the lowest strata of society, embodied in the

Outpeople; the soldiers, too, are depicted as living-impaired. With their "glass faces" (19), they evoke the lifeless, vacant quality of the zombie, caught between the living and the dead. The Soldiers, guarding the Professors' villages securely against any Barbarian attacks, evoke the image of the universal numb, unaffectionate soldier. However, if read according to a posthuman logic, presenting the Soldiers -traditionally seen as embodiments of rational, disciplined human authority- as "all dark inside", to borrow Gordon Hawkes's terms, undermines normative, supremacist notions of the human, showing that even those who uphold societal structures can be reduced to moral and corporeal ambiguity. Neither fully alive nor truly psychologically dead, they inhabit a space of liminality where all values are reconsidered.

Among those supervised by the Soldiers is Marriane, the protagonist of the novel. The daughter of a professor of History, Marianne displays traits of a determined, uninhibited and outspoken personality. With her hair cropped short, she is mistaken for a boy. However, for the purpose of my analysis, I will consider Marianne as the embodiment of a liminal corporeality by highlighting how she is portrayed as a living impaired character. Significantly, Marianne's eyes are cold and sharp, like those of a roaming zombie. Following her father's murder by her nurse, the shadow of death comes to dominate her inner world. She depicts her surroundings as a grave and perceives herself as the living dead, unburied and unrested. Speaking about her nurse, she states that: "she loved us when we were alive […] I mean, when I was young" (15), betraying, thus, her feelings of lifelessness and blurring the line between life and death.

Jewel, as well as the rest of the tribe, often doubts her human nature and mistakes her for an ethereal ghost-like figure. Jewel doubtfully touches her face to make sure she is a being of fleshly reality (26), while one of his cousins is ordered to kiss her to make sure she is in effect real, not a zombie ghost (43). Later in the novel, Jewel instructs Marianne to kiss one Barbarian woman "to show her [she is] made of flesh and blood" (103). The kiss becomes more than a test of reality; it symbolises the fragile threshold between the living

and the spectral, foregrounding the posthuman concern with bodies that challenge fixed definitions and resist normative categorisation. From a posthuman corporeal feminist perspective, the female protagonist exemplifies liminality and the collapse of ontological boundaries; she is unable to be situated as either living or dead, which in turn produces a persistent sense of unease, apprehension and confusion. Accordingly, Angela Carter is intent on exploring the porous and mutable nature of embodiment, together with the social and relational anxieties provoked by female bodies that do not conform to normative anthropocentric expectations. Marianne's liminal 'corpo-reality' makes others question their understanding of reality. They are forced to recognise that the boundaries between life and death, human and nonhuman, or male and female, are not as stable as they presume. As conveyed by Marianne, different bodily possibilities are defined through relational negotiations.

Apart from Marianne, other characters refuse the reader's search for permanent identities. The Barbarians, uncivilised tribes living at the outskirts of the Soldiers' villages, are often depicted as zombie-ghosts and living impaired not only due to the absence of any cognitive skills (38), but also through the recurring motifs of death, used in their characterisation. Indeed, the whole tribe shuffles forward in a slow, relentless procession "in the silence of near exhaustion" (14). With ageless faces and slack mouths, they exhale a stench of decay. Each step seems guided by some mindless instinct, a rhythm of death that spreads unease among any living observer:

> Movement itself progressed so slowly that distance, like time, no longer had a practical application; motion became another aspect of the road. Now the travellers were in their element, a steady, persevering progression from nowhere to nowhere, in featureless, colourless weather. (100)

In one passage, the characterisation of the barbarian brothers is reminiscent of the living impaired whose vacant eyes gleam with a hollow light, as if haunted by the memory of life rather than life itself. Their eyes "reflected nothing, and the faces themselves,

deformed or leaden, blanched or ablaze, were riven by vile, twisted mouths from which issued harsh screeches or foul abuse, faces stained with blood or fire and then blotted out by shadow" (46). It is worth noting that the brothers' linguistic impairment is highly significant as it situates them within a liminal space where the boundary between human speech and animal growl becomes blurred. Rasping through decayed throats, language itself has rotted away. Speech is no longer believed to carry meaning but is simply an echo of what communication once was, an evocative remainder of what once was human. If read from a posthuman logic, the Barbarians' inability to use language properly suggests the breakdown of the human as a rational, speaking subject.

Not only do the brothers defy linguistic faculties, they also deconstruct the boundary between the animate and the inanimate, the living and the dead. In the passage where Marianne is confronted by their attack and cornered during their attempt to rape her, she catches the unmistakable stench of the grave on them. Like the living impaired, they "smelled of the grave" (48). This mingling of decay and motion blurs the distinction between what belongs to life and what should remain buried. The living-impaired's very existence becomes the representation of a posthuman condition in which the body persists beyond its biological limits, dissolving the certainties of both mortality and identity.

Jewel, the leader of the tribe, vividly exemplifies the characteristics of the living-impaired. At the second Barbarian raid, Marianne finds him "as good as dead" loitering in the garage. On several occasions, he is depicted as a "spectre" and an "angel of death" (19). Upon his return to the village, with Marianne as his booty, he is welcomed by the Barbarians with apprehension, thinking he has returned from the dead. Having ensured he is not a zombie, first by noting the footprints he leaves on the ground and confirming that his female cousin suffers no harm from the kiss, the tribe tentatively acknowledges his corporeal presence (32). Even Jewel believes in his resurrection from the dead and affirms: "It's not every day you rise from the dead" (33). On several occasions,

his wife Marianne notices the vacant look in his hollow, corpse-like eyes, eyes "entirely blasted of life and parred to the appalling integrity of bare bone" (105). In one particular passage, she has to taste his blood to make sure its human blood (135).

