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EMAIL
patchwork.anglistika@gmail.com

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— Foreword

Dear Readers,

It is with great joy that we present to you the fifth regular issue of Patchwork Student Journal (seventh in total). We have once more gathered a collection of outstanding works written by our colleagues, all of whom have collaborated with us throughout the entire publishing process in order to bring this issue to life. Per the tradition of the previous issues, not only did we have a tremendous honor of receiving numerous works written by our colleagues from the University of Zagreb, but also we have received various papers from other national and international universities. Moreover, we have been offered assistance and mentorship by the wonderful academic staff of our own Department of English, University of Zagreb; the professors from the University of Ljubljana and the University of Split as well as our graduated colleagues from the University of Zagreb and University College London. Therefore, the present issue is the product of the hard and prolific work from ourselves, the editors, our authors, as well as our collaborators, all of whom have helped us in so many ways, and we will never be able to thank them enough.

This project was first created by our colleagues Ana Popović and Dorotea Sinković with the aim of creating a platform that would provide the students of our Department with an opportunity to express themselves, learn and improve their investigative and academic writing skills. For that, we are truly grateful. Furthermore, we are also incredibly grateful to Kristina Grgurić, Nives Kovačić and Ana Vukasović, the previous editors of Patchwork Student Journal, who trusted us with taking over the wheel with this issue and bringing new ideas to the table. We have since designed the new official website for the journal and published the yearly topical issue of Patchwork Student Journal in cooperation with the English Student Club. However, we would never have been able to develop any further without the immense help from our Department, and especially Assoc. Prof. Vanja Polić and Prof. Jelena Šesnić, who have stood by us every step of the way. We are also very thankful to our wonderful Advisory Board, all of whom have devoted their time and energy to go through every line of each paper that you are about to read in order to help our authors improve their content to the best of their ability.

Finally, we leave you with this issue with hopes that you will enjoy the read and maybe even feel inspired to embark on your own writing endeavor. In the meantime, we will be anxiously waiting!

Luka Jurić,
Editor-in-chief

01

Barbara Bočkaj

Mercy at the Price of One Fair Word: Language of Honour in *Timon of Athens* and *Coriolanus*

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

BARBARA BOČKAJ
University of Zagreb

Mercy at the Price of One Fair Word: Language of Honour in *Timon of Athens* and *Coriolanus*

This paper examines William Shakespeare's tragedies *Timon of Athens* (1606) and *Coriolanus* (1608), focusing particularly on the storylines of Alcibiades and Coriolanus, both distinguished soldiers who turn on their cities. The paper argues that the source of conflict lies in the characters ascribing greater importance to language than their communities do.

The first part of the paper looks more closely at the two soldiers in order to establish their position and character, while the second part focuses on the central conflicts in their storylines, with particular emphasis on the role played by language. Due to the prominent position given to oaths in warrior honour code, soldiers' use of language is inextricably linked to their bodies, which is another aspect of language use explored in the paper. As a consequence, the soldiers experience difficulties in communication with their communities, leading ultimately to their marginalisation.

KEYWORDS
***Timon of Athens, Coriolanus*, chivalry, language of honour**

Introduction

William Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens* follows the eponymous nobleman's decline in Athenian society following his bankruptcy and eventual self-imposed exile. A secondary storyline introduces Alcibiades, a veteran warrior fighting for Athens, who turns against the city after a failed attempt to save one of his soldiers from the death penalty. One of Shakespeare's final plays, the Roman tragedy *Coriolanus*, once again takes up the theme of the banished warrior who seeks to revenge himself on the city he protected.

This paper explores the similarities and differences in the storylines of the banished warriors in these two plays. The first step in the analysis is to establish Alcibiades' and Coriolanus' positions in society by taking a closer look at how society perceives them individually and their role. This is then contrasted with their own perceptions of their profession and their role as warriors. The discrepancy between these two perceptions of the role of the warrior is embodied most obviously in the central conflicts in Alcibiades' and Coriolanus' narratives. The second section of this paper looks more closely at those conflicts, with emphasis on language and its role in those episodes. By exploring how the two warriors use language and contrasting it to the civilians' use, attention is drawn to the fact that the warriors' use of language (in particular in relation to their bodies) ultimately results in their marginalisation and exclusion from their respective societies. Contrary to expectation, the veterans' role as warriors is not presented as a privileged position in society, but is rather shown to be a problematic one. Both plays deromanticize the chivalric role of the warrior and emphasize isolation as an inherent trait in the figure of a soldier.

Like to a Lonely Dragon: A Warrior's Position in Society

The very beginning of *Timon of Athens* distinguished Alcibiades from other characters in the play. Timon, due to his standing in society and the accompanying wealth, is besieged by sycophants hoping to be given rich presents. Alcibiades' first words in the play, however, are: 'Sir, you have saved my longing, and I feed / Most hungrily on your sight' (*Timon of Athens* 1.256-57). Although this might portray Alcibiades as just another leech, waiting to profit from Timon's bounty and using him as sustenance (187n256-7), the lines could also indicate the exact opposite – an intimate friendship. This is the first example of food imagery in the play. Until this point, those characters seeking to ingratiate themselves with Timon use the language of economy. Furthermore, it is not Timon that is Alcibiades' sustenance, but rather the *sight* of Timon. One particular early modern theory of sight, intramission, claims that 'each object of vision ha[s] its own spirits' (Sugg 35), which stream into the eye and make sight possible. Every person's spirits were thought to be responsible for the communication of body and soul, and were a kind of vapour or smoke, the rarest form of blood, responsible for

all physiological processes in the body (3). In this respect, Alcibiades could be understood as saying that the sight of Timon is nourishment for his soul.

Alcibiades' own perception of his profession is illustrated at several points in the play. At the banquet in scene two, Timon comments on Alcibiades' apparent reluctance to be there, by saying that he would probably rather be 'at a breakfast of enemies … than a dinner of friends' (*Tim*. 2.75-76; ellipsis mine). Alcibiades responds as follows: if 'they were bleeding new, my lord, there's no meat like 'em. I could wish my best friend at such a feast.' (2.77-78). These lines are seemingly problematic, as they might be interpreted as Alcibiades' thirst for blood. However, the idea of death, or rather killing, as sustenance can also simply be a direct reference to the military profession. It not only references the adrenaline rush after a victory, but could also refer to the fact that killing is his occupation and source of income. This idea is reinforced by Timon commenting on the fact that Alcibiades, as a warrior, is 'seldom rich' (2.223). He gives him a present, saying it is a charity to Alcibiades as 'all thy living / Is 'mongst the dead, and all the lands thou hast / Lie in a pitched field' (2.223-226). The gift not only confirms that the two men are close (which is reaffirmed by using the pronoun 'thou'), but it also draws attention to the fact that the life of a warrior is a difficult one – death is both a way to make a living and a fact of life, either as a threat to one's own life or as consequence of a well-executed job. However, Alcibiades is quick to retort that the little land a soldier has is 'defiled land, my lord' (2.226), thus turning the image of a pitched battle into one of dung heaps (205n225). The land is defiled precisely because it is de-filed, i.e. because files of soldiers have either been scattered or exterminated, which shows that Alcibiades thinks of war as of a sordid affair. This, in conjunction with the fact that warfare is not a lucrative profession, works to paint the picture of a warrior not as a man seeking renown, but rather a much soberer figure, emphasizing the idea of service. This point is reiterated throughout the play, as when Alcibiades stands in defence of one of his men, saying the following: 'Why, I say, my lords, he's done fair service, / And slain in fight many of *your* enemies' (*Tim*. 10.61-62; emphasis added). Moreover, he calls Athens 'your city' in the final scene (17.61). Both of these instances could be interpreted as setting Alcibiades and soldiers in general apart from Athens and the rest of its population, and in their service (which could arguably also be interpreted as an inferior position).

By expanding on the image of war as a field in *Coriolanus*, a drastically different effect is achieved. While the eponymous character is away, fighting in a war, his mother and wife await his return to Rome. Virgilia, his wife, frets for him, while his mother Volumnia imagines him wreaking havoc in battle: 'His bloody brow / With his mailed hand then wiping, forth he goes, / Like to a harvest-man that's tasked to mow / Or all or lose his hire' (*Cor*. 1.3.35-38). The idea of death as the soldier's livelihood is retained, but this is where the similarities stop. It is important to stress that this is a civilian's idea of war, and the battlefield is imagined as fertile land. The warrior is in this instance magnified, portrayed as

the grim reaper, a personification of death itself. The added imperative of all-or-nothing might also be interpreted as pointing to quite a superficial idea of war, whereby only utter destruction and carnage secure the warrior's 'hire', i.e. fame (a word which is used three times in the play, twice by Coriolanus himself in contexts where it is associated with public opinion – cf. 2.2.146-49 and 2.3.109-10). This romanticised idea of a warrior's life is far removed from a veteran's point of view, who is forced to think of men as, in essence, glorified fertilizer.

There is, moreover, strong indication that Coriolanus himself does not idealize his profession. The excitement he feels before battle invariably becomes tempered after it. Instead of listening to praises from his general, Coriolanus says:

> 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
> Hath overta'en mine act. (1.10.13-19)

This indicates not only that praise makes him feel uncomfortable, but also hints at the cause of unease – he feels he is simply doing his job. Additionally, he thinks much more of those soldiers who excel on the battlefield due to the strength of their convictions (those that only 'effec[t their] good will'). There are further examples of his embarrassment, both on the battlefield and in Rome. He tells Cominius that his wounds 'smart / To hear themselves remembered' (1.10.28-29), and that he did not go to battle to be shouted 'forth / In acclamations hyperbolical; / As if I loved my little should be dieted / In praises sauced with lies' (1.10.50-53), simply for doing that '[w]hich without note here's many else have done' (1.10.49). Cominius then compares him to a suicide, interpreting Coriolanus' dislike of praise as lethal damage to his reputation. In order to prevent this, Cominius gives his most distinguished warrior a new title – from now on he will be known not simply as Caius Martius, but will bear the addition of 'Coriolanus', a lasting reminder of his deeds at Corioli, when he stormed the enemy city alone and emerged from it covered head to foot in blood. Although this seems like a great honour, from Martius' perspective it might well be a punishment. His reaction is tellingly ambivalent, with him saying he will first wash and then they 'shall perceive / Whether I blush or no.' (1.10.69-70).

Before his return to Rome, however, the play focuses on civilians. Volumnia and Menenius, a patrician close to the family, discuss his wounds, meticulously numbering them and concluding that every 'gash was an enemy's grave' (2.1.151). Volumnia yet again paints a picture of Martius as an elemental force, saying: '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' (2.1.154-157). The warrior is here no longer the personification of death, but rather its master, able to command it with the swing of his sword. After many exclamations and flourishes, Martius asks Romans to stop as 'it does offend [his] heart' (2.1.164). His 'Pray now, no more' (2.1.165) almost seems like pleading, and the fact that praise offends his heart and grieves him even when it comes from his mother implies that Martius' leaving the senate before Cominius' speech in his honour is not simply a performance. He does not want to 'idly sit / To hear [his] nothings monstered' (2.2.74-75), i.e. shown (226n75) and distorted (and to his mind also possibly perverted in the process).

But perhaps the most accurate description of a soldier's position in society is given by Martius himself, as he tries to reassure his family before he leaves his country forever: 'I go alone, / Like to a lonely dragon that his fen / Makes feared and talked of more than seen' (4.1.30-32). It is important to note here that water imagery in *Coriolanus* is used either by veterans or by other characters to refer to veterans.[1] The image of a formidable beast living in an inaccessible waterlogged area, terrifying anybody that comes near, is not only one of isolation. It also testifies to the fact that Martius is acutely aware of the root of the problem – his circumstances in life are the ones making him an outcast. This image again raises the question of the soldier's marginalisation, and underscores perceived threat as being at the heart of the matter. The threat, however, does not come from the dragon itself, but rather from his surroundings.

My Would Ache at You: Language as Weapon

That a soldier's role is that of an instrument has already been established with Alcibiades' continual emphasis on 'your enemies' and 'your city', placing him and other soldiers in a position almost of an outsider. The idea is given more complexity from the very beginning of *Coriolanus*. Within the first couple of lines the plebeians refer to Caius Martius as a 'very dog to the commonality' (1.1.26). With hunting being an alternative arena where masculine power could be measured (Lewis 44), it is interesting that the plebeians portray Martius as nothing more than a dog used to bait the commoners, as opposed to casting him as the hunter. In other words, the plebeians themselves seem to think of Martius as nothing more than an instrument, but at the same time treat him like the ultimate threat. A similar position, almost smacking of cognitive dissonance, is present in the perception of the soldier as part of society and its protector, while at the same time treating him as a threat to it. An example of this double standard is the veterans' use of language.

Menenius insults the tribunes much as Coriolanus does the plebeians, but his words are not taken seriously. More importantly, he recognizes that he is quick-tempered and easy to provoke, and in the same breath says the following: 'What I think, I utter, and spend my malice in my breath' (2.1.51-52).

Martius, however, is held to a different standard. What he utters is understood as open threat to the plebeians, without there being any possibility that he is simply venting his contempt. It should also be pointed out that his reproaches are based on his personal experience of the plebeians' unreliable behaviour on the battlefield, whereas the insults that Menenius offers the tribunes stem from their lower social status and the novelty of their political position. In other words, while civilians are allowed malicious utterances in the heat of the moment, warriors are expected to be mindful of what they are saying at all times. Warriors' utterances being treated differently not only places them in a different (and more precarious) position in society, but also testifies to the recognition that warriors use language differently.

This importance of language and its use harks back to medieval chivalric culture. The rules of medieval chivalry were customary (Meron 5), with oaths and promises playing a central role. They were the foundation of the system of honour (141-2), meaning that a knight who broke an oath was labelled a perjurer and traitor (142). The fact that a 'knight's oath was his word of honour' (143) certainly indicates that language (especially that of bonds) played an important role in the life of the warrior class. Understanding this sheds further light on the central conflict(s) in *Timon* – both the titular character and Alcibiades realise that language has lost its currency in Athens.

The tenth scene of *Timon* focuses solely on Alcibiades (the only scene to do so). The senators which have brushed Timon off after his ruin enter the scene, adamant in their decision to condemn an Athenian soldier to death for murdering another citizen. 'The fault's bloody', so ''[t]is necessary he should die' (*Tim*. 10.1-2). Alcibiades attempts to shed more light on the event by saying that his friend 'in hot blood / Hath stepped into the law', as opposed to those 'that without heed do plunge into't' (10.11-13). He does his best to justify the soldier's reaction by characterizing him as a man '[o]f comely virtues', which he didn't soil by running away like a coward. He is a man who

> with a noble fury and fair spirit,
> Seeing his reputation touched to death,
> He did oppose his foe;
> And with such sober and unnoted passion
> He did behave his anger, ere 'twas spent,
> As if he had but proved an argument. (10.18-22)

The phrase 'touched to death' is particularly interesting. The soldier's reputation was not only mortally wounded, but also infected (246n19) by whatever implication or affront was offered him. The imagery of wounds and illness implies that reputation is for a soldier almost as another body part, integral to his person. Thinking also of Cassio's lamenting his lost reputation in *Othello*, it could be claimed that it is precisely reputation which the soldier perceives to be the single redeeming

quality about himself. In this respect, words can be construed as weapons, and defending one's reputation is equally as important as defending one's physical integrity. Moreover, Alcibiades insists that the soldier did not overreact in any way. Quite the contrary, he lucidly managed his anger, as though he were debating.

Honour, as Schwerhoff remarks, is an elusive concept (31), and could be somewhat loosely defined as sitting half-way between self-respect or self-esteem and reputation, functioning as 'a 'second skin', which had to be defended against violent attacks just like one's physical skin' (36). These violent attacks could be both physical and verbal in nature and were even legally recognised as equally pernicious (36). Much like the unnamed soldier in *Timon*, men in Renaissance Europe frequently engaged in duels to protect their honour from threats. Such duels were a laic variant of the judicial duel of honour, which arose in the fourteenth century and was legally regulated (Cavina 572). Having initially been sanctioned by authority (Mondschein 286), once the duel became a more common occurrence unrelated to the judiciary it began posing a threat to authority of the monarch as it suggested that any man can take it on himself to punish transgressions. In the early seventeenth century, public duels became such a wide-spread occurrence in London that King James did his best to condemn them (Waggoner 303). This might also have created an additional pressure on those in the military profession, as their position was already declining during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, whose 'foreign policy typically consisted of flirtation [...] and inconstancy' (Rapple 48). Using a combination of legal action and public pressure, the King and the government eventually succeeded in their campaign, leading to a change in rhetoric surrounding duels (Waggoner 303-4). Prominent members of society were openly against it, considering it to have an inflammatory effect on society, putting the person into an impossible position of either reacting to (perceived) affronts or being shamed for not reacting (303). The Athenian senators in *Timon* echo this idea when they say that this kind of valour '[i]s valour misbegot, and came into the world / When sects and factions were newly born' (*Tim*. 10.29-30). In other words, this sectarian monopoly on valour is perceived as an aberration, and the senators proceed to claim that true valour is being able to suffer wrongs and bear them with dignity.

Alcibiades then tries to speak from the position of a soldier. If suffering is valiant, why do soldiers 'expose themselves to battle, / And not endure all threats, sleep upon't, / And let the foes quietly cut their throats / Without repugnancy' (10.42-45). Alcibiades does not claim monopoly on valour for soldiers, but rather tries to make a case for the right of a soldier to remain consistent, i.e. to retain the right to live according to his code both in times of war and peace. Alcibiades does agree that murder in cold blood is a condemnable sin, but also emphasizes that 'in defence, by mercy, 'tis most just' (10.55), and in saying this, once more stresses the fact that verbal threat is understood to be equally as dangerous as physical threat. In order to further strengthen the soldier's case, Alcibiades again draws attention to the soldier's service to Athens, claiming that what he did at

Lacedaemon and Byzantium is a 'sufficient briber for his life' (10.60), as he had 'slain in fight many of your enemies. / How full of valour did he bear himself / In the last conflict, and made plenteous wounds' (10.62-64).

As the senators remain implacable, Alcibiades resorts to language of bonds and transactions, but even that fails, showing that language is a weak currency in Athens. The warrior is left '[r]ich only in large hurts' (10.107), and even his desperate cry of '[m]y wounds ache at you' (10.94) leaves the senators implacable and earns him banishment. In other words, Alcibiades' attempt to defend his soldier shows not only that for soldiers and warriors language can very easily become physical, but also that physicality and the body in itself is a language which soldiers read differently to civilians.

These ideas in scene ten in *Timon*, attributed to Thomas Middleton (244nSc.10), are further expanded on and nuanced by Shakespeare over the course of several scenes in *Coriolanus*. The crux of the matter, however, is contained in Martius' unwillingness to retroactively redact his language. He refuses to go back on his word and pander to the plebeians by telling them what they want to hear. He is forced, however, by Menenius and Volumnia to humble himself before the plebeians and be milder in his approach. When a citizen approaches him with '[y]ou have / not, indeed, loved the common people' (*Cor*. 2.3.88-89), Martius replies with: 'You should account me the more virtuous that I have not been common in my love' (2.3.90-91). This could be understood as more than just an attempt at manipulation, as the remainder of the speech gives an impression of bitterness. Martius openly shows how little he thinks of flattery when he says: ''Tis a condition they account gentle. And since the wisdom of their choice is rather to *have my hat than my heart*, I will practice the insinuating nod and be off to them most counterfeitly; that is, sir, I will counterfeit the bewitchment of some popular man, and give it bountiful to the desirers' (2.3.93-98; emphasis added). The phrase 'popular man' might be a jab at the tribunes, who manipulate the plebeians very effectively, very often and in crucial moments by lying to them (as when they claim that Martius plans to rule as a tyrant after they elect him consul).

In the same scene, Martius also says the following:

> For your voices I have fought,
> Watched for your voices, for your voices bear
> Of wounds two dozen odd; battles thrice six
> I have seen and heard of; for your voices
> Have done many things, some less, some more. (2.3.122-126)

Given Martius' opinion of the plebeians, 'your voices' could be expanded to mean 'Rome'. The above speech could then be taken to mean not that he fought to get their voices, but that he fought for them all to be able to have their voices in Rome, i.e., to be free and speak freely.

However, the plebeians cannot see past his curtness, and violent protests break out with the tribunes' blessing. Martius refuses to change his rhetoric, preferring to be blunt still, keeping in fashion with the stereotypical image of the laconic soldier (Jorgensen 227). The tribunes use this to their advantage, and call him a traitor to Rome, knowing that he will not be able to control himself after such an affront. Martius' reliance on to-the-point and truthful language is best illustrated in the following speech:

> The fires i'th' lowest hell fold in the people!
> Call me their traitor, thou injurious tribune!
> Within thine eyes sat twenty thousand deaths,
> In thy hands clutched as many millions, in
> Thy lying tongue both numbers, I would say
> 'Thou liest' unto thee with a voice as free
> As I do pray the gods. (*Cor*. 3.3.68-74)

Forgetting his promise to be milder, Martius no longer cares about the people's judgement and resolves 'not to buy / Their mercy at the price of one fair word' (3.3.91-92), preferring whatever punishment is in store, including death.

