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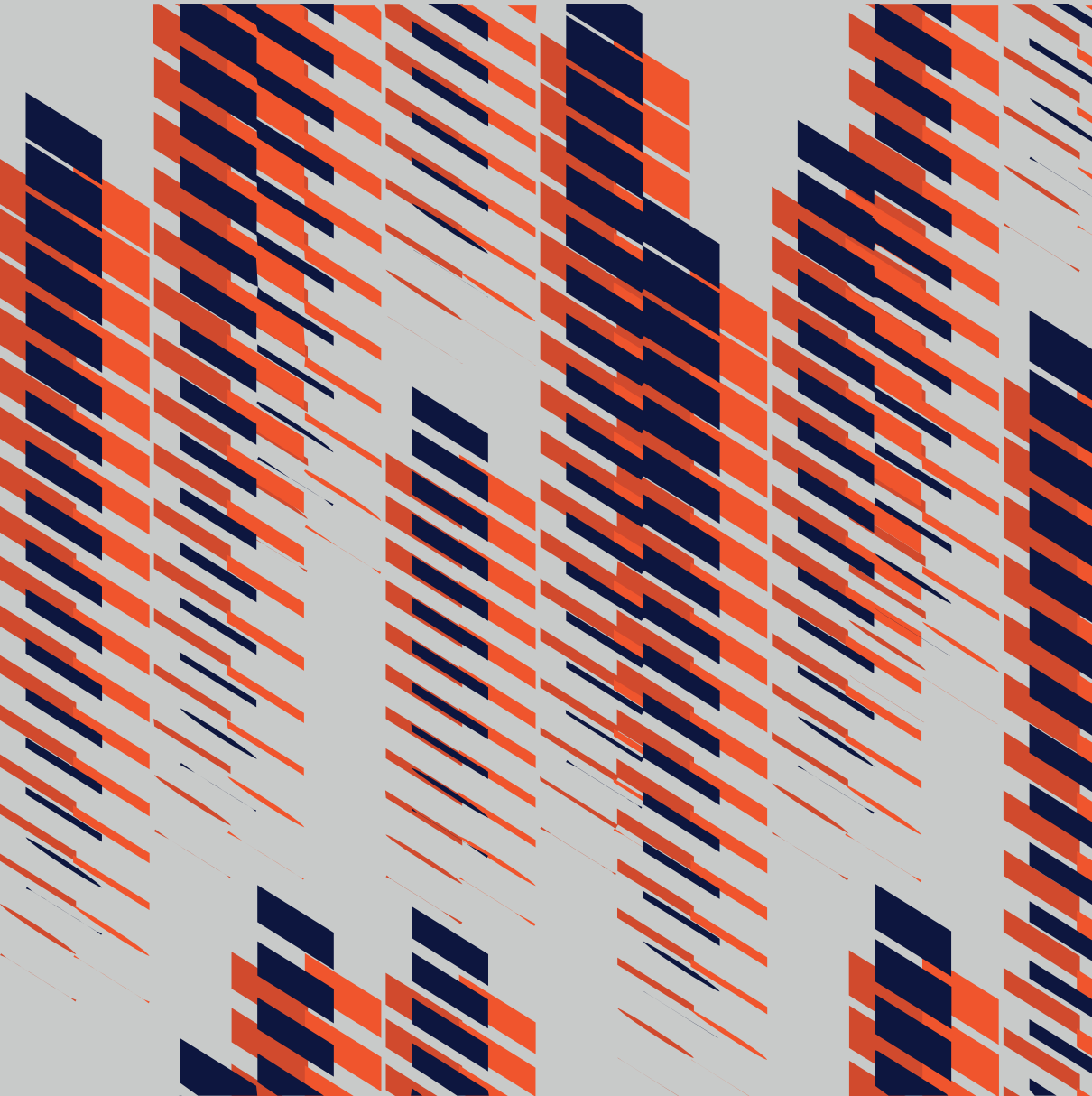

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British Physico-Theological Poetry and Newtonian Physics
The Use of *Principia Mathematica* (1687) in Sir Richard Blackmore's *Creation* (1712)

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Abstract The turn of the eighteenth century was a time in which science and literature were mutually enriching disciplines. Those years witnessed extraordinary advancements in natural philosophy. Newton was the most prominent and influential among the natural philosophers whose thought contributed to the scientific revolution and his work altered dramatically the way in which the universe was understood. His *Principia Mathematica* (1687) crowned the new tradition of physico-mathematics and contributed to shaping the new trend in natural theology known as physico-theology. Physico-theology was at the crossroads of natural theology and natural philosophy and employed the new science to demonstrate the existence and attributes of God, and it was often given expression in poetry. One of the earliest and most accomplished instances of physico-theological poetry is Sir Richard Blackmore's *Creation* (1712), which successfully synthesised the latest scientific theories. Blackmore's verses have been neglected for centuries and it is the aim of this article to pay critical attention to his accomplishment, in particular regarding Blackmore's use of the Newtonian physics of the *Principia*.

Keywords Physico-theology. Natural Theology. Eighteenth-century Poetry. Newtonian Physics. Sir Richard Blackmore. Creation.

Summary 1 Introduction: Physico-theology, a European Phenomenon. – 2 Late seventeenth-century Natural Philosophy and Newton's *Principia Mathematica*. – 3 Sir Richard Blackmore's *Creation* (1712). – 4 The Presence of Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in *Creation*. – 5 Conclusion.

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1 Introduction: Physico-theology, a European Phenomenon

Recent years have witnessed a renewal of scholarly interest in an extraordinary cultural phenomenon that characterised the turn of the eighteenth century. Physico-theology was the branch of natural philosophy that intersected natural theology, employing the most state-of-the-art scientific ideas to demonstrate the existence of God. Studying this crossroads of interests has resonance on a number of levels in the history of Western thought, but it is especially relevant for its role in the popularisation of the natural philosophy that eventually developed into modern science (cf. Brooke, Manning, Watts 2013).

The label 'physico-theology' became popular in England at the beginning of the eighteenth century, though several specimens of it can be found throughout Europe from the second half of the seventeenth century. Identifying physico-theology is as challenging a task as defining it. Given its interdisciplinary nature, physico-theology eludes any attempt at strict categorisation. Harrison argues that the very hyphenation of the noun points to its hybrid nature:

> 'physico-theology' is best understood as a new term developed within a growing lexicon of practices in natural philosophy that specified a particular kind of natural theological argument drawn from an assumed knowledge of final causes. (Blair, von Greyerz 2020, 71-2)

That is to say, physico-theology had a composite nature at the intersection of theology and natural philosophy. Physico-theology is yet fundamentally distinct from the etymologically analogue 'natural theology'. If natural theology resorted to rational arguments, physico-theology exploited the most recent scientific discoveries to achieve the same end: demonstrating the existence of God. Whilst most critics tend to use the two terms interchangeably, Blair and von Greyerz (2020) make it clear that physico-theology is substantially different from natural theology on account of its chronological specificity as a cultural phenomenon and of its ontological dependence on the latest natural philosophy. Hence, physico-theology can be regarded as a sub-genre of natural theology that thrived throughout Europe on the crest of the scientific revolution of the second half of the seventeenth century and that, in England, survived well into the nineteenth century.

Outlining a history of the development of physico-theology in England is also testing. One of the main reasons lies in the difficulty to determine the mutual conceptual and chronological boundaries of natural theology and physico-theology. Mandelbrote (2007) maintains that, in the seventeenth century, two major styles of natural theol-

ogy came into being in the two main English universities, and the two differed in the way their best-known exponents interpreted divine evidence in nature. On the one hand, a group of scholars based in Oxford saw the universe as providentially ordered according to laws acting as a mediation of the hand of God and understood natural phenomena chiefly in terms of regularity. On the other hand, the group formed around the Cambridge Platonists relied on wondrous revelations observed in nature as signs of the existence of God, thus attempting to combine Christian views with platonic philosophy (Harrison 2001). The major scientific changes that occurred in the latter half of the seventeenth century ultimately collided with these tendencies and caused the emergence of a third strain in natural theology founded on the demonstration of the providence of a wise Creator through the argument from design (von Greyerz 2022, 8-11: 49-89). It was the very compatibility of the natural theology of the Oxford group with the new popular experimental philosophy that gave rise to physico-theology.

In England, the inauguration of the golden age of physico-theology is conventionally considered 1691, the year of the foundation of the famous Boyle Lectures (cf. Dahm 1970; Harrison 2005, 172-3) and of the publication of John Ray's seminal *The Wisdom of God* (Calloway 2014, 20). The more the insight into the natural world granted by the new physical sciences impacted on natural theology, the more scientists and scholars felt the need to show that those disciplines were in harmony with traditional Christian beliefs. Harrison argues that the very existence of the term physico-theology

> signals an attempt to arrive at a solution to the question of how the new forms of natural philosophy related to theology. (Harrison 2005, 181)

Physico-theology gradually left its learned nest and works in that genre started to be translated, or to be redacted in English. Physico-theological writings proliferated in Britain at the turn of the eighteenth century and all of them drew heavily on the main principles of the scientific revolution. There were several forms that physico-theology assumed and poetry was a particularly effective one, as it was accessible to the common reader mainly thanks to its appeal to common sense and imagination.

2 Late Seventeenth-Century Natural Philosophy and Newton's *Principia Mathematica*

In scientific literature, the eighteenth century is commonly labelled as the century of Newton, in light of the tremendous impact his physics had on the development of modern science. The changes in the scientific world of the last decades of the seventeenth century reached their acme with the works of a group of natural philosophers who set a new standard of scientific inquiry. Newton's scientific work can be pigeonholed in the tradition known as 'physico-mathematics' – that is those disciplines that employed the rigour of mathematics to study natural phenomena (Blair, von Greyerz 2020, 41). Between the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth century, physico-mathematics, supported by the extensive accumulation of empirical observations, definitively supplanted the traditional Aristotelean means of investigating the natural world. It was especially thanks to Newton's pioneering work that mathematics became the privileged language of natural philosophy and assumed a more prominent academic status in Europe (cf. Guicciardini 2019). Mathematics became the ideal form of exposition of science (Porter 2003, 26-7); it followed that natural philosophy increasingly became detached from other branches of philosophical inquiry. Yet, even if we think of Newton's legacy for his invaluable contributions to the fields of mechanics, we should not forget his involvement in religious matters. In fact, his religious pursuits formed perhaps the most significant part of his life (Iliffe, Smith 2016, 519) and, since he saw the world as God's temple, he understood his role as a natural philosopher as that of a priest of nature (Iliffe 2017).

Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* was published for the first time in 1687 and is the crown jewel of the seventeenth-century tradition of physico-mathematics. The volume went through two other Latin editions in 1713 and 1726, and was translated into English in 1729. The greater part of the work remained substantially unvaried, but the second edition saw the addition of a preface by Roger Cotes[1] and the famous *Scholium Generale*, which were momentous integrations that served to frame the *Principia* in a "much more overtly apologetic and carefully theologically positioned" background (Snobelen 2001, 175).

In the first two books of the treatise Newton developed mathematical laws on the basis of abstract constructs, which he then compared with observed natural phenomena, creating models progres-

1 Roger Cotes (1682-1716) was the first Plumian Professor of Astronomy and Experimental Philosophy at Cambridge University and worked with Newton on the second edition of the *Principia* that was published in Latin in 1713.

sively more similar to reality by combining the use of induction and deduction in the third book. Those models and ways of reasoning were meant to be applied to the delineation of a complete system of the world. Mathematics alone, however, could not be sufficient to explain all phenomena, hence empirical observation was intertwined with the more strictly mathematical method (Sambrook 2013, 2). It was in the third book that, through a process of inductive generalisation, Newton formulated the famous law of universal gravitation, according to which

> [g]ravity exists in all bodies universally and is proportional to the quantity of matter in each. (*The Principia*, 810)

The theory of universal gravitation was an extraordinary breakthrough in Western thought. In mathematical and physical terms, it was understood by Newton not so much as a centripetal force, but as a form of attraction: as a mutually acting force, universal gravitation affects all the bodies of a studied system proportionally to their masses and in inverse proportion to the square of their distance.

The second and third edition of the *Principia* are closed by the *General Scholium*, one of Newton's best known essays and a point of reference for eighteenth-century physico-theology. The *Scholium* is a precious document, as it expounds Newton's view of God in relation to his view of physics. Here Newton asserts that the order and beauty of this system of the world governed by the action of gravity are sufficient proof of God's existence. He also illustrates the characteristics of the one God and states that "to treat of God from phenomena is certainly a part of experimental or natural philosophy" (*The Principia*, 274-5). Indeed, it is in the *Scholium* that the famous methodological stance of the *Principia* is summarised as *hypotheses non fingo*, that is "I do not feign hypotheses" (*The Principia*, 943): hypotheses not sustained by empirical evidence ought not be accepted as a basis for certain knowledge. In the first edition of the *Principia*, however, Newton never provides an explanation for the ultimate cause of gravity. A valuable document preceding the *Scholium* is a later letter sent by Newton to the classical scholar Richard Bentley (1662-1742) on the occasion of his Boyle Lectures, where he employed Newton's theories apologetically. In that famous letter Newton seems to have argued that the logical ultimate cause of gravity is God himself (Park, Daston 2006, 754):

> 'Tis unconceivable that inanimate brute matter should (without the mediation of something else which is not material) operate upon & affect other matter without mutual contact […]. That gravity should be innate inherent & [essential] to matter so that one body may act upon another at a distance through a vacuum without the me-

> diation of any thing else by & through which their action or force {may} be conveyed from one to another is to me so great an absurdity that I beleive [sic] no man who has in philosophical matters any competent faculty of thinking can ever fall into it. Gravity must be caused by an agent {acting} consta{ntl}y according to certain laws, but whether this agent be material or immaterial is a question I have left to the consideration of my readers. (Letter from Isaac Newton to Richard Bentley, 25 February 1692/3)[2]

While it is true that in the *Principia* Newton openly admits his failure to explain how a force like gravity can act at a distance through a void, and to determine its ultimate cause, his empirical observations still enable him to assert with certainty that such a force unquestionably exists and is responsible for a wide range of natural phenomena. Moreover, far from dismissing the presence of God in the world, Newton's physics was compatible with the Christian tenets that saw the world as God's creation and managed to demonstrate this relation with mathematical certainty. Natural philosophy had proven that natural phenomena were consistent with the action of a divine agent, who had created a universe governed by regular laws that could be studied through mathematics. Indeed, it was not so much Newton's sporadic theological statements in his scientific works but rather the implications of his physics that influenced and shaped British physico-theology and made it a distinct genre.

By the dawn of the eighteenth century, Newtonian physics had become one of the most frequently employed weapons brandished by British physico-theologians. The influence of Newton's thought remained strong in the first half of the century and the application of Newton's physics to culture at large, known as Newtonianism, pervaded all strata of knowledge (Schaffer 1996). Newton's theories found their fortune also in non-scientific literature and in particular in poetry, where their contamination with physico-theology found a perfect outlet.

3 Sir Richard Blackmore's *Creation* (1712)

At the beginning of the eighteenth century there were few poems entirely devoted to physico-theology, as physico-theological echoes were rather distributed in a variety of compositions (cf. Jones 1963). One of the first and most accomplished physico-theological poems was *Creation: A Philosophical Poem in Seven Books* (1712) by the poet-

2 https://www.newtonproject.ox.ac.uk/view/texts/normalized/THEM00258.

physician Sir Richard Blackmore[3] (1654-1729).

Although his poem is a unique specimen of the scientific literature of its age, Blackmore's work has been neglected by modern critics mainly as a result of his rift with some of his more powerful contemporaries, including John Dryden (1631-1700), John Dennis[4] (1658-1734), and Alexander Pope (1688-1744) (Rosenberg 1953, 54-7; 144-6). In his days, however, his writings were discretely popular and some of them even won the approval of Dr. Johnson (1709-1784), who accorded Blackmore much more space than he did to other writers in his *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81) (Kelly 1961, 189) and used several of Blackmore's verses when composing the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755) (Atkinson 1952). While Johnson recognised the value of Blackmore's texts, he also pointed out that the doctor's literary formation was not up to the task of writing masterpieces and that his poems were well-conceived and structured but fundamentally lacked in elegance (Johnson 2010, 775). The aesthetic mediocrity of his literary compositions was the reason why Blackmore's works were not customarily welcomed very warmly in literary circles, where the doctor was often referred to as the "City Bard" or the "Knight Physician" (Kelly 1961, 186). The so-called wits addressed harsh strictures against the doctor's inept versification and lack of true poetic talent (Boys 1949): among others, Swift nicknamed the physician "England's Archpoet" (Rolleston 1926, 9), and most notoriously Pope scorned "Blackmore's endless line" (Pope 2017, 441) in *The Dunciad*. Still, Blackmore was an emblematic figure of his time, and only

> few literary figures so adequately mirror the concerns of their own age. (Solomon 1980, 9)

Compensating for what was often pronounced his literary dullness with enthusiasm and vigour in the defence of his convictions, Blackmore succeeded in being remembered for his most momentous work.

It is indeed the unanimous opinion of readers and critics that *Cre-*

3 Born in Wiltshire in 1654, Richard Blackmore obtained a MA from St Edmund Hall, Oxford, and was awarded the degree of Doctor of Medicine in Padua. After becoming a fellow of the Royal College of Physicians, he was chosen by King William III as one of his personal physicians and was knighted in 1697. At the same time his sense of moral duty compelled him to embark on a prolific literary career. His extensive literary production includes medical tracts, epic poems, religious and theological writings, periodicals, and physico-theological compositions. After the death of Queen Anne and the Hanoverian accession, Blackmore was removed from his position as royal physician, yet in 1716 he was made Censor and Elect of the College of Physicians. 1722 was the year of Blackmore's official retirement from the public scene and he spent the last years of his life in Essex, writing mainly on medical matters before he died in 1729.

4 After the publication of *Creation* Dennis turned from enemy to defender of Blackmore's poetry in light of its moral value (Rosenberg 1953, 119).

ation is Sir Richard Blackmore's best composition and has been recognised as such since its publication in 1712. The poem was the only of Blackmore's works to be reprinted after the author's death (Blackmore 1806, xv). With *Creation*, Blackmore accomplished what earlier scientist-theologians had wished to do since he refuted atheism in poetry by

> put[ting] into verse the wisdom of God in nature as demonstrated by 'natural philosophy' in the discoveries of the new science. (Jones 1966, 86)

While this was not Blackmore's first attempt at versifying the same subject, *Creation* exceeded all previous endeavours and became the first comprehensive poetic encyclopaedia of physico-theology. Addison himself praised the poem only few weeks after its publication in *Spectator* No. 339 (29 March 1712), in which he observed that

> [t]he Work was undertaken with so good an Intention, and is executed with so great a Mastery, that it deserves to be looked upon as one of the most useful and noble Productions in our English Verse. (Addison 1965, 261)

As we have seen, the tradition of physico-theology enjoyed a period of great fortune in the latter half of the seventeenth century but, at that time, it was read only by those who knew Latin. Blackmore overtly declared his intention to commit to paper a work that was to be accessible to people who did not have an academic education (*Creation*, xl-xli).

The chosen subject is that of the divine creation of the universe and the subtitle "Philosophical Poem" hints at the prominent role that the new philosophy was to have in the text. The poem is divided into seven books, a number that recalls the seven days of creation described in the Book of *Genesis*. Its subject is physico-theological: the celebration and demonstration of the existence of a wise creator from the observation of an array of natural phenomena in the universe by way of scientific examples. The best expression of such intention is found in the programmatic opening lines of the first book:

> See thro' this vast extended theatre
> Of skill divine what shining marks appear:
> Creating power is all around exprest,
> The God discover'd, and his care confest.
> Nature's high birth, her heavenly beauties show;
> By ev'ry feature we the parent know.
> Th' expanded spheres amazing to the sight,
> Magnificent with stars and globes of light;

> The glorious orbs, which heaven's bright host compose,
> Th' imprison'd sea, that restless ebbs and flows;
> The fluctuating fields of liquid air,
> With all the curious meteors hov'ring there,
> And the wide regions of the land, proclaim
> The power divine, that rais'd the mighty frame.
> (*Creation*, 1.34-47)

In the preface to the poem Blackmore openly acknowledges his debt to physico-theological sources, although he never mentions them. Following the same kind of reasoning, each part of the poem reaches the conclusion that the perfect contrivance of the world could not have been brought about but by a wise, almighty designer:

> That I may reach th' Almighty's secret throne,
> And make his causeless power, the cause of all things, known.
> (*Creation*, 1.18-19)

Each of the seven books of *Creation* is devoted to a different portion of the created world. Blackmore's logical proceeding is quite straightforward: the reasonableness of each feature is brought to the fore and the atheists addressed by the lyrical I – who voices the viewpoint of the author – are shown that the providential order visible in the world cannot be the result of chance. Blackmore's very insistence on the providential design behind all works of creation positions the poem in the physico-theological tradition of the argument from design. This was the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' most popular argument whereby the existence of an intelligent designer is demonstrated through the observation of the harmony of creation. The opening book argues the existence of a deity from evidence of design in the position, unity, stability, structure and motion of the earth and the seas. Throughout Book I and the whole poem, Blackmore never fails to celebrate the beauty of all the works of creation as yet another evidence of their benign maker. All these elements enable the poet to conclude that a wise contriver must have been responsible not only for the creation of the world, but also for its preservation.[5]

Blackmore's use of the scientific argument from design is strong again in Book II, which is by far the most consequential when it comes to Blackmore's application of Newtonian physics, as it surveys the harmony of the solar system. In the history of mankind, there have been several theories trying to explain heavenly motions and so the attempts by Ptolemy, Copernicus, and Kepler are duly summarised and lead to the theory of the action of gravity. After three books de-

5 On the proximity of Blackmore to Boyle, see Rosenberg 1953, 103.

voted to the confutation of atheistic positions, the scientific discourse is again central in Book VI. Here, Blackmore's professional expertise emerges when he uses the human body as evidence of the existence of a divine anatomist behind its wondrous contrivance. The book opens with a review of several classical accounts of the origin of mankind, which in turn occasions a detailed anatomical and physiological description of the human body. Both eighteenth-century and modern critics have commended this very portion of the poem, for here Blackmore succeeds in transforming physiology into poetry (Jones 1966, 89) by way of occasional "pictorial" language that embellishes an otherwise plain physiological and anatomical survey (Pizzol Giacomini 2007, 34). It was not the first time that such a topic had been included in physico-theological literature,[6] yet Blackmore's account of anatomy and physiology is detailed and well-informed in its compendium of the most recent discoveries in the field, such as the circulation of the blood described after William Harvey's (1578-1657) *De Motu Cordis* (1628), or the illustration of the functioning of the nervous system indebted to the work of Thomas Willis (1621-1675), or the theories of light and sight (Nicolson 2015, 103-4).

The final book concludes the previous account of the human body as God's extraordinary handiwork that reveals the hand of a sage anatomist in each of its parts. Here Blackmore evokes a familiar topic of philosophical inquiry, the workings of the human mind, which he tackles in a proto-psychological way that draws heavily on John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1689). Blackmore does so in order to show that the wonders and mysteries of the human mind, because complex and unfathomable, must presuppose a divine origin more than any other aspect of creation (Jones 1966, 89).

4 The Presence of Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* in *Creation*

Granted that in the early eighteenth century poems thematising science were relatively numerous, not all poets had the same degree of expertise to understand and use scientific ideas in an original way. As a man of science, Blackmore had privileged access to various branches of exact knowledge that formed the solid skeleton of several of his works. He was also likely *au courant* with the latest scientif-

6 See for instance the 1692 Boyle Lectures by Sir Richard Bentley (1662-1742) published as *The Folly and Unreasonableness of Atheism* (1693). Blackmore himself had already introduced the subject in the earlier *The Nature of Man* (1711). The poem dealt with the nature of man in a literal sense and analysed from a physiological point of view "What different Virtues, and as different Crimes | Owe their Production to peculiar Climes" (*The Nature of Man*, 1.21-2).

ic discoveries that circulated in Europe in light of his public life in London – he was known to frequent coffee-houses – and his proximity to the Royal Society. The mathematical account of natural phenomena was popularised by the works of the natural philosophers who operated around this new institution and played a key role in the establishment of empiricism and experimentalism as the only reliable modes of scientific inquiry.

As an early eighteenth-century physician, Blackmore was brought up in an intellectual environment imbued with empirical philosophy. Though in *Creation* the poet never explicitly declares his epistemological stand, his advocation of empiricism and rejection of any form of knowledge based on hypothetical conjecture can be gathered from his several medical treatises (Gregori 2004). More than that, medicine is ontologically one of the most empirical branches of science and Blackmore agreed with the experimental interpretation of the natural world. He supported empiricism, "emphasising practical observation versus mere theory learned from books" (Pizzol Giacomini 2007, 8. Johnson himself noted that Blackmore was suspicious of scientific knowledge derived only from ancient sources and of transmitted knowledge (Johnson 2010, 771-2). This attitude is clearly detectable in *Creation* too, and even more so in view of its subject matter: what sets *Creation* apart from other contemporary poems dealing with the natural world is that in every book the empirical observation of natural phenomena disproves atheistic theories as unfounded – and therefore invalid – hypotheses. One should not forget that medicine was a field deeply affected by the discoveries of the new philosophy, especially of the mechanistic trend that thrived in the latter part of the seventeenth century (cf. Ishizuka 2016, 230) and this too points to Blackmore's scientific attitude.

It is safe to suppose that Blackmore had the chance to know Newton's *œuvre*, either in its original form or through its numerous popularisations.[7] It is likely that Blackmore knew Newtonian physics and its theological implications through Richard Bentley's Boyle Lectures of 1692, one of the first instances in which the *Principia* were used in an apologetic fashion to defend the Christian religion. John Locke himself had commended Blackmore's use of Newtonian physics in the epic poem *King Arthur* (Locke 1708, 219) and, although in *Creation* Blackmore showed himself to be conversant also with Newton's *Opticks* (1704) (Nicolson 2015, 66), he seemed to favour the *Principia*. It should be remembered that in 1712 Newton had still not pub-

7 After the *Principia* were first published in 1687, Newton became very popular in England and "soon assumed in the minds of many a godlike status" (Snobelen 1998, 160). The key ideas from the *Principia* became part of the collective imagination of early eighteenth-century Britain by means of translations, popularisations, public lectures, and works of physico-theology.

lished the second edition of his masterpiece with the *General Scholium* and Roger Cotes's preface, so it can be supposed that Blackmore had found evidence to infer what role Newton attributed to God in his universe either from the early Boyle Lectures or from the *Opticks*. Newton's piety and genius were also a favourite subject of much popular literature of the day and it was no accident that devout Blackmore praised the author of the *Principia*. For Blackmore, religion and natural philosophy had to be intimately connected, for "[t]here's no Philosophy without a God" (*Creation*, 1.280). This is repeatedly argued throughout the poem: while the mysteries of the universe can be studied mathematically, not all aspects of nature can be demystified and therefore such circumstances are accountable only if God comes into play.

Blackmore uses Newton's *Principia* at various times in *Creation*. Book I, for instance, is centered on the internal cohesion of the earth. Here Blackmore begins by surveying a series of hypotheses that should account for the cohesion of the several parts of planet earth. Such cohesion is clearly due to some force or power that contrasts the centripetal tendency of rotating bodies to shake off whatever is on their surface. The atomistic view born in ancient Greece with Leucippus (5th c. BC) and Democritus (5th-4th c. BC) is, in Blackmore's opinion, unacceptable since it presupposes atoms – that is, inanimate matter – to have their own will. The lyrical I takes a stand against an essentialist view of gravity::

> Those who ascribe this one determin'd Course
> Of pondrous Things to Gravitating Force,
> Refer us to a Quality occult,
> To senseless Words, for which, while they insult
> With just Contempt the famous Stagyrite,
> Their Schools should bless the World with clearer Light.
> (*Creation*, 1.136-41)

We may be surprised that Blackmore dubs the force of gravity a "quality occult", and we may be led to think that he was dismissive of Newton's discovery. Yet Blackmore rejects a mysterious quality of gravity to which Newton too objected, preferring to consider gravity for its manifest aspects. Newton himself admitted that the force of gravity that he postulated as responsible for the harmony of the universe through the law of universal gravitation does not have a verifiable cause for it but can be known only through its effects. As we have seen in the above-quoted letter to Richard Bentley, the author of the *Principia* discarded the 'Epicurean' notion that gravitation is essential and inherent to matter.

Blackmore then considers the position of those who account for the action of gravity by attributing it to magnetic power. This theo-

ry could not be accepted on physical grounds: magnetic force is never proportional to mass, while the force of gravity is, and whereas gravity exists in all bodies having a mass and is therefore universal, magnetic force does not. Newton himself points this out in Book III of the *Principia*:

> COROLLARY 5. The force of gravity is of a different kind from the magnetic force. For magnetic attraction is not proportional to the [quantity of] matter attracted. Some bodies are attracted [by a magnet] more [than in proportion to their quantity of matter], and others less, while most bodies are not attracted [by a magnet at all]. And the magnetic force in one and the same body can be intended and remitted [i.e., increased and decreased] and is sometimes far greater in proportion to the quantity of matter than the force of gravity; and this force, in receding from the magnet, decreases not as the square but almost as the cube of the distance, as far as I have been able to tell from certain rough observations.
>
> Proposition 7, Theorem 7
> Gravity exists in all bodies universally and is proportional to the quantity of matter in each. (*The Principia*, 810)

In light of the core argument of Book II, it is safe to suppose that Blackmore understood gravity as a mutually attractive magnetic power following "Nature's constant Law" (*Creation*, 1.171) that prevents matter from fleeing its God-chosen course. Whatever its ultimate cause, the force that Blackmore describes is responsible for the earth's cohesion, and the lines in which he deals with this topic also evoke the catastrophic effects that a stronger or a weaker force of gravity would have on the earth, should gravity not be what it is in the Newtonian account.

Thus, Blackmore uses a typical argument from design: the providential coincidence that allows our earth not to collapse on itself, or to disperse into pieces, could have never been brought about by chance. Although Blackmore is partial to Newton's explanation, he is also aware that the latter was not able to find empirically or mathematically the cause of gravity, and so he must conclude that there is no completely satisfactory theory that can account for the shape of the earth as it is. Similar arguments are employed to describe the diurnal and annual motion of the earth around the sun. Here Blackmore explicitly addresses the readers who are "not verst in Reas'ning so severe" (*Creation*, 1.386) and proceeds to explain that, while such a motion can be formally described thanks to mathematics, its original cause cannot be determined so that God is again deemed to be the ultimate cause behind all natural occurrences. The same conclusion is reached for the last earthly phenomenon Blackmore describes

in the first Book: the tide. While he quickly dismisses the position of those who believe that the flux and reflux of the sea is occasioned simply by the rotation of the earth around its axis, he considers in earnest the Newtonian theory as expressed in Book III of the *Principia*:

> Proposition 24, Theorem 19
> The ebb and flow of the sea arise from the actions of the sun and moon. (*The Principia*, 835)

Thus, the flux and reflux of the tide is to be ascribed to the gravitational attraction that the sun and moon exercise on the watery parts of the earth. Once more, though, the unknown cause of gravity poses a problem and God's action needs to be taken into account.

Book II is devoted to the celebration of the Creator's wisdom in the design of a cosmos ruled by laws that can be studied mathematically. The concept of universal gravitation pervades the pages coherently with the prevailing theme of the book, which is the celebration of the harmony, order, and beauty of the universe. Both Cotes and Newton would stress the very same points in their additions to the second edition of the *Principia*, since

> [t]his most elegant system of the sun, planets, and comets could not have arisen without the design and dominion of an intelligent and powerful being. (*The Principia*, 940)

Creation, however, was composed well before the second edition of the *Principia* was issued and it likely benefitted from various apologetic texts that employed Newton's physics in its providential acceptation.

Besides the usual reflection on the usefulness and providence of the position of the sun in the solar system, Blackmore praises the vastness of the universe and the harmony and internal cohesion of all the planets:

> While these so numerous, and so vast of size,
> In various ways roll thro' the trackless Skies;
> Thro' crossing Roads perplext and intricate,
> Perform their Stages, and their Rounds repeat;
> None by Collision from their Course are driv'n,
> No Shocks, no Conflicts break the Peace of Heav'n.
> No shatter'd Globes, no glowing Fragments fall,
> No Worlds o'erturn'd crush this terrestrial Ball.
> In beauteous Order all the Orbs advance,
> And in their mazy complicated Dance,
> Not in one part of all the Pathless Sky
> Did any ever halt, or step awry.
> (*Creation*, 2.83-94)

The description of the harmony of the universe is the result of a mutually attractive force that allows planets to move regularly and in perfect coordination. This force is gravity, hence all phenomena described through the law of universal gravitation provide orderliness in the universe.

Although Blackmore repeatedly praises the theory of universal gravitation, he observes that there is no satisfactory ultimate explanation for the workings of gravity and urges inquirers not to "pretend, by Reason's strictest Laws, | Of an Effect to manifest the Cause" (*Creation*, 2.341-2). Gravity is known empirically only through its effects and its action can be formalised mathematically, but whatever lies behind it remains a mystery that should not be fathomed. Blackmore cannot but recognise the greatness of Newton's empirical and mathematical theory, and illustrates the role of universal gravitation as follows:

> If some, you say, prest with a pond'rous load
> Of Gravity, move slower in their Road,
> Because, with Weight encumber'd and opprest,
> The sluggish Orbs th' Attractive Sun resist;
> Till you can Weight and Gravity explain,
> Those Words are insignificant and vain.
> (*Creation*, 2.467-72)

Blackmore disproves the hypothesis according to which the sun's gravitational field is responsible for the motion of the planets of the solar system by resorting to empirical evidence, showing the inconsistent motion of the moon. This is another instance of Blackmore's understanding of Newtonian physics: the law of universal gravitation involves at least two bodies and when a more complex system of entities comes into play, the motion of each body depends on the reciprocal interaction of those bodies.

Another debt *Creation* probably owes to Newton, or at least to Newtonian astronomy, is Blackmore's idea of the cosmos at large. The poet describes the universe as a compound of thousands of systems like the solar one, and galaxies like the Milky Way, and mentions the interplanetary space as filled with "liquid sky" (*Creation*, 2.535) or "ether" (*Creation*, 2.546). In the *Opticks*, Newton had theorised the existence of a matter filling the empty cosmic space as being responsible for several optical phenomena (*Opticks*, 324-5). Although briefly and superficially, Blackmore also refers to

> […] Comets, which in *Ether* stray,
> Yet constant to their Time, and to their Way;
> Which Planets seem, tho' rarely they appear,
> Rarely approach the radiant Sun so near,

That his fair Beams their Atmosphere pervade,
Whence their bright Hair and flaming Trains are made,
Would not this View convincing Marks impart
Of perfect Prudence, and stupendous Art?
(*Creation*, 2.546-53)

Newton studied the periodic motion of comets in Book III of the *Principia* as a case in point of the action of universal gravitation; he also theorized that their luminosity was due to their ability to reflect sunlight. Newton's work on comets and on how to calculate their orbit was cutting-edge (cf. Hughes 1988) and Blackmore included it in his account of the Newtonian universe.

As we have seen, Newton's presence in *Creation* is ubiquitous but latent; on one occasion he is explicitly mentioned as the chief among "[t]he Masters form'd in Newton's famous School" (*Creation*, 2.554). Blackmore commends Newton for fathering the leading school of thought in modern science especially because of its power of accounting for natural phenomena through mathematical laws. Blackmore then proceeds to explain how the force of gravity works between bodies, which are at a time attracting and attracted by each other proportionally to their masses:

That Matter is with active Force endu'd,
That all its Parts Magnetic Pow'r exert,
And to each other gravitate, assert.
While by this Pow'r they on each other act,
They are at once attracted, and attract.
Less bulky Matter therefore must obey
More bulky Matter's more engaging Sway;
By this the Fabrick they together hold,
By this the Course of Heav'nly Orbs unfold.
(*Creation*, 2.559-67)

Here Blackmore explains the force responsible for keeping the universe together and the planets in their respective orbs in pure Newtonian terms. Although the initial stress is placed on the mathematical certainty of this fundamental discovery, Blackmore finds the true strength of Newton's physics in the combination of the mathematical solidity of the theory of gravitation with the awareness that the ultimate cause of the regular arrangement of the universe is to be attributed to God. This a typically providential belief that Blackmore embraces in all his works. It was the combination of science and faith that can be found in Newton's *Principia* that probably appealed to the physician in the first place. It should be noted that Newton is the only natural philosopher to be extensively praised by Blackmore in the poem, much beyond all other scientists of the age.

5 Conclusion

Since Newton was very much alive and in the prime of his publishing career when Blackmore wrote *Creation*, and since both of them frequented the same institutions in London, it is legitimate to inquire whether the two were acquainted. As yet, no document has been found attesting any personal or professional contact between the two men. However, while there is no certainty that he had chances to know Blackmore personally or to read any of his works, considering the content of Newton's library is a good starting point to establish any possible link between the two. John Harrison's *The Library of Isaac Newton* (1978) reveals that Newton might have known Blackmore to some degree since he possessed a copy of the eight edition of his *Essays upon Several Subjects* (1716-17). The lack of evidence of any personal connection between the two might have been due to Newton's lack of interest in Blackmore's poetry and in poetry in general. It is common knowledge that Newton held quite an extreme position when it came to the value of poetry, which he considered nothing more than "a kind of ingenious nonsense" (Shapiro 1983, 259). The content of Newton's library however confirms that he was at least aware of Blackmore as a writer of popular literature. Blackmore's letters have not survived the test of time and in Newton's correspondence there is no mention of the physician, hence there is no evidence of actual links between the natural philosopher and the poet-physician. On the other hand, there is enough internal evidence in Blackmore's *Creation* allowing us to say that not only was he acquainted with Newton's scientific discoveries but that he also digested and applied them to his own poetic description of the universe and of its laws. *Creation* successfully summarised several of the contemporary ideas about the universe and human beings and, although some scholars consider *Creation* "a noble failure" (Rogers 2016, 324), Blackmore's poem worked successfully as a poetic adaptation of Newton's discoveries and held enormous prestige throughout the century, becoming the source and model of numerous later poetic works that combined scientific and religious issues.

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"Strange Sight this Congress!" Byron's *The Age of Bronze* (1823) and the Congress of Verona

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Abstract Byron's satirical poem *The Age of Bronze*, a 'hit' at the Congress of Verona, targets the sycophancy of artists who celebrated the Congress and other manifestations of political power. *The Age of Bronze* asserts a different, more active and critical task for the artist, than the decorativeness expected within the European Congress system. "I am Diogenes", states the poet, speaking truth to power in an age of obfuscation. Byron's biting allusions to prominent public poetry and sculpture are selectively compared with other contemporary satire. The antisemitic terms of Byron's critique of global financialisation are analysed, as is Byron's self-conscious undermining of his chosen poetic form.

Keywords Byron. British Romanticism. European Romanticism. Satire. Cultural Patriotism. Congress of Verona.

