

# PEOPLE

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Irina-Ana DROBOT. Populism: Focusing on the People's Interests.....	1–15
György FOGARASI. The Attention of the People: <i>Mein Kampf</i> and Thurber's Owl.....	16–36
Daniel TIA: Exilic, Becoming Beings .....	37–55
Florentina ROȘCA. Bonding People Through Storytelling: Community, Humor and the Porch in Gloria Naylor's <i>Mama Day</i> .....	56–68
Noémi ALBERT: "It's a Shadow Life"—Zadie Smith's <i>Swing Time</i> .....	69–85

## MISCELLANEOUS

Andreea POPESCU: Spaces of Initiation in Washington Irving's Stories .....	86–102
Bernadett JOBBÁGY. Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process.....	103–123
Magdaléna KISS: Hydronyms of Ethnic Origin in the Körös River Area .....	124–146

## REVIEWS

Dan Horațiu POPESCU. Book Review: "A Scholar's Delight"—Toma Sava's Edition of Francis Godwin's <i>The Man in the Moone</i> .....	147–149.
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# Populism: Focusing on the People's Interests

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## Abstract

Ever since the times of ancient philosophy, the focus of politics has been the well-being of the people, which has been ensured, throughout history, through various approaches. The search for a leader that is honest and also able to do justice can be seen as one of the constant wishes of the people. The way politicians build their public image struggles to achieve this sentiment of trust. Currently, Populism has risen in popularity since it claims to promote the interests of the masses, of the "pure" people, and not those of the corrupted political elite. Populism gives citizens the feeling that they are in control and free to make the right choice of leader to ensure their well-being. The present paper will rely on the fact that the increasing individualism across the world is being exploited here with respect to the citizens, who want to feel that they have the freedom of choice. The question is to what extent they truly have this freedom and to what extent they change one ideology with another. Is this alternative ideology, being tolerated next to the so-called mainstream one, an illusion or not? The paper will include the case study of a Post-Communist country, Romania.

**Keywords:** elites, masses, ideology, individualism, public image

## Introduction

The present paper will deal with Populism, which is a topic of actuality in today's societies. Additionally, concern with politics, and the way political elites are expected to ensure the well-being of the masses is also a relevant topic, as it is and has been of universal concern across cultures.

The issue of trust in politics goes hand in hand with responsibility for the masses of people. We can see this from the way that people are many times disappointed by the political leaders they have voted for, starting from the fact that they have not kept

their promises or they have taken decisions which have negatively affected the lives of the people. We expect from politicians to create good living everyday life conditions, which can be seen from small details in everyday life, starting with the way the city looks like, with its streets, buildings, the way the traffic runs, ideally smoothly, and continuing with economic conditions based on salaries that keep up with the rising prices, and ending up with respect for professions such as teachers, who have, at least in Romania, been subject to plenty of protest movements.

The ideal image of the politician could, thus, be, for the masses, a trustworthy person that shows no signs of corruption, and who knows how to act efficiently to make everything work in the respective country, from institutions to laws and bureaucracy, and continuing with means of transport and infrastructure. It goes without saying that the ideal politician should act in the interest of the people. The ideal politician can be, however, just a public image which is, at some point, ruined by gossip and a negative image presented in mass media.

Why does Populism appeal to people? The idea that the ideal political leaders should act in the interest of the people, and not their own, is not new. Honesty and justice are features of the ideal leader ever since ancient times. We could claim that Populism shows people that some political leaders think just like them, and share the same values, regarding their wishes for trustworthiness, moral correctness, lack of corruption, and lack of self-interest for taking up a leading position. The people can, thus, come to believe that what they wish for from political leaders is not that far-away from being achievable in reality. Populism refers to a "rapport with 'the people,' a 'them-and-us' mentality," and, in some cases, it also includes "a period of crisis and mobilization" (Knight, 1998, p. 223). The close connection established with the people is not specific to Populism only and neither is the problematic period for which a commonly worked-out solution through collaboration between the masses and the political elites is needed.

A narrowing down of the definition of Populism can be worked out by examining definitions in the literature review section, where we can cover in detail what is specific to Populism as compared to other ideologies. The context when and where Populism emerged should also be taken into account.

## **Literature Review**

We should consider, first of all, how Populism started and what other ideology it went against. It started out as "a form of government after the demise of Fascism," and it was, at the time, situated "between constitutional government and dictatorship" (Finchelstein

& Urbinati, 2018, p. 15). Nowadays, Populism is part of “democratizing and fully democratic societies” (Finchelstein & Urbinati, 2018, p. 15). It has begun with mass democracies and societies, starting with the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The term Populism in its English and German translation comes from the Hungarian “népi mozgalom” (Overholser, 2023). This movement in Hungary started in the 1930s, when it began as a means of wishing to bring equality to peasantry in allowing them to have land, material conditions, and access to school and education (Bartha, 2015, p. 215). We can see how social equality was an issue early on.

The definition of Populism as democratic illiberalism is put forth by Pappas (2014, p. 1). Thus, what we need to keep in mind is that Populism “may be democratic, but is not liberal” (Pappas, 2014, p. 2). Pappas (2014) mentions the understanding offered by Rawls (2005) regarding political liberalism, which is defined as a society where a variety of ideological doctrines that are not even compatible coexist. What is more, illiberal democracy can be defined as a system of governing where non-democratic practices are covered up by institutions and procedures which are, formally at least, democratic (Bonet & Zamorano, 2021, p. 559). Democratic illiberalism, as portrayed by Pappas (2014, p. 10) is dealing with a society which is split into the “good ‘people’” and the “evil ‘establishment,’” then with a polarizing types of politics instead of a politics seeking consensus, and finally with “the adherence to the majority principle.”

This distinction is old and can be considered problematic. For instance, Arendt refers to authoritarian-populism as a way of the elites claiming to represent the people, when in fact they exclude those members of the people who do not agree with nationalism and worshipping the populist leaders (Rensmann, 2023, p. 450).

Populism has been related by research to democracy (Canovan, 2002, pp. 25–44) and to nationalism (Brubaker, 2020, pp. 44–66). According to Canovan (2002, p. 25), Populism can begin in societies where there are problems related to social and economic areas, and where there is a common feature in “a political appeal to the people.” Additionally, the populist movements rely on “giving power to the people” (Canovan, 2002, p. 25). The appeal of the latter feature is that the people can finally feel in control of the decisions which are, otherwise, perceived as being taken at a higher level. Finally, the people can feel that their needs and opinions are taken into account, something that has been an issue with the previous political movements and with the previous political elites, before the populist representatives. Canovan (2002, p. 44) presents us with the following statements, quoted at the end of the research article:

"Our government has lost touch with the people (Ross Perot in Westlind 1996, 175)" and "The parties and governments in most countries in Europe are isolated from their people (Jörg Haider 1995, 88)." Both quotations show how the people's needs have been ignored, while being put aside in favor of the needs of the representatives of the elites, under the form of parties and governments, which are forms of organizations of the political elites. While this is not normal, this has been a phenomenon which explains the need for a Populist movement in politics and the way this movement does, indeed, make sense and is, indeed useful, and not just a simple artifice of ideology.

The people could be understood as being part of the nation, function of their interests and their expectations. Once their mindset and values overlap with the nationalist ideology, they could be seen as part of the respective nation. The same, however, could be said about the elites. The image of the elites can vary function of the way the people perceive them, as supporting nationalism or as willing to establish international connections and to remain far from nationalist interests, if they do not overlap with their own values. The people may also feel disappointed with what is going on at national level and decide to move abroad on long or short term. Meanwhile, the people can still have an ideal image of their own country and feelings of patriotism and nationalism, which may or may not be supported by the corrupted elites and may be, instead, supported by Populist leaders.

Brubaker (2020, p. 2) mentions the following researchers who have dealt with the connection between nationalism and Populism: Bonikowski et al, 2018; De Cleen, 2016, 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis, 2017; and Stavrakakis et al, 2017. To clarify matters, Brubaker (2020, p. 2) mentions that there was an element of nationalism in Populism due to their same concern with the people: "Populism was characterized as a kind of nationalism, the distinguishing feature of populist nationalism being its equation of 'the nation' and 'the people' (Stewart 1969, p. 183)." Brubaker (2020, p. 3) also mentions how the approaches of nationalism and Populism with respect to the people can differ. Thus, "Populism invokes the 'people as underdog' on an up-down axis," while "nationalism the 'people as nation' on an in-out axis (De Cleen 2017; De Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017)." Our immediate conclusion is that Populism sees how the people have been wronged by the corrupted political elites, which is in line with the people's emotional mindset. Populism can appeal to them since they feel understood and they feel that their needs will be taken into account by political leaders of the populist movement. The people have acquired a rebellious attitude against elites of all kinds, both political and with respect to upper social classes. They finally find a political party which appears to have the same views and to align with the same attitude. The struggle towards achieving equality and

to move away from discrimination that is preached at world level or at least at supranational level can be seen as supporting the relevance of populist movements. Otherwise, nationalism may be or may not be compatible with the real needs of the people. The people may find that the political elites take actions without considering their opinion. Lack of trust in political leaders comes from various media claiming that the votes were not really taken into account in various elections, at least in Romania, and that the elections had actually been arranged. The people felt that they had been faced with the choice of leaders they and other members of the people had not chosen and did not even know who they were.

We should mention that in the 1960s there was no clear definition of Populism, while nowadays we can distinguish their practitioners as follows: the Populists show "a strong focus [...] on the 'people,'" as well as "an implicit or explicit reference to an 'anti-group,' often the political elite, against which the 'people' is positioned" (Deiwiks, 2009, p. 1). The Populists, thus, present themselves on a par with the masses, erasing the high-power distance that is visible in authoritarian political regimes. Communist regimes are examples of regimes where the people have little to no power, and all they are expected to do is to follow the rules set out by the leader. For low-power distance societies, the relationship with authority in politics is more relaxed, to the point where the boundaries between the masses and the leaders are erased, and the political leaders simply take the role of efficient managers who seek to improve the situation in the country and with respect to the living conditions of the people. The dimensions of high vs low-power distance used to explain the situations are the ones developed by Hofstede (2011).

Most countries in the world nowadays believe that democracy is the ideal way of governing a state, since nowadays the world is moving on towards a rising individualism (Santos et al, 2017). The two influence one another, and it is believed that "democracy produces more individualism worldwide" (Ham, 2000, p. 127). While individualism, meaning focus on the interests of the individual (Hofstede, 2011) becomes prominent, we still need, as members of the masses, common ground on which to support each other. Populism provides these grounds, in that the populist leaders support the masses in their fight with a much too intervening state with respect to their personal freedom.

The democratic values are supported by supranational organizations such as the European Union, through their laws and principles, which are expressed in policies (Young, 2001), regarding equality in the way we are perceived in our country and our own non-discrimination, with respect to our lifestyle, ethnicity, nationality, and, ultimately, respect for diversity, the latter summing up all the previous values and is significant once

we have contact with many different cultures within Europe and from all over the world. The European Union promises to unite member countries in a common effort to raise the living conditions of the poorer countries.

There is a feeling of Euroscepticism for member countries, in that they feel that the European Union is being elitist and not taking into account nationalist interests and interests of the working class (ECPS, 2023). While not all Populist parties are Euro-sceptic (ECPS, 2023), we could take the dissatisfaction with the EU as a prompting point for the people to resort to Populist parties, since they would feel that their representatives understand them and share their concerns. Thus, not only the disappointment with the way local political leaders and the situation of the entire country is a starting point for the masses feeling the appeal of Populist parties and ideologies.

The case of Romania is significant from the point of view of a former Communist country and afterwards as having high hopes when having joined the European Union. Disappointment followed after the fall of Communism, and also after being accepted into the European Union.

Romania fits in with the context in which Populism developed in Central and Eastern Europe, and which is described by Stanley (2017, p. 140), as Populism can be understood as responding to the dissatisfaction of former Communist countries, and also if we are considering disappointment with the way society has been led politically after the fall of Communism.

## **Materials and Methods**

Populism and its appeal to the people could be best studied using the domain of Psychology, in combination with Politics. The present paper will focus on the way Populism is being felt as relevant to Romanians, in order to see how they have reacted to it and understood it.

This case study of Romania is based on a specific example of a post-communist country and the way it relates to Populism. It is significant to look at examples of Populist parties in Romania since the term Populism has been associated to "vagueness and overuse" (Doiciar & Cretan, 2021, p. 244). The vague definition of Populism leads to it not having a clear definition, which allows to include Populism under various forms, starting from non-authoritarian forms, to authoritarian forms, and ranging from having a leader siding with the uneducated masses, until reaching a leader belonging to a category that has been

diminished in importance for society, such as those working in the education system, the researchers, and teachers. The general tendency of populist parties is that of siding with the people, and of going against the mainstream parties and trends, with leaders taking the position of the people, in the opinion of the author of the present paper. It can be considered strange to have an against the mainstream trend while being accepted as a party, yet, throughout history, we can see how such examples abound. Donald Trump, in the USA, has been portrayed as a man of the people, and he has gone against the mainstream values of political correctness, while Vladimir Putin has been considered a representative of fighting against Western influences, and he has, as a reaction against them, led his country towards a strong nationalism and closure from Western influence (Stockemer, 2019, p. 5). The diversity of the Populist leaders and their values show that they are strongly opposed against what has brought to the people a state of disillusionment and anger from the previous leaders.

Political Psychology has been applied to the understanding of Populism, in researches such as the one by Rovira Kaltwasser who (2021, p. 2) underlines how the people sharing their views with a certain political party may or may not reject altogether other parties' views. In the case of Populism, however, Kaltwasser (2021, p. 2) shows how rejection of other parties on the part of the people is radical. People can view mainstream political parties in a negative way, which is why they will be led "to endorse the populist set of ideas." Even more so, while being upset by the current political situation, the people can project the source of all the problems and the entire responsibility on the political parties that are mainstream, as can be concluded from Kaltwasser's (2021, p. 2) remark that "individuals holding populist attitudes might translate their anger against the existing state of affairs into negative partisanship towards mainstream political parties."