His prioritisation of (his idea of) truth is made obvious in 3.2, when Menenius asks him to apologise to the plebeians and publicly repent for verbally abusing them. Martius' reply is: 'For them? *I cannot do it to the gods*, / Must I then do't to them?' (40-41; emphasis added), clearly letting everybody know that he is not in the habit of mincing words. He is also recognized by others as honest: 'He would not flatter Neptune for his trident / … His heart's his mouth. / What his breast forges, that his tongue must vent' (3.1.258-60). Prioritising honesty likewise does not allow him to hyperbolise his achievements, which is what other characters seem intent on doing. This reluctance to make a show of his 'achievements' is stressed most forcefully in Martius' attempts to avoid showing the plebeians his scars (which he needs to do in order to become consul). He begs to 'o'erleap that custom' because he cannot ask them for their voices only for the sake of his wounds (2.2.135-138). He does not want 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!' (2.2.146-149). Being a soldier is how he serves his country, which he does not want to taint by either overemphasizing his merits or by trivialising them for the sake of fame.

The frequent imagery of body parts and dismemberment is present in the play in order to underscore both the military theme and the fact that Rome is in a state of disorder (Jagendorf 458). However, it also serves to contextualise the veteran's body, imparting it with more meaning. Martius' refusal to comply with demands to display his scars, therefore, is closely connected and harks back to his use of language. While his 'I banish you!' (*Cor*. 3.3.124) could be interpreted as the rage of a proud man, and his sense of honour, primarily characterised by

violence, perceived as a perversion of the classical idea of *virtus* (Rackin 69, 70), it can also be understood as a conclusive inability to communicate, a confirmation of the society's distance from any kind of honour paradigm. The soldier, touched almost to death by Rome's ingratitude, decides to revenge himself on the city in a final and definitive act of isolation.

Conclusion

The two warrior characters in *Timon of Athens* and *Coriolanus* are far from being vainglorious. Both perceive their profession as work which has to be done and, unlike civilians, do not romanticise it. Moreover, they show that soldiers use language differently, relying on the imperative of honesty and truthfulness as one of the central notions of their profession, which rests, among other things, on giving and honouring oaths and promises.

The fact that displaying his body makes Martius feel uncomfortable has been expressed in many ways throughout the play, so much so that his repeated attempts to avoid it could well be a conclusive indication of a deep split in understanding between veterans and civilians. Both Alcibiades and Martius expect civilians to understand the narrative that their wounded bodies communicate. That narrative, however, is either completely disregarded by Athenian senators (either because unintelligible or deemed unimportant) or utterly misunderstood by Romans welcoming home their victorious warrior. The soldier's body becomes the ultimate symbol of an utterance which has two deep structures – the meaning of one construed by civilians, and the other available only to veterans – thereby marking the soldier as a problematic member of society, and consequently excluded due to the nature of their profession.

End Notes

1 Cf., among many other examples, Cominius' 'His pupil age / Man-entered thus, he waxed like a sea' and 'As weeds before / A vessel under sail, so men obeyed / And fell below his stem' when he describes Coriolanus' first experience of battle in 2.2. Another example is Coriolanus' calling the plebeians a Hydra, as well as his vitriolic speech before his banishment in 3.3 opening with 'You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate / As reek o'th' rotten fens' (note that he describes the plebeians using the imagery of water beasts and stagnant bodies of water as when he refers to his own position).

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Neven Brlek

Benjamin Franklin: Religion and Freedom

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

NEVEN BRLEK
University of Zagreb

Benjamin Franklin: Religion and Freedom

The paper considers Benjamin Franklin's writings on religious matters, as well as his interaction with religious personae and institutions, on a culturological level. In this, his *Autobiography* (1791) is the primary source, as are three principal essays he published on the matter during his lifetime: "A Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity" (1725), "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion" (1728), and "On the Providence of God in the Government of the World" (1732). From these sources, an attempt to reconstruct Franklin's curious approach to religion, cosmology and the concept of God is made, and the trajectory along which his opinions seem to have shifted is traced. Most importantly, it is argued that, for all the different approaches to religion Franklin exhibited throughout his lifetime, his stance on religion is in a metonymic relation with his political orientation as a Founding Father of the United States. That is, religious freedom he advocated is ostensibly a manifestation of his grander approach to freedom of any kind, which American cultural identity is based on. This freedom is also considered in relation to Franklin's stance towards slave owning and towards Native Americans.

KEYWORDS
Benjamin Franklin, religion, the Great Awakening, Quakers, Deism, freedom, slavery

Almost two hundred and fifty years after Benjamin Franklin's death, and after a considerable amount of scholarship published on the matter, there is still no definitive consensus regarding Franklin's religious stances any more than there was in his day. Born and brought up by his parents as a Presbyterian, by the time he reached his late teenage years and his early twenties, Franklin drifted apart from his parents' teachings, and developed a quite specific set of views on religion, both in its spiritual and dogmatic aspects. In fact, this specificity and the inability of scholars to agree upon what Franklin actually believed, as will be shown in this paper, stems from the continual religious vicissitudes and rapid alterations of his opinion in the early years of his adult life, as well as from the more stable, yet still very unique position that he settled on in the later years. Even in old age, his belief remained complex, with some of it being of his own design, other parts patched together from different religions of the world, and some parts not altogether religious in nature per se, but under heavy influence of religious philosophy. David T. Morgan, for example, calls Franklin's embrace of such large variety of beliefs "generic religion" (723), and goes on to quote John Adams who sarcastically quipped that "the Catholics thought him almost a Catholic. The Church of England claimed him as one of them. The Presbyterians thought him half a Presbyterian, and the Friends believed him a wet Quaker" (qtd. in Morgan 723). In any case, one thing that is definitely true on the topic of Franklin's religion is his openness towards a vast array of beliefs, and his definite confidence in liberty of choosing what to believe on a personal basis, which goes hand-in-hand with his more general advocacy of personal liberty, as will be argued. To delineate the development of Franklin's religious thought, the *Autobiography* will serve as the primary source, at the same time also reflecting on the three essays he published on the matter, each of which is indicative of a shift in his position. This, moreover, requires the relationship between his religious beliefs and the dominant religious culture of eighteenth-century New England to be explored, for Franklin "never was without some religious principles," yet he "seldom attended any public worship" (*Autobiography* 80-81). Other sources contemporary with Franklin's own writing will not be taken into account here, for such an act would take this study far beyond its appropriate scope.

Despite continual arguments over how fundamental religion was to the foundation of early colonial settlements in North America, it undeniably had influence on their growth and on the shaping of the nascent public sphere. One strain of scholars, perhaps best exemplified by Perry Miller, emphasizes how crucial religion was to the settlement process, and talks of the Puritan quest of 1630 to conquer the newfound continent, to seize its status of *terra nullius*, and establish a "city set upon a hill" (Miller 5) as an ideal society that the rest of the world would look upon. In the words of John Winthrop, a Puritan lawyer and one of the early leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which he uttered to the passengers of the *Arabella* on its way to the New World, the Puritans were on their way to "seeke out a place of Cohabitation and Consorteshipp under a due forme of Government *both civill and ecclesiasticall*" (qtd. in Miller 5, my emphasis). Miller and the like

do construct this narrative by completely disregarding the Jamestown colony of 1607, in which economic factors were the primary driving force, but the fact still stands that both Puritanism and religion in general were important factors in how early New England societies came to be formed. In establishing a colonial society, where the rule of monarchic law was at this point in Puritan history latent at best, religion had an important social function, as Patricia U. Bonomi expounds:

> …it was an axiom of early seventeenth-century political thought that a strong church was the handmaiden and bulwark of a stable state. The church's guardianship of morality and public behavior made it an ally of orderly government, an interdependence that statesmen acknowledged by granting official status to one church only. (…) The English in Virginia, Swedes on the Delaware, and Dutch in New Netherland transferred their state churches to the New World as a matter of course, as did Catholic France, Spain, and Portugal to their western provinces. The Puritans established Congregationalism throughout New England. (13-14)

What is also evident from Bonomi's reading is that the Puritans, as the number of colonies on the continent grew, soon became only one of many religious bodies in the region. The majority were Protestant Christians of different denominations: Congregationalists, Episcopalians, a large number of Baptists and Presbyterians, a smaller number of Methodists and Lutherans. Catholics, although they would by 1850 become the largest religious group in the United States, in the middle of the 18th century composed only about one percent of the population (Morgan 723-724). Some strains of religious historiography, noted Bonomi, would go even further to suggest an even greater fragmentation of colonial American religious thought, advocating that a "sizeable" part of the population "was split into radical sects of Anabaptist or mystical origins as varied and unruly as their counterparts in Civil-War England" (14). However one looks at it, the fact of the matter is that colonial America harbored a great religious diversity. This diversity was, moreover, accompanied by fervent religious practice, for sermons were widely attended and good preachers of any denomination would draw in masses numbered in hundreds, the "quintessential form of public edification [being] not the spectacle but the Word" (Bonomi 3-4). If not orally, the Word was spread more and more in printed form, one of the popular printed sermons being Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which Franklin himself later recounted as a great influence during his childhood (*Autobiography* 23).

This is the general context into which Benjamin Franklin was born in 1706, and in which (and against which) he developed his outlook on religion. Through his Presbyterian parents, his life was being shaped by religion from an early age: "I was put to the grammar-school at eight years of age, my father intending to devote me, as the tithe of his sons, to the service of the Church" (Franklin, *Autobiography* 20). At the same time developing a fondness of reading, his thirst for printed word was often satisfied by voraciously reading philosophy and history when available, but also sermons, which were abundantly available, Bunyan included.

Decades later, he would regret his exposure chiefly to this kind of literature:

> My father's little library consisted chiefly of books in polemic divinity, most of which I read, and have since often regretted that, at a time when I had such a thirst for knowledge, more proper books had not fallen in my way, since it was now resolved I should not be a clergyman. (Autobiography 24)

The "proper books" that he did indeed read, as Kerry Walters remarks, were from various Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Isaac Newton, whose empiricist and rationalist ideas remained "a constant thread throughout the rest of his life" (91). His reading sermons, however, lead him to what is often regarded as his first divergence from mainstream religious thought, which is also when he started writing on religion.[1] At the age of fifteen, "some books against Deism fell into [his] hands," but arguments presented in them seeming ineffective to young Franklin, they "wrought an effect on [him] quite contrary to what was intended by them; for the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to [him] much stronger than the refutation; in short, [he] soon became a thorough Deist" (*Autobiography* 61). Four years later, in 1725, while working as a printer in London, Franklin came across William Wollaston's *The Religion of Nature Delineated*, which immediately prompted him to write a harsh refutation of Wollaston's ideas, countering them with Deist reasoning in *Dissertation on Liberty and Necessity, Pleasure and Pain*, the first of his three serious publications on religion.

The combination of Enlightenment thinking and creationism he presented in the essay was problematic from a theological standpoint in the eyes of those around him. A standard eighteenth-century Deist such as Franklin "accepted the existence of an impersonal deity who created a universe defined by uniform natural laws, but who in no way subsequently interfered in the operations of the natural order" (Walters 92). Or, as Franklin puts it, "there is said to be a First Mover, who is called GOD, Maker of the Universe," and he is "all-wise, all-good, all powerful" ("Dissertation"). With these two assumptions as his starting point, he asserts that if God is "all-wise" and "all-powerful," His act of creation would at the outset create a perfect, mechanistic universe which required no further intervention: "How exact and regular is every Thing in the natural World! How wisely in every Part contriv'd! We cannot here find the least Defect! Those who have study'd the mere animal and vegetable Creation, demonstrate that nothing can be more harmonious and beautiful" ("Dissertation"). By the same token, if He is "all-good," the humans He created would also be all-good, and all their actions would always be good, godly and socially beneficial. If man "cannot act what will be in itself really ill, or displeasing to God," the conclusion is that "therefore Evil doth not exist" ("Dissertation"). Finally, since each individual act is God's good will, there can be "no distinction between virtue and vice" (Dunn 508), and they remain social constructions which are fundamentally empty. This is just a short summary of the pamphlet with several leaps in logic, but it is illustrative of how the Deist

idea of a deterministic universe in which evil is impossible, vice and virtue false, and in which there is no need for God to intervene in human affairs (effectively rendering the universe godless), wouldn't be agreeable with the religious *status quo*. Soon after publishing the pamphlet, however, Franklin's opinion on the issue shifted, and he tried to locate and destroy all of the one hundred copies that he had printed (Morgan 725).

Why exactly Franklin was so quick to change his stance is not exactly clear. In the *Autobiography*, he mentions how it "appear'd now not so clever a performance as [he] once thought it" and how he doubts "whether some error had not insinuated itself unperceiv'd into [his] argument" (61). Walters attributes the change simply to life experience which Franklin would gather over the next three years, "meeting with a number of people whose lives seemed to challenge his clever argument that a deterministic universe renders morality illusory" and coming up against a "frightening encounter with his own mortality" (95). More sophisticated answers were obviously required to reconcile the modern and rational world with the existence of a higher deity. Such was precisely the function of his next treatise on religion, "Articles of Belief and Acts of Religion," printed on his own and published in 1728 in Philadelphia.

The essay was, in his own words, a private "little Liturgy, or form of prayer," which he used for his own purposes, and after crafting which he "went no more to the public assemblies" (*Autobiography* 81-82). The text reads as a standard hymn to the beauty and tranquility of life, the wisdom and goodness of God, the serenity of one's soul etc., albeit with a notable absence of mechanistic imagery. At one point in the text, nevertheless, a curious passage appears, and one which has perplexed scholars ever since:

> I CONCEIVE then, that the INFINITE has created many Beings or Gods, vastly superior to Man, who can better conceive his Perfections than we, and return him a more rational and glorious Praise. As among Men, the Praise of the Ignorant or of Children, is not regarded by the ingenious Painter or Architect, who is rather honour'd and pleas'd with the Approbation of Wise men and Artists
>
> It may be that these created Gods, are immortal, or it may be that after many Ages, they are changed, and Others supply their Places. ("Articles")

The "INFINITE," or the "Painter," or the "Architect" here is obviously God—one and only supreme being, the creator of the universe. But he also appears to be the creator of several subordinate "Beings or Gods," which act as intermediaries between humans and the true God, leading to the immediate conclusion that Franklin had turned to some form of polytheism. This was very unlikely, says Walters, as there is not "any reason to think that Franklin espoused a literal polytheism," at least not in the traditional sense, nor is there indication that the statement was satirical, as some interpret it (96). If Franklin was serious and non-polytheistic,[2]

the purported polytheism is, then, metaphorical, all the "Gods" he talks of being symbolic representations or poetic attempts at reaching the ultimately unreachable Creator. As Walters reads it, "Franklin was convinced that the universe must have a divine First Cause: only a divine power is forceful enough to create reality itself," but at the same time he "felt a pressing personal need for contact with a wise, benevolent, good, and loving deity" (97). It is never under question whether God ("INFINITE," "Architect," etc.) exists, for that is sure—but with the caveat that the only thing humans, in all their reason, are capable of knowing of Him is that He "hast created Man, bestowing Life and Reason, and plac'd him in Dignity superior to thy other earthly Creatures" ("Articles"). The "created Gods," presumably those of conventional religions, that Franklin talks about are ultimately false, but in the absence of the real deity useful from a psychological and social standpoint, especially for *other* people. With a touch of elitism, he wrote later in life to an atheist friend: "You yourself may find it easy to live a virtuous Life without the Assistance afforded by Religion… But think of how great a Proportion of Mankind consists of weak and ignorant Men and Women" (qtd. in Waldman 34). And this is without even mentioning those "who have need of Motives of Religion to restrain them from Vice, to support their Virtue, and retain them in the Practice of it till it becomes *habitual*" (qtd. in Waldman 34). Institutional aspects of religion, argues Franklin, are a public necessity for the weak-minded who cannot, or will not perform self-improvement and build their moral character on their own. Moreover, some would argue that this faux-polytheistic position is in its nature very close to Hinduism, thus expanding the width of Franklin's religious perspective even further (Morgan 726).

On the other hand, one perhaps shouldn't be too hasty with settling on this as Franklin's definite position, as the degree of metaphoricity he employs in the pamphlet is obviously unclear and subject to interpretation. The "created Gods" being symbolic or not, what one definitely should take away from the text is his clear respect towards liberty of individual religious belief. Still refining his own beliefs, he "was willing to concede that people who recognized 'lesser gods' should be permitted to worship those gods" (Morgan 726). *Poor Richard's Almanack*, a collection of his witticisms and proverbs published by himself in 1732 attests to as much with crafty sayings like: "Different sects like different clocks, may be all near the matter, though they don't quite agree" (19), "Don't judge of men's wealth or piety, by their Sunday appearances" (19), "When knaves fall out, honest men get their goods; when priests dispute, we come at the truth" (59), and "You will be careful, if you are wise; how you touch men's religion, or credit, or eyes" (62).

"It was about this time," writes Franklin, that he "conceiv'd the bold and arduous project of arriving at moral perfection" (*Autobiography* 82). Led by the belief that "the most acceptable service of God was the doing of good to man" and that "all crime will be punished, and virtue rewarded, either here or hereafter" (80), he devised a list of thirteen "virtues all that at that time occurr'd to [him] as necessary and desirable" (82). The virtues he came up with, and which he systematically

worked through in an attempt to fully ingrain them into his daily routine, were the following: temperance, silence, order, resolution, frugality, industry, sincerity, justice, moderation, cleanliness, tranquility, chastity, and humility (*Autobiography* 82-3). A booklet containing the list, supplemented with comments upon their necessity and different schedules and timetables, was intended to be published by him under the title *The Art of Virtue*, but ultimately never was (88-89). The virtues and the entire project are interesting from the religious standpoint, though, for they clearly stem from religious roots. Once again, what comes up is Franklin's belief in the universality of religion, and the opinion that the core tenets of each form of belief are ultimately the same (virtue, morality, etc.), not unlike what he professed in "Articles of Belief":

> It will be remark'd that, tho' my scheme was not wholly without religion, there was in it no mark of any of the distinguishing tenets of any particular sect. I had purposely avoided them; for, being fully persuaded of the utility and excellency of my method, and that it might be serviceable to people in all religions, and intending some time or other to publish it, I would not have anything in it that should prejudice any one, of any sect, against it. (*Autobiography* 88)

Fundamental religious values were for Franklin often a good thing that inevitably gets bogged down by a fossilized institution, while general moral virtue often gets superseded by a doctrine or a dogma, or simply dull sermons which are of benefit to no one. In the end, he found the aim of the Church to be "rather to make us good Presbyterians than good citizens" (qtd. in Waldman 33), which was for him extremely problematic and prompted him to reject public religion in favor of a more spiritual and personal theology. [3]

Franklin's third and ostensibly final theological treatise, "On the Providence of God in the Government of the World," was presented in 1732 to his local club of Philadelphia intellectuals, the Junto. The statement in the text which most radically departs from the earlier publications is that God "sometimes interferes by his particular Providence and sets aside the Effects which would otherwise have been produced" ("Providence"), *de facto* doing away with the Deistic standpoint of the Creator who lets the universe operate strictly by its laws of nature. More implicitly but not less importantly, one of his closing statements is on the necessity to "pray to him for his Favour and Protection" ("Providence"), which would in a deterministic universe be futile. It appears, thus, that Franklin either never completely departed from the teachings of his parents, Josiah and Abijah, or returned to them somewhere along the way (Morgan 727).

Later in life, Franklin never published anything significant that was directly concerned with theology, although his beliefs, according to snippets in various correspondences and public statements, seem to have remained approximately the same as they were when presenting "Providence." In 1787, for example, he was serving as a delegate at the Constitutional Convention and he proposed that

all sessions be opened with prayer by emphasizing its necessity, especially in the situation in which he and his colleagues found themselves as leaders of a newly founded nation: "Have we … forgotten that powerful Friend? Do we imagine we no longer need [his] assistance" (qtd. in Walters 100)? Or, there is the often-quoted letter to Yale President Ezra Stiles proclaiming that God "governs [the universe] by his Providence" (qtd. in Walters 100). Having said that, both these statements and "On the Providence of God" were intended for the public, as opposed to "Articles of Belief," which were for his own private use—raising the question of their reliability. Did Franklin really believe in the declared protection of God, or was he "voicing one of those morally and socially useful fictions that the 'created Gods' underwrite" (Walters 101)?