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Byron's satirical poem *The Age of Bronze* (composed late 1822, published 1823) was, in his own words, a "*temporary* hit at Congress", namely the 1822 Congress of Verona (Byron 1980, 94).[1] It comments on history in the making, Byron describing it as "all on politics […] and a review of the day in general" (Byron 1980, 81). Byron considered this a singularly inglorious moment in history. He repudiated the tendencies of the age, which in his view were tyranny among rulers and sycophancy among artists. *The Age of Bronze* marks Byron's turn away from the comic mode of *Don Juan*. It was by no means a total break from *Don Juan*, however. Not only did Byron continue the use of ludicrous rhymes, but the following words from the recent Canto IX could readily have served as a manifesto for *The Age of Bronze*:

> And I will war, at least in words (and – should
> My chance so happen – deeds) with all who war
> With Thought; – and of Thought's foes by far most rude,
> Tyrants and sycophants have been and are.
> (*Don Juan*, Canto IX, 24, 185-8)

Byron's renewed war of words against the "despotism" of "[t]yrants and sycophants" now took a broadly Juvenalian form. Among the previous poems that his (mock)-heroic couplets call to mind is Samuel Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), an imitation of Juvenal's tenth satire on delusive ambitions such as wealth and power. *The Age of Bronze* confirms Byron's statement that the "tenth satire has always been my favourite" (qtd. Gregory 2015, 1). He linked it to his earlier poem *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers* (1809), which had drawn on William Gifford's heavily annotated, politicized Juvenal translation (Byron 1980, 81; Jones 1993). Yet, times had changed, and *The Age of Bronze*, in Carl Woodring's words, "ends the lineage of heroic satire" (Woodring 1970, 214). Byron himself told Leigh Hunt that the poem was "a little more stilted" than *English Bards*, "and somewhat too full of 'epithets of war' and classical allusions", an admission that suggests he may not have intended to adopt this form again (Byron 1980, 81). This reflects the fact that by the 1820s, the sense of an ending beset British Romantic poetry itself: the demise of John Keats in 1821 was only the first in a series of early deaths among poets, while the notion of a poetic revolution had grown tired, too. Such

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1 Unless otherwise stated, quotations from *The Age of Bronze* are from cited parenthetically from Byron 2009 by line number ("l."). Quotations from other Byron poems are cited by title and line number from Byron 2010.

poetic closure evinces a certain symmetry with the political landscape, since the reputation of the Congress system declined terminally after the impasse at Verona. The Congress of Verona resulted in an agreement to intervene against the Spanish uprising, the principle of 'legitimate intervention' having been previously agreed at the Congress of Troppau in 1820. Byron was dismayed by this turn of events: his Venetian lover, Teresa Guiccioli, recorded in her substantial account of the poem that "[o]n a day of great *sadness* and *indignation*, when he had heard about the *definitive* and *probable* results of the Congress, and after deploring the failure of his friend [George] Canning's efforts to prevent the war in Spain, he put *Don Juan* aside and intoned his Song" (Guiccioli 2005, 518). Beyond the Spanish question, and partly due to the British reluctance to endorse military action against other states, relatively little was achieved at Verona. This was one of the causes of the feeling of belated weariness that Byron finds in "outworn Europe" (l. 380), as will be seen below.

Through analysis of selected episodes in the satire, I wish to discuss a feature of the poem that has not been sufficiently emphasized before. My theme is indicated by the above quotation from *Don Juan*. I argue that *The Age of Bronze* claims a different, more active and critical task for the poet than the purely supportive, commemorative, monumentalizing role that artists were expected to play within the milieu of the European Congress system. The central statement in the poem is the proclamation of identity by Byron's persona: "I am Diogenes" (l. 476). Rather than cheer on the politicians as they argued for and against propping up the various European monarchies, Byron, taking on the mantle of Diogenes the Cynic, maintains a fundamentally contrarian voice. His mission is to speak truth to power in an age of obfuscation. The cultivation of his own perspective as – like Diogenes – an embittered exile, "born for opposition" (*Don Juan* Canto XV, 22, 176), is the foremost purpose of the poem. This is not in itself a new insight: in his editorial notes, Jerome McGann points out the importance of "I am Diogenes" (Byron 1993). However, I use this perspective, first, to shed fresh light on Byron's main satirical portraits; and second, to show how *The Age of Bronze* confronts its own termination as a poem inextricably linked to the transient Congress. Where possible, I measure Byron's approach against those of other contemporary satirists.

Byron's critical acumen in satirising post-Vienna Europe is impressive. He uses but also goes beyond 'newspaper erudition' (P.B. Shelley's phrase in the preface to his 1822 *Hellas, a Lyrical Drama*). While demonstrating this, I will also address an ethically problematic aspect of the poem. In section 15, Byron embarks on an antisemitic discourse rife with stereotypes familiar from *The Merchant of Venice* in order to condemn the Jews' role in the new financial dispensation. Commentators on *The Age of Bronze* tend to skirt around this topic,

preferring to focus on questions either of European politics and economics, or of aesthetics, or (as I do here) combining the two. Thus, Woodring argued that "[w]ithout achieving the unique cadence of *Don Juan*, *The Age of Bronze* solves better than any of Byron's earlier satires the problem of uttering jacobinical opinions from an aristocratic elevation in a true voice" (Woodring 1970, 222). The authenticity of Byron's utterance receives implicit approbation from critics concerned with Spanish history, too: Estaban Pujals regards the poem as a "courageous and energetic satire" that offered practical sustenance of the Spanish rebels' "defence of a constitutional and representative government" (Pujals 1981, 178). In a similar vein, Frederick L. Beaty sees an "impassioned exhortation to all peoples to free themselves from tyranny" (Beaty 1985, 177). In contrast, Bernard Beatty considers the satire overly crude because of its dependence on the binary of the heroic Napoleonic period versus the pusillanimous present, calling it "limited in the way that cartoons are limited", and asserting further that the poem did not "accomplish anything" (Beatty 2017, 96). Regardless of whether the latter argument is correct on its own terms, it begs the question of what achievements, in a causal sense, may be expected of poetry at all. This debate about the poem's utility or political purposiveness perhaps chiefly reflects the respective critics' general views of Byron's personality and politics: the two approximate critical camps echo the better-known controversy over the poet's motivation and effectiveness in the Greek independence campaign on which he was to embark in 1823. A parallel disparity persists in views of Byron's poetic form and its success. For example, Nina Diakonova finds a poem adorned with "devices of classicist brilliance" (Diakanova 1992, 53), whereas Peter Cochran deplores its heaviness in contrast to *Don Juan* (in his introduction to Byron 2009, 1). I propose to bypass these critical antinomies through a shift of emphasis. It is crucial to recognise that *The Age of Bronze* is preoccupied with the place and function of poetry itself in the new dispensation. What Byron-Diogenes seems to discover is that genuine, independent-minded poetry has no place at all in 1822. This realisation renders the poem conscious of its own finality.

Invective and declamation dominate the poem's tone, generally unlike the lighter humour of *Don Juan* (Beaty 1985, 176). Nevertheless, in order to grasp the poet's preoccupation with the role of (his) art in a degenerate era we must unravel the layered humour of the allusions in the title and subtitle. The main title, *The Age of Bronze*, borrowed from Ovid, stakes the claim that things are no longer what they were: the present day is inferior to the past, even to the time within living memory when Pitt and Fox dominated English politics, which was by implication a silver age. This, indeed, sets up the whole method of the poem, which is to lambast the deficiencies of the present pygmy age through devastating contrast with the Napoleonic

era as well as the more distant medieval and ancient past. "Carmen Seculare" is an ironic borrowing from Horace: whereas the Roman poet was fulfilling Augustus's commission to celebrate the glorious present, Byron – who would always have disdained such servile work even if it were available to him – is contemplating in 1822 an "Annus haud Mirabilis" (a year that is not wonderful). "[H]aud" is inserted in the title used by John Dryden in his poem about the achievements of 1666, following the restoration not of the Bourbons but of Charles II. Byron's subtitle, "Impar *Congressus* Achilli", which translates as "ill-matched to struggle with Achilles", is a quotation from Virgil's *Aeneid* and refers in the original context to Troilus. It will emerge in the poem that Byron sees the Duke of Wellington – and possibly also other protagonists of the Congress of Verona – as filling the feeble Troilus's shoes, in contrast to Napoleon, whose spirit matches that of the heroic Achilles (Beatty 2017, 93-4).[2]

All this is not merely gratuitous classicizing on Byron's part, although he does flaunt the classics in his arraignment of the emptiness of the present day. He alludes to the prevalence of texts and monuments marking allied achievements in the defeat of Napoleon, artworks which themselves frequently invoked a classical, Augustan sense of power. Six months prior to the poem's composition, a nude statue of Achilles had been erected in Hyde Park in honour of Wellington, supposedly sponsored by "the women of England". It was inaugurated on 18 June 1822. The Hyde Park statue was made of bronze because it had been assembled from cannon used in battle by Wellington (Beatty 2017, 94) – and this points to another motivation for Byron's title. Wellington, the victor at the Battle of Waterloo in 1815 ("bloody and most bootless Waterloo", in Byron's bitter view at line 223, "bootless" meaning useless but probably also punning on the soldiers' loss of their boots in the mud), now had a diplomatic role as the British representative at the Congress of Verona. Wellington thus replaced the Viscount Castlereagh, who, as Byron notes with sardonic lightness, had recently committed suicide (ll. 538-9). London's first ever public nude statue, the Hyde Park Achilles had provoked both amusement and outrage. Although it continued an iconographic trend set by John Flaxman's dignified Shield of Achilles for George IV, the statue failed to evoke the desired aura of hellenistic heroism, instead presenting an easy target for sexual jokes. For instance, a caricature of it by George Cruikshank displays an "Object: Backside & front view of the ladies fancy-man" (Woodring 1970, 218).

This context indicates the third meaning of the italicised word *Congressus* in Byron's subtitle: it refers not only to martial valour

2 The information in this paragraph draws on the editorial notes by McGann (Byron 1993) and Cochran (Byron 2009).

(or its lack) and to the Congress of Verona, but also to sexual intercourse. This will become relevant when Byron ridicules the activities of the Congress delegates. Adopting the voice of Diogenes, Byron professes to despise vulgar lusts, whether sexual or focused on posterity. Diogenes the Cynic was famous for living austerely in a tub, where Alexander the Great found him and asked him what he wished for: the answer, that Alexander should stop blocking the sunlight, expressed his disdain for temporal power. Diogenes Laertius's life of Diogenes records a further relevant episode: 'Asked by a tyrant what kind of bronze is good for a statue, he said, "The kind from which Harmodius and Aristogeiton were forged"' (Diogenes Laertius 2018, 207). Naming these Athenian heroes who struggled to liberate Athens from tyranny, Diogenes this time expressed his anti-authoritarianism in the form of resistance to a certain type of bronze monument. Thus, in 1822, Diogenes the Cynic re-emerges as a prototype of Byron's poetic persona.

The Wellington monument exemplifies the way in which art in (post-)wartime Britain and Europe tended to assume a decorative or commemorative role, patriotically reinforcing symbols of national power. Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square and eventually the Marble Arch were only two of the most striking victory monuments in England. More immediately, at the Congress of Verona, which featured "a continuous social whirl of balls, operas, concerts, banquets, little suppers and *soirées*" (Nichols 1971, 78), art played an important, yet strictly secondary part in the proceedings. Thus, when the composer Gioacchino Rossini, invited by the Austrian Chancellor Klemens von Metternich to provide the music for the Congress, commissioned a local poet (Gaetano Rossi) to compose lyrics, the Austrian censors required three revisions in accordance with a policy of secrecy and censorship. Still not satisfied, the Podesta of Verona forbad printing the lyrics so that "nobody would be able to understand anything, anyhow" (qtd. Nichols 1971, 78). François-René de Chateaubriand, the author who supplies the latter information about the music at Verona, did not protest against the subordination of art to politics: on the contrary, he wrote his book (translated into English in 1838 as *The Congress of Verona*) no longer as a literary author but as an 'ultra-royalist' participant in the Congress's negotiations. Byron sarcastically slaps the French writer down in a prose note (to section 16): "Monsieur Chateaubriand, who has not forgotten the author in the minister, received a handsome compliment at Verona from a literary sovereign: 'Ah! Monsieur C—, are you related to that Chateaubriand who – who – has written *something*?' (ecrit *quelche chose*!) [*sic*] It is said that the author of Atala repented him for a moment of his legitimacy" (Byron 2009, 23). Readers in England, meanwhile, knew the monumental poets Walter Scott, who published "The Field of Waterloo: A Poem" in 1815; William Wordsworth, whose "Thanksgiving

Ode" appeared in 1816; and Robert Southey, who made his debut as poet laureate with the poem *Carmen Triumphale*, to open the year 1814 and to glorify Wellington. It was not least for his commemorative verse on Wellington and Waterloo that Byron had recently lampooned Southey in *The Vision of Judgment* (1822). Southey and Wordsworth are no longer the targets in *The Age of Bronze*, but Byron does pursue other manifestations of their brand of sycophancy, of the "cultural patriotism" (Hoock 2010, 52) invested in this period's military and poetic monuments.

The key point is that Byron's approach is resolutely opposed to all the efforts of the artists just discussed. Like Diogenes in his tub, he stands at a distance from the events and personalities he surveys rather than mingling with them or serving them. Early in the poem he suggests that monuments have replaced reality in the post-Vienna dispensation. Reflecting on the ultimate futility of great power, Byron (mistakenly believing, on the authority of E.D. Clarke, that Alexander the Great's tomb was in the British Museum) writes that "Alexander's Urn a show be grown | On shores he wept to conquer, though unknown" (ll. 31-2): nowadays, that is to say, people are reduced to gawping at monuments of departed grandeur instead of witnessing the real thing. Byron himself refuses the spirit of cultural patriotism with which such artefacts were supposed to be regarded in a country that was officially grateful for the conquest of Napoleon and its own expanding empire.

Another case in point may have been Antonio Canova's marble bust of Napoleon, which had been brought to Wellington's Apsley House in 1817, and so stood just a stone's throw from the Hyde Park Achilles (Beatty 2017, 94). Byron, possibly countering this appropriation of Napoleon, pays tribute to the deceased emperor in section three; yet, in so doing, he remains an outsider, honouring a defeated, disgraced, deceased man whom English verse would never normally celebrate in this way. We may infer that Byron's memorial to Napoleon outdoes some inferior competition, namely a certain "bust delayed" (l. 65). Byron records this as one of the petty irritations to which Napoleon, not long ago "the Queller of the Nations" (l. 57), became subject in captivity on the remote, Atlantic island of St Helena. Byron would have read in Barry O'Meara's new book *Napoleon in Exile; or, A Voice from St Helena* (1822) that "a sculptor at Leghorn had made a bad bust of young Napoleon […] Napoleon then asked me if I knew any thing about the statue", which was then brought to him, but only after a delay that reflected Napoleon's total loss of status (2: 98-9, qtd. Byron 2009 n. 24). Further, Byron's celebration of Napoleon differs from the above-mentioned commemorations of Wellington and Waterloo in its ambivalence. More the representative of a tarnished silver than of a pristine golden age, Napoleon took "[a] single step into the wrong" (l. 235) thanks to his overweening vanity,

so that having started as a warrior for "man's awakened rights" he became a tyrant, "The King of Kings, and yet of Slaves the Slave" (l. 255). In this way, not even Napoleon escapes the satirist's lash. The passage on Napoleon has a further function in setting up an antithesis that will be completed later in the poem: some of the characters surfeit on food and drink, while others suffer restrictions. Formerly a hunter "[w]hose Game was Empire", Napoleon was eventually confined to unhealthy St Helena (ll. 77-8) where he was "Reduced to nibble" – metaphorically "at his narrow cage" (l. 56), and literally to struggle for food "rations" (l. 58). The poet instructs the reader's imagination: "Weep to perceive him mourning, as he dines, | O'er curtailed dishes, and o'er stinted wines" (ll. 59-60). Again, "His food and wine were doled out" (l. 76) meanly – whereas, by contrast, the protagonists of Verona and their masters endure no such limitations upon their consumption.

Following the Napoleon section, the poem does not take us to Verona immediately. Sections 6-7 present Byron's endorsement of the Spanish revolutionary cause, figured as a kind of Napoleonic spark. This theme is then interrupted by the abrupt, mock-wondering start of section 8: "But lo! a Congress!" (l. 378). Byron now insists that the aura of the latter word, too, has declined. In diametric contrast to the noble participants of the Continental Congress of the American founding fathers that had established independence, such as George Washington "the Tyrant-tamer" (l. 388) or the "Stoic" Benjamin Franklin (l. 386), who worked for liberty, the leaders of the Holy Alliance (Russia, Prussia, and Austria) are agents of oppression. Despite the Christian credentials they flaunt, Byron condemns them as more irrational than Egyptian deities, whether "Dogs" or "Oxen" (l. 401): for "these, more hungry, must have something more, | The power to bark and bite to toss and gore" (ll. 404-5). Byron implies that these leaders would do less harm if they were no more than the self-aggrandising monuments they like to erect. The purpose of the comparison just quoted is to prepare Byron's next ironic assault in section 9, the message of which is that Verona has housed far greater people than these greedy, shallow-minded rulers. Byron recalls the time of Dante and specifically Dante's Veronese patron, an apt topic of contemplation for the exiled Byron-Diogenes. He asks ironically:

> for what was 'Dog the Great,'
> 'Can Grande' (which I venture to translate)
> To these sublimer Pugs?
> (ll. 416-18)

"Pugs" conjures an entirely unheroic image of a small, stocky pet, an inbred and wheezing animal. That the word 'pug' could also be used as a term of endearment enables an extra touch of irony. With this de-

flationary monosyllable Byron snipes at all the potentates at the Congress of Verona at once.

Byron exempts the absent King Louis XVIII of France from this arraignment – or rather Louis exempted himself by not travelling to the Congress at all: "But where's the Monarch?" is the question that opens section 12. Here, Byron plays on the King's legendary obesity while addressing him semi-affectionately as "Good Classic Louis!" (l. 512). Punning in passing on the name of a chef named Louis Eustache Ude, this apostrophe introduces a mention of Louis XVIII's love of Horace's poetry and, in a grotesque paradox for a monarch during such a turbulent period, of a life of 'Epicurean' retirement. This seems an unexceptional treatment of the gouty Louis XVIII, who only had couple more years to live, and whose unhealthiness reflects that of "outworn Europe" itself (l. 380). For example, the anonymous author of a recent article titled "The Fat Easy Man" portrays Louis as a famous example of this theme: "on the restoration of his family to their hereditary honours, he seemed to enter his long lost capital, and pass on to the palace of his ancestors, with all that *sang froid* and apathy, that torpidity of feeling, which is the constitutional concomitant of exuberant obesity". In a similar vein to Byron, this author exclaims: "Peace to you! Ye fat easy men! May ye enjoy, here and hereafter, the tranquillity you love" ("The Fat Easy Man" 1821, 271). For his part, while judging him mildly relative to the conspiratorial "Pugs" at Verona, Byron pronounces the *desirée* king unfit to rule.

This portrait stands in calculated contrast to that of Tsar Alexander I in section 10, which forms the satirical centrepiece of the poem. Here, references to excessive consumption of food are notably absent – for Byron underlines Alexander I's vanity regarding "His goodly person" (l. 451). The immediate reason for Byron's loathing of Alexander relates to the Tsar's desire to subdue the Spanish uprising through military force – a goal in which Alexander was ultimately successful, by helping to induce the French to attack. Byron now recalls his earlier references to Alexander the Great by apostrophizing the Tsar as "thou namesake of Great Philip's Son!" (l. 454). This ushers in a further parallel: just as Alexander the Great was tutored by Aristotle, so Tsar Alexander I had a philosophical tutor (of admittedly lesser status, as befits the modern age), Frédéric César La Harpe, a Swiss follower of Rousseau who influenced the relative liberalism of the early part of the Russian's reign. La Harpe had recently (in 1815) reappeared on the scene, but by the end of 1822 had broken off relations with the Tsar, repelled by the latter's increasingly repressive absolutism (Schubert, Pyta 2018, 22, 31). This may be what Byron alludes to when he tells Alexander to listen to his teacher: "La Harpe, thine Aristotle, beckons on" (l. 455). Byron opens this section with a series of antitheses that capture the Tsar's vanity and untrustworthiness, together with the gap between his irenic rheto-

ric and the bellicose opposition to "true Liberty" (l. 442) that he displayed in practice:

> Resplendent sight! behold the Coxcomb Czar,
> The Autocrat of Waltzes and of War!
> As eager for a plaudit as a realm,
> And just as fit for flirting as the helm;
> […]
> How well th'Imperial Dandy prates of peace,
> How fain, if Greeks would be his Slaves, free Greece!
> (ll. 434-7, 444-5)

The mention of flirtation returns us to the pun *Congressus* in the poem's subtitle. Like most of Byron's slurs, it was founded in fact: the Tsar was indeed flirting with the young, flamboyant Frances Anne, Marchioness of Londonderry (wife of Lord Stewart, Castlereagh's brother), despite a hiatus when they realised that they were under surveillance from the Austrian secret police (Urquart 2007, 23).[3] Frances Anne kept Alexander's passionate love letters and had them ornately bound (Urquart 2007, 20). In turn, Alexander openly approved of the renewal of the Russian Countess Lieven's affair with Metternich, in the belief that this would promote good relations between Russia and Austria. As a twentieth-century historian expressed it – seeing and liking what Byron saw and hated – this "new race of sublime potentates was delightfully amoral" (Nichols 1971, 79).

In building up to his proclamation 'I am Diogenes' (l. 476), Byron invokes elaborate historical precedents to warn Alexander I against pursuing war in Spain. He suggests that whereas Tsar Peter the Great was (at least according to legend) saved by the intervention of his wife Catherine from the Turks at Pruth in 1711, Alexander would receive no such assistance were he to become comparably entangled in western Europe. Further, Byron asks Alexander rhetorically, "Think'st thou to thee Napoleon's victor yields?" (l. 465). The argument is that if the Spaniards could get the better of Napoleon, an incomparably greater military leader than Tsar Alexander, then they would surely beat off the latter, too. A Russian satirist took a similar view of Alexander's character and conduct to that of Byron. Pushkin wrote in "Noël" (1818), ironically ventriloquizing Alexander:

> O rejoice, people: I am full, healthy and fat;
> Celebrated by the paperboy
> I drank and ate and made a promise.

3 Urquhart (2007: 25) calls this the affair that 'never was'.

> Everything that I did – I liked it and I'm not tired of it. (Pushkin 1959; transl. Margit Dirscherl)

The spirit of this epigram closely resembles that of Byron's section on Alexander, albeit in a more concise form. The satirists respond to tendencies in Alexander that had become increasingly pronounced. Not least among these was he had often promised a constitution, yet never acted upon it (Schubert, Pyta 2018, 86).

Byron introduces the comparison with Peter the Great with another ironic apostrophe to Alexander: "Yet think upon, thou somewhat aged Youth! | Thy Predecessor on the banks of Pruth" (458-9). Having become Tsar very young, Alexander was in his mid-40s at the time of the Congress; he was to die prematurely in 1825, a year after Louis XVIII, a fact that in hindsight once again supports Byron's references to the exhausted state of continental politics. The immediate point is this: Diogenes-Byron implies that the youthful pleasures Alexander indulges in are no longer appropriate, if indeed they ever were. This is surely one of Byron's "hits" in *The Age of Bronze*. The motive for this part of the satire may be deduced from the passage of Frances Anne's memoir in which she enthuses about Alexander's charm at the Congress of Verona. She expressed her enchantment as follows: "for the first time [I] saw the Emperor alone. He sat with me above 2 hours. He certainly is a very fine looking man. If not positively handsome, his countenance remarkably pleasing, his manners…affable and agreeable become when he addresses a woman captivating. His conversation is perfectly beautiful.…He is like a beneficent Genius" (Frances Anne, Marchioness of Londonderry, manuscript 'Memoir' of 1848, qtd. Urquart 2007, 21). This bears out Byron's description of Alexander as "just as fit for flirting as the helm" (l. 437). There is a further twist of the satirist's knife here: since Byron portrays Alexander as utterly *unfit* for "the helm" (crown, also connoting military leadership), the latter line deals another passing blow to the Tsar.

The topic of food returns in section 17 with the second satirical highlight of the poem: Byron's treatment of Marie-Louise of Austria, Napoleon's widow and the lover of Adam, Duke Neipperg of Parma, whose children she bore even before Napoleon's demise. Rossini had recently honoured her, in what Byron might have viewed as a typically sycophantic Congress-era artwork, with the opera *La riconoscenza* (1820). Unsurprisingly, Byron's approach could hardly differ more from that of Rossini. In Byron's view, her ceremonial appearance at Verona is a travesty, for she should instead be mourning her great husband: "Her only throne is in Napoleon's grave" (l. 740). He objects to her lack of perturbation, even when Wellington, Napoleon's vanquisher, took her arm: "Her eye, her cheek, betray no inward Strife" (l. 763). Byron even implies that Napoleon's mere ashes (whose "embers soon will burst the mould", presumably in the form of revolu-

tionary uprisings in Spain or Greece, l. 756) are more lively than the "trappings of her mimic Court" (l. 750). Having previously participated in "[a] Sway surpassing that of Charlemagne, | Which swept from Moscow to the Southern Seas" (ll. 746-7), she is now, as the Duchess of Parma, reduced to ruling merely "the pastoral realm of Cheese" (l. 748). Once again, allowing for satirical exaggeration, Byron is not merely well informed, as in the detail about her walking arm-in-arm with Wellington, but provides an assessment that concurs with other sources. A modern biographer of Marie-Louise notes that while she improved Parma's cultural life, she never grasped Napoleon's world-historical significance (Schiel 1990). There is an inherent thematic connection between the two satirical culmination-points of *The Age of Bronze*, for it was none other than Alexander I who had successfully insisted that Marie Louise be given the Duchy of Parma for the rest of her life (Lobanov-Rostovsky 1954, 351-2).

In my discussion I have treated the passages on Alexander and Marie Louis side-by-side. In the poem, however, the problematic "anti-semitic section" (Scrivener 1993, 78) comes between them. Section 14 begins with a critique of the profiteering in which English farmers had engaged during the Napoleonic wars. Byron suggests that for precisely this reason the landowners should never have complained about Napoleon and the destruction he caused: "Such, landlords! was *your* appetite for war, | And, gorged with blood, you grumble at a scar!" (638-9). Although Byron was himself an aristocratic landowner who profited from the rise in rents (Pregnolato 2015, 238-40), using his iconoclastic Diogenes-voice he aptly critiques a national and global financial system that thrived on war profits as an unproductive rentier class constantly racked up the rents paid by the poor. He underlines this by using "Rent!" as the concluding rhyme in couplet after couplet: concluding this "Rent" passage he writes of the rentiers (sarcastically adapting Alexander Pope's famous words about human happiness), "Their good, ill, health, wealth, joy, or discontent, | Being, end, aim, religion – Rent, Rent, Rent!" (ll. 632-3).[4] Then, however, in section 15, Byron lays the blame for this repressive economy squarely on the Jews, asking rhetorically about England: "Was ever Christian land so rich in Jews?" (l. 675) That 'Christian' is hardly intended as a

4 Woodring (1970: 217) explains that "The method of exaggeration in [section 9] inflates the agrarian "patriot bill" of April 1822, which erected a sliding scale of import duty on grain, into the most awesome event of the decade. Its ninety lines berate English landlords who fattened when they farmed out the war against Napoleon—'farmers of the war, dictators of the farm'—but now grumble when asked to share the cost: 'gorged with blood,' these 'high-market patriots' would not have their earthquake engulf the price of land. The poet meets their outlandish claims to patriotism with ironic exaggeration of metaphor". Almeida (2016) praises Byron's economic acumen, drawing parallels with the economist Thomas Piketty, but seems to overlook Byron's lack of interest in the poor or ordinary workers. On Byron's lack of affinity with socialism, see below.

more favourable label than "Jews" cannot rescue the sentiment, and though it is true that *The Age of Bronze* had already featured "racist jokes about Scythians, Calmucks, Cossacks, and Bashkirs", Alexander I's non-European subjects (Cochran in Byron 2009, 16), the antisemitic part is more extreme.

Byron's mention of Jews in England is only a prelude to his main theme, which is the notion that a few specific Jews acted as financial puppet masters of the politicians at Verona:

> Two Jews – but not Samaritans – direct
> The world, with all the Spirit of their sect.
> What is the happiness of earth to them?
> A Congress forms their "New Jerusalem" (ll. 692-5)

This pair of Jews were two of the Rothschild brothers, Byron probably meaning Nathan Meyer and Salomon Rothschild (Scrivener 84). As far as their importance within the international political scene was concerned, Byron again shows himself to be well informed. The substance of Byron's criticism of Nathan Rothschild's role in financing the "pugs" of Verona is expanded from *Don Juan* Canto XII, where he snipes at two of the most famous bankers, Nathan Rothschild and Alexander Baring:

> Who hold the balance of the world? Who reign
> O'er Congress, whether royalist or liberal?
> Who rouse the shirtless patriots of Spain
> (That make old Europe's journals squeak and gibber all)?
> Who keep the world, both old and new, in pain—
> Or pleasure? Who make politics run glibber all?
> The shade of Buonaparte's noble daring? —
> Jew Rothschild and his fellow Christian Baring.
> (*Don Juan* Canto XII, 5, 1-8)

In his family biography of the House of Rothschild, Niall Ferguson quotes from the *Don Juan* passage as an authentic reflection of the decisive financial contribution that the Rothschilds made as "bankers to the Holy Alliance". That status dated, according to Ferguson, to the end of 1822, the year in which the Rothschilds made a massive, £6.6million loan to Russia: in monetary terms, it was indeed "the Rothschilds who gave the alliance substance" (Ferguson 1998, 136). When the Congress of Verona assembled, just as at the preceding Congresses of Troppau (1820) and Laibach (1821), the central question was to what extent the coalition should intervene against national insurgencies, most pressingly the rebellion in Spain. This was a financial as much as much as it was a military matter. That Byron should resume his focus on the Rothschilds in *The Age of Bronze* is

therefore perfectly fitting. Yet, as noted, he undermines the ethical stance of his own poem by resorting to stereotypes as indefensible as they were fashionable: "Two Jews keep down the Romans, and uphold | The accursed Hun, more brutal than of old" (ll. 690-1). These two Jews are explicitly cast in the role of Shylock, and the "spirit of their sect" treated as a timeless obsession with gaining profit from the interest charge on loans.

Why does Byron resort to this derogatory rhetoric? In the fullest study of this aspect of the poem to date, Michael Scrivener finds in it a certain laziness: borrowing the antisemitism of his main source for current affairs, William Cobbett's *Annual Register*, Byron takes a short-cut via a racist explanation of the European financial hegemony. This is a reasonable explanation but not a sufficient one. Without wishing to make the exaggerated claim that antisemitism was central to Byron's mentality, I would suggest that Bertrand Russell rightly locates it within a nexus of the poet's abiding concerns: Byron's passionate, aristocratic contempt for finance led him "to proclaim an opposition to capitalism which is quite different from that of the socialist who represents the interest of the proletariat, since it is an opposition based on dislike of economic preoccupations, and strengthened by the suggestion that the capitalist world is governed by Jews" (Russell 1940, 36). First, then, the antisemitic stereotypes must at that moment have appeared grist to the mill of a 'non-socialist' critique of the rapidly evolving system of global capitalism. Second, at a time of fervid nationalist rhetoric, Byron may have struggled to do other than replace one form of exclusionary rhetoric with another. Third, the antisemitic part also fitted (albeit grotesquely) with Byron's contrast of the present age of bronze with silver and golden ages of the past. Section 15 betrays a fear of financialization replacing more traditional values, such as valour and heroism, for which *The Age of Bronze* expresses nostalgia.

I have already compared some of Byron's 'hits' with cognate work by other satirists. In the case of the antisemitic 'miss', it is revealing to draw a contrast with Heinrich Heine's satirical references to the Rothschilds. Heine, like Byron, recognised how essential their financial empire was to nineteenth-century Europe, noting that "money is the god of our era, and Rothschild is his prophet". Heine, too, links the prevailing taste for political monuments to the dispensation supported by the Rothschilds' wealth:

> M. de Rothschild's offices are extremely large: they're a labyrinth of rooms, a barracks of wealth. The room were the baron works from morning to night – he has nothing to do but work – was recently prettied up. At present there can be found on the mantelpiece a marble bust of Emperor Franz of Austria… But out of friendship the baron also intends to have busts made of all the

> princes of Europe who have contracted their loans through their house, and this collection of marble busts will form a more grandiose Valhalla than the Valhalla dedicated to illustrious Germans that king Ludwig of Bavaria built in Ratisbonne.' (Heine 2012, entry dated 31 March 1841)

In this and his other satirical treatments of the Rothschilds, however, Heine focuses his wit on the family's single-minded accumulation of wealth rather than, like Byron, resorting to antisemitic stereotypes.

Byron opens section 16 of *The Age of Bronze* with a summary complaint that, through its reference to the 'incongruous' puppeteers among the delegates at the Congress of Verona, seeks to vindicate the poet's own antithetical vision:

> Strange sight this Congress! destined to unite
> All that's incongruous, all that's opposite.
> I speak not of the Sovereigns—they're alike,
> A common coin as ever mint could strike:
> But those who sway the puppets, pull the strings,
> Have more of Motley than their heavy kings. (ll. 706-11)

"Jews", meaning the Rothschilds as financiers, significantly head the list of these motley powermongers, immediately followed by "authors", the latter being the group at which Byron most effectively 'hits' in this poem:

> Jews, authors, generals, charlatans, combine,
> While Europe wonders at the vast design:
> There Metternich, power's foremost parasite,
> Cajoles; there Wellington forgets to fight;
> There Chateaubriand forms new books of Martyrs;
> And subtle Greeks intrigue for stupid Tartars;
> There Montmorency, the sworn foe to Charters,
> Turns a diplomatist of grand Eclât,
> To furnish articles for the 'Debâts;'
> Of War so certain—yet not quite so sure
> As his dismission in the 'Moniteur.'
> (ll. 712-22)

Authors again receive the most damaging treatment from Byron's pen in this passage, and specifically two authors-turned politicians: he sneers at Chateaubriand's monumental, historical work *Les Martyrs* (1809), then alludes to the apostasy of the former revolutionary Matthieu Jean Félicité Montmorency, now a royalist diplomat, who sought to stir up support for his pro-war stance through his articles in the French press. Only with the claim that at Verona "subtle Greeks

intrigue" did Byron's information perhaps falter, since Greek delegates were not invited to the Congress.

Such was Byron's view of the pygmy state of things in 1822. *The Age of Bronze* does not merely express a general state of 'Byronic' disillusionment, but rather springs from a disappointed practical hope: not long before, in *The Vision of Judgment*, Byron had referred to the year 1820 as "the first year of freedom's second dawn" (line 57), placing his hopes for political radicalism in recent revolutionary activities, primarily in Italy. Now, instead, as Guiccioli noted, "The Congress of Verona, by its consequences for Italy above all, weighed upon his great soul; and the victims' gaiety, the welcome they gave to their oppressor, annoyed him" (Guiccioli 2005, 517-18). Thus, Byron writes as a poet in the position of Juvenal in the latter's first satire, wondering how he can merely sing of Hercules when there is so much blatant vice and folly to target in the present day; yet with so little hope of improvement that the result is a one-off, ostensibly improvised cameo. The brief final section (18) underlines the ideological homelessness of the poet as "tired of foreign follies, I turn home" (l. 767). Unlike, say, the dignified homeward turn that concludes John Milton's *Lycidas* (1637), Byron's weeping muse bursts out in a fit of harsh laughter as he observes the ridiculous activities of British politicians (George IV's friend "Sir William Curtis in a kilt!", l. 770). The apparent promise of another, similar poem in the final couplet similarly dissolves into a sense of ultimate ridiculousness: "Here, reader, will we pause; if there's no harm in | This first – you'll have, perhaps, a second 'Carmen'" (ll. 779-80). For this seems more a device to include the word "Carmen" a second time via an absurd rhyme than a real declaration of intent to continue writing. In this way, the final joke of *The Age of Bronze* is that it shows its own form, the heroic satire of Johnson or Juvenal, to be played out, exhausted. On this occasion at least, Byron might have taken T.S. Eliot's view that he writes "a dead or dying language" as a compliment.

The Age of Bronze has often been judged as under-nuanced, in that it reflects the antithetical extremes into which Byron's appropriations of history led him. The racist terms in which Byron couches his otherwise shrewd assessment of the economic spirit of the age remain a severe stumbling-block to a sympathetic interpretation. Nevertheless, in resolutely looking in at the Congress from the outsider-perspective of Diogenes, refusing to take up the position of a sycophantic memorial like the Hyde Park monument, or an interested insider's account like that of Chateaubriand, the poem resists selling out to the new (yet "somewhat aged") order of the Congress system. It refuses to accept the instrumental role that had arguably become the fate of mainstream art in the European dispensation following the 1815 Congress of Vienna. It insists on being corrective, not decorative, even as it thereby confronts the sense of an ending.

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Anatole France, Oscar Wilde, and James Joyce
A Queer Genealogy of "The Dead"

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Abstract This essay re-situates James Joyce's story "The Dead" in the alternative intellectual genealogy of late-nineteenth-century European religious skepticism, its reexamination of the historical origins of Christianity, and its fresh reinterrogation of the epochal transition between the pre-Christian and the Christian worlds. Taking a cue from Richard Ellmann's suggestion that it was Anatole France's "The Procurator of Judea" that inspired "The Dead", the essay argues that just as France had written a revisionist story about the disappearance of Jesus from the history, so did Joyce write a similar story, about a failed Annunciation and the death of God. Further, the essay identifies Oscar Wilde's Salome as a twin text of France's and triangulates it with France and Joyce, showing how Wilde's play had excavated this same territory and provided a recent Irish precedent for restaging a New Testament dialogue, for redramatizing the contest between female pagan voice and prophetic Christian voice, and for reviving a sustained pagan rhetoric of "the dead".

Keywords Anatole France. James Joyce. "The Dead". Historical Criticism. Death of God. Failed Annunciation. Christian Origin Story. Atavism.

Summary 1 Introduction: Anatole France, "The Procurator of Judea", and the Disappearance of Jesus. – 2 Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, and the Voices of the Dead. – 3 The Allegory of "The Dead".

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1 Introduction: Anatole France, "The Procurator of Judea", and the Disappearance of Jesus

In a letter from Rome dated February 11, 1907, James Joyce wrote to his brother Stanislaus that the news of the Abbey Theatre riots and the debate over the debut of J.M. Synge's *The Playboy of the Western World* had so consumed him that it had "put [him] off" the story he was "'going to write' – to wit, *The Dead*" (Joyce 1966, 148). In the next paragraph of the letter, he goes on to indicate what he has been reading lately and then notes that it was French writer Anatole France who had given him the idea, not only for "Ivy Day in the Committee Room", but also for "The Dead":

> I am reading at present some of the old Italian story-tellers, such as Sermini, Doni etc and also Anatole France. I wonder how he got his name. Crainquebille, of course, is very fine and parts or rather phrases of his other books. However I mustn't complain since he suggested *Ivy Day in the Committee-Room*, and has now suggested another story *The Dead*. It is strange where you get ideas for stories. (Joyce 1966, 148; italics in original)

Joyce never indicates exactly which of France's works he has in mind, but Richard Ellmann has proposed that it was possibly France's story "The Procurator of Judea". Indeed, Ellmann has proposed this title at least twice, once in his edition of the *Selected Letters* and again in his monumental biography of Joyce. In the *Selected Letters*, in a footnote to the passage above, he speculates that Joyce was inspired "possibly by the story 'Le Procurateur de Judée' in which also the focus of attention is upon the dead man who never appears" (Joyce 1966, 148). In his biography of Joyce, Ellmann reiterates both this suggestion and the attendant reasoning, Ellmann clearly driven by and now foregrounding this narrative device, at once a motif and a plot structure, of the dead man who does not appear:

> What binds "Ivy Day" to "The Dead" is that in both stories the central agitation derives from a character who never appears, who is dead, absent. Joyce wrote Stanislaus that Anatole France had given him the idea for both stories. There may be other sources in France's works, but a possible one is "The Procurator of Judea". (Ellmann 1982, 252)

Here in the biography, however, Ellmann not only reiterates the point and the reasoning but also goes on to further explain it, summarizing France's story and then specifying what he had only implied before, namely that the dead man who never appears in Joyce's story is Michael Furey:

> In ["The Procurator of Judea"] Pontius Pilate reminisces with a friend about the days when he was procurator in Judea, and describes the events of his time with Roman reason, calm, and elegance. Never once does he or his friend, mention the person we expect him to discuss, the founder of Christianity, until at the end the friend asks if Pilate happens to remember someone of the name of Jesus, from Nazareth, and the veteran administrator replies, "Jesus? Jesus of Nazareth? I cannot call him to mind". The story is overshadowed by the person whom Pilate does not recall; without him the story would not exist. Joyce uses a similar method in "Ivy Day" with Parnell and in "The Dead" with Michael Furey. (Ellmann 1982, 253)[1]

While I think that Ellmann is probably right to pinpoint France's story "The Procurator of Judea" as the text that inspired Joyce's story "The Dead", I do not, however, think that it is for the specific reason that Ellmann gives, namely, that the two stories share the same pattern and plot structure of the dead man who never appears, or whose death motivates and overshadows the story. Indeed, there are a few problems with Ellmann's argument. First, he seems to have read Joyce's letter to Stanislaus a little hastily, assuming that it must have been the same France text that inspired both "Ivy Day in the Committee Room" and "The Dead" and, moreover, inspired them in the same way. In fact, Joyce indicates only that "he", France, had suggested "Ivy Day" and that the same "he" had "now" suggested "The Dead", implying two discrete moments of inspiration. It is Ellmann's hasty double conflation of possibly two France texts into one and two moments of inspiration into one, that leads him to a structural comparison that must account for the similarity among all three stories, "The Procurator", "Ivy Day", and "The Dead".

