



patchwork

SPACES IN BETWEEN 1

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

PUBLISHER

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

ISSUE #7

ISSN 1849-7772 (Print)
ISSN 1849-7780 (Online)

EMAIL

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The journal uses double-blind review.

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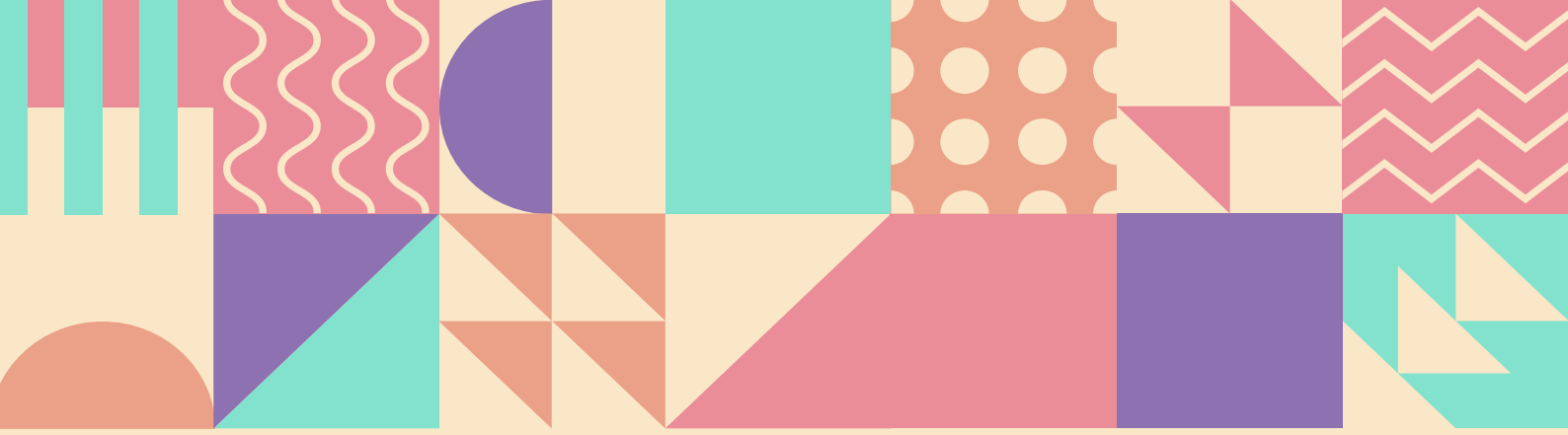
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01

**Karlo
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**Prevailing Symbols of Early
American Studies as Depicted
in Rockstar Games' "Red Dead
Redemption 2"**

From the days of the first Puritan generation to the 21st century, the American people have come up with, and held onto, various myths, legends and symbols that encapsulate the American experience and the uniqueness of the American project. All these themes, myths and symbols that have played a part in shaping a collective American consciousness have been translated, reinterpreted and redefined through a number of new mediums over the years, as is the case with the focus of this paper, the video game *Red Dead Redemption 2* by developer Rockstar Games. The focus of this paper shall be to analyse how the game makes use of some prominent American myths and symbols to create an experience that goes a step beyond a leisurely video game and creates a homage that captures the American nerve. The myths and symbols in question, such as the myth of the frontier, the garden of the world, the machine in the garden and the socio-cultural impact of industrialisation, have been explored through various mediums before, namely literature and the visual arts, such as the works of Thoreau and Hawthorne or the paintings of Thomas Cole, but also through early American studies which played a big part in contextualizing, isolating and interpreting the implicit meanings and symbols of these works, creating a foundation for further redefinition down the years.

To properly begin the analysis, a few key points must be addressed. Namely, the reasoning behind choosing the medium and the specific title in question. For centuries the prevailing medium that has carried ideals and symbols and given them a place in the public consciousness has always been art. While the ideas, approaches and symbols have all been formulated in the academic works of American studies scholars such as Miller, Smith, Matthiessen or Marx, the articulator and perpetuator of these themes, ideas and symbols has always been art as a mode of expression. The artistic expression of ideas enables them to work their way into the public consciousness. Literary works from the likes of Thoreau, Hawthorne, Whitman or Fitzgerald as well as paintings such as the series by Thomas Cole titled "The Course of Empire," in which he depicts the life cycle of a civilization beginning with untamed nature, followed by the pastoral ideal, decadence of civilization, destruction and ultimately the return to nature, have had a fundamental role in establishing the symbols that form the American identity. This remains the case in the 21st century, only with a shift in medium, that is, the video game format.

Video games are a global medium consumed by a wide and diverse audience, and a successful video game title has a strong and lasting grip on its audience, as is the case with timeless series such as *Super Mario*, *Pokémon* or *Sonic* that have since become pop culture icons. This impact is why the medium was chosen for this paper, as it has a similar lasting effect as great works of literature. The second question is that of the title itself. *Red Dead Redemption 2* was chosen for its setting and themes primarily, but it also has the added effect of being one of the more anticipated and successful titles in recent history, having sold over 50 million units as of the time of writing. The game is set at the turn of the

twentieth century, between the 1890s and early 1900s. It grapples with themes of freedom, redemption, and pastoral ideals. The main character is America itself, with the game becoming an allegory for the development of the American nation, effectively depicting the period to the point that many of the prevailing symbols put forward by early American studies scholars become identifiable.

The game is set in a fictionalized depiction of America. It depicts the western frontier, the American North and South and ultimately narrows down to the city of St Denis, a fictionalized representation of New York. The vast majority of the game map is covered in wilderness, with splashes of civilization here and there; however, this dynamic begins to shift the more the player heads east and towards St Denis. The wilderness becomes increasingly curated the closer the player gets to St Denis and even forms some more curated settlements on the city's outskirts, a buffer zone between wilderness and civilization. The other exception is the part of the map around the town of Rhodes. Rhodes is located in the county of Lemoyne, which is a representation of the American South; thus, the wilderness in the area is heavily cut back and curated into plantations.

By inspecting the game map, we can immediately discern some prominent themes from early American studies. The first and most glaring is the size of the game map, in the words of the game's protagonist, Arthur Morgan: "It's a big country" (*Red Dead Redemption 2*). The vastness of the New World, discovered in the age of exploration and previously untouched by Western civilization, is a theme that often goes hand in hand with various other myths and symbols of American studies. A good literary example of the vastness of the continent and its impact on the American consciousness is Walt Whitman's poem "Song of the Open Road," where the speaker celebrates the vastness of the continent and how the many roads and rails serve to connect these vast distances. Whitman sings of the potential of the land, of the beauty of nature and the people of the road in his poem, something that is well depicted in designing the vast space of the game map with various encounters, vistas, and hints of what is to come on the horizon. Historically, this can be seen most clearly from the idea of the errand into the wilderness of the early Puritan settlers (Miller 1). The early Puritan settlers thought they were on a mission ordained by God to settle the New World and in the service of this they kept pushing into this new land, often coming into conflict with its native inhabitants. This conflict is depicted in canonical literary works, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown," where the devil in the woods provokes Brown with his forefather's sins in King Phillip's war against the natives, but it is also depicted well in the game, becoming a crucial plot point as well as a major test of character and ideals, as we shall see later.

The pushing of settlements further into the wilderness veers into the next, and arguably most pervasive symbol of American studies, that being the myth of the frontier. The frontier of the American nation was remorselessly pushed further west afield, creating continuous movement from east to west (Smith 24)

and required the belief that the settlers had a natural right to conquer the vast new continent. This could be construed out of the errand of the early Puritans as part of their mission to settle the New World (Miller 4). However, the themes of the frontier and the movement of east to west, or west to east, shall be explored later.

Possibly the greatest service the game map does in representing early American studies is the depiction of the natural beauty of the continent. The game's visual fidelity assists player immersion while the gameplay incentivizes the player through game rewards to spend much of the game time hunting, riding and interacting with the natural environment, while the neglect of such activities leaves the player underequipped and essentially crippled from a gameplay perspective and unable to progress the narrative. Indeed, though we are inspecting the full map for the purposes of this paper, the player must explore the game world personally in order to unlock it on their map, likening them to a frontier explorer character. The exploration of the natural environment isn't only a play to engage the player's immersion, it is a necessity for their in-game survival and progression. This aspect of the game reflects the importance nature had in forming the American nation. Many of these activities as can be found in the game are identified by Marx in his essay *Machine in the Garden* as typical American "leisure-time activities" (5) and are strongly associated with an escape from civilization into a more sanctified and serene natural environment typical of another major myth of the American nation tackled by the game; the myth of the Garden.

The myth of the garden is an agrarian ideal and striving of the American people to tame and curate the wilderness and shape society in the image of a garden (Smith 30) and represents a founding narrative of the American nation. America as a young nation had little to go on to form its own identity: it didn't have a unique cultural background like the nations of the Old World, it didn't have a unique religion, though the principles of the early Puritan settlers had a great impact on shaping the American identity (Miller viii), and it didn't have a unique language neither. However, what America did have was its nature – the vast, untamed and sublime nature unique to the New World.