The Populist affiliation therefore places the people in conflict with a political elite, which is likely the mainstream one, on which everything that is negative is projected, and all that goes wrong is attributed to them as a responsibility, which is understood as a way of showing how they failed, as political leaders, to do their duty towards the people. Generally, we can encounter this psychological mechanism in revolted members of the people, who may have issues with authority that may date even all the way back to their childhood, when they did not perceive parents and teachers, or other adults in their lives, as protecting and instructing them, but as restricting their personal freedom, and as a negative influence in all ways. We can see how people expect political leaders to provide for them and ensure their well-being, as well as to create a utopic environment for them and for their families in all ways. It may be true that certain laws can affect negatively



the way people live their lives, yet, to some extent, the responsibility for success or for failure does not belong to external sources and even more so to political leaders. When someone has a bad day with bureaucracy, for example, they may claim and we may hear them in the street, saying how bad everything in the respective country is going on. Populism seems to have become aware of this psychological mechanism and is working its way to provide comfort for the people from their negative experiences with mainstream politics and with political elites that do not take into account the interest and needs of the people. Populist parties, thus, provide an alternative solution to the already existing parties that have, over the years, failed the expectations of the people.

Politics is a domain where the people are being offered hope and then they may become disappointed. Since society has grown more and more individualistic, it is difficult for parties and for political leaders to identify common interests. Besides, at least in Romania, different groups, such as those formed by different professions, have different needs, and they feel that nobody from the political world, being able to take decisions, cares about them. As an example, we can mention the frequent protests which have been taking place in the education system in Romania ever since after the fall of Communism. The issue of revolt was a combination of the place school used to have in the lives of the citizens during Communism and after Communism, together with the status of the teachers and of the way students reacted to the topic of school and education, and behaved during their school years, and with the way in which the political leaders decided to let their salaries go much too low. The salaries were seen both at a practical level, being related to the way teachers could not lead a basic needs related lifestyle in Romania, and at a symbolic level, believing that the state did not support the field of education as they did not find it valuable and in line with the current mindset and lifestyle of the new generations. This change in attitude towards school led to further debates, such as the fact not everyone was suited to and inclined to study, and that they could be good in completely different domains.

Once again there was an issue with authority, as teachers were perceived as much too authoritarian by some students. Additionally, after 1989, in Romania, the world changed, and there was a strong wish to move further, towards individualism, personal freedom of choice, and equality at all levels, following the model set forth by the American culture. The idea that we could become anything we wanted as individuals and to start from scratch, without needing school and even money resources, as we could make them through individual effort, influenced by the American ideal of the self-made man may have influenced and affected negatively the image of school and of the education system in Romania.

This was one part of the changing mindset, together with the resort to Populism in politics. Further on, we can consider a resort to what Stob (2020) called intellectual populism, as another group that has been disfavored wants to have their rights represented. Claudiu Crăciun, a lecturer at the National University of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest has created DEMOS party, which can be considered, according to the author of the present paper, as a representative of intellectual populism. He has managed to gather enough signature to enter with his party for the local council of sector 1 in Bucharest, for the elections in June, 2024, and his programme includes access to cultural events, as well as issues of concern regarding the disparity of financial situation among inhabitants in this district, as some are very poor, while some are very rich, and he intends to set up opportunities for equality of chances, as well as the usual promises for green spaces, not too much crowded billboard adds, and so on. His programme promises a decent life for everyone, starting from equality.

Education is important for him as well, an issue that has been put aside by AUR party, led by George Simion. The two representatives of Populism in Romania, DEMOS and AUR party look opposite and yet they belong to the same ideology, which proves how lack of homogeneity characterizes Populism, to the point where the only common element is a reaction against the mainstream and against other opinions of parties and politicians in power. This shows the way that society is divided into subgroups of various interests, and how they need to feel included by the political leaders.

We could view Populism as a means of answering the current needs of the people in a changing world. The mainstream trend in all areas was, gradually, being left aside and confronted, as it was no longer believed to answer everyone's needs. People started adhering to alternative lifestyles and beliefs. This allowed them an element of choice in their lives, which is specific to highly individualist societies, where people no longer want to do as they are told. One single authority for everyone is no longer a possible reality, in any area, political, music-related, film-related, book-related, and lifestyle-related. Before the fall of Communism, in Romania, we had, if we want to say so, one single truth, the mainstream, which allowed us one single choice. Nowadays, we have joined in the trends started by the Western world and which is present at international level. The wish for personal freedom, as well as for having the possibility of choice of lifestyle is being exploited by Populist leaders, who, through their ideology and rhetoric appeal to the people in Romania, based on the needs that have appeared as a consequence of historical and living conditions under Communism, then under Post-Communism, and due to the wish to live at international level, individualist standards.

We can see the appeal of Populism in Romania through the way parties have adapted to fill in the needs of the people. Among the successful Populist parties, we can find the "Save Romania Union" (USR), which was chosen for the 2016 parliamentary elections, and which took over the strategy of "reviving old populist themes but in a more radical manner," and afterwards continued "to emphasize an anti-elitist orientation combined with a strong anti-corruption campaign" (Dragoman, 2021, p. 303). The party was distinguished by its "flamboyant political style based on permanent confrontation, verbal attacks, and extensive accusations" (Dragoman, 2021, p. 303). We could claim that such a type of rhetoric could easily resonate with the people's being upset at the political situation and at the influence of political decisions on their lives. Usual discussions can include what is mentioned in the rhetorical style of the USR party, which is why some segments of the people can easily find that they fulfill their emotional needs.

Another example of populist Romanian party is the Romanian Social Democratic Party (PSD), "which, despite being a mainstream center-left party, has shifted from a latent to a crystalized populist rhetoric" (Chiruta, 2023, p. 76).

According to Doiciar & Cretan (2021, p. 243), the rise in popularity of the AUR (the Alliance for the Union of Romanians) in Romania during the pandemic, at the Parliamentary elections from December 2020, is an example of the nationalist parties gaining popularity among a younger segment of the population in Romania, consisting of men under 35 years old, and not only among the older population. Doiciar & Cretan (2021, p. 243) use the term "nationalist parties" for populist parties. Romania is, according to them, a different case, at least in 2010, "after the decay of other nationalist parties," compared to the general tendencies of Central and Eastern European countries, which "elected nationalist parties after the collapse of communism: a phenomenon often attributed to a combination of socioeconomic crisis and political instability." What may have contributed to the rise in popularity of the AUR party? Doiciar & Cretan (2021, p. 243) believe that it was all due to the fact that AUR could "offer a potent mix of old nationalism, religious faith, traditional family values and new ideological elements, such as environmentalism, anti-globalization, and anti-government critique to create a self-consciously 'alternative' political rhetoric."

By looking at the traits of AUR listed previously, we can easily see how it has adapted to the needs of the people, both from their past, as we have all noticed how, in Romania, some people have, at some point and in regards to certain aspects, the nostalgia of life in Communist times, the nostalgia of respect for faith and family, but also the needs to move on, to be modern, and to adapt to the current values and principles in the world

we live in, such as environmental care, the need to protect ourselves from globalization, the need to look critically at the work and attitude of the government. AUR takes into account the diversity and the breaking free from the mainstream trends. It focuses on alternative lifestyles and ideologies or, on what is believed to be alternative, since some of these have become part of the mainstream trends, such as anti-globalization and environmental care.

An examination of the previous situation in Romania, namely right after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989, is also necessary in order to make a comparison with the situation in the past and in the present, as well as during the times relatively close to the present. According to Mungiu-Pippidi (2001, p. 230), Romania was, back in 1989, an "electoral democracy," and the elections from 1990 and 1992 led to the institutions' operating "in principle within the framework of procedural democracy, but in practice often broke the rules and norms accepted in the West as characteristic of liberal democracy." Weakness, division, as well as indifference from public opinion led to leaving matters like this. Later on, poor citizens grew even poorer, the economy was not well managed, and afterwards corruption emerged, all of these leading "to the demise of the post-communist regime in 1996, which in turn led to the hope that with electoral democracy established, the development of democratic institutions and government accountability would follow."

The situation of Romania immediately after the fall of Communism described above could be regarded as bringing up the causes of crisis, which are specific to the start of the activity of Populist parties, in this case poor economy and rising corruption which emerged in post-communist times.

The political situation after Communism grew unstable in Romania, due to lots of conflicts and contradictory political movements, ideas, and hopes on the part of the people. The people were no longer kept united under one single ideology as in Communism, which was, after all, mainly a form of control, yet it serves to maintain a certain order.

## Results

It is difficult even to bring under one coherent movement even the Populist movements in one single country, such as Romania. We can view Populism as an adaptable tool in the hands of the political parties' leaders, who are trying to respond to the needs of the people at the time when the election campaigns are organized. What matters is, after all, the present time, and the voters react strongly from an emotional point of view to what has disappointed and angered them looking back at the time from when they chose certain political leaders who, at some point, may no longer have responded to their emotional needs.

The definition of Populism remains vague, and it juxtaposes over the specific needs of the masses at a certain time. In order to give a definition of it, we need, first of all to establish the context and analyze the values, principles and mindset the political parties belonging to the Populist movement set forth.

The main element is a high distrust in the corrupted political elites, against which the Populist leaders offer to fight on a par with the masses, supporting them emotionally. Through their rhetoric, Populist leaders show that they are aware of and they also feel the need, just like the masses, to express themselves freely, and make themselves heard. Freedom of speech is, after all, a right in any individualist and democratic society. Populist leaders offer the opportunity to allow open dialogue between themselves and the masses.

In the case of Romania, we could say that Populism offers a comforting, relaxing experience, away from the authoritarian state and regime which has remained, for Romanians, a reference point regarding what type of state they do not want, as far as relationship between themselves as individuals and the leaders in a position of authority. At the same time, the fall of Communism has brought about a crisis of values and collapse of a system having a certain kind of stability of belief systems.

## **Discussion**

Populism is based on a communication between political elites and masses by using common values and common ideal images of how leaders should be, which are relevant during any historical age and in any political context. This makes it so adaptable to various countries' political situations. It especially has an appeal for countries that have, in the past, been under the rule of authoritarian regimes, which interfered to a large extent in the personal lives of the individuals. The living conditions in authoritarian regimes are perceived as offering limited personal freedom to the individual, in contrast with the ideal image of life today in highly individualist societies, an ideal image which has been, for Romania, based on the image Romanians have of American society after the fall of Communism.

One reason for the appeal of Populism to the masses is that the political representatives show how they are aware of the same problems that the masses are preoccupied with. However, more than this, the Populists present themselves as part of the masses, and as being upset by the same issues regarding the corrupted political elite that is and has been in power. This is why it is easy for Populist parties to persuade the masses to vote for them.

All these impressions of the masses can, however, prove to be illusions finally, since all political actions rely on ideology. The ideology brings to the fore certain values, mindsets, and principles which can resonate with voters, who will react emotionally and support the candidates they feel are worth it. In the end, the image of an honest, well-intended, responsible and skillful political leader may prove to remain utopic.

We always compare the past with the present regarding the political situation in a country. We tend to sometimes idealize the past, or to see it in a very negative light. Sometimes we want to go back to the way life was in the past, while other times we completely want to break away with it. Populism relies on the negative image of the Communist regime in Romania, with a focus on political elites that are corrupt and that do not take the individual needs of the population into account, which has as a consequence a hard life for the people and restricted freedom.

Once Romania is part of a globalized society, it shows how it should be considered with respect to the mentality of its people in line with what is going on at world level. Especially with the fall of Communism, Romania was eager to join the Western, globalized trends, of freedom associated with democracy, which made Romania become divided into subgroups of interests, based on values associated with subgroups. We could divide these subgroups according to the two trends we noticed, with AUR and DEMOS, namely those segments of the population breaking free from considering education a landmark value in their lives, and DEMOS, relying on the value of intellectualism, and promotion of culture accessible to all. With globalization, various segments of the population rely on their own sense of values, and a general, stable sense of values can no longer be at work. Values, just as truth, are interpretable, and function of the interests of certain subgroups, or communities. Society becomes divided according to these interests, and Populism seeks to answer their needs, based on the subgroups the leaders themselves belong to.

## **Conclusion**

Populist political figures open up a friendly communication with the masses, in that they show that they are just like them, and follow the same interests, unlike the corrupted political elites. We could speak about a high vs. low power distance dimension in the relationship with Populist political personalities and with the other political elites. The low power distance means that the masses can be on an equal level with the political leaders, and that they feel free to negotiate with them, and to communicate to them what is bothering them at a certain moment regarding their living conditions and the status of the way everything works or not in their country.

The focus on the people's interest is being brought to the fore by Populist political leaders by showing them how they resonate with all their issues themselves. They take the position of a very understanding friend that is a good listener and who encourages them to move on, and who also offers them not just emotional support, but also takes concrete actions to help them.

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# The Attention of the People: *Mein Kampf* and Thurber's Owl

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## Abstract

During the spring of 1939, a new and complete English translation of *Mein Kampf* was issued, which induced Kenneth Burke to publish his genuinely rhetorical analysis of Hitler's writing shortly after that. The same spring also saw the publication of one of James Thurber's fables, "The Owl Who Was God." Coincidental as this constellation may be, the present paper ventures to critically juxtapose the Hitlerian recipe for war propaganda and the satirical Thurberian treatment of totalitarianism. The argument is organized around two notions: concentration and prosopopoeia. While *Mein Kampf* aims at concentrating the attention of the people on a single enemy, to be expelled by a single *Führer*, Thurber's fable demonstrates, on multiple levels, the ways in which such a concentration is inscribed in the figural workings of prosopopoeia, understood here as a trope not simply of personification but of figuration in general, as well as a trope of spectrality. Since, however, the fable does not lend itself to easy instrumentalization for didactic or satirical purposes, it also showcases a certain resistance, which may, in turn, also help us think about the materiality of literature.