Whichever conclusion one derives, one thing that is undisputable is Franklin's abundant interaction with religion on a practical day-to-day level. As stated, Franklin never was one to attend religious service, Presbyterian or otherwise, but he certainly did entertain the company of numerous preachers and even listen to sermons, which historically makes sense, the 1730s and 1740s being a time of religious revivalism. The steady decline of Puritanism and dilution of its membership strictness, the introduction of partial church membership known as Half-Way Covenant, and the rise of rationalist Enlightenment thought (and consequently of indifference towards church) are just some of the factors which set the stage for the "Great Awakening" of 1741-42, as Gaustad argues (681-682). Religion, simply put, "had become more institutional and less personal; more formal and less spontaneous; more inclusive and less demanding" (Gaustad 682). Individual piety now more and more a thing of the past, the movement, spearheaded by preachers such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, sought to reignite engagement with religion on a more personal level, and across denominational boundaries, similarly to what Franklin practiced and advocated. In the *Autobiography*, Franklin testifies to his encounters with several of these preachers, notably with Whitefield himself, whom he befriended and whose sermons and journals he printed (101-103). Though their friendship was "a mere civil friendship," between them being "no religious connection," Franklin does note being impressed by Whitefield's preaching (102). Likewise to be considered is his comment on the success of the Great Awakening, mentioning how "from being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemd as if all the world were growing religious, so that one could not walk thro' town in an evening without hearing psalms suing in different families of every street" (*Autobiography* 101). Being such a success, and sermons drawing in great multitudes, a hall was erected in Philadelphia for any preacher of any denomination or religion, "so that even if the Mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism to us, he would find a pulpit at his service" (*Autobiography* 101). New England was teeming with religious heterogeneity, and Franklin's enthusiasm is, judging by his words, more than obvious.

Finally, Franklin's encounters with various religious bodies, primarily the Quakers, in the political realm are not to be understated. The *Autobiography* re-

lates several different anecdotes concerning his entanglement with the Quakers, mostly from the period of King George's War (the third of the French and Indian Wars) of 1744-1748, their disputes mostly originating from the Quakers' principal opposition to war as such. Franklin, who during the war organized an association for the defense of Philadelphia, resorted to different means of working around the Quakers' denominational politics, but also of using religion to his advantage in a more general sense of steering the public opinion. During the war, he wrote a small piece, giving "the clergy of the different sects an opportunity of influencing their congregations to join in the association" (*Autobiography* 106), even noting such practice "would have probably been general among all but the Quakers if the peace had not soon interven'd" (107). To the Quakers, though formally against war, "the defense of the country was not disagreeable… provided they were not requir'd to assist in it" (107), as seen from the meeting of the local fire company to vote on the donation of money for building defense batteries, to which most of the Quakers purposefully didn't show up so as to invalidate their majority over Franklin's proposals. Their ultimate support of Franklin shows how, despite occasional disagreements, the two sides were on good terms, in spite of the Quakers' generally negative perception among members of the New England society, the frequent questioning of their "fitness to govern Pennsylvania" (Bonomi 171-172), and the vilification of them as "pariahs and troublemakers" (95).

So Franklin was, without a doubt, one of the foremost figures of the American 18th century to push for religious freedom, and we can probably assume that this was an aspect of his general socio-political views: if the young United States were to prosper, it was to happen on account of freedom and tolerance on all societal levels. This juncture of politics and religion, nevertheless, gets complicated when one takes into account Franklin's stance on race and racism. On the one hand, as far as slavery is concerned, he is remembered as one of the most progressive men of his time and a great fighter for the freedom of black people. He was for a time the president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery and the Relief of Free Negroes Unlawfully held in Bondage; he was a member of an English company of abolitionists called Dr. Bray's Associates and closely associated with many renowned abolitionists of the day, such as Anthony Benezet; he publically railed against "the Wars made in Africa for Prisoners to raise Sugar in America, the Numbers slain in those Wars, the Number that being crowded in Ships perish in the Transportation, & the Numbers that die under the Severities of Slavery" (qtd. in Nash 632); his last public act was the signing of a petition to Congress to abolish slavery (Nash 635).[4] On the other hand, the road to such a position was long and complicated, for Franklin definitely did not have such clear views on slavery in his youth, as more recent scholarship has shown. As Gary Nash outlines, Franklin and his Wife, Deborah, in total owned at least seven black slaves throughout the decades of their marriage (619-620); he had no objections with printing bounty ads for runaway slaves and making good money off of it (621); he warned, like when forming a militia for the defense of Pennsylvania in 1747, against the "wanton and unbridled rage, rapine and lust of Negroes,

Mulattoes, and others" (qtd. in Nash 621); he would criticize not the immorality of the act of slave ownership, but the detrimental effect having house slaves has on increasingly idle and spoiled white children (622).

But eventually, Franklin's milieu had had enough of an impact on him to change his position, first privately and tentatively, such as for example when he chose not to pursue his runaway slave while in London in the late 1750s, and later publically, as seen from his fierce latter-day attacks on slave owning. Somewhat more static and indeed more opaque was his attitude about Native Americans. Though one of the principal players in the process of purchasing and/or taking away Native American land, as delineated by Wallace (251-281), Ben Franklin's policies were always those of a pacifist, in spite of the unspoken prerogative of the white man to perform "the replacement of 'savage' hunters and gatherers and village gardeners, who subsist on land that yields them a slender harvest, by agriculturalists who farm intensively by advanced methods and thereby can support larger numbers of 'civilized' people" (Wallace 269), which is, considering the historical milieu, unsurprising, or perhaps even expected. Franklin was also loudly outspoken about his disgust by the 1764 Conestoga massacre of a group of Indians by the Paxton Boys. "These poor defenseless creatures were immediately fired upon, stabbed, and hatched to death!" he decried (qtd. in Waldman 34). Furthermore, to go back to religion, he found the massacre even more wicked and infuriating on another level, since the Paxton Boys claimed to be performing the Lord's work. It was, in Franklin's own words, a "Horrid perversion of the Scripture and of religion! To father the worst of crimes on the God of peace and love! [...] Our frontier people call themselves Christians! [The Indians] would have been safer, if they had submitted to the Turks." (qtd. in Waldman 34).

What, then, to make of Franklin, religion, and freedom? The First Amendment to the United States Constitution begins with the statement that the "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof" (qtd. in Morgan 724). Although it was adopted in December 1791, more than a year after Benjamin Franklin's death, all evidence points to the conclusion that he would have "endorsed it enthusiastically" (Morgan 724). Delving into Franklin's writings on the question of religion is bound to yield numerous incongruities, the general overview of which has been presented here, the rest being out of the scope of this paper. Starting out from the Calvinist teachings of his Presbyterian youth, he moved on to a complex Deistic reconciliation of a rationalist universe with the unreachability of the Creator, and several years later supposedly embraced the belief in the divine Providence of God—a Calvinist tenet of faith (Morgan 727). His later public life as an author and speaker shows no signs of the uncertainty of his youth, but at the same time, it cannot be said that he was an orthodox Christian in any sense of the word. He still detested both the Christian dogmaticism and the perversion of religious values to devious ends. But if we accept that his fostering of religious liberty is a fostering of a wider kind of liberty,

problems with slavery and Native Americans arise, especially in the earlier years of his life. It is not until his old age that his opinions both on religion and on slavery solidified into a more unified whole, and it is not until then that we can speak of a concrete relation between Franklin's religion and Franklin's politics. His religious views and beliefs, though they are likely never to be fully disambiguated, were certainly very unique and open-minded, fostering the kind of liberty and the kind of rejection of (religious) authority one might expect from a Founding Father—or from an abolitionist.

End Notes

1 Aged fifteen, Franklin anonymously published a series of provocative essays poking fun at various aspects of the New England society, religion included, in his brother's *New-England Courant*. Though they clearly indicate the influence of Deism on teenaged Franklin, their treatment of the topic is not nearly as systemic and fleshed out as in the later three essays.

2 "Non-polytheistic" instead of "monotheistic" because if Franklin were monotheistic, that would automatically exclude the possibility of several gods, and if he were strictly polytheistic, it would imply he believed in several gods, which also doesn't appear to be correct. His idea of imaginary polytheism that represents an ultimate, "INFINITE" deity transcends the standard binary opposition.

3 This is without even discussing the clash of Franklin's moral self-improvement with Calvinist moral determinism. Salvation, Calvinist faith would have it, is for some outright impossible, and "we could not do-good our way out of damnation if we were marked from the start," as Waldman explains (33).

4 For an overview of Franklin's pro-abolitionist writing, both public and private, see: Franklin, Benjamin. "Benjamin Franklin and Freedom." *The Journal of Negro History*, vol. 4, no. 1, 1919, 41-50.

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03

Tamara Hlupić

The Intertextual Use of H. P. Lovecraft's Fiction in *Rick and Morty*

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

TAMARA HLUPIĆ
University of Zagreb

The Intertextual Use of H. P. Lovecraft's Fiction in *Rick and Morty*

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the influence of H.P. Lovecraft's ideas on *Rick and Morty*, the TV programme from the 2010s that brings forth the devices characteristic for postmodernist works. The main focus is on explaining the postmodernist notions and Lovecraftian elements on which *Rick and Morty* was based. More precisely, two episodes in total – S02E06: *The Ricks Must Be Crazy* and S04E06: *Never Ricking Morty* – are analysed and compared with elements of Lovecraft's works they draw from. Furthermore, the effect of the time of the show's creation on the choice of used postmodernist devices and Lovecraftian elements, as well as their purpose, try to be explained. Based on the comparative analysis of two episodes of *Rick and Morty* and Lovecraft's works, one concludes that the show successfully incorporated Lovecraftian ideas and worldview into its episodes and transferred them into the 21st century. Because of the current situation in the world marked by a global pandemic, the show relies mainly upon Lovecraft's cosmic indifference. The show refers to the coronavirus, which could be regarded as a monster of the 21st century that awakened the cosmic fear present in Lovecraft's works.

KEYWORDS
Rick and Morty, Lovecraft, Cosmicism, Lovecraftian Horror, Postmodernism, Intertextuality

1. Introduction

H. P. Lovecraft was a prominent 20th-century American writer of what would today be classified as science fiction (or sci-fi) and weird fiction, a genre that includes elements of horror, fantasy, and supernatural (Clute, "Weird Fiction"). He was a prolific author, and in today's day and age, his works have gained importance because the topics they deal with, the mood they create, and the motifs they are built upon, which will be described later, fit the entire atmosphere caused primarily by the global pandemic, which changed everyone's lives overnight. He was not a postmodernist writer, but the backbone of his works – cosmicism – was taken over and used by postmodernist works of fiction. Not even a popular American TV show *Rick and Morty* could have escaped the ever-growing influence of H.P. Lovecraft, and it may even be regarded as Lovecraftian in the true sense of the word. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the influence of H.P. Lovecraft's ideas on this humorous and animated modern TV programme that brings forth the devices characteristic for postmodernist works. The main focus will be on explaining the postmodernist notions and Lovecraftian elements on which *Rick and Morty* is based. More precisely, two episodes in total – S02E06: *The Ricks Must Be Crazy* and S04E06: *Never Ricking Morty* – will be analysed with regard to postmodernist devices used in them and compared with elements of Lovecraft's works they draw from. Furthermore, the effect of the time of the show's creation on the choice of used postmodernist devices and Lovecraftian elements, as well as their purpose, try to be explained.

2. *Rick and Morty* and Lovecraft in Short

Rick and Morty is a popular animated sci-fi TV show with elements of, oftentimes dark, humour that was created by Dan Harmon and Justin Roiland and first aired in 2013 in the U.S. It follows the adventures of Rick, a crazy scientist whose intelligence is exceptional and who is moved by the desire to play god, and his grandson Morty, whom Rick drags along to his exciting, but oftentimes bizarre, adventures. They make a perfect dynamic duo – one is smart, while the other is curious. Morty looks up to his grandfather and trusts that he knows what he is doing, just as the viewers do. The best description of the show is found in Rhys Williams' review: "For its comedy *Rick and Morty* mines the by-now-familiar tropes and strategies of sf, fantasy, horror and the Weird." (148). This mixing of different genres is a postmodernist trait, as well as something that at first glance connects the show to H. P. Lovecraft. One has already seen that the basis of weird fiction is precisely this – mixing elements from different genres in one work of fiction. This is best seen in Lovecraft's novella *At the Mountains of Madness*, when he describes the rising of a notorious and dreadful mountain range:

> there was one part of the ancient land—the first part that ever rose from the waters after the earth had flung off the moon and the Old Ones had seeped

> down from the stars—which had come to be shunned as vaguely and namelessly evil…a frightful line of peaks had shot suddenly up amidst the most appalling din and chaos—and earth had received her loftiest and most terrible mountains. (*Complete Works* 550)

The narrator talks about how the mountains rose from nothing overnight and drove away even the Old Ones – the mythological creatures from the depths of outer space who took over the Earth and were in conflict with every other race of the time. Because of the mention of these extra-terrestrials and the creation of an eerie atmosphere, it is quite evident that Lovecraft here employed elements of science-fiction and horror, which creators of *Rick and Morty* also consistently use. However, to carry out an in-depth analysis of postmodernist and Lovecraftian elements *Rick and Morty* is teeming with, one must first answer the question: what is implied by Lovecraftian ideas? The peculiarity of Lovecraft's works brought about the emergence of a new subgenre of horror fiction – the Lovecraftian horror, in which:

> A certain atmosphere of breathless and unexplainable dread of outer, unknown forces must be present; and there must be a hint…of that most terrible conception of the human brain—a malign and particular suspension or defeat of those fixed laws of Nature which are our only safeguard against the assaults of chaos and the daemons of unplumbed space. (Lovecraft, "Supernatural Horror")

It can be seen from the quote that the fundamental element of the Lovecraftian horror is creating an atmosphere that fills the reader with fear of everything bigger than him. Lovecraft finds that oftentimes in the literature of this genre, a violation of natural laws and their deterioration is present. In it, it is also revealed how vulnerable man is and how incapable he is of protecting himself against the unknown. Out of the fear from the unknown comes a realization that man is small and insignificant in the grand scheme of things, which is a backbone of Lovecraft's misanthropic literature. In other words, man is in his works seen as powerless against the forces of nature and the unknown entities from space, which is an idea found in cosmicism. In Berruti's words, cosmicism is "aimed at revealing the meaninglessness and nothingness of our existence, always threatened by the fulfilment of a superior…design on a cosmic scale." (363). This cosmic indifference or indifference towards the existence of man and awareness that there is something much more grand and powerful than him is what brings out cosmic fear, which is, according to Miller, "both the feeling of terror located in a human body and the physical manifestation of that horror as an immense entity" (124). Miller refers here to the two-faceted fear with the internal, universal side, and the external side, which corresponds to some kind of a monster, or something unfathomable to man, like "immensely powerful forces from the depths of space labeled as 'gods' by the human beings who either combat them or seek to gain a sliver of reflected power by worshipping them" (Joshi, "Icons" 98-99). This personified fear is one of the main characteristics of the Cthulhu Mythos

stories. Lowell explains that Cthulhu Mythos refers to "a series of horror tales written by Howard Phillips Lovecraft…and expanded on by others after his death" (Lowell 47). In other words, Cthulhu Mythos encompasses Lovecraft's own stories as well as those stories using Lovecraftian elements (such as his characters or places) and evoking a feeling of horror inside the reader. Lovecraft's works were based on the idea of cosmic fear because, in his words: "The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is fear of the unknown." ("Supernatural Horror"). To put this differently, he was fascinated with the universal fear of everything that is unexplored, primarily space. This is what, consequently, brings Lovecraft's characters to lose their sanity, which is already fragile. Their sanity is further threatened by the events around them that they are unable to understand or handle. Because fear is a true emotion that must not be disregarded, one might as well delve deeper into it: "it is hard to create a convincing picture of shattered natural law or cosmic alienage or 'outsideness' without laying stress on the emotion of fear." (Lovecraft, "Notes"). Lovecraft here maintains that highlighting the notion of fear is what gives works of fiction authenticity. However, it must be described realistically and not be included in a story in its idealized form, which is why, in his works, he puts the focus on the extra-terrestrial.

Another element of his stories that is quite important is the notion of time, which he finds "the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe. Conflict with time seems to me the most potent and fruitful theme in all human expression." (ibid.). He finds time horrid and relentless but enjoys playing with the concept of time in his stories because it holds endless possibilities and fits perfectly into the theme of cosmic fear, as can most clearly be seen in his novella *The Shadow Out of Time*. The following scene describes travel of consciousness which allows the subjects to explore what one thought impossible through an alien body: "to such minds the unveiling of hidden mysteries of earth—closed chapters of inconceivable pasts and dizzying vortices of future time which include the years ahead of their own natural ages—forms always, despite the abysmal horrors often unveiled, the supreme experience of life. (*Complete Works* 666). This passage clearly illustrates the violation of the natural flow of time by Lovecraft allowing his characters to travel from the past into the future and vice versa, thus giving them the possibility to experience life in unimaginable ways. When describing fundamental elements of Lovecraft's stories, Joshi states that "science provides the intellectual backbone of nearly all his short stories; but at the same time Lovecraft seems to suggest that science itself will ultimately be a source of horror and destruction." ("Time, Space, and Natural Law" 176). Based on this, it can be said that Lovecraft incorporates science into his works by emphasizing its significance but simultaneously finds scientific advancements the root of all evil. The evidence of this lies in the story *Herbert West–Reanimator*, which can be seen as Lovecraft's take on Mary Shelley's famous *Frankenstein*. Lovecraft here writes about how the main character, Dr. West, experimented on carcasses, and afterwards even corpses, and so created "the elixir which he

thought would to some extent restore life's chemical and physical processes." (*Complete Works* 124). In other words, he wanted to be able to reanimate dead creatures by means of a special mixture he made. However, his research and experiments, no matter how advanced, "ended horribly—in a delirium of fear which we gradually came to attribute to our own overwrought nerves—and West had never afterward been able to shake off a maddening sensation of being haunted and hunted." (ibid.). Not only did everything have a negative impact on the main character's mental state, but he also disappeared. What is worse, later in the story it is discovered that his venture resulted in the creation of an army of the undead who went on killing sprees, and in the end, even murdered their creator. This, therefore, proves Lovecraft's somewhat dark view.

3. Analysis

Now, two episodes of *Rick and Morty* – more precisely,S02E06: *The Ricks Must Be Crazy* and S04E06: *Never Ricking Morty* – will be analysed regarding Lovecraft's ideas and works they draw from, as well as the postmodernist notions that will be introduced and explained. The first and most important reference to Lovecraft and his most famous story *The Call of Cthulhu* is the appearance of Lovecraft's monster, Cthulhu, at the end of the *Rick and Morty* title sequence in all four seasons. The opening credits change from season to season, with different "Easter eggs" for that season. In other words, the opening credits reveal the scenes the viewers might expect to find in that season, with a few random scenes thrown in, which never make an appearance in the show, just like the scene with Cthulhu. This Lovecraft-esque and one of the invariable scenes in the intro shows the monster chasing after Rick, Morty, and Morty's sister because they kidnapped its baby. Alternatively, as Norris states: "the creators have chosen, in a typically Lovecraftian manner, to create a greater narrative depth by hints rather than later full exposition." (206). In other words, this scene from the opening credits is only a preview of the greater and more fantastic world the viewer is about to be immersed in, once the actual episode begins. The monster in *Rick and Morty* title sequence[1] was drawn in such a way one may even refer to it as the replica of Lovecraft's vision of Cthulhu: "a monster of vaguely anthropoid outline, but with an octopus-like head whose face was a mass of feelers, a scaly, rubbery-looking body, prodigious claws on hind and fore feet, and long, narrow wings behind." (*Complete Works* 243). The monster from the title sequence is the monster described by Lovecraft but translated to screen and to a new context, which is why it can be described with a phrase of McHale's coinage – "an intertextual character" (78). A common postmodernist strategy seen here is a pastiche, which, in Malpas' words, "borrows ideas or stylistic devices from another work or works" (135). Put differently, a pastiche is a work of fiction that takes elements from other works and fits them into its context.

Another important aspect of the show present in its title sequence, which draws a parallel to Lovecraft, is playing with the multiplicity of worlds

and species. However, the show goes one step further and explores the idea of parallel universes and multiple timelines. These multiple genres combined in one work and the idea of the existence of different worlds or parallel universes could be found in postmodernism as well. In addition to that, from science fiction, postmodernism drew "interplanetary motifs" (McHale 66), which include themes like intergalactic travel or encounters with extra-terrestrial species. *The Rick and Morty* opening credits always show alien species, planets, and Ricks and Mortys of alternate worlds that the presumably real Rick and Morty fight against or team up with on their adventures. This presumable realness of the characters of Rick and Morty refers to the fact that the creators of the show created so many alternate worlds with different versions of the main characters that the viewer is not sure anymore if they are following the adventures of the real Rick and Morty or of their selves from an alternate reality. This corresponds to the notion of the sublime which "generates a mixture of exhilaration and terror through the sense that it might overwhelm or obliterate the subject" (Malpas 136) and is described as "a disturbance of everyday sense-making activity" (ibid. 28). In other words, it is a tactic for creating overpowering feelings in either a reader or a viewer by presenting them with something that simultaneously brings them both revulsion and enjoyment. The sublime is, therefore, used to disrupt and to challenge the reader (or the viewer).

