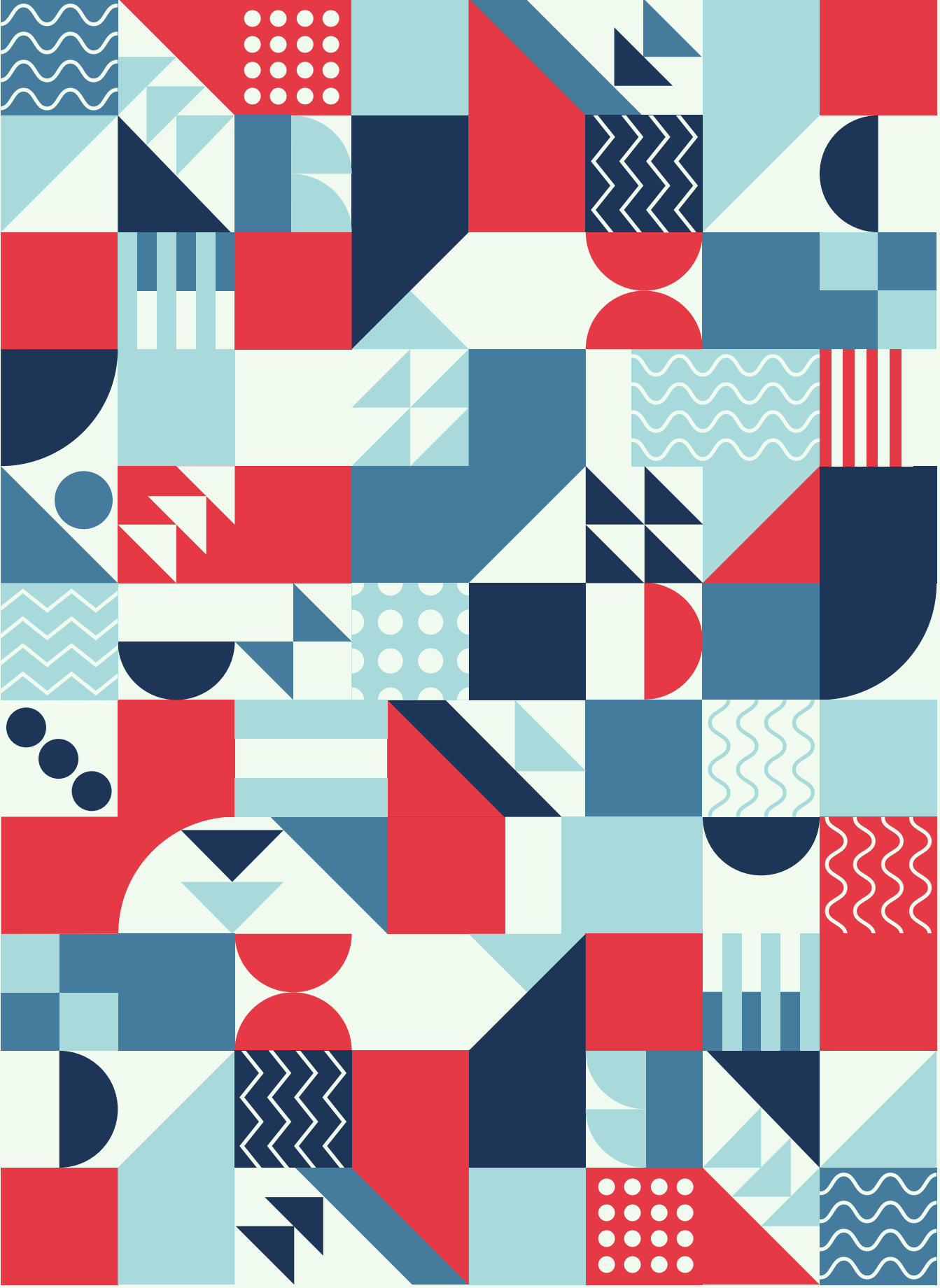

TOPICAL ISSUE

patchwork

HORIZONS

Edited by the students from the Department of English,
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

PUBLISHER
Department of English
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of Zagreb

ISSUE #6 (TOPICAL ISSUE)
ISSN 1849-7772 (Print)
ISSN 1849-7780 (Online)

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The journal uses double-blind review.

Contents

— Foreword

Dear readers,

We are pleased to present to you the newest topical issue of *Patchwork*, entitled "Horizons". "Horizons" was originally supposed to be another installment of our annual student conference, Anglophonia, which sadly never took place due to the ongoing world health crisis regarding Covid-19. Here, however, you will find a small selection of papers that were to be presented at the conference back in May 2020, and despite the conference never taking place, we hope you will enjoy the authors' work and that it will help you in your own research. The five papers in this issue all fall under the category of literary or cultural studies, yet at the same time, they are all interdisciplinary in nature and encourage dialogue with other adjacent disciplines. Thus you will find, for example, how Sofija Skuban's paper on Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* is both a cultural study of present-day United States and the role of violence in American society and culture, and a beautiful exercise in film studies. Or, consider Iva Kurtović's extremely pertinent exploration of the intermedial nature of fan fiction through her analysis of *The Night War*, a series of *Captain America* fan fiction posts, and the way in which the paper implicitly raises the question of what constitutes a literary work. On the other hand, Urszula Świątek's paper on *Beowulf* or Barbara Bočkaj's paper on Shakespeare, though dealing with centuries-old works, propose new and alternative approaches to practically ancient topics in English departments around the world in a way that hopefully pushes the disciplinary boundaries a little bit—in particular, by considering *Beowulf* through the lens of musical studies, and by considering *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus* through the lens of psychological trauma studies. Likewise, Joanna Łękawska's paper does the same by taking a look at the role of fantasy literature—here specifically Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*—in the EFL classroom, which is of course immensely relevant in the 21st century when the works of fantasy are more popular than ever before, and when at the same time TEFL curricula are being reconsidered at an increasing rate.

Of course, very little of all this could have been done without the support from the English Department here at the Faculty, and we would hereby like to express our immense gratitude for their assistance every step of the way. Many thanks to the Advisory Board as well, all of whom helped us greatly by evaluating these papers, and of course to the regular *Patchwork* team, who were kind enough to take the back seat on this issue (though, look out for another regular issue of *Patchwork* later this year). Despite the conference never taking place, and despite the dire nature of the times in which we now find ourselves, we sincerely hope that you will find these papers of some service to you.

Neven Brlek,
the guest editor for this issue

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Barbara Bočkaj

'Rome is but a wilderness of tigers': Isolation in *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus*

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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'Rome is but a wilderness of tigers': Isolation in *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus*

The titular characters of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and *Coriolanus* are both respected soldiers of Rome. Both also ultimately turn against Rome and its institutions, and are killed. This paper explores the relationship of the soldier and society in these two tragedies.

The key elements determining the position of a soldier in society which are examined in the paper are the language employed to discuss warfare (especially that used by the protagonists), the treatment of the soldier's body (linguistically and otherwise), and the soldier's relationship with his family. Aspects of the two plays which might indicate trauma are pointed to, by expanding on the plays and taking into account early modern warfare and the chivalric system. In addition, contemporary war trauma theory is used, focusing particularly on one symptom – isolation. It is precisely this element that characterizes the soldier's relationship with his society, which is illustrated by the comparison of the two protagonists' narratives.

By looking at the parallels and differences between the two plays, with the aid of history of warfare and contemporary trauma theory, the paper aims to examine the role of the soldier in Shakespeare's plays, centring on the idea of isolation.

KEYWORDS
soldier, isolation, war trauma, *Titus Andronicus*, *Coriolanus*

Introduction

Titus Andronicus is one of Shakespeare's earliest tragedies, and the first Roman tragedy. *Coriolanus*, on the other hand, is his last tragedy set in Ancient Rome. Both protagonists are distinguished soldiers who turn against Rome and its institutions, and ultimately die because of it. However, whereas the conflict in *Titus Andronicus* is contained to the Andronici and the royal family, in *Coriolanus* it extends and sets the protagonist against a whole social class, the plebeians.

Given the similarity of the positions the titular characters are in, and the plays' places in Shakespeare's oeuvre, the two tragedies present an opportunity to explore the evolution of certain elements relating to the figure of the soldier in Shakespeare's work. This paper will look more closely at the ways in which language is used to refer to war in both plays, the treatment of the soldiers' bodies, as well as the soldiers' relationships with their respective families. Special attention will be given to potential traumatic elements, analysed with the use of contemporary trauma theory in conjunction with early modern physiology. The chivalric system, as an important aspect of early modern warfare, will also be taken into consideration. The aim of the essay is to explore isolation of veterans in both of these plays, which is primarily visible in the way the protagonists are treated by Rome, whose 'cruelty and envy' (*Coriolanus* 4.5.75) is based on an inability to understand the profession of the soldier.

'I am the sea': physiology of trauma

The very beginning of *Titus Andronicus* is marked with unrest. Internally, Rome is divided between two imperial candidates, brothers Saturninus and Bassianus. However, 'the people of Rome … / have by common voice, / In election for the Roman empery, / Chosen Andronicus' (*Titus Andronicus* 1.1. 20-23). This same Andronicus, Titus, has been away fighting Goths in a conflict which has lasted for ten years. Now he is returning to Rome, having won a great but costly victory:

> Hail, Rome, victorious in thy mourning weeds!
> Lo, as the bark that hath discharged his fraught
> Returns with precious lading to the bay
> From whence at first she weighed her anchorage,
> Cometh Andronicus, … (1.1.70-74)

This first speech given by Titus is notable in establishing the use of imagery which will flow through the play, marking episodes crucial for the development of both the titular character and our understanding of them. Returning from war, he compares himself to a bark that returns to a bay where it is safe to cast anchor. By implication, the environment he returns from is conceptualised as the sea, and Rome a safe haven after the unpredictability and danger of war. Thereby war,

and by extension unrest and conflict, is symbolically marked by the element of water. This imagery is later used by Aaron in 2.1., when he says that he wants to 'see [Saturninus'] shipwrack and his commonweal's' (2.1.24). His question 'what storm is this?' (2.1.25) draws attention to the means by which he plans to execute this – Chiron and Demetrius, now part of the imperial family. It is through the figures of the two brothers that external, foreign unrest and conflict becomes internal, domestic unrest, as is attested by the prevailing marine imagery. They rape and mutilate Lavinia, using her as 'a stream / To cool [their] heat' (2.1.134-35). Seeing 'a crimson river of warm blood, / Like to a bubbling fountain stirred with wind' (2.4.22-23) streaming from her mouth, her uncle compares her to 'a conduit with three issuing spouts' (2.4.30). When Titus sees her, still distressed after the wrongful accusation of two of his sons, the language he uses reflects his gradual loss of control. The image of a river overflowing in the lines 'My grief was at the height before thou cam'st, / And now like Nilus it disdaineth bounds' (3.1.70-71) becomes a scene in which a solitary figure is faced with raging nature:

> now I stand as one upon a rock,
> Environed with a wilderness of sea,
> Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
> Expecting ever when some envious surge
> Will in his brinish bowels swallow him. (3.1.90-97)

Just her 'picture in this plight, / … would have maddened' him (3.1.103-4), but now his cheeks are 'like meadows yet not dry, / With miry slime left on them by a flood' (3.1.125-26), his pain at seeing his daughter mutilated only increasing:

> When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?
> If the winds rage, doth not the sea wax mad,
> Threat'ning the welkin with his big-swoll'n face?
> And wilt thou have a reason for this coil?
> *I am the sea.* Hark how her sighs doth blow!
> She is the weeping welkin, I the earth;
> Then must my sea be moved with the sighs;
> Then must my earth with her continual tears
> Become a deluge, overflowed and drowned (3.1.220-28; emphasis added)

It is in this speech that the two sets of water imagery conflate, Lavinia's 'weeping welkin' unleashing the force of Titus' raging sea, a considerable step away from the bark that was returning to the safety of the bay at the very beginning of the play. Titus now thinks of himself in the terms of the same chaos that war presents, i.e. as its embodiment. An alternative to understanding this symbolically is an interpretation anchored in the early modern understanding of physiology. War, conceptualised as the sea, not only evokes the elemental force of water, but also implies the quality of coldness. It could be claimed, therefore, that this quality is central to the Renaissance perception of war and its effect on the body,

which is especially pertinent in that it is also an attribute of melancholy (Sugg 277, Breitenberg 37). Renaissance medical theory has roots in the teachings of Aristotle and Galen (Sugg 12), which developed during the Middle Ages into the humoral theory of medicine. One of the four humours which influenced the body was melancholy. However, when a problematic disease, as opposed to simply a bodily humour, melancholy was the result of a change in either the quality or the quantity of black bile (Breitenberg 37), which is produced by the liver (as is blood) (51). Melancholy seems to have plagued Europe in the early modern period (Gowland 77). It was also referred to as 'black choler' (Breitenberg 37) and was characterised by symptoms such as 'inconstancy and changeability, moodiness, sullenness, an inability to be governed by reason, the excess of passion and imagination' (54). The causes of it are varied, but they all disrupt the body's homoeostasis (37). And it is precisely the preservation of that dynamic equilibrium that was the primary concern of early modern medicine.

The Renaissance idea of the body was one of a permeable entity, highly dependent on its surroundings. Apart from the well-known Galenic humours, an important aspect to factor in while discussing the Renaissance idea of the body is the notion of the spirits, the most potent and rarefied part of blood (Sugg 3). In the body, they were perceived as either smoke or vapour, and were responsible for the communication of the soul with the body (3). Three organs in particular were closely related to the spirits: the liver, the heart, and the brain. Each of these organs had a particular role in the production and processing of spirits: the liver's was 'vegetative', one of growth, the heart's 'sensitive', one of 'feeling', and that of the brain 'rational'. Similarly, the spirits of these regions were 'natural', 'vital' and 'animal' (from the Latin 'anima', meaning 'soul' or 'mind')' (16). The soul controlled the body through the spirits (15), but they could be influenced by, for example, 'the measure and the substance of the food men are used to' (23), and were 'caught up in a continual interplay of different factors: spatial, generational, seasonal and climatic' (14). According to 'intramission' (one of the theories of sight), 'each object of vision had its own spirit, usually known in optic theory as its 'species' – a kind of film or skin which streamed into the eye to permit sight' (35), where it would presumably react in some way with the observer's spirits. The air one breathed changed one physiologically – the quality of it influenced the spirits, which then changed the make-up of the humours (14). Air would 'mi[x] with blood to form spirits', and was also thought to 'remove impurities which might otherwise corrupt the blood' (16). It was therefore paramount to try and keep the body balanced with the introduction of food and activity that would help keep or restore the equilibrium.

War conceptualised as the sea in *Andronicus* could therefore also be understood as an intimation of the potential issues relating to being exposed to violent conflict. The overwhelming expanse of water might be shorthand for the physiological effects that war has on soldiers, which then in turn might also imply spiritual consequences (especially given the theory of sight outlined

above). The coldness of the sea could be interpreted to hint at melancholy, and by extension, its symptoms, especially loss of control and passionate outbursts, which might be understood as the body's way to re-establish equilibrium (which will be discussed later). A similar mechanism could be understood to be at work in *Coriolanus*. War is conceptualised as the sea in this play as well, and warriors as vessels. This is first brought to attention in Cominius' speech in the senate, praising Caius Martius, Rome's most celebrated soldier. After describing Martius' first experience of war, the battle that marked the end of tyranny in Rome and set the foundations of the Roman Republic, Cominius says that Martius 'waxed like a sea, / And in the brunt of seventeen battles since / He lurched all swords of the garland' (*Coriolanus* 2.2.97-99), meaning that his extraordinary prowess in war won him the first and most distinguished position among his brothers in arms. And more recently, at Corioli, he was a force to be reckoned with when '[a] s weeds before / A vessel under sail, so men obeyed / And fell below his stem' (2.2.103-5). The imagery is picked up by Martius, when he tries to calm his mother after his banishment from Rome, reminding her of what she used to say to him:

> That common chances common men could bear,
> That when the sea was calm all boats alike
> Showed mastership in floating; …
> … You were used to load me
> With precepts that would make invincible
> The heart that conned them. (4.1.5-11)

Martius might simply be evoking the imagery to draw attention to the fact that there are greater evils than banishment. However, this passage might also contain a hint at what it is that allows him to perform so well in battle – a fortified heart.

Courage was understood as the heat of the spirits that inhabited the heart (Sugg 23). But that organ also played an important part in the physiology of emotions such as fear, anger, affront, hate, and envy. Fear, for example, caused the spirits to drown the heart in order to protect it from the outward threat (20), while anger, on the other hand, forced the blood (and spirits) to boil and rush from the swelling heart to the extremities, preparing the body to react (21). Affront agitated the blood and spirits, thereby also causing the individual to be in a state of readiness (22), hatred and envy burdened the heart and thus hindered the circulation of blood (23), and grief forced the spirits to draw to the heart, essentially causing the body into lockdown (23). It is interesting in light of this to look more closely at what happens to Martius on the battlefield, focusing on the battle at Corioli.

After the Volscians push the Romans back, Martius launches into a torrent of insults, calling his troops 'shames of Rome' (*Cor*. 1.5.2), 'souls of geese / That bear the shapes of men' (1.5.5-6) and threatening to 'leave the foe / And make my wars on you' (1.5.10-11). Although this is in part a result of his frustration at the

necessity of a retreat, it could, given the physiology outlined above, also be an attempt on Martius' part to agitate his soldiers' spirits, and thereby spur them on. He asks them to 'prove good seconds' (1.5.14), '[m]ark [him], and do the like' (1.5.16), but they either will not or cannot. So Martius enters Corioli alone, and the gates shut behind him. It is only when he fights his way out that the Roman army storms Corioli. The text of the play describes Martius as both bloody and bleeding, which is in itself an indication not only of the destruction, but also of the sacrifice that a soldier has to make as even bleeding for medicinal purposes was thought to present the danger of bleeding the soul away (Sugg 111). In the scene set in Corioli after the battle, Titus Lartius is reluctant to let Martius leave Corioli and help their commander, Cominius: 'Worthy sir, thou bleed'st. / Thy exercise hath been to violent / For a second course of fight' (*Cor*. 1.6.14-16). To which Martius responds 'The blood I drop is rather physical / Than dangerous to me. To Aufidius thus / I will appear and fight' (1.6.18-20). The discrepancy between what he feels, i.e. that the blood he is bleeding is medicinal, and what he looks like, 'as [if] he were flayed' (1.7.22), testifies to the violence of Martius' rampage in Corioli. 'Alone he entered / The mortal gate of th' city' (2.2.108-109) and 'aidless came off' (2.2.110), and while in Corioli he 'made what work [he] pleased' (1.9.9). That level of violent physical activity might point to a well-known phenomenon – berserking.[1]

In *Achilles in Vietnam*, Jonathan Shay dedicates a whole chapter to berserking, and lists the triggers for that state, one of which is a feeling of being trapped. The phenomenon is characterised by frenzied violence, irrespective of the affiliation of the object of the violence. The people who experience such episodes often report a sense of invulnerability, and retrospectively perceive themselves as either bestial or god-like, feeling shame over the amount of destruction they were capable of. A similar loss of control is characteristic of traumatic events. In moments of extreme stress certain regions of the brain fire up to ensure the body's survival. The amygdala, for example, detects the threat and controls the reaction to it, while the prefrontal cortex is effectively shut down, disabling a rational reaction to the threat, i.e. planning the reaction (Southwick et al. 29, 33). Another important aspect relating to situations of extreme stress is the memory of it that is left, which is also where the amygdala plays an important role. It is in charge of 'encoding and consolidation of memory for events and stimuli that are arousing, stressful, or fear-provoking' (29). As this is an evolutionary mechanism, the point of such memories is the insurance of survival in a similarly stressful situation (Hunt and Robbins 60), and so the memories must be quickly accessible (59). For this reason, they are encoded as implicit memories (59), in the so-called situationally accessible memory system (SAM) (Brewin 140), meaning that they cannot be expressed linguistically (139). Implicit traumatic memories contain images, sounds, and physiological reactions, such as a sense of pain, and changes in heart rate and body temperature (140). Berserking could, therefore, due to the violence that is inherent to it, leave the individual traumatised. And although the play doesn't follow Martius into Corioli, there are some indications (apart from the ones already mentioned) that might further point to Martius

experiencing berserking episodes. The first instance comes shortly after Martius joins Cominius and the Roman army fighting the Volscians a couple of miles from Corioli. This battle over, Cominius praises Martius for his fierceness, but that is not something that Martius wants to hear:

> Pray now, no more. My mother,
> Who has a charter to extol her blood,
> When she does praise me, grieves me.
> I have done as you have done, that's what I can;
> Induced as you have been, that's for my country.
> He that has but effected his good will
> Has overta'en mine act. (*Cor*. 1.10.13-19)

This is not the only time when Martius shows reluctance to listen to praises, or indeed when he is very verbal about not believing that what he has done is any more praise-worthy than the actions of any soldier. This could of course be understood as false modesty, but given the frequency of similar reactions, it could point to him being ashamed of what happens to him when in battle. It is important to note in Martius' speech above that he himself thinks more of those that 'effected [their] good will' than of what he is doing, which does imply that there is something mechanical and impersonal about his perception of his military exploits. Being praised for what he refers to as his 'work' (1.6.17), what he can do for his country like everybody else, is something he finds hurtful (2.2.71).