Later in the novel, partially buried or evocatively improperly buried in the sand and unnervingly motionless, Marianne compares Jewel to a picture of the dead made by Ancient Egyptians who used to paint the dead with "their eyes open so they could see the way to the next world" (141). Similarly, he is depicted as a "dead pile of rags, bone and hair" when Marianne comes back from the river and finds him motionless on his face (117). This moment highlights the fragility of the boundary between the living and the undead, emphasising Jewel's position within a liminal space where human and posthuman, life and spectrality, intersect and unsettle conventional perceptions of embodiment. Marianne summarises this idea by stating that Jewel and the rest of the Barbarians are "a perfect illustration of the breakdown of social interaction and the death of social systems" (24). Ultimately, social relationships are no longer confined to human-to-human interactions but trans-corporeally extend to connections between human and beast, as well as animate and inanimate. In this way, Carter pointedly draws attention to the porous boundaries through which embodiment is experienced and highlights how identity and agency exist in a posthuman, in-between space.

Here, the living-impaired motif functions not merely symbolically but as a corporeal reality, a liminal state made tangible through Donally's claim to his mastery of necromantic practices. In fact, Jewel's mentor and the shaman of the tribe offers to teach Marianne necromancy. He thinks that he is able to raise the dead and consequently believes in the existence of the living impaired (94). He also believes in cannibalism, a feature reminiscent of the living impaired in modern zombie films. In one instance, he asks Jewel to "swallow up" and "incorporate" Marianne by marrying her (56). The latter thought that Jewel is going to: "kill me, cut me up, fry me and distribute me in ritual gobbets to the tribe" on her

wedding ceremony (76). The human body, in *Heroes and Villains*, is presented as food to be consumed. Through Marianne's attempt to "drink down" Jewel (119) and the latter's accusation that Donally may have eaten his father (125), the text evokes an underlying logic of cannibalism — one that blurs distinctions between self and other, desire and destruction, and reflects Carter's posthuman fascination with bodies that ingest and transform one another.

Indeed, Carter's novel lends itself to being read through a posthuman corporeal feminist framework concerned with the destruction of binaries between self and other. The cannibal body deconstructs the boundaries between savagery and civilisation, between beastliness and humanity. It is a liminal body and should not be read as an act of transgression or destruction, but of relational interdependence. The theories of Rosi Braidotti provide an appropriate frame for discussing cannibalism in the novel since cannibalism dramatises not only relational ontology and entanglement, but also material porosity; that is, corporeal continuity and fusion with the Other. Reading cannibalism as a positive intercorporeal representation of posthumanist aesthetics places the author's views within a different conceptual frame. In *Heroes and Villains*, cannibalism and the living impaired converge in an emancipating posthumanist vision that is concentrated on ontological interconnectedness.

Conclusion

In *Heroes and Villains,* monstrous bodies intersect with human bodies; life and death continually overlap, blurring distinctions between decay and regeneration. By juxtaposing characters with the spectral figures of the zombie ghosts and the cannibal living impaired, Carter sheds light on the permeability of corporeal boundaries and, as a consequence, debunks the anthropocentric fantasy of bodily integrity. The author's posthumanist inclinations ultimately serve to underscore her conviction that decay is not an

end in itself, but a process of transformation. In this sense, the novel's zombified and cannibalistic bodies refuse the reader's search for wholeness and enact a radical ontology of interdependence — one that understands consumption as communion rather than destruction. Ultimately, Carter invites the reader to see embodiment as a radically open, profoundly shared, and endlessly unfolding way of being, urging us to reconsider the human not as an isolated, sovereign self but as part of a living, breathing continuum of growth, decay, and renewal.

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SHADOWS THAT BEGET: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION, MEMORY AND FRAGMENTATION OF THE SELF IN "MUTTERSTERBEN" AND "SCHATTENFROH"

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Abstract: This paper examines the convergence of autobiographical fiction, memory, and the fragmented self in Michael Lentz's *Muttersterben* (2025) and *Schattenfroh* (2025); works that radically and fundamentally metamorphosed as well as challenged the boundaries of self-representation and narrative structure, especially in contemporary literature. Positioned within a postmodern macrocosm, predominantly marked by ontological instability and futility, Lentz's works inhabit a liminal space between autobiography and fiction, oscillating between personal confession and literary performance. *Muttersterben* is a reflection of the protagonist and Lentz's intimate confrontation with maternal and individual loss, while *Schattenfroh* expounds this devastation into an expansively surreal metafictional exploration in which Niemand is imprisoned to inscribe his "brainfluid" into existence. In both of these works, Lentz deconstructs the "autobiographical pact", transforming writing into an act of remembrance as well as mourning, that simultaneously constructs and negates the self. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of the ethics of self-insertion/narration (Butler, Derrida), Postmemory (Hirsh), and Melancholia (Kristeva), this research situates Lentz's writings into archives of grief, dispersed into language, form, and narrative performance. The focus would be on showcasing the paradoxical nature of loss as both an impetus of grief and expression, and the very force that disrupts coherence, leading to a rupture of discontinuity despite verbal excess, since giving an account of oneself, however thickly or thinly veiled, is constitutive of absence, belatedness, and lack. This paper contends that the aforementioned works resist closure, challenge fidelity of representation, and posit writing in loss. By relying on grief, individual as well as collective, and using it as an act of aesthetic, narrative, and linguistic invention, Lentz tries to reconstruct memory and self from ruins.