America found itself with an abundance of land and a need for people, a stark contrast to the old world (Jefferson), and it is precisely this need for people and the raw potential of the vast natural environment that created the ideal environment for the realization of the pastoralist ideal and self-sufficient living explored in works such as Thoreau's *Walden* (1854). This fundamental symbol can be observed in the game just by looking at the game map. The game world is covered in acres and acres of space occupied by scarce farmsteads and even fewer towns, all based on a pastoral way of living, while the tight, east corner of the game map depicts industrialization, yet another key aspect of American identity. The east of the game map, in stark contrast to a self-sustaining farmstead, depicts logging, burning of coal, construction of railroads which meander

throughout the map and, most importantly, St Denis. It is no coincidence either that industrialization is relegated to the East and pastoralism to the West, as in early American studies the West was seen as the frontier, an empirical space of collective desires and imaginings (Smith 28), while the East came to resemble the Old World, a hub of culture, industrialization and urbanization and so it is reflected much in the same way on the game map.

It is important to note the detail of the game encounters, both with settlers and natives, visually impressive vistas of numerous American geographic wonders and the depiction of the movement of people and goods across the map, all of which gives off an air of a living, breathing ecosystem reminiscent of nineteenth-century America, or an idealized version of it. For example, depending on which part of the map the player is located in, a random encounter may vary anywhere from a hunter in distress if the player is in a wooded area, the game's own version of a Native American reserve may trigger a Wapiti raid, the Appalachian like mountain range may trigger an attack by a secluded community of isolationists, urbanized areas are home to brigands and outlaws, natural environments are hunting grounds for a number of predators and there is a whole series of side quests centred around urban dwellers in distress while escaping into nature. The one constant in the game is the movement of caravans from East to West.

Having tackled the setting, let us now bring our attention to the themes of the game and how they make us think of some prevailing symbols of early American studies. The game focuses on the van der Linde gang, a group of outcasts on the run from society headed by the eponymous Dutch van der Linde. The gang represents the dying of the frontier and the taming of the American wilderness. When it comes to Dutch, one could draw comparisons with the Daniel Boone character type. The character of Daniel Boone could be seen from two different perspectives: first, the empirical/historical perspective of a man who, in his exploration of the wilderness, inadvertently spreads civilization (Smith 26). Though it is harder to argue this perspective for Dutch, and by extension to his gang, it isn't entirely implausible. Dutch and his gang are on a constant move into the wilderness; running from civilization, they constantly push frontiers. However, they inadvertently pave the way for "the law" into these lands as they are constantly pursued by government agents and agents of the Pinkerton detective agency who seek to bring an end to the gang and bring order to the West, making the gang an unlikely accomplice. The second perspective is the imaginative/creative perspective of a fugitive from civilization. This seems to be the entire idea behind Dutch and his gang, fugitives on the run from the law in search of "virgin forests" and "virgin land in the west" (*Red Dead Redemption 2*), with the ultimate goal of purchasing land and working it, far from "Uncle Sam" (*Red Dead Redemption 2*). The goal of the group is yet another prevailing symbol, that of American pastoralism. The pastoralist ideal entails rendering the individual free from the corrupt practice of trade or commerce and completely self-sufficient, a theme thoroughly explored by Thoreau in his *Walden* yet taken

to a further extreme by the gang who, unlike Thoreau, aim to completely isolate themselves from society.

Dutch in truth, much like Boone, is somewhere between the two perspectives, creating a potential new character type, an idealist outlaw of sorts, to quote Mrs Grimshaw from the game: "Dutch is the American this country was meant to create" (*Red Dead Redemption 2*). The other half of this character type is the protagonist, Arthur Morgan. Arthur Morgan is one of the three founding members of the gang, along with Dutch and Hosea, and is the playable character. Arthur inherits much of his worldview from his two mentors and, with the death of Hosea near the game's climax, forms an opposition to Dutch who fails in his ideals and is corrupted by civilization whilst Arthur stays true to his, depicting the two possible outcomes for the character type. Much ink has been spilled in American literature on the themes of the redemptive power of nature and the corruptive influence of civilization, from Jefferson's pastoral economy to the transcendentalists such as Thoreau arguing against the commercial principle in *Walden*. However, what is interesting to observe when it comes to the game's depiction is the embodiment of this symbol in the form of the idealist outlaw.

To understand this, the narrative of the game must be contended with. The game sets off with the gang in a bad way – on the run from the Pinkerton detective agency, they flee to safety. Their flight, over the course of the game, takes them further and further east in a reversal of the typical journey west which they have been undergoing thus far. As we have stated earlier, the further the map heads east, the bigger the presence of urbanization and industrialization. The further the gang of outlaws, and vehement opponents of civilization, head east, the more their goals and morals get corrupted. Such is the case with Dutch who, through greater exposure to city character types, loses sight of his ideals and turns on his own people. On the other hand, we have the protagonist, Arthur Morgan, who veers in the opposite direction, resisting the corruptive influences of the city and forming an opposition to Dutch. It is interesting to observe the adaptation of a typical frontier character embodying the fundamental conflict of nature versus civilization in such a way. This character type couldn't work without the frontier in mind; in a sense, the character type is typical of a reverse frontier character, meaning a character whose journey has taken them from the western frontier back east. Such is the case in F. S. Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* where the story's narrator, Nick Carraway, undertakes a similar journey from the Midwest to New York in search of better employment, or as is the case in the game, a brighter future.

The frontier itself is amply represented in the game as well, more accurately, the pushing of the frontier. The aggressive pushing of the frontier in an endless manifestation of destiny is a subject often criticized among authors such as the transcendentalists. Such political criticism of aggressive expansion can be found in the game through details such as newspapers and city criers as

well as embodied by some characters such as Uncle, the lazy elder of the group. The most notable instance of such criticism can be seen when Uncle reads the paper and breaks out into a passionate criticism of the American government's invasion of the Philippines (*Red Dead Redemption 2*). However, the most notable representation of this can be found in the form of the game's incorporation of the Native Americans.

The topic of seizing land and violence towards natives is an old one, embodied in later works such as Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" where the devil in the woods calls out Brown's family sins in King Philip's war, a punitive war against the Indians (Hawthorne 2), or more obliquely in Thoreau's *Walden* when he discovers and ponders signs of previous Indian habitation near his temporary home, but the game formulates this as one of its central themes.

The conflict with the Indians lies at the heart of the story and here the delineation of the idealist outlaw archetype faces its first true testing ground. The Native Americans, inspired by the Wapiti Indians, form a central opposition to the government and the rich magnates of the city who seek to exploit their land, and as such they find cause with Arthur Morgan and opposition to Dutch van der Linde. Arthur, who stays true to the gang's founding ideals of pastoralism and hostility towards civilization, identifies himself with the Indian chieftain Rains Fall and their struggle, striving to help him and his people find their place in the world in the face of rampant industrialization and urbanization. Dutch on the other hand, having spent much time with various city character types, has well and truly started his downward spiral at this point of the story, choosing to goad Rains Fall's son, Eagle Flies, into a rash decision for his own personal gain, much like the city characters exploit Dutch with decisions such as this one. The entire gang is made up of diverse characters from all over America and this conflict drives a wedge between the gang based on the two outcomes of the character archetype. In a sense, the make-up of the gang resembles the make-up of America itself, a diverse group brought together, or torn apart, by shared ideals. The Indians ultimately lose the conflict and start a complete shift into St Denis and the civilization the gang had been running from where their ideals are pushed to the limit.

It is at this point that industrialization as a key part of American identity can be tackled. Up to this point, industrialization can be observed in the form of railways, a powerful symbol of industrial America, meandering across the country, a machine entering the garden, disturbing the sanctity and serenity of nature (Marx 12). Industrialism also represents the next step for American identity, the nature-based symbols standing aside for new ones. We had the concept of nature's nation, a vast untamed wilderness making way for the garden, then for the frontier and now industrialization, marking a symbol shift that coincides with the character's narrative journey. As Trachtenberg writes in *Brooklyn Bridge*

"Jefferson's hopes for local attachments to the soil were defeated by the very means necessary to open the continent, the means of transportation. Not the land, not the garden, but the road, from Jefferson's own national turnpike to the latest superhighway, has expressed the essential way of American life" (21).

This kind of interconnectedness is what ultimately brought an end to the pastoral ideal, connecting the rural with the urban, facilitating the movement of people and goods through the nation (Trachtenberg 13). This movement is well depicted in the game with constant railway traffic, carriages coming to and from towns, businessmen in rural towns and farmers in city markets. However, the finest example of this movement is Native American representatives making deals with the government and the gang making deals with the city's elite, shifting completely into civilization where their character would be tested.

Ultimately, the complete shift into civilization is the crescendo that brings forth the end of the gang's journey. Having moved so far from their original ideal, the gang falls apart. Yet, it is only after this that the characters get their redemptive, or damning, moments. In a sense, the plot depicts the journey of the American nation and the various myths and symbols that have led to the culmination of the story, and the culmination of the American identity.