> For that I have not washed
> My nose that bled, or foiled some debile wretch,
> Which without note here's many else have done,
> You shout me forth
> In acclamations hyperbolical;
> As if I loved my little should be dieted
> In praises sauced with lies. (1.10.47-53)

This repeated refusal to accept praise could also indicate reluctance to revisit the events being praised. In the aftermath of the conflict with the Volscians, Martius' memory is proving to be unreliable, and he requires fortification: 'Have we no wine here?' (1.10.92). This particular request might be indicative of what is happening to him in similar situations, as consuming wine was supposed to help the spirits spread through the body and thereby increase vigour (Sugg 24), leading to wine being thought of as a cordial drink (49). Returning to the physiology of emotions outlined above, the need to activate the spirits and move them from the heart would indicate fear. It is plausible that the 'precepts' with which his mother used to fortify his heart, i.e. courage, are not always sufficient. Martius does feel fear. If that is also taken into account, his battle-frenzy would no longer seem bestial and inhuman, and his failed attempt at a pep-talk could point to a mechanism he himself uses when he finds himself between a rock and a hard

place – he tries to counteract fear with anger. In other words, when the spirits all congregate around the heart, Martius works himself up in order to send them flowing into the extremities, allowing him to do his 'work'. His outbursts of anger might be an indication of him feeling threatened, and could therefore constitute a defence mechanism (apparently highly effective when in battle). There is a further indication that this is common practice, or at least that similar episodes of berserking rage have happened before. When he appears before Cominius after Corioli, Cominius comments on having '[b]efore-time seen him thus' (*Cor*. 1.7.24) (i.e. looking like a man flayed). If similar berserking episodes, with their frenzied violence and physiology (potentially traumatic), tend to happen to Martius often on the battlefield, his reluctance to remember any of it would be understandable. His shame might be more than just modesty if hearing commendations about both his military exploits and the scars that confirm his prowess only serve to remind him of what he feels when in battle. However, celebrating him seems to be all everybody is preoccupied with.

Cominius, adamant in commemorating Martius' victory in Corioli, decides to prevent him from being 'cruel to [his] good report' (1.10.54):

> If 'gainst yourself you'll be incensed we'll put you,
> Like one that means his proper harm, in manacles,
> Then reason safely with you. …
> … and from this time,
> For what he did before Corioles, call him,
> With all th'applause and clamour of the host,
> Martius Caius Coriolanus! (1.10.56-65)

It is with this addition to his name that Rome greets him on his return: 'Welcome to Rome, renowned Coriolanus!' (2.1.163), but it seems that Martius is not keen on his new appellation: 'No more of this, it does offend my heart. / Pray now, no more' (2.1.163-64). To his mother's ''Coriolanus' must I call thee?' (2.1.170) he remains silent. Before Cominius' speech in Martius' honour in the senate, Martius excuses himself saying 'I had rather have my wounds to heal again / Than hear say how I got them' (2.2.67-68), and refuses to 'idly sit / To hear [his] nothings monstered' (2.2.74-75). His scars, on the other hand, might signal valiant deeds and honour to his mother and everybody else in Rome, but to Martius they are just another reminder of how differently he and the Romans perceive war:

> To brag unto them 'Thus I did, and thus',
> Show them th'unaching scars, which I should hide,
> As if I had received them for the hire
> Of their breath only! (2.2.146-49)

What the Romans perceive as expressions of gratitude and marks of honour could be interpreted by the veteran as constant reminders of the contexts which for him

seem to be anything but honourable. His work, which he carries out because that is his role in Roman society, in his eyes does not merit such attention. Martius' unwillingness to revisit the memory of the state he was in when he did his 'work' could be the biggest indicator that he has suffered war trauma. The most common traumatic responses are to shut down emotionally, or use avoidance as a coping mechanism (Hunt 7-8), avoiding both thoughts and conversations that are reminiscent of the traumatic event (52-3). If Martius is understood to suffer from war trauma, a potentially new interpretation of the character arises. His outbursts of anger and aggression off the battlefield could be interpreted as a comorbid disorder (i.e. one that appears in tandem with trauma), which is very often the case with trauma sufferers (56-7). Instead of wondering about the ethics of his motivation, his actions might be explained by trauma theory. His willingness to go to war might be an indication that he is having trouble working through his trauma. What would to some indicate pride and a hunger for fame, might just be an attempt on Martius' part to work through his trauma using the only means he has at his disposition – acting out. A similar lack of understanding of the soldier (and their body) can be traced back to *Titus Andronicus*.

A 'lonely dragon': social support

One of the first things mentioned about Titus is the fact that over the long years he has been Rome's soldier, he has also been losing sons on the battlefield: 'five times he hath returned / Bleeding to Rome, bearing his valiant sons / In coffins from the field' (*Tit.* 1.1.33-35). As Titus himself testifies, over the course of forty years, he 'buried one-and-twenty valiant sons, / Knighted in field, slain manfully in arms / In right and service of their noble country' (1.1.195-97), and now asks that 'Rome reward with love' (1.1.82) those that he has left. The treatment of his progeny is particularly pertinent when one considers the fact that children are more than just physical issue. Titus' children could be understood as an extension of himself, as the father was believed to 'contribute a soul which informed the raw feminine matter produced by the mother' (Sugg 263). It is therefore the manner in which his children die that lies at the heart of the matter. Those sons that died honourably for Rome in battle were accorded the appropriate respect. Martius and Quintus, on the other hand, are wrongly accused of murdering Bassianus, and are treated dishonourably, without being given the opportunity to defend themselves at court. Moreover, Chiron and Demetrius raping and mutilating Lavinia is not only a pollution of her body and soul, but could also symbolically be understood as a pollution of Titus himself, especially given the fact that he refers to his daughter as the 'cordial of mine age to glad my heart' (*Tit.* 1.1.166). When he sees his cordial defiled, the strength of his grief overcomes him, threatening also to stop his body, as grief was thought to cause the spirits to draw to the heart and force the body into a standstill. Lavinia's pain, however, works him up into a rage which finds an outlet in revenge after his two sons' heads are delivered to him. What causes the veteran to turn against his country, therefore, is not only

the Emperor's scorn of 'all [Titus'] blood in Rome's great quarrel shed' (3.1.4), both in the guise of his own blood (with the spiritual consequences that has) and his dead sons, but also the dishonourable treatment of Titus' body in peace, again encompassing both his physical mutilation (he cuts off his left hand as payment for his sons' freedom) and the treatment of his children. Seeing, after forty years of service, that 'hands to do Rome service is but vain' (3.1.80), both his body and his family (and thus symbolically his soul) decimated and dishonoured, Titus vows to revenge his family on Rome. And although *Titus Andronicus* deals substantially with the issue of family, it focuses more on the immediate physical significance it has for the veteran. A more nuanced portrayal, however, is given in *Coriolanus*.

In times of stress, social support determines how well a person will cope, leading to 'low perceived social support [being] seen as a predicator of traumatic stress' (Hunt 2-3). Seeing how trauma constitutes a breakdown of the individual's belief system and perception of self and society (10), the family is the most immediate system of support. But in *Coriolanus* the family is no longer a whole and safe unit. This division is made obvious in the figures of Volumnia, Martius' mother, and Virgilia, his wife. Although Martius is popularly thought to do what he does 'to please his mother' (*Cor*. 1.1.36), the following speech made by Volumnia might point to this popular opinion being an oversimplification:

> When yet he was but tender-bodied and the only son of my womb, when youth with comeliness plucked all gaze his way, when for a day of kings' entreaties a mother should not sell him an hour from her beholding, I, considering how honour would become such a person – that it was no better than, picture-like, to hang by th' wall if renown made it not stir – was pleased to let him seek danger where he was like to find fame. To a cruel war I sent him, from whence he returned his brows bound with oak. (1.3.5-15)

In Cominius' speech in the senate, it is made clear that Martius was at this point only sixteen years old. The physiology of the changes Martius' experiences in battle has already been discussed above, but it is precisely this that his mother does not understand. Volumnia focuses exclusively on the physical marks of courage, as can be seen in the extract above. The imagery used is that of an almost cherub-like figure, which could be put to better use than simply hang about, 'picture-like'. Volumnia's fixation on the visual, along with the stern and purposeful (as is discussed below) child-rearing it implies, might point to a home that is not exactly the safe haven and a supportive environment necessary to develop effective coping mechanisms (Hunt 79). It is also clear from the quoted excerpt that Volumnia considers honour to be fame acquired through exposing oneself to danger. Her propensity not to look past the image is again made obvious when she discusses Martius' return from Corioli. Over the course of that conversation, Menenius repeatedly inquires after Martius' injuries, and the pair of them proceed to list not only all the wounds Martius has on his body, but also how he got them. Both also seem to make him out to be almost a demi-god,

an elemental force, as when Menenius says: 'Every gash was an enemy's grave' (*Cor*. 2.1.150-51), and again in Volumnia's remark: 'Before him / He carries noise, and behind him he leaves tears. / Death, that dark spirit, in's nervy arm doth lie, / Which being advanced, declines; and then men die' (2.1.154-57). Volumnia further demonstrates her inability to understand her son later on in the play, when she tries to persuade him to meet with the plebeians and apologise to them. She first starts laying out her arguments by appealing to his profession, using the more formal pronoun 'you', and using as her main argument the fact that stratagems are perfectly allowable in war, and that pretence and lying to the plebeians 'no more dishonours you at all / Than to take in a town with gentle words, / Which else would put you to your fortune and / The hazard of much blood' (3.2.60-64). But when that does not seem to have the desired effect, she changes her tactics. She lowers the tone by saying 'I prithee now, my son' (3.2.74) and then proceeds to tell him exactly what he needs to do to provoke the desired effect, and also explains why that is necessary. The overall sense is one of Martius being just an instrument for her, or in other words of her living vicariously through Martius, which is also confirmed in the following lines:

> I have lived
> To see inherited my very wishes,
> And the buildings of my fancy. (2.1.194-96)

Phrases such as 'my very wishes' and 'my fancy' could be understood to mean not only her hopes for her son's advancement, but also her own unrealised hopes for distinction. That sense is further enforced by the idea of inheritance, implying a handing over of an entity from one person to another. Martius proves difficult to convince of the necessity of the pretence, and the emotional blackmail finally succeeds after she tells him that it is more dishonourable for her to have to beg him, than for him to have to beg the plebeians. As her final point she reminds him of the extent of his indebtedness to her: 'Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'st it from me, / But owe thy pride thyself' (3.2.131-32). Although during the course of the play she implies that she respects and understands her son, Volumnia shows either little knowledge of or care for his profession. Martius stays true to the chivalric ideal and tries to uphold his vows and oaths, which were the 'foundation of the medieval honour system', with an oath-breaker being considered a dishonoured perjurer and a traitor (Meron 141-2). His aversion to linguistic manipulation is reiterated throughout the play, and is made apparent in his reluctance to go back on his word after Menenius asks him to return to the plebeians and 'repent what [he has] spoke' (*Cor*. 3.2.39): 'For them? I cannot do it to the gods, / Must I then do't to them?' (3.2.40-41). Her lack of understanding of chivalry might also be the reason why her parallel between Martius' situation and a besieged town proves inadequate. The crux of the matter is not in using 'gentle words' to prevent loss of men. On the contrary, according to medieval laws of war, once the conquering army enter the besieged town after the town refused to surrender, it was common practice for all laws of chivalry to be suspended

(Meron 72, 133). The pressure, therefore, is not on the conqueror, but rather on the town. The emotional blackmail does work, however, both in this instance, and in the final act of the tragedy. After Martius' banishment, he goes to Antium and gives himself over to Tullus Aufidius, to be either used or killed. He ultimately becomes the Volscian general and moves to conquer Rome. In order to save themselves, the Romans send three embassies to him, first Cominius, then Menenius, and finally Martius' family. Volumnia's pleas are only effective after the three of them kneel before Martius, and she threatens not to speak until Rome is on fire. His reaction seems to imply that she only prevailed because she forced him to prioritise his duties as a son:

> O mother, mother!
> What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,
> The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
> They laugh at. O my mother, mother, O!
> You have won a happy victory to Rome;
> But for your son, believe it, O believe it,
> Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
> It is most mortal to him. But let it come. (*Cor*. 5.3.183-90)

The unnaturalness of the scene is of course contained in a mother kneeling before her son and showing respect, when it should be the other way round. It is the primacy of this custom that forces Martius' hand, which might be interpreted as another sign of trauma, inasmuch as adhering to customs can be interpreted as an imposition of structure on life. Given the fact that a traumatic event breaks down the individual's existing narrative, that narrative has to be re-established somehow, i.e. some structure has to be reintroduced. It is possible that Martius uses custom (with what he calls his work as a central notion) as a structure around which he constructs his narrative, which might explain why he only deviates from it when he feels threatened, as in the scene when he has to ask the plebeians for their votes. Asking for their voices requires him to show his scars, which is a potential trigger as they are a clear sign 'not of what he *is* but of what he has *done*' (Jagendorf 465; emphasis in the original).

Virgilia, on the other hand, even though she is not as present as Volumnia in the play, seems to be a source of comfort to Martius. On his triumphal return from Corioli, her peaceful presence stands out in the crowd. Their interaction could signal understanding between the husband and wife, as he greets her with 'My gracious silence, hail' (2.1.171). The fact that she welcomes him with silence, the complete opposite of what hurts him in the behaviour of others, does seem to imply that the couple have a healthy relationship.

Another aspect of the play that merits discussion is the mention of war in the context of sexual imagery, where the idea of the first wedding night is especially pertinent. When used to talk about war, but not by soldiers, sexual

imagery tends to imply morally questionable behaviour, as in Volumnia's claim that she 'had rather had eleven [sons] die nobly for their country than one voluptuously surfeit out of action' (1.3.24-25). Likewise, a Roman spy comments on the situation after Martius' banishment with the following words: 'I have heard it said the fittest time to corrupt a man's wife is when she's fallen out with her husband' (4.3.29-31). A Volscian serving man also wonders at the warm welcome Martius had: 'Our general [Tullus Aufidius] himself makes a mistress of him' (4.5.199-200). Similar to this is Menenius' retort to the tribunes: 'He [Martius] loves your people, / But tie him not to be their bedfellow' (2.2.62-63), which implies, much like the serving man's comment, that intimate imagery is a shorthand for equality and understanding. This is why it is our contention that intimate imagery need not necessarily be understood, as it often is, as either overtly referring to sexuality (e.g. *Cor*. 179n25) or homoeroticism (e.g. *Cor*. 58, Rackin 72), but rather evoking the sensuousness of the experience. The locus of the marital bed would then imply not just an exchange of bodily fluids, but also the spirituality relating to that exchange, and the context of safety. It is worthwhile to note that in *Titus Andronicus* the marital bed is used only in context of death, as in the phrases 'honour's bed' (Tit. 1.1.178) and 'honour's lofty bed' (3.1.11), potentially implying that the only real comfort for a soldier can be found in death. However, in *Coriolanus*, when Martius greets Cominius after Corioli with 'O, let me clip ye / In arms as sound as when I wooed, in heart / As merry as when our nuptial day was done, / And tapers burnt to bedward!' (*Cor*. 1.7.29-32), his words could be understood as an expression almost of relief at having met with a fellow combatant (as is evident in 'sound arms' and a 'merry heart'). Tullus Aufidius reacts similarly when Martius comes to Antium after his banishment: 'But now that I see thee here, / Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart / Than when I first my wedded mistress saw / Bestride my threshold' (4.5.116-19). The fact that it is soldiers who use such imagery, and that they use such language only with other soldiers, implies that there is an element of understanding between all members of the warrior class that excludes civilians, i.e. that there are aspects of their shared experiences that only other soldiers can understand. This seems to be a constant through time, as veterans very often report that they cannot openly discuss what happened to them with civilians, but do find relief in taking part in the activities of veteran support groups, as those are the only people that truly understand them (Hunt and Robbins 62). War trauma seems to be a cross-cultural and cross-historical constant, but instances of psychological breakdown were often not reported (Hunt 18), as breaking down in war was seen as a 'weakness on the part of the individual' (18-9). Much as in the case of Martius, an inability to construct a narrative that would include the traumatic event leads to acting out instead of working through. Narratives about the self are 'central to our understanding of self and identities' (6), and all traumatic memories have to be integrated into the narrative in order for the sufferer to successfully work through the trauma (63, 71). If, however, the context is such in which the sufferer does not feel they can even begin to express and encode verbally all of the physiological memories of the traumatic event, the alternative is an acting out of the trauma, visible in Martius' willingness to go to war.

Other than this affinity with the members of his class and a discomfort at being reminded of his triumphs on the battlefield, Martius himself offers a conclusive example of his isolation. On leaving Rome he parts with his family and friends with the following words:

> though I go alone,
> Like to a *lonely dragon* that *his fen*
> *Makes feared and talked of more than seen*, your son
> Will or exceed the common or be caught
> With cautelous baits and practice. (*Cor*. 4.1.30-34; emphasis added)

The loneliness of the dragon in this instance is not the result of his bloodthirstiness, but rather of his habitat. In other words, it is not the dragon himself, but that which surrounds him that makes him seem ferocious. And the *seeming* danger should be emphasized, as it underlines the fact that what is at the heart of the matter is essentially a lack of understanding. Another aspect that should be discussed is the image of a fen, which is another example of the usage of water imagery in *Coriolanus*. There is one other instance of that image being used, and that is Martius' outraged cry after the tribunes and the plebeians banish him from Rome: 'You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate / As reek o'th' rotten fens, whose loves I prize / As the dead carcasses of unburied men / That do corrupt my air …' (3.3.121-24). In this latter example, the emphasis in both images is placed on the miasma-like quality of the air – corrupt, with a potential to corrupt. But it is also interesting to note that after nature imagery Martius moves straight to a scene from the battlefield – dead bodies decomposing, with the horror of the scene contained not only in the visual, but also in the implication of that image, namely, either an inability to bury the men due to the extent of the battle, or an unwillingness (for whatever reason) to adhere to chivalric laws (Meron 77). As has already been mentioned, the quality of the air dictated the quality of the spirits in the human body, and by extension the physiological processes that went on (Sugg 14). It could therefore be claimed that there is (at the very least in Martius' perception) a lasting effect on the body of the experiences from the battlefield. And it is precisely this lasting effect that is the dragon's fen, a fen which keeps him isolated from the rest.

Conclusion

Titus Andronicus establishes the use of water imagery to signal disturbances in the normal, peaceful order. Naval imagery is used to refer to war, and when utilised by the titular character is shorthand for his own feelings, which could also be understood as tapping into his experience of battle. Images of rivers overflowing and fountains polluted, on the other hand, mark those elements which provoke the protagonist to exact revenge. In *Coriolanus*, naval imagery is likewise used to refer to war and to denote soldiers, and sources of conflict are

again marked with the usage of water imagery. Civil unrest is conceptualised as rivers overflowing, but the imagery used by the protagonist is more nuanced. It does not refer directly to the emotions felt, but rather hints at the physiology behind them. Using the image of a fen, with its corrupt and corrupting air, Martius taps into the implication of destructiveness inherent in the water imagery, but primarily draws attention to the long-lasting effects on a very physical level.