Keywords: autobiographical fiction, memory, fragmentation, narratology, metafiction, self

INTRODUCTION

In the final exhalations of the twentieth and the twenty-first century postmodernism, there have been numerous metamorphoses, especially for creativity, resistance, and the ontological crisis that exists at the recess of being. This conjunction led to the act of writing serving as an outlet for expression. There is a liminal space between testimony and invention, memory and imagination, self and other. This liminality, this third space, is where autobiographical fiction resides, as an integral part of contemporary expression.

This research paper aims to explore the aforementioned convergence of self-narratology, memory, and the fragmentation of the self, most prominent in Michael Lentz's sprawling magnum opus, *Schattenfroh* (2018), in which Niemand (Nobody) is forced to write his "gehirnwasser" (brain fluid) into existence by his captor, the eponymous *Schattenfroh*. This meta-narrative was thematically preceded by *Muttersterben* (2025), which is a fixation on death and loss, predominantly the death and loss of a mother. Both works are deeply self-reflexive, blurring the lines between reality and fiction, along with pushing the boundaries of narratology itself.

Ricocheting between autobiography and fiction, akin to the oscillation of a pendulum, Lentz's writing makes the reader question the reliability of memory as well as self-representation, whether accidental or deliberate, conscious or unconscious, especially from an ethical perspective. When he writes, it is not just a mere recount or reminisce, but a lingual performance, with trauma at its very centre, which Cathy Caruth terms "the unclaimed experience", which recurs through its belatedness, especially through language, and a compulsion to convey and express (Caruth 2016, 4). *Muttersterben* chronicles the death of the protagonist's mother, written shortly after the death of Lentz's own mother, revolving around an individual's loss, while *Schattenfroh*, on the other hand, extends that loss into an abstract, intertextual and referential explorative meditation on identity, shadow, survival, and articulation through the act of writing. "One calls this writing"

(Lentz 2025, 19, 1001), reads the first and last sentence of this behemoth of a novel, and this jarringly ceaseless articulation can only be explored through Julia Kristeva's "black sun" of melancholia, where language is one of the primary substitutes for the object of loss: "Naming suffering, exalting it, dissecting it into its smallest components—that is doubtless a way to curb mourning" (Kristeva 1989, 97). Both narratives uncover the manner in which mourning, especially through lingual experimentation, serves as a mediator for bereavement, fragmentation, repetition, and discontinuity, mirroring the cracks that appear in the metaphorical vinyl of our being, as a result of loss.

This paper contends that the self-reflexive and self-referential authorship, if situated within the contemporary theoretical frameworks of postmodern autobiography, mourning, loss, and trauma, becomes an aesthetic practice and a space for self-fragmentation as well as self-invention, curating archives of emotions and narratives that insist on the performative nature of loss and resist closure, deconstructing and reconstructing memory and self from ruins.

Significance

This paper constructs a triad of three crucial critical frameworks: autobiography, memory, and trauma. Paired with contemporary German literature, Lentz's work, which holds a distinct and prestigious place, bridges personal voice with literary experimentation. While writing in a manner that resists the stable and coherent structure of autobiography, this paper explores the fragmented and self-referential form of autobiographical fiction, where the author is an inextricable part of the work. Although autobiography hinges on an intrinsic pact between the author, narrator, and reader (Lejeune 1989, 14), Lentz subverts this contract by offering a simultaneous affirmation and destabilisation of his "I",

where it does not exist as a singularity, since it is constantly being written and rewritten through verbal and narrative instability.

Writing is an arcane form of expression, especially when it is reconfigured through autobiography as an act of mourning. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler emphasises the inability of the self to account for itself, since relation and recognition are how we always constitute identity (Butler 2005, 21). Lentz's narrators embody this inability, since their attempts to articulate and convey their loss showcase the impossibility and inability to complete a self-account. When it comes to trauma, it is not only a psychological event, but it extends to culture too, in the form of art, performance, and narratives, that are preserved for the self as well as for others (Cvetkovich 2003, 7). Additionally, memory and narratives written about and through it serve as archives, and they may take shape or form in accordance with the emotional tone. Lentz's works, through textual performance, reshape the suffering of one singularity into the suffering of a whole, intentionally and unintentionally stitching grief into the thread of every word and silence. The resulting "postmemory" (Hirsch 2012, 22) is not shaped by direct experiences, but by reconstruction through imagination, and an affective transmission.

Research Objectives

The central objective is to explore the manner in which Michael Lentz's *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* serve as manifestations of the intersectional overlap of autobiography, memory, and fragmentation, leading to a fictional autobiography. The primary objectives are as follows:

- Analyse the narrative and lingual strategies used by Lentz (fragmentation, repetition, experimentation, metafiction, and ekphrasis), and the expression of trauma and mourning.

- Probe the boundaries between truth and fiction, personal loss and collective loss, selfhood and other, from the perspective of autobiographical fiction.
- Contribute to an understanding of the relationship between narratology and memory through the lens of fragmentation, performance, and loss, in terms of self-writing.

Research Questions

This paper will revolve around the following questions:

- How does Lentz use fiction as a form of autobiography as a mediator for his experience and expression?
- In what ways do narrative fragmentation, intertextuality, and self-referential insertions portray loss, memory, and identity?
- How do *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* create autobiographical fiction, reconfiguring the representation and presence of the author in their works?

The aforementioned questions will frame this paper in a triad with writing, memory, and trauma, placing great emphasis on the text's engagement with the self and the collective.