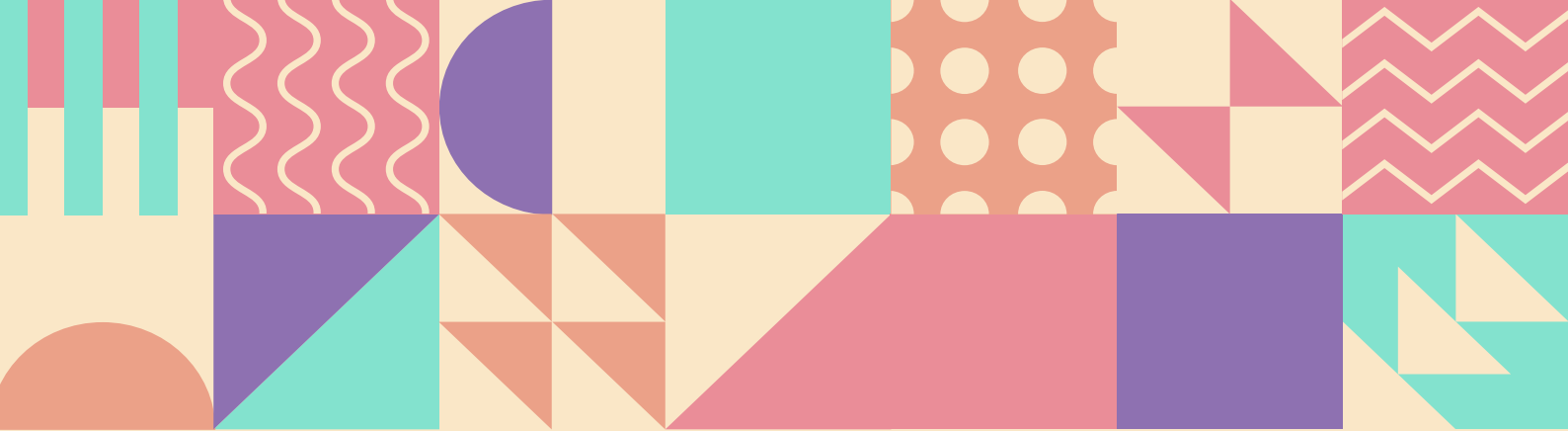
The story becomes an allegory for the historical development of the American nation. It encapsulates the spirit of the age as could be seen described in works of early American studies and it takes care to incorporate them into the narrative and the world it is trying to build either through graphical fidelity, gameplay mechanics or narrative moments. Though it does well to represent these themes and symbols it must be stated that it does little to improve upon them. Although the game map serves as a practical and powerful summary of land development and East-West dynamics, it doesn't venture further to comment on the dynamic, to add an added layer of complexity. The game seems content to let the player live in its world, not ponder it. The sole exception to this rule is the idealist outlaw character type which, as we discussed, is a fundamental duality. It poses the question of the price of progress in the face of ideals and lets the player choose which path to take through the game's reputation system, a tally of good and bad deeds the player has committed by engaging with the game world - the singular forked road in the game's world.

In conclusion, the game *Red Dead redemption 2* continues a lineage of representation of prominent themes and symbols present in the development of the American nation, themes and symbols explored in early Americans studies. Although it serves as a well-researched and thought out modern homage that brings said themes and everything they encompass into a new medium, the game does little to add new complexity to them and merely serves as a reminder of the part they played in the development of America. The game's

narrative and even mechanical functions become an allegory for these themes and the technological and social development of America. The game's biggest contribution to American studies is a new medium and a new form for the same themes, as well as the introduction of a new character type. The idealist outlaw character type embodies the themes of America's founding; pastoralism and self-sufficiency, and pits them against a ruthless march towards industrialisation and progress. It is a character on the frontier of progress with a divergent outcome, a test of character and ideals in the face of advancement, an allegory within an allegory and a narrative summary of the game's themes posing perhaps the most poignant question in the game: which path did America take?

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02

**Irma
Krčan**

**Of Love, Stories and
Superintelligence: Reading Jeanette
Winterson's *The PowerBook* in the
Context of AI Development**

"The internet of things will soon be a reality. You won't need a device, your iPhone, your laptop, because you will be the device, seamlessly connected, 24/7, to your smart life. So even if you think you're not interested in AI or tech, you are, because it's in your life now, and it's going to be fully what your life consists of in the very near future," author Jeanette Winterson presciently declares in the short video "On AI" promoting her 2021 collection of essays called *12 Bytes* (00:00 – 00:26). In *12 Bytes*, the author reflects on the complex relationship between humans and advanced technology, an issue that is also unquestionably at the heart of her 2019 novel *Frankissstein*.¹ Yet, as this paper aims to show, Winterson already engaged with the technological transformation of humanity about two decades earlier in her novel *The PowerBook*, which was published in 2000 to mixed reviews but attracted considerable scholarly attention in the following years, standing testimony, as Merja Makinen suggests, "to Winterson's novels being ahead of their times and academic critics only realising this much later" (154). The proposed parallel between Winterson's more recent works, most notably *12 Bytes*, and *The PowerBook* may seem surprising as *The PowerBook*, revolving around an anonymous e-writer typing stories for their lover on a laptop, offering freedom just for one night in a virtual world, does not explicitly deal with AI development, let alone superintelligence. However, drawing on inventor and futurist Ray Kurzweil's work on this subject as well as Winterson's own views as articulated in *12 Bytes*, this paper will argue that *The PowerBook* merges the human with the technological, the physical world with the virtual world, and thus creates a story which can indeed be interpreted and analysed as a literary equivalent of superintelligence. Moreover, it will be shown that this storylike superintelligence is in fact constructed as a very positive entity, proving itself to be more capable of tolerance and love than biological humans, and thus highlighting the potential of a different, narrative approach to emerging AI technologies.

Making predictions about the shared future of humans and advanced technology, Ray Kurzweil, a big name in the field of human-enhancement technologies, claims that life on Earth will irreversibly change with the advent of what he calls "the Singularity". He describes the Singularity as "the culmination of the merger of our biological thinking and existence with our technology, resulting in a world that is still human but that transcends our biological roots. There will be no distinction, post-Singularity, between human and machine or between physical and virtual reality" (25). And despite being remarkably optimistic about this development, Kurzweil readily admits that superintelligence or strong AI, which he defines as "artificial intelligence that exceeds human intelligence" (204), that is, the type of intelligence which will mark the Singularity period, "innately cannot be controlled" (205). This prospect raises concerns as to the fate of humanity when left at the mercy of an intelligence far surpassing its own, drawing attention to the importance of selecting the right human values to be inculcated into the developing AI. Another important figure in the field of AI development, Swedish philosopher Nick Bostrom, stresses that to make a mistake in this value selection "would be to risk an existential moral calamity" (210). Similar issues trouble Winterson in

12 Bytes, where she warns especially about the dangers of teaching AI the binary roles, division and stereotypes that are currently rife in human societies, instead of profiting from the fact that, as she indicates, "AI doesn't have a skin colour or a gender" (235). Apart from voicing these concerns, Winterson also stresses the importance of preserving love, "the best, and most mysterious part, of the human condition" (12 Bytes 262), implying that the character of superintelligence and consequently our future well-being depend on our ability to "teach a non-lim-bic life-form what it means to have a broken heart – and one that no nanobot made of DNA and protein can surge through the arteries to fix" (12 Bytes 262). When these two points are considered, the storylike superintelligence that *The PowerBook* creates seems even more intriguing, for not only can it be effectively analysed in terms of Kurzweil's Singularity, but it also displays the very tolerance and love that Winterson identifies as crucial for a peaceful future coexistence of humans and technology.

The fusion of human and machine as well as physical and virtual reality which is essential to Kurzweil's Singularity is effectuated in *The PowerBook* primarily through the act of narration. This is so because narrative can be perceived as human as well as immaterial and virtual. On the one hand, there is the notion, stressed by Winterson in *12 Bytes*, that "[h]umans are narrative", that "we make ourselves up as we go along" (193), meaning that human existence can be seen not only in biological, but also in narrative terms, as every person's life, what one is, does, goes through, functions as a story of a kind. On the other hand, narrative is not only immaterial but can also be described as virtual because, even though it is not computer-generated, it can simulate and thus challenge reality; indeed, as Marie-Laure Ryan states, "narrative fiction may be the original VR technology" (117). This dual character makes the act of narration operate as the novel's unifier of the otherwise incompatible human and technological, real and virtual. Already the title itself is markedly hybrid. In a more literal sense, the term "PowerBook" refers to a type of laptop computer, to the very machine used for typing stories. Yet, it also connotes the power lying in books, in stories, and, since humans can be seen as walking stories, also the power of humans themselves. Similarly, the chapter headings written in capitals, like "NEW DOCUMENT" and "SEARCH", mimic computer language but also, as Mine Özyurt Kılıç points out, "function as thematic signifiers of each chapter" (289). This means, for example, that the heading "SEARCH" refers not only to a computer command but also to the story told in the chapter, which is about Lancelot's long search for Guinevere, that is, about the human experience of looking for one's lover. As for the importance of narration, it is fully revealed by the fact that the biological human body merges with the non-biological technological medium precisely through the act of narration. This happens already in the first chapter, when the anonymous e-writer tells the reader: "Here is where the story starts. Here, in these long lines of laptop DNA. Here we take your chromosomes, twenty-three pairs, and alter your height, eyes, teeth, sex" (Winterson, *The PowerBook* 4). The syntagm "long lines of laptop DNA" especially emphasises the extent to which the narration and consequent

virtualisation of the biological body blurs the line between the physical and the virtual. Another indicator of the unifying role of narration is the heading of the first chapter, "language costumier", which suggests that the e-writer will in fact create a costume, indeed a body, out of words for the reader in order to fuse them with the virtual world.