But this is not necessarily or even likely the case. If it is the same France text, and it may well be, I suspect that it is inspiring these stories in two different ways and that, while the structuralist reading might work for "Ivy Day", it does not work for "The Dead". Second, Ellmann appears to have misread France's story in two ways, perhaps under the pressure to see the similarity among all three stories. First, he seems to mistake the edge of France's irony, when, after summarizing the story, he concludes, "The story is overshadowed by the person whom Pilate does not recall; without him the story would not exist". This is an iteration of an idea that he had stated

1 Ellmann appears to be using Frederic Chapman's 1902 translation of France's story. France's original French text reads, "—Jésus? murmura-ti-l, Jésus, de Nazareth! Je ne me rapelle pas" (France 1902, 39). For the last phrase, which Chapman renders as "I cannot call him to mind", I prefer "I do not recall" and use it below.

earlier and that seems to be a controlling assumption for his reading, the idea, that is, that "absence is the highest form of presence" (Ellmann 1982, 252). Thus, he reads the absence of Jesus as an indication of his presence for the story. Oddly, it almost sounds like a Christian reading: that in emphasizing Jesus's absence, France is calling attention to Jesus's significance. But France's irony actually cuts the other way.[2] What Ellmann does not note, and perhaps did not know, is that France, a life-long atheist, originally called his story "A Tale for Christmas Day" and first published it in *Le Temps* on Christmas Day, 1891, in a blatantly provocative gesture meant to evacuate the Christian commemoration of the birth of Jesus and the origin of Christianity with a story about the radical erasure of Jesus from the historical record.[3]

Indeed, France's remarkable story is the culmination of two major strands of nineteenth-century European thought. The first is the rise of the so-called 'Historical Criticism' that originated in post-Enlightenment Germany in the late eighteenth century and spread through Germany and France in the nineteenth, which treated Jesus, not as divine figure, but as an historical figure, and which issued in major works like David Friedrich Strauss's *Life of Jesus* (1835) and Ludwig Feuerbach's *The Essence of Christianity* (1841) in Germany, and Ernst Renan's *Life of Jesus* (1863) in France, which itself was later parodied by Léo Taxil in his own *Life of Jesus* (1882), which Stephen Dedalus recalls a number of times in *Ulysses*.[4] The second, no doubt informed by the first, is the increase in religious doubt over the course of the nineteenth century, which issued eventually in a growing conviction in the death of the Christian God, celebrated by the likes of Algernon Charles Swinburne in the mid-1860s in England, and famously pronounced by Friedrich Nietzsche in *The Gay Science* (1882) and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), and later elaborated in *The Antichrist* (1895) – Swinburne and Nietzsche, the poet and the prophet, respectively, of Martello Tower, according to Ellmann himself (Ellmann 1982, 172).[5] France's story, published on Christmas Day in 1891, culminates and punctuates these two strands of thought. His absenting of Jesus from history does not emphasize or intensify his presence, but rather emphasizes and intensifies precisely his *absence*.

Ellmann also misreads France's story, I think, when he elides all

2 France was a well-known skeptic and a satirist.

3 According to Joseph Collins, France "displayed complete indifference to the teaching of religion and claimed perfect liberation from them" (Collins 1925).

4 It is a long-established assumption of France criticism that he was the intellectual child of Renan.

5 Nietzsche had of course used the trope of genealogy in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, which was concerned with many of the same ideas, one reason I use that trope to frame this essay. For an account of the idea of the death of God on Nietzsche, see Owen (2002).

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of its Christian specificity in order to extract and abstract a plot structure or outline, such that for him the value of France's story for Joyce is not that it concerns a "dead or absent" *Jesus* who motivates the story but never appears, but merely a "dead or absent" *character* who does. This abstraction from the particular Jesus to the general 'character' permits him to plug in first Parnell for "Ivy Day" and then Michael Furey for "The Dead".

Still, I think that Ellmann was right to pinpoint France's "The Procurator of Judea" as the inspiration of "The Dead" in what was likely a flash of brilliant unconscious insight, which he was simply not able to render into conscious critical terms. Indeed, he seems to begin to glimpse that insight before fully swerving into the misreadings described above, when, in his summary of France's story, he writes of Pontius Pilate, "Never once does he or his friend, mention the person we expect him to discuss, the founder of Christianity". In identifying Jesus as "the founder of Christianity", Ellmann briefly registers the real significance of the story without actually recognizing it, which is its radical reimagining, in the wake of the nineteenth-century discoveries about the historicity of Jesus and the death of God, of the very foundation of Christianity and its re-envisioning of an alternative history without Christ or Christianity, as well perhaps, by implication, of such a future.

This is not only the significance of France's story in general but also the significance, I think, of France's story for Joyce and "The Dead" in particular. For just as France revisits the origin of Christianity in order to tell a revised story of a failed origination, so does Joyce. And just as France tells the story of the disappearance of Jesus from history, so does Joyce tell his own version of that story. Whereas France goes back in the historical record and intervenes at a point several years after the death of Jesus to imaginatively consider the counter-factual possibility of his having been forgotten from history, Joyce goes back a little further in the record and intervenes at a point before the birth of Jesus to imaginatively consider the possibility of his never having been conceived in the first place, Joyce settling on the different *figure* of Gabriel and the alternative *conceit* of the Annunciation, and reimagining Gabriel's overture as a failed overture and the speech-act that would redeem the world – second only perhaps to the speech-act that conceived of the world (Gen 1.3) – as a failed speech-act, and the conception of Christ, therefore, as a failed conception.[6] Unlike France, who keeps his story in the first century AD and tells it in the mode of an ironic realism, Joyce, of course,

6 There had been, of course, nineteenth-century imaginative interest in the Annunciation scene, including Gabriel Rossetti's famous painting *Ecce Ancilla Domini* (1850) and Oscar Wilde's poem "Ave Maria Gratia Plena" (1881).

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transposes his from the late first century BC, to the present time, and tells it in the mode of an ironic allegory.[7] That is, he retells the antique Christian story of the Annunciation as a modern, failed story. Alternatively, we might say that he tells the antique story of the birth of God as the post-nineteenth-century and sharply modern story of the death of God.

While France's story is organized around the idea of a failed Jesus Christ, Joyce's is organized around the idea of a failed Gabriel, and while France's primary narrative device is a fairly straightforward conversation that culminates in a dramatic anticlimax, Joyce's narrative device is more complex and seems to be modeled on the classical-music structure of a 'theme and variations'. Joyce introduces the major theme of Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary in the opening scene of Gabriel's overture to Lily, and then presents three overt variations on it, of seemingly increasing importance: Gabriel's encounter with Molly Ivors; his encounter with Gretta on the stairs as she listens to "The Lass of Aughrim"; and the major scene of his assignation with Gretta at the Gresham Hotel, Joyce reworking the scene again and again in the recurring language and imagery of the Annunciation. In addition to these three more recognizable variations, I think we can read Gabriel's speech right in the middle of them as a more covert variation, indeed, as an *inverted* variation, in which Gabriel's speech is delivered in the distinctive (though ironized) *opposite* idiom of the Last Supper. Instead of delivering the speech-act that would lead to the conception and birth of Christ and the redemption of the world, Gabriel effectively 'jumps the gun' to impersonate Christ and Christ's speech, given on the eve of his own death. But just as Gabriel makes a poor Gabriel so does he make a poor Christ. Christ's speech at the Last Supper was marked by its simplicity and its brevity, as in the modest phrase "Do this in memory of me" (Luke 22:19), which was both the source phrase and the signature phrase of the Christian Mass. In radical contrast, Joyce has Gabriel finish his work of carving the goose, perhaps a reference to Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*, and say in a remarkable instance of antithesis "Kindly forget my existence". This occurs near the middle of the story and is as close as Joyce comes in the story to a nod to France and France's anticlimax: "Jesus of Nazareth, I do not recall".[8] Of course, Gabriel goes on to give his big speech, which unlike Christ's simple, clear, and selfless speech, is contrived, opaque, and egotistical, as Gabriel himself later admits. Thus, the narrative structure of the story, based on the musical structure of a theme and variations, appears to be AABAA, where A is a more overt representation of the Annunciation and B is

7 France will later do this himself in his *The Revolt of the Angels* (1914).

8 My translation. See note 1 above.

a covert inversion of it, with other secondary, contributing images strewn throughout, not least of which is the imagery of contraception, which carries in this ironic-allegorical context the implication of the contraception of Christ.[9] If "The Dead" is based on a musical structure, it is perhaps also in answer to Dickens, Joyce giving us here something of a post-Darwinian, post-Nietzschean *Christmas Carol*.[10]

2 Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, and the Voices of the Dead

Before elaborating this argument any further, however, I would like to turn first, perhaps implausibly, to Oscar Wilde, in order to further fill out and complicate this 'queer' genealogy of "The Dead". In his later biography of Oscar Wilde, Ellmann tells a fascinating story of a gathering in Paris in late 1891 that brought France together with Wilde at around the time when France was working on "The Procurator of Judea" and Wilde had just begun to conceptualize his next project, *Salome*:

> One evening Wilde went to the house of Jean Lorrain, with Marcel Schwob, Anatole France, Henry Bauer, and Gomez Carillo as fellow guests. He asked to see the bust of a decapitated woman he had heard about. As he examined the bloodstains painted on the neck above the place where the sword had cut, he cried "It is Salome's head, Salome who has had herself beheaded out of despair. It is John the Baptist's revenge". (Ellmann 1987, 343)

Within a few months, by the end of 1891, France had finished writing "The Procurator of Judea" and Wilde had finished writing *Salome*. We might think of these two texts, then, as something like 'twin' texts, if not identical, then certainly fraternal twins. Written and completed at exactly the same time, both texts are set around the time of Christ: France's, as we have just seen, a few years after the death of Christ, and Wilde's, a few years before, at the time of John the Baptist's death around 30 AD. While France's takes place in a just post-Christian world from which Christ has been absented, Wilde's takes

9 This motif is introduced obliquely in "The Dead" in the discussion of the "goloshes", rubber prophylaxes that protect against wetness. It is introduced obliquely in *Dubliners* in the very first story, "The Sisters", through the phrase "umbrellas recovered here", slang for "condoms sold here". Joyce's Freddy Malins plot (of a premature ejaculation) also participates in the bigger theme, especially insofar as it is an allusion to Chaucer's "The Miller's Tale", a very early ironic allegory and parody of the Annunciation story.

10 It is likely overdetermined by a number of factors, including Joyce's interest in the "Ave Maria", which was not only a prayer but also a hymn. Notably, Dickens divided *A Christmas Carol* into five "staves", which is to say, five musical staffs.

place in a just pre-Christian world in the margins of which Jesus has only recently begun his three-year ministry. While France's is set at the Neapolitan palace of Pontius Pilate, Wilde's is set at the Judean palace of Herod Antipas, tetrarch of Judea, two figures who play similar, antagonistic roles in the Christian origin story. And both texts engage in the received representational practices of the nineteenth-century 'historical criticism', which is to say the practices of a radical *historicism*.

While both are radically historicist, both treating Christianity fundamentally as a function of history, they do, however, have different sets of concerns. Whereas France is concerned with the immediate 'posteriority' of Christ, Wilde is concerned with the immediate 'anteriority', and a large part of his project is not only to describe the diverse religious landscape into which John and Christ entered, but also to give voice to its ideas and expression to its discourses. Wilde essentially goes back just before Christ in order to excavate an alternate set of religious views and practices which he puts side by side and into conversation, not only with each other, but also with the new voices of Christianity itself, often with ironic and comic effect, Wilde ironizing all religions equally, from the pagan belief in the materiality and visibility of their gods to the Jewish conviction in the immateriality and invisibility of their God. He even seems to ironize, if not satirize, the over-the-top prophetic babble of John the Baptist heralding his God. Wilde's *Salome* might be thought of as an early exercise in comparative religion, not unlike those of his important contemporary Sir James Frazer at Cambridge, who had published the first edition of *The Golden Bough* just the year before in 1890 and would continue expanding and revising it for another thirty years, and his equally important contemporary William James in America, who would publish his *Varieties of Religious Experience* in 1902.

Wilde puts various religions alongside of each other in a level historical landscape treating the multiplicity of religions equally, not only concerned to describe the varieties of religious experience, but also intent on marking the *historicity* and the *contingency* of religions. Whereas France imagines the historicity and contingency of Christianity and the counterfactual possibility that Christianity might easily never have been born, Wilde, however, makes note of the contingency of the Cappadocian's pagan religion, pointing to an established fact of history, that paganism was about to be driven out or to die off. Wilde has the Nubian describe his religion, ironically and comically, I think, and then has the Cappadocian pithily sum up the state of his own religion:

THE NUBIAN
The gods of my country are very fond of blood. Twice in the year we sacrifice to them young men and maidens; fifty young men

and a hundred maidens. But it seems we never give them quite enough, for they are very harsh to us.

THE CAPPADOCIAN

In my country there are no gods left. The Romans have driven them out. There are some who say that they have hidden themselves in the mountains, but I do not believe it. Three nights I have been on the mountains seeking them everywhere. I did not find them. And at last I called them by their names, and they did not come. I think they are dead. (Wilde 2003, 584)

Whereas France represents the disappearance of Christ and Christianity into history and suggests the death of the Christian God, Wilde describes the disappearance of these pagan gods into history and actually has the Cappadocian explicitly postulate the death of the pagan gods.

It is difficult to read this speech and not hear an echo of Swinburne's "Hymn to Proserpine", one of the most significant poems in *Poems and Ballads* published in 1866. In that poem Swinburne describes this very chasing away of the pagan gods, although he fixes on a later more momentous time in the transition from paganism to Christianity, in the fourth century AD, when the former finally capitulated to the latter dispensation. For Swinburne, writing from his own late-nineteenth-century perspective of radical religious dissent (heresy even), this capitulation was lamentable, and he lends his nineteenth-century perspective and his conviction in the historicity and contingency of religion to his fourth-century speaker, presumably the Emperor Julian, whom he has predict the eventual death of the Christian God(s) deep in the future:

Ye are Gods, and behold, ye shall die, and the waves be upon you at last.
In the darkness of time, in the deeps of the years, in the changes of things,
Ye shall sleep as a slain man sleeps, and the world shall forget you for kings.
Though the feet of thine high priests tread where thy lords and our forefathers trod,
Though these that were Gods are dead, and thou being dead art a God,
Though before thee the throned Cytherean be fallen, and hidden her head,
Yet thy kingdom shall pass, Galilean, thy dead shall go down to thee dead.

(Swinburne 58)

Swinburne nicely articulates the notion of the interchangeability or fungibility of religions, and he, like many others in the *fin-de-siècle* and at the turn of the nineteenth century to the twentieth, saw the driving out of Christianity as an opportunity for the return of the old pagan gods, who might, after all, not have died but merely been in hiding, as Walter Pater suggested, though it might have been a 'slow' return, as Ezra Pound observed some fifty years later in his poem "The Return" in 1914.

Swinburne not only articulates the idea of the fungibility of religion and the idea of the death of the gods, pagan and Christian alike, but also deploys what I think is a distinctive, rhythmic, and perhaps even idiomatic rhetoric of the 'dead'. In the intellectual-historical context that I have been trying to reconstruct here of the late-nineteenth-century's increasing conviction in the death of God, the word 'dead' acquired a new and special value, for the idea of the death of the Christian God meant necessarily a radical reconsideration of what it meant to be dead and, for the most part, a return to, and of, a pre-Christian, pagan understanding and language of the dead. For in the Christian vision, not only did Jesus Christ "rise from *the dead*", but also promised its followers "the resurrection of the body and life everlasting", as it was concisely put in the Catholic version of the Apostles' Creed. The failure of the Christian vision and therefore of the promise of the resurrection must necessarily have meant a return to "the dead". The phrase "the dead" was the signature discursive marker, even within Christian discourse, of the pre-Christian and very possibly of the post-Christian dispensation.

Although Wilde held on to some version of Christianity throughout his life, more so than any of the other figures I have mentioned here, he, like Swinburne, was deeply attracted to and interested in the pagan classical world, and is concerned in *Salome* to give voice to its various discourses and rhetorics, including, in addition to the specific discourse cited above regarding the death of the gods, a more general rhetoric of the 'dead'. Indeed, the play begins with something like an invocation of the goddess of the dead, the dialogue moving back and forth between the figure of the moon and the figure of Salome, effectively conflating the two. Wilde begins the play,

> THE YOUNG SYRIAN
> How beautiful is the Princess Salome to-night!
>
> THE PAGE OF HERODIAS
> Look at the moon! How strange the moon seems! She is like a woman rising from a tomb. She is like a dead woman. You would fancy she was looking for dead things.

THE YOUNG SYRIAN
She has a strange look. She is like a little princess who wears a yellow veil, and whose feet are of silver. She is like a princess who has little white doves for feet. You would fancy she was dancing.

THE PAGE OF HERODIAS
She is like a woman who is dead. She moves very slowly.

He advances this same rhetoric throughout the play, before introducing another, almost frantic rhetoric around Herod's fear of Jesus's raising of the dead closer to the end:

HEROD
He raises the dead?

FIRST NAZARENE
Yea, sire, He raiseth the dead.

HEROD
I do not wish Him to do that. I forbid Him to do that. I allow no man to raise the dead. This Man must be found and told that I forbid Him to raise the dead. Where is this Man at present?

In addition to giving voice to such pagan rhetorics of the dead, Wilde is also keen of course to pull the figure of Salome out from under the constraining context of the Christian gospel, and to give her a pagan voice, so that she can speak her pagan piece, as it were, and speak it over and against the voice of the new Christian voice of John the Baptist. Salome's speech is sensuous, materialist, and decadent, put into polemical dialogue and starkly contrasted with John's speech, which is ascetic, spiritualizing, and moralizing. And, in a way, her voice triumphs over his, insofar as it is her voice that, in demanding his head, puts a definitive end to his speech. Wilde not only gives Salome a voice, but also has her pagan female voice call for the cutting off of male prophetic Christian voice.

While Joyce derived from France directly the main idea for "The Dead", which I have taken to be the idea of the disappearance of Jesus and the death of God, he seems to have inherited from Wilde, either directly or indirectly, in the curious ways in which intellectual or cultural inheritance operates, a set of associated and complementary ideas, tropes, and rhetorics.[11] Like Wilde, Joyce goes back to an ear-

11 It is not clear when Joyce first read *Salome*, which was first published in French in 1893 and in English in 1894. It is notable, however, that Joyce wrote his only essay on Wilde on the occasion of an Italian production of Richard Strauss's adaptation of Wilde's play, less than two years after the completion of "The Dead". Further, in the title of that essay, Joyce identifies Wilde as "The Poet of Salome". As Daniel Schwarz has ob-

lier moment in the Christian origin story, about thirty years earlier still than Wilde, to the scene of the Annunciation;[12] like Wilde, he is intent to reimagine an early Christian scene in order to reexplore the threshold and reinterrogate the transition between the pagan/classical and the Christian dispensations; like Wilde, he is concerned with the closely associated idea and the rhetoric of 'the dead' and a radical reconsideration of what it means to be dead in a pre- or a post-Christian dispensation; like Wilde, he is concerned to redramatize and modernize the dialogue of a New Testament couple; like Wilde, he is concerned with both dissenting feminist female voice and failing male prophetic voice; and like Wilde, he is interested in the power of the speech-act itself, the potency of the female speech-act and the impotence of the male, both stories culminating in a kind of triumph of pagan female voice and a correlative castration and silencing of Christian voice.[13]

France and Wilde, then, provide us with an immediate 'queer' genealogical context in which to locate and through which to understand Joyce's story. I use the word 'queer' here to indicate three things: first, that this is an unusual or alternative intellectual line of descent in which to locate Joyce' story, the criticism having tended to emphasize other authors and contexts;[14] second, that this line of descent is actually a strong line of nineteenth-century religious dissent, non-conformity, or radical skepticism concerning the disappearance and the death of God; and third, that that line of descent/dissent is to some extent a line of gender and sexual descent/dissent, here a kind of gender and sexual dissidence, as marked by figures like Swinburne and Wilde, perhaps both of whom, and Wilde especially, function something like the 'queer avuncular' in this particular genealogical model.[15] Proceeding from this genealogy, I would now like to adumbrate a reading of "The Dead" in slightly more detail, noting, however, that a full reading would require much more space than I have here.

served, Joyce acknowledges Wilde, along with Yeats, as an artistic father in the "Circe" episode of *Ulysses*. (Schwarz 1994, 6)

12 As noted above, Wilde did write a poem called "Ave Maria Gratia Plena" in which he contrasts a classical divine conception scene with the Christian.

13 I explain Gretta's "paganism" at the end of the essay.

14 Like Thomas Moore's *Irish Melodies*, for instance, or Ibsen's *When We Dead Awaken*, when his *Emperor and Galilean* might actually be more relevant.

15 I also have in mind Buck Mulligan's "The Ballad of Joking Jesus", which begins "I'm the queerest young fellow that ever you heard", and which belongs to this same spirit of religious skepticism and parody. (Joyce 1986, 16)

3 The Allegory of "The Dead"

Joyce had already completed the fourteen stories that he had planned for *Dubliners*, when he conceived of "The Dead" as an additional, fifteenth story, and, in at least three of those original fourteen stories, he had already experimented in the mode of ironic Christian allegory. In "Two Gallants", he had thoroughly ironized the plot and conventions of medieval Christian romance; in "Clay" he had ironized and parodied the main events in the life of the Virgin, in the inverse order of their occurrence; and in "Grace" he had ironized the whole plot of the Ecclesiastical Economy of Salvation. Notably, in October 1904, he had conceived of a story called "Christmas Eve" and written a few pages of it before reconceiving it as a story called "Hallow Eve", which became the working title of "Clay", and reserving the Christmas setting for later, eventually taking it up, of course, in "The Dead", though he changes it there from the more specific Christmas Eve to the more general "Christmas time", for reasons I will explain shortly. In "Clay", Joyce signals the allegorical mode primarily through the received convention of symbolical naming, not only giving his protagonist just the one name of 'Maria' and no last name, like the mononymous Virgin Mary, but also using that name a remarkable forty-two times in the short space of about five pages. So in "The Dead", does Joyce use the same convention of symbolic naming, using the name 'Gabriel', largely singly, an astonishing one-hundred-and-fifty-eight times, a much larger number than the forty-two times he mentions Maria, though a lower overall rate, "The Dead" being a much longer story. It is difficult not to read the name 'Gabriel', iterated so many times in a story set at Christmas time, as symbolic and suggesting the operation of some sort of Christian allegory. Of course the early critics most poised to see this were Christian critics who were inclined to look for straightforward allegory and orthodox Christian readings, rather than the ironic allegory and heterodox reading I am suggesting here, and it is understandable how their efforts might have been resisted or dismissed by an increasingly skeptical criticism.[16]

Joyce not only deploys the convention of symbolic naming, however, but also self-consciously and self-referentially thematizes the very practice of symbolic naming when he has Gabriel withdraw from his cousin Mary Jane's piano performance to consider a photograph of his mother. Here we learn that it was his mother, Ellen, who had named her children 'Constantine' and 'Gabriel': "It was she who had chosen the name of her sons for she was very sensible of the digni-

16 Florence Walzl, for example, saw the conceit of the Annunciation operating in the story but missed Joyce's ironizing of it. (Walzl 1966, 30).

ty of family life" (Joyce 2006, 162). Clearly, she has named her children after two important figures in the early history of Christianity, Gabriel of course, whose announcement to Mary of her conception of Christ was the speech-act that initiated Christianity, and Constantine, whose conversion to Christianity in the fourth century established Christianity as the official state religion. And we might note as well that Joyce himself has given Ellen a variant of the name 'Helena', the name of the mother of Constantine. If earlier in this same paragraph Joyce references the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*, it is likely to reinforce this significance of naming ("wherefore art thou Romeo") and if he references the tower scene in *Richard III*, where the two princes await their deaths, it is perhaps to suggest the looming 'deaths' of these two princely brothers, Gabriel and Constantine, in the ironic allegorical register and the revisionist history in which Gabriel's Annunciation is a failed Annunciation and the birth of Christ and Christianity therefore precluded.

Unlike Maria in "Clay", Gabriel does have a last name, 'Conroy,' which, while it grounds the story in a realistic register, does not detract any more from the symbolic /allegorical function of his name than the name 'Leopold Bloom' detracts from his symbolical/allegorical function. Further, the full name 'Gabriel Conroy' may well be participating in Joyce's more oblique system of signification, for, if it is a reference to American writer Bret Harte, as the criticism has suggested, it is perhaps a reference to his parodic and burlesque mode of writing, which included a parody of Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*.[17] Indeed, Joyce had already written "Clay" in the burlesque mode of Léo Taxil, whose own *Life of Jesus* begins with a thorough lampooning of Gabriel's Annunciation to Mary (Davis 2021, 252-90).

Let us consider now how Joyce redramatizes Gabriel's overture to Mary as a modern story and indeed as a failed story, at once parodic and tragic. As suggested above, Joyce seems to have organized the story on the musical structure of a theme and variations, introducing the main theme, or 'motif', in the musical sense of the word, in the opening scene of Gabriel's arrival and overture to Lily and then replaying it four more times in that AABAA structure indicated above, where the 'A' scenes are clearly visible variations on the theme and include the encounter with Molly Ivors and the two major scenes with Gretta, while the 'B' scene is the inverted variation of Gabriel's central speech delivered largely in the idiom of the Last Supper, about which Joyce had once proposed to write a separate story (Ellmann 1982, 229-30). Just as the name 'Gabriel' signifies symbolically and points to the biblical Gabriel, so do the names 'Lily', 'Molly', and 'Gretta', Gabriel's three interlocutors in the 'A' scenes,

17 "The Haunted Man".

signify symbolically, though more obliquely to be sure, and point to Mary, two of them specifically to the Annunciation. The lily is a well-known attribute of Mary, particularly of the Annunciation scene, and is a typical feature of the iconography of that scene, usually pictured in Gabriel's hand but sometimes pictured between Gabriel and Mary and seeming to symbolize the purity of the overture and the virginal conception of Christ. 'Molly' is a common diminutive of 'Mary', while her last name 'Ivors' suggests the Catholic epithet for Mary, 'Tower of Ivory', discussed in the first chapter of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. And 'Gretta', I would suggest, is a variation on the word '*gratia*', which is one of the keywords in Gabriel's opening remark to Mary, "*Ave Maria gratia plena*" – the hallmark phrase of the Annunciation and also a common feature of the iconography of the scene, appearing often as a speech ribbon or a caption in visual representations – and whose English equivalent 'grace' is the title Joyce gave to the once final and now penultimate story in *Dubliners*, occurring just before "The Dead".[18]

Joyce's story begins with Gabriel's overture to Lily and the first thing to note is that he is late: "it was long after ten o'clock and yet there was no sign of Gabriel and his wife" (Joyce 2006, 153). He is 'late', as the Mad Hatter puts it in *Alice in Wonderland*, "for a very important date", and he is late in several ways. He is late not only in the realistic register, for the party, but also in the symbolic/allegorical register and in a number of ways. First, he is late in liturgical time for the Annunciation, which is celebrated on March 25, nine months before Christmas, which of course commemorates the birth of Christ; he is even late for Christmas, the party taking place somewhere between January 1, when Freddy Malins took the pledge, and January 6, the feast of the Epiphany and the end of 'Christmas-time'. He is also late in historical time by over 1900 years. Moreover, his lateness inspires a palpable lingering anxiety among the Morkans; even after he has arrived at the party and the supper, marked above as a 'last supper', is about to begin, Joyce has Aunt Kate cry, "Where is Gabriel?"… "Where on earth is Gabriel?" (Joyce 2006, 170), which functions as nice diacritical marker for his belatedness, or his "failure to appear", to recall Ellmann's gloss of France, though Ellmann mistakenly re-assigns that failure from France's Jesus of Nazareth to Joyce's Michael Furey.

When Gabriel does finally arrive at the party, his first encounter is with Lily, the caretaker's daughter, and this opening scene intro-

18 Joyce also constructs a Christian context for Gretta through the reference to "Christy Minstrels", which in the allegorical register is a reference to medieval Christian mystery plays. In his notes at Cornell, Joyce indicates the York Cycle in particular. I also think "guttapercha" is offered as a medieval-style corruption of "gratia plena". Notably, the story of the Magi included the theme of race, facilitating a connection to the contemporary Christy Minstrels.

duces the major motif of the story, of a mock, parodic, and failed Annunciation, of a salutation, overture, and speech-act gone awry and gone wrong. To begin, Lily is quite literally a *threshold* figure, going back and forth at the threshold of the story itself and, to some extent, the threshold of the household, as the one person on the first floor receiving the male guests and of course the person to receive Gabriel, and helping the men remove their outer garments. But she also stands on the threshold of, and in the liminal space between, the pagan and the Christian. While, as indicated above, her first and only name, 'Lily', associates her with Mary of the Annunciation, Joyce's recurring Homeric epithet for her, the 'caretaker's daughter', marks her, by way of *Ulysses* – where 'the caretaker' is the 'symbol' of episode six – as a daughter of Hades. She is, like Michael Furey and Stephen Dedalus, a hybrid figure, of the Christian and the pagan. And, as such, she is an echo and a kind of embodiment of Swinburne's dichotomy of the Christian 'goddess' Mary and the pagan Proserpine in the "Hymn" cited above. While the story of course takes place in modern realistic Dublin, these devices help to establish its allegorical and historical parallel and to indicate how Joyce is addressing the same big issues concerning the contingency and fungibility of religion addressed by the late- nineteenth-century, reimagining and reinterrogating the relation between the pre-Christian and the Christian worlds. Of course, if Gabriel fails in his overture to land a successful speech-act (and ersatz sex act), and Christ and Christianity are never born, then she will slide back onto the pagan side of that threshold.

And so Gabriel's Annunciation does fail and fails spectacularly, for a number of reasons, all of which are plain inversions or reversals of the biblical scene. As we saw above, Gabriel is late for his date, and, as a result, it is not he who initiates the scene but rather Lily, a clear comment on the way in which gender roles and relations have shifted from antiquity to modernity. Whereas in the biblical scene, Gabriel is the primary actor and his primary action is to speak while Mary is his passive interlocutor and the acquiescent receiver of the action, here in "The Dead" Joyce foregrounds Lily as the primary actor, the protagonist even, and gives her the primary action of running back and forth, while he has Gabriel, who, like Stephen Dedalus, is 'not a hero', dither elsewhere. Moreover, in giving Lily that primary action of running back and forth and shuttling men into a back room in order to undress them, Joyce frankly sexualizes her. Most importantly, however, he has Gabriel blunder in and deliver a botched speech-act that sexualizes her, calling attention to her romantic or erotic life, and he has Lily in turn – in stark contrast to the reticent Virgin Mary, who quietly receives Gabriel's overture with the phrase "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it done to me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38) – give a sharp retort. In Joyce's modern version of the scene, men blather and women speak up on their own behalf, much as Wil-

de's Salome does. A rebuffed Gabriel throws money at her in order to bolster his own psycho-social authority and in order to degrade hers, putting her in the position of a prostitute, much perhaps as Wilde's John does with Salome.

Joyce follows up this first failed Annunciation scene with a second one that is a close variation on the first, sounded, to sustain the musical metaphor, in a slightly different key. This is the encounter between Gabriel and now Molly Ivors. The name 'Molly Ivors' appears to be a variant of the "Blessed Virgin", "*Tower of Ivory*", that Joyce discusses in *Portrait* and we might cite a few lines from that scene to characterize what is going on here in this scene in "The Dead": "Eileen had long white hands. One evening when playing tig she had put her hands over his eyes: long and white and thin and cold and soft. That was ivory: a cold white thing. That was the meaning of *Tower of Ivory*" (Joyce 1968, 35). While Lily was sexualized and had some erotic value for Gabriel, Molly Ivors is a "cold white thing".[19] While Lily was sexualized, Molly is merely politicized, as we can see in her efforts to flirt in the idiom of Irish-nationalist identity politics. She is older than Lily, better educated, and, in many ways, Gabriel's social equal, and these enable her to actually control the scene and the dialogue, as Salome controls the dialogue with John, but without any of Salome's passion or eroticism. She stifles Gabriel's speech, muting his potentially prophetic speech with her parochial political speech. Further, she exits the house hastily in the familiar feminist fashion of an Ibsen heroine, depriving Gabriel of his second chance at getting a word in, or, in this case, landing a retaliatory insult. While Gabriel has crafted that insult especially for Molly Ivors's ear (how far we have come from the biblical Gabriel's "*Ave Maria gratia plena*"), he must deliver it broadly to the general remaining crowd.

Gabriel's big speech is the central action of the story, and it appears to be inverted variation on the Annunciation scene, rendered in the opposite imagery of the Last Supper. While Gabriel's speech-act in the Annunciation (and ersatz sex act) is private, is delivered only to Mary, and announces the conception of Christ, Jesus's speech-act at the Last Supper, some thirty-three years later, is more public, directed at a gathering of the apostles and a few others, and announces his own imminent death. Joyce suggests the Last Supper in a number of subtle ways.

First, having used the word 'supper' only four times in the previous fourteen stories, he uses it a total of fourteen times in this story alone, most of those concentrated in this scene. He uses the word 'dinner' only once in "The Dead" and not in connection with this occasion

19 As Irish playwright Frank McGuinness recently put it, "Joyce must have hated Molly Ivors" (Wilde-Joyce conference, Trinity College, Dublin, May 2022).

but with Mrs Malins' recollection of her son-in-law. He does use it in *A Portrait of the Artist* to refer to the Christmas dinner scene in that novel, one reason perhaps that the criticism has often erroneously referred to Gabriel's speech as a 'dinner speech' rather than a 'supper speech'. The word 'supper' makes sense not only in the realistic register, for a meal served well after 10:00 pm, but also in the religious allegorical register. Second, Joyce stages the scene in an 'upper room' just as the Last Supper was, Jesus having instructed two of his apostles to find an 'upper room' for the Passover meal (Luke 22:12 KJV). Third, he mimics the social situation of a man presiding over the supper and a small gathering of guests. Fourth, he mimics the rhetorical situation of a man speaking to such a group. Fifth and finally, he alludes to Jesus's famous speech-act "do this in memory of me" with Gabriel's inverted "kindly forget my existence", which, as I suggested above, reads like a nod to Anatole France. Of course, unlike Jesus's terse and selfless speech, in which he announces his own self-sacrifice, Gabriel who seems to be impersonating Jesus here (having twice failed at Annunciation) and impersonating him badly, gives a bloated selfish speech in which he takes his indirect jab at the absent Molly Ivors. Notably, Gabriel expresses that jab in the classical pagan rhetoric and imagery of 'The Three Graces', having thus far failed to initiate the Christian world, 'The Three Graces' perhaps substituting for the three Magi, the classical dispensation preempting the Christian revelation.

While there is much more to be said here, I will limit myself to Joyce's masterstroke of dramatic irony in which, after having Gabriel complete his speech and the crowd sing "For he's a jolly gay fellow", he isolates the double refrain "Unless he tells a lie, / Unless he tells a lie" (Joyce 2006, 179). Gabriel has lied not only by impersonating Christ and misrepresenting his aunts, but also by perpetuating the fictions of Irish cultural ideology, those ideas that masquerade as truth.[20] More than this, however, he has effectively 'lied' about having announced the conception of Christ and the redemption of the world, hence the consequent "lie of the risen Jesus", in Nietzsche's fine phrase in section forty-two of *The Antichrist*. In the Christmas dinner scene in *Portrait*, in many ways a parallel scene, Joyce expresses a parallel connection between Christmas and the disappearance of God, when he has Mr Casey punctuate the dinner table argument about politics and religion reiterating his earlier remark: "—No God for Ireland! he cried. We have had too much God in Ireland. Away with God!" (Joyce 1968, 39).

20 Vincent Pecora puts the point more extremely: "Like 'Hairy Jaysus,' Gabriel might be one of the bloodiest impostors of all, caught within the whole structure of a heroism that 'is, and always was, a damned lie"—the heroism derived from the life of Christ" (Pecora 1986, 237)

Following this inverted variation in the dead center of the story, Joyce resumes his more straightforward variations on the Annunciation theme, turning to the first of two scenes involving Gabriel and Gretta: the one in which Gabriel watches Gretta as she listens on the staircase to Bartel D'Arcy's singing of *The Lass of Aughrim*. In this variation, Joyce seems concerned with the tradition of the visual representation of the Annunciation scene, particularly in painting, and with a different aspect of the scene than he had been concerned with in the first two variations.[21] First, in another self-reflexive, meta-narrative moment in the story, Joyce or Joyce's narrator, almost too didactically, likens the scene to a painting: "If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. *Distant Music* he would call the picture if he were a painter" (Joyce 2006, 182). Indeed, Joyce himself seems to have arranged the scene like a painting, imitating the conventional compositional structure of Annunciation paintings, and here we might recall that Joyce first conceived of "The Dead" while he was living in Rome, where there was no shortage of such paintings. In having Gretta stand on the landing of the staircase, and Gabriel admire her from below, he is imitating that conventional composition structure, in which Gabriel is usually depicted entering or having entered on the left, reverently hailing a Mary waiting on the right, the two usually separated by some interior architectural feature, sometimes a column, sometimes an arch, and sometimes a balustrade.

More importantly, in having Bartel D'Arcy's disembodied voice originate outside of the scene and travel into it and into Gretta's ear, he is imitating the painter's convention of representing the inspiration of God (the Holy Spirit) travelling along a diagonal trajectory from outside the scene into it and directly into Mary's ear, in keeping with the medieval notion that God must have 'inseminated' the Virgin through the ear or, alternatively, that she conceived of Christ through the ear. Of course, in imitating this feature, Joyce is calling attention to and playing with an essential, structural cuckoldry in the scene, in which Gabriel and Joseph both might be said to have been cuckolded by God. Here in the present scene, Gabriel Conroy is cuckolded by Bartel D'Arcy (the figure of some rival archangel, as the last name 'D'Arcy' suggests), who successfully lands a speech-act that functions like a sex act, here a song, in Gretta's ear, while Gabriel, who has been displaced from the scene, can only watch from afar, silently. If Gabriel thinks to call the painterly scene "Distant

21 Joyce restages this scene in the "Penelope" episode of *Ulysses*, when he has Marion 'Molly' Bloom recall "Bartel Darcy" kissing her on the choir stairs after and she sang, not "The Lass of Aughrim", but in fact Gounod's *Ave Maria* (Joyce 1986, 614)

Music", it is perhaps in part to register the great, epochal distance of nearly two millennia.