Research Methodology

This paper will employ a qualitative methodology, based on textual analysis, after a close reading of the works. Drawing on theoretical frameworks that converge complementary domains, this research uses *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* to explore fiction as a form of autobiography, negotiating trauma and loss through narratology and language, using fiction as autobiography. Since the primary methodology involves a close reading of the text, the focus would

be on the narrative structure, forms of syntax, literal and thematic repetitions, intertextuality and ekphrasis, lingual deliberation, and overall experimentation. To strengthen this approach, suitable and applicable secondary sources will be used, theorising Lentz's writing in terms of multiple dynamic processes of loss and subsequent substitution. This will provide fertile ground to critically engage with Lentz's self-referential, self-construction, and self-erasure forms of narratology to conjure and dissolve his being.

Theoretical Frameworks

The theoretical frameworks for this paper involve an integration of narratology, postmodernism, trauma, and memory in order to curate a multifaceted understanding of Lentz's autobiographical fiction. In the context of this paper, the focus will be on writing, which serves as a repository as well as "archives of experiences" and feelings, as well as trauma (Cvetkovich 2003, 7). The writings of Michael Lentz, especially in *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh*, are the personification of this grief into a textual archive, using various literary and linguistic devices to convey it. After loss, we feel a compulsion to express, and this expression can take numerous forms. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra provides a distinction between a compulsion to repeat trauma, in order to "work through" it, which can either lead to paralysis or catharsis (LaCapra 2014, 144). This is extended further into the theorisation of memory into its transmission across generations (Hirsch 2012, 22), which is a nod to Lentz's maternal and paternal loss, simultaneously inheriting and losing structures of memory, whether individual or collective.

After these respective deaths, Lentz, instead of dwelling or lamenting, turns this lost object into an exploration of his self, whether emotional, metaphorical, or linguistic, and transforms the works into testimony as well as coffins for his parents. This aligns with Kristeva's contention that melancholy turns the lost object inwards and gives a linguistic shape to mourning (Kristeva 1989, 12).

Derrida, in contrast, reframes this mourning into an encounter with alteration from the perspective of ethics. He posits that the other, what resides within, can never truly be externalised, and exists as an impossibility (2003, 44). Despite this acknowledgement, Lentz's prose performs a relentless effort to portray his loss as an absence which is both generative and looming. The motif of shadow, which can be derived from the title of *Schattenfroh*, literalises this spectre, which stands at the periphery as well as the centre of his writing.

"De-facement", which is a notion given by Paul de Man, and "fragmented self-portraiture", which is a notion given by Roland Barthes, traverse the unity and disjunction of the autobiographical self and subject, which mirrors Lentz's usage of a disjointed narrative voice in both works, and the subsequent failure to convey. Even though Lejeune provides the integral relation between author and reader (Lejeune 1989, 14), Lentz undermines it to a great extent, but this aligns with the conceptualisation of writing as an act of performance, where identity is constructed within dogmas and cultural systems (Smith and Watson 2010, 16), providing a hybrid and holistic understanding of Lentz's textual and literal selves, which exist in the social dimensions of memory, constructed through self-personhood (Halbwachs 1992, 38), elevated by the usage of irony, metafiction, and intertextuality, making the selves into the subject and object of representation.

Literature Review

The convergence of autobiographical fiction, memory, and the fragmented self-cultivates a narratology that is defined by its position within postmodern and post-postmodern contexts. In continuation of these contexts, Michael Lentz's writing stands dreadfully distinct, pushing the boundaries and limits of linguistics and conceptuality of what a novel constitutes. Both *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* are daring experiments in the expression of form and emotion, especially grief, destabilising the voice of the author, and

dissolving the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. These texts, therefore, inhabit a space of liminality between confession from the recess of the soul and invention that is meant to be read and wept, becoming the manifestation of what contemporary critics may refer to as a performative, discontinuous, broken-down, and desolate landscape that is fraught with the inevitable shadow of the creator. In order to further contextualise and situate these works, especially from a critical perspective, this literature review synthesises relevant holistic scholarship on autobiography, narratology, self-representation, trauma, and memory, amplifying Lentz's place amongst such works.

Akin to all roads that lead to Rome, the conversation regarding autobiographical fiction must begin with Philippe Lejeune's concept of the autobiographical pact, which orbits around the perceived identity between the author and the readers, allowing them to distinguish between reality and fiction based on factors that are external to the text (Lejeune 1989, 9). The primary limitations of this pact, being the presumption of objectivity, a sense of coherence, and the fidelity of representation, have led to a fracture in this model. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have observed that modern forms of autobiographical writing and narratives go beyond, and foreground this inherent textual constructedness, and acknowledge the innate instability of selfhood, since it is not fixed or rooted to a singularity, thereby resisting the need to write with transparency, completeness, and factuality (Smith and Watson 2010, 18). In accordance with this defiance, Lentz's works contribute to it with full rigour. In *Muttersterben*, the autobiographical elements are reflected through the linguistic inarticulation and fragmentation, resulting from emotional intensity and loss, which further complicates the conventional form of expectation that an autobiography is supposed to reveal the self of the author. *Schattenfroh*, on the other hand, dismantles the pact in its entirety, and the very presence of Niemand ushers the erasure of identity, rather than its assertion, foregrounding the foundational impossibility for self-representation.