The treatment of the soldier's body is in *Andronicus* closely tied to the issue of family (primarily, children). Titus' sons and his daughter are perceived as an extension of himself, so consequently any mistreatment of them is a mistreatment of him, a display of dishonourable behaviour, and a reminder that all the loss he had to sustain was futile. In *Coriolanus*, the body of a soldier is also considered an instrument, to be used as Rome sees fit, but without any real understanding of how it works. As opposed to *Andronicus*, however, *Coriolanus* does not present a united family, but rather emphasizes the difficulty of understanding the profession of a soldier by showing how differently Martius is treated by the women in his family. Ashamed of the actions he is praised for, he is himself aware of the extent of his isolation as well as the causes of it.

Titus Andronicus establishes the issue of a veteran discarded by his community, along with the elements central to the discussion of that issue, namely the use of water imagery to convey disorder and the relationship between the veteran's body and their family. And whereas Titus does have monologues at his disposal to verbalise what he is going through internally, the protagonist of *Coriolanus* remains distant even in his soliloquies. This could in itself be indicative of the extent of his isolation – real communication is only possible with other members of the warrior class. But by applying trauma theory more light can be shed on Martius' character, proving that he is more than, 'even at his most terrifying, … an extremely dangerous version of a little boy' (Greenblatt 165), and that his emotional outbursts are more complex than 'an overgrown child's narcissism, insecurity, cruelty, and folly' (166). If Macbeth is very forthcoming in his descriptions of the nuances of his emotions, with Caius Martius one almost has to read between the lines. To understand his battle-rage one has to know what happens to a body in extremely stressful situations, and to understand why he opposes praise and pomp so much one has to realise that his shame is rooted precisely in what happens to his body. The closest Martius gets to opening up is when he compares himself to a dragon, made more terrifying and mysterious by his habitat than actually seen and understood.

End Notes

1 For alternative perspectives and interpretations of violence in *Andronicus* and *Coriolanus* see for example Willis, Deborah. '"The Gnawing Vulture": Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*,' *Shakespeare Quarterly*, vol. 53, no. 1, 2002, pp. 21-52, Lamb, Caroline. 'Physical Trauma and (Adapt)ability in *Titus Andronicus*,' *Critical Survey*, vol. 22, no. 1, 2010, pp. 41-57, Rackin, Phyllis. '*Coriolanus*: Shakespeare's Anatomy of *Virtus*,' *Modern Language Studies,* vol. 13, no. 2, 1983, pp. 68-79, and chapters two and six in Starks-Estes, Lisa. *Violence, Trauma, and Virtus in Shakespeare's Roman Poems and Plays: Transforming Ovid*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

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02

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Constructing History and Reconstructing the Self in *The Night War* Series

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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Constructing History and Reconstructing the Self in *The Night War* Series

The paper presents a close reading of *The Night War*, an unfinished series of *Captain America* fanfiction, through the lens of Linda Hutcheon's discussions of historiographic metafiction. *The Night War* series presents an alternate version of the Marvel Cinematic Universe in which Captain America's best friend Bucky Barnes had kept a journal while he was a soldier in WWII, and the posthumously published diary became a literary classic. The paper examines the series' structural aspects, most notably the fact that it is written entirely in the form of a classic war memoir, with detailed footnotes for both (fan)fictional and actual historical events. Thus, *The Night War* continuously draws the readers out of a highly verisimilitudinous piece of writing and explicitly points to its own artificiality. The metafictional nature of the series comes to the fore in one of the series' sequels, in which the authors' growing thematic insistence on the unreliability of historical narratives is realized through an audio-sequel. Therefore, *The Night War* series also exemplifies a transmedia story, one in which an entire alternate universe is created to discuss the ideas of history, memory, the self – and the inherent instability of these very categories. The paper seeks to contextualize these narrative interventions by analysing *The Night War* both as a piece of fanfiction and as an example of historiographic metafiction.

KEYWORDS
historiographic metafiction, fanfiction, alternate history, Captain America, transmedia storytelling

Introduction

The Night War is an unfinished series of *Captain America* fanworks written by praximeter (Zimario)[1] and performed by quietnight[2], published from June 2017 to May 2018 on *Archive of Our Own* ("The Night War"). The series imagines an alternate version of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) in which Captain America's best friend Bucky Barnes kept a journal throughout his time on the front, and his posthumously published diary shaped post-WWII America. Apart from the journal (which is presented to the readers as *The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition*) the series also contains fabricated newspaper articles, a short story, and *The Night War: An Audio Companion*, an unfinished audio version of the journal which doubles as a sequel. All of the instalments in the series take place at different times in this fictionalized version of the MCU, thus providing not only a critical response to the source material, but also fleshing out a self-consciously constructed alternate history. The authors' dedication to painstaking historical verisimilitude is juxtaposed to the structural and thematic insistence on unreliability of the narratives and unknowability of the historicized self, thus enabling a reading of *The Night War* from the perspective of Linda Hutcheon's discussions on historiographic metafiction.

The paper will explore the metafictional aspects of the series through two segments. The first part, "Constructing History", will focus on the main text of the series and examine the impetus behind creating an alternative history, both from the point of view of postmodern criticism and that of transformative art. The second part, "Reconstructing the Self", will analyse *An Audio Companion's* treatment of the self, memory, and the (im)possibility of recreating a selfhood out of a narrative. Apart from the works contained in *The Night War* series, the analysis will also include the paratext – the tags and the comments section– as these extratextual components explicitly point to the themes and motifs crucial to the series.

Constructing history

> In "Historiographic Metafiction" Linda Hutcheon writes,
> [i]t is part of the postmodernist stand to confront the paradoxes *of fictive/historical representation, the particular/the general,* and t*he present/the past*. And this confrontation is itself contradictory, for it refuses to recuperate or dissolve either side of the dichotomy, yet it is more than willing to exploit both. (73, emphasis mine)

This explanation, aimed primarily at postmodernist historical novels, seems curiously apt for describing the artistic vision behind *The Night War* series. As a work of fanfiction based on the *Captain America* movie franchise, it is inherently rooted in "fictive representation", yet its defining feature is its historicity. As the author herself[3] reflects in the comments section to *The Night War: 60th Anniversary Edition*,

> I set out to make something as "real" as I possibly could. I wanted it to feel so plausible and three-dimensional that it could slide in right next to other contemporaneous accounts and just fit, even if it's about Captain America and a bunch of comic book stuff that never happened. But what it said about the war, and how the war was fought, and about who fought and died in it -- I needed that part to feel gruesomely, completely, heartbreakingly real. (praximeter (Zimario) on Chapter 20)

The tension between its essential (fan)fictionality and emotional and historical authenticity is resolved through the presentation of an alternate history. Through it, the author provides the readers with what Matt Hills terms as hyperdiegesis – "a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension" (qtd. in Thomas 11). This is exemplified perhaps most clearly in the notes accompanying the main body of the text that serve to explain the aspects of this hyperdiegetic structure which could not have been stated in the diary entries themselves. Hutcheon emphasises how historiographic metafiction uses "the paratextual conventions of historiography (especially footnotes) to both inscribe and undermine the authority and objectivity of historical sources and explanations" ("Historiographic Metafiction" 91). In *The Night War*, this effect is threefold – for instance, Chapter 18 contains "Historical Notes" which expound on the operations and battles alluded to in the entries and contextualize them within the progression of WWII, "Chapter Notes", which explain the 1940s slang, literary and cultural references, and "Notes", in which the author clarifies which of the events in "Historical" and "Chapter Notes" actually happened.

The multi-layered framing of the text is in a way facilitated by the very layout of the website; and even though the fictional "Historical Notes" are embedded within the body of the text, the extradiegetic "Notes" are a regularly used feature of *Archive of Own*. This aspect of *The Night War* echoes Thomas's insistence on "the inappropriateness and impossibility of focusing solely on the fanfiction text, without taking into account how aspects of the interface and website design impact upon the reading experience" (20). Authors of fanfiction can expect a kind of direct communication with their audience (Barenblat 175), a relationship that is not immediately assumed in the context of traditional publishing. This is made explicit in the e-book version of *The Night War*, which contains a fake colophon but, significantly, not the "Notes" through which praximeter (Zimario) directly addressed the readers. While the overtly "fanfictional" original layout on *Archive of Our Own* leaned heavily on what Hutcheon had in another context called the "co-existing views of history as intertextual and as extratextual, which operate in tension" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 143), the version which aimed to imitate the appearance of a traditional publication had to lose an aspect of its metafictionality in order to preserve its hyperdiegetic structure.

As Hutcheon notes, apart from the "fictive/historical", another dichotomy characteristic of historiographic metafiction is that of "the particular/the general" ("Historiographic Metafiction" 73). Unlike the first paradox, which emerges through the very medium and structure of the narrative, the tension between the particular and the general is present in *The Night War* primarily on the thematic level. On the one hand, it generalizes a very particular story, as it transforms a "historical fantasy" (McHale 95) – the WWII heroics of a genetically enhanced, morally impeccable super-soldier – into an ordinary man's terrible struggle. Where the source material pitted Captain America and his Howling Commandos against the monstrous, power-hungry Red Skull (Milford 621), *The Night War* situates the horror in the gradual unravelling of a guilt-stricken, shell-shocked soldier. The emotional impact of the narrative is thus in many ways predicated on seeing in Bucky Barnes the ghosts of millions of men who fought in the war. This is made explicit in his diary entries, especially through the *leitmotif* of horrible guilt and fear intertwined with longing for everyday domestic experiences:

> The thing is that I don't know how to get back from this. I just keep trying and trying (the only thing I know to do) and I somehow soldier on but there is this small ugly part of me that must be the most awful coward. I am so very tired of it all. I dreamed on the transport back of just braiding Curly's hair. Endlessly trying to be gentle not force a comb through it just using my fingers and she'd be sitting on the chair in the kitchen her legs swinging (she's perpetually maybe 5 years old—smallest little pipsqueak until she starting [sic] shooting up around when she turned 10) and humming or retelling me (using voices) a radio play she heard and me just braiding her hair combing it through braiding it again like a perfect calm Saturday afternoon when she came running in from playing and Ma said "Do something to fix that nest please, beloved." (August 25, 1944)

This deliberate reframing of the *Captain America* story into one which centres around the thoughts of an "ordinary" man is characteristic of fanfiction, which "utilizes the gaps and possibilities of canon and reality to reveal basic assumptions and the possibilities they exclude" (Fathallah 200). However, the "canon" praximeter (Zimario) is questioning is not limited to the *Captain America* movie franchise – it is history itself.

"History as intertext" (Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 142) is at the heart of *The Night War*, as the author emphasises in response to a reader who is praising her depiction of the brutal Battle of Hürtgen Forest,

> [o]ne of the things I'm trying to achieve with this fic is to break down some of the mythology that Americans are taught about the war, and how the war was fought. It was a "good" war, inasmuch as it was justified, necessary, and essential to the survival of the world, but it *wasn't good for the men fighting it*. So I chose this battle because it was a loss and because it was every bit as awful and brutal as something from WWI, and it tends to be forgotten because it's not as "cool" a

> battle as the campaign for Normandy or the Battle of the Bulge. So I'm really glad that the experience of the "average" soldier came through in a meaningful way. (praximeter (Zimario) on Chapter 17)

The decision to remodel a fantastical source material into something that relates the "experience of the 'average' soldier", however, does not simply exchange "the particular" for "the general" (Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" 73). It also serves as a critique of the previous re-interpretations of this story. As Hutcheon emphasises in her discussion of intertextuality, "it is only as part of prior discourses that any text derives meaning and significance" (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 126). This is particularly true of fanfiction, where authors position themselves against/alongside not only the source material, or canon, but also the previous fan discourse and range of preferred representations, or fanon (Thomas 8-9). In response to a comment praising how the story "brings home the horror and madness of war", praximeter (Zimario) states that "[a] lot of WWII-era fic … tends to romanticize and rose-colored-glasses-ify the war, making it all buddies pallin' around getting up to hijinks in little French towns and it just wasn't like that at all" (on Chapter 14). The author's response confirms Fathallah's assertions about fanfiction readers (and writers) preferring writing which they perceive to be of high literary and cultural quality (26). However, it also points to the specific conditions of producing work in dialogue with other fans: by using the tags such as "World War II" and "Historical Accuracy", praximeter (Zimario) is not merely describing her story, but trying to assert her own interpretations of these terms over the existing *Captain America* fanon.

Another aspect of *The Night War* which negotiates with both canon and fanon is the use of its narrator, Bucky Barnes, as a way to produce "a problematized inscribing of subjectivity into history" (Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" 85). In this respect, the representational conflict between "the particular" and "the general" veers decidedly towards the particular. While the *Captain America* movies give Bucky a relatively important role, he is definitely not the protagonist, as this role is occupied by Steve Rogers as Captain America, the quintessential superhero (Coogan 77). Although the fandom "recontextualizes and reimagines the source text" (Lamerichs 30) so as to accommodate for the character of Bucky Barnes, as praximeter (Zimario) remarks, it is often accomplished by casting Bucky as "Steve's-partner-in-codependency" (on Chapter 14). The predominance of fanfiction which centres on a strong emotional, romantic, and/or sexual relationship between Steve and Bucky is in line with fandom's long history of "same-sex erotica and/or relationship-focused stories" (Fathallah 27). Praximeter (Zimario), however, opts to marginalize the fandom's central romantic pairing in favour of constructing an entire alternate history around the cultural relevance of Bucky Barnes's private thoughts. In doing so, she centres the importance of subjectivity, the self *as it is recorded on page*. As Hutcheon points out, "[t]o elevate 'private experience to public consciousness' in postmodern historiographic metafiction is not really to expand the subjective; it is to render inextricable the public and

historical and the private and biographical." (*A Poetics of Postmodernism* 94). In one of his entries from September 1943, shocked after experiencing combat (but far from the truly traumatized prisoner of war he will become by the end of his journal), Bucky notes,

> *I keep thinking somehow if I put myself in this notebook then if I die I won't be gone completely*. The part of me that cannot breathe or stop screaming for all of this goes into the notebook and what's left of me—a man that can keep going is what stays on the outside. (September 15, 1943, emphasis mine)

Unbeknownst to Bucky, it is precisely this idea – of somehow preserving his "representable essence" (Currie 15) in written form – that will come back to haunt him in *The Night War's* sequels as he struggles to reconstruct the self that he "put in this notebook".

Reconstructing the self

Among the paradoxes Hutcheon lists as integral to historiographic metafiction, "the present/the past" ("Historiographic Metafiction" 73) is the one that looms most sinisterly throughout the series. Even while reading the abrupt and affective ending of Bucky's WWII narrative, the readers' thoughts are in the canonical "present". They, after all, know what *really* became of Bucky Barnes – owing to experiments conducted on him while he was a prisoner of war, he survived the fatal fall in March 1945 only to be captured, tortured, and turned into the depersonalized assassin known in the MCU as the Winter Soldier (*Captain America: The Winter Soldier*). This context, with which every reader enters the narrative, gives particular passages of Bucky's journal a chillingly prophetic quality.

> What the hell goes wrong in a man's head to make him turn on his own people. I cannot understand how somebody could do that. It doesn't matter how long you are a prisoner or how hungry you are or how afraid you are the enemy stays the enemy. (February 8, 1945, emphasis in the original)

The hyperdiegetic structure, however, cannot reflect on these parallels, for in the alternate universe that the author is presenting, the *60th Anniversary Edition* predates the discovery of Winter Soldier's true identity. Thus, the conflict between the past and the present is doubly asserted – even though the annotated edition of his journal is an attempt at "reliably capturing the experience of the human beings who really suffered and enacted history" (McHale 96), the reveal of the Winter Soldier's identity demonstrates the inherent tenuousness of such an effort.

The Night War series' overt exploration of the present self being haunted by its recorded past version is first established in "Find Me (Where the Lovelight

Gleams)". The short story recounts the disjointed and desperate thoughts of Bucky, recently saved from his captivity as the Winter Soldier, as he visits his younger brother Teddy, now an old man, and fails to remember any of their shared history. Panicking and feeling that he cannot live up to his family's expectations, he runs away and steals a copy of *The Night War.* The short story establishes "language as a 'prisonhouse' from which the possibility of escape is remote" (Waugh 41-42), presenting the reader with a Bucky who is no longer able to identify with or even remember the man who wrote the famous *The Night War*, yet knows everyone is expecting him to somehow be that person again.

The idea of portraying a protagonist who is unable to know the past, even though he is "both a spectator and an actor in the historical process" (Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" 90) is made even more explicit and urgent in *The Night War: An Audio Companion*. This sequel transforms the series into a "trans-media story" which "unfolds across multiple media platforms, with each new text making a distinctive and valuable contribution to the whole" (Jenkins 97-98). Even though *An Audio Companion* is sequentially the last instalment in the series, the listeners quickly learn that interdiegetically it was recorded before the events of the short story preceding it (quietnight on Chapter 4). This complex timeline corresponds to Schiller's assertion that transmedia stories "manifest themselves less as singular plots, and may seem to readers and viewers more like architecturally narrative universes, inhabited by multiple characters, and articulating complex temporalities and contradictory perspectives." (102).

A "contradictory perspective" which emerges within the first few episodes of *An Audio Companion* is that of its listeners as "overhearers" (Tobin 189) – for the audience quickly learn that what they are listening to is not merely a podcast containing the audiobook of *The Night War*. They have been allowed access to another diegetic level, listening to someone *as they listen to the podcast*. Initially unaware of who it is that they hear cursing, lighting cigarettes and erratically rewinding the episodes, the listeners are at once robbed of a sense of control and made aware of their position as overhearers. As a reader with the username ChangHenGe remarked in *An Audio Companion*'s comments section,

> We are readers and listeners of the text but also readers and listeners [o]f the readers and listeners, and crucially here a listener of The Listener.
>
> And I guessed a bit from hints that we could extrapolate about who The Listener was, but it's nothing like as gut wrenching and heart aching as hearing it and hearing what we do not hear, what we are stopped from hearing - the tape cut off giving us that tiny gap into which we can dive into imaginings. The unreliable narration of the text, where we are given spaces to work between the lines, becomes further developed into this knowledge of an ever present near silent listener, whose choices to stop and start are filled with increased significance. (ChangHenGe on Chapter 4)

If the *Audio Companion* cultivates a self-aware and critical audience, it is exerting even more epistemological pressures on its Listener. "The unreliable narration of the text" ChangHanGe is referring to is, after all, just another interesting source of analysis for T*he Night War's* readers – the ways in which a WWII soldier might have been overemphasizing, downplaying, or repressing certain aspects of his personality is intriguing, but of no immediate significance to the average "in-universe" audience. The Listener is, however, soon revealed to be none other than Bucky Barnes. Having escaped the disastrous family gathering described in "Find Me (Where the Lovelight Gleams)", he has run away to visit his old war buddy Frank Castellano (a recurring character in his diary entries), all in order to listen to *The Night War* and try to become the person contained within. For him, any unreliability is catastrophic, for he considers the journal as the only possible way to learn how to *be* Bucky Barnes.

Writing on the difference between modern and postmodern treatment of subjectivity, Malpas establishes that

> [t]hrough memory, the modern subject is capable of constructing a personal narrative of identity, grasping the present and judging how to respond to the future. In essence, the modern subject is the product of its ability to recall and synthesise the events that make up its life: memory generates identity and allows each of us to become an individual and unique human being. (64)

As *An Audio Companion* progresses, the audience become increasingly aware of just how much Listener Bucky's view of himself depends on his (in)ability to "construct a personal narrative of identity" by consuming and internalizing *The Night War*. His efforts are, however, not particularly successful. In this regard, his journey from a prolific diarist to a distressed amnesiac serves to illustrate how "postmodernism establishes, differentiates, and then disperses stable narrative voices (and bodies) that use memory to try to make sense of the past" (Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" 85).

Listener Bucky is therefore constituted as an essentially postmodern subject – one who battles the notions of truth, history and reliability of narratives, only to come out of the fight disenchanted and discouraged. His frustration is evident as he interacts with the podcast, but really comes to the fore when he attempts to explain his position to other people. A particularly interesting example can be found in Chapter 12. In it, the listeners are allowed to overhear Bucky's phone call with Steve (the only other person who can confirm his narrative), who gives him a different account of a particular event than the one told in the journal:

> BUCKY. Those aren't- Those aren't *the words*– In the book, what you said–
> STEVE. Buck, do you remember it at all, or–
> BUCKY. He wrote everything down! Those aren't– Why'd ya say different words, Steve??