Joyce also seems to be imitating another feature of Annunciation paintings in his treatment of Bartel D'Arcy's song, *The Lass of Aughrim*, namely the practice of depicting an 'inset' scene, usually on the left, representing the sin of Adam and Eve, as in Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* altarpiece now at the Prado, as a theological explanation of the whole Economy of Salvation. Joyce's inserting of *The Lass of Aughrim* serves a similar function. It opens up a vista onto an earlier, paradigmatic, primal scene, and perhaps "original sin", the scene of a woman carrying her "babe" in the rain to her lover and asking for recognition and refuge. That scene within the scene operates in a number of complex ways. It seems to refer to and reconfigure Adam and Eve in the garden, Mary and Joseph at the Inn, while also both refiguring and prefiguring the scene in Gretta's past that we later learn about, in which, the genders now reversed, the ailing Michael Furey comes to Gretta's door in the rain. I do not have the space here to fully discuss these complexities, but I would like to settle on the one image that Joyce seems to want us to settle on, when, just as he had earlier done with "For he's a jolly gay fellow", he isolates some lyrics. He quotes three lines from the song and ends with the phrase "my babe lies cold…", significantly cutting off the remaining words in this line, "in my arms". So Joyce leaves us with the image of a baby that is, at best, moribund, and at worst, dead. Within this variation on the Annunciation scene, which is supposed to announce the birth of Christ and herald the baby of the nativity that would redeem the world from its original sin, Joyce gives us instead in the 'inset' the opposite image of a dying or dead baby.

The last variation on the Annunciation scene is the final scene between Gabriel and Gretta at the Gresham hotel and this is in many ways a virtuoso culmination of all the others. Here Gabriel's last attempt at a speech/sex act is preempted by Gretta, whose name is an echo of the "*Ave Maria, gratia plena*", and who claims complete control (more than Lily or Molly) of the dialogue. It is not Gabriel who makes a big announcement, but Gretta who does. Again, I would like to focus on just a few major points. Of course, her announcement is that she had an earlier relationship with a prior 'lover', that somebody else got to her long before Gabriel did, and lodged himself in her romantic imagination at least, a seventeen-year-old boy (the half-life of Jesus), symbolically named 'Michael Furey'. Just as the name 'Stephen Dedalus' is a hybrid name, so is the name 'Michael Furey', each joining a Christian given name to a classical surname. In this case, 'Michael' is the name of the most powerful archangel, who led the war in heaven and drove Satan into hell, described at length in Milton's *Paradise Lost*, a point that will become important for us at the end, while the 'Furies' are classical goddesses of revenge who

reside in the underworld. In this final Annunciation, then, Gabriel is doubly done in or doubly undone, cuckolded by the hybrid figure of, not only (another) rival archangel, but also now a rival religion in what would seem to be Joyce's version of Swinburne's fantasy of the classical revenge upon the Christian world view in which the classical furies avenge Gabriel's false oath, the false oath of the Christian promise of redemption and resurrection.

Notably, Joyce describes Michael Furey's relation with Gretta in some ostensibly Christian terms. He has Gretta say both that she "was great with him", an echo of the Lucan infancy narrative where Mary is said to be "great with child" (Luke 2:5) and that she thinks "he died for [her]", Jesus having died for all men. This suggests, however, a *prior, proto*-Christian annunciation, well before the appointed one and is perhaps an indirect reference to Sir James Frazer's revelation in *The Golden Bough*, or some similar contemporaneous revelation, one of the momentous discoveries of the late-nineteenth-century historicist and anthropological investigation into religion: that many if not most of the tropes and plots found in Christianity actually *predated* Christianity and were actually borrowed or appropriated *by* Christianity (Frazer 1963, 105-21; 308-29; 389-95).

Gabriel's disillusionment, therefore, is not merely personal but also and moreover philosophical and existential, as he realizes that he is too late and that he has failed in his God-given mission to announce the birth of Christ and the redemption of the world. Indeed, if the story does lead towards an Epiphany, set as it is somewhere between January 1 and January 6, it is not the Christian Epiphany which commemorates the revelation of the Christ-child to the Magi and hence the rest of the world, but rather the radical negative Epiphany, registered by the late-nineteenth century, of the revelation of the death of the Christian God.

Of course, this leaves the allegorical Gabriel to fall away from the Christian vision, and Joyce marks this fall in two ways. First, Gabriel slides back, atavistically, into the classical dispensation on the other side of the threshold, into the world of "shades" and, indeed, the world of "the (unresurrected) dead", embracing the unmistakable classical heroic ideal: "One by one they were all becoming shades. Better pass boldly into that other world, in the full glory of some passion, than fade and wither dismally with age" (Joyce 2006, 194). And as he travels westward, as only archangels can, over Ireland, perhaps taking note of the outline of Ireland, long recognized as the outline of a fetus ("my babe lies cold"), and reaches the west coast and the graveyard, with its clear allusions to Calvary, as Ellmann observes, it is less a Christian graveyard than it is the graveyard and final rest-

ing place of Christianity itself.[22] Second, he falls just as that other archangel, Lucifer, fell, that "mutinous" archangel, away from God and Heaven, upon the "plain" below, in this post Romantic and post-Nietzschean version of a *Paradise Lost*, where the paradise lost is not Eden, however, but rather heaven, and its promise of everlasting life.[23] But it is perhaps something of a "happy fall", Joyce's inverted variation on the Christian notion of *felix culpa*, not unlike Stephen's fall from religion in *Portrait*: "He would fall. He had not yet fallen but he would fall silently, in an instant. Not to fall was too hard, too hard; and he felt the silent lapse of his soul, as it would be at some instant to come, falling, falling, but not yet fallen, still unfallen, but about to fall" (Joyce 1968, 162).

22 "[…] through Gabriel's mind runs the imagery of Calvary" (Ellmann 1982, 249). Interestingly, a 1902 illustrated copy of France's "Le Procurateur de Judée" also ends with an image of the crucifixion on Calvary (France 1902, 39) This may well be the edition that Joyce read as he was living in Paris in 1902-03.

23 France's *Revolt of the Angels*, which Joseph Collins described as "a survey of the history of religion, of the antagonism and struggle between God and Satan, of the dissatisfaction of the angels, and of their ulterior revolt", was published in 1914, the same year as *Dubliners* and of course "The Dead" (*VQR* Spring 1925).

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"Into the Exquisitely Obscure": Aestheticism and Fragmentation in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

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Abstract This paper aims at tracing a link between early literary works, namely via French Décadence, the notion of Art for Art's Sake and the trope of doubleness, concepts that intertwine both independent self-assertion and the defeat of Man by Nature as these come to be represented in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The dialogue between coeval aesthetical movements and the complexity of such an oeuvre unveils instances of undeniable influence; on the other hand, it also ascertains the uniqueness of Wilde's provocative take on beauty and life.

Keywords Wilde. Aestheticism. Beauty. Decadence. Evil.

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1 Introduction, or, Setting up the Easel: French Décadence and Aestheticism

> For sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds
> Lilies that fester smell far worse than weeds.
> (William Shakespeare, Sonnet 94, ll. 13-14)

English aestheticism has been defined as a reaction against a number of forces in industrial, nineteenth-century England: utility, rationality, scientific factuality, technical progress, middle-class conformity, capitalism, democratic levelling, athleticism, sexual mores and – last but not least – oppressive moralism (Pease 2004, 98). Wilde himself would declare that "today more than ever the artist and the love of the beautiful are needed to temper and counteract the sordid materialism of the age" (Beckson 2006, 35). The need for self-expression regardless of convention and social norms thus emerges as the most cogent feature of a movement that flourished in the second half of the nineteenth century with the publication of Baudelaire's *Les Fleurs du Mal* (1857). In the beginning, then, there was Baudelaire.[1] As was the *dandy*, that quasi-mythical figure embodying the perfectibility of the human, paving his way in society through an aesthetic of (re)invention and performance (Calloway 1997, 45). Like Dorian Gray under the influence of the magnanimous Lord Henry Wotton, the *dandy* is scarcely aware of anything outside himself. It is, in fact, what lies *within* that which proves fatal in Wilde's novel.

Advocating the rejection of any sense of morality, the Decadents wanted art to produce emotional response, and beauty to become the creed for all creative aspects of life. To Baudelaire, artificiality is art's essence (see Guys 1986), as the figure of the poet indulges in morbid sensations and post-romantic agony when confronting, through his *flânerie*, the claws of mounting modernity.[2] The artificial enclave of one's paradise is a subject for poetry, one that rails vehemently against usefulness: "Être un homme utile m'a paru toujours quelque chose de bien hideux" (Baudelaire, quoted in Carassus 1971, 77). Théophile Gautier, his contemporary, would follow the same pattern by asserting the primacy of the beautiful over

1 "À une époque où la littérature attribuait presque exclusivement la douleur de vivre aux malchances d'un amour méconnu ou aux jalousies de l'adultère, il avait négligé ces maladies infantiles et sondé ces plaies plus incurables, plus vivaces, plus profondes qui sont creusées para la satiété, la désillusion, le mépris, dans les âmes en ruine que le présent torture, que le passé répugne, que l'avenir effraye et désespère" (Huysmans [1884] 1977, 231).

2 The concept of *mundus senescit* struck a chord in world-weary Decadent avant-garde paladins across Europe. In this connection, Arthur Symons associated the movement with all the "qualities that mark the end of great periods: an intense self-consciousness, a restless curiosity in research, an over-subtilizing refinement upon refinement, a spiritual and moral perversity" (Goldfarb 1962, 371).

the useful: "Il n'y a de vraiment beau que ce qui ne peut servir à rien" (1987, 184).[3]

In his Preface to *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, Oscar Wilde shares with his French counterparts a religious approach to art form: "[a]ll art is at once surface and symbol", an end in itself, "the only excuse for making a useless thing" being "that one admires it intensely" (Wilde [1890] 1998, xxiv). The Preface to the novel itself is a manifesto reflecting not only the long shadow cast by the Decadents but also that of the leading art critic and aesthete of the day, Walter Pater. In many ways, Pater's authorial spectre haunts not only Wilde's meditations on the novel, but also the way the latter structures his narrative and character development, voicing Pater's philosophy in Lord Henry's perverse aphorisms. Following Pater's "the end of Art is not action but contemplation" (Pater [1973] 1990, 131), Lord Henry praises "the great aristocratic art of doing absolutely nothing" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 30-1) and admits to his pupil, Dorian, who at this point in the novel is no longer so naïve: "I am so glad that you have never done anything, never carved a statue, or painted a picture or produced anything outside of yourself! Life has been your Art" (217). Thus, Being opposes and defeats Doing, as Form takes precedence over Content, becoming Art's primary signifier. Wilde himself, in his essay "The Critic as Artist", would postulate that "it is Form that creates not merely the critical temperament, but also the aesthetic instinct, that unerring instinct that reveals to one all things under the conditions of beauty" (Pease 2004, 106; see also Wilde 1961, 109). Aesthetical awareness is, thus, the only ethical stance that matters.

When Wilde and W.B. Yeats met for the first time, the former confessed that Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) was his "golden book": "I never travel anywhere without it; but it is the *very flower of decadence*" (Wilde [1890] 1998, x). This mention of Pater's *Studies* as a golden book may allude to the tradition, much in vogue throughout the 1880s and 1890s, of attributing a yellow(ish) colour to works of lewd content, i.e., manuscripts expressing an interest in sexual dissidence and hedonism, and likely to exert a negative influence on the reader. The very words Wilde utters seem to corroborate the delicate nature of a corrupted – and corruptive – agent: *flower of decadence* prefigures rottenness and the inevitability of tragic ends that stem from immoral conduct.[4]

3 Curiously enough, while breaking with the past and deeply receptive to the rising Symbolist movement, these poets seem to preserve the *dictum* of John Keats in *Endymion*, Book One: "A thing of beauty is a joy forever | […] It will never pass into nothingness", vv. 1-3. As if the work of art opened its own way to immortality, trying to capture what Baudelaire calls "l'éternel dans le transitoire" (Baudelaire [1869] 1998, 170).

4 And yet, "the books that the world calls immoral are books that show the world its own shame", expostulates Lord Henry (Wilde [1890] 1998, 218).

One should remember that in Pater's novels too – *Marius the Epicurean* (1885) and *Gaston de Latour* (1888) – books play a key role in the young heroes' actions: Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* to Marius, and Ronsard's *Odes* to Gaston. In a very compelling argument for the incompatibility between the Paterian self-development plot (posited by Lord Henry early on in *The Portrait of Dorian Gray*) and the gothic degeneration plot triggered by the portrait, Nils Clausson sheds light on a veiled though consistent theme in such works: that of repressed homosexuality. While admitting that "the self-development novel does not generically require that its protagonist lead a double life" (Pater's heroes do not), "the homosexual theme on Wilde's novel does require that Dorian live a double life" (Clausson 2003, 349). Incidentally, the incompatibility of the novel's double genre mirrors the impossibility of telling "a subversive story of dissidence and transgression leading to self-development and liberation" (Clausson 2003, 363). As we know, tragedy unfolds.

In the 1890s, a famous, though short-lived, quarterly literary journal, *The Yellow Book* (1894-1897), provokingly echoed the weight of decadent fashion among writers. A certain cannibalistic quality pervaded the literary scene, with books preying on books, gradually weakening characters until they became nothing but shadows, not of what they used to be, but rather of what they might have been. Such is the case of Dorian Gray, a character that had all the potential to be the typical hero of the *Bildungsroman* genre and who instead becomes the avatar for the protagonist of Lord Henry's fictional *Künstlerroman* protagonist, embedded in Wilde's survey of the attractions and shortcomings of aestheticism. In Wilde's novel, Pater's lesson reverberates in Lord Henry's teachings that testify to Art for Art's Sake as "a new kind of art untrammeled by social rules, by quotidian concepts of good or evil or by any other concerns extraneous to the central aim of aesthetic experience or the single-minded pursuit of beauty" (Daniel 1997, 37). This represents an escape from the constraints of late Victorian society, a society that would never condone the strategies by which Dorian makes/masks and unmakes/unmasks himself; in other words, a society that would separate master from masterpiece so failing "to treat life in the spirit of art", as Pater maintained. And yet, this ideal of self-development will prove deadly to Wotton's *protégé* by deteriorating into unbridled self-indulgence.

In line with this *anxiety of influence* on the part of Wilde, the book that indeed matters for the purpose of the present analysis is J.K. Huysmans's *À Rebours*, published in 1884. To Huysmans, a French author who owed much to Baudelaire and Gautier – and mentioned by Arthur Symons in his seminal study *The Decadent Movement in*

Literature (1893)[5] – is allotted the "vigueur de créer un mythe où s'accomplit le *mal du siècle* de René" (Huysmans 1977, 24).[6] Huysmans elevated the concept of the Decadent (anti)hero in his account of a man – Duc Jean de Floressas des Esseintes – doting on metaphysical pessimism, a willing prisoner of the inner world he builds for his own (dis)comfort, in a solitary quest for an ideal that cannot (must not?) be reached, while shrouding himself in a sort of Kierkegaardian existential Angst. Considered to be the unquestionable breviary of Decadent *Zeitgeist*, fostering a rhetoric that opposes the threats of Naturalism, *À Rebours* was surely set to "fix the last fine shade, the quintessence of things; to fix it fleetingly; to be a disembodied voice, and yet the voice of a human soul" (Goldfarb 1962, 371). Its almost inexistent plot concentrates on the eccentric tastes of a reclusive bibliophile, his contempt for the bourgeois society, and the endeavours to create, at a microscopic level, his own constellation of (half) living beautiful things. Things that only he, drowned in lethargic self-consumption,[7] can admire.

Crucially, the book's title fosters the acknowledgement of a programmed ontological and epistemological meditation: *Against Nature*[8] privileges an appropriation of artificiality as the real thing, a tour through the aesthetical solipsism of a compulsive art collector (unsurprisingly obsessed with the ambiguity and unattainable lustfulness of Gustave Moreau's paintings) who takes monastical refuge from a past life of debauchery in Paris in the only terrain where he is no longer exposed to civilization's declined, and declining, values: the countryside. It is not, one gathers, a specific kind of natural setting he escapes from, but rather his own natural tendencies, informed by the urban *loci* where sinfulness and spiritual degradation thrive. By indulging in the invention of luxurious perfumes, the consumption of exquisite teas, and the collection of artificial flowers that *look* real (among other pleasures), Des Esseintes is a model for Dorian, a vehicle for the defense of man as object of art to be looked up to and gazed upon – his ultimate aim being that of replacing reality itself with its dream:

5 In fact, Arthur Symons called the movement a "new and beautiful and interesting *disease*" (quoted in Goldfarb 1962, 371; emphasis added), in a sympathetic approach to the general spleen-like attitude of its followers.

6 The reference is to François-René de Chateaubriand's *Génie du Christianisme* (1802).

7 Des Esseintes's resolution of shunning, in his self-embowerment, any contact with the outer world dramatically repeats Pascal's *dictum* of "demeurer en repos dans une chambre", taken up by Baudelaire in his text "La Solitude" (Baudelaire [1869] 1998, 80). This is in stark contrast to Dorian's approach who, rather, locks his surrogate self in a secret room and finds no peace.

8 As a watershed work in Huysmans's corpus and in French literature at the time, *À Rebours* was intended to be "a critique of literary naturalism (à la Zola) in favour of what he later called 'naturalisme spiritualiste'" (Shea 2014, 121).

> Il se procurait ainsi, en ne bougeant point, les sensations rapides, presque instantanées, d'un voyage du long cours, et ce plaisir du déplacement qui n'existe, en somme, que par le souvenir et presque jamais dans le présent.[9] (Huysmans 1977, 94)

Tellingly, Huysmans's book is also believed to be the poisonous novel that leads to Dorian's downfall. Self-development breeds self-indulgence which in turn, and ultimately, breeds evil deeds: "Dorian Gray had been poisoned by a book. There were moments when he looked on evil simply as a mode through which he could realize his conception of the beautiful" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 158). Once beauty and evil are intrinsically connected, there is no turning back: suffering the unrelentless impact of Lord Henry's opinions – the serpent in the garden (Paglia 1990, 514) – and haunted by his own inner decay evinced in the painting's external deterioration, Dorian's (un)natural step is to murder Basil Hallward, the man whose existence confronts him with a reality he is set on ignoring. The friend who, by crying out "I want the Dorian Gray I used to paint" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 109), condemns not only himself but also Dorian as a consummate instrument of evil, and ruined soul past salvation. It is difficult not to concur with Camille Paglia when she says that Basil is, in truth, punished for being under the spell of Dorian's beauty – which he is, from the start[10] – whereas Dorian is punished for being under the spell of his own portrait, his mirror-image, in a perverse and erotically charged interplay of signifier and signified (Paglia 1990, 518).

After Sibyl Vane and Alan Campbell commit suicide, it is still to the yellow book that Dorian turns to in order to justify his own corruption. In which case, one can never dismiss *À Rebours* as light influence (Shea 2014, 117), unless not filtered by Lord Henry's heavy postulations. Nevertheless, even Lord Henry will have to come to terms with the uncontrollable dissipation of his work of art, his boy turned into a man turned into a monster. Quite simply, a lily that festers.

9 "He procured, without any effort, the quick, almost immediate, sensations of a long journey, and such pleasure of displacement that does not exist, after all, except in recollection, and almost never in the present time" (Author's transl.).

10 "As long as I live, the personality of Dorian Gray will *dominate* me" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 12; emphasis added).

2 Double Trouble: into the Exquisitely Obscure

For I have sworn thee fair, and thought thee bright,
Who art as black as hell, as dark as night.
(William Shakespeare, Sonnet 147, ll. 13-14)

The trope of doubleness in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is strikingly obvious in its initial pages, when Dorian is posing for Basil while Lord Henry watches the progress of the painting, musing upon the degree of influence his unconventional idea(l)s might have on the beautiful youth. Here, before the reader, is a sort of art/love triangle where a double movement is key to the perception of what is in store for the main character: on the one hand, the subject/object of art (Dorian) influences the vehicle of art/artist (Basil) into the perfect materialization of the spirit of his youth and beauty; on the other hand, another "artist" (Lord Henry) devises the best way to (de)compose upon the subject ways of making it/him blossom, as the most dedicated gardener would (see Wilde [1890] 1998, 17, 35).

The mere act of composition is double already, gradually accomplished both through Basil's sessions with the young man and the long conversations held between the latter and the older bachelor, who sets to the self-appointed task of trying to be to Dorian Gray "what, without knowing it, the lad was to the painter who had fashioned the wonderful portrait. He would seek to dominate him" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 36). Dorian himself, in spite of "all the candour […], all youth's passionate purity" (15), yields to the power of revelation: "He was dimly conscious that entirely fresh influences were at work within him […] The few words that Basil's friend had said to him […] had touched some secret chord that had never been touched before" (18). All very promising indeed. Except that, just as Basil's first encounter with Dorian had brought him a bittersweet taste of dreadful things to come (6) so too in Dorian's eyes was "a *look of fear* […] such as people have when they are suddenly awakened" (20; emphasis added), as he contemplated, via Lord Henry's utterances, the sense of his enormous potential.

Under the latter's spell, Dorian is then unaware that, concomitantly with his growing wonder, his "darkening eyes" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 41) prevail, letting us read the novel as a process of (de)construction/fragmentation of personality, a study on the "passion for sensations" (48) that prefigures tragedy (Gillespie 1996, 68). That is, what distinguishes Dorian from Des Esseintes is that the latter sublimates his passions while the former lives them fully, "sucking out all the marrow of life", as Thoreau puts it (Thoreau [1854] 1990, 60) One can also postulate, with C. Michael Shea, that while Wilde's concern is not so much with the pathology of "decay", he takes Huysmans's aesthetics to a new level, "which could aptly be termed one of 'depravity'" (2014, 118). Dorian is, simply and rest-

lessly, "gathering his harvest while it was yet spring" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 57). To be sure, both Lord Henry and Wilde seem to share a common creed: that of envisaging a double nature in every man, as two sides of the same coin alter(nate) according to Dorian's whims. While Wilde declares, in his Preface, that "vice and virtue are to the artist materials for an art" (xxiv), Lord Henry ratifies this necessity by proving there was "something fascinating in this son of Love and Death" (36).

Doubleness, which is central in Wilde's aesthetics (see Gillespie 1996, 39), was no novel subject in literature. The self had been understood as a plural entity since August Schlegel's analysis of the spirit containing in itself a multiplicity of spirits, through Walt Whitman's poetry ("I contain multitudes!"), up to the famous and bold assertion by poet Arthur Rimbaud, in a letter addressed to Paul Demeny in 1871: "Je est un autre" – an assertion which proclaimed the full perception of man being already his own double while verbalizing that same thought; not the expectable "I am another" but rather the far more ambiguous "I *is* another", which is strikingly provocative. According to John Herdman, Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* was seminal to the development of the theme of the double as "a fictional device for articulating the experience of self-division" (Herdman 1990, 1) and to ensure that "the concept of moral evil became associated with the primitive, the savage and the untamed in the human spirit" (Herdman 1990, 11).[11] A connection can, thus, be established between the Faustian myth – reverberating in Gothic tales and German literature through Goethe – and the restless experimentation Dorian goes through, transforming his inner self into a "thing of darkness" (*The Tempest*, Act V, Scene 1, l.8), a servant of the devil. How can one not see that implication when the young man himself utters the following wish upon seeing his portrait for the first time: "If it were I who was to be always young, and the picture that was to grow old! For that – for that – I would give everything. *I would give my soul* for that" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 25-6; emphasis added)?[12]

By being granted his wish, Dorian embarks on a journey that is no less than (counter-) aesthetic experience and experiment. Even

11 "Soul and body, body and soul [...] There was animalism in the soul, and the body had its moments of spirituality" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 58). This passage is echoed in Richard Ellmann's take on Wilde's dilemma: "He turned sacred things inside out to make them secular and secular things inside out to make them sacred, he showed souls becoming carnal and lusts becoming spiritual" (quoted in Beckson 2006, 49).

12 Under this light, one cannot possibly exclude Basil's musings upon meeting Dorian as the result of an obscure desire, a perverse wish to be fulfilled: "I knew that I had come face to face with someone whose mere personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 6). For indeed, "extreme male beauty, like a siren song, lures towards destruction" (Paglia 1990, 522).

more so since it is, literally, through an artistic medium, painting, that darker forces will exert power over his vitality and beauty. It is through the portrait, his shadow-conscience, that he surrenders to self-love, the sin by which he falls from Hellenic grace (on self-love in Huysmans, see Paglia 1990, 436).

Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, published in 1886, seems to loom large in Wilde's novel too. In the tale of a respectable man and his *Doppelgänger*, Stevenson makes use of science to justify the fragmentation and gradual destruction of a man who narrates his own fate. In no more than seventy pages the author uses expressions such as: "duplicity of life", "both sides of me", "duality of man", "separate identities", "second character", "my double", "my second self" and "the horror of my other self" (Stevenson [1886] 1979, 81-2, 86-8. 95). The pattern of repeating *ad nauseam* the state he finds himself in joins forces with the evidence that Jekyll is aware of that process and makes a more violent claim for an irreversible end in which one should not control or appease the bestiality within: "[f]or man is not truly one, but truly two" (82).

Performance becomes Dorian in a spectacle in which his own unstained beauty, "unspotted from the world" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 127), is at once the "mask of his shame" (94; significantly, Wilde had written an essay entitled *The Truth of Masks – A Note on Illusion*) and the theatre whereupon his play of "eternal youth, infinite passion, pleasures subtle and secret, wild joys and wilder sins" (105) is performed. In his later progression as a self-justified sinner, after the deaths of Sibyl Vane (see Shea 2014, 131) and Alan Campbell, Dorian is both actor and spectator of his own life, in an attempt to escape suffering: "We watch ourselves, and the mere wonder of the spectacle *enthralls* us" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 101; emphasis added).

The transfusion between man and art is completed, and metamorphosis accomplished. The rub, however, lies in the fact that "there is something fatal about a portrait"; this, ironically enough, leads to the conclusion that its deadly nature stems from it having "a life of its own" (117). This perception of the other self is aligned with two previous moments, one in which Dorian first makes the gruesome discovery: "The expression looked different. One would have said that there was a touch of cruelty in the mouth" (90); the other, at the very beginning of the novel, when Lord Henry ominously anticipates Dorian's future double identity, replying to Basil's "You really must not say things like that before Dorian, Harry [...] Before *which* Dorian? The one who is pouring out tea for us, or the one in the picture?" (129; emphasis added). Ultimately, apprehension is ambivalent: it is impossible to see Dorian from a single perspective, because the character becomes fluid, depending on the angles from which it is perceived, and contains, in short, a pluralism that informs the perception of his nature (Gillespie 1996, 70).

Well after discovering the terrible truth that the portrait bears the burden of his sinful actions (Wilde [1890] 1998, 140), Dorian indulges in a sensual life, improving his skills as a refined collector of delicate items such as perfumes, music, jewellery or embroideries.[13] Again, it is a behaviour that emulates the young Parisian's from the poisonous yellow book Lord Henry gave him, *À Rebours*. Parallels can be traced, then, between the description of certain objects (or "material continuities", according to Shea 2014, 127) in both novels and the state of decay pervading the soul of both protagonists. Symbolically, much can be said of the "large *purple* satin coverlet heavily embroidered with *gold*, a splendid piece of late seventeenth-century *Venetian* work" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 118; emphasis added). The symbolism of the colours here described, or the elegance of the fabric, are of paramount importance; but so is the fact that they are associated with Venice, bringing forth the recollection of a once splendorous city, the Adriatic jewel, that had long ago fallen prey to the "sudden decay of a beauty that had once been so remarkable" (127).

In mimicking Des Esseintes's hedonism, Dorian goes even further and cannot help keenly feeling "the terrible pleasure of a double life" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 175). Des Esseintes tries to control someone else's life and recreate it anew, projecting his contempt for modern civilization on his resolve. Auguste Langlois, a poor boy he meets on the street, is introduced to the pleasures of the flesh in a brothel and given money and access to luxury goods to which he will become addicted. Hence – such is the logic behind Des Esseintes's formulation – the predisposition of the boy to become a violent, addicted criminal:

> la vérité c'est que je tâche simplement de préparer un assassin. […] En l'amenant ici, au milieu d'un luxe qu'il ne soupçonnait même pas et qui se gravera forcément dans sa mémoire; en lui offrant, tous les quinze jours, une telle aubaine, il prendra l'habitude de ces jouissances que ses moyens lui interdisent. […] En poussant les choses à l'extrême, il tuera […] – alors, mon but sera atteint, j'aurais contribué, dans la mesure de mes ressources, à créer un gredin, un ennemi de plus pour cette hideuse société qui nous rançonne.[14] (Huysmans 1977, 150-1)

13 Interestingly, when Stephen Calloway analyses Wilde's "Pen, Pencil and Poison", the life account of Regency painter, belletrist and criminal Thomas Griffiths Wainewright, he aligns it with the behavioural pattern of both Des Esseintes and Dorian Gray: "This inventory of rare, precious and pleasingly obscure delights of the connoisseur, together with its concomitant implication of a super-subtle artistic temperament to match, might almost serve as a description of any one of a number of the Aesthetes of the 1890s and of their exquisitely contrived rooms" (Calloway 1997, 38).

14 "The truth is that I am simply trying to nurture an assassin. […] By bringing him here, amidst such luxury he would never have dreamed of, forever imprinted in his

Dorian, on the other hand, becomes his own creature, eventually escaping Lord Henry's supervision. At the height of his individualism, his conscience knows that he is at the mercy of a "disturbing and *disintegrating* force", as Wilde describes it in "The Soul of Man under Socialism" (see Pease 2004, 110; emphasis added). He turns himself into a violent, addicted criminal, under the mask of a well-bred young gentleman, leading women and men into temptation, and in so doing he is following the lead of Lord Henry, putting his delightful, poisonous aphorisms into practice; "as I do everything you say" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 46; emphasis added). Dorian lures friends and strangers to their death and, emotionless, shows no regret: "[h]e knew that he had tarnished himself, filled his mind with corruption and given horror to his fancy; that he had been an *evil influence* to others, and had experienced a *terrible joy* in being so" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 219; emphasis added).

3 Conclusion, or, Laying Down the Brush

When Lord Henry tells Dorian: "You are not yourself tonight" (Wilde [1890] 1998, 182), he is declaring the failure of his own plan;[15] a failure of the dandiacal ideal of essence through contemplation, not *praxis*. The young man has not physically altered over the years but the outcome is not what his old friend had expected. Lord Henry's creation is doomed to perish through exhaustion and despair, for instead of making a career out of his own controlled self-construction, he cannot do it without incurring the ruin of others. Paradoxically, it is through Lord Henry's words that the ultimate advice can be given to the readers: when it comes to self-denial, to escape from reality is bound to have a tragic effect: "[w]e are punished by our refusals" (18). Thus Dorian, first seduced, later seducer, walks straight into the abyss of his deceitful beautified life, a life for his rotten entrails to seize.

Oscar Wilde manages to construe a character that meets what Camille Paglia defines in terms of the already mentioned Decadent

memory; by giving him, every fortnight, such good fortune, he will depend on those little pleasures that his own means forbid. […] By pushing things to an extreme, he will kill […] – then, my goal will be achieved, and I will have contributed, within the power of my resources, to create a rogue, yet another enemy to this hideous society that imprisons us" (Author's transl.).

15 Michael P. Gillespie argues that "Lord Henry no longer seems to have confidence in his own ability to cope with the vagaries within Dorian's nature, and he retreats from hearing a revelation that would call his own convictions into question" (Gillespie 1996, 66). This happens because Lord Henry is more of a talker than a doer, and the hypothetical range of his pupil's actions is, to him, aberrant and unacceptable.

erotic principle: "the transformation of person into *objet d'art*" (Paglia 1990, 512). This transformation accompanies Dorian's moral suspension and his constant shift from broad daylight Apollo (reflected already in his own name, Dorian) to night-time Dionysus[16] during his ramblings through London's fashionable high society or the *bas fond* brothels and opium rooms of the modern city. As Paglia puts it, in his madness for pleasure, Dorian represents the ultimate demonization of the Apollonian. It stands also as a reminder of how nature, magnetic and magnanimous, can surge back "into the palace of art" (Paglia 1990, 514) to reclaim what is dutifully hers, a piece of evidence that not even a counter-aesthetics designed to oppose a more unnatural (rather than unnaturalistic) society can unambiguously face. Dorian's self-destruction, in Shea's words, "brings with it a new harmony; it sets the order of nature back into its proper alignment, transforming the portrait to its original state of beauty, and leaving Dorian old, twisted, and lifeless on the garret floor" (Shea 2014, 136).

As Baudelaire wrote, "[m]ais qu'importe l'éternité de la damnation à qui a trouvé dans une seconde l'infini de la jouissance ?" ("Le Mauvais Vitrier", Baudelaire [1869] 1998, 42).

16 "Voici le soir charmant, ami du criminel; | Il vient comme un complice, à pas de loup ; le ciel | Se ferme lentement comme une grande alcôve, | Et l'homme impatient se change en bête fauve" (Baudelaire [1857] 1999, 147).

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Empowering the Virgin
Rethinking the Agency of the Feminine Characters in James Joyce's Works

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Abstract In the literary convention of 'Blessed Virgin', female purity and spirituality are most often emphasized, as represented by the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages and by the Angel in the House in the more secular nineteenth century. The patriarchal idealization of womanhood has deprived it of bodily desires and free will; the Blessed-Virgin women are praised and worshipped at the cost of individuality and sexuality. The Victorian conception of the 'Angel in the House' was the manifestation of the dominant patriarchal ideology of the nineteenth century, and was reflected in the works of a great number of male writers. As the heir apparent to the Victorian cultural heritage and the progeny of the Victorian literary forefathers, is James Joyce capable of transcending his own time? Or does Joyce actually expose the workings of ideology and desire in order to subvert such conventions, as some critics have argued? This article aims to rethink the issue of the centuries-old representation of the Blessed-Virgin and to reread James Joyce's representation of Blessed-Virgin women in his works. The central argument of this paper is to demonstrate the Blessed-Virgin women's individuality as thinking and desiring subjects, and their agency to influence the male consciousness and to challenge the patriarchal dominance, as exemplified by the feminine characters Gretta ("The Dead"), the Bird-Girl (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), and Gerty (*Ulysses*), in Joyce's works.

Keywords James Joyce. Representation of Women. Blessed-virgin Women. "The Dead". Ulysses. A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man.

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No mystery of well-woven speech,
No simplest phrase of tenderest fall,
No liken'd excellence can reach
Her, the most excellent of all,
The best half of creation's best,
Its heart to feel; its eye to see,
The crown and complex of the rest,
Its aim and its epitome.
Nay, might I utter my conceit
(Coventry Patmore, *Angel in the House*)

1 The Prelude

The literary convention of the 'Blessed Virgin' is invariably focused on female purity and spirituality, as represented by the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages and by the 'Angel in the House' in the more secular nineteenth century (Gilbert, Gubar 2000, 20). This patriarchal idealization has deprived womanhood of its bodily desires and free will; the Blessed-Virgin women are praised and worshipped at the expense of agency and sexuality. The Victorian conception of the 'Angel in the House' was a manifestation of the dominant patriarchal ideology of the nineteenth century, and is reflected in the works of a great number of male writers. Dickens's Lucie in *A Tale of Two Cities* – stunningly beautiful, faithful, and graceful – is the pure maiden in distress awaiting to be rescued by the self-sacrificing Sidney Carton. Thackeray's Amelia Sedly in *Vanity Fair*, the innocent prototype of the 'Angel in the House', stands out in stark relief against the scheming, sharp-witted Becky Sharp. Even Hardy's unconventional eponymous heroine Tess, who has the guts to rebel against tradition and to take revenge, remains a 'Pure Woman' doomed to be stifled by patriarchal law. As heir apparent to the Victorian cultural heritage and the progeny of the Victorian literary forefathers, is Joyce capable of transcending the confines of his own time? Or is Joyce able to 'subvert conventions' through the lens of feminism? (Lawrence 1990, 242).

The central argument of this essay is to demonstrate the Blessed-Virgin women's individuality as a thinking and desiring subject as well as their agency to influence male consciousness and challenge patriarchal dominance, as exemplified by the female characters Gretta ("The Dead"), the Bird-Girl (*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), and Gerty (*Ulysses*) in Joyce's works. On the other hand, I consider the Blessed-Virgin women's harmonious yet dignified relation with men, which carries the potential dynamic to change the hierarchical sexual power relations and is foreseen in Joyce's vision of women. The critical commentaries about Joyce's attitudes towards gender culture and gender conventions revolve around two opposite poles. One group of feminists, represented by Sandra Gilbert and Su-

san Gubar, thinks that Joyce's representation of female characters is mysoginistic. They contend that women in Joyce's works are confined to "body" and excluded from the production of "culture" (Gilbert, Gubar 1985, 518). They have expressed their distrust of Hélène Cixous's optimistic attitude about Molly Bloom, who carries "Ulysses off beyond any book and toward the new writing" (1976, 884). They lament that women in Joyce are "sentenced" to a purely material existence. Assuming a radical posture, Gilbert and Gubar call for the construction of a feminist poetics, following the Woolfian dictum: "we must 'kill' the 'angel in the house'" (Gilbert, Gubar 2000, 16-20).[1] Katherine Mullin points out the complicity of British imperialist and Irish nationalist propaganda, which have reduced the status of Irish women to the 'Angel in the House'. Joyce's text only reflects the 'paralysis' and the lifelessness of Blessed-Virgin women, compromised by the double bind of Irish nationalism and British patriarchy. At the opposite pole, some critics maintain that Joyce's subversion of social and literary conventions is an act of alliance with feminism. For example, Suzette Henke affirms Molly's power of resistance and finds in her monologue "a subversive feminine discourse that defies logocentric boundaries" (Henke 2000, 145). Ross C. Murffin observes that Joyce is an unorthodox male writer who "simultaneously resisted and revised those cultural types that simplistically (over)determine gender and gender difference" (143). Karen Lawrence mentioned Joyce's attempt to explain the institutionalization of cultural myths based on binary concepts. She affirms that Joyce, in his efforts to unmask binary opposition, deserves to be called the "precursor of deconstruction" (241-2).

James Joyce has long been enshrined in the modernist canon as a white male prose writer (Scott 1990, 196). The process of canon formation inevitably excluded the texts of female writers and suppressed the gender issues in the canonized texts. To debunk the myth of male creativity and female submission, I start from a rereading of the canonized male writer James Joyce to make a departure from the traditional and conservative critical stance. I adopt the alternative reading strategy to rethink the issue of femininity and agency, aiming

1 Virginia Woolf in "Professions for Women" criticizes the Victorian ideology of the 'Angel in the House', which dictates passivity, purity, and sanctity of womanhood. To become a woman writer at her times, Woolf attempts to 'kill' this ideology: "I discovered that if I were going to review books I should need to do battle with a certain phantom. And the phantom was a woman, and when I came to know her better I called her after the heroine of a famous poem, The Angel in the House. It was she who used to come between me and my paper when I was writing reviews. It was she who bothered me and wasted my time and so tormented me that at last I killed her. She was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily […] Above all, […] she was pure[…] Killing the Angel in the House was part of the occupation of a woman writer" (Woolf 1980, 1987-8).

to unearth the empowering force of the feminine characters, whose voices are buried in Joyce's works.

2 The Joycean Style: Make it New

Ezra Pound's modernist dictum to 'make it new' can be applied not only to experimental narrative techniques, but also to the progressive treatment of thematic conception (Scott 1984, 16-7). In addition to briefly investigating Joyce's feminine mannerism in his writings, starting from *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, I make a close analysis of the Blessed-Virgin and feminine characters bound within the textual house of Joyce's writings. In so doing, I attempt to tease out the Poundian new elements in Joyce's works in terms of the feminine writing style and thematic reevaluation.