This aforementioned deconstructive approach, which is an amalgam of autobiography and fiction, can be categorised as autofiction, enabling writers to explore emotional truth while not being overly occupied with factual accuracy. Ever since Serge Dubrovsky coined the term, scholars have pointed out the tendency of autofiction authors to merge the contexts of their traumas with their internal crises, particularly regarding identity. Lentz's oscillation between personal confession and surreal journeys resonates and complements this framework, and similar to historical and contemporary writers like Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Karl Ove Knausgård, Annie Ernaux, and others, his work showcases usage of distortion, fragmentation, experiments with the narrative form, and divergence from conventional writing.

When it comes to self-representation, Paul de Man's concept of "de-facement" contends that autobiographical modes of writing inevitably and inherently erase the very self that they were aiming to portray and paint in the first place, resulting in the presentation of a constructed identity. Similarly, Roland Barthes describes this modality of writing as a "fragmented self-portrait", rather than an integrated whole. Both of these terminologies and notions further exemplify how both *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* present identity as a perpetually dissolving series of fragments laden with narrative attempts that continue to fail consolidation, instead of a stable and fixed picture.

Like most works of writing, Lentz's autobiographical fictions cannot be parted from trauma. Cathy Caruth, one of the most notable names in trauma studies, argues that trauma is characterised and defined by its belatedness and recurrence, since it is "the unclaimed experience" that returns to haunt, insistently adamant to be processed through, but refusing to assimilate (Caruth 2016, 5). The nonlinear and recursive nature of *Muttersterben* embodies this broken temporality and results in a narrative that is plagued with repetitions and sensory fragmentation, all presented in a non-chronological form. Here, trauma's resistance to assimilation becomes the formative theme that governs and moulds the writing.

When paired with Julia Kristeva's conclusions in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), the understanding of mourning extends beyond mere psychological scars to a lack of the tongue. For Kristeva, the production of melancholia occurs when the initial object of loss cannot be emotionally and symbolically substituted; language, then, becomes the sole means of survival, and by clinging to it, a misshapen form takes place in the void that is created by loss (Kristeva 1989, 19). The protagonists in both of Lentz's works suffer from and enact this loss, as observed through their dialogue and the dense, experimental, fragmented, and repetitive prose. Here, these linguistic and narrative forms do not function solely as stylistic and aesthetic choices or indulgences, but as symbols of mourning, thinly veiled attempts to convey and put into words the grief that substitutes for the lost maternal as well as paternal presence(s).

In that same vein, Dominick LaCapra proposes two distinctions of behaviour when dealing with trauma, namely "acting out" and "working through", both of which permeate the oeuvre of Lentz. The former refers to the meticulous and compulsive repetition of trauma, which leads to the entrapment of the subject, and the latter, to an acceptance and mourning that empowers the subject to process, understand, engage with, and integrate the trauma into their consciousness (LaCapra 2014, 5). In *Schattenfroh*, Niemand's subjugation to forced writing of *Schattenfroh* through his "brain fluid" results in a forcefully compelled reiteration, since he is trapped within the very narrative that he is creating. Thus, for Lentz, trauma works as imprisonment as well as the force of creation.

The writings of Lentz, therefore, serve as an "archive of feelings", a notion put forth by Ann Cvetkovich, extending trauma beyond the psyche, and stressing the manner in which emotional responses and experiences are the primary underpinnings of artistic forms and creations (Cvetkovich 2003, 50). Lentz's repositories of personal grief, and their subsequent transformation into fragmented and experimental narratives, where language, structure, and form embody as well as carry their remnants and aftereffects. The death of his mother, and then his father, the collapse of familial memory

and collective loss, all are not merely present in the narratives, but woven into the very fabric and texture of the writing itself.

Loss itself is a relic of the past, but emotionally, it defies temporality. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" describes this crucial notion that may be transmitted from one generation to another, while being shaped by their subjective experiences and lives, resulting in an imaginative reconstruction of something that may or may not have happened (Hirsch 2012, 37). While *Muttersterben* is a direct account and/or recount of maternal loss, it is not merely personal, since it exceeds the gravity of the loss into inherited stories, scripts of cultures, and reverberations of language, engaging with an understanding of familial loss and emotional rupture. *Schattenfroh* is a requiem to death and to the shadow of fathers that persists in white light too, while being mediated through historical and cultural artefacts and intertextuality.

To complement "postmemory", Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective trauma acts as the ideal arbitrator. Trauma, even when individual and private, is dependent on recall and narration within shared emotional, social, and cultural frameworks (Halbwachs 1992, 38). Lentz's writing accentuates this dynamic as the protagonists' memories are reformed and shaped by various rituals of mourning, lingual articulations that have been inherited, and the intertextual allusions that further place those memories, as well as experiences from a microcosm to a macrocosm of cultural, historical, and emotional labyrinth. Notably in *Schattenfroh*, where Niemand's suffering takes place within mythic, historical, literary, and metaphorical traditions and understandings of shadowed existence and identities.

Lentz's postmodern forms of writing, brimming with narratological and experimental narratives, usage of dissonance, recursion, cyclicality, and fragmentation, are means to probe identity as well as ideology, since his writing is ontological in its concern with being itself, and the immanent dissolution, and multiplication within language. Metafiction, naturally, is central to *Schattenfroh*. Linda Hutcheon defines metafiction as follows:

> (…) issues such as those of narrative form, of intertextuality, of strategies of representation, of the role of language, of the relation between historical fact and experiential event, and, in general, of the epistemological and ontological consequences of the act of rendering problematic that which was once taken for granted by historiography—and literature (Hutcheon 2003, 5).