In *Never Ricking Morty*, Rick and Morty find themselves stuck on a train that is, in reality, a story device, or, as it is evident from Rick's statement: "A literal literary device quite literally metaphorically containing us." ("Never Ricking Morty"). The dynamic duo is aware that they are only metaphorically a part of a fictional story with different alien species, which is one of the main sources of Lovecraftian cosmic fear. The extra-terrestrial element is perfectly depicted in Lovecraft's story *The Colour Out of Space*:

> It all began…with a meteorite…That fragment lasted a week…When it had gone, no residue was left behind, and in time the professors felt scarcely sure they had indeed seen with waking eyes that cryptic vestige of the fathomless gulfs outside; that lone, weird message from other universes and other realms of matter, force, and entity. (*Complete Works* 416-417)

In this story, a meteorite from outer space fell on Earth, and whenever a fragment of it was saved, it started shrinking, which led to it completely disappearing over time. The scientists thought that they could solve the mystery surrounding the meteorite, but they had no luck. Something unexplainable and unknown brought immense fear to the inhabitants of the town.

In *The Ricks Must Be Crazy*, Rick and Morty travel in-between different worlds that are found inside one another. The duo goes on an adventure into the microverse Rick created inside a battery of his ship. He plays god by making his society whose inhabitants he treats like his slaves since they produce electricity

that powers his ship. When Rick visits them, they call him an alien, which proves that they are aware of the existence of multiple worlds. However, they are entirely unaware that they live inside a battery. In the microverse, he encounters a scientist, Zeep, that is the spitting image of Rick, only of a different race. He too created his universe – miniverse – and is referred to as a "traveller from another world" ("The Ricks Must Be Crazy") by the inhabitants of that miniverse. When the trio travels to the teenyverse created by a scientist from the miniverse (Kyle), they get stranded there because they told Kyle what the real purpose of these small universes was. He was not sure what was true anymore, so he suffered an existential crisis and went on a suicide mission, which resulted in a blown-up ship that was the crew's only way out of that world. All of this resembles the postmodernist notion of Chinese-box worlds. It is a strategy which "involves frequency: interrupting the primary diegesis not once or twice but often with secondary, hypodiegetic worlds, representations within the representation." (McHale 113). Put differently, when this strategy is employed, one can find a world within a world, which resembles the way in which a Matryoshka doll or, as the name suggests, a Chinese box is constructed. To be more precise, in this episode, a simulation within a simulation is found. Rick's character, and his intentions, are also translated into different characters in smaller universes. The implication here is that science is what ultimately may bring destruction, which corresponds to Lovecraft's view on science: "The sciences, each straining in its own direction, have hitherto harmed us little; but some day the piecing together of dissociated knowledge will open up such terrifying vistas of reality" (*Complete Works* 238).

Moreover, Lovecraft's playing with time is present in *Never Ricking Morty*. Lovecraft writes in his story *The Shadow Out of Time*: "In every age since the discovery of mind-projection, a minute but well-recognised element of the population consisted of Great Race minds from past ages, sojourning for a longer or shorter while." (ibid. 667). He talks about the extra-terrestrial Great Race who worked out how to send consciousness into the past and back into the future, thus defying the linear concept of time. What could be connected with this is a humanized concept of time inside the train in *Rick and Morty,* as well as the one character who gets cut in half and is floating simultaneously outside the train and inside the arcade – the Floaty Bloody Man: "His followers believe the entire universe is Floaty Bloody Man's nightmare as he dies in a time dilated reality" ("Never Ricking Morty"). Because of his existence in both realities, he became a myth and even a new god. This calls to mind Lovecraft's Elder Things and his newfound religion based on these deities, best described in *The Call of Cthulhu*: "They worshipped…the Great Old Ones who lived ages before there were any men, and who came to the young world out of the sky. Those Old Ones were gone now, inside the earth and under the sea; but their dead bodies had told their secrets in dreams to the first men, who formed a cult which had never died." (*Complete Works* 246). In this passage, Lovecraft suggests the existence of monster-like alien creatures from outer space who lived long before any humans have existed. They talked to the first men through their dreams, and

so these first men formed a cult (or religion) around these Elder Things (or "Great Old Ones") whom they worshipped.

Furthermore, many postmodernist notions can be found in the *Never Ricking Morty* episode, especially since the focus is on blurring the lines between reality and fiction. The strategy used to achieve this is separating the reality inside the train from the reality outside it, which resembles postmodernist works, where sometimes "multiple narrative frames and styles that continually force the reader to reassess the truth of what is happening in the story" (Malpas 101) are used. Essentially, these multiple frames are employed to confuse the reader (or viewer, in the case of TV programmes) and make them question the reliability of the narrator or even their senses. This is evident in the fight scenes from the aforementioned episode, where every time a character is thrown out of the train window, they enter a different reality. For example, inside the train, Morty is the "real" Morty, but when his head smashes the window, he gets transported into a reality in which he breaks out of an egg inside a laboratory, the second time he is a soldier on a battlefield, etc. All these Mortys from parallel realities think their reality is the original one. To make things even more complicated, the train is first presented as a world in the game inside an arcade, the second time as a part of a training video for train cops (which they somehow leave through TV and enter the room where the training is held), and finally, as a toy train inside Rick and Morty's living room. All of this could in a way relate to Lovecraft's interdimensional travel, as in his short story *The Challenge from Beyond*, which revolves around a worm-like alien species that could transfer their consciousness across different galaxies while their bodies remained in place. In this scene, Lovecraft describes how this species occupies the bodies of its victims to explore their world:

> The investigator's mind would now occupy the strange machine while the captive mind occupied the interrogator's worm-like body. Then, in another interchange, the interrogator's mind would leap across boundless space to the captive's vacant and unconscious body on the trans-galactic world—animating the alien tenement as best it might, and exploring the alien world in the guise of one of its denizens. (Lovecraft et al.)

Even though he describes the possession and interchange of bodies between alien species, there is a motif of travel in-between worlds and even galaxies. The consciousness is the one that does the travelling and not the person as a whole. The focus is also put on the exploration of an alien planet in disguise as one of its inhabitants, which is in opposition to the situation in *Never Ricking Morty*, where the focus is on travel between different realities or parallel universes, and even between the different diegetic levels. The viewers, as well as the characters, are confused by what is happening: "It's enough to really make you question all of existence, isn't it?" ("Never Ricking Morty"). Here, a connection can even be made with Lovecraft's cosmicism, which is also present in *The Ricks Must Be Crazy*. On his way back to reality, Rick said to inhabitants of the microverse: "Nothing you

do matters. Your existence is a lie." ("The Ricks Must Be Crazy"). Lovecraftian anti-anthropocentric approach is best highlighted here, with which the insignificance of a man in the grand scheme of things is stated. Such an idea is described best in a passage from Lovecraft's *Beyond the Walls of Sleep*: "we are all roamers of vast spaces and travellers in many ages…You and I have drifted to the worlds that reel about the red Arcturus, and dwelt in the bodies of the insect-philosophers that crawl proudly over the fourth moon of Jupiter. How little does the earth-self know of life and its extent!" (*Complete Works* 19). Lovecraft associates humans with insects, therefore alluding to their insignificance. Moreover, he finds humans ignorant and oblivious to the complexity and grandeur of the universe and life in general. What else is postmodern about *Never Ricking Morty* is that the only way the duo can save the universe is by storytelling, which is when viewers witness a story-within-a-story type of situation. After the train derailed and the duo got out, they mentioned the coronavirus because of which they had to stay home and all they could do was shop.

This show employs mimesis frequently, which is evident here. McHale explains mimesis nicely: "For the real world to be reflected in the mirror of literary mimesis, the imitation must be distinguishable from the imitated…A mimetic relation is one of similarity, not *identity*, and similarity implies difference." (28). In other words, mimesis points to similarities between the fictional world and the real world, but also emphasizes their differences since the distinction between the two is crucial. As Hutcheon states, "fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded" (40). The emphasis is put on the process by which that reality, and, consequently, the work of art, are constructed. There is no realistic transposition of the real world into a work of art, but the reality serves only as a model based on which the author makes their picture of reality that may not correspond to the real world around them. This is precisely what the authors did when mentioning the coronavirus in the show. This marked the moment when, in Currie's words, "an internal boundary between extratextual reference to real life…signifies the artificiality of the fictional world while simultaneously offering its realistic referential possibilities." (4). By referencing the current situation in the world, the creators of the show are highlighting its fictionality, as well as showing that works of art are still based on the real world. Because of the current pandemic that the world has been going through, Lovecraft's worldview has found its way into fiction more than ever before. As Sederholm and Weinstock state: "Although our contemporary monsters may not resemble those Lovecraft imagination, we nevertheless live today with the very Lovecraftian awareness of the looming specter of a sudden apocalypse." (34). One can say that in the 21st century monsters come in different shapes – technology (primarily AI), coronavirus, global panic caused by the news, etc. What is still present, and Lovecraft describes it best, is the universal fear of the unknown, what the show is trying to prove with the strategies it uses to incorporate Lovecraftian and postmodernist elements into its episodes.

4. Conclusion

Based on the comparative analysis of two episodes of *Rick and Morty* and Lovecraft's multiple works, one can conclude that the show is Lovecraftian in every sense of the word. It successfully incorporates Lovecraftian ideas and worldview into its episodes in a humorous way and transfers them into the 21st century. Because of the current situation in the world marked by a global pandemic, Lovecraft's cosmic indifference evident in his misanthropic approach to man has been fundamental to the show. The direct reference to Lovecraft is apparent in the intertextual character, Cthulhu, in the title sequence of all four seasons. Moreover, since the main character in the show is a scientist who makes others question their existence and suffer an existential crisis, one might say that Lovecraft's view of science as a means of bringing destruction is present. However, not every show involving scientists or science is Lovecraftian. As one can see, multiple factors need to be present in order for a show to be classified as such. In one episode, a new religion resembling Lovecraft's worship of the Elder Things is created. The show takes Lovecraftian ideas to the next level and plays with cosmic fear in such a way that it creates either parallel universes or simulations within simulations with different alien species in various galaxies. The notion of the sublime is highlighted with the presence of Chinese-box worlds since it leaves the viewers (and characters) confused, and maybe even terrified, but also amused. In the show, a story within a story is also present since in one episode, the only way the duo can save the world is by storytelling. Intergalactic travel is present in both the show and Lovecraft but the only difference is that in Lovecraft, the travelling of consciousness and manipulation of time are possible, while in *Rick and Morty*, the duo travels in their bodies to different realities, planets, and even various diegetic levels. The artificiality of the show is evident in the duo's awareness of living in a fictional universe, but also in their referring to the real-world situation with the coronavirus. With this, the lines between fiction and reality become blurred. One can even refer to the coronavirus as a monster of the 21st century which awakens the cosmic fear present in Lovecraft's works.

End Notes

1 From the following pictures, one can see that the monster in Rick and Morty (1) was undoubtedly based on Lovecraft's Cthulhu (2): (1) https://www.express.co.uk/showbiz/tv-radio/1216561/Rick-and-Morty-characters-Why-is-the-Cthulhu-not-in-any-episodes (2) https://repository.library.brown.edu/studio/item/bdr:926697/

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04

Nadja Jukić

Femininity, Masculinity, and the Tomboy: Gender Behavior in Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

NADJA JUKIĆ
University of Ljubljana

Femininity, Masculinity, and the Tomboy: Gender Behavior in Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five*

The Famous Five book series is a staple of children's literature. Yet, there is a serious lack of academic criticism regarding these books. Somehow, Enid Blyton has mostly slipped through the cracks of contemporary gender studies in literature. It is my aim in this paper to compensate for this by examining gender behavior in the novels, focusing on the interplay between femininity and masculinity in the two female protagonists, Anne and George. Gender appears all-encompassing but can be analyzed methodically using various approaches within gender studies and feminist theory. Post-structuralist feminism deconstructs the notions of femininity and masculinity, which enables an exploration of how and why they are used in society. During the twenty-year period (1942-1962) in which Blyton was writing her series, femininity and domesticity were propagated as the ideal for women. This was done in order to reformulate British national identity: harmony between the genders metaphorically represented harmony in the nation. In the novels, this socio-political background is implicit but undeniably present. Gender behavior is only accepted and approved by others when it naturally follows from sex: girls are only allowed to be feminine and boys masculine. Therefore, Blyton subscribes to the essentialist understanding of sex and gender, which unites the two into an inseparable entity. The books are especially hard on the tomboy character, George, who is sometimes seen as an example of a subversive gender identity. I argue that this is certainly not the case, as George is repeatedly punished for her incorrect and inappropriate gender behavior.

KEYWORDS
femininity, masculinity, tomboy, gender studies, feminist theory, The Famous Five

Introduction

No literature is as powerful as children's literature. That is, children and young adults are remarkably impressionable, and literature can shape their opinions and beliefs in ways it cannot do later on in life. Part and parcel of children's literature is the construction of gender. No book can truly escape this topic, though it can place varying degrees of emphasis on it. A worldwide famous book series such as Enid Blyton's *The Famous Five* has influenced the interpretation of (in)appropriate gender behavior for hundreds of readers. Therefore, it is not only worthwhile but in fact necessary to analyze the novels' portrayal of gender.

The Famous Five book series, comprised of twenty-one installments, was published in England from 1942 to 1962. The series stretches over a twenty-year period of British history, from the height of World War II through the so-called post-war period and beyond. The books, however, are adventure stories for children and make no mention of their turbulent historical background. In each volume, four children (Julian, Dick, George, and Anne) and one dog (hence the famous *five*) embark on a new adventure with its own perils and outcomes. The fictional world created in the books seems separate, if not entirely disconnected, from its historical reality.

That is not to say, however, that the book series, and more importantly its portrayal of gender, are not profoundly influenced by the novels' socio-political background. This influence, which might seem invisible, is present in the form of "implicit ideology," that is, "in the form of assumed social structures and habits of thought" (McCallum and Stephens 360). It is precisely when a social theme is present but not mentioned explicitly that it can have a substantial effect on children: it seems familiar and ordinary, something that can be taken for granted (McCallum and Stephens 360).

For example, while gender is an important aspect in the relations between characters in *The Famous Five*, societal assumptions and rules regarding gender behavior are never brought to the forefront or questioned. Consequently, they are invisible and so appear omnipresent and natural. It is my aim in this paper to make these rules visible by analyzing gender behavior in the novels. I focus specifically on the two female characters, Anne and George, and how their appropriate or inappropriate gender behavior is connected to the socio-political context of the novels. I argue that the portrayal of the tomboy character, George, is far less subversive than it may appear at first sight.

The Construction of Gender

There is never an easy way to start with gender. As numerous critics have pointed out, gender permeates our society and everyday existence to the point

that it seems inescapable and ordinary (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1, Lorber 13). In other words, all of us have our own ideas about gender, including how it is constructed and how it plays out in society. Gender studies aim to provide a systematic analysis of gender in literature and beyond. Even within this academic field, however, there are various and even conflicting approaches. Toril Moi summarizes Julia Kristeva's description of three types of feminism, which correspond to different approaches within gender studies:

> (1) Women demand equal access to the symbolic order. Liberal feminism. Equality.
> (2) Women reject the male symbolic order in the name of difference. Radical feminism. Femininity extolled.
> (3) Women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical. (Moi 128)

While all three types listed here would be necessary for a transformation of society in a truly feminist direction, both Kristeva and Moi emphasize the downsides of liberal and radical feminism (Moi 128-129). Only the third approach, also known as post-structural or deconstructive feminism, questions the very nature and construction of binary categories such as masculinity and femininity (Moi 128). In order to do so, a post-structural analysis begins with the difference between sex and gender.

It is commonly accepted within gender studies that sex is of biological and gender of cultural origin. In other words, sex is something we are born with, but gender is something we learn and acquire over time with the help of parents, peers, and the media (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 8, Lorber 17). On the other hand, an essentialist interpretation characteristic of liberal and radical feminism conflates sex and gender to a certain extent: it posits that men and women have *essential* or inherent characteristics that distinguish one sex from the other, which explains why different genders are necessary (Eckert and McConnel 22). For example, essentialist approaches might claim female and feminine mean the same thing or follow from one another naturally, but post-structuralist analyses will not (Moi 123).

When femininity and masculinity are seen as independent of sex, they can be understood "as a set of culturally defined characteristics" (Moi 117). That means each entails a list f characteristics that are then ascribed to that concept. Since these characteristics are always the opposite of one another, in other words "binary oppositions" (Moi 124), we refer to them as gender binaries. For example, masculinity equals activity, strength, courage, virility, and rationality, while femininity is passivity, weakness, timidity, submission, and irrationality (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 22). Moi, as well as many others, point out that there can be no true equality within gender binaries, since one concept is always the more valuable and more valued of the two, as is the case with the

characteristics ascribed to masculinity (124). Consequently, when masculinity is seen as a biological result of being male, and femininity of being female, men are understood as superior to women.

(In)Appropriate Gender Behavior

The strong ties between sex and gender are especially obvious if we consider the idea of appropriate and inappropriate gender behavior. A renowned gender theorist, Judith Butler, problematizes the "*unity* of experience" and "casual relation" that ties together "sex, gender, and desire" (*Gender Trouble* 22). She proposes a rethinking of gender construction that reimagines gender as an ongoing process rather than a "seemingly seamless identity" ("Performative Acts" 520). Not only does Butler reject any essentialist interpretation of gender, she goes one step further by claiming that gender is "performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (*Gender Trouble* 25). Put plainly, it is not that gender creates *us*, it is *us* who create gender. Butler links gender to "acts:" we are like actors acting out our gender; gender is a performance ("Performative Acts" 522). Similarly, Judith Lorber refers to masculinity and femininity as a "social script" (27).

What happens if we do not stick to this script, or if we do not act out our gender appropriately? When women are supposed to be inherently feminine and men masculine, those who cross these rigid boundaries become examples of "incoherent" identities (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 17). In other words, women who are masculine and men who are feminine cannot and are not allowed to exist, because they upset the supposedly natural connection between sex and gender. This is why, Butler goes on, "those who fail to do their gender right are regularly punished" ("Performative Acts" 522). In this context, doing our gender right means acting out the right social script: for a woman, this would mean acting out the characteristics associated with femininity. If she acts out masculine characteristics instead, she is doing her gender wrong, and is likely to be punished for it in some way. For example, she might be ridiculed, shunned, or even physically assaulted. Even if we create gender ourselves, we are still only allowed to perform the gender attributed to us on the basis of our sex.

Gender and Society

There are reasons why these constraints are placed on gender behavior. Gender does not exist in a vacuum: the reasons *why* we are allowed to perform one gender and not the other lie in the status of gender as "a social institution" (Lorber 30). As such, Lorber asserts, gender "has social functions and a social history … It is produced and maintained by identifiable social processes and built into the general social structure and individual identities deliberately and

purposefully" (35). In other words, Lorber stresses the societal function and social importance of gender. The specifics – for what purpose gender is used and why – change according to time and place. Nevertheless, as long as gender is of use in a particular society, there will exist rules, written or unwritten, concerning how it should be performed.

These rules regulating gender behavior depend on what West and Zimmerman call "institutional arrangements" (qtd. in Lorber 25). To uncover how these institutional arrangements affect gender in *The Famous Five*, gender behavior in these novels must be analyzed in the context of their socio-political background. The Second World War is usually hailed as a time of women's emancipation. It is true that more women entered the workforce during this period than between the wars or in World War I (Ward 47). While this might have been accepted behavior in a time of crisis, the same cannot be said for the post-war period. Quite the opposite: "The 1950s saw an attempt to re-establish domesticity as women's primary occupation" (Ward 50).

The new emphasis on women's domesticity was intentional and meaningful. Its primary aim was to "restructure British national identity" (Ward 50). This project relied on women reverting to femininity, which in this case entailed becoming obedient housewives who take care of household duties and their family. The number of women entering the workforce threatened the national project, so the role of literature and other media like women's magazines became to propagate the appeal of domesticity and femininity for women (Ward 50). Paul Ward explains how the nation was reconstructed as a family unit: "Masculinity and femininity were 'restored' in harmony within the home, in turn aiding national unity" (Ward 51). The harmony created by the gender binary signaled that the nation, too, was a harmonious unit. National identity and unity were becoming increasingly significant after the two World Wars as Britain was facing migrations from parts of the former British Empire (Ward 51).

Gender Relations in *The Famous Five*

The Famous Five series might make no explicit reference to its socio-political background, but the relationship between the two most important adult characters, George's parents Fanny and Quentin, perfectly symbolizes the kind of harmony in the home Britain was striving for at the time. This is how the readers are first introduced to Uncle Quentin (as he is called by the other children who are all George's cousins): "He was a very tall, frowning man, a clever scientist who spent all his time studying" (Blyton, *Treasure Island* 5). He is the perfect example of masculinity: strong, intellectual, and rational. His wife, on the other hand, gardens, cooks and prepares meals, washes up, and takes care of the children. She is the role model of the caring and dutiful housewife.

Family life revolves around Uncle Quentin and his desires and needs; most frequently, he demands that the children be silent so that he can work in peace. His somewhat violent outbursts when the children are not quiet are approvingly reframed and normalized: he is just a fierce man and his wife warns the children that he should not be interrupted while doing "such important work" (Blyton, *Demon's Rocks* 19). His wife's concerns, on the other hand, are petty and unimportant to him: he makes it clear, on numerous occasions, that domestic affairs do not concern him (Blyton, *Demon's Rocks* 4). Their relationship, then, is built on clear gender binaries as well as patriarchal hierarchies. Not only are their personalities and activities presented as being naturally different, they are also *valued* differently.