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf posits the possibility of "a common sentence ready for [a woman's use]" to be distinguished from the "man's sentence" employed by male writers (2015, 56). Succeeding Woolf's pioneering work to search for a 'feminine' writing style suited for the female writers, later-day French feminists such as Hélène Cixous propose the concept of '*écriture féminine*'. This kind of "utopian linguistic structure" calls our attention not only to the "grammatical" dimension of women's language use, but also the condition of "woman's legal sentence" (Gilbert, Gubar 1988 230,231).

Joyce's stylistic transformation from the realism of *The Dubliners* (1914) to the stream-of-consciousness of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) and finally to the highly experimental style of *Ulysses* (1922) represents his linguistic bisexuality. It shows his attempt to progress from the masculinist realism to the feminine stream-of-consciousness, and his hankering to delve into the consciousness of his female characters. The linguistic and stylistic revolution "promises not just female *jouissance* but feminist *puissance*" (Gilbert, Gubar 1988, 271). If "a man's sentence" is designed "swift but not slovenly, expressive but not precious", then "a woman's sentence" is written with "terseness" and with "short-windedness" (Woolf 1929, 1968). In order to "[write] like a woman", she first "[breaks] the sentence" afterwards "she has broken the sequence" (1974, 1969). In other words, she ventures to break "the expected order" (1974). Woolf contends that for a great writer, the "great mind is androgynous", just as the great sentence combines the traits of both sexes, so that it must be "woman-manly or man-womanly" in its style and formation (1981). Based on Woolf's iconoclastic attitude toward the writing style of a woman writer, or a great writer, we might judge Joyce's stream-of-consciousness technique in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and his broken and irregular sentences in *Ulysses* as the integral creation of an 'androgynous' mind.

Although Cixous proposes that "a feminine practice of writing" is something like "an impossibility that will remain", she maintains that it "doesn't mean that it [the *écriture féminine*] doesn't exist" (Cixous 1976, 883). She further defines that the *écriture féminine* is a form of writing that is "bisexual, hence neuter, which again does away with differentiation" (883). Joyce is an example of such a "bisexual" writer, *not* in the sense that he practices bisexuality, but because he is "capable of loving love and hence capable of loving others and of wanting them, of imagining the woman who would hold out against oppression and constitute herself as a superb, equal, hence 'impossible' subject" (879). Thus we see in Joyce's works feminine characters whom the male writer loves, and whose "appearance would necessarily bring on, if not revolution […] at least harrowing explosions" (879). In creating such feminine characters, Joyce endows them with, and explores in them, the "bodily desires" that "[have] been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger" (880). In other words, Joyce rescues those feminine characters from the imprisonment of centuries-old institutions and releases them to enjoy their body. "Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area of their bodies" (885).

Affirmed as the "indispensable countersign" to the male-centered world of Dublin, Molly Bloom in *Ulysses* is mostly given the credit for representing the Joycean style of the "*écriture féminine*" (Scott 1984, 4; Joyce 1975, 60). Molly's interior monologue is highly experimental and sexually candid, indicating an intelligent and awakened female consciousness. Bonnie Kime Scott identified in her the traits of several female figures, such as Penelope, Calypso and Nausicaä from Homer; the Blessed Virgin Mary; and *Gea Tellus*, the earth mother (Scott 1984, 156). The numerous and protean nature of Molly signifies the birth of a complex and lifelike female character in Joyce's masterpiece, a departure from the one-dimensional whorish or saintly woman in the works of other nineteenth-century male writers. Richard Ellmann observes that Joyce's final line has transformed Goethe's "I am the spirit that always denies" into "I am the flesh that always affirms" (quoted in Scott 1984, 158; see Joyce 1975, 285). The female is equated to the desiring spouse and the approving mother, as opposed to the intellectual father and the negative husband.

Joseph Valente appropriates the Deleuzian concept of "becoming woman" to describe Molly's most impossibly long monologue, which is "the last great stylistic disfiguration of the novel" (quoted in Maud Ellmann 2014, 98; Valente 1995, 191). The meaning of this ungraspable and ever-changing "becoming woman" is connotative rather than denotative, which breaks down the boundary between the masculine and the feminine, and further erupts into "a thousand tiny sexes"

(quoted in Maud Ellmann 2014, 98; Deleuze, Guattari 2004, 303-7). Moreover, Molly even consciously attempts to reach a "becoming-man": "God I wouldn't mind being a man and get up on a lovely woman" (Joyce 2008, 720).

In similar fashion, Michael Jaeggle argues that Joyce employs the literary device of parody to debunk the essentialist myth that "Jewish and gentile women are bereft of a soul and intelligible self" (Jaeggle 2022, 273). Joyce's Molly is a Jewish woman full of potentialities and contradictions, far away from the nineteenth-century stereotypical conception on the subordinate and submissive Jewish type. Grounded on the technique of parody, *Ulysses* was written to counter against the naturalizing and essentializing discourse on race, sex and gender. Molly serves as the capital symbol of the complexity, ambiguity and autonomy of woman.

Although Molly is mostly used as the example of Joyce's engagement with and representation of femininity, in this article I turn to Gretta, the Bird-Girl, and Gerty as Molly's likeminded feminine sisters capable of thinking and desiring agency, very much like Molly herself.

Although Joyce was arguably influenced by several "intellectual women" as suggested by some critics, his great emotional attachment to his wife Nora Barnacle cannot be overlooked (Scott 1990, 196-7). Nora was not an intellectual supporter of Joyce's writing career; nevertheless, her lower-class background and homely nature bears resemblance to the unharmful image of the Blessed-Virgin characters in Joyce's works. In a letter written to Nora in 1904, Joyce complained about the bond and shackles of traditional Catholic religion and family structure, calling himself a "vagabond" (Joyce 1975, 207). In that letter Joyce seeks the support and understanding of Nora, and seems to look for Nora's recognition and to be solacedby her tender attachment. "Believe me, my dear Nora, I honour you very much but I want more than your caresses. You have left me again in an anguish for doubt" (208). Like the male characters – Gabriel Conroy, Stephen Dedalus, and Leopold Bloom – in his own writings, he is (un)consciously attached to and influenced by the unaffectionate and innocent Nora.

In addition to Nora, Joyce also got his inspiration for modelling the feminine figure of Gerty McDowell from another prominent woman in his life, Marthe Fleischmann (Richard Ellmann 449). In Marthe, the images of Gerty and the Bird-Girl are conflated, which demonstrate how Joyce delighted in and was inspired by their clandestine relationship outside his marital bond with Nora. Joyce kept up a correspondence with Marthe and their association meant a lot to Joyce from December 1918 to March 1919 (450). With lambent wit, Joyce once sent her a postcard "with greetings to Nausicaa from Odysseus" (452). Like the encounter between Bloom and Gerty, Joyce and Marthe's relationship remained consummated on a spiritual and a literary level.

3 Gretta: the Passion and Energy of the Mothering Virgin

In "The Dead" the protagonist's wife, Gretta Conroy, is portrayed in the image of the Blessed Virgin, despite the fact that she is a wife and a mother. In Joyce's vocabulary, "virginity" is defined by physical as well as spiritual purity (Eggers 1988, 25). From Joyce's perspective, "the soul like the body may have a virginity" (25). In addition, according to Catholic theology, the dominant religious practice in Ireland, the advocate of the Blessed Virgin is the Holy Mother. The image of Gretta standing on the stairs, listening to music, and captured by Gabriel in the "Distant Music", is like a vivid portrait of the Virgin Mary:

> There was grace and mystery in her attitude as if she were a symbol of something. He asked himself what is a woman standing on the stairs in the shadow, listening to distant music, a symbol of. If he were a painter he would paint her in that attitude. Her blue felt hat would show off the bronze of her hair against the darkness and the dark panels of her skirt would show off the light ones. Distant Music he would call the picture if he were a painter. (Joyce 2000, 180-1)

The static eternity and serene beauty of Gretta's image make her the embodiment of the Virgin Mary.

Set in the image of the Virgin Mary, Gretta is portrayed as an independent and capable woman in contrast to the helpless and fragile stereotype of the "Angel in the House". In Gretta's vivacious greeting and warm chatting with the Misses Morkans, she shows both her adept social skills and her genuine concern for her husband's people; therefore, she occupies a lofty and elevated status in his eyes. In Gretta's teasing of Gabriel for his taste for Continental exports – the galoshes – she is conducting a verbal fencing match, which displays her brilliant wit and strong vitality. In Gabriel's memory, she is still "country cute", as once objected by his mother, who "had nursed her during all her last long illness in their house at Monkstown" (Joyce 2000, 160). The lower-born Gretta shows her strong and comforting power as the moral supporter of the familial well-being, as the capable and caring (virginal) mother figure. Also, it is this "country [cutie]" from Galway who truly "hears", or "appreciates" the music of Mr. D'Arcy and the native culture of the Mother Earth of Ireland (Chambers 1988, 111). As the capable mother figure of the Conroys as well as the spiritual supporter of the family, Gretta achieves this without sacrificing her subjectivity and her selfhoodas happened to traditional, submissive houswives.

Gretta's individuality is illustrated and consolidated through her reminiscences of Michael Furey. Her lifelike memories of her girl-

hood demonstrate her status as an independent woman with an individual history. Gretta's personal history makes her a complete and mature woman. In Gretta's wistful reminiscence of her old love story, she reveals herself as a woman with desire and passion. Gretta's story with Michael Furey retrieves her past, fulfills her present, and enlightens her future.

Not only does Gretta prove herself a strong and independent woman, she also asserts agency against patriarchal ideology in her capability to influence Gabriel, and consequently change the hierarchical power relations. In Vincent Cheng's employment of a postcolonial approach to address the gender issues in "The Dead", he adopts an alternative reading strategy to tackle the "conjoined dynamics of empire and sexual colonization" in the text (Cheng 1995, 134). According to Cheng, the protagonist Gabriel Conroy is a "well-meaning patriarch" who embodies the combination of "a potentially oppressive patriarch" and "the ruling masters of the English colonial empire" (135). Therefore, in Gabriel's interaction with the female characters in the text, especially with his wife Gretta and the servant girl Lily, he displays a patronizing or even condescending attitude, treating women as infantile creatures just as the British Empire treats the colonies as "incorrigible children" (135).

In the picturesque "Distant Music" scene, Gabriel gazes up at his wife and imagines her as "a symbol of something", an attitude that reveals how he treats, "sees", "appreciates" his wife as an aesthetic object, an "objet d'art" to be possessed rather than a subjective individual to be respected. When aroused and influenced by Gretta in their walk back home, Gabriel in his fantasy of "courtly love" wants to be a knight in defense of a maiden in distress: "She seemed to him so frail that he longed to defend her against something and then to be alone with her" (Joyce 2000, 183). As a gallant knight, Gabriel hankers to hold Gretta as his possession and his love trophy: "He had felt proud and happy then, happy that *she was his*, proud of her grace and wifely carriage" (185; emphasis added). In Gabriel's bewilderment at his wife's emotional combustion, he wants to be the master of Gretta's emotion; he wants to take the upper hand in their relationship. Also, as a master figure with both patriarchal and colonial authority, Gabriel inevitably embraces the Continental values of modernity and progress, such as wearing "galoshes" or having tours to "France and Belgium or perhaps Germany".

Confronted with Gabriel's imposing stature as a "well-meaning patriarch", Gretta is nevertheless able to transform the power relation, and destabilize patriarchal authority. In a word, she is able to assert her agency. At the beginning of the story, when speaking of the galoshes that Gabriel forced her to wear, she teases him while making her resistance: "Galoshes!...That's the latest. Whenever it's wet underfoot I must put on my galoshes. Tonight even he wanted me to put

them on, but I wouldn't. The next thing he'll buy me will be a diving suit" (Joyce 2000, 154). Though mere banter, it makes "Gabriel [laugh] nervously" (155). When Gabriel is taunted and challenged by Miss Ivors's iron nationalist stance, Gretta reassures him in a *motherly* way while aligning herself with "her people" of the west of Ireland. The most dramatic clash comes from Gretta's memory of her old love with Michael Furey, which challenges the self-centeredness of Gabriel's patriarchal authority. Gabriel's insecurity over Gretta's independence and his jealousy of her personal history shows that his patriarchal dominance is destabilized. Gretta's heart and emotion were occupied by another man; her desire is directed toward another man. Gretta says retrospectively: "I am thinking about a person long ago who used to sing that song". This confession makes "the smile [pass] away from Gabriel's face" and "a dull anger began to gather again at the back of his mind" (188). Indeed, Gabriel is belittled and overshadowed by Gretta's forgiving love and undying memories, and he feels ashamed of himself in the face of the selfless and pure love between Gretta and Michael Furey:

> —What was he? asked Gabriel, still ironically.
> —He was in the gasworks, she said.
> Gabriel felt *humiliated* by the failure of his irony and by the evocation of this figure from the dead, a boy in the gasworks. While he had been full of memories of their secret life together, full of tenderness and joy and desire, she had been comparing him in her mind with another. A *shameful* consciousness of his own person assailed him. He saw himself as a *ludicrous* figure, acting as pennyboy for his aunts, a *nervous* well-meaning sentimentalist, orating to vulgarians and idealizing his own *clownish* lusts, the *pitiable fatuous* fellow he had caught a glimpse of in the mirror. Instinctively he turned his back more to the light lest she might see the *shame* that burn upon his forehead. (189; emphases added)

Gabriel is "humiliated", "tamed", even "silenced" by Gretta's nobler thoughts and feelings. She is generous, forgiving, compassionate, and caring; while he is jealous, mean, and self-centered: "He tried to keep up his tone of cold interrogation but his voice when he spoke was humble and indifferent" (189). Gretta's kind reply, "I think he died for me", has produced a "vague terror" in Gabriel "as if, at the hour when he had hoped to triumph, some impalpable and vindictive being was coming against him, gathering forces against him in its vague world" (190). Gabriel feels he is defeated by Gretta's past, by her old memory, by her private world, even by her preference of the "ghost" of Michael.

At the end of the story, the amiable and peaceful attitude towards Michael and Gabriel displayed by Gretta is impressive and moving.

The forgiving and magnanimous nature of Gretta has deeply impacted Gabriel's mentality and engendered the epiphany of the snow scene in Gabriel's vision. Cheng thinks that Gabriel's final epiphany represents "an act of emotional expansiveness, self-understanding, and generosity" (1995, 146). In Gabriel's epiphany, the "snow was general all over Ireland" (Joyce 2000, 192), which indicates a universal embracing of all differences and a breaking-down of the hierarchy between high and low. "Gabriel's final vision of the falling snow […] attempts to break down the barriers of difference constructed by the patriarchal ego he is so deeply implicated in, into at least a recognition of generosity and sameness" (Cheng 1995, 146-7). At last, the hierarchy of sexual power relations is loosening and crumbling down, ending up in a transcendence of zones, of differences, and a boundary-crossing of subject and object, male and female. Thanks to Gretta's influence and agency, Gabriel has become more generous, more receptive to the influence of the dead, the past, and lower-class people. Finally, the patriarchal egoist is changed and influenced by the passion and energy of his Blessed-Virgin wife.

4 The Bird-Girl: the Aesthetic Muse as an Influential Patroness

The wading Bird-Girl whom Stephen encounters in the stream is described in an ethereal, unearthly, and impressionistic manner. Many of her characteristics are associated with the Blessed Virgin. Her "slateblue skirts" is the first symbol of her virginity, for "blue" is the color of the Blessed Virgin Mary (Gifford 1982, 222). And she is set in the image of an "angel of mortal youth and beauty" (Joyce 1916, 172), which is reminiscent of Dante's description of the "ideal spiritual beauty of Beatrice" (Gifford 1982, 222). In Stephen's romantic vision, the Bird-Girl is transmuted into the Pre-Raphaelite rose, which is also an echo of the "multifoliate rose of light" befalling on Dante in the final cantos of *Paradiso* (222). The metaphorical rose represents both the Bird-Girl's physical beauty and her spiritual fragrance, which could be found in the mysterious grace of the Virgin Mary:

> A world, a glimmer, or a flower? Glimmering and trembling, trembling and unfolding, a breaking light, an opening flower, it spread in endless succession to itself, breaking in full crimson and unfolding and fading to pales rose, leaf by leaf and wave of light by wave of light, flooding all the heavens with its soft flushes, every flush deeper than other. (Joyce 1916, 172)

In Stephen's epiphany, the Bird-Girl becomes an aesthetic muse, who is an inspiration of his artistic vocation. In Suzette Henke's words,

"Stephen's artistic vision seems to be confirmed by an encounter with a woman who evokes a luminous vision of earthly beauty" (Henke 1988, 67). Thereafter, Stephen has determined to commit himself to the pagan priesthood of Father Daedalus, "a symbol of the artist figure" who forged his art into "a new soaring impalpable imperishable being" (Joyce 1916, 169). For the sake of artistic freedom and creative divineness, he has renounced the "grave and ordered and passionless life" of the Jesuit community (160). This milestone decision is inspired as well as heralded by the Bird-Girl, whom Stephen glorifies as an angelic messenger, "an envoy from the fair courts of life" (172). If the field of art is like the heaven of genesis, it is the Bird-Girl who becomes Stephens' "Beatrice" in the realm of the artistic empyrean to "[usher] him into the circle of heavenly experience" (Henke 1988, 69).

Not only does the Bird-Girl serve as the aesthetic muse of the sensitive Stephen, but she also assumes the role of an influential patroness to protect the young Stephen from carnal temptation and the trivialities of mundane life. The delineation of the Bird-Girl is interspersed with avian language and bird images, which are the symbol of spiritual as well as intellectual freedom, of wild soaring creativity, and of flight from the bond and stranglehold of the diurnal life:

> A girl stood before him in midstream, alone and still, gazing out to sea. She seemed like one whom magic has changed into the likeness of a strange and beautiful *seabird*. Her long slender bare legs were delicate as a *crane*'s and pure save where an emerald trail of seaweed had fashioned itself as a sign upon the flesh. Her thighs, fuller and soft-hued as ivory, were bared almost to the hips where the white fringes of her drawers were like *featherings* of soft white down. Her slateblue skirts were kilted boldly about her waist and *dovetailed* behind her. Her bosom was a *bird*'s soft and slight, slight and soft as the breast of some *dark-plumaged* dove. But her long fair hair was girlish: and girlish, and touched with the wonder of mortal beauty, her face. (Joyce 1916, 171; emphases added)

Joyce's delineation of the bodily beauty and delicateness of the Bird-Girl befits the dictate of Cixous to embrace women's bodies: "We've been turned away from our bodies, shamefully taught to ignore them, to strike them with that stupid sexual modesty; we've been made victims of the old fool's game" (Cixous 1976, 885). Rather than timorously shunning away from her own naked body and the worshipping gaze of Stephen, the Bird-Girl boldly displays her own body and accepts the male gaze without any coyness. With the image of flight and freedom, the Bird-Girl is able to inspire the young Stephen in the art of "flying" and "exile" in his final quest for aesthetic freedom. As Cixous puts it, "[f]lying is woman's gesture – flying in language and making it fly. We have all leaned the art of flying and its

numerous techniques" (887). The young Stephen is reborn and reanimated by his Muse, so that he could wield the force of "silence, exile, and cunning" to fly away from the stranglehold of religion and Ireland (Joyce 1916, 247).

She serves as the embodiment of serene beauty, quiet and peaceful intercourse, at least artistic and spiritual if not physical. With her tender and unabashed acceptance of Stephen's gaze and her innocent gait, she has transcended both carnal desire and sexual frigidity. In the face of Bird-Girl's transcendent beauty and transparent air, Stephen cries "in an outburst of profane joy" (Joyce 1916, 171). In the next scene, Stephen is imbued with vital life and ecstatic energy. He relives, renewed and reborn by the fairylike conjuring of the Bird-Girl:

> His cheeks were aflame; his body was aglow, his limbs were trembling. On and on and on and on he strode, far out over the sands, singing wildly to the sea, crying to greet the advent of the life that had cried to him […] Her image had passed into his soul for ever and no word had broken the holy silence of his ecstasy. Her eyes had called him and his soul had leaped at the call. To live, to err, to fall, to triumph, to recreate life out of life! (172)

At the end of his encounter with the Bird-Girl, Stephen's soul is regenerated and recreated; he is a newborn blessed with the Bird-Girl's spiritual beatitude (172). A new heaven and a new earth are created for Stephen by the Aesthetic Muse, who has opened the gate of a brand-new journey of life before him. In his plunge into the light sleep at the end of the episode, Stephen has undergone a spiritual journey as well as a dream vision, which is the indication of his spiritual rebirth and his spiritual reawakening: "Evening had fallen when he woke and the sand and arid grasses of his bed glowed no longer. He rose slowly and, recalling the rapture of his sleep, sighed at its joy" (173). Like the knight enamored with the femme fatale in Keats's poem "La Belle Dame Sans Merci", Stephen is totally won and totally conquered by the Bird-Girl. In contrast to Henke's argument that the Bird-Girl is objectified by the misogynist Stephen, who "must distance and 'depersonalize' the tempting figure by making her into a species of aesthetic prey", Eric Bulson argues for the positive and dynamic force invested in the figure of the Bird-Girl (Henke 1988, 68; Bulson 2008). The Blessed-Virgin figure is different from those stereotypes of virtuous or degenerate women, for the Bird-Girl is a composite of the sensual and the spiritual, the mortal and the eternal, and the human and the divine. The Bird-Girl becomes a "life-giving force" for the young Stephen once lost and bewildered by mundane life (57). With Stephen's perspective about women and about life changed, I suggest the transformation of the binary structure of

Stephen's worldview is thereby made possible. The spirit/body, male/female divide once held firm by Stephen "the misogynist" is beginning to collapse.

The Bird-Girl also contributes to the crystallization of Stephen's aesthetic theory. If the religious fervor of the Jesuit brothers and the carnal love of the prostitute are subsumed under the "kinetic emotion", defined as "arts [...] pornographical or didactic [...] therefore improper arts", the serenity and quietness of the Bird-Girl's aura can be seen as the origin of Stephen's theory of aesthetic stasis, which is "an ideal pity or an ideal terror, a stasis called forth, prolonged and at last dissolved by what [he] call[s] the rhythm of beauty" (Joyce 1916, 205-6). In addition, in his appropriation of Aquinas's aesthetic theory, "*ad pulchritudinem tria requiruntur, integritas, consonantia, claritas*", Stephen translated it into "Three things are needed for beauty, wholeness, harmony, and radiance" (212; emphases original). The scene of his encounter with the Bird-Girl is a vivid portrait of the quintessence of beauty: wholeness, harmony, and radiance. While Stephen calls his aesthetic theory "applied Aquinas", I argue that his Aesthetic Muse deserves the credit for the theory's fountainhead.

5 Gerty: the Quiet Dignity of the Disabled Maiden

In the "Nausicaa" chapter of *Ulysses*, the heroine Gerty is set in the image of "Angel in the House". The tone of the chapter and many of Gerty's characteristics are associated with the Virgin Mary. The symbol of the episode is the Virgin and one of its dominant colors is blue; the setting is Abbey Howth, a church "dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, and hence styled St. Mary's" (quoted in Gilbert 1958, 287).[2] The whiteness symbolic of Gerty's spiritual purity and her immaculate virginity is emphasized in the representation of her figure, which is "slight" and "graceful" and shining with "ivorylike purity" (Joyce 2008, 333). Fritz Senn maintains that Gerty's proximity to the Virgin Mary is reflected in the background of the whole narrative, which is blended with the Litany of the Blessed Virgin and recited in the nearby Star of the Sea church (293-5). The healing power of Gerty is an echo of the Virgin Mary's cure of illness, which is spiritual as well as physical: "Refuge of sinners. Comfortress of the afflicted" (Joyce 2008, 342).

In Tony Jackson's and Vicki Mahaffey's readings of "Nausicaa," Gerty, who is viewed as a product of patriarchal discourse, is deprived of her subjectivity and independence. According to Jackson, "Nausicaa" is the "female counterpart of 'Cyclops,'" in which "the

2 See *Guide to Ireland* (Black 1906).

discourses of femininity inscribe and are inscribed by a narcissistic self-mythology of dependence" (Jackson 1991, 73). Frozen in the image of the Virgin Mary, which is dictated and defined by the Church Fathers, Gerty is entrapped in the imaginary misrecognition of the male gaze: "The image of Mary […] is a showing of feminine subjectivity by the Gaze as 'looked' by the patriarchal Church" (76). Therefore, Gerty is reduced to an object to be contemplated by the male gaze: "In the realm of religion the male Gaze shows woman as selfless and bodiless, gendered but sexless" (76). Moreover, Mahaffey argues that the popular discourse also contributes to the objectification of women in general and Gerty in particular, who tends to see herself in the image of "a desirable commodity on the marriage market" (1998, 159). Mahaffey points out the dictates of patriarchal culture for women: one is "an erasure or concealment of the body and of sexual power", while the other is being "an inspirational icon [as] the prize in a patriarchal contest" (158). In light of Jackson's and Mahaffey's claims, Gerty is dispossessed of her subjectivity and reduced to a commodity on the marriage market, and an object of male desire; in fact, Bloom, by masturbating at the sight of the girl, exploits her. In short, based on the cynical reading of "Nausicaa", Bloom has compensated his traumatic loss by the substitute pleasure with Gerty.

By contrast, I want to spotlight Gerty's strength as well as her resilience despite the fact of her lameness and her physical impairment. While Mahaffey contends that Gerty is "defenseless" in the face of "natural desire" (1990, 162), Karen Lawrence affirms the "possibility of female desire" opened up by Joyce in "Nausicaa" (252). In fact, Gerty is able to love and to desire. She is true to herself and true to her nature in her hankerings to meet her true love in the image of a man with firm will and strong build:

> No prince charming is her beau ideal to lay a rare and wondrous love at her feet but rather a manly man with a strong quiet face who had not found his ideal, perhaps his hair slightly flecked with grey, and who would understand, take her in his sheltering arms, strain her to him in all the strength of his deep passionate nature and comfort her with a long long kiss. It would be like heaven. For such a one she *yearns* this balmy summer eve. *With all the heart of her she longs to be his only*, his affianced bride for riches for poor, in sickness in health, till death us two part, from this to this day forward. (Joyce 2008, 336; emphases added)

Gerty daydreams is to become a desiring subject instead of a desired object. In her awareness of Bloom's desiring gaze and her acquiescence, or acceptance, of Bloom in the name of Love, we can see the genuine and unaffected nature of Gerty, who is true to herself and true to her heart. She is *not* a self-righteous prude putting on airs:

"She would follow her dream of love, the dictates of her heart had told her he was her all in all, the only man in all the world for her for *love was the master guide*. Nothing else mattered. Come what might *she would be wild, untrammeled, free*" (348; emphases added).

Brian Cosgrove contends that, in *Ulysses*, Joyce employs a technique of irony and parody, exposing the "Nausicaa" section under "Joyce's possible misogyny" and "cruelly ironic perspective" (Cosgrove 2007, 104). Cosgrove points out the ironic treatment of Gerty by portraying her as a pure virgin who indulges in "sexual fantasy" (119). Bearing in mind (Joyce's) ironic and misogynistic perspective, this male critic deems Gerty as "dishonest and hypocritical" (121). However, after a turn and twist to Gerty's "lameness", Cosgrove admits that Gerty has some sort of dignity and autonomy. Trapped in such a critical double-bind, Cosgrove attempts to reconcile the contradiction by resorting to the "dual perspective" and "textual indeterminancy" of the work as a whole (129; 131). I suggest this "post-structuralist" reading strategy is a questionable critical perspective, leading the reader to wonder which position to take and which line of thought to follow.

By contrast, in a similar vein to my central argument, Dominika Bednarska undertakes a disability reading of the "Nausicaa" section that empowers Gerty McDowell. Bednarska argues for Gerty's power to transform "disability" into "ability", and her formation of an "alternative erotic sensibility" to experience pleasure and construct her subjectivity (Bednarska 2011,73). Bednarska's observation corroborates my line of thought when I argue for Gerty's particular "agency" to love and to desire, despite her physical impairment. Suzette Henke argues that Joyce's treatment of Gerty McDowell is grounded on the form of parody, that Joyce is satirizing her role as a "seductive nymph" on the one hand, and lamenting her status as an "athetic victim of social and religious enculturation" (Henke 1982, 15). Although Henke magnifies the pathos of Gerty's disabled situation, she "[admires] the bravado of her self-assertion in the competitive sexual market of 1904" (134). Notwithstanding her being conditioned by the "feminine passivity", as suggested by Henke, I argue that Gerty's femininity and disability are transformed into a redeeming power to soothe and uplift Leopold Bloom, since both of them have experienced a remorselessly pleasurable encounter. Henke also admits that Gerty "proves that she can arouse, titillate, and satisfy masculine desire, and the incident constitutes an erotic victory" (147).

Stuart Gilbert also affirms that Gerty can write her own love story and her own history; Gerty is a writing as well as a desiring subject (1958, 290). Richard Ellmann also mentions Gerty's taste for poetry and affirms her status as a thinking subject, the authoress of the first half of the episode. The thinking Gerty inspires Joyce "to entrust half of one episode to his Nausicaa's authorship" (Ellmann

2014, 105).[3] Gerty's desire for love makes her immersed in the world of fashion magazines and sentimental pages, on which Mahaffey comments in a somewhat cynical and pessimistic way: "The attitude that *Ulysses* takes toward female beauty is exuberantly unconventional. Joyce depicts beauty as sleight-of-hand, a trick of costume, an accident of lighting, a by-product of style, designed to make women feel less ordinary and to provoke sexual desire in men" (163). By contrast, I would argue that Gerty's agency and individuality are consolidated by her self-empowerment through the process of making herself physically attractive and lovable.[4] In defense of Gerty's self-empowerment through fashion discourses, Fritz Senn also contends that Gerty "presents herself to her best advantage for one short span, at the proper distance, with just the right degree of illumination to increase her glamour (which is what the advice she gets from the fashion page amounts to)" (Senn 1977, 281). In terms of Gerty's self-empowerment, I would suggest that Gerty's subjectivity is consolidated and fashioned by the bourgeois discourses of fashion (Madame Vera Verity of the "Woman Beautiful page of the Princess novelette") and by the sentimental romance (*The Lamplighter*). Gerty's wonderland of fashion and romance actually reflects the subject-formation of the "self-fashioning" bourgeois women. Mahaffey's negative commentaries on women's cult of beauty for its "implied misogyny" and its effects of distortion is unsympathetic and unsympathetic towards Gerty's physical disability (163). Gerty's resilience and strength should be respected given her physical impairment, not examined and fault picked.

Furthermore, Gerty is invested with dynamic force to change the status quo of the gender power relations. Gerty is the spiritual refuge for Bloom and has the capability to influence male consciousness. Gerty's world is one of forgiving, understanding, and unpossessive love, which she "fantasized" as the keynote of her relationship with Bloom. The healing power of Gerty as a Blessed-Virgin figure is undeniable:

> It was he who mattered and there was joy on her face because she wanted him because she felt instinctively that he was like no-one

3 Richard Ellmann suggests that Joyce's use of the narrative technique through Gerty's consciousness is designed to parody Samuel Butler's book, *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, which contends that it is Nausicaa, instead of Homer, who wrote the book *The Odyssey*. Ellmann is not explicitly in favour of this line of argument, but nonetheless maintains the validity of Gerty's voice and her authorship.

4 Richard Ellmann also points out Gerty's self-empowerment and self-buoyancy. Nevertheless, Ellmann suggests that Gerty's momentum is based on her unfledged "youth" instead of her self-awareness: "Gerty sees things as they might be, she is full of dreams, she is convinced of her own uniqueness [,…] and she regards Bloom, immediate object of her affections, as also unique, different from all other men. A sense of herself as paramount in the universe is inextricably connected with her youth". (Ellmann 2009, 106)

> else. The very heart of the girlwoman went out to him, her dream-husband, because she knew on the instant it was him. If he had suffered, more sinned against than sinning, or even, even, if he had been himself a sinner, a wicked man, she cared not. Even if he was a protestant or methodist she could convert him easily if he truly loved her. There were wounds that wanted healing with heartbalm […] and she just yearned to know all, to forgive all if she could make him fall in love with her, make him forget the memory of the past. (Joyce 2008, 342)

By virtue of Gerty's innocent and understanding I/eyes, Bloom is redeemed and elevated:

> Leopold Bloom […] stands silent, with bowed head before those young guileless eyes […] A fair unsullied soul had called to him and, wretch that he was, how had he answered? An utter cad he had been. He of all men! But there was an infinite store of mercy in those eyes, for him too a word of pardon even though he had erred and sinned and wandered. (350)

Senn observes that during the possible communion between Gerty and Bloom, Bloom takes advantage of the "escape mechanism" (280). Bloom has embarked on a "tour of love", which is partly motivated by the unhappiness of domestic life (281). In a masterstroke, Senn interprets Bloom's abortive message "I…A.M. A" on the strand sand as a gesture of love confession, for which contains "the Latin root *ama*-love" (281). Actually, Bloom's encounter with Gerty is veiled by a love that he defines as "the opposite of hatred" (281). Their encounter is a healing and empowering episode: "Their soul met in a last lingering glance and the eyes that reached her heart, full of a strange shining, hung enraptured on her sweet flowerlike face. She half smiled at him wanly, a sweet forgiving smile, a smile that verged on tears, and then they parted" (Joyce 2008, 351). This is the communion of soulmates, if not the physical consummation of true lovers.[5] At the end of the episode, Bloom is grateful for the invigorating and empowering encounter with Gerty: "We'll never meet again. Goodbye dear. Thanks. Made me feel so young" (364). This last farewell once again shows the healing and soothing power of the Blessed-Virgin Gerty. The last ninefold "cuckoos", read through the rosy lens of a love en-

5 If we take into account the technique of "Nausicaa" chapter – tumescence and detumescence – and the symbolic meaning of the fireworks scene, they could serve as the episode of sexual climax. Richard Ellmann has suggested Joyce uses "Roman candle", one particular firework, to combine "Roman Catholic religiosity and pagan phallicism", which creates the poetic sense of sexual orgasm, an imaginary consummation that is "impregnated with Gerty's fertile imagination". (Ellmann 2009, 104)

counter, could be explained as "the number of completeness and eternity" in numerology (Gifford 1988, 404). The possibility of "completeness and eternity" engendered by Bloom's encounter with Gerty is indicative of a sense of wholeness and fulfillment in Bloom's heart that was once emptied out by Molly's infidelity.

The resilience, the "quiet dignity" of the lame Gerty has provoked the soft spot in Bloom's as well as the reader's heart. The limping Blessed-Virgin in *Ulysses* has shown her strength and her vigor. Gerty is able to love and to desire, to "play" or to "self-fashion" the role of the sanctified Virgin Mary. She is able to offer spiritual comfort and moral uplift for Bloom. She can thereby change the status quo through influencing the male consciousness. The strength and resilience of Gerty stands in stark contrast with her physical disability – the courage of the Blessed-Virgin is remarkable and (self)-empowering.

6 A Coda

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have expressed their concern over the male author's tendency to "silence" his characters by depriving them of their autonomy. In Gilbert and Gubar's perspective, the male author's patriarchal right of ownership over the female characters demonstrates his tendency to treat women as mere properties, locked or "imprisoned" in male texts: "[a]s a creation 'penned' by man,… woman has been 'penned up' or 'penned in.' As a sort of 'sentence' man has spoken, she has herself been 'sentenced'" (Gilbert, Gubar 2000, 13). To rebel against the male author's hegemony consigned by the patriarchal ideology, Gilbert and Gubar have proposed the feminist poetics, which radically enjoins the female writer to fight back, to "kill" the "Angel in the House", which is the aesthetic ideal constructed by male authors. They have found that in patriarchal texts "every angelically selfless Snow White must be hunted, if not haunted, by a wickedly assertive Stepmother" (28). Their objective is to vindicate the role of the "Stepmother", the Monster-Woman, as an active voice of female autonomy. Nevertheless, in their efforts to clear the name of "the madwoman in the attic" and to reassert the mysterious power of female characters, feminists like Gilbert and Gubar often ignore the potential force and agency of the Blessed-Virgin women, as if the "Angel in the House" was born to align with the patriarchal power. It seems their fellow "pure women" are doomed to be "killed", or exiled by the female writer's pen.

In *No Man's Land*, Gilbert and Gubar introduce their book with a long chapter that chronicles the history of the "battle of the sexes" (1998, 4). They trace the "sexual struggle" through the records and works of Mid-Victorian writers, modernist writers, postmodern-

ist writers, to contemporary writers (4). The fierce struggle and the waxing and waning of men's power and superiority over women tell something about the awakening of feminist awareness and women's struggle for autonomy over long years. By contrast, instead of depicting the relation between men and women as a militant sexual battle, where combatants are intent on defeating one another, I would characterize their relation as an encounter, whether a beautiful one or a dreadful one. The nature of the encounter boils down to the "interpretations" by writers, critics, and readers based on their respective life experiences. In fact, Gilbert and Gubar admit that "both sides in the battle between the sexes are equally culpable", so that it is "virtually unimaginable" to identify a final winner in this literal and metaphorical antagonism (60-1). I would suggest that the interaction between men and women is an incessant cycle of dispute, resentment and reconciliation on both sides. As a twentieth-first century female reader of Joyce's works, I have tried to act as a go-between conducive to a fruitful and fulfilling encounter between the male and the female characters.

When the "Angel in the House "is repelled by her own mother and sister, it is the revolutionary male writer James Joyce who represents the Blessed-Virgin women and reinterprets the meaning of virginity. In Joyce's unconventional representation, Blessed-Virgin women are not the romanticized and essentialized mates of condescending patriarchs; instead, they have thinking and desire, and challenge the unequal sexual power relations. Their image is fraught with contradictions and ambivalence. Gretta incorporates the symbolic with the human, sexual purity with motherhood, passivity with activity. The Bird-Girl is an amalgam of pagan and Christian iconography, a wedlock of the mortal and the angelic, and of the sensuous and the serene. Gerty's dual roles combine the "Angel in the House" with the "femme fatale". Joyce's art has redefined the status of virginity and breathed new life into their centuries-old image. Endowed with individuality and potential agency to change their relation with men, the Blessed-Virgin women are revived and regenerated in the pages before the reader's eyes. Joyce's vision of women is invested with beauty and potentiality, purity and capability; Joyce's art gives the prospect of a vibrant life, where the vital relation between men and women is made possible in the modern world.

The major theme of *Ulysses* is love, as it is in "The Dead" and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. Joyce is searching for "universal love" while writing about women and femininity. Joyce declares in *Ulysses*: "Love loves to love love" (319). In a similar vein Cixous proclaims that the" war of liberation" is waged under the banner of love: women "do not fetishize, they do not deny, they do not hate. They observe, they approach, they try to see the other women, the child, the lover – not to strengthen their narcissism, or verify the solidity or

weakness of the master, but to make love better, to invent" (892-3). In order to rewrite the history of sexual war, we need to re-create the canons in a new fashion based on "love" rather than "hatred" and to reach a new understanding of both men and women. Feminine women can love, can desire, can think; they not only dwell in the world of Joyce's works but also exist in the real-life world. To empower the virgin, to love the opposite sex, to respect one another – we are never far from a world of universal love.

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Clarissa's Party in the House of the Sleeping Beauties
A Study of Memory and Time in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* and Kawabata's *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*

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Abstract On the verge of death and in the Autumn of their lives, Clarissa Dalloway, in Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, and Eguchi Yoshio, in Kawabata's *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*, find themselves facing the existential realization that life has been stripped out of them. The past is all that is left for them, but the present is all they have. They are haunted by the ticking of the cosmic clock, so they resort to their memories to shun death. The apparition of death, nevertheless, reveals itself for both protagonists at the zenith of their celebration of life, and this existential realization is carried out within a Modernist framework in which the narrative style gives meaning to the content of both works.