Here, fiction foregrounds its own constructedness to covertly or overtly talk about the processes of meaning-making, aiding in the exploration of ethics, and the impossibility of writing the self. The looped opening and closing lines — "One calls this writing"— serve as the overarching metanarrative, fixating on the compulsive failure of writing.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler explores this aforementioned dimension from an ethical perspective, arguing that the self can never fully narrate itself, because it is always constituted in relation to Others and social structures (2005, 21). Lentz's narrators, marked by this incompleteness, exemplify it through their attempts to articulate grief, thereby exposing the fundamental lack of self-knowledge. Similarly, Jacques Derrida, in *The Work of Mourning* (2003), extends this notion, contending that mourning itself is structured around an internalised Other who can never be fully externalised or realised (2003, 81). Writing, then, becomes a trace of this absence—the shadow outlining the centre of identity. The very title of *Schattenfroh* (shadow-glad), encapsulates this paradox: the shadow is a manifestation of absence and loss, yet it sublimates into artistic creation.

Fragmentation, therefore, whether lingual or ontological, works as something far greater than a stylistic signature; it becomes the architecture that stands at the very core of Lentz's autofictional vision. By placing emphasis on multiplicity, discontinuity, and a decentered sense of subjectivity, Lentz amplifies the rupture to the point where voices dissolve, memories fracture, and identities blur into a residue that leaves neither colour nor taste. The protagonists, and by extension, Lentz, become liminal figures, caught between presence and absence, memory and forgetting, self and shadow. Neither factual nor invented, neither memoir nor fiction, neither

written nor unwritten, neither constructed nor deconstructed, caught in a curve of their own making.

Analysis

Michael Lentz's *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* are at the forefront of the most demanding, self-invigorating, and experimental works in contemporary literature. Even though there are tonal, narrative, and scalar differences in both works, there is a mutually converging engagement with autobiographical fiction, the fragmentation of memory, and the fracture of the speaking "I." Throughout both of these works, Lentz is able to curate a literary space that is not a coherent source of narrative authority or totalitarianism, but a scarred, broken, and porous rhizomatic assemblage formed through loss, grief, repetition, and coercion. This analysis argues that *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* constitute complementary explorations of the fragmentation of the self and, by extension, whether intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, the autobiographical subject, and the performative staging of the self as something that is perpetually produced and undone in the shadow of itself. By conjunction, they form a diptych in which grief, mourning, melancholy, trauma, and language subvert the boundary between what is lived and what is not, eventually, revealing autofiction as a medium which exposes, rather than resolves, the crisis of selfhood.

Autobiographical Fiction as Exposure and Undoing

Traditionally, autobiographical fiction ricochets between self-revelation and self-production. This tension is further radicalised and fuelled by Lentz with his assertion that no autobiographical "self" exists prior to being narrated or made part of the work;

instead, it is through emotions, particularly those of grief, loss, and linguistic associations amongst them and the rupture that produces a subject that is able to speak, but not precisely what it wants. In *Muttersterben*, the protagonist constantly tries to recount the death of his mother, which ends up becoming an act of disintegration, rather than consolidation. The prose showcases the matter-of-fact reaction of the protagonist upon hearing about his mother's death: "On the twenty-first of August, nineteen-ninety-eight, at around eight-thirty-three, Father called to make the announcement: 'Mother died at around eleven-fifty last night.' I went back to bed and continued my reading of the duck comic that'd been interrupted the previous night. Mother's disappearance had been expected for a long time" (Lentz 2025, 37). This inability to process or grieve, and the immediacy with which the protagonist tries to distract himself, mirrors the reaction of Camus' protagonist in *The Stranger* (1942), and the compulsive syntactic structures. The book performs bereavement not as a mere event or universal happening, but as a structural wound that severs the very capacity of the narrator to articulate his loss.

In contrast, *Schattenfroh* pushes autobiographical fiction into the realm of allegory as well as grotesque historical accounts and satire. The protagonist, Niemand, finds himself trapped and bound to a device by his captor, Schattenfroh, who is a part of the bureaucratic, quasi-religious Frightbearing Society. Here, the autobiographical impulse, or the artistic impulse, becomes distorted into a system of forced inscription, with a singular judge, jury, and executioner. Niemand is forced to record his thoughts, visions, and sensations, all of which are a part of his "brainfluid", into a book that ends up being *Schattenfroh*, the work, which is a literal extraction from his body, making autobiographical fiction into autofictional extraction. The emerging narrative defies categorisation into genres and provides a parodic and unsettling portrait of Niemand, whose identity is written by him as well as for him.

Both of these texts, then, provide a dramatised version of reality, creating autofiction, but that too not as a means of self-unification, but rather, as a process that brings to the surface the impossibility of a stable identity. Since Lentz's narrators do not recount a self, instead, they demonstrate the manner in which their self-disintegrates when dwelled upon, or faced with mourning and an account that they are forced to narrate. These generative losses, these "shadows that beget", may be trauma, loss, lack, or inability that bring forth the factored spectral forms of subjectivity.

Memory as Wound, Memory as Construction

Memory, as discussed earlier, is not just a simple recollection from the past. It is an extremely volatile, often unstable, and at times a violent process that folds and unfolds the present, even leading to disruptions. In *Muttersterben*, memory cannot be separated from mourning; every time the narrator tries to recall the life of his mother, he brings her back from the dead. "Now that she's dead, she's a stranger. How is it that when someone dies, they become a stranger? Now, when someone dies, they become a stranger. Where, then, is that when. Is her life a remembrance that's become other, that remnant now left to wonder" (Lentz 2025, 30). Recounting the sporadic scenes of caregiving, dying, and bodily deterioration in a non-chronological movement leads to a recursion that manifests a temporal discontinuity.