**Keywords:** attention, propaganda, concentration, prosopopoeia, materiality

On February 28, 1939, just about a week after the infamous pro-Nazi rally of the German-American Bund—held at Madison Square Garden in New York on February 20, and marking the peak of NSDAP popularity in America—a new and complete English translation of *Mein Kampf* was published. Hitler's partly autobiographical and partly programmatic two-volume work had originally been issued in 1925 and 1926 in German (with a sequel written in 1928 but discovered and published only posthumously). It gained heightened American popularity after the 1933 appearance of the Dugdale translation, which was an abridged version entitled *My Battle* in the US and *My Struggle* in the UK. The new and complete

translation of 1939, published by Reynal & Hitchcock (Hitler, 1939), preserved the German title of the original. It was carefully prepared and richly annotated by a team of scholars from the New York-based New School for Social Research—it even indicated the beginning and the ending of passages omitted from or condensed in the Dugdale version.<sup>1</sup> Shortly after its appearance, this new translation induced Kenneth Burke to publish his genuinely rhetorical analysis of Hitler's writing *The Rhetoric of Hitler's "Battle"* (Burke, 1973). Burke's lucid commentary came to be the first in a series of linguistically oriented analyses aimed at Nazi rhetoric, from works by contemporaries like Victor Klemperer and Svend Ranulf to more recent readings by Umberto Eco or the team of the 2016 German critical edition of *Mein Kampf*.

The spring of 1939 also saw the publication of James Thurber's fable, "The Owl Who Was God." Thurber gained a reputation during the 1930s as America's number one literary satirist and cartoonist, while he was working for *The New Yorker* as a member of a socially sensitive editorial team. He produced a whole series of fables during those years in his career. After its publication on April 29, 1939, "The Owl Who Was God" would get reprinted in Thurber's 1940 collection *Fables for Our Time and Famous Poems Illustrated*. Even though it can by no means be considered a direct reaction either to Hitler's book or to the growing popularity of Nazi ideology, "The Owl Who Was God" was a warning just months before the war when there was almost no sense of danger in the United States (Cashman, 1989, p. 562). It exemplifies the tone of social satire present all over Thurber's art of writing and drawing. Besides the infrequent sporadic mention of Hitler in Thurber's correspondence (Thurber, 2002, pp. 251, 281, and 296), one could mention his satirical engagement with the emerging cult around the Nazi leader in a cartoon he had made the previous year, in which a woman looks up from a newspaper asking her husband, "Who is this Hitler and what does he want?"<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, just a year before that, Thurber's humor itself elicited a critical response from none other than Kenneth Burke, who produced a psychoanalytical reading of Thurber's recurrent gesture of making fun

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<sup>1</sup> There were two more unabridged English translations coming out in those days, which only shows the intensifying rivalry for a growing number of fanatic readers. The Stackpole edition of Barrows Mussey's anonymous translation appeared the same day as the Reynal & Hitchcock edition, on February 28; however, the primer was without copyright permission. James Murphy's translation for Hurst & Blackett followed within a month on March 20. During the war, in 1943, another complete English edition came out in Ralph Manheim's rendering. For an overview, see the German Critical edition (Hitler, 2016, pp. 1761–1762). All these complete translations bore the title of the German original. Also worthy of mention is the so-called Stalag translation, issued as *My Struggle*, presumably in 1940, by the official publisher of NSDAP. It was based upon an early version of Murphy's translation, a work originally commissioned by Joseph Goebbels (Barnes et al., 1986, pp. 376–377).

<sup>2</sup> Cartoons became increasingly popular as a form of social commentary by the end of the decade (Solomon, 1984, pp. 202–203).

of the psychoanalytic clichés of self-help books. While Burke acknowledged Thurber's art as "a very amusing burlesque of psychoanalysis," he still suggested that Thurber should "go after bigger game" (Burke, 1972, pp. 56–57; cf. Bassett, 1985, p. 38; Pauley, 2009)—an advice Thurber might have heeded a year later, in his cartoon on Hitler.<sup>3</sup>

Contingent as it is, the simultaneous publication of the complete English translation of *Mein Kampf* (followed by Burke's analysis) and Thurber's fable "The Owl Who Was God" might serve as a suggestive metonymy, and thus, an occasion to critically juxtapose the Hitlerian recipe for war propaganda and the satirical Thurberian treatment of totalitarian ideology. As I will argue, both texts seem to be occupied with the question of leadership, specifically, with the control over the attention of the people; however, they do so from two fundamentally different aspects. Two notions, concentration and prosopopoeia, will help us articulate that difference. To put it briefly, while *Mein Kampf* aims at concentrating the attention of the people on a single enemy (to be pointed out by a single *Führer*), Thurber's fable demonstrates the ways in which such a concentration is inscribed in the phantasmatic workings of prosopopoeia, understood here not simply as a trope of personification but as a trope of figuration in general, as well as a trope of spectrality. Against the backdrop of *Mein Kampf*, Thurber's fable appears to foreground the attention of the people not so much as a mental state engineered purely by propagandistic manipulation but as a quasi-spontaneous and, to some extent, even inevitable immersion in a collective fantasy.

### Concentration in *Mein Kampf*

Writing in "Propaganda and Organization" in the second volume of his book, Hitler formulates his understanding of political leadership as follows: "to lead means: to be able to move masses [*Führen heißt: Massen bewegen können*]" (Hitler, 1939, p. 848; 2016, p. 1473). As the title of the chapter already suggests, the task of the leader is twofold: propaganda comes first, and organization is second. Propaganda aims at attracting "followers" (*Anhänger*), inactive sympathizers, while organization is built upon propaganda, as far as its task is to recruit "members" (*Mitglieder*) from among followers, turning them into activists in the service of the party. Propaganda must always precede organization in order to "win for the latter the human material to be utilized" (1939, p. 846; 2016, p. 1471). No wonder that a great part of *Mein Kampf* deals with the prime task of propaganda.

From early on in the book, whenever the question of leadership comes up, it is usually linked with the ability of the leader to attract and guide the attention of the people

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<sup>3</sup> Several years later, however, in his essay on "The Case for Comedy," Thurber still bitterly discussed the condemnation of humor by "arrogant intellectual critics" (Thurber, 1961, pp. 118–119).

by means of propaganda. One such instance occurs in chapter 3 of the first volume, in a passage also quoted by Burke (1973, pp. 193–194), where Hitler spells out his conception of the “art” (*Kunst*) of leadership. We learn that the true leader must be able to concentrate the attention of the people on a single enemy:

As a whole, and at all times, the efficiency [*Kunst*] of the truly national leader [*Volksführer*] consists primarily in preventing the division of the attention of a people, and always in concentrating it on a single enemy [*die Aufmerksamkeit eines Volkes nicht zu zersplittern, sondern immer auf einen einzigen Gegner zu konzentrieren*]. The more uniformly the fighting will of a people is put into action, the greater will be the magnetic force of the movement and the more powerful the impetus of the blow. It is part of the genius of a great leader to make adversaries of different fields appear as always belonging to one category only, because to weak and unstable characters the knowledge that there are various enemies will lead only too easily to incipient doubts as to their own cause.

As soon as the wavering masses find themselves confronting too many enemies, objectivity at once steps in, and the question is raised whether actually all the others are wrong and their own nation or their own movement alone is right.

Also with this comes the first paralysis of their own strength. Therefore, a number of essentially different enemies [*eine Vielzahl von innerlich verschiedenen Gegnern*] must always be regarded as one in such a way that in the opinion of the mass of one's own adherents the war is being waged against one enemy [*gegen einen Feind*] alone. (Hitler, 1939, pp. 152–153, translation slightly modified; 2016, pp. 353–355)

The threatening image of “paralysis” (*Lähmung*) in the last paragraph indicates how important it is for the leader to be able to keep the masses in motion and mobilize them during political or military campaigns. He can only do so by arresting and directing their attention to an object singled out as an enemy. The key notion that governs the passage is that of concentration (*konzentrieren*) used here as a technical term taken from the psychological discourse of attention. It is far from self-evident that it should be used this way. When one hears the loaded word “concentration” in the context of the Nazi movement, one more readily expects the term to crop up with reference to concentration camps (*Konzentrationslager* or *Sammlungslager*, as distinguished, however problematically, from work camps, *Arbeitslager*, or extermination camps, *Vernichtungslager*), specific type of camps set up in rapidly growing numbers from 1933 on, to gather and keep at bay allegedly dangerous ethnic, social, or political groups. Also, one could think of the concentration of military forces on the battlefield, foreshadowed by the concentration

of political forces, that is, large crowds formed at giant rallies or “mass gatherings” (*Massenversammlungen*) during political campaigns, or even masses of spectators or supporters at politically staged sporting events like the 1936 Berlin Olympics. Both these meanings of “concentration”—as a gathering of one’s enemies or one’s own forces—are implied in the psychological meaning of the word. For just as a military concentration of forces makes sense only after a target has been established, or the concentration of enemies in a camp is a decisive step in the process of demarcating such a target, so concentration as a mental state of attending implies the direction of mental powers onto a delineated object of focus that can be singled out for targeting.

In fact, throughout the two volumes of *Mein Kampf*, Hitler heavily relies on fashionable psychological clichés taken from Gustave Le Bon’s mass psychology<sup>4</sup> or, especially, from the turbulent discourse of attention as it has developed since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In his seminal book on *The Principles of Psychology* (1890), William James defined attention as a state of “focalization” or “concentration,” preceded by a moment of selection, by which an object is singled out from a multitude of objects, the rest of which remain neglected (1890, vol. 1, pp. 403–404). This is behind the seemingly paradoxical claim that attention implies inattention, rather than being its opposite. According to James, the “real opposite” of attention is “distraction”—the total lack of selection—understood as a “confused, dazed, scatterbrained” state of mind, which, he adds, is “called *Zerstreuung* in German” (1890, vol. 1, p. 404). With the advent of new forms of media in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—including steam-powered rotary printing press, photography, telegraph, telephone, phonograph, gramophone, film, and radio—there is a growing anxiety concerning one’s control over one’s own mental faculties, and primarily, over one’s attention. The multitude of publications in this field, the “explosion of research and debate,” as Jonathan Crary put it (2001, p. 23), can be seen as a symptom of that anxiety.

In Germany, during the Weimar Republic, self-help books on the “art” of controlling one’s attention, like Reinhard Gerling’s *Die Kunst der Konzentration* from 1920 (not to mention the very device called *Konzentrator*, advertised on the cover of Philipp Müh’s guide from c. 1927, *Coué in der Westentasche!*), became highly popular.<sup>5</sup> They were soon followed by books on the “art” of influencing others, first in commerce, and then in politics.<sup>6</sup> As the title

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<sup>4</sup> Le Bon’s *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind* (*Psychologie des foules*, 1895) was available in German translation from 1908

<sup>5</sup> For an overview, see Carolin Duttlinger’s chapter on “The Art of Concentration: Weimar Self-Help Literature” in her book *Attention and Distraction in Modern German Literature* (2022, pp. 204–220).

<sup>6</sup> Gerhard Schultze-Pfaelzer’s *Propaganda, Agitation, Reklame* (1923) was preceded by early works by Werner Sombart (“Die Reklame” and “Ihre Majestät die Reklame,” both from 1908) and Victor Mataja (*Die Reklame*, 1910).

of Friedrich Schönnemann's *Die Kunst der Massenbeeinflussung in den Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika* (1924) indicates, much of the lore of the rhetoric of advertising came from the United States, where none other than Freud's émigré nephew Edward Bernays implemented the insights of psychoanalysis into commercial and political "propaganda," initially a technical term which Bernays gradually replaced by his own euphemistic inventions, "public relations" and "the engineering of consent." These formulations also indicate how propagandistic activity shifted emphasis from direct advertising to more sophisticated mechanisms of influencing the masses through dramatic events. The fact that Joseph Goebbels, minister of "public enlightenment and propaganda" in Nazi Germany, was himself heavily relying on Bernays' early work (both his *Crystallizing Public Opinion* from 1923 and his *Propaganda* from 1928, see Tye, 1998, pp. 89 and 111), creates an uncanny entanglement in the modern parallel histories of liberal democracy and fascism. The linguistic fact that self-help "guides" were (and are) called *Führer* in German further complicates that confusion (Duttlinger, 2022, p. 211).

The modern concept and discourse of attention is born out of the mourning over its loss, as the frequent reference to the menace of distraction indicates. One such reference appears, in close temporal proximity to our present field of focus, in the 1939 (third) version of Walter Benjamin's essay on "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility." Critically reflecting on the by-then "commonplace" dichotomy of "concentration" (*Sammlung*) and "distraction" (*Zerstreuung*) (2006, p. 268; 1991, vol. 1, p. 504), Benjamin attempts to demonstrate how the emergence of modern art or media (as epitomized in film, that is, in mass cinema) profoundly changes the process of apperception and establishes distraction as the default mode of modern-day reception (2006, p. 269; 1991, vol. 1, p. 504). For him, modernity is characterized by the loss of attention as an ability to concentrate. What it brings is an endless dispersal or scatteredness in the form of amusement orchestrated by the entertainment industry. Benjamin's interpretation of fascism as a propagandistic instrumentalization of art for the purposes of politics appears in this context as a critique of the nostalgic effort that tries to stick to the ideal of attention as concentration.<sup>7</sup> Fascism tries to gain control over the masses' attention, a faculty the masses themselves are no longer capable of controlling.

According to the *Mein Kampf* passage, concentration is the prime prerequisite for mass mobility. Distraction would lead to paralysis. To avoid such a scatterbrained state of mental

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<sup>7</sup> For Benjamin, this might have been part of a broader critique of the very dichotomy and hierarchy of attention vs. distraction (see Duttlinger, 2007, pp. 35, 43, 51, and 2022, pp. 6–7 and 275, and North, 2012, pp. 4–5 and 143–174).

dispersal or “division,” which Hitler pinpoints by the verb *zersplittern*—a term not very far from *zerstreuen*—one needs to find an object of focus. However, since that object does not offer itself spontaneously, it must be formed artistically by a systematic reduction of heterogeneity. The enemy is essentially manifold, composed of “*inherently different*” (innerlich verschiedene) adversaries.<sup>8</sup> Only by reducing that diverse plurality to “one category” do we arrive at a “single enemy” that can, in turn, serve as a target. That reduction is also elemental to the unification of forces—the uniformity of the “fighting will”—which otherwise would be overwhelmed by doubts and uncertainties, with an imminent relapse into the paralyzing state of hesitation. By leaving “objectivity” behind, the inherent heterogeneity of the enemy can be reduced to a “single” target—say, the Jew—against which the people can be “uniformly” mobilized.