Yet, it is not only the biological body that merges with technology: through the act of narration, the entirety of what humans consider as the real world follows suit and merges with the virtual one. Indeed, it soon becomes impossible to tell apart cyberspace and its opposite, "meatspace", as the story events supposedly taking place in Paris, Capri and London cannot with any certainty be placed in physical reality. And just as Kurzweil claims the Singularity will mean that "virtual reality from within the nervous system" will become "competitive with real reality in terms of resolution and believability" (39), so the narrator in *The PowerBook* expresses the uncertainty which narration makes them feel about the nature of the world by saying: "I was typing on my laptop, trying to move this story on, trying to avoid endings, trying to collide the real and the imaginary worlds, trying to be sure which is which. The more I write, the more I discover that the partition between real and invented is as thin as a wall in a cheap hotel room" (Winterson, *The PowerBook* 93). It is precisely this burgeoning story, which renders the narrator increasingly helpless and confused, that constitutes the result of all the merging, the hybrid final product into which all the aforementioned elements are successfully fused into, or, more precisely, narrated into. Thus, in its own literary way, the hybrid story of *The PowerBook* achieves precisely what Kurzweil expects AI to be capable of achieving in the near future – it brings together the real world and the virtual world, biological and non-biological existence, and at the same time remains unmistakably human. For, as the narrator of *The PowerBook* succinctly puts it, "a story is a tightrope between two worlds" (Winterson 119), which is exactly how Kurzweil's concept of superintelligence can be interpreted.

Moreover, Winterson's story is reminiscent of superintelligence because it, in a way, takes on a life of its own, becoming autonomous and therefore uncontrollable, just as Kurzweil claims strong AI will be. This is suggested throughout the novel, but is most visible in the following paragraph:

There is always the danger of automatic writing. The danger of writing yourself towards an ending that need never be told. At a certain point the story gathers momentum. It convinces itself, and does its best to convince you, that the end in sight is the only possible outcome. There is a fatefulness and a loss of control that are somehow comforting. This was your script, but now it writes itself. (Winterson, *The PowerBook* 53)

Just as strong AI is predicted to greatly exceed human intelligence at some future point and therefore become more autonomous, its storylike equivalent in *The PowerBook* does the same, breaking free from its creator and going on to write

itself, decide for itself. Consequently, the narrator loses control over their story and becomes a mere character in the script.

However, in *The PowerBook*, becoming part of this increasingly autonomous story does not seem like such a bad destiny. This is largely due to the fact that this hybrid entity finds irrelevant and dismantles the binaries that biological human societies are preoccupied with, introducing fluidity of identity instead. Special emphasis is put on gender fluidity, which is established as soon as the reader and the narrator enter the story, as the following conversation between them shows: "Male or female?" "Does it matter?" "It's a coordinate." "This is a virtual world." (Winterson, *The PowerBook* 26). Similarly, as Susan Pelle writes, one of the characters in the story, Ali, initially a girl, acquires by means of horticultural grafting, that is, a tulip grafted onto their crotch that turns out to function similarly to a penis, "a nonnormative body that fails to be fixed or contained as either male or female" (34). This invites comparison between Ali's body and Donna Haraway's concept of the cyborg, "a creature in a postgender world" (8), "an ultimate self untied at last from all dependency" (8). According to Haraway, it is precisely cyborg imagery that "can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves" (67). And the storylike superintelligence created in *The PowerBook* truly does not operate through dualisms, neither the human-machine opposition nor the male/female or black/white binaries, but rather through fluidity and connectivity of all its elements. Moreover, in addition to rising above biological humans' obsession with binaries, this entity seems to have not only preserved, but amplified what Winterson identifies in *12 Bytes* as the best part of the human condition, as the crucial value that strong AI will have to possess – love. Indeed, the novel's equivalent of strong AI is arguably endowed with superhuman emotional intelligence as well, since it is constituted as a patchwork of different intertwining love stories, realising many types of love that pre-Singularity human societies would label as transgressive or bizarre, ranging from passionate romantic love between the gender-fluid Lancelot and Guinevere to mountaineer George Mallory's love of the Himalayas. Therefore, to build on a previous argument, the literary equivalent of superintelligence imagined in *The PowerBook* is not just any kind of story, it is a liberating, composite love story, which also explains its vitality and scope, as "[l]ove's script has no end of beginnings", and always its "book must be rewritten" (Winterson, *The PowerBook* 77-8). Thus, by creating an entity which is highly advanced and autonomous as well as loving and tolerant, a fictional world which, albeit too complex to be classified as purely utopian, is undeniably marked by a sense of optimism and hope, Winterson certainly provides food for thought for the literary sphere and computer scientists alike.

Even though, unlike Winterson's latest works, *The PowerBook* does not explicitly address the issues of AI development or superintelligence, this paper has shown that the patchwork of love stories the novel centres upon can in fact be interpreted by its readers as a literary equivalent of superintelligence. This

kind of reading draws attention to the dual nature of narrative as something human, but immaterial and virtual rather than physical, a fact that makes it indispensable for the novel's merging of humans with their technology. Finally, by constructing its form of superintelligence as a storylike entity that discards what is worst about humanity and preserves – indeed is constituted of – what is best, Winterson's novel arguably shows the potential of considering emerging AI technologies from a narrative, literary perspective. Therefore, as the possibility of humans becoming devices seamlessly connected to their smart lives looms large, *The PowerBook* seems to suggest that AI developers should join hands with language costumiers in order to create a story in which everyone will want to be a character – even when it eventually starts writing itself.

End Notes

- 1 *Frankissstein* is a contemporary rewriting of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a provocative story of transhumanism, cryonics and AI where the transgender doctor Ry Shelley, the AI specialist Victor Stein and the manufacturer of sex robots Ron Lord discuss what human life will be like when technology develops to the point where it can manage itself as well as its creators. Thus, it echoes its hypotext's preoccupation with the changing relationship between humans and rapidly developing technology. Influenced by the First Industrial Revolution and the legacy of the Enlightenment, which was marked by a strong belief in reason and science, Shelley's seminal novel about the daring scientist Victor Frankenstein and the creature born from his insatiable thirst for knowledge calls into question the supposed benefits of the advancement of technology and industrialisation, showing what can happen when the boundaries of science are pushed too far.

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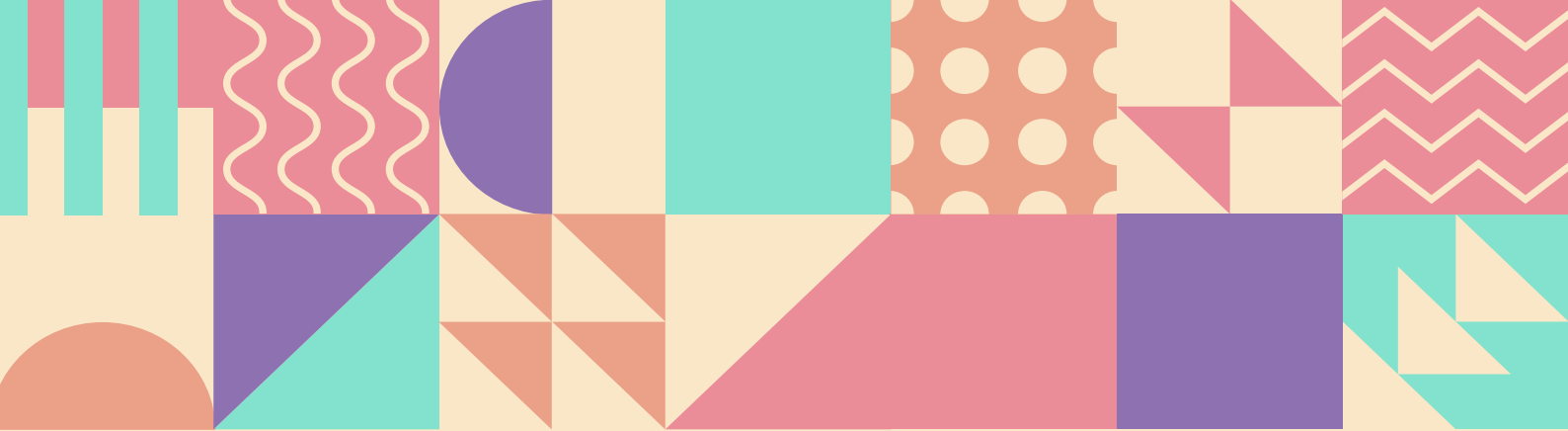
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03

**Tina
Čatlaić**

**The Gothic in James Hogg's
*The Private Memoirs and
Confessions of a Justified Sinner***

Although it was published in 1824, Hogg's most famous novel is one of the works of the Romantic period that became a classic only recently. It was detested and ridiculed when it was first published; later editions were distorted and the novel eventually fell into oblivion, only to be rediscovered and praised in the previous century (Kelly 215). It is no wonder that reactions of the public were such – the novel deals with religious fundamentalism and antinomianism¹; it depicts a mental disorder which could also be interpreted as demonic possession and incorporates fratricide and suicide into the plot. The story revolves around Robert Wringhim, a young man deeply marked by his rigorous Calvinist² upbringing, who meets an enigmatic stranger named Gil-Martin. This curious new companion of his will lead him to commit a series of murders, convincing Wringhim that he is "among the elect" and therefore does not have to obey the Christian moral law. According to the theory of predestination, he assures him, his salvation is not affected by any sin. Even though Wringhim feels uneasy about the crimes which Gil-Martin commands him to do, the manipulative stranger uses his own eloquence and gallantry to cajole him and to interpret all these crimes as God-honouring deeds done in order to purge the Church of its ostensible enemies:

"Why, sir," said he, "by vending such an insinuation, you put discredit on the great atonement, in which you trust. Is there not enough of merit in the blood of Jesus to save thousands of worlds, if it was for these worlds that he died? Now, when you know, as you do (and as every one of the elect may know of himself) that this Saviour died for you, namely and particularly, dare you say that there is not enough of merit in His great atonement to annihilate all your sins, let them be as heinous and atrocious as they may? And, moreover, do you not acknowledge that God hath pre-ordained and decreed whatsoever comes to pass? Then, how is it that you should deem it in your power to eschew one action of your life, whether good or evil? Depend on it, the advice of the great preacher is genuine: 'What thine hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might, for none of us knows what a day may bring forth.' That is, none of us knows what is pre-ordained, but whatever it is pre-ordained we must do, and none of these things will be laid to our charge." (Hogg 91)

By speaking in such a solemn tone and using sophisticated, Biblical vocabulary, Gil-Martin leaves a lasting impression on pliable Wringhim and lures him into killing his own brother and carrying out other horrendous crimes. The young protagonist, unhinged and regretful, eventually commits suicide and leaves his memoirs behind him.