Similar gender binaries and hierarchies are visible within the children's group. The eldest, Julian, is strong, reasonable, inventive, and active. He is responsible for the others and acts as their leader, which everyone around them, including the other children, readily recognizes (Poynter 89). His younger brother, Dick, is more or less his exact copy, and slowly becomes the "second-lead" as the book series progresses (Poynter 90). George and Anne, the two girls who will be analyzed separately, can participate in the action if they wish, but cannot truly take initiative.

Appropriate Gender Behavior: Anne

Anne's behavior perfectly aligns with all the characteristics associated with femininity. She is presented as timid, passive, weak, and irrational (Poynter 90). Often, she is the only member of the group who is frightened and does not want to participate in the action. When she does, she needs reassurance and comforting: "Anne slipped her arm through Julian's. She felt rather small and scared" (Blyton, *Treasure Island* 54). Her ideas and feelings are regularly dismissed or even elicit derogatory responses from others. When Anne confesses she is scared that the lighthouse they are staying at will get blown away in the storm, Julian explicitly labels her fears as irrational: "Dear Anne, use your common sense!" (Blyton, *Demon's Rock*s 128).

If Anne is either dismissed, rejected, or put down when she tentatively tries to engage in the action, the situation is quite the opposite when it comes to her fondness for domestic duties. Anne is very committed to "'playing house,'" which includes cooking, cleaning, and preparing the food for others (Blyton, *Camp* 65). As a consequence, she increasingly misses out on exciting adventures, but seems happy with her newfound role. The young girl's preference for domesticity is approved and even praised by others:

> "What are we going to have?" "We've unpacked some bacon rashers and tomatoes," said Anne, who loved cooking. … "I say, did we pack a frying-pan?" "Yes. I packed

> it myself," said Anne. "Do go and bathe if you're going to. Breakfast will be ready before you are!" … Anne had fried big rounds of bread in the fat, *and the boys told her she was the best cook in the world. She was very pleased*. (Blyton, *Camp* 25; emphasis added)

It is important to note that Anne's choice of cooking over adventures is not, in fact, simply a matter of personal preference. Liesel Coetzee claims that "even though [Anne] appears to conform to dominant discourses that restrict the role and behaviour of women, Anne is emancipated because she uses her freedom to choose" (15). This type of liberal feminist reading renders the societal function of gender invisible. It stresses the notion of personal freedom without taking the socio-political importance of gender behavior into account. Even Anne herself recognizes that domestic activities are gendered. She ties housekeeping duties explicitly to women and femininity when she says: "I don't expect boys to tidy up and cook … but George ought to because she's a girl" (Blyton, *Wonderful Time* 25).

Anne clearly understands that housekeeping is a responsibility assigned to women; she might even believe women are inherently better at it than men. When she plays at being a housewife for the group, she is emulating the behavior of adult women around her. At a time when domesticity was advocated as women's primary goal in life, this was seen as gender-appropriate behavior. Being a good *housewife* equaled being a good *woman*, that is, performing femininity correctly. Therefore, when Anne is participating in gender-appropriate activities, she is doing her gender correctly and is praised for it. Sadly, whether or not she truly enjoys cooking is insignificant as long as this activity is intrinsically linked to gender and in turn socio-political circumstances.

Inappropriate Gender Behavior: George (the Tomboy Character)

While Anne is the epitome of femininity, George's character is much more ambiguous. George is a tomboy: she has short hair, does not dress like a girl, refuses to be called by her given name (Georgina), and overall does not care about any feminine toys or activities (Blyton, *Treasure Island* 16). Jack Halberstam describes tomboyism as "an extended childhood period of female masculinity" (5). Since female masculinity refers to masculinity present in a female body, it breaks the seemingly natural continuity between sex and gender (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 17). A surface level reading might interpret the inclusion of such a character as subversive in and of itself. Whether this character will truly be subversive, however, depends on the way it is treated in the narrative.

Halberstam explains how tomboyism usually appears quite harmless: it "tends to be associated with a 'natural' desire for greater freedoms and mobilities enjoyed by boys" (6). George, for example, prefers climbing, swimming, and

sailing to playing with dolls or dressing up (Blyton, *Treasure Island* 17). Additionally, masculinity is more highly valued than femininity, which means aspiring to be masculine is understandable and might even be presented as desirable (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 24). But such desires are not without their limits: when tomboyism becomes a sign of "extreme male identification," tomboys are punished (Halberstam 6). Identifying as a boy may include dressing up exclusively in masculine clothing and refusing to be called by a feminine name (Halberstam 6). These tomboys are on the verge of inappropriate gender behavior, and, as Butler points out, "[p]erforming one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect" (Butler, "Performative Acts" 528).

Overtly, George's masculinity is invalidated and ridiculed by other characters, who seem to acknowledge it only to please or entertain her. After the two get in a minor argument, Anne explicitly tells George that her brothers Julian and Dick are "real boys, not *pretend* boys, like you" (Blyton, *Treasure Island* 16; emphasis added). George's father, Quentin, calls her *Georgina* when he is angry or displeased with her and *George* when he is proud of her (Blyton, *Treasure Island* 159). George is often mistaken for a boy because of her masculine appearance. When this happens in front of the group and George feels satisfied, this is how Dick replies: "'You only liked him because he was ass enough to think you were a boy … I don't believe that boy thought you were a boy at all. He was just sucking up to you. He must have heard how much you like *playing at being what you aren't.*'" (Blyton, *Kirrin Island Again* 56; emphasis added)

George is also punished for her gender transgressions in subtler and more complex ways. Elizabeth Poynter points out how George's behavior and personality are frequently described with negative adjectives and adverbs (90). Consider how Aunt Fanny first describes her to Anne: "George hates being a girl, and we have to call her George, as if she was a boy … [t]he *naughty* girl won't reply if we call her Georgina" (Blyton, *Treasure Island* 13; emphasis added). The word *naughty* implies misbehavior. George is presented as stubborn and irritable, and her incorrect gender behavior as troublesome and childish (Poynter 89).

An encounter between George and Mr. Roland, the children's tutor in F*ive Go Adventuring Again*, also encourages a negative reading of George's female masculinity. Mr. Roland, who despises dogs, insults George's dog Timmy in front of her, and George reacts strongly and emotionally (19). Immediately, her response is related to her gender behavior. Mr. Roland refuses to call her George and explains to her cousins that "Georgina has got to be *sensible*, as you three are" (19, emphasis added). By using the word *sensible*, Mr. Roland suggests that George's misbehavior extends to her gender: she is being unreasonable in both her general and her gender behavior. Blyton attributes the same line of thought to Dick and Julian, who are embarrassed thinking of their "silly and difficult" cousin George (19).

Although the group then ostracizes her, George does not give in to the pressure. She confides in Dick, admitting that their behavior is hurting her, and that she believes Mr Roland is a bad person (which is true, as he ends up being the main villain of the novel). Dick, however, sides with Mr Roland: "'You're silly, George … You haven't really got a Feeling – it's only that Mr Roland will keep calling you Georgina and *putting you in your place*, and that he doesn't like Tim. I dare say he can't help disliking dogs'" (26, emphasis added). Again, the situation is unequivocally linked to George's incorrect gender behavior. Mr. Roland is *putting George in her place* by refusing to comply with her wish to be called by a masculine name. Therefore, masculinity is not George's rightful place: she is performing her gender wrong.

In light of all this, it is difficult to imagine how Coetzee can read George's character as a plausible, positive alternative for girls who do not wish to be feminine (2-3). George is continuously and consistently punished for her gender behavior by both adults and her friends. Additionally, what Coetzee reads as evidence of Blyton's sexism, namely her portrayal of boys as superior to girls, is in fact the juxtaposition between masculinity and femininity (2-3). Blyton complies with the essentialist notion of gender as a natural consequence of sex. Or, as Julian clarifies to George: "You may look like a boy and behave like a boy, but you're a girl all the same" (Blyton, *Hike Together* 29). In other words, if George is capable of masculine tasks and activities and is praised for them, it is only because she is acting out masculinity, not because this is a part of her intrinsic abilities as claimed by Coetzee (9-10). Her female masculinity is just a pretense and confirms that Blyton entirely complied with the view of gender-appropriate behavior promoted by her socio-political background.

Conclusion

Even if gender behavior is a performance, we must learn to perform our gender correctly. For Blyton, however, gender is only a pretense when it is done incorrectly: for boys, masculinity is an innate ability, but for girls it is only a fiction. Throughout the course of the series, two clear patterns emerge: the boys are presented as the leaders who are rational, sensible, imaginative, and active, while the girls are sensitive, intuitive, emotional, and irrational. It is made obvious which of the two (masculinity or femininity) is more highly valued, as well as who are the only ones who are allowed to act it out. Blyton's novels offer no radical rethinking and reimagining of gender, not even when it comes to her tomboy character, George.

There is another way of looking at this. Coetzee minimizes Blyton's role and involvement in perpetuating gender stereotypes by claiming Blyton was simply appealing to her audience and what they expected of her character's gender

behavior in order to sell more novels for her own financial gain (6). This argument could be applied to any author, or in fact any person who has done something potentially harmful to others. How many young girls and tomboys read these novels and were discouraged from pursuing their own sense of gender identity? We will never know, but if we do not hold authors accountable for their writing, the possibility of genuinely subversive literature will diminish and soon cease to exist.

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05

Iva Kurtović

Gender and Class in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

IVA KURTOVIĆ
University of Zagreb

Gender and Class in George Bernard Shaw's *Pygmalion*

George Bernard Shaw's play *Pygmalion* depicts a young flower girl's linguistic and sartorial transformation into a fake duchess under the tutelage of a well-off phonetician. Eliza Doolittle's and Henry Higgins's clashing personalities and humorous misunderstandings however point to wider societal forces – that of gender and class. The circumstances of their meeting and their initial interactions serve as clear illustrations of their disparate levels of education, sophistication and social capital. Eliza Doolittle's position as a young working-class woman makes her uniquely vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of middle-class men, and while Shaw does not frame Higgins as predatory, he nevertheless emphasizes Eliza's anxieties and worries. Even though Higgins's clear lack of interest or ill-intent enables the readers to laugh at Eliza's fear for her virtue, as her transformation progresses, the untenability of her new social position becomes glaringly obvious. Higgins may have corrected Eliza's speech and provided her with fashionable clothes, but he has no interest in concerning himself with her future, now that she is too genteel to work as a flower girl, but too poor to truly ascend to a higher class. This lack of consideration for Eliza's prospects can be interpreted as a sign of Higgins's uncaring character, but is also a symptom of wider societal obstacles facing women trying to find their place in the world. Eliza manages to triumph and carve a space for herself by integrating her two identities, in the end thriving as an amalgam of the duchess Higgins presented her as and the flower girl she once was.

KEYWORDS
***Pygmalion*, G. B. Shaw, gender, class**

In the preface to his play *Pygmalion* (titled "A Professor of Phonetics") George Bernard Shaw writes at length about the recent history and contemporary state of phonetics, as well as his ties to various phoneticians, concluding that his play is very successful and yet "so intensely and deliberately didactic, and its subject is esteemed so dry, that I delight in throwing it at the heads of the wiseacres who repeat the parrot cry that art should never be didactic" (6). However, in the decades since the work was first staged, many critics have pointed out that even if *Pygmalion* is a didactic play, what it is trying to impress on the viewers is hardly the intricacies of phonetics. For instance, Milton Crane claims that "[v]irtually nowhere in *Pygmalion* do the characters discuss phonetics, despite Shaw's specific statement that phonetics is the subject of the play" (882). Louis Crompton also advocates this view, characterizing "Preface to *Pygmalion*" as "somewhat misleading" (73) and insisting that "for all the shoptalk about phonology, it is possible with a little analysis to see that it is really manners and not speech patterns that underlie the character contrasts in *Pygmalion*, accents being, so to speak, merely their outer clothing" (74). Indeed, one could go so far as to claim that if accents are "merely the outer clothing" of manners, then even manners themselves are only the external manifestation of deeper societal forces: that of class and gender. These underlying thematic concerns are perhaps best encapsulated in the play's two main characters, Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins, as their tumultuous relationship highlights the different privileges (or lack thereof) they either already have (in the case of Higgins) or wish to gain access to (Eliza). Therefore, the aim of this paper is to use Eliza's transformation from flower girl to artificial duchess as a starting point for a discussion of Shaw's approach to gender and class in *Pygmalion*.

From the first act of the play, Shaw establishes Eliza and Higgins as polar opposites (L. Chen 41), with Higgins clearly established as the one with more power and social capital, as well as more common sense, if not politeness and good manners (Crompton 76). While many of the members of the assembled crowd stand out in their own ways (for example, even when represented only with the moniker "The Daughter", Clara Eynsford Hill stands out right from the onset as a brilliant parody of bourgeois crassness), Eliza's behaviour functions in direct contrast to Higgins's calm and commanding manner. For instance, after she manages to extract three halfpence from Colonel Pickering (at that point known only as "The Gentleman"), Eliza has the following reaction to a bystander's warning:

> THE BYSTANDER. [*to the girl*] You be careful: give him a flower for it. There's a bloke here behind taking down every blessed word you're saying. [*All turn to the man who is taking notes*].
>
> THE FLOWER GIRL. [*springing up terrified*] I ain't done nothing wrong by speaking to the gentleman. I've a right to sell flowers if I keep off the kerb. [*Hysterically*] I'm a respectable girl: so help me, I never spoke to him except to ask him to

> buy a flower off me. [*General hubbub, mostly sympathetic to the flower girl, but deprecating her excessive sensibility. Cries of Don't start hollerin. Who's hurting you? Nobody's going to touch you. What's the good of fussing? Steady on. Easy, easy, etc., come from the elderly staid spectators, who pat her comfortingly. Less patient ones bid her shut her head, or ask her roughly what is wrong with her.* …] Oh, sir, don't let him charge me. You dunno what it means to me. They'll take away my character and drive me on the streets for speaking to gentlemen. They—
>
> THE NOTE TAKER. [*coming forward on her right, the rest crowding after him*] There, there, there, there! Who's hurting you, you silly girl? What do you take me for? (Shaw 11)

Her panicked reaction seems out of proportion with the gravity of the situation. Indeed, a similar occurrence is repeated again in Act Two, when Eliza first comes into Higgins's home in order to purchase elocution lessons, and Higgins decides she ought to become his live-in experiment:

> HIGGINS. [*storming on*] Take all her clothes off and burn them. Ring up Whiteley or somebody for new ones. Wrap her up in brown paper till they come.
>
> LIZA. You're no gentleman, you're not, to talk of such things. I'm a good girl, I am; and I know what the like of you are, I do.
>
> HIGGINS. We want none of your Lisson Grove prudery here, young woman. You've got to learn to behave like a duchess. Take her away, Mrs. Pearce. If she gives you any trouble wallop her.
>
> LIZA. [*springing up and running between Pickering and Mrs. Pearce for protection*] No! I'll call the police, I will. (Shaw 24)

These moments of Eliza's hysterical fear are seemingly played for comedy, and to point to the fact that, at this stage of the play, she has very little awareness as to what is going on around her. However, there is a sinister undertone to them, as Eliza's worries mirror the threats many working-class women faced at the time. Derek John McGovern insists on the fact that *Pygmalion* showcases not only Shaw's socialist leanings, but also his feminist attitudes, as it insists on the image of "working-class *women* as especially downtrodden" (73, emphasis in the original text). Eliza's protestations about being "a good girl" and "having her character taken" therefore appear over-exaggerated in the context of her dealings with Higgins and Pickering (who show no signs of bad intentions or even the slightest sexual interest in her), but echo broader concerns. In her essay "Parodying the £5 Virgin", Celia Marshik writes extensively on the way Shaw references and undermines the contemporary discourse of sexual purity. When analysing Higgins's offer to Eliza to come live with him and Pickering while he trains her to sound like a duchess,

Marshik urges the readers to look beneath the surface of the situation and its great comedic timing. Rather, we are asked to see Higgins's offer as it might have appeared to an inexperienced working-class girl who has been brought up on fears of sexual exploitation by rich men.

> If Higgins dismisses Eliza's fears, *Pygmalion* continues to play with the unstable opposition between reformers and sexual predators. Higgins's proposal to 'take [Eliza] out of the gutter and dress [her] beautifully and make a lady of [her]' mimics the kind of offer a rake would make to a potential mistress. … In a society where sex is a working-class woman's most valuable commodity, a middle-class man's philanthropic interest in an Eliza Doolittle is vexed by her sexual availability and vulnerability. (Marshik 328)

Here it is crucial to observe the added level of anxiety class lends to the already problematic idea of women's sexual purity, as it is the intersection of these two social categories that elicits ideas of possible violation and exploitation. Even though Eliza's father is openly stated to be prone to changing sexual partners (along with other vices, such as drinking and extorting money), he is not depicted as a potential threat to the women he encounters. Rather, he is presented as a stereotype of the "undeserving poor" (Shaw 37). As Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja states, "Eliza's dustman father is poor, dirty, a drunkard, generally unwilling to engage in any honest work (he attempts to pimp Eliza to Higgins for a five-pound note). The name ''Doolittle'' itself connotes the laziness attributed … to the poor" (121). While his stereotyped faults are given a humorous subversion through his later inheritance and unwilling entry into the bourgeoisie, Shaw never adds seduction to his list of sins. Rather, in keeping with the contemporary debates on the dangers threatening working-class women's purity, the role of potential predator is allotted (if in an extremely comedic way) to Higgins.

All this is not to suggest that Shaw presents women's sexuality and their economic position as fraught with difficulties *only* if they are working-class, and *only* if they are threatened (or afraid of being threatened) by lecherous middle-class men. On the contrary, while Eliza's initial uneasiness with Hastings and Pickering is quickly dismissed as a result of her "Lisson Grove prudery" (Shaw 24), the potential problems stemming from her new position as a penniless "duchess" are the driving force behind the dramatic conflict of the play. Although mostly taking place in Acts IV and V, Eliza's altercation with Higgins is hinted at in Act III, when they visit his mother for her at-home day. After they successfully pass Eliza off as a lady in front of the Eynsford Hills, Higgins and Pickering are berated by Mrs. Higgins for failing to consider "the problem of what is to be done with [Eliza] afterwards" (Shaw 55):

> HIGGINS. I don't see anything in that. She can go her own way, with all the advantages I have given her.

> MRS. HIGGINS. The advantages of that poor woman who was here just now! The manners and habits that disqualify a fine lady from earning her own living without giving her a fine lady's income! Is that what you mean?
>
> PICKERING. [*indulgently, being rather bored*] Oh, that will be all right, Mrs. Higgins. [*He rises to go*].
>
> HIGGINS. [*rising also*] We'll find her some light employment. (Shaw 55-56)

Even though they deny the accusation of being "a pretty pair of babies, playing with [their] live doll" (Shaw 54), Higgins and Pickering genuinely do not seem to even contemplate the fact that by "transforming" her into a lady, they have irreversibly changed Eliza's life (and, as Mrs. Higgins implies, not necessarily for the better).

This idea of a social, linguistic, and sartorial transformation executed so fortuitously and easily (for, as Higgins and Pickering cannot help but brag to Mrs. Higgins, Eliza is *such* an accomplished pupil) inevitably diverts attention away from the play's titular literary palimpsest and calls to mind the story of Cinderella. For instance, Norbert F. O'Donnell writes of Eliza's "Cinderella-like transformation" which "[provides] the chief dramatic impact of *Pygmalion*" (7). But instead of a fairy godmother, there are two middle-aged, middle-class bachelors – "teaching Eliza, dressing Eliza, inventing new Elizas" (Shaw 54) – all the while never really considering her future after she has ceased to be a source of entertainment and pleasure for them. That is why the resolution of the play begins with Eliza's altercation with Higgins in Act IV. As Charles A. Berst points out when describing the specific setting in the beginning of Act IV, "Shaw evokes a fairy-tale association as the clock on Higgins's mantlepiece strikes twelve… Just as the ball is over at midnight for Cinderella, so it is for Eliza." (qtd. in McGovern 81-82). As they begin quarrelling in earnest, Eliza even throws Higgins's slippers at him, as a sign of complete disavowal of the mere possibility of a fairy-tale ending (McGovern 82).