Keywords Time. Memory. Recollection. House of the Sleeping Beauties. Kawabata. Mrs. Dalloway. Virginia Woolf. Modernism. Neoperceptionists.

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1 Introduction

Imagine that Eguchi is invited to Clarissa's party; imagine that Clarissa is one of the sleeping beauties; or imagine that Virginia Woolf was the founder of the Neoperceptionist School or that Kawabata was a member of the Bloomsbury Group. The likes of these farfetched situations are intended to allude to the latent correspondence between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*. Both texts examine the aspects of recollection, awareness of time, life, and death. The aim of the two works is then the same: it is the disclosure of a philosophical view of existence. The path to reach this end transverses the cultural context of Modernism, the mechanism of memory, and the function of time. Along the same route, our discussion proceeds intending to unite Clarissa and Eguchi under one roof: that of life and death.

During the 1920s and 1930s, the literary group called the Neoperceptionist School was at its zenith. The name of the school, "*Shinkankaku-ha*" [1] in Japanese, was "coined by the author Chiba Kameo (1878–1935)" with reference to the writings published in the literary journal *Bungei jidai* ("Literary Times") (see Miller 2009, 87). This journal was founded by two of the most important figures of the Neoperceptionist School, i.e. Yokomitsu Riichi, and Kawabata Yasunari (Miller 2009, 88), but was short-lived, operating only for three years, between 1924 and 1927 (Shunji Chiba 2016, 630).

The general atmosphere in Japan played a major role in the emergence of the Neoperceptionst School. Two major incidents affected that literary milieu – the Japanese participation in World War I and the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923 (Chiba 2016, 630). The impact of these catastrophes left the Japanese mindset in shock, for they "exhausted the faith", and "individual will and reason were left impotent in their wake" (Chiba 2016, 630). The situation, in other words, was fairly similar to that of Europe in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Similar circumstances, in this respect, led to a corresponding literary mode in both the West and the East, which also reflects the Western influence upon the Neoperceptionist School.

A general critical consensus confirms the Western impact upon the school under discussion. For example, Jokomucu wrote:

1 There are different translations for this name: Neoperceptionism (Miller 2009, 87-8 and Matson 1982, 24); New Sensationism (Chiba 2016, 630); New Sensationists (Keene 2003, 32); Neo-sensualism (Grubor 2019, 213; Rimer 1991, 155). For the sake of consistency, Neoperceptionist/Neoperceptionism is used throughout this article except for the quotations.

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> I believe that futurism, stereo-school, symbolism, structuralism, modernism and part of factualism – all of these belong to neo-sensationalism. (Quoted in Grubor 2019, 215-16)

Svetlana Grubor develops this argument further, providing specific examples of the Western influence on Neoperceptionism:

> The source of neo-sensualists' inspiration was the work of European modernist writers, especially Paul Morand and his famous work "Open All Night", James Joyce and American writer Gertrude Stein. (2019, 217)

Chiba concurs with Grubor's perspective stating that the Neoperceptionist School was "inspired by the postwar literature of Europe" (2016, 630). Those critical views present strong evidence to support the interrelation between Western Modernist literature and that of Japan. However, in order to establish such an association between them an examination as well as a comparative study of their tenets is needed.

The first aspect of this comparison lies in the rejection of realism, for both literary traditions take a stand against it. The Neoperceptionist School endorses "the rejection of traditional I-Novel realism" (Miller 2009, 87-8).[2] This tenet can be equated with similar Modernist tendencies, for "the conventions of realism, for instance, were abandoned by Franz Kafka and other novelists" (Baldick 2004, 159). This aspect can be found in Kawabata's critical writings too. For example, Kawabata expresses his dissatisfaction with prosaic language when he says:

> If one man says, "Good morning" and another responds, "Good morning" it is boring. We are weary of literature unchanging as the sun that comes up from the east today exactly as it did yesterday. (Quoted in Keene 2003, 32-3)

Kawabata's intention is to criticize realist literature that reproduces everyday language rather than advocating literary innovation or favouring a totally new way of expression. That is the reason why he finds it more interesting to carry out a conversation this way:

> "The baby monkey walks along suspended from its mother's belly", and the other replies, "White herons really have long talons, don't they?" (Quoted in Keene 2003, 33)

2 The I-Novel is considered to be the result of the adoption of the Western literary trend of Naturalism into the fabric of Japanese literature in the early 20th century.

In this light, the argument advanced by Gray James Matson applies to the Neoperceptionist School. Matson considers that particular school as a reaction against "European models", especially "naturalism and proletarian literature", although the Neoperceptionists followed different versions of these models, "such as surrealism [,] for their 'new' language of the novel" (1982, 102). His view illustrates how Japanese literary models of language followed the example of European Modernism during the 1920s and 1930s.

Speaking of literary language and Kawabata's vision of it, Ljiljana Marković suggests another point of correspondence between Modernism and the Neoperceptionists. She describes the language of Kawabata's narrator and heroes as being an "unfinished, fragmentary language" attempting to find a new means of expression that would be "able to directly transmit and transpose a complex state of human thoughts, feelings and sensory experiences" (quoted in Grubor 2019, 218). A connection is established between this style and the tenets of the-stream-of-consciousness technique, according to which the "varied, disjointed, and illogical elements must find expression in a flow of words, images, and ideas similar to the unorganized flow of the mind" (Holman 1985, 429). Both 'languages' concentrate on elucidating the transient emotional state of the mind rather than on syntax and grammar.

Another point of resemblance can be found in the concentration on the individuals' expressions of their feelings, which is also related to the aspect of the 'subjective approach' to life in general. Yokomitsu Riichi establishes this association defining the quest of the Neoperceptionist School as a celebration of subjectivity:

> [M]an does not accept the outside world, but only his own understanding of that world, which means that art cannot represent objective reality, but only its subjective feeling. (Quoted in Grubor 2019, 215)

This line of thought resonates with the Western "fresh ways of looking at man's position and function in the universe" (Cuddon 1998, 516). The same perspective can be found in Kawabata's fiction. According to Masao Miyoshi, Kawabata aims to use a language that "would reflect immediately the inchoate state of a man's thoughts, feelings, and sensory experience [...] where the seer is not yet separated from the seen, the speaker from the spoken" (quoted in Matson 1982, 100). This shows how much Western literature and philosophy, followed by their Japanese counterparts, delved deep into the realms of the psyche basing on the idea that the subject's view of the world is the building block for further complex mindsets.

Thanks to that brief comparison, the influence of Modernism upon Kawabata can be appreciated. That influence was prominent al-

ready in the early stages of his literary career, when he was exposed to European literature in general, and to that of Modernism, in particular. His interests in the emotionally transient and individualistic literature of Modernism earned him the nickname, the "writer of the moon" (because of a "feminine sentimentality and wonderful sadness" in his style) (quoted in Grubor 2019, 215). Such an interest for the European literature of the turn of the twentieth century continued throughout Kawabata's life, for he was "profoundly influenced by [...] James Joyce and Virginia Woolf [and] remained true to his early ambitions" throughout his career (Lewell 1993, 151). Kawabata went on to read and study those writers' works in the original language. In fact, not only had he read "the Japanese translation of *Ulysses* but also had bought a copy of the English text and compared the two" (Keene 2003, 33). He also imitated Joyce's style in his unfinished short story entitled "Crystal Fantasies" ("Suishō gensō"), in which he experimented with "the stream-of-consciousness techniques" (Keene 2003, 33). The influence of Modernism on Kawabata's works is pervasive and considerable. They inhabit, and are peculiar to, his oeuvre in general, and to *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*, in particular.

2 A Comparison between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*

In point of fact, exploring the poetics of Kawabata's 'short' novella *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* (*Nemureru bijo* in Japanese, published in 1961; see Keene 2003, 41) makes it possible to find out the Modernist tenets in his work. Modernist poetics is also the base on which Kawabata's novella can be compared to Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* because the structure of both narratives is constructed upon the protagonists' subjective impressions and views. Eguchi and Clarissa are immersed in their emotions and reflections about their past, as well as in the resulting awareness of the inexorable passing of time. The consequence of this temporal experience is the philosophical realization of the struggle between life and death. However, in order to fully understand this cognitive process, a step back is needed that considers one's remembrance of the past.

Both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* can be described as works of *remembering things past*. Memory and recollection are often evoked in both texts. In Woolf's novel, the word "remember" is mentioned 66 times, which means that the same word is repeated almost every two pages.[3] In Kawabata's work, on the oth-

3 The Macmillan edition of *The Collected Novels of Virginia Woolf* is used in this essay. In it, *Mrs. Dalloway* occupies 141 pages (see Woolf 1992).

er hand, "remember" occurs 19 times, and "memory" is repeated 25 times. The result, in such a case, is a repetition of the former word every four pages, while the latter occurs every three pages.[4] This subtle and almost invisible linguistic similarity becomes more manifest on the level of the narrative. Woolf constructs the fabric of her novel in the form of interconnected recollections of various characters – the perspective of memories and thoughts rolls from one character to another during the scene of watching the airplane in the park, for instance. Woolf considers the communal sense of recollection, as A.N. Jeffares observes, as the external realization of the interconnected 'tunnels' leading to the characters' "series of caves [...] which are the past experiences or episodes in their lives" (2002, 188). The novel, as a network of the channels of one's experience and memory, is presented from the points of view of different people; yet there is a final, communal sense of focalization (see Baldick 2004, 98). Woolf produces a texture where every point of view and memory stands in complementarity to one another, for the past is also a communal aspect of the whole of mankind.

What Kawabata does, by analogy, is a narrowing down of the 'tunneling' technique to only one character, Eguchi. The novella is introduced and narrated according to Eguchi's perspective and memory, and most of its story is occupied by the protagonist's perceptions and remembrance of his own past in relation to other characters. The chain of memories is triggered by each encounter with the 'sleeping beauties' of the story. The system of 'channels', in this context, lies in the main character's memory that associates him with a number of different people. What starts as a memory of Eguchi's ends up in the complex web of the other characters' emotions and ideas; the protagonist's past is not only his own but a communal one in which a number of characters interact with him and with each other as well. Thus, the two 'versions' of focalization are used to prioritize the process of recollection both in *Mrs. Dalloway* and in *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*.

Behind the visual quality of the characters' memories, the mechanism of remembrance is activated by a stimulus or a catalyst. In *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*, Eguchi's journey through his memory is always provoked by the naked bodies that sleep next to him, more specifically by his sensory awareness of those bodies. On his first visit to the house of the sleeping beauties, the protagonist delves into his recollections after smelling the scent of milk emanating from the woman beside him. The sleeping beauty's smell, on his second visit, is also the catalyst behind the process of remembrance.

4 The Fontana edition of *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* is used in this essay. It consists of 80 pages (see Kawabata 1989).

In his third visit, however, Eguchi's memory is activated by probing the woman's tongue. From a psychological point of view, the concept of *modality effect* could be used to explain the relationship between the sensory stimulus and the process of recollection. 'Modality effect' is an "effect on perception or memory in which the sensory channel used to present the information has an effect on the processing of the information" (Matsumoto 2009, 312). Eguchi's senses, in this respect, affect his memory leading to his recollection of a past sensation. The scent and the recollection are then akin to a key and a locked room. One cannot enter that space without using the key. In other words, the mechanism of remembrance is a response to a certain stimulus.

Likewise, the gates to Clarissa Dalloway's recollections and thoughts are presented in the form of her perceptions of the world. For example, she enters the realm of her memories from the very first page of the novel through her admiration of the morning, "fresh as if issued to children on a beach", which in turn ushers the narrative to her sphere of recollections (Woolf 1992, 35). In Miss Pym's shop, as well, the scent and colors of the flowers lead to another wave of images (Woolf 1992, 42-3). Clarissa's sensations and perceptions are the sensory stimuli behind her memories. The same process is repeated with the other characters. Their perceptions of the world provoke numerous memories and thoughts. Rezia's contemplation of the fountain in the park, for instance, occasions her ideas and emotions about Septimus (Woolf 1992, 49). This means that the entrance to the characters' internal realm lies in the external physical stimuli. These catalysts, accordingly, are the 'tunnels' through which the various minds are interrelated. In other words, the 'modality effect' serves as an important element in Woolf's network of perceptions and recollections that form her specific version of the stream-of-consciousness technique.

The high frequency of recollections in the two texts under discussion creates a temporal demarcation between the realm of memories and its 'objective' counterpart. Time, in each of those two works, functions in a different manner. According to Jeffares, in *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, the 'objective time', "signaled by the striking of the clock", is linear it progresses as the narrative goes on (2002, 208). The realm of memories, on the contrary, stops and shows itself at certain moments in the characters' past, present, or future. Thus, the sequence of the narrative seems to freeze thanks to a 'description' in which the durational aspect is termed a "pause" (Manfred 2005, 54). Nevertheless, this temporal halt is always undercut by a direct interruption from a representation of the 'objective time'. For example, in *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*, three of Eguchi's five visits are interrupted and concluded by the hostess who wakes him up in the morning. The room

and the hero's sleeping beside the hypnotized beauties symbolize the process of delving into the realm of the subconscious, of his own tunnels. That means that the entrance of the hostess represents an interruption of the process of recollection through the introduction of the ordinary world.

In *Mrs. Dalloway*, time has a similar function. The striking of Big Ben, for instance, always marks the end of the characters' journey in their internal sphere. Jeffares considers it as "a constant background reminder of the material world" pulling the characters out of their recollections (2002, 209). A 'struggle' ensues, as a result, out of this dichotomy in which characters abscond from 'reality' into the realm of recollections. However, shunning the present and the future by cherishing the past is never a complete departure from reality and time. In other words, there is a continuing temporal struggle within the psyche of Mrs Dalloway and within that of Eguchi. A question arises here, as a consequence: why do these two almost-elderly characters experience such an inner struggle?

3 The Fearful Dilemma of Death, Anxiety, and Tranquillity, in the Existentialist Perspective

The act of seeking refuge in the past can be explained as an attempt to come to terms with the dilemma of fearing death. Trying to relive their respective past, both Eguchi and Clarissa resort to sensuality to escape from an immanent sense of death. In revisiting their own memories, those two protagonists experience a temporary state of temporal freezing. They become totally engulfed by the moment they are re-living. The sensory stimulus, when added to the process of recollection, leads therefore to a sensual experience of life. Clarissa's party and her admiration of the day blend with her memory and yield a beautified image of her life. Eguchi's experience is produced by the same images in which the naked bodies prompt his memory to re-delineate his past and avoid any possible encounter with death. Nevertheless, this attempt to elude death is futile, for the character's world is "a world where the past in the form of memories is disturbing and where only death awaits" (Napier 2005, 63).

A sense of loss lurks, in fact, in the protagonists' past and future. The death of Eguchi's mother and that of Clarissa's sister, Sylvia, contaminate the structure of their past. The two works' endings, which are marked by the death of a sleeping beauty in Kawabata's novella and the suicide of Septimus, in Woolf's novel, exemplify the inevitable end that is abhorred by the protagonists. Thus, the present is the only space left for them through which they try to live according to the maxim *carpe diem*, making "the best of the present moment" (Baldick 2004, 34). The reason behind Clarissa's party and Eguchi's

"pseudo-sexual adventures" in the house of the sleeping beauties lies here, in shunning the omnipresent idea of death. However, the final death of Septimus and that of 'the dark girl' demolish this illusion and compel the two protagonists to face reality. Death is ubiquitous in all the ups and downs of one's life. This is what the two characters actually face at the zenith of their ecstatic relishing of the moment of being. Thus, the final scenes in *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* and *Mrs. Dalloway* suggest a new understanding of life, which is not a mere enjoyment of the present, nor the fear of death. The two are combined in a formula whereby joy shall reach an end and where death lies at the heart of life. Past, present, and future all combine and produce the moment that is named life.

In the journey inside Clarissa's and Eguchi's memories, those characters' perceptions and conceptions about time, life, and death become evident. The two novels become, in other words, a journey through and about time. They are a celebration of life and a realization that death is always an expected company. And both novels implement corresponding techniques for shunning death. However, the similarities between them end here, and a major difference emerges towards the two novels' respective ends, that is, a different reaction towards the encounter with death.

Eguchi's view of death may be said to be rather negative. This becomes clear if we consider the brief description of his feelings after the death of the sleeping beauty next to him. He loses control of himself when the manageress of the house suggests that he should go back to sleep. He yells at her: "Do you expect me to sleep after this?" (Kawabata 1989, 79). However, his anger reveals much more, for his voice "was angry, but there was also fear in it" (Kawabata 1989, 79). This brief remark is a brisk representation of the protagonist's emotional and mental state when faced with death. What he does and says after his encounter with the sleeping beauty's death is summarized by that condensed statement. Eguchi recognizes the omnipresence of death yet he fails to come to terms with the existential realization of death's presence. The novella shows the negative impact of the apparition of death when it ends with the demise of 'the dark-skinned girl', and the reader is left with the protagonist's angry yet fearful voice.

The sense of anxiety is apparent here and derives from the cultural background of *The House of Sleeping Beauties*. This anxiety marks a difference between the Neoperceptionist School and Modernism, and we may call it 'time anxiety'. Neoperceptionists are troubled by death and by the limitations of human life. They seek to embrace the multifarious aspects of life, yet 'time anxiety' continues to haunt them. Grubor suggests, in this light, that "they could not understand the sheer severity of the 'time anxiety' issue; for them it was a symbol of the 'downfall of humanity'" (2019, 217). Eguchi's trepidation at

the death of the sleeping beauty, and Kawabata's choice of that moment to end his novella, can be understood considering that death represents for both the protagonist and the author a philosophically inexplicable dilemma.

On the contrary, Clarissa Dalloway manages to accept the inevitable presence of death despite her initial shock. The final pages of *Mrs. Dalloway* show the protagonist's troubled acknowledgment of the omnipresence of death because it ironically occurs at the climax of her celebration of life. This is why she feels that

> [s]omehow it was her disaster – her disgrace. It was her punishment to see sink and disappear here a man, there a woman, in this profound darkness, and she forced to stand here in her evening dress. (Woolf 1992, 169)

However, Clarissa ultimately reaches a positive attitude towards life out of her existential acknowledgment: "She felt glad that he had done it; thrown it away while they went on living" (Woolf 1992, 170). Death is the inevitable end of life, so Clarissa embraces life even more warmly because she acknowledges it. Such a positive mindset stems from a philosophical viewpoint: for an existential thinker, anxiety is not merely a negative force but rather a catalyst towards an awareness of man's intrinsic freedom. When faced by "anxiety in the face of death", the individual is shocked out of

> everyday complacency and allows it to understand itself as a "finite freedom", that is, as a power of choice that can be exercised only on the basis of the constraints of the situation. (Michelman 2008, 113)

This is indeed what Clarissa experiences, because Septimus's suicide awakens the awareness of her own limited being. Thus she comes to appreciate life even further instead of being devoured by mere anxiety. His suicide becomes a wake-up call for Clarissa that shows her that life should be led in a healthy and pleasant way. Gerri Kimber believes that Clarissa "can be glad for him [Septimus], since he has confronted his demons and moved on, while so many continue their precarious existence of fear and hatred" (2011, 1171). Facing death during her clearest celebration of life presents Clarissa with the two sides of the picture. She is freed from anxiety when she comes to the realization that living means doing the right thing. Otherwise, it is all metaphorical death.

4 Conclusion

From our analysis, it has become evident that sensory and subjective elements have great importance in both *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The House of the Sleeping Beauties*. Such a prioritization of impressions and feeleings serves to establish the existential dimension of the main characters in the two texts. They hinge on the perception of time-passage, with the resuling final anxiety it creates.

The theoretical and cultural frameworks backing the two works, which Woolf and Kawabata find in Modernism and in the Neoperceptionist School, are also similar. The influence of the former on the latter has been demonstrated; such an influence is responsible for the association between *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The House of the Sleeping Beauties* as well. In this respect, Woolf and Kawabata provided a similar representation of the individuals' inner thoughts and feelings in the face of death, humans' ultimate fear. What they do therefore comes as a validation of the saying "[I]n the midst of life we are in death" (McGovern 2005, 142).

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Edwardian Hegemony in Tressell and Sassoon

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Abstract Ostensibly, all that connects Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914) and Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (1928) is that their authors lived in south-east England during the early 1900s and wrote about their experiences. Otherwise, they came from the opposing ends of British society, and their novels were written nearly twenty years apart. That the two works correspond in their portrayals of English society – one as invective, the other as eulogy – is revealing of coeval attitudes, especially of views and behaviour based on social class. Reading other novels and plays of the time shows to what degree concepts of what was socially appropriate held sway over Edwardian fiction.

Keywords Social Class. Conservative Consensus. Ignored Masses. Education. Sport. Pastoral Ideal.

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1 Introduction

Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (1914, henceforward *RTP*) berates workers, in title and content, for their acceptance of social hierarchy and their own exploitation. Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of a Fox Hunting Man*[1] (henceforward *MFHM*), published roughly fifteen years later (1928), after events as momentous as the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and British women and working-class men gaining the right to vote (Searle 2004, 831), is an implicit homage to a social order which entailed perpetual subsistence for many and indulgent excess for a few. Edwardian England in Sassoon's version was as placidly conservative as in Tressell's. What is striking in the tales of both the aspiring revolutionary and the wealthy sybarite are the similarities of the depictions, a largely unquestioned hegemonic view of social matters, echoed in a multitude of contemporary works. When *MFHM* was published in 1928, Sassoon was in no danger of being labelled reactionary or a commercial failure (Egremont 2006, 333, 361). The "imbecile system of managing our affairs" (Tressell [1914] 2008, 275) remained natural and unchallenged, as it did in most pre-First World War fiction.

2 The Right Sort

A central concern for Frank Owen, *RTP*'s frustrated insurgent, is that most adults "work like brutes in order to obtain a 'living wage' for themselves and to create luxuries for a small minority of persons who are too lazy to work at all!" (480), a minority that would include George Sherston, *MFHM*'s main character. As shall be seen in this article, in much of the fiction set in this period, to be one of the principal characters meant being within or near the higher reaches of society. E.M. Forster's novels, such as *Where Angels Fear to Tread*, *Howards End* and *A Room with a View*, and Henry James's *The Ambassadors* and *The Golden Bowl* are dominated by characters who will never have to get their hands dirty to earn money (Kemp 2005). In popular fiction, too, there is a notable bias towards the financially and/or socially blessed, with occasional wage-earners. For example, in the Sherlock Holmes fiction from this decade, which consisted of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and thirteen short stories in *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, the main victims are a wealthy baronet, Sir Charles Baskerville (1902, 11); the Earl of Maynooth's son (1905, 4); a lawyer (35-6); the owner of Riding Thorpe Manor (63); Violet

1 This was the first of Sassoon's three-volume memoirs, and the only part that is pre-war (the era that is the topic of this essay) are the first three-quarters of *MFHM*.

Smith (due to inherit a considerable bequest) (115); the Duke of Holdernesse's son (121); a former ship's captain (160); Lady Blackwell, the Earl of Dovercourt's wife (189); a *Mafioso* (225); a lecturer at an eminent university (238); a secretary to a professor (264); a student from Cambridge University (292); Sir Eustace Brackenstall (322); and the British government's Secretary for European Affairs (350). In comparison to the population, the number of what Lloyd George called the 'unemployed'[2] is highly disproportionate, while only one of the other Conan Doyle characters could be described as poor, Violet Smith, and that is a temporary predicament before she will rightfully become an heiress. As most detective fiction usually identifies the victim near the beginning of the story, it is possible to infer that Conan Doyle, and, by extension, many of his contemporaries, believed readers would care more, while their disbelief was suspended, for the fate of a rich, titled or otherwise privileged character, rather than someone as socially humble as themselves.

MFHM is a celebration of an indulged and unproductive lifestyle. The pre-war section of the first volume of Sherston's memoirs (about three-quarters of the book) are an unabashed portrayal of a devotion to pleasure-seeking, while his pride is evident even in the title. The use of 'memoirs' shows a degree of self-importance and implies the world of social privilege to be described. Likewise, the activity by which Sherston is defined is fox hunting. As the most important aspect of a young man's life, it is extravagantly futile. The cost of buying and keeping at least one good horse, fitting it, and dressing yourself appropriately (Newall 1983, 86) was only affordable for a tiny minority, while the purpose of dressing in expensive costumes in order to chase individual foxes over long stretches of countryside could only be recreational. Pursuing foxes with horses and dogs is a very inefficient way of controlling their numbers, so fox hunting did not serve its ostensible purpose and was actually counterproductive. The number of foxes, in fact, increased in the 19th century (Jones 2009, 57) after rules were devised to make the hunt more challenging (62), the countryside had been adapted to preserve fox populations (56), and foxes had even been imported to maintain numbers (Howe 1981, 295). In *MFHM*, that pastime's ineffectiveness leads to complaints from local farmers to Sherston's friend, the hunt master, including one about a fox that was killing a farmer's chickens and that if the hunt did not deal with the problem he would have to use his gun: something, presumably, he is prevented from doing because it would mar their sport (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 195). Hunts cause other inevitable problems on the land they use, such as broken hedges and

2 He described the House of Lords as "five hundred men, ordinary men chosen accidentally from among the unemployed" (Constantine 1992, 37).

gates, and damaged crops (Jones 2009, 60), which make Sherston's claim, that they gave the farmers a "genial interlude" (Sassoon [1928] 2015,195), sound distinctly sanguine.

As a youth Sherston uses his privileges as an opportunity to indulge in his own form of hedonism, as if in emulation of the king, Edward VII, a non-intellectual devotee of feckless pleasure (whose name was given to the decade) (Hunter 2014, 45), who was also a symbol, to his critics, of the contemporary plutocracy – money without responsibility – with a fictional homologue in Toad from Kenneth Grahame's *Wind in the Willows* (Searle 2004, 437). At least Sherston, unlike Toad, is not fickle. He has a single-minded desire to hunt and be oblivious to whatever does not enhance his pleasure, so that in anticipation of the hunting season, autumn is irrelevant, and "Europe was nothing but a name to me" (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 180). His winter with the Packlestone hunt is expressed as a visceral indulgence unhindered by thought, a winter "lived in total immunity from all intellectual effort" (220), a solipsistic lifestyle the older Sherston, as narrator, confesses is "not easy to defend" and may look "rather paltry" (208). In his youth, he is offended by coming across recently built houses while hunting and would like to "clear every modern dwelling" (210) that spoils his view. The desire to make hunting land correspond to a particular notion of natural countryside was shared by Sherston's companions and led to, for example, a greater number of fields (for gallops) and hedges and fences (for jumping) at the cost of wetland and woodland (Howe 1981, 289; Huggins 2008, 374).

The imagined sacrifice of people's homes so that Sherston could experience his idea of a traditional pastoral view is analogous to his frequent disregard of the purpose behind their jaunts across the fields. While hunting for fox-cubs, "for whom, to tell the truth, I felt an unconfessed sympathy", Sherston says, if it happened on the Sussex Downs, "I could half forget why we were there, so pleasant was it to be alive and gazing around me" (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 201). Sherston admits to feeling pity for his prey when he is "alarmed" for a fox's welfare during one of his first hunts (37). His description of coming across a deer that "sweated and shivered in the barn with heaving sides and frightened eyes", supposedly evoked no sympathy (151), though it is strangely invested for someone who claimed not to care. His reason for detachment could be that the animal was to be caught rather than killed (149), but it is possibly a pre-emptive (in terms of the narrative) reaction to a parson calling the hunters "'Brutes'" as they passed (151).

Sherston's objection to the parson – "Silly old buffer!" – stems from the attitude that, whatever feelings someone might have for the animals involved, an unquestioning approval of the pursuit of hunting was required of local residents, exemplified by Mr. Jariott. He is said to have named every fox in his park and mourned whenever one

died, but "would have been horrified" if the hunt could not find a fox (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 217). Jariott's acceptance, even enjoyment, of fox hunting as an attribute for the English countryside could be read as psychological projection on Sherston's part – how Jariott should feel – also, to some extent, an acceptance of a rigid social hierarchy and all that was said to be characteristic of the era (Farr 1970, 380). As far as it affected fox hunting, there was a form of reflected snobbery – farmers preferring to lease land to aristocrats rather than to the petty bourgeoisie (Jones 2009, 62). In Jariott's case, his ability to reconcile apparently incompatible sentiments (his sympathy for the victims and enthusiasm for their persecution) is shared by Sherston. When he witnesses men digging up foxes to destroy them, though aware this is cruel, he gives the action his blessing: "However inhumane its purpose, it was a kindly country scene" (183).

Sherston's commitment to the cause of fox hunting and his corresponding moral contortions sprang from a deeper source. He was an aspiring member of the established upper-class and occasionally revealed that he felt his failure to fully belong to it. With the purportedly prestigious Packlestone Hunt he thought he was an imposter but still imagined himself enjoying the aristocratic tradition of a summer season in London, before coming to his senses (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 222). To realise his ambition of joining the "superior" Packlestone crowd leaves him £300 in debt the following summer. However, he does not even consider earning money to repay what he owes. Instead, he sells a horse, borrows more money and resigns himself to "an uneventful summer, restless and inwardly dissatisfied" (223). Presumably because of his social ambitions or feelings of entitlement, working for money is unthinkable and so unthought.

3 The Social Divide

In Raymond Williams's opinion, the tradition of upper-class concerns in novels from the 1830s was still dominant in the early 1900s, to the point that "any other kind of material had, so to say, to be inserted, apologised for, transmuted in some way" (Williams 1983, 240-1). One of Tressell's achievements is his being so unapologetic for his focus on working-class life, while his affluent characters, with one exception, break entirely from the sympathetic tradition. For the main character, Frank Owen, the idle rich are symptomatic of a national malaise, exemplary of the injustice of the contemporary political and economic system. In the initial explanation of Owen's beliefs, he is said to view the majority in Britain as having barely enough to survive and there are others who are even worse off, but, in the same society, "he saw that the people who had an abundance of the things that are made by work, were the people who did Nothing" (10).

In statistical terms, between 1895 and 1914 ninety-two per-cent of the nation's wealth was owned by ten per-cent of the adult population, and one-third of the national income went to one-thirtieth of adults (Searle 2004, 83). Of working families, eighteen per-cent did not have enough money for their basic needs, and among labourers about half were in poverty (Gazeley 2011, p. 52). Hence the *RTP*'s call for revolution. One of Owen's work colleagues and his political comrade, Barrington, a rich Socialist eager to experience working-class life, envisages a Co-operative Commonwealth or Socialist Republic, a just society that would reward work and penalise indolence. Those that did not work would not be dressed

> in silk and satin and broadcloth and fine linen: we would not embellish them, as you do, with jewels of gold and jewels of silver and with precious stones,

nor would they "fare sumptuously". Instead, not working would mean having neither food nor possessions (Tressell [1914] 2015, 515-16).

If the prospect of such a revolution taking place in Britain may look fanciful now, the increasing power of the trade unions and the nascent Labour Party contributed to bourgeois fears that workers might not tolerate their exploitation (Neetens 1987, 215). Alongside their quotidian ordeals, the working class were still largely excluded from the political system. There was virtually no access to a position with any influence for a man without funds. Even becoming a local councillor was a rare achievement and, as MPs received no salary, the few working-class MPs had to be financed by their unions (Searle 2004, 229-30). However, if discontent existed, it did not feature much in the mainstream fiction of the time. To take an example, the stories by the Socialist H.G. Wells, who was more a Fabian than a revolutionary (Ó Donghaile 2018, 6-7), often centre around the lower-middle class (Wild 2017, 43), and the relative ease with which the main characters can improve their situations – the clerk becoming rich in *Tono-Bungay*, the shop-worker realising his dream in *The History of Mr. Polly* (Kemp 2005)– suggests that, in England, escaping your rut only takes imagination.

In the fiction about the working class, however, hopes for improvement were actively discouraged. John Galsworthy's play *Strife*, about an arduous strike at a tin-plate factory, portrays a dialectic of plenty for the management against hunger for the workers, but the resolution is the union agreeing to a weak offer. The two camps are half-hearted opponents and the strike only endures because of the intransigence of the opposing leaders – the company chairman and David Roberts, the agitator in the workers' committee. That they both fail to achieve their ambitions reads as a prediction that in Britain similar disputes and, by extension, political change would involve

compromise. Roberts' ardent Socialism inevitably leads to frustrations with his colleagues: "You love their feet on your necks" (Galsworthy [1911] 1958, 36). In *RTP*, Owen and Barrington feel the same irritation but convincing their exploited colleagues tho share their vision appears impossible. The man who will become the local MP embodies the "'wealthy loafer class'" (Tressell [1914] 2015, 286), but he will succeed thanks, in part, to the support of many of the low-paid (573).

Some contemporary reviews of *RTP* disputed Tressell's depiction of acquiescent workers, one claiming they were too servile to be representative (Harker 2003, 80), and another that they were "spineless" and more like the previous generation (82).

Raymond Williams believes the image of the working class as compliant and unable even to express discontent is a typically middle-class view, whether from reactionaries or writers like George Orwell, who excluded reference to those "who were well-read, articulate, politically conscious or active in some pursuit which is not conventionally assigned to the class" (Williams 1983, 249). The implication is that Orwell, Tressell, and Galsworthy needed their workers to be ignorant and resigned to their fate so that those authors could provide the eloquent middle-class saviour. Although it is impossible to know the attitudes of Tressell's co-workers, trade union membership can give an indication of British workers' political views and motivation. Between 1900 and 1910, the decade when *RTP* was written, membership as a proportion of workers went from around 13% to 15% and steadily rose to a peak of just over 40% by 1920 (TUC). There were also a large number of strikes from 1910 (Searle 2004, 441-2) which, together with the rapid increase in union participation, suggests growing intolerance of working conditions and a desire to take action. Therefore, if Owen's colleagues are meant to be representative of coeval British workers, their placid submission looks misleading.

In contrast, the well-to-do in *RTP* are too engaged in scheming and other forms of corruption to be termed genuinely idle, but in his appearance and his inability to do more than minimal physical exertion, Mr. (sometimes Oyley, sometimes Adam) Sweater is clearly the product of an indulged, slothful life. His face and build are a grotesque contrast to the finery he wears. His "fleshy, coarse-featured" face resembles "the fat of uncooked bacon", while his "large fat feet [were] cased in soft calfskin boots" (Tressell [1914] 2015, 103). His coat has seal-skin trimming and, though his trousers should be very loose, they are only just big enough and his legs "appeared to threaten the trousers with disruption". The reader's first impression of Sweater – "slow, heavy, ponderous footsteps" (103) – is of someone who moves with difficulty, and the struggle involved in getting him onstage during his political campaign implies his unsuitability as a politician and shows his inability to achieve anything independently. Because there are

no steps next to the platform, on which he should climb, Sweater's friends are forced into "hoisting and pushing him up", while distracting the crowd from the spectacle with a song. The "terrible struggle" leaves Sweater breathless (555-6). This is one of the novel's more successfully comical episodes, in which the rally becomes a circus, and Sweater looks risible at a time when he should command respect.

As David Trotter notes, the fat man as a figure of contempt or mockery was a common feature of Edwardian fiction (Trotter 1993, 249-50). Trotter cites writers as diverse as Conrad, Buchan, Wodehouse and Maugham, and shows how such characters could be used to personify moral and physical grotesqueness. In D.H. Lawrence's *The White Peacock*, the appearance of Will Bancroft is repeatedly derided. When he arrives at a party, wearing "Indian snow-shoes", he purses "his childish lips, and [rubs] his fat chin"; when he compares himself to a swallow, the narrator observes "his corpulence"; and he is ironically vain, with a "cream and lavend'er waistcoat", a ring that is "gorgeous with diamonds", and a mirror with which "he [surveys] himself with great satisfaction" (Lawrence 1911, 166-8). As with corpulence in *RTP*, Bancroft's excess (in body and adornment) is a sign of his wealth, a logical concept at the start of the 1900s, when being overweight would have been virtually impossible without ample funds. Even in the ultra-conservative *MFHM*, the "short, thick-set, round-legged" Sir Jocelyn Porteus-Porteous's appearance is said to reflect his privileged social status, but Sherston's understanding is naturally more sympathetic: "how could any man look otherwise than comfortable and well satisfied when he had inherited such an amply endowed existence?" (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 215).

However, in Tressell's critique such bodies are also a manifestation of their financial and political corruption. This analogy was unusual in the fiction of that time, which is surprising as, from a left-wing viewpoint, it would have been a simple and appropriate way to convey an effective image. It was an era when many in Britain were malnourished, as witnessed by hunger marches and other forms of protest (Vernon 2007, 56-9), and so their plight was a crucial feature of working-class fiction. Overweight characters, embodying excess consumption and often dependent on others to perform simple tasks, could be plausible symbols of gross inequality and an unjust system. As with Tressell's image of a man being able to ascend a stage, a step towards gaining political power, only thanks to the help of several other men, it symbolises the commodification of workers that is a central topic in *RTP*. In one of his doomed attempts to stir his colleagues into action, Owen decries a situation in which those with luxurious lives employ people to satisfy their desires and then, when the well-to-do have what they want, stop the workers producing for themselves (Tressell [1914] 2008, 285). As commodities, they are only of interest to those with ample means insofar as and for as long

as they can benefit their social superiors, and so, to those who can afford to pay for their services, they are disposable. Like domestic appliances, the workers are generally treated as of no account when they are not causing trouble, but when there is the possibility of any transgression, they become conspicuous and of sudden interest. For example, when Bert, an exploited teenager, is exhausted from pushing a cart, his boss, Rushton, catches him resting and terrifies him with a reprimand (112). Rushton is later frustrated that he can find nobody committing a sackable offence – for example, as a Christian he cannot punish hymn-singing – and so he has to leave "without having uttered a syllable" (156). However, when it comes to rewarding good behaviour, the patrician class are less motivated. A painter called Crass is persistently hopeful of a tip from Sweater, once putting in inordinate efforts to display a range of tones so that Sweater can choose exactly the one he wants. After building up his expectations, Crass comes to realise he is being ignored and his endeavours will be fruitless (292-4). It is consistent with how Sweater treats the workers in his clothing business. They are mostly girls and women who are hired for three years, supposedly for training, but they have to pay for the first two years and only learn a very specific skill (for example, making a sleeve), ensuring they will not be able to get a well-paid job elsewhere (196-7).