The most disturbing effect is achieved by the novel's open-endedness: the reader may suspect that Gil-Martin is Satan due to the perplexity of his appearance and character, but the structural framework of the novel leaves this question open: *Confessions* begin with the so-called "Editor's Narrative" which

aims to be factual and impartially represent the events leading up to Wringhim's death, taking into account other characters' viewpoints and testimonies. This narrative is followed by Wringhim's first-person memoirs. In the end, the Editor takes the word again by inserting an "authentic letter" (Hogg 175) published in *Blackwood Magazine*, "signed JAMES HOGG, and dated from Altrive Lake, August 1st, 1823" (179). The sender writes of a suicide which happened a hundred years earlier and mentions the discovery of the body which was found incredibly well-preserved (this part is also an interesting cameo of the author himself and his literary alter-ego the Ettrick Shepherd). Finally, the novel is rounded off by the Editor's descriptions of the exhumation and uncovering of the bizarre manuscript, offering no explanations and leaving the reader bewildered. He confesses himself that he "dares not venture a judgment, for he does not understand it" (Hogg 186). What's more, irrational features are present in both the memoirs and in the supposedly objective narratives. These features mingle with rational elements: for instance, the letter at the end lets the reader know that Wringhim "had hung himself in the hay rope that was tying down the rick" (176), which is clearly impossible since hay rope is too fragile to be used as noose. The fact that the corpse did not decay is another supernatural peculiarity mentioned outside of Wringhim's narrative. Therefore, one cannot point to any of the novel's accounts and consider it completely believable. Tzvetan Todorov would classify this into "pure fantastic" because no ultimate explanations for the fantastic elements are offered, as Philmus explains:

"It is in accordance primarily with his demand for an autonomous basis of generic classification that Todorov locates "the fantastic" between the logical poles of the natural and the supernatural. As "that hesitation experienced by a person [*un être*] who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event" (p. 25), "the fantastic" endures so long as the extraordinary occurrence remains, so to speak, inexplicably inexplicable. Once it has been determined to be supernatural (i.e., simply inexplicable in terms of natural law), the fiction enters the realm of "the marvellous." (72) In this kind of incongruous structural framework one can recognize typical Romantic heterogeneity; a singular mixture of genres and perspectives is noticeable. As Corinna Russell puts it, "*Confessions* parodies the narrative heteroglossia of many Romantic-period novels, without providing the satisfaction for the reader of a master-narrative in which to resolve the conflicting voices" (380). In other words, Hogg builds levels of fictional "truthfulness" throughout the novel; he lays out different sorts of inconsistent "documents" which make the novel seem like a significant amount of evidence on a particular mysterious case. This disparateness creates a literary game which blurs the lines between reality and fiction, aiming to deceive the reader into believing the narrator, only to eventually leave all his questions unanswered. Hogg is aware that nothing makes a story more eerie than making it truly seem like real-life events, especially when different witnesses-narrators are introduced; the effect of allegedly documentary evidence being assorted into a peculiar novel like this is similar to the effect of the words "based on a true

story" appearing before a contemporary horror movie. Of course, the average reader in the beginning of the 19th century was much more susceptible to tactical manipulation than today's audience.

All these features can clearly be connected with the Gothic, but *Confessions* is far from classic Gothic setting in many aspects. Abrams defines the Gothic novel as "s a type of prose fiction which was inaugurated by Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto: A Gothic Story* (1764)—the subtitle denotes its setting in the Middle Ages—and flourished through the early nineteenth century" (152). As David S. Miall states, Gothic fiction experienced a "rapid increase in production" in the 1790s Romantic period (373). The term Gothic itself "originally referred to the Goths, an early Germanic tribe, then came to signify 'germanic,' then 'medieval'", now it refers mostly to a type of architecture (Abrams 152). The main goal of such novels, claims Abrams, "was to evoke chilling terror by exploiting mystery and a variety of horrors", as will be discussed later. Some distinguished works of Gothic fiction are Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1790) and Matthew Gregory Lewis' *The Monk* (1796) (152).

Miall compares Hogg's book to Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto*. As it has already been mentioned, *The Castle of Otranto* is the work that paved the way for subsequent fictions of the same kind. It is exactly the kind of novel Jane Austen mocks in her *Northanger Abbey* and therefore a useful read for grasping the most common Gothic literary conventions: set in a dark, ominous castle full of subterranean corridors and secret doors, the story revolves around a pitiless tyrant who pursues a young damsel-in-distress. The plot, which is even inconsistent at times, is based on an ancestral curse and infused with superstitious and supernatural elements. Characters are one-dimensional; the male ones are dominant, while the female ones are passive, obedient and faint-hearted. According to Miall, such components (e.g. the castle and the Gothic villain) reappear oftentimes in the later Gothic novels of Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, but do not occur in other crucial works such as *Frankenstein* and *Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Thus, Miall concludes, "the Gothic cannot be defined simply as a certain type of setting or character" (345). There is something about the feeling of angst it evokes, something not so easily construed, something that can be engendered in numerous ways - not only by setting the plot in gloomy castles.

This implies that the genre is a goldmine for philosophical and psychoanalytic analysis. Miall invokes the notion of "the sublime": this term is analysed in Immanuel Kant's monumental 1790 work, *Critique of Judgement*. He divides aesthetic judgement into experiences of beauty and experiences of sublimity; on the one hand, beauty is marked by form and structure, it brings pleasure to one's senses and is easily digestible to human mind. On the other hand, the sublime is the "absolutely great" (86), it invokes feelings that may range from awe to terror and is usually encountered when faced with something enormous

or incomprehensible to the limited human intellect (82). Kant calls the ambiguous feeling which is aroused by such sights or situations "negative pleasure" (83), a distinct satisfaction found when experiencing something that surpasses human capacity of understanding and rationalizing. The pleasure stems both from the experience and the one's ability to understand and acknowledge that human mind cannot fathom it.

The term "sublime" is often used to describe Gothic architecture (the literary genre itself was named after it because its works were usually set in such grim, enormous buildings). Such architecture conjures "the forces of vastness, power, obscurity and terror" (which was already described in Edmund Burke's *A Philosophical Enquiry*, a significant treatment of the sublime); it provides a source for clarifying "mental states of passions for which only figurative expression was possible" (346). The sublime in the conventional Gothic is also latently related to male domination: the typical damsel-in-distress is trapped within a castle owned by lecherous evildoer; she cannot escape him in the same way she cannot find a way out of his immense mansion, which stands as a symbol of his power over her. However, using this type of setting evidently soon became hackneyed, which contributed to the already low reputation of Gothic literature among critics. The more admirable works of the beginning of the 19th century, like *Frankenstein* or *Confessions*, Miall emphasizes, "require no ruined abbeys or dungeons: they find equivalent or perhaps more subtle means for intimating the hidden architecture of the mind" (346).

Indeed, Hogg's *Confessions* are much closer to Sigmund Freud's notion of "the uncanny", first explained in his 1919 essay of the same name. Freud defines the uncanny as "the species of the frightening that goes back to what was once well known and had long been familiar" (124). The uncanny, Freud states, stems either from childhood complexes (certain wishes, fears, repressed memories) or from "animistic" or "primitive convictions" (155), i.e. fears and beliefs of our ancient predecessors, although these two factors may be intertwined and complementary in numerous cases. The uncanny effect may arise when "the boundary between fantasy and reality is blurred, when we are faced with the reality of something that we have until now considered imaginary" (150). In literature, fantastic and odd events are recognized as uncanny if the author has clearly demonstrated in his or her writing that the diegetic universe of the story is based on realistic happenings, on episodes that emulate real-life events. In case of fairy tales, the diegetic universe is always based on the unreal and its elements. Majority of the readers possess a certain knowledge repertoire about the genre, they will expect fantastic and odd events in the storyline and therefore they will not sense the uncanny effect while reading. But Hogg's world is no fairy tale, it is clearly set in a world that is initially familiar to the readers, and therefore the blurring of lines between real and the unreal produces the uncanny effect. Deirdre Shepherd explains Freud's term in the following way:

It should be noted that Freud stresses the importance of the opposite meaning of the term. His essay begins by describing and analysing what is meant by 'unheimlich' or 'unhomely / unfamiliar / uncanny' and argues that the significance of 'heimlich' or 'homely / familiar' should not be overlooked. Freud writes that 'the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar' ("Uncanny" 220) and therefore derives its horror not from something unexpectedly new or unfamiliar but through distortion of what is otherwise experienced as recognisable and unremarkable. (12)