Fairy-tales, after all, usually require a prince – and Higgins is in no way a suitable candidate for the role. The play provides the reader with the following description of his character:

> He is of the energetic, scientific type, heartily, even violently interested in everything that can be studied as a scientific subject, and careless about himself and other people, including their feelings. He is, in fact, but for his years and size, rather like a very impetuous baby 'taking notice' eagerly and loudly, and requiring almost as much watching to keep him out of unintended mischief. His manner varies from genial bullying when he is in a good humor to stormy petulance when anything goes wrong; but he is so entirely frank and void of malice that he remains likeable even in his least reasonable moments. (Shaw 19)

Not only are "his behaviour and language are often in conflict with the politeness norms set by [his] class" (Do and Nguyen 40), but Higgins is also "a double character … spiritually a dominant giant, but emotionally and psychologically a spoilt child" (H. Chen 340). Even if his rudeness and immaturity did not constitute an obstacle for the match – for he is, after all, egalitarian in his verbal abuse, treating a duchess as he would a flower girl (Shaw 77) – there are other valid concerns. Crompton, for instance, reminds the reader of something the play made clear from the onset – "Higgins lacks not only the personal tenderness Eliza craves but even the tact necessary to avoid hurting her repeatedly" (80). This lack of care is partially due to his personal idiosyncrasies, which leave him looking far worse off when compared to a genuinely amiable character, such as his close friend Colonel Pickering. However, one might claim that what is expressed through Higgins's callousness is not simply a particular man's insensitivity, but the deeper, structural connectedness of money, class and gender as obstacles on Eliza's path to independent selfhood.

After Eliza, Higgins and Pickering have come home from the ambassador's garden party in Act IV and the men have congratulated themselves (but, significantly, not Eliza) on their success, Eliza confronts Higgins about his lack of tact and care towards her, making him aware of her very realistic existential fears ("LIZA. [*pulling herself together in desperation*] What am I fit for? What have you left me fit for? Where am I to go? What am I to do? What's to become of me?" (Shaw 61)). Where Eliza's qualms about Higgins's potential nefarious intentions were treated as comic relief in the earlier acts, her worries about her future are presented as completely reasonable. As Mugglestone explains,

> [i]n effect, once Higgins's bet is completed, Eliza belongs nowhere; no longer possessing her 'kerbstone English' she is ill-equipped to return to the gutter, and though possessing in abundance the social markers of a 'lady', she lacks the financial means to give them social reality. (383)

Higgins, however, does not really have an answer for her, instead only making her feel worse with his tactless disregard of the gravity of her predicament:

> HIGGINS. [*enlightened, but not at all impressed*] Oh, that's what's worrying you, is it? [*He thrusts his hands into his pockets, and walks about in his usual manner, rattling the contents of his pockets, as if condescending to a trivial subject out of pure kindness*]. I shouldn't bother about it if I were you. I should imagine you won't have much difficulty in settling yourself, somewhere or other, though I hadn't quite realized that you were going away. [*She looks quickly at him: he does not look at her, but examines the dessert stand on the piano and decides that he will eat an apple*]. You might marry, you know. [*He bites a large piece out of the apple, and munches it noisily*]. You see, Eliza, all men are not confirmed old bachelors like me and the Colonel. Most men are the marrying sort (poor devils!); and you're not bad-looking; it's quite a pleasure to look at you sometimes—not now, of course,

> because you're crying and looking as ugly as the very devil; but when you're all right and quite yourself, you're what I should call attractive. That is, to the people in the marrying line, you understand. You go to bed and have a good nice rest; and then get up and look at yourself in the glass; and you won't feel so cheap.
>
> *Eliza again looks at him, speechless, and does not stir.*
>
> *The look is quite lost on him: he eats his apple with a dreamy expression of happiness, as it is quite a good one.*
>
> HIGGINS. [*a genial afterthought occurring to him*] I daresay my mother could find some chap or other who would do very well—
>
> LIZA. We were above that at the corner of Tottenham Court Road.
>
> HIGGINS. [*waking up*] What do you mean?
>
> LIZA. I sold flowers. I didn't sell myself. Now you've made a lady of me I'm not fit to sell anything else. I wish you'd left me where you found me. (Shaw 61)

If the idea that a middle-class man would have singled her out to be seduced and defiled while she was grubby, wailing flower girl was presented as ridiculous, the notion of a beautiful, accomplished Eliza being expected to trade herself for financial security is portrayed as far grimmer, for being all the more realistic. Higgins, "rattling the contents of his pockets, as if condescending to a trivial subject out of pure kindness" (Shaw 61), serves to highlight many of the frustrating aspects of Eliza's dire situation. He has money and security, while she has none; he is in the position to condescend to her existential struggle as if it were a trivial subject, while she must decide whether to give in to the social system that would have her sell all her hard-learned new skills (and, needless to say, her virginity) to the highest bidder. "The notion of Eliza as tradeable property" (McGovern 74) does not even strike Higgins as something pernicious, because it is simply the way things have always been. He is aware that "middle-class marriage is a *bargain* which enables husbands and wives to exact reluctant favors from one another" (O'Donnell 8, emphasis mine). The reader is reminded of Eliza's father proselytizing against "middle class morality" (Shaw 37) while trying to sell Eliza for 5 pounds – Alfred Doolittle is attempting to do what countless fathers have done, only without the social graces afforded by a middle-class education and mindset. This is why Eliza immediately sees Higgins's suggestion for what it is: the same paternalistic posturing her father attempted two acts ago, now given higher stakes (marriage instead of life as a mistress) by a loftier man. This is also why, after her father has unexpectedly gotten wealthy in Act V, she wishes her old life back:

> LIZA. Oh! if I only COULD go back to my flower basket! I should be independent of both you and father and all the world! Why did you take my independence from me? Why did I give it up? I'm a slave now, for all my fine clothes. (Shaw 79)

She is a slave because she cannot decide her own fate, and she cannot decide her own fate because she cannot work for a living. Rather, she is expected to live off the benevolence of either a husband, her father, or one of her benefactors, "to become a commodity among wealthier men" (Bohman-Kalaja 126). In the words of Robert Harvey,

> Eliza, having freed herself from the dialect chains that kept her in the gutter, finds herself shackled again by a new variation of the same middle-class morality: a respectable lady doesn't work for a living – she marries for her means of support. (1237)

Shaw's socialist feminist attitudes (McGovern 7), however, ensure that *Pygmalion* neither celebrates her former life in the slums, in which she had no education or power (Pirnajmuddin and Arani 148), nor depict her new status as aspirational. Rather, she is presented as between a rock and a hard place – if she is now better off for not having to fend for herself in a precarious economic position with little protections, her feelings of self-reliance and independence have been completely nullified by the social expectations of bourgeois womanhood. O'Donnell explicitly links the predicament Eliza has found herself in with Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, drawing a parallel between Eliza's secretarial services and eagerness to please with Nora's "'repertory of 'tricks' - dancing, dressing up, making Torvald comfortable" (8). Although Shaw is less explicit about it than Ibsen, O'Donnell firmly believes that "his story of the metamorphoses of Eliza cannot be fully understood unless one realizes that her final escape is from a 'doll's house' which she herself attempts to build" (8).

The protagonists' final confrontation in Act V compounds all of these thematic problems and makes them crystalize into a coherent image: that of Eliza finally managing to stand her ground. As Li-hua Chen sardonically points out, "the play is not only the creation of a woman for man's preference, but also the creation of a soul for man's admiration and respect" (42). By the end of the final act, Eliza has realized that she is just as competent, if not more so, than Higgins, and this in turn makes her former teacher finally appreciate her.

> LIZA . … Aha! Now I know how to deal with you. What a fool I was not to think of it before! You can't take away the knowledge you gave me. You said I had a finer ear than you. And I can be civil and kind to people, which is more than you can. Aha! That's done you, Henry Higgins, it has. Now I don't care that [*snapping her fingers*] for your bullying and your big talk. I'll advertize it in the papers that your duchess is only a flower girl that you taught, and that she'll teach anybody to be a duchess just the same in six months for a thousand guineas. Oh, when I think of myself

> crawling under your feet and being trampled on and called names, when all the time I had only to lift up my finger to be as good as you, I could just kick myself.
>
> HIGGINS. [*wondering at her*] You damned impudent slut, you! But it's better than snivelling; better than fetching slippers and finding spectacles, isn't it? [Rising] By George, Eliza, I said I'd make a woman of you; and I have. I like you like this.
>
> LIZA. Yes: you turn round and make up to me now that I'm not afraid of you, and can do without you.
>
> HIGGINS. Of course I do, you little fool. Five minutes ago you were like a millstone round my neck. Now you're a tower of strength: a consort battleship. You and I and Pickering will be three old bachelors together instead of only two men and a silly girl. (Shaw 82)

Even as he observes "Eliza's self-consciousness and linguistic competence [become] the sources of her power" (Pirnajmuddin and Arani 150), Higgins still struggles to understand what it is that Eliza wants. Throughout their argument in the final two acts, what she had been demanding was not only his respect, but his affection – for him to see her as she is, both a flower girl and a duchess, and still appreciate her. Higgins's highest compliment, however, is illustrative of just how much he does not understand her. No longer carelessly proposing to marry her off to secure her future, he now suggests she should stay with him and Pickering, so the three of them can be "three old bachelors together instead of only two men and a silly girl" (Shaw 82). This cannot appease Eliza, as it merely trades one category society has put her in by another. Born a working-class woman and educated in middle-class mannerisms and habits, Higgins would now bestow another, by far most superior life on her: that of a leisurely gentleman. As Vicki Kennell points out, it is precisely these one-sided formations of identity that Shaw is denouncing in *Pygmalion*:

> The central core of Shaw's *Pygmalion* project is this tension between the fiction of reality and the fiction of the fictive. As far as Higgins is concerned, Eliza's 'reality' is merely her voice – initially 'guttersnipe,' eventually 'duchess' – a diametrically opposed duality. Yet Shaw ensures that readers see the error of this viewpoint by having the socially accomplished Eliza revert to guttersnipe speech in moments of stress or excitement. … The duchess 'self' is thus only one of the assorted collections of stories that individuals, such as Eliza, can tell about themselves, or that others can tell about them. Eliza's 'reality' is Shaw's postscript - marriage to Freddy, flower shop, and all. Her "fiction" involves the entire collection of personae she has inhabited, whether or not they occupied legitimate social space. Thus Shaw asserts the primacy of both modes in locating a 'real self,' collapsing the artificial dichotomy in order to include both external and internal factors in the piecing together of an individual identity. (76-77)

By locating Eliza's "reality" in the Epilogue, Kennell emphasises that Eliza *becomes* Eliza only when she decisively stops being her Pygmalion's Galatea. This is also why, conversely, Harvey insists on the play's original ending (and believes that "resorting to [the Epilogue] for an explanation does violence to the artistic integrity of the work" (1237)), as "[t]he actions of a truly free person cannot be predicted – at least, in dramatic terms. It is, then, a most fitting ending that Shaw picked: we do not know what Eliza will do because she is free to do as she wishes." (1238) If we opt to disregard Harvey's insistence on only analysing the play, we find that the Epilogue only confirms what the final act had hinted at – that Eliza finds her independence and happiness not by choosing either of her two previous identities, but by combining them. As Lynda Mugglestone stresses, "[t]he solution is of course in terms of Eliza's original social ideal, the 'lady in the flower shop', a role uniting her new social abilities with those more pragmatic ones gained earlier beneath the auspices of Covent Garden" (384).

Connecting *Pygmalion* with the notion of "passing" – the ability of a member of a social group to be perceived and treated as if they belong to another, often more privileged group (Kalei Kanuha 27-29) – Bohman-Kalaja points to how Shaw launches

> a critique of the idea that passing as a means of accessing social power is an end in itself. Instead, although his characters seem to be successful, through them Shaw calls for a dismantling of the categories out of which social identities are constructed and on which 'passing' is predicated. His vision is much more radical than a challenging of categories by showing their penetrability. There is, after all, a difference between deciding how to best win at a game, and calling the entire game into question. (111)

Eliza Doolittle has, by the end of the play, arguably won the game: once a lowly flower girl, she has been lifted into a life of comfort and now only has an advantageous marriage (or agreement to, for instance, become Colonel Pickering's legal ward) standing between her and a successful rags-to-riches story. But, by having Eliza want something else from life – not just upward social mobility, but respect, affection, and personal fulfilment – Shaw subverts the notion of "passing" as a simple solution to the underlying problems posed by gender inequality in a class society. Rather, he insists on Eliza choosing an amalgam of her previously conceived options in life (working, but as a lower-middle-class woman; married, but to a man who is devoted to her and does not see her as a project to be successfully completed), thus showing how "character and personality can be constructed and reconstructed and how such reconstructions are themselves potentially *authentic*" (Bohman-Kalaja 111, emphasis in the original).

Although it is perhaps most often interpreted in terms of its status as a "socialist parable and social comedy" (Mugglestone 374), *Pygmalion* also offers many valuable insights into the intersecting social pressures of gender and class.

An analysis of the play which favours Eliza's path from working-class economic precarity and fears of sexual exploitation to her successful (but, significantly, not fulfilling) "passing" as a duchess highlights the different struggles she faced while belonging to different classes. While she was a hapless flower girl, Eliza had neither the skills nor the connections to achieve upward social mobility, but she did have a sense of independence, gained from her ability to take part in the labour market. After she gained access to the comforts of a middle-class lifestyle, she was able to acquire education and refinement, but lost the opportunity to earn for a living, as middle-class womanhood allowed her to commodify only her hand in marriage. These underlying issues of the play are personified in Higgins, as his lack of understanding for Eliza's needs symbolizes the wider societal implications of being a woman with no money or power in an uncaring patriarchal society. Their arguments throughout the final two acts and her decision to leave him therefore represent Eliza successfully finding a path to independent selfhood – one in which she can recognize and utilize all her capabilities to decide on the life *she* wants to lead.

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06

Valentina Markasović

Cuisine and Punishment: Eating Transgressions in Contemporary "Hansel and Gretel" Retellings

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

VALENTINA MARKASOVIĆ
University of Osijek

Cuisine and Punishment: Eating Transgressions in Contemporary "Hansel and Gretel" Retellings

The fairy tale "Hansel and Gretel" by the brothers Grimm remains recognisable in today's culture in terms of the characters, the setting, and the way it deals with food and eating. "The Woodsman's Second Tale," a story found within John Connolly's novel *The Book of Lost Things*, and Leigh Bardugo's "The Witch of Duva" are both inspired by the narrative of "Hansel and Gretel." However, they are retellings of it, and as such, they propound different messages – they exhibit different socialisation objectives. Namely, stories can be used to socialise the audience, that is, to instil the desired characteristics, behaviours, and morals into the audience. Being retellings of "Hansel and Gretel", both stories make fruitful use of the staple food-related scenes found in it – overindulgence and cannibalism. The exploration of these eating transgressions and the punishments that follow them allows for an examination of the civilising aims of the texts. The paper investigates the instances in which food plays a prominent role in these two narratives and the ways in which they cast light on the civilising objectives of children's literature. This is done through an elaboration of the civilising process, the presence of food in children's literature, and the role of eating and subsequent punishment in "The Woodsman's Second Tale" and "The Witch of Duva".

KEYWORDS
abjection, Hansel and Gretel, John Connolly, Leigh Bardugo, socialisation, transgression

1. Introduction

With its vivid food imagery and the threat of getting roasted in an oven, "Hansel and Gretel" remains popular among children and adults, as evidenced by its frequent revisions in popular media. What inevitably comes to mind are the fairy tale's food scenes. The plot is motivated by a famine, inspired, in the classical tale, by the common real-life occurrences of hunger in the medieval and early modern periods, when the lack of food "drove people to commit atrocious acts" (Zipes, 1993, 23). The tale juxtaposes the widespread hunger with the overindulgence in sweets that comes to the fore in the rising plot. The tale can be seen as cautioning against "unrestrained giving in to gluttony [that] threatens destruction" (Bettelheim, "Hansel and Gretel"), which falls under the civilising aspect of fairy tales. This term refers to the didactic nature of a tale intended to educate children about proper, often restrictive and rigid, codes of conduct. Contemporary fairy tales frequently take it upon themselves to "transform the civilizing process" (Zipes, 2006, 177) found in the classical tales through the invention of new tales or through reimagining the classical narratives. Such texts were produced by John Connolly in *The Book of Lost Things* (2006) and by Leigh Bardugo in *The Language of Thorns: Midnight Tales and Dangerous Magic* (2017). Connolly's novel contains a short story, "The Woodsman's Second Tale" (told to the main character, David, by the Woodsman), about a boy and a girl who are left in the forest and sup on a witch's house. The girl saves them, but the boy encounters another witch and again fails to resist temptation. Bardugo's story, "The Witch of Duva", features Nadya, whose brother Havel leaves for the army and whose father, Maxim, marries Karina, a suspected witch, and Nadya is forced into the woods. Here she encounters a witch, who feeds her and makes her her apprentice. The witch, Magda, and Nadya bake a gingerbread girl who is sent to Nadya's home to defeat the evil presence that has been killing the village girls. Maxim is revealed to be the predator and is punished. This paper aims to investigate how these writers incorporate food and its potential different meanings into their narratives, as well as to show the changing nature of the civilising objective of fairy tales. Comprehensive studies have been written about food in children's literature, such as Carolyn Daniel's *Who Eats Whom in Children's Literature* (2006),[1] on which this paper partially relies. It also makes use of Julia Kristeva's concept of abjection, elaborated in *Powers of Horror,* to explain different instances of consumption in the stories. The paper first explicates the socialising aspect of fairy tales and then analyses the two stories through an investigation of food-related scenes – encounters with witches in "The Woodman's Second Tale" and the baking of human-like gingerbread children in "The Witch of Duva".

2. Socialisation and Food in Fairy Tales

The canonical, classical fairy tales came into being by the authors' appropriation and adaptation of the folktales. The authors often fine-tuned these

stories "into a type of literary discourse about mores, values, and manners so that children and adults would become civilized according to the social code of that time" (Zipes, 2006, 3). This means that the tales were used to instil the hand-picked characteristics into their audience; the same trend permeates the later children's literature in general, not only fairy tales (Daniel 213). Therefore, the tales also represent fertile ground for educating the readers about the proper ways of eating. Scenes of transgressive eating events often cause the reader (and the characters) to feel disgust and horror (Daniel 24), thereby making the tales cautionary, as well – these narratives spark fear within their audience, "warn of material dangers, and didactically reinforce the notion of the child's rightful place in the social hierarchy" (Daniel 150). Food-related misbehaviours in stories include overeating, lack of manners, ingestion of unwholesome foods, eating outside of meal times, cannibalism, and so on. When focusing on desserts in a work of fiction, it should be noted that sweet foods are allowed when they are a constituent of a meal and, again, should not be sought out outside of meal times. Furthermore, the sweets should follow the savoury segment of the meal and should be consumed in moderation to be considered wholesome. When characters do not abide by these rules, their transgressions are punished to show the audience what should and what should not be done.[2] Children's stories often end with the return home and a domestic scene in which the adult provides food for the child, demonstrating "the benefits for children of an adult authority" (Nodelman 132). Hence, the important civilising components of food-related scenes in fairy tales include the eating transgression and the punishment of it.

3. The Witches of "The Woodsman's Second Tale"

Connolly opens his narrative in a formulaic exposition that outlines the existence of a boy and a girl and the remarriage of their parent. What is unusual is that it is the mother who is still alive in the story and the position of the villainous stepparent is actually occupied by a stepfather. The trouble starts "[w]hen the crops failed and the famine came" (Connolly ch. 11) – this dearth prompts the characters to consider resorting to cannibalism, which, along with overindulgences, is the capital transgression present in the story. At the very beginning, the stepfather "began to suggest to his wife that they might eat the children and thereby save themselves from death, for she could always give birth to more children when times improved" (Connolly ch. 11). The mother is "horrified" at the idea (Connolly ch. 11) because of the abject nature of it. Abjection is, as defined by Julia Kristeva, that which is "ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable" (1). In the cases of food ingestion, which "is perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection" (Kristeva 2), the notion boils down to the person being "reminded of the body's physical and semantic proximity to meat produces disgust, horror, and abjection" (Daniel 21). The mother in the story is disgusted by her husband's idea because it upsets the "social and symbolic order" (Kristeva 68) – she is forced to consider the social conception

of what is viewed as food and what is not. Simultaneously, she faces the image of her children and, by extension, herself, not as subjects, but as food. Still, she knows she is unable to feed her children so she leaves them in the forest to fend for themselves, in fear of "what her new husband might do to them when her back was turned" (Connolly ch. 11). This points to the husband's firm intention to have his way, although it would mean upsetting the order and crossing the line into the abject. This transgression is continued in the children's meetings with the two witches.