This dynamic is formalised through fragmentation of the self, memory and language. Scenes are narrated and left unfinished, repetition is scattered throughout, and being ceases to be.

> That was nineteen ninety-four. That was the end of the meal. Even today, seriously ill sounds like the end of a life. So as not to say *is already in the process of dying*. Eight cold treasures. No more food. I ate no more after nineteen ninety-four (Lentz 2025, 53).

Here, the instability of memory is at its strongest, where it does not act as a transparent window into the life and mind of the character, but as a broken mirror, reflecting the grief and loss-stricken consciousness of the protagonist. In that regard, *Muttersterben* becomes "postmemory": through the mediation of memory, its active and passive reconstruction, and continual reshaping by affect rather than objective recall, leading to an intrapsychically formulated memory, inherited, revised, and experienced cyclically through the affective change caused by mourning.

Schattenfroh, on the other hand, shows an explicit, blatant, and coercive form of memory. The Frightbearing Society functions as an introduction to the bureaucratic archive of revelations, rituals, and dictations. Memory is forced to be institutionalised and transcribed into scripts, narratives, coded litanies, rituals, and indecipherable proceedings. Memory does not remain individual or private, and becomes manipulated and overwritten.

> I am my own memory and deciphering apparatus, I inflict upon myself and make use of myself, yet am not my own ultimate consumer. Perhaps I'm merely a signal processor, the data of which sometimes appears as an image and sometimes as a word—or as both together (Lentz 2025, 29).

Here, we see Derrida's "Archive Fever", wherein the archive serves a dual purpose: a repository, and a relentless force that regulates what can be remembered in any way or form. *Schattenfroh* uses this archive not as a mere metaphor, but as a literal apparatus that erases, moulds, and restructures the mind of Niemand, along with his perception. Identity becomes mediated and reliant on various forms of technology (masks, boxes, spectacles) that constantly frame his vision(s) and regulate his inner narrative.

The contrast between the two is clear: *Muttersterben* is an account of memory as an inner wound, while *Schattenfroh* is a grand spectacle of memory as an external object, but regardless, both converge in the portrayal of memory as unstable, fragmentary, and identity-

constituting/consuming, with the presence being not preservation of the self, but the very reason for its fracture.

The Fragmentation of Self: Stylistic and Ontological Breakdown

Fragmentation, whether of self, memory, or otherwise, is the central ontological principle and thematic fluid that governs the texts. In *Muttersterben*, the source of fragmentation is an organic form of grief; Lentz recounts the mother's death through stylistic and syntactical fragmentation, abrupt shifts and recursions of time, and rhythmic prose.

> Now, you can no longer call and ask for Mother, I concluded. And you never went to the movies with Mother and never went to the theatre with Mother, I concluded. In fact, you never went anywhere with her ever. There are so many last looks that I can't remember at all when I last saw her (Lentz 2025, 41).

Here, Kristeva's melancholia can be observed: when the lost object, especially when the lost object is a mother, is not completely or fully mournable, language begins to loop in on itself, leading to dissolution. The voice of the narrator mirrors a trembling structure, barely held together, word and world, nearing collapse under the weight of maternal loss.

Additionally, there are various repetitions and recursions of phrases, of events, and of memories that oscillate between meticulous and clinical detail, along with lyrical afterthoughts and reflections, where language seems to fall on its knees, buckling under the weight of emotions. The narrator, after the death of his mother, often returns to the bedside, to the very same hospital, to the corridors, to relive the sensory and visual details of the breathing machines and medications, the flow of the noise, and the entrapment of this liminal space between life and death; identity

becomes a threshold that is indeterminate, suspended between before and after.

Whereas in *Schattenfroh*, this fragmentation is systemic, rather than emotional. The self of the narrator negates itself, but not because he experiences grief and loss, but because of the pressure put forth by an authority, namely, *Schattenfroh*, along with the Frightbearing Society's assertions, rituals, reforms, dictations, impositions, and devices placed on Niemand's body. "My mission is to write everything down from the beginning. I said it can't be done. I don't know when the beginning is, and I don't know what everything is. They've suddenly changed something" (Lentz 2025, 19). Here, writing is not a form of voluntary self-expression, but a ritualised and forced extraction of "brainfluid." Consequently, there is a shift of voices based on expectations, and due to unpredictability, the "I" becomes pluralised into multiplicities, displaced by voices that either speak through, over, or in his stead. This fragmentation mirrors Foucault's notions of disciplinary power, since the narrator's body becomes an instrument and medium; his words, thoughts, actions, and his very being become codified and examined. The self is displaced by the dominance of society, instead of just an isolated fracture. Fragmentation is not a symptom of domination, but its product. The novelist's juxtaposition reveals two modalities through which the author dissolves in the narrative: the result of organic, intimate grief, and through authoritative control.

The Body as Archive, the Body as Site of Writing

Both works engage deeply with the body as an archive as well as a site for memory. In *Muttersterben*, the protagonist narrates various observations and physical transformations: breathlessness, fragility, deterioration, medical interventions, made devastating through a prose that mirrors that deterioration and fragmentation.

> Well, I'm slowly getting old, she suddenly said once, years ago. She sits at home on the sofa. Something on the tip of her tongue, it won't come. She remembers very clearly that she can't think of a name. Oh gosh, she says, I can truly feel I've grown old. It just won't come to her (Lentz 2025, 44).

Here, the body grows into an archive of pain, a canvas upon which pain is inscribed and carved, but still tries to live for as long as it can. Exhaustion, trembling, somatic and psychosomatic reactions blur the distinction between the suffering of the mother and the suffering of the protagonist, diverged by their respective bodies.