Besides distraction, there is however another, slightly different but just as (if not even more) challenging threat that *Mein Kampf* attempts to tackle: the menace of “diversion” (*Ablenkung*). As opposed to distraction, diversion does not dissolve attention. It keeps the people focused but on the wrong object. The Jew does not simply figure in the text as the “single enemy” to be targeted. Represented as master of the bloodsucking “spider” of international capital (1939, pp. 251 and 534, cf. 288; 2016, p. 529) and the “so-called liberal press” (1939, p. 331; 2016, p. 643), he also figures, as Burke pointed out (Burke, 1973, p. 195), as the abject “rival” of the *Führer* in his effort to concentrate the attention of the people. (More specifically, the Jew is a male rival, as far as the masses are deemed to be feminine, cf. Eco on “machismo,” 1995.) By diversionary activity, the “smiling,” “cunning” Jew purposefully misguides the masses’ attention (1939, pp. 331, 817–818, cf. p. 108; 2016, pp. 645, 1405–1409, cf. p. 283). The figure of the Jew is an abject one precisely for his alleged ability to gain control over the people’s attention and thereby become the double or specular counterpart of the *Führer*. The latter will need to present himself as the one who points to the right target. As opposed to *diversion*, he will need to exercise *aversion* in the sense of turning the attention of the people *to*—rather than *away from*—the proper object of focus. He does so by importing the modern psychology of advertising into the field of politics.

The commercial advertisement appears in *Mein Kampf* as the prototype for “political advertising” (1939, p. 236; 2016, p. 505). As the chapter “War Propaganda” in the first volume clearly shows, Hitler’s idols in this regard are Germany’s WWI adversaries,

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<sup>8</sup> I have slightly modified the English translation, which mistakenly renders innerlich not only as “essentially” but also as “internal,” and thus, speaks of “essentially different internal enemies.” Burke, who was fluent in German and was teaching at The New School for Social Research (Pauley, 2009), also omitted the false reference to “internal” enemies when he quoted the passage (1973, pp. 193–194).

the British and the Americans, who followed the psychological principles of advertising in all their propagandistic practices. Those principles can be derived from the nature of the audience to which propaganda is designed to appeal: "To whom has propaganda to appeal? To the scientific intelligentsia or to the less educated masses? It has to appeal forever and only to the masses!" (1939, p. 230; 2016, p. 497). Since propaganda is aimed at the masses (the majority of which Hitler, following Le Bon's mass psychology,<sup>9</sup> deems feminine and primitive, 1939, p. 237; 2016, p. 507), it has little to do with education or scientific training. It is directed toward the feelings of the people, and "the greater" the mass, "the lower" the level of its spiritual workings (1939, p. 232; 2016, p. 499). This becomes fundamental to the "art of propaganda," which is only able to find "the way to the attention, and further to the heart, of the great masses," if, "understanding the great masses' world of ideas and feelings," it applies "a correct psychological form" (1939, p. 233; 2016, p. 501). To explain what that form indeed looks like, Hitler turns to the medium of the poster: "A poster's art lies in the designer's ability to catch the masses' attention by outline and color [*Die Kunst des Plakates liegt in der Fähigkeit des Entwerfers, durch Form und Farbe die Menge aufmerksam zu machen*]" (1939, p. 230; 2016, p. 497). Placed in the masses' "field of vision" (*Gesichtskreis*), the poster has the power to direct their attention or to move things into that field (1939, p. 231; 2016, p. 499). Hitler brings two examples: first, the poster of an art exhibition, then the poster of a soap advertisement.

To exemplify the art of the poster by a poster of an art exhibition provides an occasion for Hitler to separate the "real art" (*wirkliche Kunst*) of propaganda (1939, p. 227, translation modified; 2016, p. 489), made for the masses, from the art of museums, made for intellectuals ("scholars or 'aesthetic' languishing monkeys" [*Gelehrt[e] oder "ästhetisch[e]" Schmachtaffen*], or "aestheticists" so often seen at "literary tea parties" [1939, pp. 233 and 238; 2016, pp. 499 and 509]). Even if it advertises an art exhibition, a poster must always be designed to capture and turn the masses' attention. It must refrain from any aesthetic autotelic finery. At a later point in the book, Hitler brings his own functional design of the NSDAP flag with the Swastika to explain what a right combination of "outline and color" means (1939, pp. 734–735; 2016, pp. 2016, pp. 1249–1251).

The example of the soap poster allows Hitler to draw some further conclusions related to an earlier observation concerning the limitations of the masses' cognitive and memorizing capacities (their "brief attention span," Koschorke, 2017, p. 37): "The great masses'

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<sup>9</sup> Since crowds, according to Le Bon, can only think in images, they are incapable of critical thinking. For Le Bon, crowds are in the position of the sleeper (1986, p. 56), whose thoughts and feelings can be influenced unconsciously by suggestive images—in fact, by one image at a time, like that of the fall of the Eiffel Tower, an example foreshadowing the imagery of 9/11 (1986, p. 60).



receptive ability is only very limited, their understanding is small, but their forgetfulness is great" (1939, p. 234; 2016, p. 501). Accordingly, the emphasis now falls on the way posters combine simplicity with repetition. Speaking the verbal and the visual language of antithesis, the soap advertisement simplifies all differences to the brute binarism of good and bad. Similarly, war propaganda should not be afraid to be one-sided or "subjectively biased" (*subjektiv einseitig*), telling "its own truth" (*eigene [Wahrheit]*) to the point of even telling a "lie" (1939, p. 236 and 238; 2016, pp. 503–507). It must get rid of the German illness of a "mania of objectivity" (*Objektivitätsfimmel*) and all the "half measures" (*Halbheiten*) that come with it (1939, p. 237; 2016, p. 507). No matter how magnificent the goals of the war are, the means must be basic and simple to an extreme. Once that bottom line is reached, only the task of endless mechanical repetition remains.<sup>10</sup>

Just as commercial posters, political slogans also need to be in line with the above principles. They need to be able to point to the themes they address, formulate them in a simplified and polarized way, and repeat them unaltered without end. They need to personify the enemy but also to dehumanize it. Personification and dehumanization do not contradict each other, provided they both work toward the figural production of a perpetrator who can be blamed for all the trouble. This time, Hitler took his example from the British, who successfully prepared their compatriots for the terrors of war by introducing "the German as a barbarian and a Hun," and speaking of the "Hunnish brutality" of the adversary (1939, p. 234; 2016, p. 503).<sup>11</sup> The German or Austrian propagandists, on the other hand, only ridiculed the enemy in comic papers, which proved tragically disappointing as soon as the dark reality of war turned out to be anything but funny. More in accord with the example set by the British was the later poster and slogan, designed by Hans Schweitzer ("Mjöltnir") in 1943, in which a finger can be seen pointing at a Jew banker, with the exclamation: "He is to blame for the war! [*Der ist Schuld am Kriege!*]" Guilt and innocence couldn't be more sharply apart. As far as the debilitating

<sup>10</sup> As the editors of the critical edition of *Mein Kampf* note, Hitler highly exaggerates the constancy and uniformity of Allied propaganda during the First World War. With the change of targeted audiences (from allied troops and civilians to neutral states and enemies), the form and content of propaganda had to be permanently adjusted (Hitler, 2016, p. 510).

<sup>11</sup> The British campaign was later joined by the American propaganda machine with posters (like the one popularizing war bonds, from 1917, showing the bloody handprint of a Hun with the inscription "The Hun—his Mark/Blot it Out with Liberty Bonds", see Schönemann, 1924, p. 142) and films (like *The Hun Within*, *The Claws of the Hun*, or *The Leopard's Spots*, also known as *Once a Hun, Always a Hun*, all three from 1918, cf. Taylor, 2003, pp. 186 and 194). False atrocity propaganda about the "Prussian Ogre," the "Beastly Hun," or the "Corpse-Converting Factory" producing soap out of dead bodies had a tragic backlash later in the 1930s and 1940s, as they caused a general disinclination on the part of the public to give credit to news about real atrocities committed by the Nazis (Taylor, 2003, pp. 179–180 and 197).

repetition of the same is concerned, the 1939 editors of *Mein Kampf* also note Hitler's barely changing theatrical pose and gestures (1939, p. 239), so aptly parodied by Charlie Chaplin in his 1940 satire, *The Great Dictator*.<sup>12</sup>

As we have seen, *Mein Kampf* outlines the Hitlerian conception of propaganda as a concentration of the attention of the people on an artfully fabricated enemy. As the editors of the German critical edition have shown in their chapter "Hitler's Language in *Mein Kampf*" (2016, pp. 21–24), the book also performs what it outlines: its style consists of affective concepts, hyperboles, first-person plural forms, exaggerating prefixes and adverbs, biological vocabulary and military metaphors, at points even loan words to indicate erudition (even though this contradicts Hitler's despisal of intellectuals), slogan-like formulations, frequent questions (immediately answered, if not rhetorical), reductions and polar homogenizations, and so on. Beyond these, *Mein Kampf* also foregrounds a certain paradox, which can be formulated in the following question: how is it possible that a text like this, so openly admitting its inclination to manipulate and so voluntarily revealing its tactical secrets, can remain efficient and widely influential among its readers? Or, in the words of the editors of the critical edition: how can such a "tactical instruction manual [*taktische Handlungsanleitung*]" have such a "destructive propagandistic effect [*verderbliche propagandistische Wirkung*]" (2016, pp. 10 and 4)? One answer could be that even though *Mein Kampf* was a global bestseller, the multitudes who purchased it did not necessarily read it as well. Or, even if they did, most of them might have been members of a less educated class who did not have the critical tools to uncover the text's inconsistency, its self-debunking character. Or, as one could also argue, precisely because readers were critical they found the book's claims so absurd that they simply could not take them seriously. All these explanations could be valid to some extent. However, in the reading that follows, I will try to offer another route to account for this paradox by means of a different genre and vocabulary.

### **Prosopopoeia in Thurber's "The Owl Who Was God"**

James Thurber engaged the spread of authoritarian rhetoric and war propaganda in several of his works at *The New Yorker* in the 1930s and 40s (for a context, see Gale,

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<sup>12</sup> Just a few years before that, in *Modern Times* (1936), Chaplin had also sarcastically presented mechanical repetition as a seminal component of modern factory work. It was precisely this terror of working by the production line that formed the basis of Disney's propagandistic anti-Nazi animation from 1943, *Der Fuehrer's Face* (dir. Jack Kinney; with the original working title *Donald Duck in Nutzi Land*), a short film that visualized the inhumanity of Nazi terror by the imagery of the dehumanizing work by the production line, thus providing us yet another example for the ambivalent entanglement, mentioned above, of Nazi totalitarianism and liberal democracy.

1984, p. 11, and Arner, 1984, p. 237). So much so that the FBI even had a file on Thurber categorizing him as “prematurely anti-fascist” (Grauer, 1994, p. 106). Besides the 1938 cartoon on Hitler mentioned above and the 1939 fable “The Owl Who Was God,” which I am going to discuss below, one could mention his earlier joking with the swastika in 1929 in “The Nature of the American Male” (Tobias, 1970, 27), or his antiwar picture booklet “The Last Flower” published near the end of 1939. Some other pieces of the period, mostly from the 1940 collection *Fables for Our Time*, also formed part of that engagement. To mention but three examples: “The Rabbits Who Caused All the Trouble” is a parable of the blaming rhetoric of Nazism; a later version of this is the “The Peacelike Mongoose”—from the 1956 collection *Further Fables for Our Time*—whose pacifist main character is labeled crazy, sick, coward, and even “mongoosesexual;” and as an even more relevant example, there is “The Very Proper Gander,” a story based upon the pun of “proper gander” being mistakenly overheard as “propaganda,” which then creates a growing suspicion among the animals and leads to the banishment of the innocent gander.<sup>13</sup>

“The Owl Who Was God” is a unique combination of all these: it has a cartoon illustration, it thematizes admiration and personality cult along with practices of blaming and banishment, it also heavily builds upon the material aspect of language in the form of wordplay. The cartoon Thurber prepared for this fable shows the emblematic image of a sage owl (a Eurasian eagle owl, to be more precise) perching alone on the branch of a tree, with its body whitely shining against the night darkness of the background. Its large staring eyes and face-like head seem to explain why the owl could become an emblem of wisdom for centuries. While the brightness of its figure seems to emanate wisdom, the black pair of eyes might still remind us of the world of darkness to which it belongs.

The title further elevates the owl’s status to heavenly heights, referring to it as the divine center of a monotheistic cult, most probably with attributes of limitless power and omniscience. Yet, according to the logic and tradition of fables, the past tense of the formulation also suggests the temporary and mutable character of that divinity, the profanation of its sanctity, foreshadowing the ultimate loss of any superhuman features the owl may seem to have. From a philological aspect, there is one more element we need to point out. According to its first publication in *The New Yorker* in 1939, the title of the fable was, in fact, slightly longer: “The Owl Who Thought He Was God” (Thurber, 1939, p. 23).<sup>14</sup> This was shortened to “The Owl Who Was God” when the text got reprinted

<sup>13</sup> On the latter story, see my “Propaganda, Proper-ganda, Proper Gander: Edward Bernays and James Thurber,” forthcoming in *Americana: E-Journal of American Studies in Hungary*.

<sup>14</sup> The original formulation might remind us of an earlier story, “The Greatest Man in the World,” whose title character is said to behave like “the animal that knows its power” (Thurber, 1935, p. 212).

in Thurber's collection of fables a year later (Thurber, 1940, pp. 35–36).<sup>15</sup> The difference points to a hesitation or insight concerning the owl's perspective. The first version makes mention of a belief or perception on the owl's part, which the second version decides to omit, raising the question of whether the owl really "thinks"—believes or knows—that it is God or is just considered God unknowingly, without notice, by others, his followers. We shall come back to this question.

In contrast to its title, the moral of the story, as well as the narrative itself, remained unaltered. It reads: "You can fool too many people too much of the time." Upon first reading, this lesson seems to formulate customary wisdom concerning manipulation, the credulity of the people, their constant vulnerability to demagoguery, their inclination to be deceived by their leader—the many to be misled by the one. At a closer look, however, the phrasing seems more nuanced, at least from two aspects: firstly, it mentions multitude or frequency not as a clear majority but simply as "too many" or "too much," allowing for lower numbers with a countdown to even one—the implication being that even one victim could be too many and a single occurrence too much—and secondly, it uses the general subject "you" which does not limit the potential manipulators to any privileged individual but leaves the position open, to be occupied by perhaps anyone. What it states, therefore, is that whenever there is fooling, it is always one person fooling another or others—fooling is an act with a perpetrator who has the power to control the people, if only occasionally and partially.