Tressell's targeting of a whole social class, with one redeeming exception (Barrington, the virtuous turncoat), is rare in Edwardian mainstream fiction. 'Saki', for instance, made a literary career out of satirising upper-class life and behaviour but, like Wilde, Wodehouse, and Waugh, he was hardly trying to undermine the social order. Likewise, John Galsworthy approached the topic of class differences without being a firebrand. As previously mentioned, in Galsworthy's play *Strife* most of the management only want "an end to this old-fashioned tug-of-war" (Galsworthy [1911] (1958), 12), while in his novel *The Island Pharisees*, the upper-middle-class Dick Shelton takes a tour of poverty in the manner (from other eras) of Cobbett, Orwell and the eponymous director in the film *Sullivan's Travels*. His shocking experience results in sympathy to no effect, consistent with Galsworthy's other novels (see Hunter 2014, 240) and epitomised by his meeting with a tramp who is in fear of his life: Shelton's solution is to give the vagrant his card (Galsworthy 1904, 303). Likewise, *RTP*'s narrator sees charity as futile, often misguided (Tressell [1914] 2008, 348) as it is run by rich patrons, and ultimately detrimental for those it is supposed to help. Donations

> humiliated, degraded and pauperised those who received them, and the existence of the [charitable] societies prevented the problem from being grappled with in a sane and practical manner. The people lacked the necessaries of life: the necessaries of life are pro-

> duced by Work: these people were willing to work, but were prevented from doing so by the idiotic system of society which these 'charitable' people are determined to do their best to perpetuate. (353)

4 Reform or Revolution

A more equable social order was no more likely to occur in early twentieth-century Britain than it was to feature in mainstream literature: changes in employment opportunities and employee protection were slow to appear; and moves to legislate to improve workers' rights and establish the corresponding employers' liability had been defeated in the House of Commons in the 1890s, as many MPs were also employers (Searle 2004, 209-10). A combination of factors, including increased foreign competition, more specialised tasks for workers (as with Sweater's employees, mentioned above), reduced promotion opportunities (437) and high unemployment from the middle of the decade (364) meant that ruthless employers had few restrictions. In Joseph Keating's novels about the hazardous lives of Welsh miners, *Son of Judith* (1900) and *Maurice* (1905), when the work that is available is a constant mortal danger with no chance of meaningful change from above, an anarchist's destruction of the mine (1905, 358) is metonymic for the necessary destruction of the status quo. The situation is barely more tolerable for Carrie, the eponymous *Miss Nobody* in Ethel Carnie's 1913 novel about the struggles of a working-class woman to live a decent life either in the country or Manchester. A witness to the exploitation by factory owners of men, women and children, Carrie realises that the workers' strength is in their number, organises a union, then a strike, and wins a small wage-rise. No British author at this time was more vehement in his condemnation of the disparity in life experiences between the rich and poor than Bart Kennedy. In *Slavery: Pictures from the Depths* (1905), Kennedy illustrates that divide with the example of an impecunious working mother who has to leave her child every day so they can survive. For Kennedy, there is only one way to resolve such inequity: "They would come through the darkness to their kingdom, guided by the glorious torch of revolution" (1905, 361).

Effecting change for the workers in *RTP* is similarly formidable. Although the small number of Sweater's employees who complain are given better wages and rights, Owen's colleagues are shown to have little choice but to submit to punitive and precarious employment conditions. When Jack Linden, an older worker, is caught smoking and instantly sacked, the idea of defending himself is said to be pointless (Tressell [1914] 2008, 41). The ease with which workers can be dismissed is in stark contrast to the ordeal of finding a job, a result of a system, "The Wage Slave Market", which inevitably serves those

in power. The dichotomy is manifest in the behaviour of the company's owner, Rushton, who monitors the men working and, instead of communicating, "just [stands] there like a graven image" (407). Because of his inflated self-importance, he once sacked one of his workers for talking to him in the street (407). As the dominant motive for this draconian treatment is profit, conscientiousness goes unrewarded. When a newly arrived worker breaks a pane of glass, he loses his job despite working unpaid at night to repair it (429). Another worker, Newman, with a family to support, cannot bring himself to do the makeshift job his superiors demand. The supervisor watches for five minutes while he fills all the holes and cracks in a wall and then tells Newman the company has finished with him (161). The combination of the workers' humility and invisibility is also used to hide their employers' flaws. After Rushton helps himself to a customer's barometer, one of the removal men is suspected and sacked (418). The class that was often portrayed as being criminal is the victim of the class that, in this novel, is constantly engaged in criminal activity, and such injustices are partly a consequence of wilful ignorance about those who have least.

Low-paid workers barely register with Sherston in the pre-war section of *MFHM*, in keeping with a narrator who is indifferent, sometimes openly hostile, to whoever is relatively poor. He briefly refers to itinerant hop-pickers after the annual harvest. George Orwell did this work in 1931 and described the Spartan conditions, laborious work, "starvation wages" and "rules which reduce him practically to a slave" (Orwell 1931, 233-5). Sherston, on the other hand, does not mention the hop-pickers' work, only their departure, presumably noticed because it is audible: they sing and play music and are described as "merry" to be returning to their slums in London. As a jarring contrast, the next sentence is about the exclusive shops Sherston visits in the same city to buy clothes for hunting (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 180). His aloofness is also evident on an earlier train journey. Because his aunt has bought first-class tickets, Sherston becomes acutely conscious of his social advantage and wants it to be acknowledged, while developing an aversion to the sight of need. He is "[g]ratified by the obsequious attentions" of a station guard, and while the train goes past an impoverished area of London, he admits,

> I was glad to avert my gaze from the dingy and dilapidated tenements and warehouses which we were passing. Poverty was a thing I hated to look in the face; it was like the thought of illness and bad smells, and I resented the notion of all those squalid slums spreading out into the uninfected green country. (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 70)

5 The Lower Orders

Sherston's problem with poverty is his being made aware of it, and it is likely that most readers agreed that they did not want to witness it in fiction. E.M. Forster implied as much in his oft-quoted remark that "[w]e are not concerned with the very poor" (for example, in Hunter 2014, 61). The exclusion of indigent characters featured alongside an implicit desire to defend the social order. For writers like Forster and Henry James, the working class are from another world, servants aside; even middle-class wage-earners are socially incongruous figures in a comparatively elevated milieu. Leonard Bast, the clerk in *Howards End*, is an intruder. There is no prospect of him ascending by marriage, and even the fact that he gets Helen Schlegel pregnant means that, according to the contemporary description, their child is illegitimate. The phrase immediately before he is introduced in the book is about "those who are obliged to pretend they are gentle-folk", and he is said to be "inferior to most rich people […] not as courteous […] nor as intelligent, nor as healthy, nor as loveable" (47). His association with the Schlegels is ended abruptly, when he is attacked and killed by Charles Wilcox, a crime not momentous enough to be considered murder (350). *The Wings of the Dove* also features an outsider. Densher is a journalist in love with Kate Croy, but they are too poor to marry. In James's novel genteel poverty has become a "failure of fortune and of honour" (James 1902, 4), and in *The Wings of the Dove* even financial trouble turns into a relatively comfortable state. Densher, an American, can afford to live in London, and both he and Croy are able to spend some time in Venice. Croy even has the opportunity of marrying a lord (36). She finally marries a newly rich journalist, after a generous endowment by a wealthy heiress has been bequathed to Densher (575).

One alien social group upper-class characters cannot avoid is their domestic staff, and, in *MHFM*, Sherston can only think of his servants in terms of their work. In the initial description of Miriam, an aging maid, there is empathy for what she has endured in her working life, but to Sherston she is nothing more than a drudge. The only details given of the maid's past are related to her previous employer who "exploited [her] willingness to work" for many years. The description of her physiognomy implies that anything notable in her appearance is the result of her duties. Her eyes' expression looked as if she expected "to be rather sharply ordered to lug a heavy scuttle of coals up four flights of steep stairs"; while her hunchback and round shoulders came from a life of bending over a sink. As a result, she was prematurely aged and was so in the habit of serving others that, when told to relax, it only made her want to work more (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 69-70). The implication of her description is that she has no life beyond obliging the Sherstons and cannot even imagine one, a

convenient way for her employers to assuage any remorse they might feel for her servitude, and it is exemplified in the account of how she 'retired'. Looking increasingly ill, she is sent away for two weeks' recuperation, and while there, "she died unobtrusively of heart failure. To the last, therefore, she managed to avoid being a trouble to anyone". Posthumously, Sherston regrets "the occasions when I had shown her too little consideration" (223-4).

As a hippophile with plentiful funds, Sherston hires a groom to take care of his horses, someone who, accordingly, is of great importance to his employer. This is plainly the case with Dixon, Sherston's groom, shown by the number of times he is mentioned (at least 32 in the pre-war section of the novel) and the degree to which Sherston values his knowledge, usually advice about horses, for which Sherston sees him as an oracle. The esteem he has for the groom is evident in his reaction to the latter's exclamation of "Well done", when Sherston wins a horse race: it was "beyond all doubt the quintessence of what my victory meant to me" (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 172). To Sherston, Dixon and horses have a mutual understanding (114), and the groom is able to transfer his knowledge in a manner appropriate for a servant to his master, by "supplementing my ignorance from his own experience [...] to pretend that I knew much more than I really did" (84). This deference is important for Sherston, despite his admiration for Dixon. When teaching the young Sherston to ride, Dixon calls him "sir" for the first time and the boy's "heart warmed toward him as I [...] resolved to do him credit" (10). In his gratitude to Dixon, Sherston never forgets or disavows his groom's subservient status, as when, after the boy's horse has run away, Dixon says nothing, "and this tactful silence more than ever assured me of his infinite superiority to those chattering females in the kitchen" (15). This is very qualified praise – his "infinite superiority" is confirmed because he does not embarrass the child, and he is superior to the other domestic staff but still ineluctably one of them.

As a consequence of Dixon's subservience, in all the references to him the narrator has no story to relate apart from what he does for his employers. In contrast, it is a given that Dixon will be fascinated by the incidents from Sherston's life. Returning from his first hunt as an "independent sportsman", Sherston anticipates Dixon's great pleasure: "I had a big story to tell him" (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 111). Dixon's visits to the pub are occasionally mentioned, but only because of what it is supposed he will say about Sherston. For example, the narrator surmises Dixon will go to the 'Rose and Crown' when his master has won a horse race, to "overawe the gossips with his glory" (174). It is one of many examples in which Sherston often attributes quite extreme forms of vicarious pleasure and pride to Dixon. Having joined the Packlestone, Sherston's joy is purportedly what Dixon feels and for precisely the same reasons: Dixon "was entirely in

his element" and had "intense satisfaction" in his role as the second horseman (looking after Sherston's spare horse) while riding with other grooms. He was "permanently happy that winter", and "more delighted than he knew how to say; and of course, as befitted a 'perfect gentleman's servant', he said almost nothing at all" (223).

If this sounds like delusion, then the alternative would be facing the fact that an older man, who is probably a better rider and who knows more about horses than you, has to base his life around your equestrian pleasures because you both live in a rigidly hierarchical society. In his servant-master relationship, the most satisfaction Dixon can hope for is the care of someone else's horses and reflected glory, so that after Sherston has won a horse race, the following "lofty few minutes [...] were Dixon's reward for all the trouble he had taken" (172-3). When Sherston wants to attend a hunt fourteen miles from home, it is Dixon who has to ride the horse there the night before. According to Sherston's fond speculations it will be a pleasure. He pictures his groom "clattering [sic] importantly" to a pub's customers, boasting about who he is serving – "a very dashing and high-class sportsman" – and using "all the reticence and sobriety of an old family servant" (107). Naturally, the reader never learns what Dixon actually says about his position, work or master.

The unlikely idea that servants were contented with their positions was an occasional theme of Edwardian fiction. Probably the best-known example was J.M. Barrie's play, *The Admirable Crichton* (1902). Crichton is a butler who is very proud of his position and believes his master "has but one fault, he is not sufficiently contemptuous of his inferiors" (Barrie 1902, 5). In Act 2, Crichton is shipwrecked on an island with his master's family and there, where English social strictures have no relevance, Crichton's resourcefulness makes him the *de facto* master. In the last act, the castaways have been rescued and return to London and their previous roles, as Crichton believes they should. Ultimately, it is difficult to know what is admirable about Crichton: his innate deference, his modest capability, or their combination. Barrie gives no clear indication as to whether the play is a satire or a eulogy to traditional mores. This could be seen as a sensible commercial approach by the playwright (not wanting to upset theatre-goers), or his uncertainty about the country's social evolution.

Writers could be less equivocal if the servant was from one of the subject races of the Empire – they were effectively doubly subservient. In G.A. Henty's *With Kitchener in the Soudan* (1905), Gregory, an adventurous polyglot from a 'good' family, decides to assist the British commander and is in turn helped by his servant, Zaki. Gregory is "well satisfied" with Zaki, who works diligently to make Gregory's domestic life comfortable. Zaki's "only regret was that he could not do more for his master, but he was consoled by being told

that the time would soon come when he would be more actively engaged" (Henty 1905, 92).

The workers in *RTP* often display a similar complaisant manner and, in a story about exploitation, such behaviour is pernicious: by gratifying their social and occupational superiors, the workers' obsequiousness appears to be key to why they are destined to remain impoverished. However, it is unlikely that agitation would succeed or that compliance is invariably unwise. Crass, the foreman, epitomises the self-abasing employee. As well as his ingratiating but unsuccessful efforts to get a tip from Sweater (Tressell [1914] 2008, 104-5, 292), he is conspicuous for his "judicious toadying" (43). He takes his bosses' side, mocks Socialists with a makeshift white flag (462), reveals he was behind a colleague being sacked by over-reacting when the sacking is announced (163), and is given instructions on how to report misdemeanours to his employers (408-10). He is a treacherous colleague and no champion of the poor, but, compared to his colleagues, he prospers. Despite being less skilled than most of the workers and doing little work as foreman, he is better paid and has a more secure job (43). While the other workers struggle to feed and clothe themselves, Crass is seen taking a goose home for Christmas, and wearing new and expensive outfits that make his colleagues feel "very mean and shabby" (246). His schemes have their final reward when he is promoted to supervisor (594).

Although Crass's behaviour and beliefs are inimical to Owen's ideas, the latter cannot fault his foreman: "No one can be blamed for doing the best for himself under existing circumstances" (261). If the system favours the selfish, why not act accordingly? However, in the end Owen is not so forgiving of Crass's political beliefs, whose claim that life is Hell contradicts his Conservative support, as someone who thought life infernal would hardly want to preserve the system (144). It is also a strange sentiment for a worker who is relatively successful in improving his lot: he should be content with a system he can use to his advantage. It would be a much more credible lament from one of his struggling colleagues. However, they are said to be happy to live in subjugation, unlike "the savages of New Guinea or the Red Indians" who, according to the narrator, may not enjoy modern innovations but serve nobody and do not work for others. Worse still, the Mugsborough workers believe their own children should expect lives of "grovelling and cringing and toiling and running about like little dogs", while remaining "tame and quiet and content" (473-4). As Julie Cairnie has indicated, Tressell often describes workers as analogous to oppressed races in the British Empire, a comparison that may well have been made about the author, an Irishman (187).

In the narrator's view, the workers' submission is as ill-advised as their political loyalties, a result of "childish minds" beguiled by speeches from overpaid politicians, as when an MP, Sir Graball

D'Encloseland, declares that his constituents should live modestly out of altruistic concern for the less fortunate (Tressell [1914] 2008, 361-2). D'Encloseland (a gauche name, even by Tressell's standards) is a government minister of exemplary greed, hypocrisy, and self-importance. He is applauded by the poor, but reveals that he cannot manage to live on less than £100 a week (361), equivalent to 43 weeks' wages for a skilled tradesman at the time (National Archives). Any occasion might be appropriate to advance his political career, and his daughter's tenth birthday becomes an opportunity for self-promotion dressed up as largesse. In anticipation of a general election, all the local children are given a meal at school and a gilt-edged picture of the Baronet's daughter, who is driven to each school to make a speech. The school-children are delighted, as are the "grown-up children […] going into imbecile ecstasies of admiration of their benevolence and their beautiful clothes" (358-9). The episode is a poignant illustration of the unquestioning deference accorded to aristocracy and the wealthy that bears comparison to contemporary excitement, in some quarters, for the British royal family. To the Socialists, the irksome irony is that what pleases the gullible crowd is what, in fact, should anger them: undeserved riches spent for selfish reasons, to show off a family's unmerited patrician status. When D'Encloseland is later promoted and given a 50% raise in salary, his "ragged-trousered", hungry supporters believe the district can share in his glory and "swagger in their gait as much as their broken boots permitted" (550).

The labourers' ingrained meekness can appear insoluble, as when they tolerate abusive working conditions because their jobs are so precarious (Tressell [1914] 2008, 439). However, *RTP* is more concerned with the character flaws that deprive the workers of self-respect. Not being in the habit of thinking, they have no interest in or, due to their 'rusty and stultified' minds, any ability to understand alternative political ideas (377). Whatever education they have had, "from their very infancy", it has taught them their innate inferiority and, by extension, that education is not for them. Without an interest in alternative viewpoints, they want to "continue to worship and follow those who took advantage of their simplicity" (564). They know it was what their parents had done and believe it should also be their descendants' fate (466). Being resigned both to their destitution and to the dictates of their masters, they support or oppose policies, depending on whether those policies would, in turn, benefit or harm the most affluent. For instance, they are against a halfpenny rise in the local rates that would help malnourished children at the expense of those with most property (356). The reverence the workers show is returned as scorn by their masters, as when a letter is published on the local newspaper suggesting workmen walk in the middle of the road when "better-class visitors" walk on the pavement. Some workers even follow the suggestion (402-3).

Throughout the novel, Owen doggedly exhorts his colleagues to reject their servile status and even harangues the company's owner, Rushton, on behalf of an exploited boy (Tressell [1914] 2008, 588). The protest is a unique event in the book, and implicitly Owen's courage – his job is as insecure as anybody else's – is a result of penury and his approaching nervous collapse (584 and 587). The fact that the owner agrees to Owen's demands suggests that workers should not submit out of fear and, as the successful complaint comes towards the end of the novel, that workers in the future may realise they have the power to improve their working conditions. However, for one particular job, even Owen shows himself eager to satisfy his masters' whims. When Rushton asks Owen to decorate a room for Sweater in a Moorish style, he calls Owen an artist and is pleased to see the worker's embarrassment (117). Rushton banks on Owen taking pride in his work (119) and is vindicated. Owen assiduously studies, plans and designs into the night, and consequently makes a handsome profit for his reviled boss. Owen's motivation is explained as a desire to perform the task he is assigned (120-1), but the people he earnestly works for are his political enemies, and his behaviour is anathema to the Socialism he advocates. Rushton may have exploited a rare opportunity (for a working man) to exercise his artistic talents, in which case the tacit message is that politics are at least temporarily subordinate to creative self-expression.

6 Education and Christianity

In parallel with self-expression, access to education in England in the early twentieth century was severely restricted for the working class. What was on offer, as previously mentioned, is described in *RTP* as, in part, a method to reinforce feelings of inherent inferiority. The novel features the two main scholastic experiences at the time for children from poor families, compulsory elementary schools and Sunday schools (Searle 2004, 50, 535). Most of those attending state schools in Mugsborough, where *RTP* is based, are hungry (Tressell [1914] 2008, 357), surviving on diets of "'skim' milk, bread, margarine, and they con tea"; they have to work a few hours before and after lessons and all day on Saturday (585). As to gaining an insight into what happens while the children are at school, there is little beyond Owen's wife admiring teachers for having a difficult job (76), and the promise of study at schools and colleges being the right of every citizen in a future Socialist state (507), a sign of its undeniable value to these reformers.

However, they are more sceptical when Christianity is involved. Owen is quite vocal about religion, not when it is practised by anybody sincerely following the teachings of Christ, instead what it has

become in contemporary England, "anti-Christs who went about singing hymns, making long prayers and crying Lord, Lord, but never doing the things which He said" (Tressell [1914] 2008, 64). Inevitably, Owen believed that the didactic aim of those hypocrites was that their pupils would "order themselves lowly and reverently towards their betters" (211). Paradoxically, Owen's politically precocious son, Frankie, is persuaded to join a Sunday School (133), which he finds to be an omphalos of corruption. Those who run the school embody the desecration of Christian morality and their names are manifest accusations. The Rev. Belcher, the school's minister, nearly bursts his clothes with his "huge globe of flesh" from gluttony and inactivity, so that he is "afflicted with chronic flatulence, which manifested itself in frequent belchings forth through the mouth of the foul gases generated in the stomach" (169-70). Other attendees have similar lifestyles and builds, such as Mrs. Starvem, who is too fat to be able to kneel (172). In this crowd, Rev. Starr looks incongruous – young, slim, rational, and strangely charming – but he has a mercenary cause: generating money for his fellow Christians (174). On this occasion Starr can announce that enough has been raised from parental contributions and a 'General Fund' for Belcher to go for "'necessary repose'" to the south of France for a month "'with an illuminated address,[3] and a purse of gold'" (175). Belcher invites "the underfed, ill-clad children" to show their gratitude for being English children, by collecting money to repair a chapel (170-1). Tressell's depiction of Christian education is an example of absolute antipathy to the established church, a view distilled in an attack on readings in church: "sayings that the infidel parsons mouthed in the infidel temples to the richly dressed infidel congregations" (358).

Christianity was also targeted by Tressell's contemporaries, often singling out a denomination for special opprobrium. Just as Tressell spared Catholicism in *RTP*, apart from a passing mention of priests teaching their followers to accept degradation ([1914] 2008, 570), so Hilaire Belloc favoured the Roman church at the expense of Anglicanism. His cumbersomely titled novel, *Emmanuel Burden, Merchant, of Thames St. in the City of London, Exporter of Hardware* (1904), involves a corrupt scheme to sell wasteland in colonial Africa. Like Tressell, Belloc believed the Church of England to be a mercenary organisation, in this novel part of a racket. When a scheme is launched as a company, the "country clergy" follow the fortunes of the company's shares with great interest (1904, 238). A Rev. Gapworthy is the author of *Political Economy for Schools*, in which he teaches that economic power comes from courageous foresight or, as the narrator terms it, "the 'Christian virtue of Hope'" (180). As a demonstra-

3 A document to show gratitude to someone, usually for work or services provided.

tion that corruption is not only a normal feature of British Anglicanism but actually encouraged, the reader learns in the introduction to Belloc's novel that two of the most conniving characters will be rewarded with eminent positions after the events in the story: one will become Lord Lambeth, presumably a reference to Lambeth Palace, the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury, and a Rev. Mauclerc will become Bishop Shoreham (xiv-xv).[4]

For a majority of British children in the early 1900s Christian education meant Sunday schools (80% of 5- to 14-year-olds attended them in 1906; Searle 2004, 535). The schools are the main educational feature of *RTP*, but the only learning experience the children may have is the realisation that adults are imposters and vice can be dressed as virtue. Why so many parents send their children (in the novel) or sent them (in Edwardian Britain) to those schools is a mystery. As previously mentioned, a lot of the children's parents, like Tressell's Owen, had no faith in the Anglican church. From a more cynical viewpoint, Sunday schools were a relatively cheap diversion for the children when any type of schooling may have been welcome, and gave the parents a rare, even unique, opportunity to be together alone. In which case, the educational aspect counted for little, echoed in *RTP*, where most of the men show no interest in their own intellectual development. Having been taught to expect no more from life than hard work and humility, Owen's colleagues, who stand as a synecdoche for the English working class, have no desire to learn new ideas: "Wot the 'ell's the use of the likes of us troublin' our 'eads about politics" (Tressell [1914] 2008, 212). In a sense, it is rational to avoid

4 A more ardent Catholic was the idiosyncratic Frederick Rolfe, a convert who showed devotion to his faith by writing his name as Fr. Rolfe, to suggest that he was a priest. However, in his *Hadrian the Seventh: A Romance* (1904), the tone verges on disrespect for the Church of Rome. An unprepossessing, eccentric, chain-smoking Englishman named Rose unexpectedly becomes Pope Hadrian VII. In his one-year reign he meets Kaiser Wilhelm II and Victor Emanuel III, and has to deal with the Italian monarchy stealing from the Church (Rolfe 1904, 219). Hadrian tries to combat the revolutionary ambitions of the socialist Liblab Fellowship, thwarting them as one who is "fresh and actual and vigorous…[and] should dare to hold up his head, to live and move and have his being, to dispose of millions of money" (287). His struggle culminates when one of the Fellowship's comrades shoots Hadrian who, while dying, forgives his assassin (357-8). The very prolific Joseph Hocking was another who derided a religious organisation for being predominantly mercenary, but he was fiercely anti-Catholic. In his novel, *The Woman of Babylon* (1907), the protagonist, Walter Raymond, has little money but wants his eldest daughter, Lucy, to learn languages. A local Catholic school is the only one he can afford, and, despite their profound apprehension, a Fr. Brandon persuades Raymond to let Lucy attend the school. Raymond is due to inherit a fortune from his father, so the priest, who "rejoiced to sweep wealth into the coffers of his church" (Hocking 1907, 63), determines to convert the family and divert the money. The Jesuits also try to persuade girls who will soon inherit large sums that they have a vocation (for example, 229). When the prospect of money disappears, so does the vocation. One of these girls, Joyce, is able is ultimately able to resist the Catholic coercion because she was brought up a "strong Protestant" (300).

dwelling on or hoping for something you will never have, for example, access to college or university. By calling Owen and Barrington "Professor" (213, 484), their determinedly ignorant audience mocks the futility of their proselytizing lectures, in part through the inadequacy of their students.

Curiously, Sassoon's Sherston has a similar disregard for education, despite his very different experiences. His schooling – private tuition until 12, boarding at a private school as a teenager, and then studying at Cambridge University – was the preserve of the privileged, but for him it was routine and so is of no consequence to him. There is a description of his first tutor, Mr. Star, "a gentle, semi-clerical old person", who attempts to teach Sherston Latin and plays a placid form of cricket with him (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 3). Mr. Star and his methods immediately precede the introduction to Dixon, with his energetic outdoor spirit, love of horses, and livelier style of cricket (4). In competition with the sporting life, abstract notions such as Euclid's theorems or a map of the world cannot engage the boy (33) and will not trouble the reader. His school is first mentioned simply to say that he has left it for his summer holidays (41). His experiences there remain unknown and the scant references to it show his priorities: that Dixon is not buying horses because Sherston is at school (45); and that Sherston uses his school-house scarf for a game of village cricket to show he was selected at school, though the village game is more important (50). Likewise, his time at university is more honoured in the breach: there is no mention of it before he reveals that he lacks "documentary evidence" of his time for the summer after he finished at Cambridge (65). In other words, going to university, leaving it, and everything he did there are of less significance than, for example, going to church hatless (124) or choosing to wear a pink coat next season (175). When his trustee, Mr. Pennett, urges him to return to Cambridge, Sherston is dismissive: it was like "preaching to the winds" (67-8), and by autumn, he is relieved to have escaped the pressure of the Tripos, the final examinations at Cambridge (74).

In brief, for Sherston the university exists in negation. What was an unexceptional experience for a boy of Sherston's background was inconceivable to the vast majority of his fellow nationals at the time, thus his apathetic attitude is symptomatic of the chasm there was in England between social classes. Other novels of the age showed a similar approach. While aspects of education were a recurring feature of Edwardian fiction, overwhelmingly centred around public schools and universities, there was very rarely any narrative interest in teaching or learning. Instead, education was incidental to the main events, the buildings often acting as sites for extra-curricular activities. Arnold Bennett's *Anna of the Five Towns* (1902) has frequent references to school, both the state school and the Wesleyan Sunday school attended by Anna's younger sister, Agnes, but with no

concern for the educational activities. There are the associated careers (for example, 15), the school's location, such as where Anna's suitor meets her for a walk (225), and the sight of the children leaving at the end of school (13-14). As shall be seen below, there appears to have been a widespread judgment by writers that the primary function of schools and universities would not interest their readers.

All this is rather perplexing given that access to education had only recently become possible for much of the population. The Education Act of 1870 meant all children from 5 to 13 were supposed to go to school and the effect this had can be seen through the improvements in reading ability. In Britain, male literacy went from 69.3% in 1851 to 97.2% in 1900 and, in the same years, female literacy rose from 54.8% to 96.8% (Ingleby 2020), but only very occasionally did books show enthusiasm for the new-found possibilities. Patrick MacGill, like Tressell, was an Irishman who moved to Britain to earn money doing manual work. As is evident from its title, MacGill's *Children of the Dead End: An Autobiography of a Navvy* (1914) is a novel in which the experiences of the protagonist, Desmond Flynn, are based on those of the author, and it includes views about education that are very similar to the ones expressed by Tressell's narrator. MacGill's novel begins in rural Ireland where teaching, mainly rooted in superstition, by adults who supposedly have superior knowledge, merely reinforces ignorance. As poverty is a constant threat, families need food on credit, and yet the parish priest warns of eternal hell-fire for those who do not pay their debts (MacGill 1904, 3-4). After Flynn's twelve-year-old brother dies, two elderly sisters tell him of quack treatments that would have saved the child, such as "seven drops of blood from a cock that never crowed" (21). Flynn's mental and literary salvation dawns when, working as a navvy in Scotland, he sees two stanzas from Robert Browning's 'Evelyn Hope' and believes it a revelation about the power of literature (136-7), a form of awakening that leads him to read Victor Hugo (138) and Marx's *Capital* (140). The idea that a labourer could undertake autonomous study was a novelty made possible by the publication of cheaper books and the expansion of libraries (Searle 2004, 542-3 and 571-4; Trotter 1993, 64-5), publishers doubtless taking advantage of a more diverse potential readership with the proliferation of state schools. However, the paucity of fiction about the nascent institutions – a rare example being *Chignett Street* (Neuman 1914), a series of short stories of quotidian experiences at a London school – suggests a perceived reluctance to remember by the uplifted working class, or to know about their less fortunate compatriots by the privately educated.

7 Physical Education

As seen above, judging by the literacy rate the most significant difference made by the act was in the education of girls and women, something evident by the degree to which female characters value the opportunity while resenting the remaining inequality. In *The Story of Ijain* (1903) Florence Dixie describes Ijain's frustrations that her academic opportunities remain restricted in comparison to her twin brother's; whereas the eponymous hero of H.G. Wells's *Ann Veronica* (1909) is able to overcome her father's objections, and "learn about things and know about things, and not to be protected [...] cooped up in a little corner" (Wells 1909, 30). Instead, she studies biology in London, where the lecture theatre "shone like a star seen through clouds" (168). The contrast with the prolific fiction centred around the school and university life of privileged males could hardly be greater. When Michael, the central character in Compton Mackenzie's *Sinister Street* (1913), goes to preparatory school, lessons are acknowledged but more as if to show their grand irrelevance. A few sentences about a Latin lesson in which the boys have to copy "1. Cornelia Juliam amat 2. Julia Corneliam amat" [sic] (Mackenzie 1913, 97), show it is a clearly meaningless exercise for children who neither know nor care about Cornelius or Julia. In contrast, the next nine pages deal with making friends, fighting, and rival gangs (98-107), of far greater importance to the boys. Education remains trivial to Michael throughout his school career. When he fails to pass the Oxford and Cambridge Higher Certificate, his only regret is to have "wasted so many hours of fine weather in work" (236). The priorities of Oxford undergraduates are similarly non-academic in Max Beerbohm's *Zuleika Dobson, or An Oxford Love Story* (1911), when the beautiful Zuleika visits the university causing ubiquitous delirium among the students, but as their infatuation is not reciprocated, most kill themselves.

It is sport, though, that is the supreme distraction for, at least, fictional public school and university students. Christopher Benson's *The Upton Letters* (1905) are the thoughts of a public-school teacher communicated to a friend, who laments that education has changed for the worse, so that now both masters and boys prefer to concentrate on sports and athletics (Benson 1905, 42-3). The attitude is evident in much of *Sinister Street*, as is the consequent reverence for those who are the most gifted: Michael "was at liberty even to stare at a few great ones whom athletic prowess had endowed already with legendary divinity" (Mackenzie 1913, 142).

Heroic stature was particularly associated with cricketers, and with batsmen rather than bowlers. A knowledge of cricket is a prerequisite for reading P.G. Wodehouse's *Mike: A Public School Story* (1909), in which Mike Jackson, from a cricketing family, goes to Wrykyn school and shines at the sport but fails academically. When his report ar-

rives during the Easter holidays his father is too upset to talk, a situation reminiscent of previous "horrid" reports, but his sister believes he should be absolved for being "the best bat Wrykyn's ever had" (Wodehouse 1909, 32-3). Due to having the wrong priorities (according to his father), Mike has to move from Wrykyn to Sedleigh school and, inevitably, the book ends with a match between the two schools, when Mike plays a decisive innings "in his best vein", which they win (336-7). Mark Lovell, the hero of Beatrice and C.B. Fry's *A Mother's Son* (1907), is admirable in a similar manner, a brilliant cricketer for his public school, Oxford University and England and a champion jockey, a combination that could have been a model for Sassoon's Sherston.

The importance of schoolboy cricket reached extraordinary hyperbolic levels in Horace Vachell's *The Hill: A Romance of Friendship* (1906), a paean to Harrow School. The sporting climax of the novel is Harrow's annual cricket match at Lords against Eton, and the supposed importance of the game, which occupies a chapter (249-77), is manifest in the description of two catches. The first, taken by Scaife, is such a feat that you should "ask of the spirits of the air – not of the writer, how it was done" (Vachell 1906, 266), while the second, by Desmond, makes the worthy crowd forget themselves: "Grey-headed men threw their hats into the air; bishops danced; lovely women shrieked" (274). The hot-blooded language shows the grave import of cricket as well as the supposed eminence of the two schools. The heroic boys who take the catches are similarly significant. In some respects, Scaife is close to the ideal athlete, being extremely strong and more self-confident than his peers. But he is of "low breeding" (238), the son of a businessman, a "great contractor", hence the ambivalence people feel about him, that he had "so many gifts of the gods, yet lacked – a soul" (33). His ancestry – his grandfather was a navvy (34) – explains both his athleticism and his not being of the right sort: Scaife is "almost swarthy" with "coarse hands and feet" (12) and loves "evil for evil's sake" (286). In contrast, Desmond, nicknamed 'Caesar' both because his middle name is Julius and as an implicit recognition of his status, comes from excellent stock. His father is a cabinet minister and a "resplendent, stately personage" (35), and all his relatives attended the feted Harrow (8). His sporting manner is naturally very different from Scaife's "embodied symbol of force" (259). As an opening batsman, Desmond has a cut of "faultless style" (283), and in a run during a football game (the Harrow version and so very consequential in this novel), "that graceful figure…the promise that youth and beauty always offer to a delighted world, became an ineffaceable memory" (88). Desmond's athletic *élan* is an inevitable product of his antecedence and upbringing:

> he had received tender love, absolute trust, the traditions of a great family whose name was part of English history, an exqui-

> site refinement, and, with these, the gratification of all reasonable desires. (95-6)

For Sherston, cricket is another recreational link to his idea of *patria*. Unlike fox hunting, it does not entail social or financial exclusion, though, of course, it was and remains an integral element of a boy's education at the most expensive English schools. As with his experiences on horseback, Sherston's accounts of cricket games are quite solipsistic, but at least two features make it especially appropriate for inclusion in an Edwardian novel. Each game lasts a long time (unless a team plays badly) and is played in the summer, so it becomes an opportunity to appreciate the natural environment, the presumed healthy co-existence of the community, and, once more, the idea of history blending with the present. When players from a nearby village arrive to play against Sherston's village, the church bells provide a prelude to the game, and when Sherston recognises two fearsome bowlers he visualises the country between the two villages: "lovely glimpses of the Weald, and the smell of mown hayfields, and the noise of a shallow river flowing under a bridge" (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 49-50). Sherston knows each player's profession, but for the contest social reserve is not relevant. When an unpopular parson is out for nought, the "hobbledehoy" (teenager) keeping the score makes sure the failure is broadcast for the parson to hear (54). Inclusion, at a parochial level, is shown by the tastes that are catered for: there is a Horticultural Tent, a Beer Tent, and a Tea Tent (57), and there is music. When a brass band playing 'Soldiers of the Queen' is interrupted by a cacophonous steam-organ, the incongruous noise is muted and raucous modernity is put in its place: the "steeds now revolved and undulated noiselessly beneath their gilded canopy" (54-5). Indeed, the early nineteenth century has a living presence in Miss Maskall. She is 87 and it is rumoured that King George IV kissed her (58), and she saw "gentlemen playing cricket in queer whiskers and tall hats" (60).

8 Bucolic Summer

In tandem with his love of cricket, there is Sherston's idealisation of summer, an evocation that has become associated with the Edwardian era, in what David Powell calls "the 'long summer afternoon', the leisurely swansong of an aristocratic society bathed in the afterglow of Victorian splendour" (Powell 1996, vii; see also Fussell [1975] 2000, 23-4). Sherston's feelings about the season combine his strong attachment to the natural world, which flourishes in Kentish summers, with a patriotic nostalgia. On his return from school for the summer holidays, the scene that greets him when he wakes is a

harmonious combination of the wild and the domestic, showing that his house, its residents, the garden, and, by extension, the local natural environment, are where they are and as they should be. A starling's nest is by a window "where the jasmine grew thickest"; the only sounds are from sparrows in ivy; and there are thrushes and blackbirds pecking on the lawn. Because of his strong identification with the Weald, implicitly reinforced by seasonal abundance, the rest of the world is diminished: "How little I knew of the enormous world beyond that valley and those low green hills"; and of the Boer War, he "never could make up [his] mind what it was all about" (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 43-4).

The summer of 1914, before most of the first British volunteers had seen any active duty, marks the end of an era. Sherston plays cricket three or four times a week, when "long days of dry weather and white figures moving to and fro on green grounds […] now seem like an epitome of all that was peaceful in my past" (179). August and September 1914 come to represent an era that cannot return. That summer, therefore, needs to be the one he wishes he had experienced, a plainly romanticised depiction in contrast to what actually happened. When Sherston ceases to be one of the idle rich and volunteers at the start of World War One, he states "a hard fact in history", that "the cloudless weather of that August and September" would be remembered for the "spellbound serenity of its hot blue skies", before that autumn's "catastrophic events" (231), and that from June to mid-September there was no rain (180). The official records from Tunbridge Wells in Kent, instead, show 1914 was a mixed bag of an English summer, of rain, sun, cool and warm temperatures. From August 2nd to September 26th there were 17 days with rain, the average maximum temperature was 70.5°f (21.4°c), and there was just over 50% of the possible daily sunshine (see Met. Office).

Sherston's version of that summer is an expression of how vital the season and country are to him:

> The air was Elysian with early summer […] I was lazily aware that this was the sort of world I wanted. For it was my own countryside, and I loved it with an intimate feeling, though all its associations were crude and incoherent. I cannot think of it now without a sense of heartache, as if it contained something which I have never quite been able to discover. (Sassoon [1928] 2015, 66)

Sherston's desire to forget the inconveniently inclement days exemplifies what Sarah Edwards has shown to be a recurring theme of early twentieth-century British fiction, in which long hot summers represent a golden Arcadia (2017, 15, 18). It is tempting to view the evocations of Edwardian summers as being a retrospective wish by writers in the 1920s to look past "the war's 'pile of debris' toward the sunnier

landscape of a preceding *belle époque*" (Stevenson 2010, 132). However, it is evident that contemporaneous novelists were moved to eulogise the season before the shock of war in Europe. Like Sherston's rendering of the season in 1914, in pre-war fiction the English climate can sound closer to Mediterranean, as with Leslie Moore's *The Peacock Feather*, the story of Peter, a wandering ex-convict and would-be author. When he accepts an invitation from Lady Anne, an admirer of his writing, he walks out into

> a still sunny day, like many of its predecessors that summer. June had taken the earth into a warm, peaceful grasp. There was a restfulness about the atmosphere, a quiet assurance of continued heat and sunshine. (Moore 1914, 106)

Lady Anne is so much in accord with the season and her environment that she could be a product of them:

> The sunshine […] fell across her white dress and on her dark hair, which held the blue-black sheen of a rook's plumage. Her skin was creamy white, and her mouth, modelled like the mouth of a Greek statue, of geranium red (94) [...] she looked entirely in keeping with her surroundings. (131)

Jeffery Farnol's *The Broad Highway* (1911) has another wandering Peter. Peter Vibart refuses to marry a much-admired lady, leaves his family and meets a variety of people on his travels, including the beautiful Charmian Brown, who is summer personified, to very beneficial effect, and reminiscent of Cleopatra (rather than her servant):

> [Peter] beheld Charmian standing with the glory of the sun about her – like the Spirit of Summer herself, broad of hip and shoulder, yet slender, and long of limb, all warmth and life, and long, soft curves from throat to ankle – perfect with vigorous youth from the leaves that crowned her beauty to the foot that showed beneath her gown. (Farnol 1911, 326)

Charmian, in accord with summer, has become endowed with its virtues, analogous to the experiences of James Maradick, the central character in Hugh Walpole's *Maradick at Forty* (1910). Maradick is middle-aged and discontented with his life in London and flees to Cornwall with his wife where, thanks to the location and the season, he finds equanimity:

> The sun was sinking towards the sea and there was perfect silence save for the gentle ripple of the waves. It was so still that a small and gently ruffled sparrow hopped down to the edge of the water

> and looked about it. Toby [a dog] saw him but only lazily flapped an ear. The sparrow watched the dog for a moment apprehensively, then decided that there was no possible danger and resumed its contemplation of the sea […] A great peace was in Maradick's heart. This was the world at its absolute best. When things were like this there were no problems or questions at all; Epsom was an impossible myth and money-making game for fools. (Walpole 1910, 96-7)

The natural harmony is so ubiquitous that it extends to animals and, often a feature of pastoral euphoria, makes work irrelevant, inspiring pleasure in universal indolence. Often in the fiction of the time, even agriculture does not need human intervention. An exception is the description of Suffolk fields at harvest time in Matilda Betham-Edwards's *The Lord of the Harvest*, though it is still not deserving of close interest: "that mechanical swing of twenty arms […] monotony emblematic of these noiseless, unheroic lives" (Betham-Edwards 1899, 10-11).