Wicked Witch of the Forest

After they are left in the forest, the children try to adapt to their new life. The girl is more successful and she "learned to trap small animals and birds, and to steal eggs from nests", while the boy only "missed his mother and wanted to return to her" (Connolly ch. 11). His wandering leads him to discover a marvellous house: "Its walls were made of chocolate and gingerbread. Its roof was slated with slabs of toffee, and the glass in its windows was formed from clear sugar. Embedded in its walls were almonds and fudge and candied fruits. Everything about it spoke of sweetness and indulgence" (Connolly ch. 11). The house is a typical fairy tale creation brimming with sweets and allure. The boy is already enjoying himself, "picking nuts from the walls when [the girl] found him, and his mouth was dark with chocolate" (Connolly ch. 11). His face is dirty from all the food, which is already an element of improper behaviour, and he is aware that he is engaging in a transgressive act – namely, he invites his sister to join him and says: "Don't worry, there's nobody home" (Connolly ch. 11), which signifies that he knows he is operating outside of (adult) authority. Like the classical Hansel and Gretel, they "know what they are doing is wrong, that it is sinful, but they cannot control themselves" (Cashdan ch. 4). On top of that, as has been mentioned, sweets are not regarded as proper, real food when they are not part of a meal (Daniel 56) and should not be tasted in this case. The girl shows more resistance, possibly due to her more definite separation from the mother and the oral phase (Daniel 94), the phrase of maternal influence (Freud, 1976, 88-89). Still, "the smell of the chocolate was too much for her, and she allowed herself to nibble on a piece. (...) and together they ate and ate until they had consumed so much that, in time, they fell into a deep sleep" (Connolly ch. 11). The punishment for their overindulgence and misbehaviour ensues – the witch catches them and puts them in a cage. The witch herself seems to be decaying – she smells and her teeth are ruined – which may represent both the detrimental effects of overindulgence in sweets and her own cannibalism (Daniel 25). The children see that "[p]iles of bones lay stacked on the floor by her feet, the remains of the other children who had fallen prey to her. ''Fresh meat!' she whispered to herself. 'Fresh meat for old Gammer's oven!'" (Connolly ch. 11). The witch faces children with the abject notion of their flesh becoming meat and it makes the children themselves the "in-between, the ambiguous, the composite" (Kristeva 4) and therefore both disturbed and disturbing.

The witch's transgressive eating behaviour is represented by the bones of the deceased children. The boy is terrified of the witch, while the girl offers herself to the witch, explaining: "I am plumper than my brother, and will make a better roast for you. While you eat me you can fatten him up, so that he will feed you for longer when you cook him" (Connolly ch. 11). Curiously, neither of the children expresses the disgust related to the abject, although the boy is evidently afraid. The reason for this may lie in the scope of the story and its adherence to the classic fairy tale structure, in which there is usually no place for deeper characterisation, as figures in folk and classic fairy tales are flat characters or character types (Forster 67-70), "figures without substance, without inner life, without an environment; they lack any relation to past and future, to time altogether" (Lüthi 11). The witch is delighted by the girl's suggestion and prepares to put her in the oven. The girl takes it upon herself to punish the witch for her cannibalism and succeeds in this by tricking the witch into entering the oven. "So hot was the oven that the fats of her body began to melt, creating a stench so terrible that the little girl felt ill" (Connolly ch. 11). The girl does what the witch threatened to do, but, as she has no desire to eat the witch's meat, she is not punished for roasting her.

A Witch in Mother's Clothing

After the defeat of the first witch, the girl begins to prosper in her forest life. Instead of coming from 'not home' to 'home', the two places that often frame the narrative of children's literature (Stott and Doyle Francis 223),[3] she remains in the forest and makes a new home for herself. She does not seek adult authority. The boy, however, does not adapt at all. He has continually exhibited a desire to go back home – primarily, he "yearned always to be back with his mother" (Connolly ch. 11). This desire, in Freudian terms, hints at his wish for oneness with his mother – his desire to revert back to the period when "[a]n infant at the breast does not as yet distinguish his ego from the external world" (Freud, 1962, 13-14). The boy is still stuck in the oral phrase. Therefore, he is susceptible to the influence of the second witch of the story. He follows a berry path deeper into the forest, eating the berries as he forages them (Connolly ch. 11). Such recklessness and his refusal to gather provisions, choosing instead to gorge on the berries immediately, are subsequently punished. The boy happens upon "a pretty little house, with ivy on the walls and flowers by the door and a trail of smoke rising from its chimney. He smelled bread baking, and a cake lay cooling on the windowsill. A woman appeared at the door, bright and merry, as his mother had once been" (Connolly ch. 11). The house he encounters emulates wholesomeness and cosiness, while the woman becomes a substitute for the mother the boy has lost. In short, he finds everything he has been looking for. This is an instance "of a return to the primal mother-infant relationship" (Daniel 125). The link between the woman and the mother is reaffirmed when she offers to nurture him by providing food and comfortable lodging and it is finally explicitly stated when she offers: "Stay as long as you wish, for I have no children, and have long wanted a son to

call my own" (Connolly ch. 11). The boy falls under the spell and is so blinded by the promise of a motherly embrace that he does not recognise the danger he is in. Again, this misstep is immediately punished and, this time, there is no sister to save him from demise: "he followed the woman into the house, where a great cauldron bubbled on the fire and a sharp knife lay waiting on the butcher's block. And he was never seen again" (Connolly ch. 11). The cauldron and the butcher's knife hint at his destiny and represent the abject notion of the boy becoming a witch's meal. The tale simultaneously destroys the social and symbolic order by having the boy become food and establishes the social order by having him ruthlessly penalised for not learning from his mistakes. Connolly's version of Hansel and Gretel still "tells about the debilitating consequences of trying to deal with life's problems by means of regression and denial, which reduce one's ability to solve problems" (Bettelheim "Hansel and Gretel").

4. The Gingerbread Children in "The Witch of Duva"

In Bardugo's story, when the famine strikes, it takes its toll on the whole village, but the society still manages to push through, even to organise celebrations, albeit without food (Bardugo 86, 88), that all-important societal adhesive (Keeling and Pollard 5, Cashdan ch. 4). When faced with a lack, the people of Duva show their worst sides – "mothers smothered infants in their cribs to stop their hungry howls, (...) the trapper Leonid Gemka was found gnawing on the muscle of his slain brother's calf when their hut was iced in for two long months" (Bardugo 82) – reflecting the atrocities conducted in times of need. The story exposes some of these violations of the social order, but, interestingly, they do not seem to extend to the improper eating of sweets. Namely, when first arriving at Magda's house and smelling the alluring scent, Nadya is afraid, but her fear is intermingled with the instinctual desire: "she smelled it, hot and sweet, a fragrant cloud that singed the edges of her nostrils: burning sugar. Nadya's breath came in frantic little gasps, and even as her terror grew, her mouth began to water" (Bardugo 93). When finally inside the witch's house, "[s]he lifted her spoon, but still she hesitated. She knew from stories that you must not eat at a witch's table. But in the end, she could not resist. She ate the stew, every hot and savory bite of it, then flaky rolls, plums in syrup, egg pudding, and a rum cake thick with raisins and brown sugar" (Bardugo 96). Here, Nadya goes against the common warnings about sharing a meal with a witch – which could also be more broadly interpreted as the danger of accepting food from strangers – and gives in to a similar temptation as the boy and the girl from Connolly's story. However, instead of eating away at the house itself,[4] Nadya ingests meals that are all wholesome, properly sequenced, and not overly-indulgent, for example: "stuffed cabbage leaves, crispy roast goose, little dishes of apricot custard"; "butter-soaked blini stuffed with cherries and cream"; "potato pie and sausages" (Bardugo 97, 98). Interestingly, the story does not condemn candy and sweets like the classical "Hansel and Gretel" story does. The father is said to bring candy as gifts to his

children (Bardugo 79), sugar is a highly-prized rarity (80), and Magda is apparently known for her sweet tooth (99), but this is not seen as an unhealthy or disgusting overindulgence.

The protagonist of the story, Nadya, sometimes engages in improper behaviour related to food – she licks the leftovers from Karina and Maxim's plate of cake and her determination not to eat witch's food wavers and is dispelled. However, she is never punished for these transgressions, as would be expected in the typical narrative dealing with gluttony and children. These instances could be written off as motivated by her extreme hunger, and therefore not breaking the social order. However, Nadya is also seen as eating candy outside of meal time, as well as overeating at specific, excusable situations after extended periods of malnourishment (Bardugo 100), which could arguably be interpreted as misbehaviour, but she still does not suffer because of it. The descriptions of food she gets to eat do not play a crucial role in the story. In fact, Bardugo reclaims the food scenes as aesthetically pleasurable, unlike many authors who represent food as "an abject object in contemporary culture" (Daniel 213). The abjection is reserved for the instances in which the parents begin to see their children as food.

The Comfort of the Gingerbread Baby

The first major incident in which a child explicitly becomes food occurs when a grieving mother arrives at Magda's doorstep. They confer in hushed tones and it is revealed that the woman wants Magda to bake a gingerbread replacement for her dead baby. "[B]efore the woman left, she took a tiny pouch from her pocket and shook the contents into Magda's palm" (Bardugo 100) and the content of the pouch remains a mystery, but it is probable that it was the ashes of the late baby and that Magda uses it to bake the gingerbread creation. Nadya is horrified at Magda's baking project, but the woman is beyond speech when "Magda wrapped her hands in towels and pulled open the oven's iron doors. A squalling cry filled the room" (Bardugo 102). The baby hence becomes literal comfort food, as it brings solace to the woman (Bardugo 102). Because of this, the woman is not coded as the bad mother, who is the "evil, possessive and destructive all-devouring one" (Kaplan 48), or the smothering mother, who is "over-indulgent, satisfying her own needs" (Kaplan, 48) – although the connection between the food baby and the devouring motherhood is obvious. She is motivated primarily by her wish to be reunited with the baby, which could be read as her desire for oneness. Usually, it is the child who craves the return to the mother, and not *vice versa*, like in this story, but it serves to emphasise the mother's grieving. Hence, the incident is not villainous *per se*, although Nadya feels abjection. She is distraught because she views the baby as human, or human-like, similar to Nadya herself; this view disagrees with concurrent notion of the baby being food: "And then she heard it again, a gurgle followed by a plaintive coo. From inside the oven. Nadya pushed back from the table, nearly knocking her chair over, and stared at Magda,

horrified, but the witch did not flinch" (Bardugo 101). Nadya is at first attracted by the smell of gingerbread and is looking forward to enjoying the dessert after dinner so her disgust at realising it is a baby is furthered by her subconscious desire to eat it. The abjection stems from the baby, as Magda says, being "real enough" (Bardugo 102), meaning, human enough, which may additionally lead to the abject realization that if the baby is food, Nadya, too, can become food. Nevertheless, the grieving woman will die of the same illness that her baby had suffered from, but she will not have eaten the gingerbread baby before that, as Magda speculates that at some point the baby "will be nothing but crumbs" and the woman "dead long before that" (Bardugo 102). This disconnects the woman from the image of the devouring or smothering mother and takes away some of the abjection due to the baby not being eaten.

The Gingerbread Girl Sits in a (Gingerbread) House

Nadya manages to overcome her disgust over the gingerbread baby: "She did not go inside for lunch. She meant to skip dinner too, to show what she thought of Magda and her terrible magic. But by the time night came her stomach was growling, and when Magda put down a plate of sliced duck with hunter's sauce, Nadya picked up her fork and knife" (Bardugo 102). This is significant because the incident with the baby sets the stage for the culmination of story.

This takes place after Nadya expresses her desire to go home and Magda offers her a way to do it. The girl concedes to having two of her fingers cut off and "Magda took the two fingers and ground them down to a wet red meal that she mixed into the batter. When Nadya revived, they worked side by side, shaping the gingergirl on a damp plank as big as a door, then shoved her into the blazing oven" (Bardugo 105-106). A part of Nadya is transferred into the gingerbread girl and, despite the inherent abjection, Nadya feels the desire to eat the girl: "All night the gingergirl baked, filling the hut with a marvelous smell. Nadya knew she was smelling her own bones and blood, but still her mouth watered" (Bardugo 106). Of course, she makes no attempt to actually eat the sweet, as she recognises it would be beyond unacceptable – she remains within the social and symbolic order and the girl, the abject, belongs outside of it. The girl who is the abject part of Nadya exhibits agency when "the oven doors creaked open and the gingergirl crawled out. She crossed the room, opened the window, and lay down on the counter to let herself cool" (Bardugo 106). She willingly lets herself cool and be prepared to be eaten, going against the human instinct for survival and therefore showing herself to be outside of the order.

The gingerbread girl is sent to Nadya's home, and Nadya follows her in the guise of a crow. The meeting of Nadya's gingerbread twin and Maxim results in the girl being eaten whole. The consumption is made explicitly sexual, which is not surprising considering the connection between food and sex is a well-es-

tablished one and food scenes often liquidate the lack of sexuality in children's literature (Nikolajevna 129, Daniel 81). In this narrative, the link is hinted at in the beginning. First, the girls who are abducted and murdered are described as "full-grown girls near old enough to marry" (Bardugo 83), hinting at their maturity and level of development. That only girls are taken away is significant in itself, because they are a fitting target for the heterosexual Maxim. While discussing what kind of a monster haunts their village, a member of the community notes: "'Maybe it just likes the taste of our girls,' said Anton Kozar, limping by on his one good leg and waggling his tongue obscenely" (Bardugo 83). There is nothing subtle about Kozar's implication and the text continues in the same line. In a scene that foreshadows Maxim's predatory nature, Nadya is locked in her room by Karina and she hears "the tentative scratch of his fingers at her door. Before she could answer she heard Karina's voice, crooning, crooning. Silence, the rustle of fabric, a thump followed by a groan, then the steady thud of bodies against the wall" (Bardugo 92).[5] Here, Maxim's hunger for his daughter is exchanged for the sexual gratification his new wife gives him and the line between the two types of desires becomes blurred. The sexual connotation is carried on in the scene where Maxim eats the gingerbread likeness of his daughter. From the outside, Nadya witnesses the whole scene, despite Karina's warning that "Some things are better left unseen" (Bardugo 110):

> Her father had pulled the gingergirl into his lap and was stroking her white hair. "Nadya," he said again and again. "Nadya." He nuzzled the brown flesh of her shoulder, pressed his lips to her skin. (...) "Forgive me," Maxim murmured, the tears on his cheeks dissolving the soft curve of icing at her neck. (...) But her father's hand slipped beneath the hem of her skirts, and the gingergirl did not move. *It isn't me*, Nadya told herself. *Not really. It isn't me.* Maxim opened his wet mouth to kiss her again, and the sound he made was something between a groan and a sigh as his teeth sank into the sweetness of her shoulder. The sigh turned to a sob as he bit down. Nadya watched her father consume the gingergirl, bite by bite, limb by limb. (Bardugo 110-111)

The physical and sexual hungers are almost inextricable from each other. The scene upsets Nadya on several levels – she is astonished that her father is revealed as the villain; she is disturbed by the sexual violation, coupled with the fact it is conducted by her own father; and, finally, she is faced with her body being consumed for food. The gingerbread girl not only bears her image, but is also made from her flesh and bones. Nadya recoils from the act because it is outside of the symbolic order and she tries to preserve it by repeating that it is not actually her that has become the object of Maxim's attack.

In the end, the father is punished for his abject, cannibalistic eating habits: "They found Nadya's father there the next morning, his insides ruptured and stinking of rot. He had spent the night on his knees, vomiting blood and sugar" (Bardugo 111). His death is a clear sign that disregarding the symbolic order and delving

outside of it cannot be tolerated. Additionally, it could also be an indication that his nutrition is also outside of the social order. Namely, his stomach becomes "distended" from the amount of food he consumes (Bardugo 111), which points to his overeating. The act is harmful to the rest of the society, the members of which suffer from famine, because "whoever consumes more than their share, deprives others of theirs" (Claude Fischler, qtd. in Probyn 132). Therefore, he can be seen as threatening the social order by his bad habits and his disregard of cultural taboos; his swollen belly is "indicative of excessive appetite, of a lack of self-control, of laziness, and of an unwillingness to conform to accepted paradigms of beauty. Arguably it also signifies a lack of morality" (Daniel 185, 187).

The Abject Potential of the Feminine

Maxim's wife and her connection with food also lend themselves to fruitful analysis. Karina Stoyanova, the stepmother and the suspected villain of the story, is a particularly interesting character. The food she makes or possesses is linked to magic through its unknown origin; on top of this, she seems to use her pastries to unwholesome ends, apparently poisoning Nadya's mother: "The only thing [Nadya's mother] seemed to crave were little cakes made by the widow Karina Stoyanova, scented with orange blossom and thick with icing. Where Karina got the sugar, no one knew" (Bardugo 80). She seems to imbue the food with properties that let her influence Nadya's father, as well (Bardugo 84, 89). Nadya is all but certain that Karina is a supernatural being, a khitka, responsible for the horrors that have become the everyday of the village: "[t]he khitka might take any form, but the shape it favored most was that of a beautiful woman. Soon Karina seemed to be everywhere, bringing Nadya's father food and gifts of kvas, whispering in his ear that someone was needed to take care of him and his children" (Bardugo 84). Except for her beauty, which links her to the otherworldly and the dangerous, another aspect of Karina's physical appearance comes to foreground. Namely, the narrator describes her: "Karina leaned in close to Nadya. When she smiled, her lips split wet and red around what seemed like far too many teeth" (Bardugo 87). This visage of Karina's mouth is a clear invocation of the *vagina dentata*, the voracious representation of the "monstruous feminine" (Grosz 194, Creed 2). However, the description is immediately followed by Karina telling Nadya to go away from home because she is "just another mouth" that Karina and Maxim would have to feed (Bardugo 87). By using this PART-FOR-WHOLE metonymy and equating Nadya with a mouth, Karina actually aligns Nadya with herself, the devouring mouth, and hints at the final reveal – that Karina and Nadya are not truly enemies, but that they should both work against Maxim. Working against the reader's expectation of the beautiful woman as evil (Kinyon 2), Bardugo is, like feminist fairy tale writers, "shifting the narrative voice, undoing plots, and expressing the concerns of women through new images and styles of writing" (Zipes, 1992, 35).

5. Conclusion

In different ways, both John Connolly's and Leigh Bardugo's tales are cautionary. They warn against the hidden dangers, embodied either in strangers or in those closest to us, because, as Bardugo appends in the author's note in her story collection, "predators come in many guises" (282). To do this, they both utilize images of food and food consumption. Connolly makes the witches in the story, as well as the stepfather, cannibals, while the children recklessly and improperly indulge in unwholesome foods. The boy and the girl are punished for their transgression, as is the first witch. Both encounters with the witches serve to civilise the children – within the plot of John Connolly's *The Book of Lost Things* the target is David, the protagonist, who is thereby warned not to be reckless in the fantasy world he has found himself in. This civilising point is firmly embedded into the tradition found in the classic structure of the "Hansel and Gretel" story, where the child is punished for gluttony – the boy's final misfortune is merely a repetition of the first sequence with the witch. It ends differently because he is alone now and has learnt nothing from his previous experience. However, Connolly steps back from the tradition when he has the children's paths diverge and the sister learns from her mistakes and prospers. She continues to live alone, in the forest, and does not re-enter the familial sphere, abandoning the segment of civilising procedure that favours the family life and the reestablishment of the social balance. Instead, Connolly is attempting to instil independence and adaptability. Additionally, the girl's new life allows her greater freedom and a woman living in a forest is no longer inherently viewed as evil or as a witch, despite the presence of other witches in the story; this potentially points to the girl's escape from the repressive, patriarchal society and the need to stop viewing agency in women as evil.

On the other hand, Bardugo does not have her protagonist engage in transgressive behaviour; or, rather, Nadya does eat too much sometimes and has sweets outside of meal times, but this is not represented as harmful. In a new aspect of the civilisation objective, Nadya's desires, signified by her enjoyment of food, are not suppressed and forced into a strict framework that holds no place for even a small amount of indulgence. The story sees another kind of consumption/consummation as problematic. The villain of the story, Nadya's father, is the secret predator who eats human flesh. His punishment does not come immediately, as he has been feeding on young girls throughout the story and even before its beginning. Only at the very end is he discovered as the culprit, but his punishment is then severe and results in death. The punishment is doled out by women and the tale argues against seeing women's agency as harmful or wicked, which contributes to the feminist aspect of the story. On the whole, Bardugo's narrative could be said to civilise the audience by deconstructing their preconceptions about women as evil, children as gluttonous, and by making them examine different kinds of predators in today's society.

End Notes

1 Others studies include Kara K. Keeling and Scott T. Pollard's *Critical Approaches to Food in Children's Literature* (2009) and T*able Lands: Food in Children's Literature* (2020). An overview of research on food in children's literature can be found, for example, in the introduction to their 2009 study. Prominent works include Wendy Katz's 1980 article, "Some Uses of Food in Children's Literature," Norman Kiell's 1995 *Food and Drink in Literature: A Selectively Annotated Bibliography*, and Lynne Vallone's 2002 article "'What Is the Meaning of All This Gluttony?': Edgeworth, the Victorians, C. S. Lewis and a Taste for Fantasy".

2 Carolyn Daniel notes that it is the girls who are more often punished for their eating misbehaviour, rather than the boys (60). This points to the patriarchal view of the juxtaposed notions of "good girls" and "boys will be boys".

3 According to Stott and Doyle Francis, children leave their 'not home', a place that does not meet their needs, at the beginning of the story. At the end of the narrative, "[i]deally, the setting which at first was 'not home' now becomes 'home'" (224) due to the changes and challenges the child character has gone through or overcome. In Connolly's story, the girl does not see her parents's abode as 'home' like her brother does. Conversely, as the brother has not transformed, the situation at the place he attempts to return to would probably not have evolved beyond the initial stepfather-mother dynamic and would still not have been a proper 'home.'