The story of the fable involves a colorful group of anthropomorphized animals who fluently communicate with each other, even though they belong to different species, both wild and domestic. This miniaturized version of the American melting pot soon becomes a growingly hierarchized society as religious sentiments begin to dominate the life of the "creatures." The owl takes on divine powers right from the outset. His night vision invokes omniscience in the two ground moles who encounter him, supposedly due to their implicit assumption of his panoptic ability.

"Once upon a starless midnight there was an owl who sat on the branch of an oak tree. Two ground moles tried to slip quietly by, unnoticed. "You!" said the owl. "Who?" they quavered, in fear and astonishment, for they could not believe it was possible for anyone to see them in that thick darkness. "You two!" said the owl. The moles hurried away and told the other creatures of the field and forest that the owl was the greatest and wisest of all animals because he could see in the dark and because he could answer any question." (Thurber, 1940, p. 35)

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<sup>15</sup> Due to the brevity of the text, I will only give page numbers for the block quotations.

This is a scene of fear and trembling, where total darkness means safety until there is one who can see in the dark. It is also a scene of address and response, a scene of interpellation. In response to the owl's address, the ground moles ask a question, followed by a repeated and reaffirmed address. While the owl might indeed appear to have night vision, the initial dialogue hardly establishes him as an omniscient being. What is initially just an assumption is turned into empirically substantiated knowledge once the secretary bird decides to investigate the situation.

"I'll see about that," said a secretary bird, and he called on the owl one night when it was again very dark. "How many claws am I holding up?" said the secretary bird. "Two," said the owl, and that was right. "Can you give me another expression for 'that is to say' or 'namely'?" asked the secretary bird. "To wit," said the owl. "Why does the lover call on his love?" "To woo," said the owl. (Thurber, 1940, p. 35)

The secretary bird poses a rather diverse series of questions to the owl, trying to test both his vision and wisdom, and receives an accurate answer to each. Since, however, there is some resistance among the rest of the animals—the red fox and his friends posing questions concerning the owl's daylight vision—a unified common stance can only be reached after their banishment from the land. By now, the social setup is fully hierarchized. Having expelled the sceptics, a clear stratification ensues with animals of the air above—volant birds—and ground animals below—including non-volant birds. The owl is still missing from the top, but that place is reserved for him, to be immediately followed by the "secretary" bird—a name highly suggestive of that rank—who is later assisted by a hawk below him. Then come the rest: ground moles, Plymouth rock hen(s) —only mentioned later—and all the other unspecified creatures.

That is when the animals decide to ask the owl, by way of a messenger, to occupy his place and lead them: "They sent a messenger to the owl and asked him to be their leader." The text is significantly elliptical regarding the details of that message. We get no information either about the messenger, what he said to the owl, or how the owl reacted or responded, if at all. With a leap forward, we are immediately placed into the final scene, a scene of leading and following, but also a scene of catastrophe:

When the owl appeared among the animals it was high noon and the sun was shining brightly. He walked very slowly, which gave him an appearance of great dignity, and he peered about him with large, staring eyes, which gave him an air of tremendous importance. "He's God!" screamed a Plymouth rock hen. And the others took up the cry "He's God!" So they followed him wherever he went and when he bumped into things

they began to bump into things, too. Finally he came to a concrete highway and he started up the middle of it and all the other creatures followed him. Presently a hawk, who was acting as outrider, observed a truck coming toward them at fifty miles an hour, and he reported to the secretary bird and the secretary bird reported to the owl. "There's danger ahead," said the secretary bird. "To wit?" said the owl. The secretary bird told him. "Aren't you afraid?" he asked. "Who?" said the owl calmly, for he could not see the truck. "He's God!" cried all the creatures again, and they were still crying "He's God" when the truck hit them and ran them down. Some of the animals were merely injured, but most of them, including the owl, were killed. (Thurber, 1940, pp. 35–36)

What first appears as a neatly symmetrical scene of leading and following—the scene of a leader leading his followers and of the followers following their leader—becomes imbalanced and shaky precisely because it is also a scene of catastrophe. Not that there were no signs of the approaching doom. However, all the signs are seen from the perspective of a desire to have a leader who can be trusted and followed. A slow walk is seen as a sign of dignity, and a peering look is seen as a sign of importance. In fact, we read that this behavior "gave" such an appearance to the owl. Disregarding the fact that the owl's daylight vision has never been proved—something we might be reminded of when, before the accident, the narrator notes that the owl "could not see the truck"—the animals begin to call him "God," to blindly follow the blind<sup>16</sup> and "bump into things" just as he does. The linkage of religious belief to the act of following, so emphatic in this passage—"So they followed him," "all the creatures followed him"—implicitly invokes the definition of religion as an act of following. If religion is "following" (*Nachfolge*), as Martin Heidegger claims (2000a, p. 590),<sup>17</sup> then the movement of the animals as they are tracking the movement of the owl is rightly represented here as deeply religious in its nature. It is also political, as far as the movement of "followers" if we recall the English rendering of *Anhänger*

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<sup>16</sup> Besides its general significance, there is also an autobiographical relevance to blindness. Blinded to one eye in a childhood accident, Thurber was beginning to lose sight in his other eye around this time and turned totally blind for his last years, before his death in 1961. Around 1939, he used extra strong glasses along with a Zeiss loupe and many large sheets of paper both for his writing and drawing tasks.

<sup>17</sup> Here Heidegger himself is presumably following Dietrich Bonhoeffer's 1937 book *Nachfolge* (translated into English as *The Cost of Discipleship*). Already in his 1933 rectoral address, though in a somewhat different wording, Heidegger speaks of the crowd of followers (*Gefolgschaft*) and the act of following (*Folgen*) as counterparts of the leader (*Führer*) and leadership (*Führung*, *Führen*). For him, the act of following is both a march or service and a resistance (2000b, pp. 112–116). The former implies focusing, selective simplification, "the reduction of the gaze" (*Vereinfachung des Blickes*) to the proper object (2000b, p. 111). Its threatening opposite, distraction, will be the subject of a later essay, "The Pathway" (*Der Feldweg*, 1949), where he writes: "The danger looms that men today cannot hear its [the pathway's] language. The only thing they hear is the noise of the media, which they almost take for the voice of God. So man becomes disoriented [*zerstreut*] and loses his way. To the disoriented [*Den Zerstreuten*], the simple seems monotonous. The monotonous brings weariness" (1981, p. 70; 1989, p. 89).

in *Mein Kampf*) is not reserved for religious movements. Le Bon formulates succinctly how certain practices beyond religion, including atheist fanaticism, can attain a religious character: "A person is not religious solely when he worships a divinity, but when he puts all the resources of his mind, the complete submission of his will, and the whole-souled ardor of fanaticism at the service of a cause or an individual who becomes the goal and guide of his thoughts and actions" (Le Bon 1896, p. 64). Whenever there is following, it is patterned after religion. However, to follow is not just to move in space. It also means copying, reproducing, or inheriting. That is exactly what we see happening as all the animals begin to bump into things and suffer the material resistance of the world much the same way their leader suffers it himself. That happens until the fatal moment of catastrophe occurs. The catastrophic moment is "coming" not just as a particular object, a truck—a metonymy of ultrahuman presence in a world of already-humanized animals—it is just as much the coming of the future as coming, as something entirely unforeseeable or incalculable and, therefore, brutally material.<sup>18</sup>

This materiality has, in fact, been lurking all way long in the apparent addresses and responses of the owl. Read together as a series, they appear as so many instances of inarticulate hooting: "You," "You two," "Two," "To wit," "To woo," again "To wit," and finally, "Who." These soundings might very well compose an animal semiosis but also threaten to remain pure noise to human ears—unless those ears have the power to hear in them meaningful words or expressions, even minimal sentences. The series of questions posed by the secretary bird during his test of the owl's capabilities turn out to be fatally answerable by terms that can be mistakenly heard in the sounds of the bird. The sophisticated incoherence of these questions might even raise suspicion in the reader unless their randomness is taken as nothing more than an instance of spot-checking. On the level of writing the fable, one can sense Thurber's ingenious arsenal of wordplay, his fascination with the material aspects of language (Gale, 1984, p. 19; Chiba, 2015, p. 159). One could also call it the homonymic—or, in this case, homophonic—aspect of language as far as the mistaken overhearing of the owl's sounds creates a contingent interface between two "natural" languages utterly foreign to each other: the language of animal semiosis and the language of human verballity, or rather, between two singular languages within one and the same language. Neither entirely animal nor entirely human, they can, ironically, coincide, much the same way "proper gander" was overheard

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<sup>18</sup> From the perspective of its catastrophic ending, "The Owl Who Was God" appears to combine two other pieces: "The Hen Who Wouldn't Fly" (the image of a fatal road accident) and "The Hen and the Heaven" (the theme of a community running carelessly into their doom).

as “propaganda” in another of Thurber’s fables, mentioned above.<sup>19</sup> Insofar as contingency dominates the interpretation of the owl’s hooting and behavior, his appearance among the animals at noon can be seen as merely coincidental. Rather than responding to the messenger and fulfilling the request of the community (about which the narrative was so elliptical), the owl happens to be there by pure chance or some misunderstanding—rambling about having been awakened from his daytime sleep—regardless of how unlikely his midday appearance might otherwise seem.

In all the above instances, the senseless—or radically foreign—hooting of Thurber’s owl is given a meaningful shape. In the language of classical rhetoric, as it has been reinterpreted by Paul de Man, we can identify the trope at work here: it is *prosopopoeia*, understood not simply as a trope of personification or anthropomorphism, but, in line with its etymology, as a trope of giving or lending a face to something faceless, of “face-making” (*prosopon poiein*), and by extension, as a trope of figuration, of giving—visual, auditory, or other—figure to that which has no figure at all.<sup>20</sup> What “gave” it dignity and importance, was not its slow walk or peering look, as the narrative put it from the perspective of the other animals, but the phantasmatic perception of the other animals themselves. As far as *prosopopoeia* is hallucinatory, the figures it provides will have a spectral character. The owl’s initial address turns out to have been a mere projection. The God followed by the community of creatures is a specter, an ideological phantom made up not by some propagandistic manipulation but by their own hallucinatory fantasy. In this respect, the story diverges from its moral (Chiba, 2015, p. 161),<sup>21</sup> and suggests that people are more likely to be spontaneously fooled by themselves than by others, because the leader they choose to follow is to some extent an idol of their own making.<sup>22</sup> Even if one considers

<sup>19</sup> For a linkage of wordplay to human-animal relations in Thurber, see Eckler, 1973, pp. 241 and 247.

<sup>20</sup> In de Man’s formulation: “...in its most restricted sense, *prosopopoeia* makes accessible to the senses, in this case the ear, a voice which is out of earshot because it is no longer alive. In its most inclusive and etymological sense, it designates the very process of figuration as giving face to what is devoid of it” (1996, p. 46).

<sup>21</sup> That the moral of “The Owl Who Was God” lives its own life, independently of the story, is not without precedent. Something like that also occurs, perhaps ironically, in “The Very Proper Gander,” or in “The Stork Who Married a Dumb Wife.” A story can only be “complete with moral” (says “The Tortoise and the Hare”). But speed is just as important: “Don’t get it right, just get it written!” (says the moral of “The Sheep in Wolf’s Clothing,” a narrative of competing publications). Thurber’s spontaneous writing habit always involved a bunch of titles and morals waiting for a story (Rosen, 2019). As he said: „I don’t believe the writer should know too much where he’s going. If he does, he runs into old man blueprint—old man propaganda” (Fensch, 1989, p. 54).

<sup>22</sup> In a letter dating from March 24, 1938, Thurber writes: “it[']s terrible to think of [Vienna] in the hands of the worst bastards the history of the world has ever known. The worst of it is that the rank and file of young Germans are all little Hitlers. I think Hitler’s claim that Fascism will last a thousand years is probably true. [...] It’s a wonder I don’t lose patience with the wonderful freedom of democracies—the right of squabble, the right to have a to-hell-with-it attitude, the right to make fools of themselves—like a bunch of drunken bums in a barroom” (Thurber, 2002, p. 296, emphasis mine).



the “secretary” bird, rather than the owl, to be the prime manipulator, one needs to explain why on his lone visit to the owl he poses his questions, for if he wanted to deceive the others, he could have just lied to have tested the owl, without actually testing him. The very fact that the secretary bird does indeed pose his questions suggests that he himself wants to be convinced, and that he either becomes the victim of a fatal coincidence by asking questions that can be answered by misheard hootings, or his questioning is preconceived from the start and all he needs is just a self-calming reaffirmation, which he needs in order to be able to make others give credit to what he himself can only scarcely believe.

A similar discrepancy might have been why Thurber chose to modify the original title of the fable, omitting any reference to the owl's belief or perception of being God. The owl seems unaware of being considered God (Kenney, 1974, p. 288). The resistance of the story to its moral is based upon a resistance, within the story, of animal noise to human voice, which in turn can also be seen, on a broader level, as a resistance of animals to the very genre of the fable, to the sacrificial structure of that genre, its ruthless putting of animal singularities to the service of human self-conceit (Sun, 1994, pp. 52–53; Williams, 2022, pp. 51–75).<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

To view Thurber's owl against the backdrop of *Mein Kampf*, and inversely, to put the latter in critical perspective through the lens of the fable, means a modification in both. The totalitarian dream of control over the people through control over their attention is supplanted in the fable by a spontaneous figurative mechanism that generates ghosts. Concentration is displaced by prosopopoeia. The leader is formed phantasmatically by his followers, who are then captivated by a phantom of their own creation. Moreover, even though propaganda can always try to capitalize on existing fantasies, it can never totalize its control because it is deeply embedded in that phantasmatic process.

To better estimate the significance and consequences of the above conclusion, let us cast a passing look at a passage in the chapter on “Propaganda and Political Leadership” in Edward Bernays' 1928 book *Propaganda*, where he quotes Disraeli's lament “I *must* follow the people. Am I not their leader?” and replies with an inversion: “I *must* lead the people.