STEVE. You didn't write everything down! Buck–
BUCKY. Not every day, but–
STEVE. Even in what you did write–
BUCKY. It's got– It's got *everything* I don't remember, Steve, don't–
STEVE. No, it doesn't! I mean, it's your thoughts, Buck, but you used to– You'd write and rewrite. I remember because you'd–
BUCKY. *I* don't!
STEVE. I know! I know Buck, but the book, it's not– It's not a skeleton key, Jesus H!
…
BUCKY. You said, before, how it didn't, what you remembered was– different. From the book.
STEVE. Yeah.
BUCKY. But, how? There's… it's so *full*, it's got–
STEVE. It ain't you, Buck!
BUCKY. I know that, because its fucking *him*!
STEVE. It ain't him either! (00:06:16-00:12:56)

This conversation, halting and insecure, yet full of desperation and conviction, serves as a microcosm of not only Listener Bucky's existential and epistemological struggle, but of the entire *Audio Companion*. Bucky and Steve cannot reach a conclusion, and neither can the extradiegetic overhearers of *An Audio Companion*, as its unfinished status (fourteen episodes out of the planned twenty were ever produced) prevents any kind of closure. The central tensions running through the series – that of truth, memory and the (im)possibility of containing them within a written account – seem to support the notion "that there are only truths in the plural, and never one Truth; and there is rarely falseness per se, just others' truths" (Hutcheon, "Historiographic Metafiction" 76). But rather than solely focusing on the depiction of "incompatible realities [that] flicker into existence and out of existence again, overwhelmed by the competing reality of language" (McHale 234), *The Night War* series is deliberately affective. By giving the audience access to Listener Bucky's desperate attempts to reconstruct the self, it compels them to feel his anguish at the hopelessness of anyone finding any stability or unassailable truths in a narrative.

Conclusion

In order to critically engage with the *Captain America* franchise and dominant fan interpretations, as well as historical representations of WWII, praximeter (Zimario) and quietnight created a multi-layered alternate universe centred around the fraught subjectivity of Bucky Barnes. By predicating an entire alternate universe on the cultural significance of a classic war memoir, the authors are thematically centring the power of narratives to shape history, thus situating their work in the postmodern discourse on historiographic metafiction. The temporal, diegetic and historiographic intricacies of the narrative(s) contained within *The*

Night War series, however, do not serve to only to lay bare the authors' procedure, but to create a sense of emotional authenticity. *An Audio Companion*, the last, unfinished sequel, transforms written fiction into audio, making *The Night War* a transmedia story, one in which the listening experience rests on the existence of an interdiegetic Listener. The audience is thus allocated the position of overhearers, who are allowed access to The Listener's attempts to rebuild his identity on the supposed reliability and knowability of the self as it is contained in the journal. His inability to do so brings to the fore the series' structural and thematic preoccupation with metafictionality. Even more explicitly, its unfinished status robs the readers of a chance at "overhearing" an emotionally satisfying end to the narrative – and thus, just as Bucky, the readers are forced to confront the idea of a story not granting them, or the protagonist, any narrative stability to cling to.

End Notes

1 praximeter (Zimario) is the username of the author of *The Night War* series on the fanfiction website *Archive of Our Own*.

2 quietnight is the *Archive of Our Own* username of the author's main collaborator, who recorded the audio version.

3 The author's pronouns are stated on her Tumblr blog ("dreaming of 1940").

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03

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Elements of Western Culture and History in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. A Possible Resource for Teaching English as a Foreign Language

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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Elements of Western Culture and History in Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*. A Possible Resource for Teaching English as a Foreign Language

This paper aims to explore the elements of Western culture and history in Neil's Gaiman's novel *Neverwhere* and show how it can be used in teaching EFL. The novel is an urban fantasy set in London, in which the protagonist by accident discovers the existence of London Below, a realm ruled by its own laws, but very connected to its counterpart in the "real" world. The city of London is almost a character in the novel, with both its dark and illustrious moments of history and the complexities of a modern city. The novel may be used to teach London geography and explore its rich history. Each tube station or street name which is mentioned contains an additional meaning, which helps the reader broaden their vocabulary and improve the use of metaphoric language. The novel also abounds in allusions to literary works, from *Robinson Crusoe*, Shylock from Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, to *Mansfield Park*. Lastly, by exploring the reality of London Below, the novel may be used as a teaching tool for the problem of homelessness and the attitudes that surround it, all in the context of TEFL.

KEYWORDS
urban fantasy, literature, EFL, London, metaphor, homelessness

1. Introduction

Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* is an urban fantasy novel set in London, in which the protagonist, Richard Mayhew, by an act of kindness discovers the existence of London Below. It is a realm ruled by its own laws and regulations, while remaining very connected to its counterpart in the "real" world, London Above. The city of London is a key element in the novel, with both its dark and illustrious moments of history and the complexities of a modern city. As Hadas Elber-Aviram argues, the novel is "overtly and deeply concerned with the material history of the city" (2). It contains an enormous wealth of geographical and historical detail, which enable the reader to experience the city almost tangibly. Furthermore, Gaiman uses many literary and cultural allusions, which give the novel an additional richness. By juxtaposing the parallel worlds of London Below and Above, the author also explores the themes of social injustice and homelessness present in large cities. All of these elements make the novel attractive as possible EFL teaching material. When writing about the relevance of literature in language instruction, Truong Thi My Van states that "in addition to developing students' English language skills, teaching literature also appeals to their imagination, develops cultural awareness, and encourages critical thinking about plots, themes, and characters" (2). Gaiman's novel has the right characteristics to address all these educational objectives. This essay aims to analyse the historical, literary and social elements presented in the novel and briefly show how they can be used in teaching English as a foreign language to advanced learners.

2. Using literature in the EFL classroom

Before delving into an analysis of *Neverwhere*, the role of literature in language instruction shall be briefly discussed. It is an area of study that has gained much prominence in the last decades, and its role "as a basic component and source of authentic texts of the language curriculum ... has been gaining momentum" (Hişmanoğlu 53). Rather than as an end in itself, literature in TEFL is used as a tool to teach language in a more engaging way. Hişmanoğlu lists several reasons for using literature in English instruction, such as the usage of "valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement," as well as "universality, non-triviality, personal relevance, variety, interest, economy and suggestive power and ambiguity" (54). As "authentic material," literary texts give the learners access to "unmodified language," which is often "difficult or unknown," and they thus develop skills to also use such language outside of the classroom setting (Clandfield and Duncan 1). The cultural and language enrichment aspects allow the students to "learn about history, society, and politics of the country described in the novel or story" and to discover "the more subtle and varied creative uses of language" (Koutsompou 75). Both of these features abound in *Neverwhere* and shall be discussed further on. When it comes to personal involvement, a well-chosen literary work can

engage the learners emotionally to such an extent that the language learning process becomes very enjoyable. It certainly helps with the students' motivation to learn because, as Gillian Lazar points out, "a good novel or short story may be particularly gripping in that it involves students in the suspense of unravelling the plot" (15). Koutsompou also observes that "designing stimulating activities that motivate the learners is the greatest challenge for language teachers, and literature has a strong motivating power due to its calling on to personal experience" (75). Choosing literary works that appeal to the learners and cater to their linguistic and cultural development needs is, thus, an important part of the teaching process.

2.1. Fantasy literature in the classroom

While the use of literature in EFL instruction is rather widely accepted, fantasy novels as part of the curriculum are still not very common. In her article "Teaching Fantasy: Overcoming the Stigma of Fluff," Melissa Thomas argues for the use of this genre in the classroom for two basic reasons, namely, that "students like it," and that "it is a metaphor for the human condition—ripe with mythic structures, heroic cycles, and social and religious commentary" (60). In recent years there has been an increased interest in fantasy literature, especially among young adults[1], and due to globalisation, this applies to native speakers of English and EFL learners alike. When writing about the use of fantasy as a way to motivate students in language classes, Jóhan Daníel Jimma argues that "a great majority of EFL students will have seen Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* or *The Hobbit* trilogies. … This has resulted in fantasy literature having the benefit of being relevant to EFL students, since it is close to something they have enjoyed and engaged with throughout their entire lives" (61). Moreover, because of its use of metaphors and appeal to the imagination, fantasy writers often speak cross-culturally and are universally acclaimed, while remaining deeply rooted in a specific culture. Fabrizi writes the following:

> One of the most interesting aspects of fantasy literature is that it tends to ask the "big" questions of life, forcing students to consider such topics as the nature of good and evil, universal morality, the afterlife, heroism and the quality of one's character, the role of the individual in society, and the importance of cultural diversity. (1)

These topics range from existential to social issues, and provide an opportunity for the reader to reflect upon and exchange ideas on important questions. Furthermore, as Thomas explains, "in addition to religious issues, authors are taking on global issues on a more human scale: hunger, pain, loss, confusion, simple human fallibility, and triumph. Their characters, while remaining fictional, experience very human emotions" (62). This further engages the reader emotionally and probes into important questions through fictional characters set

in secondary-world settings. All of these elements, when treated in a way that makes the literary material accessible to the students, can be of great educational value to EFL learners.

Because of its rich cultural and linguistic content, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* is a good novel to use in TEFL. The language, cultural references and social issues which the novel addresses make it more suitable for adult learners, such as university students, rather than for younger learners. Besides age, Lazar mentions the students' "emotional and intellectual maturity" among the criteria for text selection (52). The motifs and themes used in the novel, such as the assassination of Door's family or the question of homelessness, require a certain degree of maturity often lacking in a younger reader. Similarly, the many cultural references to British and London history as well as the frequent uses of metaphorical language may be more appropriate for an adult learner. Van observes that "for many university teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL), the study of literature is indispensable because it exposes students to meaningful contexts that are replete with descriptive language and interesting characters (2). Gaiman's *Neverwhere* certainly offers such a context and language.

3. Cultural elements

One of the possible approaches to the treatment of literature in the EFL classroom is the "cultural model," in which the literary text "is treated as a source of information about the target culture" (Clandfield and Duncan 2). Koutsompou states that through the literary text "students get to know the background not only of the particular novel but also they learn about history, society, and politics of the country described in the novel or the story" (75). The innumerable references to British history and society in *Neverwhere* can give EFL students "access to the culture of the people whose language they are studying" (Lazar 16). In this case this access is mostly to London culture, with its rich history as well as its cosmopolitan character.

3.1. London and its geography

One of the most prominent aspects of the *Neverwhere* is the city of London, and this can help the EFL student to learn a great deal about its geography. From the very first sentence of the novel, the city is presented in a way that closely relates to the novel's protagonist. Gaiman opens the Prologue with the sentence, "The night before he went to London, Richard Mayhew was not enjoying himself" (Gaiman 1); he closes it by saying that "Richard Mayhew went to London feeling like hell" (Gaiman 5). Both sentences sound like a foreboding about the young man's stay in the metropolis, and express the contrast between the city's greatness and its possible dangers. There are several other references to this

double dimension in the Prologue and it is perhaps best summarised by the old woman who tells Richard's fortune, "You got a long way to go. … Not just London. … Not any London I know" (Gaiman 3). The city which Richard gets to know and experiences has more to it than what meets the eye. This is what he especially discovers when he crosses the threshold of London Below. Furthermore, from the very beginning London is presented almost as one of the characters of the novel. In the Prologue itself, the name of the city is mentioned fourteen times, whereas Richard's name is given nineteen times; almost the same weight is quantitatively given to both. London is not merely the setting of *Neverwhere*, it is one of the novel's intrinsic elements.

The city is also very well delineated as far as its streets, boroughs and landmarks are concerned. In her article "'The Past Is Below Us': Urban Fantasy, Urban Archaeology, and the Recovery of Suppressed History," Hadas Elber-Aviram argues that urban fantasy is characterised by "the genre's concern with the material history of the metropolis," and thus, "its predominant interest in the concrete, tangible details of the city, and the way in which these details cohere to form a larger narrative of the city's past" (2). In *Neverwhere*, the narrator minutely describes the different sights and monuments of London, which are intrinsically connected to the plot. He gives the exact names of locations, provides precise directions of how to get to them, as well as their historical background. The range of the described places varies from closed tube stations, such as the British Museum (Gaiman 169), to Harrods (Gaiman 109). A very useful pre-reading activity to help EFL students with "the historical and cultural background to the story" (Lazar 84) could be a look at the history of the London tube and the main stations which appear in the novel.

It is even possible to go on a sightseeing tour of London using Gaiman's descriptions and trace the characters' steps through the city. In addition to the official Neil Gaiman website, which presents "A Stroll in Old London at Dusk," there are blog entries on the internet that discuss possible sightseeing routes based on the novel. The author of the blog *Walked-In London*, who discusses the locations presented in different literary works set in the British capital, argues that "[m]any of the locations in *Neverwhere* are real although some are virtually unknown to many Londoners. Due to the location of London Below a lot of the action takes place in sewers, disused tube tunnels and alleyways and if you look hard enough they really are there" ("Neverwhere - Neil Gaiman"). He then provides a map of fifty-one locations across London, in which the action of the novel takes place. Gaiman himself suggests that much of London remains hidden to its inhabitants when he describes his protagonist's first journey with the Marquis de Carabas: "Richard wondered where they were. This didn't seem to be a sewer. Perhaps it was a tunnel for telephone cables, or for very small trains. Or for. . . something else. He realized that he did not know very much about what went on beneath the streets of London" (Gaiman 48). In another passage, while going to the Floating Market with Anaesthesia, the narrator remarks that Richard "was astonished that they

were still under London: he was half-convinced that they had walked most of the way to Wales" (Gaiman 98-99). Throughout the novel, the reader is encouraged to explore further the city's landmarks and places mentioned, especially because so many of their aspects seems to remain undiscovered. For the EFL student this is especially enriching as he or she learns about London geography and history. Just as one reading Tolkien's *The Lord of Rings* should have the map of Middle-earth always present, the plan of London is a necessary companion to the perusal of *Neverwhere*.[2] This map is literally mentioned in the novel several times, and already in the Prologue when Richard receives "the gift of the white umbrella with the map of the London Underground on it" (Gaiman 1) from his friends. This motif of the map of the London tube appears repeatedly throughout the work and further underlines the tangibility of the narrative.

3.2. Allusions to literary works and popular culture

Besides references to specific places and historical events, there are many allusions to literature and popular culture in the novel. Most of the former make mention of British literature, either explicitly or implicitly, but there are also references to the Bible and works from Classical antiquity. When Door is recovering in Richard's apartment after he has rescued her from the two assassins, she finds a copy of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park* and begins to read it. The narrator points to the fact that "Richard had not previously known that he possessed" this novel (Gaiman 41). An analogous passage appears at the end of the novel when Richard and Door recover from their final encounter with Islington at the Black Friars' monastery. When Richard enters Door's room, he sees her "sitting on the edge of her bed, reading a copy of *Mansfield Park* that [he] was certain the friars had not previously known that they had" (Gaiman 341). The narrator does not reveal to the reader whether Door finishes reading Austen's novel, nor what she thinks about it, and it could be worthwhile to explore this further as one of the activities in the EFL classroom.

Besides Jane Austen, the narrator also refers to Daniel Defoe (Gaiman 41), Charles Dickens (Gaiman 209), and most frequently to Shakespeare. A rather grim allusion to the words of Shylock from *The Merchant of Venice* is given in the following conversation between the two assassins: "Mr. Croup turned out the lights. 'Oh, Mister Vandemar,' he said, enjoying the sound of the words, as he enjoyed the sound of all words, 'if you cut us, do we not bleed?' Mr. Vandemar pondered this for a moment, in the dark. Then he said, with perfect accuracy, 'No'" (Gaiman 75). As opposed to the original text (Shakespeare III.i.66), in which the words are meant to show the humanity of Shylock, here they point to the inhumanity and villainy of Croup and Vandemar. Another play of Shakespeare's that Gaiman refers to more explicitly is *Macbeth*. There is a very witty reference to a citation that is sometimes misquoted. When Richard is about to enter the room, in which he has to face the ordeal of the key, the narrator describes it in the following way:

> 'Right,' said Richard. And he smiled, unconvincingly, and added, 'Well, lead on, Macduff.' Brother Fuliginous pulled back the bolts on the door. They opened with a crash, like twin gunshots. He pulled the door open. Richard stepped through it. Brother Fuliginous pushed the door closed behind him, and swung the bolts back into place. He led the abbot back to his chair and placed the cup of tea back in the old man's hand. The abbot sipped his tea, in silence. And then he said, with honest regret in his voice, "It's 'lay on, Macduff' actually. But I hadn't the heart to correct him. He sounded like such a nice young man. (Gaiman 240-241)

Pascal Tréguer explains the meaning of both "lay on, Macduff" from Shakespeare's text, and "lead on, Macduff," and he also points to the origins of the distortion of the primary text. The phrase mistakenly used by Richard means "let's get going, start us off;" whereas the original means "go ahead (and give it your best effort)" ("Meaning, Origin & Early Occurrences of *Lay On, Macduff*"). This rather dark-humoured passage points to the sophistication of Gaiman's language and allusions. There are also several other references to Shakespeare's heroes, such as to Prospero from *The Tempest* (Gaiman 89) and to the eponymous hero of Shakespeare's *King Lear* (139), but they shall not be further considered here.

There are also several allusions to the Bible in the novel, either to specific characters, such as Lucifer, to whom Richard refers in his final encounter with the Angel Islington (Gaiman 324), or to chosen passages, such as the one about Tower of Babel (Gaiman 291). Irina Rata argues that these references "allow a dialogue between the Bible and the novel, accentuate the oppositions between the two Londons" (96). Just as the Biblical episodes explicitly mentioned in the novel—the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Gaiman 135) or the rebellion of Lucifer—show the constant tension between good and evil, they also point to the unspoken strife between the two worlds of London Above and London Below, and between the powers within both. Even though the novel does not explicitly deal with religious themes, there is a considerable number of references and images that point to the narrator's concern with the supernatural. A thorough analysis of all the literary allusions present in the novel exceeds the scope of this paper; it is certainly a valuable one to explore, especially when using *Neverwhere* in a language teaching setting.

Besides references to literature, the novel is laden with images and characters from contemporary Western culture. These include various pop-cultural items, such as Richard's "Batmobile-shaped telephone" (Gaiman 57), images, such as the "giggle … [of] a Japanese girl" (Gaiman 84), and people, such as Rupert Murdoch (Gaiman 58). They are often placed side by side with historical or fictional characters or elements, and this gives the novel an additional depth. For example, the fictional Arnold Stockton, Jessica's boss, becomes more credible when juxtaposed with Murdoch or Robert Maxwell (Gaiman 193). Similarly, a vivid description of Lear's saxophone rendering of "Burt Bacharach and Hal David's 'I'll Never Fall In Love Again,'" (Gaiman 137-138), or of "the old Julie London 'Cry Me a

River.' *Now you say you're sorry*..." (138) gives the musician a semblance of historicity. Other allusions to songs, people and expressions common to contemporary Europeans help the reader to relate more to the characters and experience the narrative in a more tangible way.

4. Linguistic elements

In addition to the cultural elements that can be explored in a literary text, "the language model for teaching literature [aims] to give students knowledge with some sense of the more subtle and varied creative uses of language" (Koutsompou 75). It includes both the grammatical and lexical elements of the novel, but also draws attention to the stylistic and aesthetic value of literature. This approach is more "learner-centred" and it encourages him or her "to make meaningful interpretations of the text" (Clandfield and Duncan 2). The linguistic richness of *Neverwhere* makes the novel a very appropriate choice for an EFL classroom.

4.1 Metaphorical language and rich vocabulary

Gaiman's *Neverwhere* is a work of great linguistic value, especially considering its numerous metaphors and well-chosen vocabulary. The title itself seems to contain several levels of meaning. A very fitting pre-reading activity to create student interest in the novel may be "a group discussion about what the title of the story suggests" (Lazar 84). At first glance, "neverwhere" seems to mean *nothing*, or "no place and no time." The word "never" gives the impression of non-existence in time or atemporality, and, connected with "where," it seems to imply no specific place. As has already been shown, however, the novel has a well-defined setting: the city of London with its rich history. Furthermore, the names in the novel often contain a meaning or a historical reference. Irina Rata gives a detailed account of the onomastic allusions present in the novel, in which she discusses the names of the primary and secondary characters. For example, Richard's surname recalls the two prominent Mayhews who greatly contributed to the development of London (Rata 90), as well as the Marquis de Carabas. The latter "takes his name from the main character of Perrault's fairytale *Puss in Boots*," and "embodies the cleverness and resourcefulness of somebody, who provides services by trickery for a living" (Rata 90). Similarly, the name of every, or most, characters in *Neverwhere* points to various linguistic and historical sources which are relevant to the novel's plot.