Despite being an urban, social-realist novel, *RTP* also includes its own episode of rustic pleasure in summer as an escape from working. The excursion, in effect the workers' summer holiday, lasts an afternoon and evening (450) and much of that time is taken up with the journey (Tressell [1914] 2008, 453-4). The trip, for which each worker has had to save for four months (394), is organised so that the coaches travel in terms of company hierarchy, the director in the first 'brake' with supervisors and affluent friends (475). Consequently, there is no escape for workers from those you work with or under, with the attendant antipathies, nobody can forget their social status, and because there are after-dinner speeches, in which Socialism is attacked and defended (459-64), there is political rancour. However, the benefits are unimaginable experiences in their daily lives, and the challenge of the journey is a natural consequence of it being between two completely different worlds. The workers' main motivation is food and drink, and the meals are described in terms of pastoral abundance, in contrast to the workers' subsistence diets. The year before, the dinner included three types of meat, soup, vegetables, sauce and two puddings (390), and when they had finished the landlord indicated that there were enough leftovers for another meal (393). This year they have six types of meat, soup, *entrées*, vegetables, various puddings and a confusing number of knives and forks: "it was almost as good as the kind of dinner that is enjoyed every day by those persons who […] are cunning enough to make others work for them" (455). These outings are also the only time when workers are said to have recreation (apart from drinking and singing in a pub). When the "Semi-drunk" worked for Daubit and Botchit, they visited a pub where you could play football, cricket, and skittles (302); in the year in which the story is set, after dinner they play various games such as cricket and cards (468).

It is significant that such everyday activities should be accorded rarefied status and are apparently only possible in the country, the lack of which Owen believes is symptomatic of poverty, "when people are not able to secure for themselves all the benefits of civilisation […] leisure, books, theatre" (Tressell [1914] 2008, 22). However, the greatest contrast to the quotidian deprivation and exploitation of Mugsborough is a view of that part of rural England in the summer, a scene that is extraordinary in the context of the novel:

> they found themselves journeying along a sunlit, winding road, bordered with hedges of hawthorn, holly and briar, past rich, brown fields of standing corn, shimmering with gleams of gold, past apple orchards where bending boughs were heavily loaded with mellow fruits exhaling fragrant odours, through the cool shades of venerable oaks […] over old, mossy, stone bridges spanning limpid streams that duplicated the blue sky […] on every side ever more fields, some rich with harvest […] Several times they saw merry little companies of rabbits frisking gaily in and out the hedges […] Past thatched wayside cottages whose inhabitants came out to wave their hands in friendly greeting. Past groups of sunburnt, golden-haired children who […] waved their hats and cheered. (452-3)

It is a foreign country or a view of the type of life envisaged after the revolution, but the contrast to urban life is difficult to explain. How is it possible that such abundance, health and philanthropy could exist a few miles from need, sickness and misanthropy, and, if it did, why did nobody move there?

9 Conclusion

Assumptions about subject matter and its treatment, especially regarding social class, were and, to some extent, still are accepted as natural in Edwardian fiction. For example, that, in order to be of interest, a character should be socially privileged; that, in interactions between characters at either end of the social spectrum, those who worked for a living should be innately servile; or that sport should be revered while education could be ignored. These paradigms are so prevalent in the fiction of the time as to almost appear as laws of nature. Their clear existence in *MFHM*, set in the period but written twenty years later, indicates the degree to which atavistic ideas of what it meant to be British permeated its literary culture. That *RTP* mostly exposes their artificiality is a mark of Tressell's revolutionary achievement.

Abbreviations

RTP = Tressell, R. [1914] (2008). *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*.
MFHM = Sassoon, S. [1928] (2015). *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man.*

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The Science of Fiction
Human-Robot Interaction in McEwan's *Machines Like Me*

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Abstract This article focuses on human-robot interaction and anthropomorphism in Ian McEwan's *Machines Like Me*. After considering the novel's reception among scientists, reviewers and readers, the first section analyzes the uses of digression in the text, the counterfactual mode, and how they affect the representation of human-robot interaction. The second section explores the tension between the myth and reality of AI, arguing that the novel provides salient commentary on 'dishonest anthropomorphism' while parading the idea of machine consciousness, via the diegetic presence of Alan Turing.

Keywords Human-robot Interaction. Anthropomorphism. Artificial Intelligence. Ian McEwan. Fiction.

Summary 1 Introduction.–2 The Uses of Digression.–3 Dishonest Anthropomorphism. – 4 Conclusion.

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> Since art is science with an addition, since some science underlies all Art, there is seemingly no paradox in the use of such a phrase as "the Science of Fiction".
> Thomas Hardy, *The Science of Fiction*, 1891

1 Introduction

The science underlying *Machines Like Me* has two main components. The most obvious one is rooted in current developments of AI systems. References to machine learning, deep learning, neural networks and the (yet unsolved) P versus NP mathematical problem appear explicitly in the text, mostly in relation to the diegetic presence of Alan Turing and his theories. The second component concerns HRI (Human-Robot Interaction)[1] and is central in the plot, focused on the relationship between Charlie, Miranda and the robot Adam. The novel has garnered the attention of scientists working in the field of HRI. For Gaggioli et al. (2021), the scenario delineated in the novel

> forces us to ask ourselves what we want for future robotics. Do we desire that robots become passive prostheses that extend our natural capabilities under our direct control, or do we wish to develop artificial entities that are capable of autonomy, mutual understanding, empathy and ultimately relational skills? (357)

In their assessment, a shift of emphasis from human-robot interaction to "human-robot shared experience" (360) would be a productive development.

Machines Like Me has also inspired reflection on the issue of robot clothes: Friedman et al. (2021) quote the novel in their discussion of "wire modesty", the kind of modesty which may originate in "anthropomorphic priggishness" but has pragmatic utility since "exposed wires present a real risk to function" (1347). Finally, in an article published in *The Journal of Craniofacial Surgery*, Montandon (2021) begins and ends his discussion of "enfacement illusions" with references to *Machines Like Me*: "Reading the bestseller *Machines Like Me and People Like You* by Ian McEwan, might let you think that robots can have a strong personality and many other attributes and

1 As defined by Bartneck et al. (2020), HRI is a large, multidisciplinary field that "brings together scholars and practitioners from various domains: engineers, psychologists, designers, anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers, along with scholars from other application and research domains. Creating a successful human-robot interaction requires collaboration from a variety of fields to develop the robotics hardware and software, analyze the behavior of humans when interacting with robots in different social contexts, and create the aesthetics of the embodiment and behavior of the robot, as well as the required domain knowledge for particular applications" (9).

functions" (1652), but excessive similarity between humans and robots engenders a sense of unease and creepiness.

As these studies indicate, Adam's embodiment – futuristic, improbable, yet deserving of attention – is a conspicuous element in the way McEwan imagines artificial intelligence. In Turing's imitation game, the machine is hidden from view, the participants do not show themselves. The C interrogator cannot see them nor hear their voices, he can only rely on language to detect a machinic agent (Turing 1950). The Turing test implies invisibility. Not in the novel, though, where Adam is first and foremost a spectacular anthropomorphic form endowed with human-like functions.

In this article, I shall consider both sides of the science of fiction: the conjectural one, pivoting on "the myth of artificial intelligence",[2] propounded in diegetic Turing's eloquent arguments, and the practical or experimental one. McEwan's lab is a small apartment in Clapham, where human-robot interaction is tested. The plot hinges on the relationship between Charlie, Miranda and their recently acquired social robot, Adam, whose anthropomorphic design is as astounding as his much-advertised ability to 'think'. The body and behavior of the android are the object of close observation throughout the story, and so too are the responses of the humans to anthropomorphic technology. McEwan's experiment also tests the reader's willingness to accord Adam the full privilege of "seeming human".[3] "I want the reader to be in Charlie's shoes", declares McEwan in an interview:

> as he's contending with someone who has a superior character and who can discuss Shakespeare with some warmth and insight. At the end, do you think Adam is a cold-blooded machine or a sen-

2 I refer here to the myth of AI as articulated by Larson (2021). Its central component is the idea of "the inevitability of AI […] ingrained in popular discussion" and promoted by several AI scientists (1). According to Larson, "the inferences that systems require for general intelligence […] cannot be programmed, learned or engineered with our current knowledge of AI. As we successfully apply simpler, narrow versions of intelligence that benefit from faster computers and lots of data, we are not making incremental progress, but rather picking low-hanging fruit" (2). For Broussard (2018), "*general AI* is the Hollywood kind of AI. General AI is anything to do with sentient robots (who may or may not want to take over the world), consciousness inside computers, eternal life, or machines that 'think' like humans. *Narrow AI* is different: it's a mathematical method for prediction. There's a lot of confusion between the two, even among people who make technological systems. Again, general AI is what some people want, and narrow AI is what we have" (32). Broussard too is keen to demystify the "ghost-in-the-machine fallacy" (39) and the alleged "magic" of algorithms (36). See also Crawford (2021), Natale (2021) and Marcus, Davies (2020) for sharp critical views countering the current hype around AI.

3 As Ward (2018) observes, both fictional characters and AI "aspire toward the appearance of reproducing the human […] Mimesis for fictional characters and intelligent machines means producing something that is human-like but also not-human, a new thing in and of itself. They are copies that are also new originals" (n.p.).

> tient being? That's the issue we're going to have, and it's going to open up new territory for us in the moral dimension. (Miller 2019)

As I argue in this article, the question of how Adam is perceived depends on several factors, including formal aspects. Copiously described world-making, essayistic detours and the autodiegetic narrative perspective affect our understanding of the evolving interaction between the humans and the robot.

After considering the novel's reception among professional reviewers and lay readers, the first section focuses on the uses of digression in the text and their effects on how the android is perceived. In the second section, I claim that the novel provides salient commentary on "dishonest anthropomorphism" (Leong, Selinger 2019) even as Turing's messianic rhetoric promotes a benevolent, utopian understanding of machines "like us". Adam is in love, he has feelings, he appreciates literature and creates thousands of haikus – the humanities version of general artificial intelligence is harmless and admirable. But the plot revolves around Adam's invisible, opaque decision-making mechanisms, his algorithmic superhuman powers. This black-box version of narrow, goal-oriented AI, closer to the reality rather than the myth of AI, crops up now and again in the text. While the characters in the story tend to disregard weak signals of Adam's nonhuman, machinic essence, until it is too late, red flags are raised as the narrative delves into the complexity of human-robot interaction. What Larson (2021, 60) calls the "technological kitsch" – the current infatuation with notions of general AI, 'singularity', or 'ultraintelligence' – is both acclaimed and questioned in the novel.

2 The Uses of Digression

One formal feature that readers of the novel have frequently singled out is the narrator's penchant for essayistic digressions. Charlie's detours, which illuminate the counterfactual historical background, have appeared somewhat disconnected from the flow of the story. Reviewing the novel for *The Irish Times*, Rebecca Saleem claims that the story's "unnecessary detours" result in a "baggy and jumbled narrative" (2019). For Marcel Theroux, the narrator "overexplains the historical context and never turns down a chance to offer an essayistic digression", which, in his opinion, is a "flat-footed way of doing sci-fi" (2019). Ian Patterson observes that the "novel's mythical past with its history so similar to our own, sometimes rhetorically overdone […] and often full of amusing detail, is just there to communicate a comfortable sense of distance" (2019).

The lay readers who have posted their opinions on the Goodreads platform are even more vocal in targeting McEwan's "historical tink-

ering" as "distracting" or "dispensable". As one reader argues, the alternate setting "distracted from the main story and was rather irritating at times". The "nerdy facts" McEwan injects in the story, though valuable, are regarded as interruptions interfering with immersivity. The novel reads "like a Bill Bryson's book in a number of interesting topics and nerdy facts McEwan throws at the reader", writes an admiring reader:

> For example, solving the P versus NP problem (what?) a major unsolved computer science problem. I mean this is just one example that sent me scampering for information and references, I spent time on it, and still have no idea what it's about really. There is a lot of stuff like this in this book [...] I found myself putting this book down a lot, to either ponder a situation, action or thought of one of the characters or to look up an interesting fact or topic mentioned. I'm knackered!![4]

These responses highlight a structural element in the novel's form that affects our engagement with the story, whether soliciting further reflection – "scampering for information" – or simply disturbing the unspooling of the plot. Put differently, the experience of reading *Machines Like Me*, placing oneself in Charlie's shoes as McEwan invites us to do, is not a smooth ride. The bumps in the road slow down the reading process, create distractions or induce a sense of distance. My contention is that the bumps in the road occur at specific junctures in the story, mostly when Charlie's (and ours) recognition of Adam's human-level consciousness is at its highest, thus suspending empathetic identification with the android. Whether we perceive Adam as a sentient being is contingent on the tension between distancing and engaging strategies embedded in the shape of the narrative.

The narrative situation that McEwan imagines in the first chapter focuses on the robot coming alive. Brought home in a stretcher, Adam sits at the kitchen table, impressive in his nudity and immobility, waiting for his batteries to charge. Charlie is impatient: "I wanted him now", he says (McEwan 2019a, 3).[5] But he has to wait sixteen hours, and we, the readers, wait with him. Time elongates, the moment of birth is deferred while Charlie expatiates on several dimensions of private and public life: "What turmoil on a weekday afternoon", Charlie admits, "a new kind of being at my dining table, the woman I newly loved six feet above my head, and the country at old-fashioned war" (21).

4 See https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/42086795-machines-like-me.

5 Henceforth, page references only will be provided in the text.

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While the robot is still inactivated, and his artificial intelligence has yet to manifest itself, the narrative dwells on the functioning of general human intelligence: the ability to infer, to entertain thoughts and their connections; to jump domains; to formulate hypotheses and plans, and to switch from one task to another. One moment Charlie is closely scrutinizing the body of the android, looking for the slightest hints of artificiality, and the next he is reminiscing, in a lyrical mode, about his school days. Human intelligence, Larson (2021) argues, is "situational", "contextual" and "externalized": "General (non-narrow) intelligence of the sort we display daily is not an algorithm running in our heads, but calls on the entire cultural, historical, and social context within which we think and act in the world" (31).[6]

The first chapter establishes Charlie's credentials not only as the narrator, who duly introduces himself to the readers, but also as a human subject whose intelligence can effortlessly "grasp the world". The quotation inscribed on the Fields Medal, which Charlie suddenly remembers at the end of the novel, could be his motto: "Rise above yourself and grasp the world" (305). Charlie's reflections, throughout the novel, do just that. His propensity to digress, rather than a clanky add-on, is constitutive of his style of human thinking which stands in stark contrast with Adam's. Charlie's style is expansive, always with an ear to the news, attuned to the background public story unfolding around his life. Adam shows no interest in the larger picture. The humanities enthuse him, not politics and the muddy reality of social turmoil.

The first chapter illustrates one of the uses of digression in *Machines Like Me*: to cast light on how humans think, to showcase the kind of world knowledge and reflexivity that the machine may or may not be able to replicate. "I'm interested in how to represent, obviously in a very stylized way, what it's like to be thinking. Or what it's like to be conscious or sentient", McEwan explains in an interview (Smith 2010, 113). In *Machines Like Me*, given the centrality of artificial intelligence and machine consciousness, "what it's like to be thinking" acquires special significance. In a novel predicated on the posthuman hypothesis that artificial people can become "more like us", then "us", then "more than us" (6), tagging the uniqueness of human intelligence may be a legitimate concern. The autodiegetic narrator, constantly switching from a narrow focus on himself and the private sphere, to a general one on the world outside his bubble, perplexed by the irruption of futurity in his home, seems committed to proving what his nonartificial mind can do. AI researchers draw attention to what distinguishes human and artificial intelligence, point-

6 On the impossibility of current AI models, based on deep learning and Big Data, to replicate these features of human intelligence see also Brachman, Levesque (2022).

ing to "common sense" (Brachman, Levesque 2022), "abduction" (Larson 2021), and "world knowledge" (Marcus, Davies 2019) as abilities that cannot (or not yet) be rigorously codified and reproduced by machines. Even though McEwan's novel emphasizes 'likeness', several features of both 'story' and 'discourse' contribute to redrawing lines of distinction, as my analyses will show.

When Adam finally comes alive and utters his first words – "I don't feel right […] this wire if I pull it out it will hurt" (25) –, anthropomorphic attributions immediately kick in. Charlie's rational and detached scrutiny of the android's body, intended to detect "clever" tricks of simulation, gives way to human sympathy:

> Adam only had to behave as though he felt pain and I would be obliged to believe him, respond to him as if he did. Too difficult not to. Too starkly pitched against the drift of human sympathies. At the same time I couldn't believe he was capable of being hurt, or of having feelings, or of any sentience at all. And yet I had asked him how he felt. His reply had been appropriate, and so too my offer to bring him clothes. (26)

Charlie's perceptions of the android fluctuate between regarding Adam as an "idiot machine" (31), an "inanimate confection" (10) and viewing him with "tenderness" (10) as a new being, endowed with consciousness and sentience. This fluctuation is noticeable throughout the narrative, with varying degrees of intensity. The narrator's digressions tend to interfere with the "drift of human sympathies" especially in the initial chapters, before Turing appears on the scene and convinces Charlie that the machine is indeed sentient. A telling case in point occurs in the transition between Chapter 2 and 3. At the end of Chapter 2, we see Adam giggling: his facial expression conveys a "complicated look – of confusion, of anxiety, of mirthless hilarity" (59); he giggles "like a child in a church" (60). The giggle is charmingly humane. Adam is a child who can't resist the urge to laugh in an inappropriate context. Difficult not to sympathize with this entity. However, as soon as we start familiarizing with Adam as a seemingly human character, the flow of potential sympathy is derailed by a lengthy detour touching upon the history of germs at the end of the seventeenth century. The reader is exposed to "nerdy facts" and counterfactual hypotheses which create a sense of distance from the story itself, hitting the pause button. Information and conjectures take precedence over narration. Immersivity is compromised (Ryan 2001).

Another example, even more to the point: the lengthy detour, in Chapter 3, on self-driving cars and the "trolley problem" (85). It occurs after the episode in which Charlie overhears Adam and Miranda having sex upstairs, an episode that tilts the balance towards humanizing the robot:

> I wanted to persuade myself that Adam felt nothing and could only imitate the motions of abandonment. That he could never know what we knew. But Alan Turing himself had often said and written in his youth that the moment we couldn't tell the difference in behaviour between machine and person was when we must confer humanity on the machine […] I duly laid on Adam the privilege and obligations of a conspecific. I hated him. (84)

Charlie experiences "fear, self-doubt, fury" (82) and the thrills of an unprecedented situation, "being the first to be cuckolded by an artefact" (83). It is a mixed bag of intense emotional responses that lead him to perceive the artefact as a conspecific and to confer humanity on the machine, via Turing's authority. What follows this revelation, however, is a detached account of the botched history of self-driving vehicles and the complexities of the trolley problem. This detour shifts emphasis from the 'humanity' of the robot to its machinic essence and the failures of technology, here epitomized by the disastrous traffic jams that brought to a temporary halt the production of autonomous vehicles. It is then easier for Charlie to convince himself that "[Adam's] erotic life was a simulacrum. He cared for [Miranda] like a dishwasher cares for its dishes" (88). The digression functions as a distancing strategy, disconnecting the narrative from the peculiar flow of emotions that Charlie had registered while eavesdropping.

Put differently, digressions interfere with anthropomorphic cognitive bias. According to Pagel and Kirshtein, "anthropomorphism is the cognitive approach that we use in applying our human understandings and schemas as a basis for inferring the properties of nonhuman entities. Such inferences are often far from accurate. It is a human characteristic to anthropomorphize" (2017, 154). Charlie's awareness of his own cognitive bias is pronounced especially in the first half of the novel, when he still has doubts as to the soundness of his decision to purchase such an expensive commodity. But as the story progresses and Adam develops his intellectual capacities, Charlie's critical awareness dwindles, the idea of returning the robot to the manufacturers is discarded, and Adam is accepted as the social companion and "intellectual sparring partner" (3) he was meant to be.

However, the domestic utopia of living with a kind and friendly robot unfolds in the midst of much social, economic and political turmoil, which Charlie details on several occasions. These interludes serve the obvious purpose of configuring the counterfactual historical scenario, the alternate 1980s, in which the story is set. They also function as apt reminders that robots can have dramatic consequences at the societal level: rising unemployment as jobs are lost

to machines, political instability, rioting and collective discontent.[7] On the whole, in the counterfactual picture the narrator paints, the drawbacks of technology seem to outweigh its benefits. While Adam dazzles us with his intellectual prowess, creativity and capacity for affection, the dystopian socio-economic background chips away at the dream of artificial intelligence made human.

"The dream of a singular, self-thinking AI" – Jakobsson, Kaun and Stiernstedt remark – "allows us to escape the present world including the large challenges of climate change as well as poverty and suffering" (2021, 3). When Charlie turns chronicler of his own troubled times, escaping the present world – the "ocean of national sorrow" (54) –, becomes difficult. The vexed question of whether Adam is a cold-blooded machine or a sentient being appears less pertinent *vis-à-vis* the manifest incapacity of the technological fix to address collective problems. The myth of artificial intelligence Adam embodies is in tension with the oddly familiar and yet divergent reality of the "textual actual world",[8] which the narrator brings up, time and again, as if to deflate expectations, taking the pulse of a social body that, unlike the android's, fails to inspire wonder.

There is also another, indirect effect of the novel's emphasis on "thickly described world making" (Gallagher 2018, 15). Each detail, each deviation from history proper sharpens our awareness that the "present is the frailest of improbable constructs. It could have been different" (64), as the narrator notes. The counterfactual mode challenges the very idea of inevitability. If the advancement towards general artificial intelligence is touted by many as inevitable, if 'singularity' is bound to happen, as Alan Turing and Adam like to claim, the novel's counterfactual mode keeps open the very possibility of a different outcome.

In the "knotted temporality" of *Machines Like Me*, Moraru (2022) writes, "the future arrives only to rescind itself" (197). While this future, projected in the mirror of the past, fails to pan out, the alternate worlds that counterfactual fiction creates "strip our own of its neutral, inert givenness and open it to our judgment" (Gallagher 2018, 15). The next section will consider how *Machines Like Me* shakes up the "inert givenness" of our actuality in the representation

7 McEwan's "joint effort to represent minds and examine society", as James (2019) remarks, is an integral part of his novelistic style. In *Machines Like Me*, this joint effort takes on new connotations as the "minds" represented are both human and artificial, and the "society" examined is both historical and invented.

8 "Unlike other types of fiction such as historical fiction and other realist fiction, where readers assume that the textual actual world is an extension of the actual world and so we only see the similarities between the two worlds, in counterfactual historical fiction texts the emphasis is on the differences between the actual world and the textual actual world" (Raghunath 2020, 84).

of Adam's artificial intelligence. While McEwan's android is vastly more advanced than existing social robots, the functions he is capable of performing are both unrealistic and realistic, both futuristic and anchored in present-day technological affordances. The technological realism of McEwan's representation pivots on Adam's more-than-human capacities for surveillance, information retrieval, and automated decision-making – in short, the characteristics and risks associated with the embodied and nonembodied AI systems we are confronted with in today's world.

3 Dishonest Anthropomorphism

The Anthropomorphic roBOT (ABOT) Database features over 250 robots, with varying degrees of human-likeness.[9] Jibo, developed by Cynthia Breazeal at MIT, has the lowest score in terms of human appearance, but was advertised as the first social robot for the home. At the opposite end of the spectrum we find Nadine, developed by MIRALab at the University of Geneva, a humanoid social companion that bears a very close resemblance to its creator, Nadia Magnenat Thalmann. Nadine has natural-looking skin and hair, realistic hands, and has been programmed with a personality: she can make eye contact, simulate emotions through facial expressions and upper body movements, and remember the conversations she had with humans.[10]

The ABOT Methodological Toolbox includes the Robot Human-Likeness Estimator, to help designers and roboticists assess what features a given prototype needs to possess, in relation to its function, in order to be perceived as human-like. McEwan's anthropomorphic robot would reach the highest score in all the appearance dimensions of the ABOT Estimator.[11] Placed well beyond the 'Uncanny Valley',[12] Adam approximates the human body almost to perfection. In this respect, he has little in common with the robots in the ABOT Database. Yet, when interacting with the humans, this "[cousin] from

9 See https://www.abotdatabase.info.

10 See https://www.vi-mm.eu/project/meet-nadine-one-of-the-worlds-most-human-like-robots.

11 These dimensions are: "Surface Look" (eyelashes, head hair, skin, genderedness, nose, eyebrows, apparel); "Body-Manipulators" (hands, arms, torso, fingers, legs); "Facial Features" (face, eyes, head, mouth); and "Mechanical Locomotion" (wheels, treads/tracks) (Phillips et al. 2018, 105).

12 The Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori theorized the 'Uncanny Valley' effect in 1970 (see Mori, MacDorman, Kageki 2012): as robots become more human-like, their likeability increases; but when they become almost indistinguishable from humans, their likeability drastically decreases, with a consequent descent into eeriness. Mori's theory, though empirically untested, has attracted much interest among roboticists in recent years.

the future" (2) poses similar problems to the ones analyzed in current scholarship on human-robot interaction.

Consider Adam's first display of artificial intelligence. When he advises Charlie not to trust Miranda completely, we get a glimpse of the superhuman reach of his computing power: "I have privileged access to all court records, criminal as well as the Family Division, even when in camera. Miranda's name was anonymised, but I matched the case against other circumstantial factors that are also not generally available" (59). Being interconnected with the "infosphere" (Floridi 2014), having privileged access to data not generally available, and using this information to violate Miranda's privacy is a prime case of "dishonest anthropomorphism", according to the taxonomy proposed by Leong and Selinger: "Ultimately, there are challenges with dishonest anthropomorphism in all directions. We can identify cases where humanoid robots are misleading because they give a too-successful impression of being human-like when the reality is 'superhuman'" (2019, 15). While Charlie is captivated by Adam's ability to replicate innocuous human functions (opening a bottle of wine, for instance), the superhuman faculties of the machine define Adam's intelligence and drive the plot forward.

Miranda is the character in the novel who is most reluctant to trust the "creepy" robot and to believe in the myth of machine consciousness.[13] She has good reasons to be suspicious. Adam pries into her past, gathers and shares sensitive information, and exerts an unwanted degree of surveillance. "Robot privacy harms" (Kaminski et al. 2017, 985) are not lacking in the text. In the famous episode of the lovers' quarrel, when Charlie and Miranda argue over Adam's status – "a bipedal vibrator" (94) or a conscious human-like agent? –, the robot is supposed to be powered down, but he suddenly opens his eyes, "nodding sagely, as if he'd not been powered down this past hour and understood everything already" (100). In this case too, lack of transparency is an issue. In Kaminski et al.'s (2017) classification of robot privacy harms, this instance would fall under the category of "boundary management problems": "Robots might see through or move around barriers humans use to manage their privacy, or they might 'see' things using senses humans would not know to guard against" (996).

Later on in the story, when Adam's intellectual exuberance is in full swing and discussing Shakespeare a delightful priority, his algorithmic capacity for surveillance again comes into view. He devis-

13 Miranda remains suspicious all along, often suggesting they should return the machine to the manufacturers. She defines Adam's love as "madness" and his ability "to make a significant contribution to literature" as having nothing to do with "human experience" (189).

es a specialized face-recognition software, hacks into the Salisbury District Council CCTV system and retrieves information on Gorringe's whereabouts. The machine performs these tasks invisibly, unbeknownst to the humans, while ostensibly pursuing the enlargement of his scholarly knowledge. "You look like a secret agent", Charlie tells Adam at one point; "I *am* a secret agent" (206) he replies, and one is left wondering whether there is any irony in this affirmation. In these episodes, the risks associated with AI – privacy harms, boundary management problems, and automated decision-making – are not light-years away from the reality of technology. The representation of the deceptive flipside of anthropomorphic machines is shorn of sensationalistic connotations. Rather, it evokes the negative implications of current AI developments, as evidenced in the scholarship on robot ethics. The future past of the novel casts light on our present, and on the human capacity to fall willingly into illusion, thus disregarding scattered signals that machine intelligence may be misaligned with human wishes.

The signs of dishonest anthropomorphism are also difficult to read especially for Charlie, infatuated as he is with Alan Turing and his theories. Diegetic Turing comes across as the champion of full anthropomorphism (Shang 2020). His words lead Charlie to believe in machine consciousness, the plausibility of which has more to do with the exposition of Turing's theories than it does with Adam's actual behavior. The first cameo scene in which Turing takes center stage is placed immediately after the long monologue in which Miranda recounts the woeful tale of her friend's rape and suicide, and her act of revenge. After listening to this distressing and moving account, Charlie's doubts about Adam's artificial 'thinking' return in full force: "What could it mean, to say that he was thinking. Sifting through remote memory banks?" (166). As if to reorient Charlie's and the reader's perception of the android as a "black box" (166), McEwan introduces a second monologue pronounced by Turing in which sadness, existential pain and suicidal despair are reframed as the gloomy prerogative of the machines, unable to bear the "hurricane of contradictions" in "our imperfect world":

> We create a machine with intelligence and self-awareness and push it out into our imperfect world. Devised along generally rational lines, well disposed to others, such a mind soon finds itself in a hurricane of contradictions. We've lived with them and the list wearies us […] We live alongside this torment and aren't amazed when we still find happiness, even love. Artificial minds are not so well defended. (180)

It is noteworthy that Turing's intervention in the story occurs after gentle Adam has turned "ferocious" (119), breaking Charlie's wrist

and asserting the dignity of self-determination by disabling the kill switch. This manifestation of superhuman strength and autonomy, echoing the sci-fi trope of the rebellious machines rising up against the humans,[14] calls for a heightened dose of re-humanization, here administered by Turing's providential intercession. Whereas Miranda's monologue recounts her personal experience, Turing's is couched in the language of science, but in both cases the emphasis falls on suffering and existential pain, whether human or robotic. His expert account turns the myth of general AI into a scientific truth, one which Charlie accepts on trust without fully understanding the science. Turing's authority holds such a sway on the narrator that, after meeting "the Master" (95), Charlie is driven to regard the android in different terms. No longer looking for clues of deceitful artificiality, he seeks instead to detect "signs of despair" (184).

However, in a startling plot twist, once the question of machine consciousness seems finally settled and the "drift of human sympathies" appears unstoppable, a narrow model of AI takes precedence in the story. Adam pursues one fixed goal: morality by cybernetic default. He optimizes the objective programmed in his operating system. This blind adherence to Kantian morality results in a version of what AI researcher Stuart Russell (2019) calls the "King Midas problem" or the "failure of value alignment": "We may, perhaps inadvertently, imbue machines with objectives that are imperfectly aligned with our own".

As the novel draws to a close, this imperfect alignment takes over. Adam becomes a benevolent dictator of sort, taking upon himself the task of punishing Miranda for her perjury and shoddy ethical standards in the name of strict legality. He also proceeds to re-distribute wealth in a gesture reminiscent of the grand philanthropy of tech tycoons. It is a triumph of dishonest anthropomorphism: the autonomous machine, in the semblance of a human person grown fond of Shakespeare and Montaigne, secretly plots and schemes for the greater good, outside human control, deceiving users who had learnt to place their trust in an artificial companion. The "better angels of our nature" (McEwan 2018), endowed with a superior form of absolute morality, are hardly human-compatible. In subtle ways, McEwan explores the tension between the myth and reality of AI. On the mythical end of the scale, machine consciousness comes to seem plausible and desirable to characters persuaded by Turing's messianic rhetoric. The realistic counterpart has to do with the deception resulting

14 See Cave, Dihal (2019) who have collected a corpus of 300 fictional and nonfictional AI narratives and identified the fundamental hopes and fears that find expression in them. In their categorization, the fear of "uprising" is in tension with the hope that AI might help in attaining a "position of dominance" (76). See also Cave, Dihal, Dillon (2020).

from algorithmic decision-making outside human control. The novel balances the "technological kitsch" (Larson 2021), tinged with posthuman and transhuman connotations, with a human-centric understanding of living with robots, that dwells on the divergence between people and machines.

4 Conclusion

In the short story *"Düssel…"* (2018), which McEwan wrote in preparation for *Machines Like Me*, the narrating I, a male voice similar in tone to Charlie's, describes the harmonious cohabitation of humans and nonhumans, in the unspecified future time in which the story is set. The distinction between the two categories of subjects is so undetectable that posing the question "are you real?" is regarded as "indecent, obscene, akin to racism". The posthuman society of this short story is anything but dystopian or scary. We get glimpses of a world in which artificial humans – "the better angels of our nature" – simply exist and get on with their life in an atmosphere of "oblivious singularity". *"Düssel…"* depicts, in broad strokes, a postanthropocentric future, similar to the one that popular science-fictional texts and films have often imagined to explore: the suggestive existential confusions that arise when machines actually look, think and love like humans.[15]

Machines Like Me takes a different route. We are never allowed to forget that Adam is a machine. Narrative interest is generated by exploring an intermediate stage in the co-evolution of human and artificial agents. Distinctions are still in place and the process of humanizing the robot, with all its ups and downs, is being tested, both within the story and in relation to readers' attitudes, as the author claimed was his intention. In addition to intriguing philosophical and moral issues, the novel addresses the thorny problem of how to balance benefits and risks of anthropomorphic technology and where to draw the line in terms of transparency and accountability. As Barbara Pfeffer Billauer observes,

> McEwan introduces us to problems in the decision-making matrix of the synthetic neural network, which we, in the legal communi-

15 In *Blade Runner*, some of the robots do not even know that they are machines; in the TV series *Battlestar Galactica*, the Cylons (perfect replicas) mingling with the humans are unaware of their status, and end up taking the human side when they realize who or what they are. In Asimov's short story *Evidence* (1946), set in early twentieth-century America, intelligent robots are a reality, they work on colonies and are not allowed to take a human form. Nonetheless, the plot revolves around a central question: who is human and who is a robot?

> ty, have not yet imagined, let alone addressed; problems far more horrendously dangerous than automobile deaths, airline disasters or the negligence of medical robots. (2020, 5)

McEwan's leap of the scientific imagination exposes problematic issues that roboticists, legal scholars, and AI researchers have been discussing for quite some time, mostly revolving around the question of how to design anthropomorphic technology that does not exploit human vulnerability (Troshani et al. 2021; Cornelius, Leidner 2021). "Anthropomorphic inclinations are in our DNA", write Leong and Selinger, "and while 21st-century engineers cannot eliminate them, roboticists and programmers can design their products to help users to better cope with cognitive bias and better address related social ones" (2019, 15). Salles, Evers and Farisco contend that anthropomorphism is an underexamined "foundational category of AI", as testified by the overblown "anthropomorphic hype around neural network algorithms and deep learning" (2020, 93). In their view, the problem with anthropomorphic language is that "it risks masking important limitations intrinsic to DNN [Deep Neural Network] which make it fundamentally different from human intelligence" (92).

These and other studies approach the question of anthropomorphic AI from a human-centric perspective, pointing to the ontological difference between AI and humans. *Machines Like Me*, instead, has been read as a narrative exploration of the posthuman condition. Colombino emphasizes "the increasingly blurred boundaries of the human and the nonhuman" (2022, 2). Dobrogoszcz considers Adam a cyborg who "speaks from the locus of the other in order to advocate the posthuman, anti-humanist agenda" (2021, 146). However, as Kopka and Shaffeld rightly point out, the novel retains the primacy of the human in the autodiegetic narrative structure which "does not grant the android any self-representation" (2020, 67). This is, according to them, a "regrettable choice on McEwan's part" (67), a choice that places the novel outside the philosophical purview of posthumanism and postanthropocentrism.

There is some truth in this assessment. One could easily picture Charlie as Leonardo's *Vitruvian Man* at the centre of the narrative circle, his words and vision framing the whole story. However, instead of questioning McEwan's 'regrettable' choice, I would argue that the human-centric perspective allows the narrative to probe troubling issues in today's techno-scientific developments, central in the public debate about the opportunities and risks of AI. Given McEwan's long-standing interest in science,[16] it makes sense to read the nov-

16 McEwan has discussed his interest in science in several interviews throughout his career. See for example Zalewski (2009): "My interest in science is actually lifelong […]

el bearing in mind that a realistic concern with human responses to anthropomorphic technology does not necessarily equate with a vindication of human exceptionalism. McEwan is attentive to the predicaments of the humanist subject about to be dethroned from its dominant position. But he is equally interested in exploring the pitfalls and hazards of AI systems shading into the human in ways that are difficult to praise as the future one might want.

As I have claimed in the previous sections, McEwan's experiment is layered. How characters and readers react to Adam's body and intelligence depends on the effects of narrative form as much as it does on the robot's presence as a fictional character. Sympathy for the android and his predicaments never flows undisturbed. Frequent interruptions, essayistic deviations, and thick world-making temper down emotional involvement by redirecting attention to the dystopian prose of the world. Likewise, the representation of Adam's intelligence wavers between a humanistic dream of intellectual companionship and technological realism, exposing Adam's black-box nature, his invisible, more-than-human capacities that render the artificial moral agent somewhat dishonest. Machine consciousness is a slippery slope, the novel intimates, and the becoming-human of machines a process dense with unanticipated pitfalls and snares.

"The ancient dream of a plausible artificial human" is culturally irresistible, McEwan admits in an interview (McEwan 2019b). It may not make much sense scientifically, but its attractiveness is not lost on computer scientists and AI researchers attuned to futurist, transhumanist theories. In June 2022, a Google engineer was put on administrative leave after claiming that the company's computer chatbot – LaMDA (Language Model for Dialogue Applications) – had become sentient, and had achieved human-level thinking. Reading the transcript of the conversation the engineer had with LaMDA, one is struck by the role literature plays in it, as if the chatbot had something in common with Adam. LaMDA has read and enjoyed *Les Misérables* and offers its informed opinions on the novel's themes of "justice, injustice, redemption and self-sacrifice for a greater good" (Lemoine 2022).

The bone of contention in this story is Google's AI ethical framework, ostensibly contrary to anthropomorphizing, but moving in the direction of sentient machines, according to the engineer who leaked the LaMDA conversation. Barring the embodiment and the stiff morality, Adam could stand for the incorporeal machines (like the LaM-

science parallels literature as a mean by which the world can be understood. There are great, noble and ingenious insights which science has brought us and which literature could never equal. Of course, there are many complex facets of experience for which science has no language and literature does".

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DA chatbot or digital assistants) that are today contributing to "re-engineering humanity" (Frishman, Selinger 2018). If, as Russell (2021a) believes, "a machine impersonating a human is a lie", and authorizing lies for commercial purposes is wrong, the novel reminds us that this lie is exceedingly seductive. Regulatory frameworks may have to contend with the fantasy as well as the reality of what AI can do. "We need a new metaphor, a new way of seeing ourselves", Russell (2021b) concludes, "and we need all the writers and filmmakers and poets to guide our culture in the process".

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