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<sup>23</sup> In this last respect, “The Owl Who Was God” prefigures Thurber's later treatment of the human-animal relationship in “The Human Being and the Dinosaur” (from *Further Fables for Our Time*), with the ironic moral (implicitly also citing and mocking Alexander Pope) that “The noblest study of mankind is Man, says Man” (Thurber, 1956, p. 69).

Am I not their servant?" (Bernays, 1928, p. 92). Disraeli rethinks the relation between leader and followers according to the Hegelian master-slave dialectic, implying that the leader is forced to change from being the master of his followers to their slavish follower if he is to maintain his popularity and his leading position, which, thus, is only a "leading" position by the name. Bernays, on the other hand, continues to claim the uninterrupted leadership of the leader, presumably concerning the sophisticated techniques of propaganda, the figural modes of influencing others, whereby spin doctors can manipulate the will of the people, to make them want what they, spin doctors, want them to want. As a result, the leader will only seem to be following his followers, whereas, in reality, he will remain their actual and absolute leader through manipulation.

The very fact that in Thurber's text the owl does not appear to manipulate anyone at all and the secretary bird does not manipulate others either—unless, in a rather limited sense, being compelled to prove to himself what he attempts to prove to others—indicates that, even if regarded from the perspective of Bernays' propagandistic view, leadership cannot be limitless, because it is always inscribed in a phantasmatic process to which even the leader is exposed and which he himself is a part of, rather than being its external manipulator. This is not to say that manipulation or the attempt to manipulate is not something real. Far from it; however, it cannot be fully controlled and thus, it cannot be used as a reference to explain away one's own responsibility.

In this regard, the prosopopoetic generation of phantoms could account for the apparent paradox of *Mein Kampf's* ability to manipulate, despite its openly admitted intention to do so, since even an open admittance will not help if readers do not want to see the contradiction. On the other hand, Thurber's story does not simply replace manipulative propaganda by some ideological phantoms that would spring from the heads of individuals according to their will. Although the story does not fully eliminate consciousness and responsibility—as indicated by the homogenizing banishment of the sceptics—the fable does not simply replace one control with another—external political control with internal cognitive control.

For the formation of figures, one needs some material that can be formed or reformed, and one cannot decide how to form it or whether to form it at all. Formation is a historical process involving a certain amount of spontaneity to it. Prosopopoeia, as a trope of figuration, is a historical figure. To the extent that it is historical, it is subject to contingency. If the attention of the people gets concentrated and the masses mobilized, that is just partially due to deceptive propaganda or the conscious decisions of members of the community. It has just as much to do with a quasi-spontaneous event of prosopopoeia,

an imaginative perception, which forcefully invents a single leader, who just as forcefully invents a single enemy, his rival, against whom all forces can then be concentrated—until the accumulation of material resistance, the coming “truck” of the future, erases that concentration and enforces a reorganized restart.

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# Exilic, Becoming Beings

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## Abstract

Exile is the unique reliable way out for the world's citizens when they feel unsafe in their home countries. As such, it is neither confined to any particular era nor to any specific society. This is a pure human phenomenon, which can occur at any time in an individual's life. Its degree of occurrence might vary, up or down, depending on the political, economic, educational, cultural and legal conditions that a given society offers to its citizens. The more those values are promoted and put into practice, the less the spectrum of exile diminishes. A careful, up-to-date look at the global society helps to remove ambiguities about the exilic people's conditions. No human society is immune from the exilic phenomenon. Citizens are compelled to leave their native homes to avoid arbitrariness, injustice, and death. As a social fact, exile is considered as a necessary evil. Necessary, because by exiling, the exilic being survives, learns to recreate and reinvent him/herself, overcome social obstacles and negotiate a new way of life. Evil, because the exilic subject, regardless of his/her know-how, intelligence or culture, is perceived as an intruder, a threat to the host community. Thus, the hospitality, which is offered to him/her, is always fraught with difficulties; a dose of adaptation is always required for his/her survival. The issue of exile is recurrent in the 21<sup>st</sup> century societies and is dealt with in various news media. Literature subjectivizes it by creating fictional, imaginary characters with complex, uncertain exilic destinies. Interrogating the exilic individuals' conditions through the prism of literary works is therefore an ambitious exercise. For that purpose, *Crosian* sociocritical perspective will serve as a methodological framework. Its purpose will consist in digging into two major points of interest (exilic evil and integrating modes) in a series of novels by authors of varied nationalities.

**Keywords:** exile, human, injustice, literature, liminality

## Introduction

The human condition as a topic of interest is interrogated in countless critical studies. Together, they all seek to comprehend the human's pains, concerns, and sufferings, in order to take care of him/her. In this sense, medical research provides tangible results. As far as philosophy, anthropology, sociology, history, literature, and psychology are concerned, they are also interested in human nature. Their common purpose is to dig into its origins, discourses, deeds, visions, and will. While the results obtained are varied, united and satisfying, it should be noted that the human remains an elusive, mystical, mythical, cultural being. It is unquestionably dynamic; it constantly attempts to transform its environment according to its prevailing aspiration.

Books such as Alain Badiou's *L'Être et l'événement* (1988), Alan W. Watts's *The Book: On the Taboo against Knowing who You Are* (1989), Monique Atlan and Roger-Pol Droit's *Humain: Une enquête philosophique sur les révolutions qui changent nos vies* (2014), Jürgen Habermas's *L'Avenir de la nature humaine: Vers un eugénisme libéral?* (2015), Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (2018), Robert Greene's *Les Lois de la nature humaine* (2019), and Alain Perusset's *Sémiotique de la vie. Mondes de sens, manières d'être* (2020) belong to different areas of knowledge; however, their unique object of study is the human condition.

Due to the current emergence of threats such as demographic growth, technological development, natural disasters, military conflicts, and economic crises, people's conditions have turned more precarious than ever. This troublesome situation brings about their massive exodus, either from one region to another within the same country, or from one country to another, or from one continent to another. Anyway, the most pressing issue is that, as the world moves forward, one realizes that the earliest critical works having people as their core subject have just become benchmarks; people are still prey to new burning phenomena, constraining today's critics to undertake further research upon them. New analytical perspectives in no way call into question the originality of the earliest works; on the contrary, they reopen the debate on people, helping to shed light on issues that are still obscure, or account for the realities that are intrinsically linked to humans, and which have only just come up.

Literature, the field *par excellence* for social representation, pictures today's people as crisis-affected beings who constantly strive to transform their pain into joy and hell into paradise. A thorough reading of Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959) and *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their*

*Accents* (1992) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2014) will contribute to determining the perilous experiences that sometimes compel people to move from one place to another. A critical look at the fiction of those novelists helps to reveal that they depict various societies, whose people embark on an adventure towards the American society. If the destination is unique, several social reasons motivate their displacements.

Thus, from an interpretative point of view, the study of the exilic subjects' social status turns out to be substantial, for the host space acquires a hellish value, to the extent that the exilic beings lose their dignity, and become socially invisible. A reflection upon those crisis-affected people is significant, but before going ahead, it is necessary to consider some of the works carried out on the novels under consideration. In the critical study titled "Notions of Home: Re-Locations and Forging Connections in Paule Marshall's *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (2018), Ashma Shamail looks into themes such as immigration, exile, equality, freedom, racism, materiality, cultural reconnection and return to the ancestral source. This study shows that both immigrant and exilic beings are confronted with the same social difficulties. Furthermore, delving into the hardship undergone by the migrant characters in Paule Marshall's creative art, Kelly Baker Josephs avers that "(...) the dynamic Marshall probes between socially (and often financially) privileged white women and less powerful women of color illustrates the implicit 'limits of personhood' that plague attempts at intersectionality (when attempts are made at all)" (2023, p. 3).

Furthermore, in his article entitled "I can't be me without my people: Julia Alvarez and the postmodern personal narrative" (2003), David Vázquez questions "the real trauma inflicted on Dominicans in the insular and American contexts" (2003, p. 383). According to Vázquez's analysis, the prevailing crisis in the Dominican Republic is political. This is due to the absence of democracy and poor governance, while the American crisis is both economic and sociocultural. Better still, analyzing the ambivalent feature of immigration in "Gains and losses of immigration in Julia Alvarez: How the García Girls lost their accents" (2010), Šárka Bubíková asserts that "while moving to America most likely saves their lives, at the same time it involves a loss in status. The Garcías have to lower their expectations significantly—both in terms of possession and position" (2010, p. 11). Further, through an article on Adichie's *Americanah*, Aristi Trendel avows that:

in her polyphonic novel, she orchestrates the woes of a divided self thus transforming the shabby condition of loss into a treasured aesthetic motif. Her ironic title points both to a story of assimilation and acculturation and to the loss which exiles keep alive. (2018, p. 87)



In addition to that, in a critical reflection on Adichie's novel, M. Robert Chandran and C. Govindaraj account for "the minds and identities of African immigrants who face cultural adaptation and identity creation challenges [in the American society]" (2022, p. 77).

As we can see, building upon varied methodological approaches, those critical studies have tried to elucidate Marshall's, Alvarez's and Adichie's fiction. Taken isolately, each of them has scrutinized a specific aspect of the literary projects under investigation. A close look at those works also helps to realize that they all deal with both exile and immigration. From that observation, one can infer that the field chosen for this study is migrant literature. Without falling into a trap of overstatement, the preceding critical review of literature provides a momentous insight into those novelists' writings. Nevertheless, textual values such as the exilic subject's sociocultural shift deserves to be interrogated. For that purpose, Edmond Cros's sociocritical perspective will serve as a methodological tool. This approach differs from the sociology of literature; its object is the literary texts. With reference to *Crosian* view, [sociocriticism] postulates that referential reality undergoes, under the effect of writing, a process of semiotic transformation, which encodes the referent in the form of structural and formal elements.<sup>1</sup>

With reference to *Crosian* thesis, the exilic beings are instances of codification. The interval between their homeland and the host society is made of various semiotic changes. They have undergone a set of figurative metamorphoses. To account for that social mutation, the use of *Crosian* sociocritical perspective will be helpful. Its interest for this study will consist in scrutinizing the forms of transformation that occur in the exilic beings' lives through two lines of research, *exilic evil* and *integrating modes*.

## Exilic Evil

The current stage of research looks into the textual values of the chosen novels, which exemplify the hellish feature of exile. Exile is a purely human phenomenon and has ambivalent features; it can be forced or intentional. In both cases, there is always a displacement from an initial space (homeland) to another one (host space). Forced exile can be politically motivated, i.e. an individual is accused of anti-social actions. To avoid eventual acts of reprisal, the respondent might go into exile. This estrangement from the homeland might be short-lived, long-lasting or permanent. Here, the eventual coming home hinges on the prevailing socio-political climate. Forced exile can have economic reasons;

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<sup>1</sup> "[La sociocritique] postule que la réalité référentielle subit, sous l'effet de l'écriture, un processus de transformation sémiotique qui code le référent sous la forme d'éléments structurels et formels" (Cros, 2003, p. 37).

growing poverty in a given society might compel its citizens to go into exile. They might also go into exile for educational, family or professional reasons. Despite the nuance between forced exile and intentional exile, they all involve the subjects' displacement. Whether exiled or immigrant, both seek to protect and improve their physical integrity and social well-being.

The novels under consideration substantiate that particular situation. Paule Marshall's fictional beings are Caribbeans, Julia Alvarez's are Dominicans and Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's are Nigerians. Despite those differences in terms of cultural roots, the American society emerges as the characters' single destination. This essentializing strategy praises the host society. Obviously, the novelists' characters migrate for different reasons. Marshall and Adichie picture a number of characters who evolve in a precarious situation in their home societies. Alvarez's heroes, on the other hand, are well-to-do, but are forced to leave their home country because of political unrest. In other words, they go into exile to preserve their physical integrity. Examining the reasons, which can compel a subject to go into exile, Clément Moisan maintains that

The reason for exile comes almost naturally to anyone who has to leave their homeland, and the people who are close to them. However, it takes various forms, depending on whether it is the result of an obligation to leave one's homeland and the impossibility of returning, or the action of leaving one's country voluntarily, either because of a particular context (dictatorship, war, risk to one's life, famine), or because of a desire to improve one's lot, to access a better existence, or even because of a taste for adventure.<sup>2</sup> (Moisan, 2008)

In line with both categories, Marshall's and Adichie's characters migrate to resolve their economic difficulties. Here, what is relevant in the homeland is that none of the fictional beings suffers from identity problems. Their only concern is to acquire economic autonomy. The passage below describes Silla Boyce's social misery in Barbados; the Caribbean island undergo a chaotic economic situation, which compels her to go into exile:

You know what I was doing when I was your age? She asks Selina. I was in the Third Class.  
... The Third Class is a set of little children picking grass in a cane field from the time  
God sun rise his heaven till it set. With some woman called a Driver to wash yuh tail

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<sup>2</sup> "Le motif de l'exil s'impose presque naturellement à toute personne qui doit quitter son pays, et les personnes qui lui sont proches. Mais il prend des formes différentes, selon qu'il résulte d'une obligation de quitter son pays et de l'impossibilité d'y revenir, ou de l'action de quitter volontairement son pays, soit en raison d'un contexte particulier (dictature, guerre, risqué for sa vie, famine), soit par désir d'améliorer son sort, d'accéder à une existence meilleure, ou encore par goût de l'aventure" (Moisan, 2008, p. 73).

in licks if yuh dare look up. Yes, working harder than a man at the age of ten. ... And when it was hard times. ... I would put a basket of mangoes 'pon muh head and go selling early-early 'pon a morning. Frighten bad enough for duppy and thing 'cause I was still only a child... (1959, pp. 45–46)

In contrast to the above-mentioned case, Alvarez's characters suffer from no financial trouble. For example, the Garcías are wealthy enough. However, Carlos García, the head of the family is accused of conspiracy by Trujillo's government, thus forcing the Garcías to go into exile in New York, United States. The reason for that exile is purely political. Be it forced or intentional, exile is always tedious. Indeed, through a comparative approach, Gérard Keubeung reveals the exilic evil as follows,

(...) immigration is a perilous adventure for those who embark on it. From the moment you set out on your journey to the moment you settle in your host country, everything is fraught with danger. Even if you let yourself be lulled by the illusion of some kind of paradise. Moreover, the danger of immigration is all the greater given that the journey is fraught with signs of failure.<sup>3</sup> (Keubeung, 2011)

As argued above, exile is a complex social phenomenon in today's world. Once settled in the American society, the exilic beings experience some dramatic realities. Henceforth, they are identified with the host society. David Álvarez points out that the "[exilic beings] are frequently seen and figured as faceless and racialized threats to the body politics" (2022, p. 41). Due to racial discrimination, they are deprived of various privileges. As a result, they are socially reclusive and lose their ancestral identity. In that state of cultural shift, the exilic people have no value. In Marshall's and Adichie's novels, race is deeply codified; it is one of the symbols that reinforces the exilic beings' social invisibility. From that perspective, Sharjeel Ahmad and many other critics affirm that "a person with black or grey color of skin has no equal rights in America to pursue his/her American dream and is only limited to the white color of skin" (Ahmad et al., 2022, p. 1418).