A prominent feature of the novel is the significance of the names of the London tube stations. These frequently refer to well-known landmarks or streets, which are taken for granted by most Londoners. Gaiman presents these names in a new light when he takes their literal meaning or changes the spelling of the original words. There is the first hint of this already in the Prologue when Richard

Mayhew reads the tube station names on the London map umbrella he gives to the old homeless woman: "Earl's Court, Marble Arch, Blackfriars, White City, Victoria, Angel, Oxford Circus … Richard found himself pondering, drunkenly, whether there really was a circus at Oxford Circus: a real circus with clowns, beautiful women, and dangerous beasts" (Gaiman 4). What is at first a seemingly thoughtless consideration of a drunken man becomes a reality when Richard enters London Below. When he suddenly finds himself in the court of a real earl at Earl's Court Station, he continues his musings about the meaning of the names: "'Earl's Court', thought Richard. 'Of course.' And then he began to wonder whether there was a Baron in Barons Court Tube station, or a Raven in Ravenscourt" (Gaiman 151). He gradually becomes less surprised as he discovers the literal meaning behind each of the stations he visits, and does in fact meet real Black Friars at the Blackfriars station (Gaiman 240) and the Angel Islington at the Angel Station located in the Islington Borough (Gaiman 132).

A passage which is especially rich in metaphors is the description of Knightsbridge. In London Above it is considered to be a rich neighbourhood, to which "Richard would accompany Jessica on her tours of such huge and intimidating emporia as Harrods and Harvey Nichols" (Gaiman 12). In London Below, however, Anaesthesia, who is Richard's guide to the Floating Market, calls it "a really nasty neighbourhood" and is genuinely scared of it (Gaiman 92). The narrator draws explicit attention to the metaphor in a conversation between Richard and Hunter and the events that follow:

> They walked toward the bridge. … Richard looked at the woman in leather. 'Is there anything, really, to be scared of?' 'Only the night on the bridge,' she said. 'The kind in armour?' 'The kind that comes when day is over.' Anaesthesia's hand sought Richard's. He held it tightly, her tiny hand in his. She smiled at him, squeezed his hand. And then they set foot on Night's Bridge and Richard began to understand darkness: darkness as something solid and real, so much more than a simple absence of light. He felt it touch his skin, questing, moving, exploring: gliding through his mind. It slipped into his lungs, behind his eyes, into his mouth. (Gaiman 101-102)

This passage presents a masterly example of vocabulary teaching and discovering additional layers of meaning. "Knight" is not only revealed as a homophone of "night," but it may also metaphorically refer to the idea of crossing the bridge as a form of combat, in which someone always loses. There is a toll one has to pay to cross it, and Anaesthesia has become this toll (Gaiman 104). The language used to describe darkness as almost a living being also provides the instructor with many possibilities when using this passage in a language class.

5. Social elements

The Critical Literacy learning approach draws attention to the social elements inherent in literature and "reveals the interrelationship between language use and social power" (Van 7). Even though social issues are not central to EFL instruction, they can certainly be very enriching, especially when presented in an attractive way through engaging literature. According to scholars who wish to implement Critical Literacy in the EFL classroom, there is a "need of introducing *critical literacy pedagogy* into the language teaching curriculum as a means of promoting social justice … [by] teaching students to read texts in an active, reflective manner for a better understanding of power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships" (Bobkina and Stefanova 679). In this context, Gaiman's exploration of the theme of social inequality, especially as depicted through London Below, may in the EFL classroom serve as a teaching tool for raising awareness of and sensitivity towards this social issue.

5.1 Homelessness

Gaiman presents the topic of homelessness in the Prologue when Richard meets the homeless woman who warns him about the future (Gaiman 2). Already in this passage, the protagonist is shown as one who is sensitive to another's suffering. He does not ignore the woman, but enters in conversation with her. There is a stark contrast between Richard's attitude to the homeless and his fiancée's, Jessica's. Elber-Aviram argues that Londoners turn "a blind eye to the city's downtrodden; allowing them to plunge into an under-city termed 'London Below' that lies beneath the surface of upper-class 'London Above'" (11). Jessica represents those who are blind to see the suffering poor, which is clearly shown when she steps over a bleeding young woman without taking proper notice of her. The disparity between the attitudes of the couple is well-presented in the following, rather lengthy but important, passage:

> 'Jessica?' He could not believe that she was simply ignoring the figure at their feet. 'What?' She was not pleased to be jerked out of her reverie. 'Look.' He pointed to the sidewalk. The person was face down, and enveloped in bulky clothes; Jessica took his arm and tugged him toward her. 'Oh. I see. If you pay them any attention, Richard, they'll walk all over you. They all have homes, really. Once she's slept it off, I'm sure she'll be fine.' She? Richard looked down. It was a girl. Jessica continued, 'Now, I've told Mister Stockton that we…' Richard was down on one knee. 'Richard? What are you doing?' 'She isn't drunk,' said Richard. 'She's hurt.' He looked at his fingertips. 'She's bleeding.' Jessica looked down at him, nervous and puzzled. 'We're going to be late,' she pointed out. (Gaiman 24-25)

Jessica not only does not notice Door lying on the ground, but remains unmoved by her suffering, even once she does see her. Even though Door is physically

visible to Jessica, she remains invisible to her as a person. Seeing their suffering and helping the poor, in turn, makes one invisible to the rest of society. Irina Rata says that "in the novel, the metaphor of invisibility of the poor and homeless is literalised. Richard becomes invisible to everybody, and as a result becomes homeless and jobless after helping Door" (Rata 91). Even though nothing has changed about him externally, he loses his official identity and is rejected by society. Richard's reaction to hearing his landlord talk about his belongings is insightful, inasmuch it provides a voice for the poor. He says, "It's not rubbish … It's my stuff" (Gaiman 65). Short phrases like this one are a powerful statement about the dignity of each person and their superiority over things.

Throughout the novel there are further examples which underline the distance between London's upper-class and its poor. Rata draws attention to the posh style represented by Clarence, Jessica's assistant, who uses the latest "portable phone" and wears an "Armani suit" (184) and all those present at the opening of the exhibit organized by Jessica's office at the British Museum. On the other side of the social spectrum are the lowest inhabitants of London Below. Rata continues: "the extreme poverty of some of the inhabitants of London Below is represented by Sewer Folk, who scour the sewers for all sorts of junk to sell, including dead bodies" (93). It is true that the Sewer Folk's degradation is enormous, but it is also true that Clarence's and Jessica's insensitivity is equally degrading to them as persons. What seems to be Gaiman's strongest commentary on the subject of this social injustice is the incommunicability between the two realms. Even though they share some streets and the London tube, there seem to be no connecting routes between the two worlds. The theme of homelessness and social inequality is also one which can be further developed. It can certainly lead to numerous EFL classroom activities, "where students need to share their feelings and opinions" (Lazar 17), develop "critical thinking abilities" and engage in debate (Hişmanoğlu 64). This can be of great value in teaching the English language to foreign students, especially in today's social and political context of increased migration.

6. Conclusion

To conclude, Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* is a novel which contains many elements of Western culture and history which can serve as valuable "authentic" material in the EFL classroom. The novel presents the history and geography of Great Britain and London in great detail, and helps the reader to experience the places mentioned in an almost tangible way. There are numerous allusions to literary works and popular culture, which can be greatly explored in an English language teaching setting, as has been shown. Finally, Gaiman also points to important social questions, such as inequality and homelessness, and provides interesting insight into them and gives ideas on how to grow in sensitivity towards others. Even though *Neverwhere* is a novel that is very rooted in a particular

setting, its discussion of topics such as language, friendship, or injustice transcends cultural borders and can be enjoyed by many—which in turn makes it a tremendous resource for teaching English as a foreign language.

End Notes

1 See, for example, Derrick Smith's article "Bringing Fantasy and Science Fiction into the Classroom" (2012) in which he shows the reading preferences of young adults in the United States in 2011; it is included in the Works Cited.

2 The first Polish edition of *Neverwhere* (*Nigdziebądź*) provides the map of London in the appendix.

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04

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Violence as a Form of Social Criticism in Transgressive Art: Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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Violence as a Form of Social Criticism in Transgressive Art: Quentin Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs*

Contemporary art often aims at criticizing the modern society and its values and in transgressive art this is usually done through the use of violence, which is represented graphically and matter-of-factly. The films of Quentin Tarantino are highly transgressive in that respect, and his debut film *Reservoir Dogs* is even thought to have initiated a whole new era in the American cinema commonly known as 'the new brutality'. *Reservoir Dogs* helped the American filmmaker establish his characteristic 'tarantinoesque' style in which violence – excessive, graphic, and even aestheticized – plays a crucial role. This paper will examine the violence in Tarantino's *Reservoir Dogs* focusing on its nature, its various types and manifestations, the way it is represented and the purpose of such representation. Violence in *Reservoir Dogs* is omnipresent: it lingers throughout the whole film and dictates its narration to reach its peak in the infamous ear-cutting scene, where it is grotesquely juxtaposed with cheerful popular music. By exploring the variety of cinematic techniques used to represent violence, the paper will seek to explain the purpose of Tarantino's use of violence in this film. It will be argued that Tarantino does not aim at eliciting strong emotional reactions in the audience, but rather, in accordance with his affinity to metafictionality and self-referentiality, at presenting violence as a cinematic artifice that is detached from the real life and can therefore serve as a source of aesthetic enjoyment. However, it is precisely this way of representing violence that serves as a social commentary by suggesting that violence is so ubiquitous in the contemporary world that the society as a whole has become completely desensitized to it.

KEYWORDS
Tarantino, *Reservoir Dogs*, violence, transgression, film

1 Introduction: the violence of Quentin Tarantino's films and the new brutality

The films of Quentin Tarantino are famous for their unrestrained, over-the-top representations of violence, which has been both praised by critics for its craftsmanship (Maglajlija 3) and stylistic brilliance (Coulthard 1) and criticized for its shallowness or lack of any moral ground (McKinney 20-21). Nonetheless, it is precisely the violence in his films and its representation that has earned Tarantino the reputation of one of the legends of the American film industry. *Reservoir Dogs*, as his debut film released in 1992, may not be Tarantino's most critically appraised film, nor the one which stands out as particularly violent or provocative, at least compared to some of his subsequent films.

However, *Reservoir Dogs* undoubtedly established Tarantino as a director who would become one of the most popular and most controversial filmmakers in the modern American cinema. As critic Roger Ebert said after the film was released, "now that we know Quentin Tarantino can make a movie like *Reservoir Dogs*, it's time for him to move on and make a better one" (qtd. in Maglajlija 17). The popularity of the film indeed served as a confirmation that the audience was ready for the amounts of graphic violence present in Tarantino's films, which was to be even more excessive in his subsequent films, even to the extent and with the purpose of being parodic.

Therefore, it could be said that *Reservoir Dogs* helped Tarantino establish his characteristic style when it comes to the representation of violence; as will be discussed in detail later in the paper, it is graphic, excessive, and even aestheticized. What is more, not only does *Reservoir Dogs* represent the beginning of Tarantino's extremely successful filmmaking career and the birth of his characteristic style, but it is also thought to be the film that initiated a whole new era in the American cinema in regard to the representation of violence (Bouzereau, qtd. in Grønstad 155), an era usually known as "new brutality" (Gormley 7), "Hollywood ultraviolence" (Coulthard 1), "neo-violence" (Rich, qtd. in Grønstad 155) or "new violence" (Slocum, qtd. in Grønstad 155).

New brutality films represent an entirely new direction in the aesthetic of Hollywood films when it comes to the representation of violence: they "renegotiate and reanimate the immediacy and affective qualities of the cinematic experience within commercial Hollywood" (Gormley 8), thus aiming at an entirely different reaction from the audience than 'traditional' violent films, as will be shown later in the paper. Moreover, most of these films possess certain postmodern qualities, being often characterized by "postmodern detachment, lack of affect, and ironic distance" (Coulthard 1). All of these characteristics are present in *Reservoir Dogs* as well, as will be elaborated in more detail below.

2 Slow violence and narration

Disregarding the so-called 'ear-cutting' scene, the most famous scene in the film which will be discussed later, it would be fair to say that violence in *Reservoir Dogs*, though undoubtedly present, is neither that graphic nor that excessive as is the case in some of Tarantino's subsequent films, since the American's debut film does not abound in scenes of gunfire or extreme bloodshed that can be found, for example, in *Pulp Fiction* or *Inglourious Basterds*. However, this is far from saying that *Reservoir Dogs* does not contain extreme violence: it is just that instead of being 'quick' and limited to certain gory scenes with breaks between them, violence in *Reservoir Dogs* lingers throughout the whole film, thus completely dictating its narration.

The connection between violence and narration and the omnipresence of violence in *Reservoir Dogs* is hinted at in the very first utterance of the film after the opening credits: Mr. Orange (Tim Roth), who is bleeding heavily in a car and asking Mr. White (Harvey Keitel) to hold his hand, says "I'm gonna die" (*Reservoir Dogs*, 9:41-9:42), thus foreshadowing the remainder of the film, since the entire one hour and forty minutes of the film can indeed be seen as a process toward a fulfillment of this statement, a process of Mr. Orange dying. In this way, as Taubin argues, in *Reservoir Dogs* "temporal and dramatic unity is principally determined by the length of time it takes for a man … to bleed to death in front of our eyes" (qtd. in Grønstad 159). Although Mr. Orange gets shot in the end of the film as well – which is, of course, a direct cause of his death – the process of him dying nevertheless begins in the very first scene of the film, the temporality of the film thus being "conceived as one extensive moment of death" (Grønstad 159).

Besides the slow death of Mr. Orange, another way in which Tarantino emphasizes the lingering violence in this film concerns the fact that most of the characters do not manage to survive until the end of the film, thus occupying throughout the entire narrative a kind of a "death space" (Blanchot, qtd. In Grønstad 159). Namely, not only does it become apparent rather early in the film that Mr. Orange is going to die, but the viewers are aware of the fact that there is a possibility for the other members of the gang to share his fate. What is more, it could even be said that this 'death space' that most of the characters occupy is even literalized in the film, since most of it takes place in an abandoned warehouse which is not only separated from the outside world, but is actually itself a morgue, with coffins and a hearse in it. Therefore, it once again becomes clear that in *Reservoir Dogs*, as Grønstad argues, "death by violence is not only limited to discrete narrative moments but has come to immerse the spatio-temporal continuum of the movie" (160), which proves that violence and its consequences not only dictate narration, but narration and violence can seemingly "no longer be kept apart as two separate entities" (Grønstad 159).

In connection to the previously discussed death by violence which is omnipresent in *Reservoir Dogs*, one more important thing that needs to be mentioned when discussing the slow, lingering violence in the film is the fact that in *Reservoir Dogs* Tarantino seems to pay more attention to the bodies and their postures in the aftermath of violence than to the very moments of violent acts. Namely, the film does not focus on the very heist that has gone wrong or on violence perpetrated during it, but rather on its consequences that linger throughout the entire film, i.e. the injured, dying men – or, more specifically, on the "slow, sticky death of Mr. Orange, belly-shot and bleeding fatally throughout the real time of the film" (Nathan 63).

All in all, considering the fact that Quentin Tarantino generally observes a distinction in terms of the speed of violence – his films possessing instances of both 'quick' and 'slow' violence – it could be said that violence in *Reservoir Dogs* is the perfect example of the latter. Instead of showing a gunshot which would come as a surprise to the audience and the victim and even the perpetrator, Tarantino presents the viewers with 'prolonged' violence whose culmination they are constantly anticipating, as the whole narrative unravels while Mr. Orange lies dying. However, despite the fact that violence stretches throughout the whole film, there is one scene which stands out for its 'quick' and over-the-top violence: the infamous ear-cutting scene.

3 Quick violence: the ear-cutting scene

The scene which has attracted most attention in the film and which is undoubtedly one of the most analyzed and quoted scenes of violence not just in Tarantino's films, but in the modern cinema in general is the famous 'ear-cutting' scene – the one in which Mr. Blonde (Michael Madsen) tortures the captive cop (Kirk Baltz) by tying him up and gagging him, cutting off his ear and spilling gasoline all over him in order to burn him alive, all the while dancing to a catchy pop song from the 1970s. The director himself has acknowledged the importance of the scene multiple times in his interviews, claiming it to be "the most cinematic scene in the whole film" (Tarantino, qtd. in Page 26).

One of many reasons why this scene is so important has to do with the fact that it represents a turning point in the film when it comes to the representation of violence in it. Namely, according to Gallafent, the violence in *Reservoir Dogs* before the ear-cutting scene is of two different kinds: it is either mostly playful with human bodies suffering no real harm (as when Mr. Blonde and Eddie (Chris Penn) wrestle in Joe's office) or it is violence whose consequences are shown graphically, but the very moment of the violent action is not shown (as is the case with Mr. Orange bleeding in the car and the warehouse; only later in the film do we actually see the scene of him being shot) (40). Thus, up to the ear-cutting scene the violence and its representation are as 'benevolent' and as bearable as

they can be; however, in this infamous scene, the violence becomes much more striking, not only due to the way it is represented (which will be discussed later), but also due to its nature.

Before discussing the nature of violence in this scene, it is important to make a distinction between the reason characters decide to indulge in violent actions – which is a means of their characterization, a manifestation of their personality – and the reason the director, Quentin Tarantino, decided to use violence and represent it the way he does: only the former will be discussed in this part of the paper, while the graphic representation and the purpose of Tarantino's use of violence will be discussed in more detail later. In order to examine the nature of violence in this scene and to account for the effect it has on the viewers it is necessary to explore the reasons characters decide to perpetrate violence. Before this scene, violence is perpetrated with a certain goal in mind: for example, Mr. White and Mr. Pink (Steve Buscemi) torture the cop in order to extract certain information from him, which suggests that their violence has a purpose to it, however unreasonable or futile it may be.

On the other hand, when Mr. Blonde tortures the same cop in the ear-cutting scene, the purpose of violence is quite different and, what is even more important, almost inexistent. Namely, during the entire torture Mr. Blonde is aware of the fact that he cannot get any information from the cop and that the information he may get would be extracted by force and therefore unreliable. Thus, the only reason Mr. Blonde decides to indulge in such violent behaviour is for the sake of pure sadistic pleasure; his violence has no purpose but is an end in itself, which can be seen from the torturer's own words: "I don't give a good fuck what you know or don't know, but I'm going to torture you anyway" (*Reservoir Dogs*, 54:10-54:23). In that respect, Gallafent argues that for Mr. Blonde the cop – or rather the cop's body – is present only "as the provider of physical sensation", suggesting that the pleasure Mr. Blonde derives from the torture is similar to that which he derives from song and dance and can even be said to possess a kind of an orgasmic quality (43-44). This can indeed be seen from Mr. Blonde's own line following the ear-cutting in which the torturer asks the cop, "Was that as good for you as it was for me?" (*Reservoir Dogs*, 57:04-57:09), which clearly points to the extent to which Mr. Blonde has enjoyed the violent act.

Based on everything discussed above it could be concluded that violence in this scene is not only extreme, but it also has no real, pragmatic, justifiable cause. As Gormley suggests, "the bout of violence has no real narrative logic beyond the fact that we have been told by another member of the gang that Blonde is a 'fucking madman' and this lack of narrative cause and effect leaves the viewer without a clue as to what happens next" (7). Moreover, not only does this lack of narrative logic in violence make it even more unpredictable and difficult to bear, but it also makes the reason Tarantino decides to include it in the film even more puzzling. Even though the director undoubtedly uses violence

in this scene as a means of characterization – aiming to portray Mr. Blonde as a psychopath – there may be other reasons behind this. Thus, the purpose of violence in this film – i.e. the reason the director includes violence and represents it in a particular way – being extremely relevant for the topic of this paper, will be discussed in detail in the final section. Before that, it is necessary to observe the way Tarantino represents violence in *Reservoir Dogs*, as it is precisely the representation of violence that makes it so striking and provocative rather than its nature or narrative logic.