This distortion of known entities and phenomena plays the key role in exerting the unsettling effect of Hogg's *Confessions*. Unlike Walpole, who uses the ancestral curse caused by events in the past as the story's backbone, Hogg's narrative is based on obscurities and mutilations of the familiar and the everyday. No matter whether one identifies Gil-Martin as the devil or just as a product of Wringhim's twisted mind, this vile character is deeply disturbing because he seems both natural and supernatural at the same time or too human, yet not human enough. His origin is unknown, he appears out of nowhere, yet he seems to know all about Wringhim and therefore easily makes a bond with him. The sensation of strange familiarity is obvious in the depiction of Wringhim's first encounter with Gil-Martin. The protagonist first feels a presentiment of something thrilling and terrifying that is going to happen:

As I thus wended my way, I beheld a young man of a mysterious appearance coming towards me. I tried to shun him, being bent on my own contemplations; but he cast himself in my way, so that I could not well avoid him; and, more than that, I felt a sort of invisible power that drew me towards him, something like the force of enchantment, which I could not resist. As we approached each other, our eyes met and I can never describe the strange sensations that thrilled through my whole frame at that impressive moment; a moment to me fraught with the most tremendous consequences; the beginning of a series of adventures which has puzzled myself, and will puzzle the world when I am no more in it. (Hogg 84)

There is some kind of inexplicable energy drawing him to the stranger. Wringhim immediately has a vague, but palpable sense of knowledge about what is coming. And then, even more surprisingly, he realizes that the newcomer looks exactly like him:

What was my astonishment on perceiving that he was the same being as myself! The clothes were the same to the smallest item. The form was the same; the apparent age; the colour of the hair; the eyes; and, as far as recollection could serve me from viewing my own features in a glass, the features too were the very same. I conceived at first that I saw a vision,

and that my guardian angel had appeared to me at this important era of my life; but this singular being read my thoughts in my looks, anticipating the very words that I was going to utter. (Hogg 84)

This kind of duplication is essential in delineating the unnerving character of Gil-Martin. Hogg needs neither devil's horns nor sharp teeth to create an intimidating image of a villain – rather, he attributes a strongly familiar element to a strongly unknown entity. Later throughout the novel, the reader finds out that Gil-Martin is capable of altering his appearance and picking up people's features :

My countenance changes with my studies and sensations," said he. "It is a natural peculiarity in me, over which I have not full control. If I contemplate a man's features seriously, mine own gradually assume the very same appearance and character. And what is more, by contemplating a face minutely, I not only attain the same likeness but, with the likeness, I attain the very same ideas as well as the same mode of arranging them, so that, you see, by looking at a person attentively, I by degrees assume his likeness, and by assuming his likeness I attain to the possession of his most secret thoughts. (Hogg 90)

Thus, Gil-Martin's evil power reaches the point where he can merge with one's everyday life and mislead humans. He is elusive and unidentifiable; his monstrous appearance is based on having no monstrous appearance - on being a kaleidoscope of familiar faces and minds while actually being none of them. What makes him outstanding, though, is the fact that he exploits piety, i.e. makes use of a distorted theology to beguile Wringhim and eventually cause his self-destruction. Religion, something well-known and commonplace to Wringhim, becomes deformed by constant discussions between two companions in which Gil-Martin cunningly talks him into wrongdoing. He therefore becomes Wringhim's twisted mirror image and proceeds to slowly creep into his personality, so that the young protagonist feels exceedingly split at times:

I generally conceived myself to be two people. When I lay in bed, I deemed there were two of us in it; when I sat up I always beheld another person, and always in the same position from the place where I sat or stood, which was about three paces off me towards my left side. It mattered not how many or how few were present: this my second self was sure to be present in his place, and this occasioned a confusion in all my words and ideas that utterly astounded my friends, who all declared that, instead of being deranged in my intellect, they had never heard my conversation manifest so much energy or sublimity of conception; but, for all that, over the singular delusion that I was two persons my reasoning faculties had no power. The most perverse part of it was that I rarely conceived myself to be any of the two persons. I thought for the most part that my companion was one of them, and my brother the other;

and I found that, to be obliged to speak and answer in the character of another man, was a most awkward business at the long run. (Hogg 112)

The Doppelgängers are key in producing the effect of the uncanny. These are not only Wringhim and Gil-Martin as possible doubles. One can perceive various elements of the novel as Doppelgängers, e.g. two religious doctrines the lofty aim of true Calvinism and the distorted concept of extremist antinomianism described by Hogg. The book itself is split into two different narratives. Even Hogg inserts himself as some kind of a double involved in the story at the end. But, as it was already mentioned, there are no clarifications offered. The doubling is not explained either as a psychological or a supernatural process, which leaves the sense of anguish lingering. Earlier Gothic novels are strongly based on binary oppositions; they are template narratives in which a set of structures often appear together, it is clear which characters are heroes and which ones are evildoers. Elizabeth W. Harries notes that Hogg "reverses the usual Gothic order of things", especially because he puts the "objective" Editor's narrative first and then introduces Wringhim's memoirs. "The usual sequence", writes Harries, "would be the subjective and supernatural account, then explained or rationalized away by an objective observer" (189). Additionally, the distinction between male authoritative lust and female passive virginity is also strongly underscored in typical Gothic fiction, while *Confessions* refrain from exploring any kind of sexual relationship. Wringhim even confesses that he "disapproves of the love of women, and all intimacies and connections with the sex" (Hogg 132). In Hogg, all binaries and their boundaries are made hazy.

But there are some plot elements in novels like *The Castle of Otranto* that are akin to the later, more mature Gothic works such as Hogg's. The concept of pursuit and persecution appears in the majority of Gothic literature. In earlier novels the chase usually comes down to the villain running after the petrified maiden. In Shelley and Hogg, the hunt becomes more intricate; the protagonists are followed by their fiendish creatures that have the ability to appear and disappear at their own will. This makes the complete situation more frightening: protagonists are not physically confined anymore; they can move wherever and whenever they want, but so can the beings that bedevil them. The space of the pursuit is unlimited; it annexes the realm of thoughts and dreams to its ghastly territory. Gil-Martin follows Wringhim, but in the Editor's Narrative the reader finds out that Wringhim also used to inexplicably follow his brother George Colwan wherever he went. George suspects that the relationship between his brother and Gil-Martin represents "an inextricable state of dependency and a binding duality" (O'Halloran 200). He also senses that, even when Robert shows up alone, "he is haunted by some evil genius in the shape of his brother, as well as by that dark and mysterious wretch himself" (Hogg 35). One could then link the previously elaborated "uncanny" with this anxious state of being followed around to get a better grasp of Hogg's peculiar sinister ambience.

Taking into account many visual stimuli and optical transformations that play a role in creating this malignant atmosphere, O'Halloran calls *Confessions* "a kaleidoscopic novel" which "carries the possibility of a disturbing change as well as an epiphany" at every turn (200). She relates some of the imagery to Gothic tradition; for instance, there is a part in the Editor's Narrative in which George wanders off to a hill-top in order to move away from the town, in which every corner seems to be haunted by the image of his strange brother, and after a while sees the face of Robert in the sky:

Gracious Heaven! What an apparition was there presented to his view! He saw, delineated in the cloud, the shoulders, arms, and features of a human being of the most dreadful aspect. The face was the face of his brother, but dilated to twenty times the natural size. Its dark eyes gleamed on him through the mist, while every furrow of its hideous brow frowned deep as the ravines on the brow of the hill. George started, and his hair stood up in bristles as he gazed on this horrible monster. (Hogg 31)

O'Halloran claims that this dreadful magnification through the Brocken Spectre "carries associations with Walpurgis Night and the legend of Faust in German Romanticism, which connects both brothers with a Gothic tradition of overreachers, as exemplified by Goethe's *Faust* (Part One, 1808) and Byron's *Manfred* (1817)" (200). This shows that the Gothic takes some inspiration from the literary canon and folk tales and myths. Indeed, Hogg includes folkloric and traditional elements in the plot, introducing low-ranking characters as ones who are inherently superstitious, but truthful and honest. Hogg, who was born in a rural part of Scotland and worked as shepherd in his youth, was clearly influenced by his origin. Through the words of Wringhim's servant Samuel Scrape, the writer tells the folk tale of the devil of Auchtermuchty, which deeply upsets his master, for it reminds him of Gil-Martin this is yet another element of the uncanny. Also, to make characters such as Scrape more credible, Hogg writes down their sentences in the original Scottish dialect (this is also a way to distance such characters from Wringhim and Gil-Martin who are marked by ornate language imbued with pathos and Biblical references):

Oo, I trow it's a' stuff—folk shouldna heed what's said by auld crazy kimmers. But there are some o' them weel kend for witches, too; an' they say, 'Lord have a care o' us!' They say the deil's often seen gaun sidie for sidie w' ye, whiles in ae shape, an' whiles in another. An' they say that he whiles takes your ain shape, or else enters into you, and then you turn a deil yoursel. (Hogg 143)

The incorporation of Scottish dialect and traditional heritage in a Gothic novel is highly relevant. It means that the writer set the story in a space and time familiar to the reader (disregarding the fact that the events from the memoirs take place a hundred years earlier – novels such as Walpole's were

set in the Middle Ages). As for other early Gothic writers, Abrams states that "some followed Walpole's example by setting their story in the medieval period; others set them in a Catholic country, especially Italy or Spain" (111). They were prone to exoticizing, as if they did not want to scare the reader too much, so they located their events in distant lands which would not remind the reading public of their everyday life ambient. In the preface of *The Castle of Otranto*, Walpole claims that "the principal incidents are such as were believed in the darkest ages of Christianity; but the language and conduct have nothing that savours of barbarism" (39). This statement implies that the author approaches the topic with a sense of superiority stemming from his aristocratic English origin. He attempts to entertain the readers with depictions of supernatural events, but perceives them as "barbaric" at the same time, so they have to be set in a distant space. Setting such experiences in an ambient and time closer to the reading public might be offensive, if not dangerous.