In Adichie's *Americanah*, race embodies the metaphor of liminality. A thorough analysis of Ifemelu's trajectory helps to discover that her experience has three phases: separation, transition and incorporation, which correspond to what Arnold Van Gennep respectfully calls "preliminary rites", "liminal rites" and "postliminal rites" (1960, p. 3). In the liminal phase, the exilic subject suffers from social invisibility; he is subject to restrictions, his freedom

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<sup>3</sup> "(...) l'immigration est une aventure périlleuse pour ceux qui s'y engagent du voyage que l'on entreprend à l'installation dans le pays d'accueil, tout n'est que danger. Même si l'on se laisse bercer par l'illusion d'un quelconque paradis qui y existerait. Et ce danger que représente l'immigration est d'autant plus grand que le voyage est émaillé de signes annonciateurs de l'échec" (Keubeung, 2011, p. 112).

is threatened. That is why Victor Turner, one of Genep's readers avers that "liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness" (1991, p. 95). Indeed, since birth, Ifemelu evolves in her native society (Nigeria) where no prejudice is associated with race. However, after migrating to the United States for educational purposes, she discovers that her race is a handicap, a barrier to her social achievement. Her words reflect her high degree of bitterness, "I came from a country where the race was not an issue; I did not think of myself as black, and I only became black when I came to America" (2013, p. 290). With time, she realizes that her survival in her host space depends on her capacity to adapt to the new realities. In keeping with those details, one can assert that Ifemelu suffers from social difficulties (social exclusion) because of her race. This makes her a social invalid. Whiteness being the norm for survival, Ifemelu feels compelled to adopt the white style for her job interview:

My full and cool hair would work if I were interviewing to be a backup singer in a jazz band, but I need to look professional for this interview, and professional means straight is best but if it's going to be curly then it has to be the white kind of curly, loose curls or, at worst, spiral curls but never kinky. (2013, p. 204)

This means that race is one of the factors of restriction, rejection and denigration. In the American society, the exilic people are socially handicapped; their rights are trampled on. Thus, they acquire the status of subhuman or subaltern. For instance, in *Americanah*, Aunt Uju, one of Ifemelu's relatives also suffers social liminality. The ensuing utterances illustrate that handicap, "ever write about adoption? Nobody wants black babies in this country, and I don't mean biracial, I mean black. Even the black families don't want them. He told her that he and his wife had adopted a black child and their neighbours looked at them as though they had chosen to become martyrs for a dubious cause" (Adichie, 2013, pp. 4–5).

In other words, the American society appears in Adichie's text as a mirage. The opaque feature of its migration policy negatively influences the exilic subjects' social conditions. This discredits the American dream, whose prestige attracts people. A close look at its textual figuration helps to infer that the hypocrisy of the American laws mainly contributes to deepening dissensions between the natives and the exilic people. Those social shortcomings are vehemently decried in Adichie's novel. Indeed, the exilic beings have no value in the American society, for

There's a ladder of racial hierarchy in America. White is always on top, especially White Anglo-Saxon Protestant, otherwise known as WASP, and American Black is always on the bottom, and what's in the middle depends on time and place. (Or as that marvellous rhyme goes: if you're white, you're all right; if you're brown, stick around; if you're black, get back!). (Adichie, 2013, p. 184)

Plainly, the exilic people are erased from the scene; they do not exist socially. From a representational point of view, they are unrecognized as the American citizens' equals. Their invisibility is also noticeable through language. Most of the time, the exilic people do not speak the language of the host universe. Indeed, analyzing the function of language in *Poétique des valeurs*, Vincent Jouve avers that "language, too, is the object of very precise social codification. First, there is the grammatical norm, which draws a line between those who have not mastered the code. (...) The relationship with language is commonly used by authors as a means of evaluating characters" (Jouve, 2001).<sup>4</sup> With reference to this quotation, one can infer that the exilic beings who are described in *How the García Girls Lost their Accents* have no command of the linguistic codes. They are confronted with a linguistic barrier. In such a context, language becomes one of the key symbols of division and rejection. Consequently, Carlos García (husband) and Laura García (wife) are barred from the stage. Quoting Jean-Marie Le Clézio, in one of his essays, Alain Corbin notes, "silence is the supreme achievement of language, and consciousness" (Corbin, 2016).<sup>5</sup>

In that state of being, the exilic people are constrained to remain confined. This means that they cannot open up to their host society. In Alvarez's novel, the two heads of the García family (husband & wife) advocate the use of their native language (Spanish) at home. In reality, there is a conflict between their language and that of America, which is regarded as the norm. The Garcías' language seems to be losing its usefulness. According to García Carlos, any rejection of the language would annihilate their cultural values. Explicitly, Spanish is for them a sociolect, which embodies the Garcías' collective memories. Cros maintains that "the utterances of literary discourse always differ by one or more relevant features from those exchanged in practice, outside literary discourse, even if they are all syntactically correct" (Cros, 2003).<sup>6</sup> In other words, Spanish utterances epitomize an ideological scope. Apart from its communicative use, it helps the Garcías connect with their past. With Spanish, they also avoid being acculturated. Pierre V. Zima maintains in this regard that "[the concept of sociolect] is an ideological language that articulates, lexically, semantically and syntactically, particular collective interests" (Zima, 2000).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Le langage est, lui aussi, l'objet d'une codification très précise sur le plan social. Il y a, d'abord, la norme grammaticale qui trace une frontière entre ceux qui ne maîtrisent pas le code. (...) Le rapport au langage est couramment utilisé par les auteurs comme moyen d'évaluer les personnages" (Jouve, 2001, p. 22).

<sup>5</sup> "Le silence est l'aboutissement suprême du langage et la conscience" (Corbin, 2016, p. 104).

<sup>6</sup> "Les énoncés du discours littéraire s'écartent toujours par un ou plusieurs traits pertinents de ceux qui sont échangés dans la pratique, en dehors du discours littéraire, même s'ils sont tous syntaxiquement corrects". (Cros, 2003, p. 41)

<sup>7</sup> "[Le concept de sociolecte] est un langage idéologique qui articule, sur les plans lexical, sémantique et syntaxique, des intérêts collectifs particuliers" (Zima, 2000, p. 131).

Spanish helps the members of the García family preserve their cultural identity; they safeguard their ancestral heritage and protect their collective memory. Being socially handicapped, the exilic beings' conditions in the American society turn hellish. In other words, they are trapped in the exilic hell. For example, Yolanda is one of the members of the Garcías, whose painful experience is illustrative of that trap, "I saw what a cold, lonely life awaited me in this country. I would never find someone who would understand my peculiar mix of Catholicism and agnosticism, Hispanic and American styles" (Alvarez, 1992, p. 99). Obviously, Yolanda's new life in New York is intriguing. Examining the linguistic obstacles encountered by the exilic beings such as Yolanda, Simon Harel asserts that "for the [exilic] subject, one must imagine a primitive abandonment and the conquest of an adopted place so that the host language enables him to become a subject" (Harel, 2005).<sup>8</sup> This negative image of the American society is also rampant in *Americanah*. Delving into the exilic people's difficulties in *Adichian* fiction, Chinenye Amonyeze avows, "Adichie's novel exposes America as a country where one does what needs to be done to succeed including adopting American accents, identity theft, and prostitution" (2017, p. 7).

Obviously, adopting the linguistic system of the host space is one of the prerequisite for the creation of a "new self." In this way, the American space takes on the nature of a prison, for the exilic people lose their dignity. Indeed, the loss of one's ancestral language is a threat to the survival of the exilic people's cultural identity. This is confirmed by Simon Harel as follows, "insofar as the [exiled] subject accepts the violence of a matricidal and parricidal act, which consists in killing a former language, he or she successfully responds to the gift of integration. The great complexity of this act lies in the fact that the former language becomes the stake in a psychic death" (Harel, 2005).<sup>9</sup> More significantly, as depicted in Alvarez's novel, the American society is a space where the Spanish language falls into disuse. The Garcías' ancestral language undergoes alteration. That influence also gives rise to a number of crises. Interrogating the relevance of language, Moisan asserts, "the language of exile makes the mother tongue foreign, and the being who speaks and writes it, being foreign to oneself" (Moisan, 2008).<sup>10</sup>

Further, the exilic space does not promote the exiled individuals' ancestral identity. The latter negotiate a "new self," which is never stable. From that point of view, exile is harmful. To survive in the American society, Alvarez's characters appropriate new

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<sup>8</sup> "Pour le sujet [exilique], il faut imaginer un abandon primitif et la conquête d'un lieu d'adoption afin que la langue du pays d'accueil lui permette de devenir un sujet" (Harel, 2005, p. 60).

<sup>9</sup> "Dans la mesure où le sujet [exilique] accepte la violence d'un acte matricide et patricide qui consiste à tuer une langue première, il répond avec succès au don de l'intégration. La grande complexité de cet acte tient du fait que la langue première devient l'enjeu d'une mort psychique" (Harel, 2005, p. 60).

<sup>10</sup> "La langue de l'exil, rend la langue maternelle étrangère et l'être qui la parle et l'écrit, étranger à soi" (Moisan, 2008, p. 82).

identities: Laura (Mami), Carlos García (Papi), Sandra (Sandi), Yolanda (Yo, Yoyo, Joe), and Sofía (Fifi). Similarly, in Marshall's *Praisesong for the Widow*, Jay Johnson turns Jerome and Avey Johnson takes on Avey. This patronymic denial epitomizes the death of the ancestral identity. *A priori*, those new names have no cultural background; they do not define the exilic subjects' ancestral roots for any possible identity construction. Avey Johnson encounters several difficulties when she embarks on a process of cultural reconnection. When visiting Carriacou (Caribbean), she does not comprehend the Patois spoken by her Carriacouan relatives, "Avey Johnson realizes then with a start that everyone around her was speaking Patois. She had been so busy examining them she had failed to take in their speech. Or her ears had perhaps registered it as the dialect English spoken in many of the islands which often sounded like another language altogether" (1983, p. 67).

Avey Johnson's incapacity to communicate with her Caribbean relatives compels her to be silent. In terms of analogy, Avey Johnson and Alvarez's characters are similar; their respective experiences show that, without language, one's identity disappears. That is why Fatou Diome avows in the prologue to her book titled *Marianne porte plainte* (2017), "language is the key part of identity" (Diome, 2017).<sup>11</sup> Beyond the linguistic aspect, the host space provides the exilic people with a high standard of living, thus constraining them to be more interested in the quest for material well-being and less interested in the ancestral values. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, the narrator reveals Silla Boyce's daily activities as follows:

Each morning they (Silla and the other Barbadian women) took the train to Flatbush and Sheepshead Bay to scrub floors. The lucky ones had their steady madams while the others wandered those neat blocks or waited on corners—each with her apron and working shoes in a bag under her arm until someone offered her a day's work. Sometimes the white children on their way to school laughed at their blackness and shouted nigger, but the Barbadian woman sucked their teeth, dismissing them. Their only thought was of the few raw-mout pennies at the end of the day, which would eventually buy house. (Marshall, 1959, p. 11)

In Marshall's novel, Silla Boyce's cumulative materialistic yearning symbolizes her hatred towards her Caribbean heritage. Indeed, she persuades her husband to sell his Caribbean land; her desire is to buy a "brownstone house" in Brooklyn, New York. In her plan, any possible return to her homeland is banned. She defines herself as an American. Her love for the Caribbean relatives has entirely vanished:

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<sup>11</sup> "La langue, c'est la part clef de l'identité" (Diome, 2017, p. 8).

at night the children were often awakened by muffled arguments from the master bedroom; savage words sparked in the darkness: Sell it, sell it... and always the same reply, growing more weary each night but persisting, it' mine to do as I please. (Marshall, 1959, p. 41)

This change compromises her integrity. In one of his critical studies, Roberto Strongman describes Silla Boyce as follows:

her voice stands the staunchs, assimilated voice of reason, and of the determination of immigrants to attain the mythical American dream. As such, Silla not only propagates stories, which paint Barbados as an unwelcoming place, she also participates in elitist-hegemonic discourses, which privilege the urban industrialized world over the under-developed region of the globe. (Strongman, 2005, p. 51)

More importantly, exile is an evil; its negative effects influence the exilic people. Their only concern is to get rid of their past. Silla Boyce's hateful attitude towards Barbados is an illustrative case. Likewise, examining Ifemelu's experience, Sharjeel Ahmad and many other critics maintain that "the suffering she faced as an African immigrant in American society traumatized her by causing some indispensable wounds to her identity. Furthermore, racism has aggravated her situation and creates a sense of guilt and inferiority complex in her mind" (Ahmad *et al*, 2022, p. 1424).

By the same token, exile is a transitional period experienced by some given citizens; it can change their standard of living. In the case of forced exile, the victimized beings might lose their initial job and fall into jobless; they might move from wealthiness to poverty. In *How the García Girls Lost their Accents*, Carlos García's social status in the Dominican Republic differs from that in the United States. In the former society, he is wealthy. However, in the latter one, he is poor. His feeding regime changes. Those dietary changes negatively influence the Garcías. Psychologically, he feels unbalanced and disoriented. In his article titled "The Locus and Logos of Exile" Aliko Songolo notes that "what has been left behind continues to haunt the conscious of the exile" (1997, p. 114). In other words, the exiled subjects feel torn between two spaces; the former gradually slips away. According to Moisan, in the latter space, where the exilic beings are perceived as [strangers], they must constantly restart [their] quest for existence. [Their] identity, which is based on a perception of emptiness, a kind of divestment of reality, imposes a constant change of being (Moisan, 2008).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> "Doit sans cesse recommencer [leur] quête d'existence. Leur identité qui se fonde sur une aperception du vide, une sorte de dessaisissement du réel, impose un changement constant de l'être" (Moisan, 2008, p. 81).