4 The representation of violence

As already mentioned, in Quentin Tarantino's films violence is omnipresent. Nonetheless, perhaps the most important thing about it is precisely the way it is shown: his films are known not only for their excessive violence, but also for the fact that it is often depicted very graphically. Moreover, Tarantino uses a number of cinematic techniques in order to represent violence in a particular way and to make a certain point, as will be discussed below.

4.1 Graphic violence

Graphic violence can be defined as the one that "entails the visual representation of the actual damage done to the subject of physical harm" (Maglajlija 5). Despite being considered "an inescapable and ubiquitous characteristic of contemporary cinema" (Prince, qtd. in Gallafent 38), graphic violence is still considered to be rather transgressive, and as such is one of the most notable characteristics of transgressive art in general. What is more, graphic violence may be the main reason Quentin Tarantino's films are considered to be highly transgressive[1], since they abound in the images of injuries and blood splashing, as well as, even more importantly, the scenes of processes of infliction of these injuries, such as bullets hitting bodies, mutilations, etc.

The purpose of Tarantino's use of graphic violence is often questioned, both by the critics and the viewers. One explanation that is given by the author himself concerns his wish to represent violence as realistically as possible – as Tarantino himself has explained in following words: "If a guy gets shot in the stomach and he's bleeding like a stuck pig then that's what I want to see – not a man with a stomach ache and a little red dot on his belly" ("Quentin Tarantino: violence is the best way to control an audience", par. 5). Such graphic representation of violence and injuries is precisely what can be found in *Reservoir Dogs*, since we get to witness Mr. Blonde 'bleeding like a struck pig' all the time. However, apart from his desire to provide a realistic representation of violence, there are other reasons Quentin Tarantino's films are so gory and 'explicit' in terms of violence representation. However, before looking into this problem, it is

necessary to examine other ways in which the filmmaker represents violence in *Reservoir Dogs*, i.e. to examine the way he juxtaposes violence with some other elements, as well his choice of cinematic techniques for representing violence and the reasons behind such choice.

4.2 Juxtaposition

An important characteristic of Quentin Tarantino's representation of violence concerns the fact that it is often juxtaposed with some other elements. For example, in *Reservoir Dogs*, the first scene before the opening credits is rather light-hearted and humourous, showing the men sitting and discussing, among many other things, the lyrics of *Like a Virgin*. What this scene is followed by (after the opening credits) is the aforementioned scene of Mr. Orange bleeding in the car, a scene which is extremely bloody and violent. Thus, by putting these two scenes adjacent to one another, Tarantino juxtaposes them, making the latter one come as an even bigger shock to the viewers when placed after a 'lighter' scene like the former.

An even more prominent juxtaposition, however, concerns the way the filmmaker combines violence with music and humour, which is again best illustrated in the ear-cutting scene that may be so iconic and memorable precisely due to the extraordinary use of soundtrack in it. Namely, what happens in the scene is that all the time while torturing the cop Mr. Blonde dances, almost psychotically, to an upbeat pop song from the 1970s "*Stuck in the Middle with You*" by *Stealers Wheel*. This seemingly strange combination of violence being scored with catchy popular songs is often found in Tarantino's films, as the filmmaker tends to juxtapose visual elements (in this case extreme violence) with aural elements (music). What is more, the audio tracks are sometimes even provided by the characters themselves, which can be seen as another proof of Tarantino's affinity to postmodernism (Page 11, Gormley 11). Namely, in *Reservoir Dogs* Mr. Blonde is the one who plays the record on the gramophone; i.e. the character from the film is the one who creates this juxtaposition of two incongruous elements – a juxtaposition which creates a certain effect in the audience – which can be seen as an instance of reflexivity and self-consciousness which are characteristic of postmodern cinema.

Besides that, apart from juxtaposing extreme violence with upbeat music, Tarantino also adds an element of humour to the dialogue in this gory scene, thus making another juxtaposition; for example, when Mr. Blonde cuts off the cop's ear, he speaks to it saying "Hey, what's going on?", after which he turns to the cop and asks him "Hear that?" (*Reservoir Dogs*, 57:09-57:11). According to Verstraten, this combination of cheerful music and humour with extreme violence can be seen as an instance of grotesque, which can be defined as "the incongruous co-presence of some laughable and disgusting things", "the intrusion of comic

elements in 'spine-chillingly' uncanny setting" (294). What makes this scene even more grotesque is the fact that violence is presented matter-of-factly, which is often the case in transgressive art in general.

As is the case with cinematic techniques used to represent violence, this juxtaposition of violence and music (as well as violence and humour) serves the same purpose of provoking a certain reaction from the audience. Namely, while the viewers usually feel disgust and abhorrence when watching scenes of extreme violence, when a joyful tune is added to it or when they hear a witty comment they may be tempted to feel amused and bewildered, all the while feeling guilty since 'one is not supposed to enjoy the scenes of extreme violence'. In this way, the director addresses an important cultural taboo: we often, for example, condemn Roman circus games as unreasonably cruel and we abhor the violence inflicted upon the animals in today's Spanish corrida – nevertheless, there are occasions in which we, almost unwillingly and therefore quite guilt-strickenly, enjoy watching violence being perpetrated on someone, even if on screen. This contradictory reaction is precisely what the director is trying to achieve, the reasons for which will be discussed in the last section of this paper.

4.3 Cinematic techniques

Quentin Tarantino, in accordance with his affinity for postmodernism (Page 11, Gormley 11), employs cinematic techniques in his films in a very playful way in order to affect the audience's reactions and sympathies, the most important one being change of perspective. Namely, apart from the juxtaposing violent scenes with the 'normal' ones or with cheerful music and humour, another way in which Tarantino tries to control the viewers' reactions is by playing with perspective. The most illustrative example for this is again the previously discussed ear-cutting scene, which was filmed in ten minutes of real time (Gormley 7) and filmed precisely in such a way to control and manipulate the sympathies and emotions of the viewers. Namely, at the beginning of the scene, the camera follows Mr. Blonde while he arrives at the warehouse and stays behind him while he is watching other men in the warehouse, so his perspective is the same as the perspective of the audience. Later on, while the three men argue, Mr. Blonde sits on top of a hearse observing the argument, thus being aligned with the audience once again. Being constantly provided with Mr. Blonde's point of view, the viewers may easily feel tempted to sympathize and ally themselves with him, despite the fact that he is the perpetrator.

However, what Tarantino does next is play with the audience's sympathies once again: when the torture starts the camera is aligned with the cop, thus providing his perspective and challenging the audience's standpoint, especially when the close-ups of the cop's face are given. What is more, there is even one particular moment in which the audience is completely aligned with the victim.

When Mr. Blonde slaps his captive, his hand moves towards the camera so that it seems as if we, the viewers, are going to get a slap in the face (Gervais 16). Indeed, this intent of complete alignment can even be seen from the very script of the film, where the scene is described in the following way: "A slash across the face. *The cop/camera* moves around wildly. Mr. Blonde just stares into t*he cop's/our* face, singing along with the seventies hit. Then he reaches out and cuts off *the cop's/our* ear" (Tarantino, qtd. in Gervais 17, emphasis added). Therefore, what can be concluded is that Tarantino's constant shifting of perspective between the perpetrator and the victim serves the purpose of playing with the audience's sympathies and standpoints.

In the most intense moment of the scene, however – when the cop's ear is being severed – the director refuses to provide any perspective whatsoever, with the camera panning away from the scene of the actual mutilation and showing the upper left corner of the warehouse with the 'Mind Your Head' sign, which is, of course, deliberate and ironic. Nonetheless, the fact that the severing is not explicitly shown does not seem to alleviate the audience's disgust and horror. As Suarez argues, the viewers are given all the elements of the very act of severing; they are given a trigger and all they have to do is finish the scene in their minds, as if they were directors – which, however illogical it may sound, may even make the scene even harder to bear (par. 3). Therefore, what is evident is that Tarantino uses the shift of perspective in order to play with the audience's reactions, this playfulness being just one of many features of postmodern films, as will be discussed in more detail later in the paper.

5 The purpose of violence

The most common question concerning Quentin Tarantino's films – asked by the critics, journalists and readers alike – is why the director employs so much violence in his films and especially why it is represented so graphically. At first sight, it may seem logical to assume that such representation of violence is supposed to provoke strong emotional responses from the audience; for example, when it comes to the previously discussed juxtaposition of violence and cheerful music, it could be claimed that it was done with an aim of highlighting the extremity of violence, of making it even stronger and more appalling and thus causing a deeper emotional reaction in the audience. However, if this was the filmmaker's intention, it is not very clear to what extent it was successful. Namely, Tarantino's films, including *Reservoir Dogs*, have often been criticized for their treatment of violence which, as critics have argued, does not intend to evoke a critical response in the audience, and is therefore morally problematic. For example, McKinney criticizes *Reservoir Dogs* for its "hollow treatment of violence" (20), his assumption being based on the fact that in the film, especially in the discussed ear-cutting scene, the audience identifies neither with the victim nor with the perpetrator

and thus only serves as a passive observer. He thus classifies it into a category he terms "weak violence", since "empathies are not engaged, commitments are not brought to bear, ambivalences are not acknowledged, neutrality is the currency" (McKinney 21).

However, what critics like McKinney seem to disregard is the fact that evoking strong emotional reactions in the audience is not at all what Tarantino aspires to by representing violence the way he does – his aim seems to be quite the opposite. First of all, as Gormley argues, the new brutality films in general tend to induce a reaction from the viewers in a much more immediate and intuitive way: namely, by assaulting their bodies and causing an involuntary reaction, since the body of a viewer should act in a way "that it imitates and mimics the actions of the cinematic body, or the bodies that the viewer experiences on the screen" (8). That is precisely what happens in the ear-cutting scene: by aligning the camera with the cop and giving the audience 'a slap in the face' Tarantino, rather than trying to evoke sympathies from the audience through their emotional or cognitive identification with a character, tries to provoke a reaction which is much more immediate and superficial, almost entirely physical and "based on immediacy and bodily affect" (Gormley 8). Therefore, it could be concluded that violence in *Reservoir Dogs* is represented in a way to provide only a physical, instinctive reaction and not to entice any deeper affective involvement. One may wonder why that is the case, why the director does not try to evoke strong emotional reactions in the audience, at least not in an 'obvious' way as some other films do. However, that has never been the aim of Tarantino's films. Instead, what the American filmmaker tries to do – in accordance with his affinity for postmodernism – is attract the viewers' attention to the fictional, cinematic nature of violence on screen, thus enabling the viewers to find aesthetic pleasure in violence, but also serving as a social commentary on the general attitude towards violence, as will be discussed in more detail below.

5.1 Violence as a Cinematic Artifice

Quentin Tarantino's films possess many postmodern elements: they are highly intertextual, they employ non-linear time (as is the case in *Reservoir Dogs*) and they are often metafictional and self-referential, as the audience is constantly being reminded of the fact that they are watching a film and that everything that they see is created and artificial. This can be seen, for instance, from the opening credits which are almost always separated from the world of the film itself – both visually and aurally – and therefore, "rather than focusing on character introduction, affective positioning, or expectation (the way the opening credits in a horror film or melodrama, for example, ready the audience for fear or tears), the opening credits of a Tarantino film foreground aesthetic appreciation, intertextual recognition, and kinetic energy" (Coulthard 2).

Besides that, and even more importantly, Tarantino's aim at pointing to the artificiality of a cinematic work can be seen in his representation of violence. Namely, by representing violence in such a graphic, over-the-top way, Tarantino constantly tries to draw the viewers' attention to the fact that they are only watching a film, a piece of fiction disconnected from the real world, and that violence on screen has therefore nothing to do with violence in real life. Even though there have been many accusations when it comes to the amount of violence in his films in terms of the influence it can have on people watching it, Tarantino dismissed those accusations constantly emphasizing the distinction he sees between real-life violence and the cinematic one: "If you ask me how I feel about violence in real life, well, I have a lot of feelings about it. It's one of the worst aspects of America. In movies, violence is cool. I like it" (Lange, par. 10). One must admit, though, that it may seem slightly unrealistic to expect the audience to make the same subtle distinction between on-screen violence and real-life violence as the filmmaker does, considering the fact that film in general is one of the most 'mimetic' arts and that the audience usually (consciously or subconsciously) correlates what they see on screen with the real life. Nevertheless, Tarantino seems to expect his viewers to make such a distinction and he constantly tries to draw their attention to the artificiality of cinematic violence.

In *Reservoir Dogs*, the director does this, first of all, by hyperbolizing certain aspects of violence: if violence on film reflected the one in real life, the mutilated body of Mr. Orange, for example, would not "magically contain more than the standard 5.5 liters of blood in order to supply dramatic splatters" (Lange, par. 5). Secondly, Tarantino emphasizes the artificiality of cinematic violence by presenting it as being detached from the real world both temporally and spatially. For example, in the ear-cutting scene, the violence lasts just as long as the song is playing (and the song is from the 1970s, so not even contemporaneous with the action and thus serving to frame the violence and distance it from the viewers even further) and it takes place in an abandoned warehouse, which looks as if completely separated from the external reality. When Mr. Blonde leaves the warehouse in order to bring the gasoline, and the song gets quieter and quieter and eventually dies out, it serves as a reminder to the viewers that not only is there a world outside of the violent space of the warehouse, but there is also a world outside of the film they are watching. In this way violence is controlled and limited: the audience is aware of the fact that violence will not last forever, that the gory scene will eventually end and will probably not last for an extremely long time either. Finally, the fact that violence in this scene is (grotesquely) juxtaposed with upbeat popular music is just another way of controlling it. Namely, the fact that the song dominates over the sounds of torture and violence, being louder than the cries of the cop, serves to limit the effect violence has on the audience, point to its artificiality and thus make it as 'enjoyable' as violence can possibly be. Therefore, it is clear that Quentin Tarantino makes a distinction between real-life violence and cinematic one, considering the latter artificial and constantly trying to draw the viewers' attention to this fact.

5.2 Violence as a Source of Aesthetic Enjoyment

As already mentioned, Tarantino's representation of violence has often been a target of criticism: the director was accused of "shallowness and nihilism both on a formal and a moral level" (Grønstad 155), "possessing no compassion or sympathy for his characters or for the humanity in general" (Sharett, qtd. in Grønstad 156), while some critics even argued that violence in his films "lacks the moral framework that in various forms always has been a staple of American storytelling" (Grønstad 166), as well as that "Tarantinian sensibility is all style and no substance" (Whachack, qtd. in Grønstad 166) and that it "aspires to no particular realism or social import" (McKinney 21). What is more, the very fact that in the UK the film did not receive the home video certificate until 1995 tells a lot about certain (mis)perceptions of violence in it.

However, the main reason Quentin Tarantino decides to present violence in such a graphic way, thus pointing to its artificiality, is precisely in order to enable the viewers to find a source of pleasure in it. Understanding that cinematic violence has nothing to do with real-life violence and that it can be as brilliantly crafted, in terms of style and aesthetics, as any other cinematic element, allows the viewers to 'find beauty' in it and enjoy its stylistic craftedness. Indeed, according to Maglajlija (3), aestheticization of violence – along with dark humour and excess – can be seen as one of three main cinematic elements that create Quentin Tarantino's recognizable style, thus referred to as 'tarantinoesque'. One way in which Tarantino aestheticizes violence concerns the elements surrounding it – such as the scenery, the setting, the clothing, etc. – since they are all skillfully crafted in order to influence the viewers' perception of the violent act, the victims, and the perpetrators. Moreover, Tarantino's 'villains' are often presented as charming, intelligent, easy-going, and possessing strong ideologicalbeliefs, which also adds to the "glorification of violence" (Maglajlija 21).

However, even though the likeability of perpetrators and the surrounding elements influences the viewers' perception of violence, the most important way in which Tarantino aestheticizes violence in *Reservoir Dogs* is precisely, as already mentioned, by pointing to its artificiality. Characters who indulge in violent acts are almost always indifferent and emotionally detached from the violence they are perpetrating: therefore, what Tarantino suggests is that there is no reason why the audience should not take the same detached stand. The very fact that the characters are perhaps not too 'deep' or developed and that there is no internal conflict in them allows the audience "to enjoy the action and the entertainment of a movie and be aware of its fictional nature, allowing them to go through a fun cinematic experience" (Maglajlija 61). Moreover, even Tarantino's use of popular music in the ear-cutting scene, rather than making it more disturbing, serves not only as an ironic commentary, but it also, perhaps even more, adds to the aesthetic enjoyment of the scene. Besides that, by juxtaposing two incongruous elements and producing the feeling of grotesque, Tarantino may be trying to test

the limits of the aesthetic; it almost seems as if he were trying to establish how far can a filmmaker go in 'manipulating' the audience's responses. Nevertheless, even the fact, for example, that the camera pans away during the very mutilation seems to remind the audience that they do not have to look at the screen if they do not want to: they have a power over it – it is not a 'real' violence being done to their bodies or in their real-life, but in the other, cinematic sphere. Therefore, as Tarantino seems to suggest, we should try to enjoy its 'beauty' as much as we can, since, as Coulthard argues, "recognition of artifice is a fundamental part of the pleasures offered" (2).

Nonetheless, even though violence in *Reservoir Dogs* does not aim at provoking a strong emotional response but only serves to provide aesthetic enjoyment, it is precisely this that may make it serve as an equally strong social commentary as that of any openly 'socially engaged' representation of violence. The way in which, for example, Tarantino seems to test the viewers' aesthetic limits in the grotesque ear-cutting scene may be his way of asking if a person who finds pleasure in watching violence being inflicted upon someone is perhaps as much of a sadist as a person who enjoys inflicting physical pain. However, rather than tackling these issues openly, Tarantino seems to bracket them off by placing them in a highly stylized context. Therefore, what Tarantino may be trying to imply with his postmodernist style is that in today's society – i.e. in the contemporary cultural moment – such an excessive, oblique, stylized (and perhaps even kitschy) representation of violence can prove as more effective in raising questions about the nature and effect of violence than what used to be a socially engaged representation of violence, which perhaps may today seem as rather obsolete and thus ineffective. In other words, even though the audience may be aware of the fact that this film, *Reservoir Dogs,* is "as nonreferential to a reality outside itself as a mimetic work can be" (McKinney 21), the fact that they are able to enjoy the violence in it and not get emotionally involved speaks volumes about their apparent habituation to violence and serves to prove that violence has indeed become an integral part of our reality.

6 Conclusion

Violence is an indispensable element of Quentin Tarantino's films, and *Reservoir Dogs* is the one with which it all started – from the slow violence that lingers throughout the entire film and dictates its narration to the extreme, over-the-top one in the ear-cutting scene, violence in this film is omnipresent. What is even more important, though, than the 'amount' of violence in *Reservoir Dogs* is the way it is represented, as Tarantino pays a lot of attention to the visual representation of violence through the use of cinematic techniques in order to control and manipulate the reactions of the audience. Nonetheless, the aim of the director has never been to provoke strong emotional reactions in the audience but rather – precisely by not provoking such reactions and emphasizing

the artificiality of screen violence – to aestheticize violence and thus point to the society's perception of it. Thus, what Tarantino is trying to do in *Reservoir Dogs* is help his viewers enjoy the stylistic brilliance of cinematic violence by taking a neutral moral stand in its representation. Nevertheless, as has been argued here, this by no means suggests that his attitude towards violence in general is amoral. By pointing to the fact that the viewers are able to feel pleasure when watching brilliantly crafted scenes of violence Tarantino is trying to show that violence is so ubiquitous in contemporary world that people have become almost completely desensitized to it. After all, if violence is so omnipresent in real life, often without being adequately condemned or morally judged, there is no reason why it should not be included in the world of cinematic artifice, especially considering the fact that, unlike real-life violence, cinematic one – when crafted by such masterminds of filmmaking like Quentin Tarantino – is indeed a spectacle to be enjoyed and a satisfying aesthetic experience.

End Notes

1 There are, of course, other reasons why Tarantino's films are considered to be highly transgressive, such as their "prolific profanity" (Nama 12).

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05

Urszula Świątek

Contemporary Musical Settings of *Beowulf*

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

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Contemporary Musical Settings of *Beowulf*

The centuries-old *Beowulf* continues to inspire contemporary culture through a variety of adaptations and reinterpretations. Through its continual presence in the cultural memory, the poem has also made its way into music. The aim of this paper is to survey four contemporary musical settings of *Beowulf*, i.e. compositions which set the words of the poem in Old English or a Present-Day English translation of the poem. The importance of this overview lies in the documentation of a phenomenon present in contemporary music: the practice of setting Old English texts to music. However, the focus of this article are settings of *Beowulf* in order to narrow down the discussion.