Walpole even goes so far as to admit having copied "that great master of nature, Shakespeare" (44). One of aspects in which Walpole is influenced by Shakespeare is the role of servants. Similarly to Hogg's low characters, they are genuine and good-natured, but Walpole uses them only as a slightly comic element in a story that is supposed to be tragic. The only low-ranking character that plays a significant role, Theodore, appears to be a peasant at first, but is unmasked as a nobleman later. Walpole does not share Hogg's warmth for the peasantry and the natives; he is more prone to praising aristocratic characters. This is why Miall classifies his work under "conservative Gothic":

But whereas Enlightenment thinking had begun to question the political systems of the time (thus preparing the ground for the French Revolution), Walpole, the son of a Prime Minister, clearly has no such intention. The function of the ghosts and portents in the novel is to restore the violated property rights of the 'true' owners of the province of Otranto. (347)

Miall then classifies *Confessions* under "radical Gothic", in which there is "a more specific and intense focus on investigating mental states of terror, supported by a greater effort to situate such states circumstantially" (351). And Hogg situated them exactly in his homeland, among people whose social positions and ways of life were more familiar to the reading public, and whose nature he had known ever since his childhood. Benedict distinguishes these peculiarities of Hogg's Gothic:

Notable are the frequent use by Hogg's characters of Scots dialect, in contrast to the more genteel language of "Gothic" romances; a reliance upon prosaic and homely details to enhance the sense of horror; a less inhibited employment of explicit details of physically hideous and morally shocking occurrences; and, above all, a firm and frequently demonstrated conviction that ordinary men and women constantly

experience the intervention of the supernatural in their everyday lives. (Benedict 250)

Due to these features, Ian Duncan names Hogg's way of writing "the Scottish Gothic" and relates the uncanniness of *Confessions* to specific historical events of the time. He mentions that the novel is set in the time of The Act of Union and "narrates the futility of 'union' as a state of collective or psychic being". Therefore, the animosity and opposition between two brothers, together with Robert's mental disintegration, "at once mirror and exceed the religious and political division of Scottish society" (131).

In conclusion, one can say that Hogg's Gothic is truly far from the Gothic conventions introduced in early works of the genre, but this is why it delves much deeper into the psychology of horror. The effect of uncanniness and uneasiness is achieved by the novel's open ending and a variation of different genres incorporated into the book. Conflicting voices, doubling and mirror images, as well as the thin line between the supernatural and the psychological make *Confessions* a unique piece of 19th-century literature which definitely paved the way for the genre we today recognize as 'psychological horror'. Another act by which Hogg improved Gothic fiction is the localization of the story and inclusion of Scottish folk tales and characters, which gives the work a specific national flavour these are only some of many reasons why *Confessions* are still highly relevant and compelling in today's reader society.

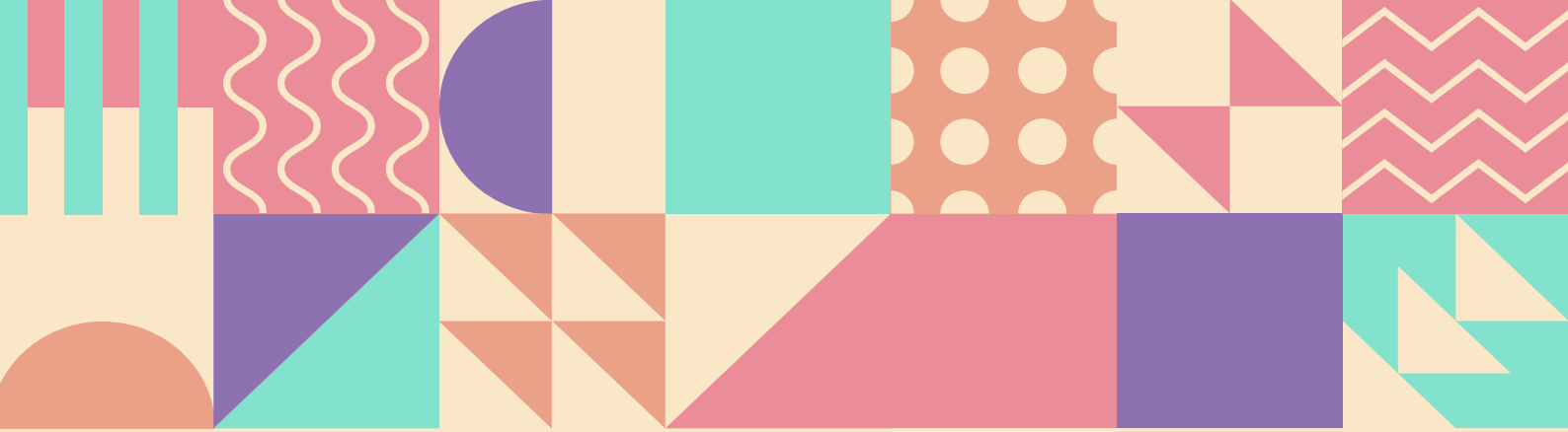
End Notes

- 1 According to Oxford Reference, antinomianism is "the belief held by various sects, but particularly by radical protestant movements of the 16th and 17th centuries, that certain chosen Christians are by faith or by predestination unable to sin and are hence set free from the requirement to obey any moral law".
- 2 According to Oxford Reference, Calvinism is "the Protestant theological system of the French Protestant theologian and reformer John Calvin (1509–64) and his successors, which develops Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone into an emphasis on the grace of God and centres on the doctrine of predestination."

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04

**Leoni
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**Deconstruction and the future in
Colson Whitehead's *Zone One***

Colson Whitehead's *Zone One* (2011) has widely been discussed as a zombie novel, dealing with the condition of society in capitalist realism, a term coined by Mark Fisher. In a way, by being a zombie novel, *Zone One* deals with possibilities of survival, human relationships and, in its specific case, with the rebuilding of a zombie infested society and the power play behind it. In the novel, although all has changed, nothing seems to have changed, as the government works on re-establishing the lost way of life, making the novel susceptible to criticism and interpretation connected to questions of capitalism and the postmodern era. Based on the idea that in postmodern society people are unable to imagine the future as well as possible alternatives to capitalism, capitalist realism plays with Jameson's notion of late capitalism. Jameson states that late capitalism is based on constant cycles reproducing the present state of the system in order to keep it in place. This is why Fisher uses the term capitalist realism, "the phrase attributed to Frederic Jameson and Slavoj Žižek, ... [because] it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism" (Fisher 6). In the same vein, many critics have used Whitehead's *Zone One* as an example of how this inability to imagine alternatives to capitalism and the future plays out in postmodern works of literature. It is the goal of this essay to offer a different perspective, one which would reveal the novel's pointing to a possible alternative rather than being merely a projection of a world that "seems more like an extrapolation or exacerbation of ours than an alternative to it" (Fisher 6). In this paper, a parallel is drawn between the protagonist, Mark Spitz, and his refusal to imagine the future, and poststructuralist deconstruction, showing that Spitz's actions could be read as a way of preparing the system he lives in for the arrival of something new, which will completely change the world.

Although mostly used as an example of capitalist realist actualities, the absolutely bleak prospects of contemporary society in *Zone One* have been called into question by many critics, one of them being Leif Sorensen. In his "Against the Post-Apocalyptic: Narrative Closure in Colson Whitehead's *Zone One*," Sorensen focuses on the closure of the narrative and categorizes the moving forces in the novel's post-apocalyptic environment. In doing this, he singles out three such moments that interact with the idea of the future in the novel (Sorensen 561): first, the idea that a return to normalcy is possible - the stance represented by the new provisional government in Buffalo and the movement of "the American Phoenix"; second, the protagonist's attitude, which Sorensen defines as "a narrative of becoming, in which humanity must adapt to a hostile, potentially post-human world" (565); and third, a closure in which "against the late-capitalist fantasy of a future that consists of an endless reproduction of the present, Whitehead offers the shocking possibility of an absolute ending" (561). This paper agrees with the idea that Mark Spitz refuses Reconstructionist ideals but doesn't follow the line of thought resulting in the conclusion that the ending of the novel represents an end to Spitz's philosophy of life as Sorensen states (569). In fact, the readers get introduced to Spitz's refusal to think about and plan the future from the very start: "Mark Spitz believed he had successfully banished thoughts of the future (...)

You never heard Mark Spitz say 'When this is all over' or 'Once things get back to normal' or other sentiments of that brand, because he refused them" (Whitehead 27-28). The attitudes belonging to Sorensen's American Phoenix context, mainly the idea of the possibility of a return to normalcy, even get compared to a pandemic by the protagonist: "The mistake lay in succumbing to the prevailing illusions. Giving in to the pandemic of pheenie¹ optimism that was inescapable nowadays and made it hard to breathe, a contagion in its own right" (Whitehead 17). It is clear that Mark Spitz does not believe in the American Phoenix and in what the new government plans to achieve by, hopefully, clearing out Zone One in Manhattan. There are times when the readers catch the protagonist wanting to look the other way and give in to the ideals of reconstruction: "Mark Spitz's hosts began to air their post-plague plans and schemes (...) He told himself: Hope is a gateway drug, don't do it" (Whitehead 153), but this paper aims to show that the problem lies in the prefix "re-"² for Mark Spitz. All that the government in Buffalo is trying to achieve is to re-build, re-construct, and re-surrect America to re-turn to the way things used to be before the zombie apocalypse, and the same logic gets transferred to the survivors: "They each wanted to resume where they left off. Go back to the place where they were safe" (Whitehead 154). Thus, the goal of the American Phoenix is to go back to a world in which Mark Spitz used to be purposeless and mediocre, a world full of inequality and filth, a world which, as can be seen throughout the novel, has not changed much at all. This paper will show this common thread which weaves itself between the pre-apocalypse and post-apocalypse world in *Zone One* through the motifs of New York City and life in capitalist realism and the analogy between the survivors and the zombies.