4 Notably, Magda's house has more in common with the Slavic Baba Jaga's house on chicken legs than with the decadent sugary abode of the "Hansel and Gretel" witch. This is not surprising, since Bardugo sets her story in a fictional world inspired by Russian customs and mythology.

5 Notably, Maxim likens himself to a wolf, calling the mystery monster "an animal (...) mad with hunger" (Bardugo 83). The metaphor is extended and his true nature is foreshadowed by his prowling, and the already mentioned scratch of his fingers on Nadya's door (89, 92). The wolf, as a very evocative symbol familiar as the predator from the "Red Riding Hood" tradition (Zipes, 2006, 66), intertextually establishes the sexual nature of the danger Maxim presents.

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07

Mia Uremović

“Be Men, or Be More Than Men”: *Frankenstein*, *Frankissstein*, and Judith Butler

PROFESSIONAL PAPER

MIA UREMOVIĆ
University of Zagreb

"Be Men, or Be More Than Men": *Frankenstein, Frankissstein*, and Judith Butler

This paper aims to explore two novels, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Jeanette Winterson's *Frankissstein*, through the theoretical lens of Judith Butler. Butler's works used as frameworks are *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993). The two books focus, among other things, on the notions of gender performativity and the body as the most material dimension of sex and sexuality. The main topics analyzed within the scope of this paper are the notions of gender performativity and gender identity, the body, naming, and phallogocentrism.

As the older of the two novels and the one that can be considered a part of the canon of English literature, *Frankenstein* has a stronger presence in both gender and queer studies. It is more analyzed and the questions of gender and body present in the story have been explored in more detail and from more sides. *Frankissstein*, in turn, also covers a number of the same topics, but often in more explicit ways, and offers a variety of interpretations and elements discussed in gender and queer theory.

In the analysis of the two novels, the focus is placed on the presence and representation of gender, how characters stray from the gender binary, or alternatively what place they have in it, what do their bodies constitute, and how do they function with and within them.

KEYWORDS
gender performativity, gender studies, queer studies, Judith Butler, *Frankenstein*

Frankenstein (Mary Shelley, 1818) and *Frankissstein* (Jeanette Winterson, 2019), written nearly exactly two centuries apart, share a number of characteristics, due in large part to the fact that the latter is deliberately inspired by the former. Be it implicitly or explicitly, they present many notions and ideas presented and prominently discussed in the works of Judith Butler. The aim of this is paper is thus to provide an exploration of the two novels using Butler's works, namely *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993).

Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus was written by Mary Shelley and published for the first time in 1818; the author's name appeared in 1821, when the second edition was published. It is the story of Victor Frankenstein, a scientist whose pursuit of knowledge culminates in an unconventional experiment that brings to life an intelligent creature, who is shunned from its creator and the rest of the world because of its monstrous appearance. The novel, written partially in epistolary form and as a retelling of a story, follows the confrontation of Frankenstein with his creation. *Frankenstein* is considered one of the first and most influential science fiction stories, and it has inspired a number of adaptations and rewritings. One such work which takes clear inspiration, storylines, and characters (and even the author herself in a fictionalized form) from *Frankenstein* is Jeanette Winterson's 2019 novel *Frankissstein: A Love Story*. Told in first person by in turns Mary Shelley, the author of *Frankenstein*, and Ry Shelley, a young transgender doctor, it is a story set in the world of the present or near-future and explores the complexities of love and artificial intelligence. The similarities between the two novels range from characters, who are slightly altered in the hypertext (*Frankissstein*) when compared to their original iterations in the hypotext (*Frankenstein*), to plot points, images, and ideologies.

The theoretical framework against which the two novels will be analyzed is constituted by *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Bodies That Matter: on the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (1993), both written by Judith Butler. In the two works, Butler posits her[1] significant theory of gender performativity and gender as a construction, how this construction affects the way gender, and by extension sex are viewed, how they relate to the notion of the body, what is the role of the heterosexual matrix, what is meant by women as a category, to name a few.

The notion of gender performativity – "not a singular 'act', for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms" (*Bodies That Matter* 12) – is the focal point in the two books. Butler states in *Gender Trouble* that "[t]here is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (33). In *Bodies That Matter,* the analysis also turns to the 'matter' and 'materiality' of bodies and their correlation to gender, sex, and language. The materiality of bodies is constituted through performativity of gender and sex; bodies that materialize the (heterosexual) norm thus also qualify as bodies that matter.

A notable fact to consider when analyzing the two novels is that they were written two hundred years apart, in 1818 and 2019, respectively, and that Butler's works appeared at the beginning of the 1990s, in 1990 and 1993, to be exact. The temporal placement of the novels is important because, especially in the case of *Frankenstein*, the contemporaneous politics and attitudes play a significant role in how certain elements appear and can be analyzed. Since the topics that will be discussed concern the notions of 'gender' and 'sex' in modern terms (with an understanding of feminism and queer studies), a study of *Frankenstein* must consider the novel's historical context. Despite the fact that the novel was written and published in the nineteenth century, it has been cited by Diane Hoeveler as being important in "numerous queer-theory readings (…), which are in part motivated by the feminist analysis of gender as a cultural construct" (57), an aspect that gained more significant traction in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Hoeveler references Anne K. Mellor and Eve Sedgwick when she states that the reasoning behind this feminist analysis is Victor's "homosexual obsession" (57) with the creature: "Victor and his creature/double are engaged in the classic homosocial dyad gone horribly wrong so that the murderous rejection of the bond between them can only end in both their deaths" (58). When we look at *Frankissstein*, we can see that the novel was published relatively recently and mentions certain terms and ideas connected to the topic at hand, and the analysis will thus in some cases be more overt. The study of the two novels is almost exclusively based on the elements tied to the characters of the creature in *Frankenstein* and Ry Shelley in *Frankissstein*. The two are characters who struggle the most (or are perceived to) within the confines of gender identity, which is the reason for their placement in the center of this analysis.

The main topics analyzed are those of gender performativity and gender identity, the body, naming, and phallogocentrism. In her work, Butler uses the notion of 'gender performativity', identifies the differences between 'gender' and 'sex' and tackles the binary on which they both function in the heterosexual matrix, that binary being the division between 'male' and 'female'. This is often matched by the binaries of 'culture'/'nature' and 'mind/'body', where culture and mind are paired with the male, and nature and body with the female. Butler argues that gender is "constructed" and is not biological, but she points out that that does not automatically equate it to being a purely cultural construct. In order to provide a more detailed definition of how gender is constructed, she goes on to underline that

> performativity cannot be understood outside of a process of iterability, a regularized and constrained repetition of norms. And this repetition is not performed *by* a subject; this repetition is what enables a subject and constitutes the temporal condition for the subject. This iterability implies that "performance" is not a singular "act" or event, but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production, but not (…) determining it fully in advance. (*Bodies That Matter* 95)

The above-mentioned 'reiteration' and 'repetition' underscore the idea of performativity in the sense of 'subjection' and 'subjectivation'. Gender then exists in the acts which are repeated constantly. There is no singular act or deed, nor is there a singular actor or 'doer'; as Sara Salih explains in her book *Judith Butler* by referencing one of Butler's interviews, "the concept [of] 'performativity' [is connected] to the speech act theory of J. L. Austin's (…) and Derrida's deconstruction of Austin's ideas" (56). Salih goes on to clarify that "[g]ender identities are constructed and constituted by language, which means that there is no gender identity that precedes language" (56). The "gendered body" is "performative" (*Gender Trouble* 173), because the only way that its reality, or an illusion of it, is constituted is through the repetition of various acts, which are then in turn taken as the signifiers of a specific gender. Since there is not one single act or one single deed, gender is constantly in the act of being performed, but not necessarily by a specific subject that can be singled out. Instead, harkening back to Nietzsche, Butler states her idea that "there need not be a 'doer behind the deed', but that the 'doer' is variably constructed in and through the deed" (*Gender Trouble* 181). In this ouroboric concept, gender is performed, but simultaneously constructs the basis for its own performativity.

The issue of names and naming, presented in both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies That Matter*, is evaluated by Butler in relation to the notion of patronyms and the 'law of the father'. The idea of the woman or bride given from one man to another to establish kinship lines, a "ritual exchange of women" (*Bodies That Matter* 153) finds its parallel in the story or Frankenstein and the creature, when the creature asks his creator to make him a bride. Had Frankenstein finished what he had promised to, he would have ceremoniously given the creature his bride. However, since Frankenstein, as the creature's creator, functions as a father/parent, he would have also been the father/parent figure to his bride, meaning that he would also be the creature's father-in-law, and the female creature would have been the sister of the male creature, as well as his wife (had they married). Similarly, the same relationship can be seen between Victor and Elizabeth, who were step-siblings and married (albeit briefly). In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler dedicates a chapter to author Willa Cather and her writing, and presents Cather's play on words with the name of her novel *Tommy, the Unsentimental*. The main character, a young woman, takes on both the first and last names of her father, thus occupying a specific sort of position in relation to the notion of paternity. In *Frankenstein*, the creature is not given nor does he at any point take on a specific name; he is only ever described as "Frankenstein's creature" in numerous references. It is interesting to note that there are many cases in popular culture where the creature himself is mistakenly referred to as "Frankenstein". This way, he takes on his creator's name outside the text. As Butler states in reference to Lacan, "to be named is thus to be inculcated into that law and to be formed, bodily, in accordance with that law" (*Bodies That Matter* 72); the creature is then only erroneously and extratextually baptized. Butler also describes Saul Kripke's distinction

between "'rigid designators' and 'nonrigid or accidental designators'" (*Bodies That Matter* 211) and specifies in the *Notes* that the "name refers rigidly, that is, universally and without exception, to a person no matter in what way the descriptions of that person may change" (280). Frankenstein's creature can never take on any true human characteristic of his father, and Victor in turn becomes a very specific signifier. In *Frankissstein*, Ry shortens their given name, removing the 'Ma' ('mother') from 'Mary', and becoming an individual in their own right. They are also often mistakenly, and by several different characters, referred to as 'Ryan', even though they do not at any point claim this name. The standardized perception, that Ry must be short for Ryan, prevails here, bringing us back to the male/female binary and the dominance of the male over the female.

The creature's insistence that he be given a wife – "What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of another sex, but as hideous as myself; (…) Oh! My creator, make me happy; (…); do not deny me my request!" (125) ties back into the idea of performativity. Jackie Docka suggests that "Victor's monster conceptualizes his own gender to be more like his creator" (10). By being given a wife, he can be completed, stating that "[i]t is true, we shall be monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more attached to one another" (125). Carol Margaret Davison notes in her chapter "Monstrous Regiments of Women and Brides of Frankenstein" that "[o]nly in this manner, Victor rationalises, may he appease his resentful, homicidal monster and regain peace and normalcy" (196). Instead of existing outside the "oppressive categories of sex" (*Gender Trouble* 160), the creature attempts to follow the established law. Butler notes Monique Wittig's claim that 'men' and 'women' are "political categories, and not natural facts" (147), describing that "[t]he 'naming' of sex is an act of domination and compulsion, an institutionalized performative that both creates and legislates social reality" (147). The creature can be said to have had a "biological birth, but not a human one" (Docka 11). He is, however, created in the "the realm of the perverse" (Hoeveler 58), because Victor created him outside the binary of male/female, essentially dooming him from the start within the matrix of heterosexuality.

In Butler's analysis of author Willa Cather, she notes that Cather negotiates "conventions of anonymity (…) with the conventions of traditional masculine authorship" (*Bodies That Matter* 146). This analysis of Cather, who has been described as "a male-identified writer, one whose stories presume a masculine narrator or foreground a masculine protagonist" (143), can be linked to a similar analysis of Shelley and Winterson, who both write from the perspective of male characters (Victor Frankenstein and Captain Walton in Shelley's case, and on occasion the creature, who is male; Ry, who identifies as a trans man, shares the main narrative voice with Mary Shelley and, for a few pages, the male guard in Bedlam in Winterson's case). Writing of *Frankenstein*, Sandra M. Gilbert notes in her article that "despite its male protagonist and its underpinning of 'masculine' philosophy, [it] is somehow a 'woman's book,' if only because its author was caught up in such a maelstrom of sexuality at the time she wrote the novel" (49).

Frankenstein's titular character is male, as are all other significant active roles in the story. Mary Shelley's awakening sexuality, teen-age motherhood, and tragedy after the death of her child (all analyzed as her 'female' experiences and all having occurred around the time she came up with her story) are contrasted by "a number of writers" to her male-focused story. Observing the same aspect, Devon Hodges builds a bridge with the ideas of speech acts and performativity and considers that

> if speech is associated with masculinity, then a woman must lose her identity in order to make self- expression possible. But perhaps in adopting a male voice, the woman writer is given the opportunity to intervene from within, to become an alien presence that undermines the stability of the male voice. (157)

Discussing *Frankenstein* within this paradigm must be done while keeping in mind the period from which the text originates, and using it in discussions within gender studies conscientiously takes into account its time (the early 19th century). There have been a number of readings of the text that focus on the creature and his constitution within the context of gender, as well as queer studies. In "The Trans Legacy of *Frankenstein*", Jolene Zigarovich asks "[h]ow can we discuss the Gothic as a genre that crosses over boundaries constructed by culture to define and contain gender and sexuality?" (264). Judith Butler herself has commented on the gender of the creature in the afterword to *A Life with Mary Shelley*, stating that "the 'monster' functions as a liminal zone of gender, not merely the disavowed dimensions of manhood, but the unspeakable limits of femininity as well" (48). In the opening lines of her work "My Words to Victor Frankenstein Above the Village of Chamounix: Performing Transgender Rage", Susan Stryeker states

> The transsexual body is an unnatural body. It is the product of medical science. It is a technological construction. It is flesh torn apart and sewn together again in a shape other than that in which it was born. In these circumstances, I find a deep affinity between myself as a transsexual woman and the monster in Mary Shelley's Frankenstein. Like the monster, I am too often perceived as less than fully human due to the means of my embodiment (…) (238)

Jolene Zigarovich points out that "trans theory has always been rhetorically haunted" (260). In the discussion of bodies becoming "sexed" (*Bodies That Matter* 95), meaning marked by and as 'masculine' and 'feminine', we also come to an impasse when faced with bodies which 'refuse' (one way or another) to be marked within this binary. As Butler notes, "[i]f this last implication [that there is no body prior to its marking] is accepted, we can never tell a story about how it is that a body comes to be marked by the category of sex (…)., any story we might tell about such a body making its way toward the marker of sex will be a fictional one" (98). In reference to the creature, Steve Vine writes that

> the monster's bodiliness is ambivalently – perhaps undecidably – positioned (…). For, even though the monster's body is the site of his abjection and exclusion, that body at the same time imposes itself as the site of a certain resistance, a certain refusal – a refusal of the entire symbolic order that so viciously repudiates and abjects the monster as body. (144)

The creature's experience of exclusion is primarily external, and through it becomes more severely internalized. Its body is inextricably tied to this experience, as Vine notes at the beginning of his explanation. The creature's inability to adhere to the regulations of the system and what is expected retreats to the fact that it cannot exist within the confines of the gender binary. It is therefore necessary for it (or rather him) to either create a space and bring in to it the necessary components of a 'normal' life (such as a wife), conscious that it will be a deformed version of such a life, or choose to end it because of the inability to attain it. As the story goes, Frankenstein and his creature meet the same end, and ultimately do find some form of resolution – in death.

In *Frankissstein*, Elena Sheppard notes in her review, Victor Stein, "who repeatedly asserts that he is not gay, couches his attraction to Ry as something as philosophical as it is physical". Paralleling Ry with the creature is done within the confines of what has been presented above; the trans experience and identification with the 'monstrous' or 'fabricated' body are based on the experiences of trans authors and their identification with certain aspects of the creature's condition. In addition, as Butler notes in her reference to Freud, "only from a self-consciously denaturalized position can we see how the appearance of naturalness is itself constituted" (*Gender Trouble* 140). It is through the lens of Ry, and the creature, that gender performativity can be observed, and their storylines can be used to underline the instability of strict binary identities within the heteronormativity of fiction and reality.

One section of *Gender Trouble* is reserved for the analysis of Monique Wittig's philosophy, with a focus on Simone de Beauvoir's writing and what it means to 'become' a woman. Butler notes at one point that one of the ideas presented by Witting is also that "one can, if one chooses, become neither female nor male, woman nor man" (1990: 144). This can be applied to Ry Shelley, who consciously and purposefully chooses an existence outside the gender binary. It is a specifically crafted space that they are forced to create. It is important to note that the continuation of this explanation by Butler refers to "the lesbian [as] a third gender", and Wittig's philosophy presented is focused on "lesbian-feminism"; Butler has pointed out that her own writing is non-binary/trans-inclusionary.

The idea presented by Witting is that "it is possible to become a being whom neither *man* nor *woman* truly describes" (162), which Butler explains as referring to "an internal subversion in which the binary is both presupposed and proliferated to the point where it no longer makes sense" (162). Ry walks along

the lines of the gender binary when they refer to their own body as both male and female, mostly to simplify it for others who are struggling to understand it. Their own understanding and perception of it, however, are clear, even though complex. As a transgender man, Ry is forced to exist within the confines of what Butler presents as a general opinion, and that is that "one is one's gender to the extent that one is not the other gender, a formulation that presupposes and enforces the restriction of gender within that binary pair" (*Gender Trouble* 30), as well as compulsory heterosexuality and heteronormativity. Ry's 'self-made' body correlates to what Witting describes as "disunity", when she states

> [i]ndeed, the "unity" imposed upon the body by the category of sex is a "disunity," a fragmentation and compartmentalization, and a reduction of erotogeneity. (…) the "integrity" and "unity" of the body, often thought to be positive ideals, serve the purposes of fragmentation, restriction, and domination. (146)

Witting writes of the 'disunity' imposed by the naming of sexual organs as erogenous zones, which results in the restriction and fragmentation of the body. An imposed "artificial unity" (146) of the body is the consequence of the categorization of "sex" itself as something biologically and naturally given.

Another important notion in the two novels is the theory of phallogocentrism. The general notion has been developed by many, notably Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida. In the analysis, the 'phallus' is used to present the crucial distinction between 'male' and 'female', and it is a term which exists in the Symbolic. The two states of the phallus are 'having' and 'being', where 'having' is a 'male' characteristic, as the action or act of penetration, and 'being' is a 'female' characteristic, as the place which the 'phallus' penetrates. The 'being' also corelates to the key idea of 'lack' in Lacanian philosophy, tied to 'castration' in Freud; 'being' is the 'lack', a "hole within the self" (Hoeveler 50), since it is that which is 'female, and therefore not 'male'. Butler mentions Lacan in great detail, both in her analysis of phallogocentrism and other notions more or less tied to it; however, an interesting digression is made in *Bodies That Matter,* where she suggests that a refusal or failure to "accede to punishment" (102) that is castration results in an operation that is "much more destructive [as] feminine (…) [than] masculine" (103). For a 'woman' to then 'have' the phallus can be seen as even more severe than for a man to 'be' one. Here, Butler explicitly mentions identities that exist outside the gender binary and whose existence helps in negating it:

> these figures of abjection [the inverted versions of the heterosexualized masculinity and femininity], which are inarticulate yet organizing figures within the Lacanian symbolic, foreclose precisely the kind of complex crossings of identification and desire which might exceed and contest the binary frame itself. (102)

The contestation of "the binary frame itself" is then made possible through the existence of identities and bodies who actively break out of the mold, or try to

do so. Breaking out of or away from this frame brings with it an uncertainty that is the opposite of the definite and often secure confines of the gender binary. In *Frankissstein*, Ry's reality of existing in this liminal space is underlined in their own words; there is no clear-cut solution for them to be one or the 'Other', nor are they trying to find one:

> I am a woman. And I am a man. That's how it is for me. I am the body that I prefer. But the past, my past, isn't subject to surgery. I didn't do it to distance myself from myself. I did it to get nearer to myself. (*Frankissstein* 122)

It also constitutes a construction of such an identity, a deliberate and mindful mission. Unlike the creature's tragic fate and choice in the face of an impossibility of integration, Ry's decision is based on the knowledge that forced assimilation is neither possible nor necessary. It is neither a "descent into feminine castration" nor a "monstrous ascent into phallicism" (*Bodies That Matter* 103); rather, it can be seen as a manifestation of what Deleuze and Guattari note as "individual" sex (*Gender Trouble* 157), an active choice, and a way to find peace.

The notions of gender performativity, gender identity, the body, naming, and phallogocentrism taken from the works of Judith Butler find their parallels in *Frankenstein* and *Frankissstein* in both closely tied and distinctly separate ways. The novels, linked by characters, storylines, and ideas, provide ample space for interpretation, and Butler's works, in turn, serve as a well of inspiration in the analysis of not only contemporary, but also classic literature.

End Notes

1 Butler identifies as non-binary and uses she/they pronouns. https://www.newstatesman.com/international/2020/09/judith-butler-culture-wars-jk-rowling-and-living-anti-intellectual-times (accessed on 20 February 2021)

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