The settings span from 1925 to the present, and are the following: Howard Hanson's "The Lament for Beowulf" (1925), Ezequiel Viñao's "Beowulf: Scyld's Burial" (2009), Cheryl Frances-Hoad's "Beowulf" (2010), and Benjamin Bagby's reconstructed performances of the poem (1987-). A brief discussion of the concept of cultural memory and (re)interpretation precedes the analyses of the musical settings. Each setting is examined separately; however, points of comparison are also noted and discussed. Moreover, each setting is analysed in an individual manner depending on the settings' key elements: the fragment of set text, the ideas, moods, techniques, tones, and rhythms which form the piece.

Contemporary approaches to *Beowulf* vary greatly. Even in the common medium of musical setting, the way in which the composers tell the story differs in choice of form, technique, instrumentation, and overall atmosphere. However, these are all settings of the same story which has persisted throughout the ages, and it is worth recording the contemporary perceptions of *Beowulf*—so as to sharpen the historical sense of the pastness of the past and its presence.

KEYWORDS
Beowulf, musical setting, reinterpretation, contemporary music, music analysis

1. Introduction: Old English texts in contemporary cultural memory

> New texts are created not only within the current cut of culture but also in its past. Along the entire course of cultural history, "unknown" artifacts of the past are constantly being found, discovered, or unearthed either from the ground or from under the dust of a library.
>
> —Juri Lotman, "Memory in a Culturological Perspective"

The "unearthing" of Old English (henceforth: OE) literary texts, scholarly efforts to recover their meaning and context, and artistic reworkings of those texts all lead to their subsequent presence in a society's cultural memory. New texts arise on the basis of established texts whose meanings are in return altered by every novel approach, and so "cultural memory creates a framework for communication across the abyss of time" (Assmann 97). However, this communication is not without hindrance. Long periods of disuse, of gathering dust in archives (Assmann and Czaplicka 110),[1] lead to the loss of their original functions, contexts, and meanings. In oral cultures discontinuity means the death of a text; in literate cultures, however, this means the forgetting of a text and its significance within the culture. Therefore, there remains a chance for recovery, or rather, for reconstruction. Each such reconstruction, each new scholarly or artistic effort was a new interpretation of the original texts; and contemporary perceptions of OE texts both stem from and shape those interpretations.[2]

The concern of this article are contemporary interpretations of that most famous work of OE literature, i.e. *Beowulf*. The OE poem resides in the canon, in culture memory. Therein, it is "recalled, iterated, read, commented, criticized, discussed" in the complex processes of meaning-production (Assmann 97). To particularize further, the foci of this discussion are four contemporary musical settings of *Beowulf*: Howard Hanson's "The Lament for Beowulf" (1925) for chorus and orchestra; Benjamin Bagby's reconstructed performances of *Beowulf*; Ezequiel Viñao's "Beowulf: Scyld's Burial" (2009) for a SATB voices and percussion quartet; and Cheryl Frances-Hoad's "Beowulf" (2010) for mezzo-soprano and piano. These settings, rather than stemming from one common strand of thought, seem to be largely unrelated to one another. They span the 20th and 21st century with their composers being of different origins and musical traditions. The settings may collectively be characterized as art music, i.e., music which is produced and transmitted primarily by professionals, not subject to mass distribution, usually publicly funded (commissioned by an institution), and recorded via musical notation.[3] However, Benjamin Bagby's performances of *Beowulf*, while close to art music, escape axiomatic classification.

It is also worth noting that the dual production of language and music through poetic song or declamation with instrumental accompaniment may have likely been the mode in which the Anglo-Saxons delivered their poetry.[4] From this follows that such contemporary musical settings recontextualize both

the linguistic and musical levels of the OE text. The former level involves both the aural and conceptual aspects of the text: the Old English language has to either be translated or reconstructed phonetically, and the text's meanings comprehended or reconstructed from a contemporary perspective. The musical level, on the other hand, may be reconstructed on the basis of archeological and historical evidence or reinvented through the use of any imaginable compositional technique or style.

In order to limit this discussion to the recontextualization of *Beowulf*—both its linguistic and performative aspects—the compositions in question are settings of the original OE text or its Present-Day English (henceforth, PDE) translations. This excludes musical compositions which draw inspiration from the original OE text to create instrumental pieces as well as original lyrics or libretti. The scope of the musical works discussed is further narrowed to those compositions which are not connected to the medium of drama, thus excluding musicals, operas, and theatrical productions. This delimitation serves to omit those works which rely on extra-musical drama for meaning, in order to reduce the number of forms of expression to discuss. What is left for analysis is vocal music, the dual production of language and music, wherein "the poetry becomes the context for the music and is, itself, controlled by the context of the composition which it inspired" (Lannom 16).

In musical settings of literary texts the musical layer often carries significant meaning—be it in the reinforcement of a poem's atmosphere or imagery, or in the fact that the vehicle for the words, i.e., the voice, engages in complex prosody, in a kind of melopoeia.[5] In the dual production of language and music, the analysis of a musical setting involves working on at least three intersecting levels: the textual level, the musical-prosodic level (henceforth, melopoetic), and the instrumental level. The textual level is concerned with the story or narrative, the characters, the scenery, etc.; the melopoetic level looks at how words, phrases, and meaningful segments are musicalized, and which elements are emphasized; and the instrumental level looks at the choice of instruments and what they attempt to represent, and what atmosphere they create. The relationships between these levels are crucial in determining the ideas which constitute the composition as a whole: how an image or a trope may be represented in each of the levels. For example, the idea of a *scop* singing the poem may not be expressed on the textual level, but is instead represented by melodeclamation to the accompaniment of instruments.

This article is a survey of the contemporary musical settings of *Beowulf*, and does not, therefore, include thorough musical analyses of the pieces. The focus of this discussion is on the settings' crucial elements: the ideas, moods, techniques, tones, and rhythms which form the piece. Therefore, each of the four settings is examined in an individual manner. Common points for discussion include the composers' approach to the text—whether they choose to set a short,

one-scene fragment or a bigger portion of the text; the way in which the text is set to music, and the musical elements which evoke meaning, atmospheres or imagery present in the original story of *Beowulf*.

2. Survey of contemporary musical settings of *Beowulf*

> [*Beowulf*] is now to us itself ancient; and yet its maker was telling of things already old and weighted with regret, and he expended his art in making keen that touch upon the heart which sorrows have that are both poignant and remote. If the funeral of Beowulf moved once like the echo of an ancient dirge, far-off and hopeless, it is to us as a memory brought over the hills, an echo of an echo.
> —J.R.R. Tolkien, "The Monsters and the Critics"

Much debate has surrounded the question of the identity of the maker of *Beowulf*. Tolkien reported in his famed essay, quoted above, that critics had called the poem "the confused product of a committee of muddle-headed and probably beer-bemused Anglo-Saxons" or "a string of pagan lays edited by monks", "the work of a learned but inaccurate Christian antiquarian" and also "a work of genius, rare and surprising in the period, though the genius seems to have been shown principally in doing something much better left undone" (Tolkien 8). The creation of *Beowulf* has sometimes been deemed a collective effort of a literary tradition different and remote from our own. In speaking of a collective effort, the distinction in oral literary traditions between a song, or an epic, and its versions realized in performance must be noted. The latter is indeed the work of an author or composer, but the former is a multitude of formulae, themes, and tropes transmitted through the ages—the work of generations of poets.[6]

The idea that *Beowulf* arises from a Germanic oral tradition has been present in the minds of scholars especially since the 1960s with work on epic oral poetry drawing from Parry and Lord's groundbreaking work.[7] The singing of Anglo-Saxon tales could now be imagined to resemble the scenes from Heorot in *Beowulf* with "the Anglo-Saxon oral poet as a performer entertaining the company feasting in his lord's hall with narrative songs accompanied by a harp—a picture satisfactorily in harmony with Lord's description of the guslar in a Bosnian coffeehouse" (Opland 14). However, the notion of an Anglo-Saxon singer of tales—a *scop*—has since been disputed. The problem lies in the fact that the depictions of *scops* in OE poetry may serve as a kind of trope evoking a past which has been long gone. After all, much of the OE corpus of poetry is elegiac in character, i.e. mourning and longing for the irrecoverable past. The lyrical subjects of *the Seafarer, the Wanderer, Deor,* and *Widsith* all long for the glorious past. Similarly, *Beowulf* tells of tales from ancient times—of legendary founders, godlike heroes, and conquered monsters. Niles (2003) notices a "similar quality of nostalgia" permeating heroic and elegiac OE texts. The *scop* would then be part of the Anglo-Saxon nostalgia for their ancestral Germanic past, a kind of cultural myth; and the reason this myth arose may be found in

> a desire for *the simplicity of master/man relations* in a world where the actual workings of power were becoming ever more remote and impersonal. At a time when real-life social ties were being subsumed into an impersonal, formalized, state-sponsored bureaucracy, with its systems of coinage and taxation and proxy military service, the desire for spontaneous, personal man-to-man relationships naturally became more pronounced. (Niles 39)

Nonetheless, even if the scholarly world rejected or at least began to doubt the existence of an Anglo-Saxon *scop*, the image survived in popular consciousness, albeit somewhat merged with the Nordic *skald*, Celtic *bard*, and other traditions of singing storytellers.[8] It comes as no surprise, then, that the image, or perhaps sound of a *scop* is present in some musical settings of OE texts: especially in the case of *Beowulf* which from its opening *hwæt* evokes the telling or singing of a tale in a mead-hall or such.

However, each of the four compositions based on *Beowulf* discussed in this article take a different approach to the epic. Cheryl Frances-Hoad's *Beowulf* attempts to tell the whole story, however with "large chunks of the tale … left out" (Frances-Hoad).[9] The whole performance takes an estimated 28 minutes in the form of a song cycle which, according to the composer, was "more like an opera for two musicians". Although the narrative is carried clearly by the mezzo soprano to the accompaniment of a stringed instrument, i.e. a piano, the inspiration for this is not said to be an Anglo-Saxon *scop*, but rather the event of "seeing the poem spoken live several years ago" (Frances-Hoad). Benjamin Bagby's performances of the poem tackle it at length, up to Beowulf's victory against Grendel. In the case of Bagby's *Beowulf*, the performance is that of a *scop* singing the tale to the accompaniment of an Anglo-Saxon lyre. Another setting of the epic is Ezequiel Viñao's *Beowulf: Scyld's Burial.* As the title suggests, this setting recounts the story from the very beginning of the poem—of the passing of the legendary founder of the Scyldings. In the programme notes to his work, the composer mentions *scops* as an inspiration in that he "tried to tell the story from the point of view of a *scop* (a poet in Anglo-Saxon society) who is detached from the action but who nevertheless is "of" the scene".[10] On the melopoetic level of the work, however, we hear choirs of warriors and the lamenting people rather than a single *scop* singing a story. Finally, the chronologically first of the settings of *Beowulf*, Howard Hanson's *Lament for Beowulf* from 1925 has no trace of a *scop* on the melopoetic level, and rather takes the approach of representing a scene from the tale, this time from the end of the epic, the funeral of Beowulf. However, on the textual level the lamenting choirs, supported by a full orchestra, sing the words of the poem translated by Morris and Wyatt, and are in fact singing a third-person narrative, and therefore a somewhat detached account of the events. For example the choir, supposedly representing the Geats, sing: "For him then they *geared*, the *folk of the Geats./*A pile on the earth all unweaklike … ".[11] The four compositional approaches to the story span nearly a century and manifest a variety of ideas about *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxon world. Here follows a

discussion of the settings, and primarily some of the more salient aspects of each work.

2.1. Howard Hanson: *The Lament for Beowulf* (1925)

Howard Hanson's setting of *Beowulf* is the earliest extant musical setting of a translation of an OE text. The story of how Hanson came to set the text demonstrates the importance of the publishing editions and translations of texts: it leads to their subsequent reworkings. Namely,

> during a side trip to England, he came across a version of the epic poem *Beowulf* translated by William Morris and A.J. Wyatt. One of the earliest and most important writings in English, *Beowulf* is believed to date from 700 A.D.; it was a translation of this eighth-century version that captivated Hanson – the final pages seemed "to cry out for a musical setting," he recalled. He began sketching the *Lament* while in Scotland, "an environment rugged, swept with mist, and wholly appropriate to the scene of my story. (Smith 3)

The musical setting for chorus and orchestra was completed in 1925 and premiered at the Ann Arbor Festival in 1926 under the composer's direction. In his musical setting of the poem, Hanson intended to "realize in the music the austerity and stoicism and the heroic atmosphere of the poem". After all, the fragment he chose to set is in many ways the climax of the story.[12] In its essence the poem is, as Tolkien put it, "an heroic-elegiac poem; and in a sense all its first 3,136 lines are the prelude to a dirge: *him pa gegiredan Geata leode ad ofer eordan unwaclicne*: one of the most moving ever written" (Tolkien 31). It is exactly that moving OE phrase with which the choir comes in after an orchestral prelude.

The work opens with an iambic rhythm in the string section. This pulsating and harmonically unchanging ostinato serves as a prelude to the funeral of the Beowulf. Similarly to walk-dances in triple-meter, it brings to mind a moving procession. Above this harmonic and rhythmic base the brass section, supported by the timpani, calls out in a kind of fanfare—perhaps somewhat similarly to the opening march of Purcell's *Funeral Sentences and Music for the Funeral of Queen Mary*. The procession-like character of this orchestral prelude, together with the fanfares fit the occasion of the funeral of royalty, of king and hero.

As the ebb and flow rhythm in the strings pass into a more divided rhythm played by wind instruments, which give it a more shrill sound, the tension rises. The processional prelude continues until only the timpani beats out an irregular rhythmic figure. A general pause is followed by the return to the iambic string ostinato, and the choir finally sounds. Although the work is scored for a mixed choir, the text is often divided between the male and women's choirs, sometimes combining into one mixed choir or interacting in imitation.

Divisions of the text are emphasized by brief instrumental interludes between fragments. Such a brief interlude precedes the lines "Likewise a sad lay the wife of a fore time" sung by the women choir about the widow of Beowulf. As the women choir take on the role of Beowulf's widow and her handmaidens and lament vocalizing "Ah", the male choir sings "Said oft and over/ That harmdays for herself she dreaded./ Shaming and bondage./ The slaughter falls many, much fear of the warrior", and then joins in the lament. This is one of the few fragments of the work which are not based on an ostinato rhythm.

An abrupt change of character opens the scene of setting treasures into the mound. A fanfare precedes a low and thunderous melody of the male choir supported by instruments. The women choir introduces another contrasting melodic theme which takes over. The music speeds up and the dynamic rises right onto a climax on the line "As useless to men as e'er it erst was", pertaining to the gold and treasures of the hoard. The vocals reach new heights, the timpani trembles, the brass section screams out, and the strings plaint. With each repetition of the line the music calms. A somewhat abrupt transition follows with a new ostinato rhythmic base which once more speeds up the music. This is when the funeral proper takes place with young princes riding around the mound and bemoaning their king. Another climax erupts on the lines "And love in his heart, whenas forth shall he/ Away from the body be fleeting at last", after which the music calms down entirely again.

The concluding fragment of the text beginning with the words "In suchwise they grieved, the folk of the Geats", sees a return once more of the initial iambic rhythm for two lines. A gentle ostinato on the harp accompanies the final lauds for the king: "Quoth they that he was a world King forsooth,/ The mildest of all men, unto men kindest,/ To his folk the most gentlest, most yearning of fame." The *Lament* ends with a homophonic harmonizing of "Ah", and a final peaceful harmonic resolution.

Although Hanson "has generally been considered a neo-Romantic composer, influenced by Grieg and Sibelius" (Watanabe and Perone), his *Lament for Beowulf* makes use of unconventional harmony and relies heavily on rhythmic sound and structure. All in all,

> The Lament remains one of Hanson's finest choral works. Its harmonic language combines ancient modality with modern tonality, evoking both a harsh, tribal age and a timeless sense of bereavement. (Smith)

2.2. Ezequiel Viñao: *Beowulf: Scyld's Burial* (2009)

Ezequiel Viñao's *Beowulf*: *Scyld's Burial* sings of a similar occasion—also a funeral of a hero—however, of a different one.[13] The SATB choir calls this hero

"the long-loved founder of the land". This setting of *Beowulf* was completed in 2009, commissioned by The National Chamber Choir of Ireland and The Cork International Choral Festival. The fragment of *Beowulf* used in this setting was translated into PDE by the composer himself.[14] The scene begins with the words "Mighty Scyld was dead", and therefore states the character of the setting. However, the listener may find themself surprised by the character of the music which is lively and bright. The setting is scored for an SATB choir and percussion instruments. The sound of these instruments is often metallic and bright. The vocal voices move quite rapidly with "an early music, straight tone" sound,[15] thus avoiding a sustained, sombre, dark tone; apart from the sound of the fourth stanza. In the programme notes this approach to the somewhat joyous sound of this setting is explained:

> [T]he funeral of a great soldier, one that has fallen in battle, was never tragic or sad in the post-renaissance sense. (…) The imagery is quite moving: a long goodbye to a great hero. The people are sad, they mourn their loss but they also rejoice in his life and in the certainty that he is off to the land of his forefathers. (…) I didn't want to evoke a nineteen century sense of heightened tragedy, because even though there is longing in the text, I feel it is of a more bucolic nature. (Viñao)

This "bucolic nature" is reinforced by and based on the heavily percussive, and therefore rhythmic, nature of the setting. The near constant presence of the percussive instruments, except for the final parts of each stanza, propel the music forward giving the listener a heightened awareness of rhythm—of accents and beats, despite the constant changes of metrum and varied rhythmic figures.

The percussive element of the piece is crucial to its form. The setting is divided into five larger parts in accordance with the five stanzas of the text, and an epilogue at the end of the piece. Each of the five stanzas of the text follows a similar formal pattern: the entire text of a stanza is sung, mostly syllabically, to the accompaniment of two percussion instruments, it is then repeated, with a repetition of melodic material, to the accompaniment of four percussion instruments. Once the stanza comes to an end that second time, an emphasized word from the stanza is set as a long melisma in the manner of *ars antiqua* or the Notre-Dame school of polyphony. These emphasized last words are the following, in order of appearance: "dead", "king", "far", "alone", and "truth". Each stanza is accompanied by a different set of percussion instruments: the first by anvils and claves, the second by triangles and clapping, the third by frame drums and nipple gongs, the fourth by log drums and temple blocks, and the fifth by anvils, clapping, then a nipple gong, and finally a small triangle. *Beowulf: Scyld's Burial* also features an epilogue on the first line of the fragment, i.e. "Mighty Scyld was dead" to the sounds of triangles and a gong for the final sound of the work. The stanzas, withstanding the first, are preceded by a short instrumental interlude which introduces the percussive instruments for the next fragment.

As for the unique rhythmic sequences and constantly changing time signature, they are based on a scansion of the OE text into morae, i.e. units determining syllable weight, that were then "rendered as rhythms in a metrical setting".[16] Variations or rotations of this metrical setting imposed changes in meter. This compositional technique is an interesting way of reconstructing the prosody of OE poetry on the percussive level of the setting.

It must be noted that the percussion instruments are also important elements of meaning-creation. In the programme note to the piece, Viñao discloses that "the anvils at the beginning are meant to symbolize the warriors striking their blades against their shields; the sound world, metal for men, wood for women, seemed natural to me." The same division does not really hold for the choral voices. Although the tenor and bass often hold the role of the fundamental voice as in early music while the soprano and alto move more swiftly and carry the melody, there occur reversals of these roles or fragments of rhythmic movement in all four voices—in many ways resembling the *clausulae* of the Notre Dame period. While a fundamental voice features in the setting of the first three stanzas, and they are quite similar in character, a noticeable change occurs in the fourth stanza. There is no holding voice, and all four voices move in both fragments of *contrapunctus floridus* and *nota contra notam*. The third formal segment of this stanza, a melisma on the word "alone", has a dark, sombre, sustained, and spacious sound like that of four-part Renaissance polyphony.