In *Schattenfroh*, dominion over one's own body is completely lost.

> I am writing into my brain fluid. I must write that I am here voluntarily. And so I write: I am here voluntarily. And, as I am here voluntarily, I have voluntarily subjected myself to the confines of this society. I write: As I am here voluntarily, I have voluntarily subjected myself to the confines of this society. Society demands amusement (Lentz 2025, 19).

The grotesque imagery of writing into his "brainfluid", that too, involuntarily, collapses the distinction between the self and the word, the text and the flesh. Writing, therefore, becomes an invasive, compulsive, controlled, and derivative act, rather than an organic and innate urge to create. The body does not just remember and keep score; it is written upon. Similar to Butler's idea, the self that constitutes itself demands an account; it wants to be remembered, it wants to exist. In *Schattenfroh*, this demand becomes brutally literal, since the narrator's account is forced, extracted, and inscribed onto, into, and from him by external forces.

Both of these selected texts, therefore, utilise the body as both an active and a passive archive, where memory, loss, and identity are recorded. However, each work fixates on the instability of that archive, with it being fragile and susceptible to distortions in *Muttersterben*, and controlled and moulded in *Schattenfroh*.

Language as Rupture, Language as Ruin

Instability of language is an inherent feature of postmodern

writing, and in that same vein, Lentz's experimental stylistics foregrounds that very instability. In *Muttersterben*, language breaks down and fails, as the narrator is forced to confront the inherent limitations of what can be said and what must be passed over in silence. The death of his mother marks the death of linguistic stability and coherence too, but despite that, he still tries to narrate her life and talk about her, anything that allows him to cling to her and to keep her alive.

> In the decomposition chamber. In the graveyard. In the diffusion distance. Was removed from our midst. Wherever that could be. Take note. Baitlanguage. To speak of Mother as something unedited. Fragment, marginal gloss. Priming, crack and lettering. Form and break, swathe and stroke. A sickness is always a sickness of consciousness (Lentz 2025, 51).

Barthes, in *Mourning Diary* (2010), reflects upon how grief, no matter how minute, leads to a crisis in language, which manifests as an inability to put loss into words (2010, 183). This is readily apparent, as we observe the narrator constantly repeat and revise and restart his sentences, but still not being able to convey what he wishes to, leading to a fragmentary discord, showcasing grief as a psychological as well as physiological event.

In *Schattenfroh*, on the other hand, language does not break down; instead, it becomes totalising. The Frightbearing Society's mystic and cultic jargon, ritualistic terminologies, and philological manifestos create a dominion in which language does not work as a source of expression, but is metamorphosed into a rigid, oppressive, and brutal tool of control.

> Our language is a hard, polished peale; our words know no rust that makes the people carp and cavil. We have realised that new words create a new world, thus we have created new words. Our language is crystal clear. It is to be used absolutely for understanding between humans (Lentz 2025, 35).

As conveyed here, the linguistic crisis in *Schattenfroh* is systemic: language becomes the decaying corpse that compulsively and fervently perseveres and is rewritten endlessly, ad nauseam and

ad infinitum. Here, these ruins of language become the sole legibility of the wreckage and, in turn, reveal the moral decadence and decay of society, culture, structure, self, and all. Both works, thus, use language as a site, however preserved, for rupture, domination, loss, and control.

Comparative Synthesis: Shadows That Beget

Lentz's writing, across both, *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh,* reveals the manner in which autobiographical fiction comes to life not from a singularity or unified subject, but from the broken and fractured experiences of memory, grief, loss, and control. The shadows that beget the self are both intimate, and brutal. In *Muttersterben*, the shadow is grief: the death of the mother cast a darkness which reshaped memory, language, and expression. In *Schattenfroh*, the shadow is domination: the Society's literal and abstract control of the self. Despite these divergences in the origin of the shadows, there is a commonality in the form of forged rupture. Hence, autofiction becomes a medium that reveals the damage that precedes, accompanies, and follows self-referential narration, existing in zones of liminality, and between memory and erasure, autonomy and coercion, language and its breakdown.

Both of these texts also refuse to offer catharsis, closure, and consolation. *Muttersterben* refuses to process or resolve the grief into the narrative; *Schattenfroh* refuses to restore the individuality or agency of Niemand. Instead, Lentz constructs work in which lack is not a presence but a modality of acknowledging the complexity of lived experiences in the face of loss. Therefore, autobiographical fiction is not a singularity but a constellation of ruptures rendering memory unstable, and transmuting it into a site of struggle and archive, marked by tenderness as well as violence. Lentz's works demonstrate that the self is not just haunted by shadows, but produced by them.

Conclusion

Michael Lentz's *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* offer an exegesis through profound, innovative, inventive, and recessive meditations on autobiographical fiction, memory, and fragmentation of the self. Through divergent but complementary approaches, the instability and transience of the autobiographical subject, along with the accompanying tensions that are an inherent part of the narrated lived experience, reveal themselves. Whether that be the intimate, the melancholic, or the grotesque, Lentz portrays the breakdown of language, coercion through apparatus, the role of writing, and a self that is perpetually being produced and erased, negated and given birth by shadows, shadows of grief, trauma, domination, and instability.

In summation, these works redefine autobiographical fiction not as a mode of self-narration and discovery, but self-exposure. They show that the self is not necessarily something that is remembered but written, rewritten, fractured, stitched together, and never made while, all across time. The "shadows that beget" are manifestations that structure experience, unsettle identity, and shed light on the unspeakable.

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