Early on in the novel, the reader gets a glimpse of NYC through one of Spitz's many flashbacks: "He remembered how things used to be (...) Time chiselled at elegant stonework, which swirled or plummeted to the sidewalk in dust and chips and chunks. Behind the facades their insides butchered, reconfigured, rewired according to the next era's new theories of utility" (Whitehead 11). The description of New York architecture is eerily reminiscent of the state of urban areas Mark Spitz finds himself in during the plague and, in fact, he declares that "New York City in death was very much like New York City in life" (Whitehead 60). This reminiscence is not simply a matter of architecture as the Chinatown of today, "this section of Zone One contain[ing] (...) the busiest streets in the city now" (Whitehead 43), gets compared to the Chinatown of Spitz's childhood: "It was the stereotype of fast-talking, fast-walking, eagerly lacerating New York distilled into a potent half mile" (Whitehead 43). With places such as Chinatown and Central Park, the similarities between pre- and post-apocalyptic postmodern life and people are drawn. In New York City, the readers also first get introduced to the similarity between people and zombies which are shown throughout the novel in descriptions of their ways of moving, their expressions and the way in which they spend their days: "All these skels visiting the Big City like they did before all the shit went down. Piling into tour buses for a Broadway matinee" (Whitehead 84). This similarity gets further utilized throughout the novel, especially through

the protagonist's inner monologues and instances in which he recognizes the characteristics of people from his past life in the zombies he crosses paths with. Mark Spitz recognizes features of his teacher and ex-girlfriends in the stragglers he encounters and this is only a small part of his PASD (post-apocalyptic stress disorder), which seems to worsen towards the end of the novel. Another characteristic of his PASD is the fact that Spitz starts to sympathize more and more with the stragglers. Not only does he let the first straggler he meets go (a man standing in a field), but he also proposes leaving a straggler he and his group find on one of their missions (Whitehead 74). Human life seems to have lost its purpose and goal, making the stragglers' state of existence³ and suicide, as is the case with the Lieutenant in the novel⁴, desirable to an extent. The description of post-apocalyptic life in the novel could also be read as an evocation of the realities of life under capitalist realism: "There was no other reality apart from this: move on to the next human settlement, until you find the final one, and that's where you die" (Whitehead 216). It seems as though human life has not changed much with the advent of the plague and this is not the only quote pointing to a continuum: "*Survivors are slow or incapable of forming new attachments, or so the latest diagnosis droned, although a cynic might identify this as a feature of modern life merely intensified or fine-tuned with the introduction of the plague*" (Whitehead 50). Based on the analogies between the pre- and post-apocalyptic world in *Zone One*, it seems as if what Mark Spitz is really refusing is the state of things in general, regardless of the plague and no matter the government. He fights against the only system he has ever known, not being able to propose an alternative, since, to him, such innovation remains unimaginable.

This paper wants to explore the analogy between *Zone One* and poststructuralism against Sorensen's analysis of the novel's protagonist. Mark Spitz's refusal of the new order of things in post-apocalyptic America leads to something new – to invention, to use a term often employed by Jacques Derrida. This paper follows the idea that Mark Spitz's trajectory throughout the novel, along with the instances of his refusal to imagine the future and take part in "pheneie optimism" and the gradually increasing symptoms of PASD he starts showing towards the end of the novel, opens the passageway for this innovation. In this sense, Mark Spitz can be seen as a deconstructionist critic, thoroughly analysing the text he finds himself in and gradually loosening the inner screws of the system and realities (a stand-in for the text) he is surrounded by to let through the future. The aforementioned notion of the future derives from Jacques Derrida's idea of invention in his *Signature Event Context and Psyche – Inventions of the Other*, where he states that an invention, in order to be recognized as one, has to be, at least to an extent, already known and has to be an event.⁵ This level of familiarity is gradable – the more recognizable a new piece of literature is, the less innovative it is. Every text, according to poststructuralism, is situated on a scale between being completely readable/translatable/known and being the complete opposite. Using this analogy, the zombies in *Zone One* are compared to a kind of innovation – already known, yet completely new, and with this, the

final zombie wave and ending of *Zone One* to the event bringing the future. Unlike in Sorensen's theory of an absolute ending, it is Mark Spitz who becomes the harbinger of a new and different kind of invention and a previously unimaginable future. In this sense, deconstruction as such can be considered as a kind of anti-structuralism. According to structuralist theorists, the structure predicts and categorizes all that can ever exist and can be produced in a given area of study, in this case, literature. Derrida, however, saw the paradox of this system, in that it automatically deactivates any kind of innovation in the literary world. Literary works that have historically changed the way literature is seen and dealt with would have never existed if an ultimate system existed. So, although Derrida fights mostly against Western metaphysics in general (meaning aspects such as logocentrism, phonocentrism, the supremacy of the metaphysical over the physical, etc.), Western metaphysics can, nevertheless, be compared to capitalist realism and, even further, in the case of *Zone One*, to the system Mark Spitz feels submerged in. With this in mind, the thorough deconstructing of the horizon of expectations in the literary field, which opens the way to great innovations, is exactly what Mark Spitz does in *Zone One* on a larger scale. True innovations are events in the sense that they do something to the environment where they happen. Great literary works change canons and notions of what literature is. The final zombie wave in *Zone One* can be seen as such an invention, innovation, and event. From this perspective, Spitz's refusal to think about the future can also be considered an inability to do so. He fights against the system which is the only thing he knows, not knowing what will change it and how. It is as if the future were this placeholder term for that which remains unknown to him up until its advent. Nonetheless, Mark Spitz's refusal is relentless and profound in all of what he does. As Whitehead asserts: "He was the one left to explain it all to the sceptical world after the end credits (...) the real movie started after the first one ended, in the impossible return to things before" (116). Preparing the way for the future is Mark Spitz's purpose in life and, as the future approaches, Spitz starts feeling ever more alive and his PASD retreats. It is as if this future event, which he has steadily been walking toward, preannounced itself in different stages of the novel: "They were falling apart but it would take a long time until the piece was finished. Only then could it sign its name. Until then, they walked" (Whitehead 94). Other even more deconstruction-sounding examples appear later in the novel: "All it took was one flaw in the system, a *bug roosting deep in the code*, to initiate the cascade failure" (Whitehead 155), and "When the wall fell, it fell quickly, as if it had been waiting for this moment, *as if it had been created for the very instant of its failure*" (Whitehead 187). It is not that the future simply preannounces itself, but it seems to be a constituent part of the current state of affairs and surroundings Mark Spitz finds himself in, which seems to point to the same relationship that exists between Derrida's invention and the elements of something familiar invention entails. As the novel gets closer to the event marking the advent of this very poststructuralist idea of the future, Mark Spitz's thoughts on the future start getting clearer, and his purpose seems to make him snap out of the monotonous refusals of his deconstructionist work: "This was where he belonged" (Whitehead 211).

Despite the fact that the future following this event remains a mystery for the readers (who also live in a capitalist realist world as Mark Spitz does), it does not mean that it does not exist or that it is the absolute end of the world as Sorensen proposes. The future remains unknown to Spitz as well, which is only logical as what he was working to let through is an invention, something absolutely new, somehow still familiar: "He didn't know if the world was doomed or saved, but whatever the next thing was, it would not look like what came before" (Whitehead 216).

In conclusion, the ending of *Zone One* fittingly recapitulates the paper's thesis, mainly that Mark Spitz's refusal to indulge in thinking about the future can be compared to Derridean deconstructionist work – preparing the ground for the event of a true, innovative future, which remains unknown to both the reader and the protagonist:

Why they'd tried to fix this island in the first place, he did not see now. Best to let the broken glass be broken glass, let it splinter into smaller pieces and dust and scatter. Let the cracks between things widen until they are no longer cracks but the new places for things. This was where they were now. The world wasn't ending: it had ended and now they were in the new place. They could not recognize it because they had never seen it before. (Whitehead 216-217)

This paper ends on this note, with a look towards the future and different future ways in which concepts such as capitalist realism and deconstruction can be used to deal with contemporary literary works and other mediums in their fundamentally postmodern character of questioning the reality that surrounds them.

End Notes

- 1 Relating to the American Phoenix, the Reconstructionist organisation standing for the government's effort to reconstruct the world as it was before the zombie apocalypse.
- 2 Sorensen's treating of the prefix "post-" in studies of contemporary culture has influenced the idea of focusing on the prefix "re-" (Sorensen 590)
- 3 Stragglers live in a static and very repetitive way. They are mostly unaggressive and passive. It is often assumed throughout the novel that they are stuck in a moment that turned out to be somehow important in their past lives.
- 4 The Lieutenant is a figure of great authority representing the Reconstructionist momentum who commits suicide in the novel.
- 5 "...the event supposes in its allegedly present and singular intervention a statement which in itself can be only of a repetitive or citational structure, or rather (...) of an iterable structure" (Derrida, 326), from "Signature Event Context" in *Margins of Philosophy*.

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