The fifth and final stanza of the setting is climactic on both its textual and musical level. This is the moment when the boat carrying the body of Scyld and his treasures is set to sea—the Danes are, for the first time, explicitly said to be grave in spirit and mournful. All the instruments, representing all that has been happening up till that moment, take part in accompanying the choir. The soundscape of this final stanza is varied, vibrant, and very rhythmic—perhaps even dancelike.

After this final stanza which seemingly closes the narrative, the scene of the funeral, there is still the epilogue. Once more the opening words of the setting sound out: "Mighty Scyld was dead at his destined hour. Might Scyld was dead". In strict *nota contra notam* two-part counterpoint first the soprano and alto sing out this line, and then the tenor and bass, closing the work *unisono*, with a final bang from the triangles and the gong.

2.3. Cheryl Frances-Hoad: *Beowulf* (2010)

Cheryl Frances-Hoad's setting of *Beowulf* is an attempt to sing the story of the hero from start to finish. Rather than representing one scene, the setting resembles the singing of an epic in the manner of a bard, a *guslar* or a *scop*. The solo singer, a mezzo soprano, is accompanied by a string instrument—the piano.

However, in order to shorten the 3182-line long OE text, Frances-Hoad elides one battle of the three in *Beowulf*, i.e., the fight with Grendel's mother. Therefore, what is left is Beowulf's fight with Grendel, and then with the dragon.

Frances-Hoad's setting is based on Seamus Heaney's translation of *Beowulf*,[17] and it is compressed into an orderly arrangement, albeit diverting from the original. Many lines from Heaney's translation are elided, i.e. omitted without altering the overall meaning. Frances-Hoad's arrangement of the text is, as it were, a summary of Beowulf's tale with the major plot points present. Generally left out are those fragments which do not propel the action forward. Phrases from nonadjacent lines are often combined in imaginative ways, for example, when singing of the fight of Beowulf with Grendel in Heorot: "Fingers were bursting, (759) /… Sinews split (816)/ … Every bone in his body (752)/ quailed and recoiled, but he could not escape. (753)".[18] As seen from the original line numbers, their order is switched around to make new combinations which nonetheless evoke the same image—of a life and death fight between the hero and the monster. Another noteworthy example of this play with Heaney's translation is in the lines: "The hall clattered and hammered … (770)/ … the timbers trembled and sang (766)/ … Then an extraordinary (781)/ wail arose … (782)/ the howl of the loser the lament of the hell-serf (786)". The image of a hall "clattered and hammered" is juxtaposed with timbers which trembled and sang—the piano clatters and hammers during this fragment, and the singer emphasizes the word "sang". As for the latter part of the cited text, the verb "arose" is ambiguous in the setting fitting both the original "wail" as well as the "howl" from a few lines ahead. Both words are musically represented with an abrupt crescendo.

The fragments quoted above both come from the episode of the story when Beowulf fights with Grendel which is told in a single formal segment out of the 14 which make up the setting. Frances-Hoad's concept for the form was such: "I thought of this song cycle more like an opera for two musicians, and wanted the narrative to be very clear (even though large chunks of the tale have had to be left out)".[19] Therefore, this setting of *Beowulf* is an organic song cycle telling a single story. The first song begins with Heaney's ingenious rendering of the original's hwæt, i.e. "So!". It introduces the audience to the Spear-Danes, briefly mentions Scyld or Shield, and moves on to Hrothgar whose "mind turned to hall-building". Interestingly, the original reason for Grendel's rage is omitted in the setting.[20] Rather, "times were pleasant for the people there/ until finally one, a fiend out of hell,/ began to work his evil in the world".

The musical character of this first song resembles what one might imagine a *scop*'s performance. The initial "so" is shouted out, and only with the next words does the singer enter the singer's formant. Moreover, after the call to attention, the piano is struck, similarly to the striking of a lute, harp or lyre, in an open fifth, which

> from the beginning, is the primordial sound from which Frances-Hoad derives the two-chord piano fanfare that is the setting's first motive force. Over the course of half an hour the keyboard music opens out to encompass a tremendous range of technique, imagery and expression, but what is most striking about it is the directness and almost defiantly traditional ways in which everything falls into place, from the rumbling bass sonorities of the monsters to the high detached notes, like flecks of ash, which finally ascend from the hero's funeral pyre. (MacDonald 7)

The symbiosis of the vocal voice and piano is, indeed, as an opera for two musicians. Already in the second song of the cycle titled "Grendel" from its incipit, sees an abrupt change in both the character of the singing, and the piano. The music turns increasingly grim together with the evolving narrative—the approach of Grendel and his gruesome combat with Beowulf. A calm and peaceful mood returns with the seventh song of the cycle "When Hrothgar arrived". The piano is minimalistic as it strikes individual chords or groups of two or three chords while the singer tells of Hrothgar's acknowledgment of Beowulf as a hero, and as his son. A feast follows, and "So Beowulf drank his drink, at ease; (1024)/ They sang then and played to please the hero, (1062)/ words and music for their warrior prince, (1063)".

Indeed, the song which follows is an actual song from the text, i.e. the tale of Hildeburgh. The style of this song differs from any other in the cycle. The piano resembles traditional song accompaniment, moving rapidly in the right hand, and striking chords in the left. In this song, the tale of Hildeburgh is complemented by Beowulf's words: "... It is always better (1384)/ to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning./ For every one of us, living in this world/ means waiting for our end. Let whoever can/ win glory before death ... ". As Beowulf speaks through the voice of the singer, the piano goes silent. These solemn words mark the end of the first half of the setting, and the episode with Grendel.

A brief "piano onterlude" precedes the next, i.e. the tenth song of the cycle—"A Lot was to happen". These are words marking Beowulf's kingship which lasted fifty winters, and which was marred by the awakening of a dragon: "When the dragon awoke, trouble flared again. (2287)". The eleventh song, "He Rippled Down the Rock" sees the dragon wreak havoc on the Geats, and Beowulf pledging revenge. The piano's glissando perhaps illustrates the dragon's movements: his rippling with anger, and his brazing flames, as once the focus is on Beowulf, the piano is quiet and withdrawn. The singer reveals that Beowulf "was sad at heart, (2419)/ unsettled yet ready, sensing his death./ His fate hovered near, unknowable but certain".

The fight with the dragon follows. The line "then he drew himself up beside his shield" (2538) is sung as an ascending scale. The piano closely follows the dragons movements with "a rumble under ground" and rapid figuration "while

the serpent looped and unleashed itself./ Swaddled in flames, it came gliding and flexing/ and racing towards its fate (2570)". It goes silent as the dragon sinks their teeth into the hero's neck. What follows in the setting is chronologically earlier in the original story, i.e. Wiglaf's words of assurance and motivation to Beowulf. It was after these words that the dragon attacked again and inflicted the fatal wound upon the hero. In the story told by this setting, however, it is after Wiglaf's words that Beowulf manages to deal the dragon a deadly wound.

The penultimate song is Beowulf's last words: "For fifty years (2732)/ I ruled this nation. No king/ of any neighbouring clan would dare/ face me with troops/ (I stood my ground and) took what came/ … All this consoles me,/ doomed as I am and sickening for death./ To the everlasting Lord of All, (2794)/ to the King of Glory, I give thanks".[21] As Beowulf falls silent, so does the piano, as if acknowledging the death of the king of the Geats.

The final song of the cycle tells of the same scene as Hanson's setting—the funeral of Beowulf. The song begins with the same line as Hanson's *Lament*: "The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf".[22] The similarities between the two settings end here. Frances-Hoad's setting is sombre, but not grandiose. The piano flutters in the upper octaves and roams around singular notes in the left hand, as the burial mound is being described. A change of character occurs when the lamenting Geat woman is introduced. The singer ululates as the Geat woman "sang out in grief". However, as the woman's fears are listed, i.e. "her nation invaded,/ enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,/ slavery and abasement", the music becomes calm and withdrawn. The piano may be described as playing "high detached notes, like flecks of ash, which finally ascend from the hero's funeral pyre" (MacDonald). The closing words of the setting ring out unresolved: "Heaven swallowed the smoke (3155)".

2.4. Benjamin Bagdy: *Beowulf* (1987—)

> The notationless world of medieval epic song is one such musical culture (a patchwork of cultures, actually) to which I am drawn, a world in which we know that northern peoples—in their huts, their fields, their boats, on horseback, around their cooking fires, their pagan shrines, and even in the first Christian monasteries—were singing and listening to song: narrative, heroic epic, myth, instrumental music, and long sung tales of their own ancestors' deeds, real and imagined. (Bagby 182)

As a modern-day *scop*, Benjamin Bagby is fully aware of the shortcomings of "historically informed performance". Even where there is no shortage of documentation on the musical tradition of a time and place—musical notation, treaties, playable instruments, descriptions of performance, etc.—a crucial element for accurate reconstruction is irretrievably missing, i.e. "the actual

sound, the presence of a living master" (Bagby 182). The latter may be of greater importance. Even in the contemporary world which possesses audiovisual recordings of lost or geographically remote musical traditions, what comes from imitation of audio(visual) recordings yields at best a compressed version of the original: a version which resembles the original but with loss of data[23] A *scop*, as a professional singer, would likely be trained under the eye and ear of a master. Even if their own style were nuanced from that of their master, it would be so in a way that does not alter tradition:

> The oral song (or other narrative) is the result of interaction between the singer, the present audience, and the singer's memories of songs sung. In working with this interaction, the bard is original and creative on rather different grounds from those of the writer. (Ong 143)

Moreover, the *scop* in an oral culture "knows what they can recall", and the organized knowledge of a community resides in their memories: a text, a practice, information, once forgotten by every single member of a community—is lost. It cannot lie in the ground or in an archive waiting for its rediscovery, or unearthing. The performing of an epic by a singer of tales is a retrieving from memory, singing, performing, and composing at the same time. It is believed that they have in their memory the stories, the formulae, and most likely previous performances from which they compose their own variant of the text (59). Bagby, on the other hand, studied *Beowulf* as a written text, memorized it, and now performs the text *verbatim*, and not a variant of the tale of Beowulf. While elements of improvisation are present in his performances—on the melopoetic and instrumental levels—the element of arranging text on the spot is lost. However, the element of choosing particular episodes of an epic to sing is somewhat retained, as Bagby sings the first two of the *Beowulf* episodes, i.e. the fight with Grendel and Grendel's mother, and elides the dragon episode.

Bagby begins with the call for attention; he shouts: *hwæt*. Then he draws the audience into the story, rather by speaking than by melodeclamation or song. The latter two soon make their appearance. The tale is set into motion by melodeclamation to the accompaniment of the harp. He also drifts into lyrical song especially during moments of tales within the tale: of the *scop* singing of Creation, or of Beowulf boasting about his feats when he arrives at Heorot. As Bagby explains in his insightful article on his performances of *Beowulf*:

> When performing the Eddic stories or Beowulf, I enter with my voice into a world which is informed as much by the actor's art as by the singer's, and in that world I only rarely make use of the techniques suited to the needs of what we might call lyric song (say, a troubadour *canso*). (...) [F]or the storyteller's art, in which time passes at various speeds, and in which real-time events are recalled, relived, commented upon, and sometimes quite literally inhabited by the "singer of tales," the use of lyric techniques must be reserved for those

> isolated moments which call out for them, usually moments of reflection and introspection. (Bagby 187)

The instrumental level of Bagby's performances is just as complex. The harp—or lyre, as its strings pass over a bridge and do not enter the body of the instrument—is a reconstructed version of remains "found in a seventh-century Allemanic burial site in Oberflacht (Germany), as reconstructed by Rainer Thurau (Wiesbaden,Germany)" (188-9). It is a six-stringed instrument which Bagby tunes according to the type of material he is playing. For *Beowulf* he chose an "open" pentatonic tuning with an octave between the highest and lowest note. According to Bagdy, this tuning is "ideal for the spontaneous outbursts needed in a six-hour performance of the complete Beowulf, and it is the most resonant of all the tunings I have tried" (190).

Although Bagby's *Beowulf* will not bring the epic's original sound world back to life, the performances have the feel of something different than composed art or popular music. Perhaps what makes up this feeling is the element of improvisation, of the melding of word and song into one whole, in the way, we can only suppose, poetry used to be.

3. Conclusion

The general overview of contemporary musical settings of *Beowulf* showcases the various compositional approaches to the text. Different parts of the epic are made musical—sometimes single scenes, other times whole parts of the narrative, or simply those parts which make up the body of the story, without "stories within the story". Each of the settings uses compositional techniques to somehow visualize, or rather audialize elements of the epic. Hanson brings to the listener's mind a funeral procession, of lamenting. He sees the segmented nature of the text, and renders the short fragment a story in its own right: the building of the pyre, the burning of the body. The woman's lament, the building of the mound, the burying of the treasure hoard, the princes' elegy and praise, and finally the closing remarks of the *scop*. Viñao's setting sings of the funeral of the legendary Scyld as of a joyous occasion—of a great warrior entering the glory of his afterlife. There is intertextuality and symbolism in his setting: the rhythmic structure is based on the prosody of the Old English original, the character of the vocal polyphony brings to mind the soundworld of Medieval music and A*rs Antiqua* in the third rotation of each stanza, the melismas highlight key words of the text, and the percussive instruments carry associative meaning—metal for the men, and wood for the women. Frances-Hoad envisions *Beowulf* as an opera for two singers. The text is sung clearly, and the piano asserts the unstable moods of the constantly changing narrative, and illustrates the action points—the moments of peace, of glory, of battling monsters, and of death. Finally, Bagby does not so much compose a setting of the poem, but creates a setting for it. He gives

the OE poem a voice, and tells it in a historically informed way, recreating the spontaneous feel of the performance despite giving it a lot of intellectual effort.

By way of closing remarks, just as each of the pieces is a reinterpretation of a poetic text from a distant past, this paper is also merely an interpretation of those reinterpretations. While some obsolete meanings of symbols may be reconstructed with reasonable accuracy, others may be lost or interpreted on grounds of the author's structure of feeling. After all,

> [t]he meaning of a symbol is not constant, and so cultural memory should not be seen as a kind of storehouse containing messages that are essentially invariant and always identical to themselves. In this respect, the metaphorical expression "to store information" can be misleading. Memory is not a storehouse of information but rather a mechanism for its regeneration. On the one hand, the symbols stored in a culture carry within themselves information related to past contexts (i.e., languages), while on the other hand, in order for that information to be "awakened," the symbol must be placed in a contemporary context, which will inevitably transform its meaning. Therefore, reconstructed information is always produced in a context of play between the languages of the past and the present. (Lotman 143-4)

This article is simply another cog in the machine of cultural memory. While it may not go on to serve as an influence on contemporary understandings of OE texts and their musical reworkings, it may perhaps be someday recovered from the dust of a library or an archived webpage as documentation of past perceptions of the past—so that it may be even further reinterpreted.

End Notes

1 See Assmann and Czaplicka (110): "Cultural memory exists in two modes: first in the mode of potentiality of the archive whose accumulated texts, images, and rules of conduct act as a total horizon, and second in the mode of actuality, whereby each contemporary context puts the objectivized meaning into its own perspective, giving it its own relevance."

2 It is also worth noting that only some of the studied OE corpus has made its way into popular consciousness. While *Beowulf* has earned itself an annotated list of translations and artistic depictions, the Anglo-Latin and prose traditions of Old English are rarely touched upon in artistic reinterpretations. Even though *Beowulf* was first published only in 1815 by Thorkelín in Copenhagen as Danish poetry in the Anglosaxon dialect, "in the subsequent study of Old English poetry, there was exhaustive work on Beowulf and the shorter heroic poems *Widsith, Waldere, Deor,* and *The Finnsburh Fragment*, but little attention was given to the more numerous and often more substantial religious poems, except to comment on the way in which the Christian story was Germanicized by the poetic language in which it was told, or to consider them wonderingly as works written for an unsophisticated audience" (Hill 92). See Osborn for the annotated list of translations and artistic depictions. URL of archived webpage: https://web.archive.org/web/20180627115732/https://acmrs.org/academic-programs/online-resources/beowulf-list.

3 See *Figure 1* in Tagg (42) for a set of characteristics defining the "axiomatic triangle consisting of 'folk', 'art' and 'popular' musics [*sic*]".

4 Following from the tradition of *The Singer of Tales* (Lord 1965), it is safe to assume that the marriage of music and poetry in song is prevalent in oral cultures. Moreover, even after the spread of Christianity among the Anglo-Saxons, stories such as that of Caedmon suggest that the dual performance of poetry and music persisted. However, Opland (15-6) argues that the image of the *scop* presented in OE poetry may be misleading due to errors in parsing the text, i.e. the harper and the singer of songs may well be two separate people doing separate things. Nonetheless, the common perception of the *scop* has been grounded as a singer of tales with a harp, or rather, a lyre, such as in the reconstructive performances of Benjamin Bagby.

5 See Pound, Ezra, and T.S. Eliot (25). *Melopoeia* is one of the three types of poetry which Ezra Pound lists. It is a type of poetry "wherein the words are charged, over and above their plain meaning, with some musical property, which directs the bearing or trend of that meaning".

6 As Lord (1995) noted: "The oral traditional narrative genres transmit stories and story materials together with the art of creating a text, that is, of making

verses, themes, and songs. In these cases what is remembered is a story and/or themes. In this context a poem, or song, means a story, not a given set of words, not a given text. It must be admitted that these characteristics apply especially to epic and to prose narrative". For the whole text see URL: https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6272.1-the-nature-and-kinds-of-oral-literature.

7 See Lord (1995) chapters 4.-6. under the URL: http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_LordA.The_Singer_Resumes_the_Tale.1995, as well as Magoun (446–467), and Opland.

8 Notable singers of tales are found throughout Skyrim in *The Elder Scrolls V: Skyrim*, Jaskier (Eng. Dandelion) from *The Witcher* series by Sapkowski as well as the *Netflix* TV 2019 series adaptation, in *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* with the song *Brave Sir Robin Ran Away*, as well as in many RPGs as a character class. Singing to an Anglo-Saxon (Sutton Hoo type) lyre is also fairly popular on video-sharing platforms.

9 See the programme note by the composer at the URL: https://www.cherylfranceshoad.co.uk/beowulf/.

10 See the programme note by the composer at the URL: http://www.tloneditions.com/Ezequiel_Vinao_Beowulf_Scylds_Burial_program_notes.html.

11 I cite the text from the CD booklet: Hanson, Howard, Seattle Symphony Chorale and Orchestra, Schwarz, Gerard. *Symphonies (Complete), Vol. 1 - Symphony No. 1 / The Lament for Beowulf. Naxos* American Classics, 2011: p. 4. The program notes were written by Steven Smith, henceforth Smith (2011).

12 The translation on which the setting is based comprises lines 3137-3182 of the original text.

13 The translation on which the setting is based comprises lines 26-52 of the original text.

14 Given the compositional technique Viñao based his setting on, he needed a translation which would have the exact same number of syllables as the original OE fragment of the text.

15 This is indicated in the performance guidelines in the score. The author of this article expresses their thanks to *TLON Editions* and Mr Viñao for granting me access to a perusal score of *Beowulf: Scyld's Burial*.

16 Viñao, Ezequiel. "Re: question". [email] Received by Urszula Świątek, 27 March 2020.

17 The author of this article could not find the information as to which edition of the translation had been the basis of Frances-Hoad's setting. The translation remains the same in the editions, therefore the edition used for reference by the author can be found in "Works Cited".

18 The numbers in parentheses indicate the line number in Heaney's translation, and the ellipses mark that a phrase has been abstracted from a line. For example, the whole line containing the phrase "sinews split" in Heaney's translation was "appeared on his shoulder. Sinews split".

19 See programme note by the composer at URL: https://www.cherylfranceshoad.co.uk/beowulf.

20 See the fragment in Heaney's (2001) translation: "It harrowed him [Grendel]/ to hear the din of the loud banquet/ every day in the hall, the harp being struck/ and the clear song of a skilled poet/ telling with mastery of man's beginnings (87-91)".

21 Heaney's translation does not feature the phrase in parentheses.

22 In Hanson's setting based on Morris and Wyatt's translation the line goes: "For him then they geared, the folk of the Geats./A pile on the earth".

23 An insightful *YouTube* video discussing Simha Arom's book *African Polyphony & Polyrhythm* examines modelling, i.e. making a model for performance out of data collected from a performance of musicians from the original musical tradition; and how a limited or biased way of notating music leads to data loss. The modelled performance may sound very convincing, however it will never carry all the nuances of the original performance.

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