From the preceding analysis, it should be noted that exile epitomizes various evils (racial stigma, inequality, disenfranchisement, fragmentation of the self, cultural alteration and disconnection). Despite those threats, the exilic beings use some symbolic integrating modes, which need to be deciphered.

### **Integrating Modes**

This section scrutinizes the *integrating modes* which help the exilic beings move from social invisibility to social visibility.

In accordance with that purpose, the first point to be deciphered is the spatial adaptation. Let us note that in the novels under investigation, the level of development of the host society is higher than that of the exilic individuals' homeland. From that point of view, the subjects who venture there are bound to adapt to what such a social development requires. This implies that they abide by the laws or rules in force and master the host language before claiming for what they really deserve. To keep up with the new standard of living encountered in the American society, the exilic individuals are to use some palliative measures to carve out a noble social place for themselves. For instance, Marshall's (1959) exilic characters, namely Avey and Jay embrace the capitalist system advocated by their host society (United States). They exert various jobs. As parents of three children, Avey Johnson and her husband (Jay Johnson) have no choice; the unique way out is to work hard. This contributes to turning the situation to their advantage.

With that ambitious stance, Avey and her husband (Jay) manage to overcome their daily difficulties. With regards to Avey Johnson's vision (Marshall, 1959), the exilic subjects evolving in the American society cannot be saved by the political system in place. To Avey Johnson, the only way out and the surest one is to cultivate courage or devotion. This means the exilic people are to invest in all sectors of activity without any exception and save enough from a material point of view to construct an efficient economic independence for themselves. Avey Johnson's reasoning contradicts the claim according to which the American society is an earthly paradise. In essence, that society epitomizes the great civilization, but it covers some undeniable shortcomings; the exilic subjects who evolve there are constrained to reinvent their social visibility by undertaking challenging and demanding jobs. In the passage below, a vibrant appeal is addressed to the exilic beings to take up the challenge nurtured by the host society,

The trouble with half there Negroes out here is that they spend all their time blaming the white man for everything. He won't give 'em a job. Won't let 'em a break. He's the one

keeping 'em down. When the problem really is most of 'em don't want to hear the word work. If they'd just cut out all the good-timing and get down to some hard work, put their minds to something, they'd get somewhere. (...) That's what most of these Negroes out here still haven't gotten through their heads. Instead of marching, protesting, and running around burning down everything in the hope of a handout, we need to work and build our own! Our own! Shouting it at her. Lashing out periodically at her, himself, his own at that world which had repeatedly denied him, until finally the confusion, contradiction and rage of it all sent the blood flooding his brain one night as he slept in the bed next to hers. (Marshall, 1983, pp. 134–135)

The call for activism (courage) resonates well in Jay Johnson's family; he and his wife (Avey Johnson) embrace the activist ideals. Through fair devotion, they embark on the quest for material well-being. This helps them acquire their desired goal (upward mobility) and leave the precariousness of Hasley Street to settle in North White Plains where their social visibility turns more obvious. Contrary to Hasley Street, North White Plains is a smart district where both wealthy Blacks and Whites cohabit. Here, there is an emergence of a friendly closeness. This is possible by virtue of Avey's and Jay's commitment. As exilic people, they are compelled to guarantee their upward mobility; this is a prerequisite for their recognition as worth beings. To put it differently, the acquisition of material goods provides them with an active power. The one they acquired through hard commitment has a thoughtful scope. It helps the exilic people be respected by the native Americans, be equally treated, find decent accommodation, share the same neighborhood.

At this level, the prevailing look postulates recognition of the exilic beings. For example, Avey Johnson and two other white characters, Thomasina Moore and Clarice, decide to go on excursion. Thomasina and Clarice share the same cabin. Thus, through a loving look, the relationship prevailing between Avey Johnson and her American friends (Thomasina Moore and Clarice) is friendly. Both communities, white and black share the macro-space (North White Plains) and micro-space (Cabin) on the ship used for their excursion. Avey Johnson is delighted to realize that the power of material wealth provides expressiveness and consideration to her words. The paragraph below describes her enthusiasm,

The marathon packing was done. On an armchair over near the widow lay the clothes she had hastily set aside to wear. The suitcases, all six of them along with the shoe caddy and hatbox, stood assembled near the door, ready for the steward. Giving the apprehensive glance over her shoulder, she immediately headed toward them, not even allowing herself a moment to rest her back on wipe the perspiration

from her face or to consider, quietly and rationally, which was normally her way, what she was about to do. (Marshall, 1983, p. 16)

The change in social status strengthens Avey Johnson's authority. She imposes her will on the other members of the family. For example, Marion, one of Avey Johnson's daughters does not approve of her going on excursion with some unknown white women. However, Avey Johnson systematically rejects her pieces of advice. Obeying Marion's orders is considered as a form of humiliation. Avey Johnson perceives this as being a dishonor. She overlooks her child's rebukes, because she feels independent enough to make her own choices. Indeed, to show off her economic asset and power, Avey Johnson travels with six suitcases for few days. Henceforward, she gets dressed in the Western style. Thus, through her attire, she gives her social visibility a sheen, which leaves no character indifferent in Marshall's fictional universe.

In *Carriacou*, Caribbean, she reveals her American identity and distances herself from Lebert Joseph by informing the latter of her eventual return to New York, USA. The construction of the "exilic self" and recognition of the "exilic self" are two major facts whose effectiveness provides the exilic beings with a new existence in the host space. In Marshall's novel, the exilic beings appropriate the power of material abundance to fulfil their dream. In *Brown Girl, Brownstones*, that asset is at the heart of the exilic people's emergence. Deciphering the respective transformations that have occurred in Silla Boyce's life, Marjorie Thorpe writes:

like Proteus, Silla cannot be fixed, pinned down, comprehensively defined. In the course of the novel, she moves from exploited child labourer, to hopeful wife and mother, to humiliated domestic worker, to the godlike figure on the floor of the wartime factory. And the effect of each experience is evident at different times. (1999, p. 308)

The charisma of Marshall's exilic characters is life-saving. It enables them to dominate their troublesome conditions. In Marshall's creative art, they assert themselves as the actors in the construction of their history. In terms of struggle for recreation and recognition, the female characters play a leading role. Through their image, Marshall's novel subverts the patriarchal power. As a result, the male voice loses its authority and emerges as a support rather than a guide. Analyzing Silla Boyce's courage, Mary Helen Washington avers that "on every issue confronting their lives Silla imposes her own meaning, affirming for herself and the others the role of language in the survival of oppressed people" (1981, p. 313). Silla Boyce is aware that Barbados is poor and that the American society is not a paradise either. Therefore, her dream is not to go back, but to define herself

as an American. That is why Swati Rana asserts that “Silla represents an attachment to the American dream that is both troubling and impossible to ignore. She views the United States as a site of economic advancement” (2020, p. 152).

Beyond the major role played by the material aspect of life in the construction of the *exilic self*, the adoption of the language of the host society also contributes to the exilic people's sociocultural achievement. By familiarizing themselves with the language of their new dwelling (host society), the exilic people create a sense of brotherhood between them and the native population. This togetherness eliminates hatred and advocates altruism. In addition to the above details, the exilic people adopt the American accent to be accepted. For example, in *Americanah*, Dike “[appropriates] a seamless American accent” (2013, p. 129). To put it another way, speaking the language of the host society (English) is advantageous. Through that communicative strategy, the exiled people move from marginalization to the stage. Once visible and recognized, they construct a wide network of friends with whom they promote some cultural values and cultivate the ideals of Pan-Africanism. Indeed, Adichie's novel features the exilic beings who adopt several modes of integration—they even militate in congregations. The textual clues below corroborate their strategy,

Try and make friends with our African-American brothers and sisters in a spirit of Pan-Africanism. But make sure you remain friends with fellow Africans, as this will help you keep your perspective. ... You will also find that you might make friends more easily with other internationals, Koreans, Indians, Brazilians, whatever, than with Americans, both black and white. (2013, pp. 141–142)

Unlike the colonial feature of exoticism, which posits the concept of *elsewhere* as a location of confrontation with the Other, exoticism is revitalized in Marshall's, Alvarez's and Adichie's fiction. Their migrant characters are neither colonists, nor conquerors, nor explorers. Rather, they are crisis-affected subjects who settle abroad to acquire security and social well-being. In that context, interbreeding is a significant way out for them as it contributes to their social integration. Jean-Xavier Ridon writes in that respect, that “today, on the contrary, *métissage* offers a dialogue between cultures that are becoming more open to each other and forms part of an ultimately more tolerant humanity” (2010, p. 203). Obviously, the acquisition of the host society's cultural values enables the exilic individuals to consolidate their sense of belonging and humanity. Françoise Král maintains that “‘diasporas’ were commonly depicted as melancholy places of exile and oppression that restricted social and cultural fruition; (...) [today], ‘diasporas’ are enthusiastically embraced as arenas for the creative melding of cultures and the formation of new ‘hybridic,’ mixed iden-

ties" (2005, p. 5). Metaphorically, among the cultural markers, the host linguistic system functions as a cement, it unifies peoples. As such, its acquisition substantiates the exilic people's openness and hybrid feature. This makes the barrier between them and natives more porous, promoting love. In her text titled *Habiter la frontière*, Léonora Miano asserts that the border evokes relationship. It says that peoples met, sometimes in violence, hatred and contempt, and that despite this, they gave birth to meaning (2012).<sup>13</sup> In other words, the language of the host society helps the exilic people externalize their truth, a truth that belongs to no one, but which emerges as the symbol of humanity.

Further, through the language of the host country, the exilic individuals pictured in the novels under investigation, provide the Americans with what they need, and in turn receive from them the vital sap, which gives meaning to their existence. This means, by acquiring the language of the host society helps the exilic beings communicate with their hosts, fraternize with them, understand their history, embrace their cultural values and have a successful integration. This also opens up jobs opportunities for them. Demonstrating the relevance of language in the exilic context, Joan M. Hoffman states that "language, in both its form and its content, is an important unifying agent here, every bit as essential as the strong family connections" (1998, p. 18). As a means of oral and written communication, a language acquired in particular circumstances such as immigration, is always advantageous. According to Aristi Trendel, the success of Latino writers in America is made possible by their perfect acquisition of English, "it is through a disrupting of the hegemonic language codes that Latino/a writers make English malleable enough to suit their purpose: recounting the story of a Hispanic in the United States" (2018, p. 92). Explicitly, the use of English by the Garcías in Alvarez's novel contributes to their social insertion.

## Conclusion

The study of two points of interest, *exile evil* and *integrating modes* in four novels (*Brown Girl, Brownstones* and *Praisesong for the Widow*, *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents*, and *Americanah*) emanating from some women writers pertaining to different cultural roots helped to account for the transformations that occur in the exilic beings' lives in the American society.

Drawing on the principles of sociocriticism, this reflection considered the texts under investigation as a figurative space where human experiences (history) and social realities are pictured. Through the lens of that approach, Barbados (Caribbean), Nigeria (Africa),

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<sup>13</sup> "La frontière évoque la relation. Elle dit que les peuples se sont rencontrés, quelquefois dans la violence, la haine, le mépris, et qu'en dépit de cela, ils ont enfanté du sens" (Miano, 2012, p.25).

and Dominican Republic (West Indies) were considered as the exilic beings' ancestral roots and the United States was defined as a host society plagued by injustice, exacerbating the exilic subjects' social conditions. The analysis of the textual data also revealed the exilic beings' steady resilience. That commitment was regarded as a substantial value in the construction of their new identity. The acquisition of material and language was regarded as being determining in constructing the *exilic self*. Those extratextual values provide the exilic beings with a new social status and help them consolidate their existence. In view of the achieved results, one can infer that the sociocritical approach was useful in the conducting of the current reflection.

However, it should be noted that the literary texts under consideration embody varied complex figures. People, as evolving beings, generate values whose picture in the literary texts is constantly renewed and semantically heterogeneous. The Caribbean and African people's figurative movement towards the American society is followed by transcultural, intercultural and cross-cultural phenomena, whose study remains advantageous. Those textual values are original; any eventual research upon them might be contributive and provide further insight into Paule Marshall's, Julia Alvarez's, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's literary projects.

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# Bonding People Through Storytelling: Community, Humor and the Porch in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*

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## Abstract

The present article will examine the African American porch as the nexus of the community and the stage upon which the Black oral tradition becomes art and people, active participants in the recreation of communal ties. We will cast an in-depth look at the porch actors and their performance as depicted in Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day*. The analysis of the porch as an intermediary site opens with a discussion of the origins of this piece of Americana and its crucial cultural function, especially for the African American communities located in the southeastern part of the United States. Several other distinctive attributes of the porch will be identified, all linked to and representative of the community. Ultimately, this article highlights the paramount role of storytelling as a unifying force for a community, through the prism of Naylor's novel, deemed as a faithful rendition of the Black Southern cultural expression.

**Keywords:** storytelling, community, cultural memory, porch, dialogism

The power of the porch is the power of spoken language.

—Trudier Harris

A Southern porch is a concept as well as a place.

—Eugene Walter

Specific to the South of the United States, the porch appears mainly in works by Southern writers or in novels that reconfigure a Southern story or setting. Certainly, behaviors associated with the porch are not exclusively Southern; however, the geographical position and the natural conditions, the rustic lifestyle, and the slowness specific to this region

have contributed to its idealization in literature as a Southern locale. In African American literature, the porch holds a primordial role in the life of the community as the privileged place for social interaction, storytelling, and the preservation of cultural heritage. This paper seeks to underscore the pivotal role of storytelling as a unifying force for a community, especially when intertwined with humor and performed within the heart of community life—the porch. From the rich African American literary production set in the South, spanning from Zora Neale Hurston to Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Ernest Gaines, August Wilson, and more, we direct our attention to Gloria Naylor's *Mama Day* (1989) as an example of the artful depiction of a Southern Black community and its survival through storytelling.

In times of slavery, porch gatherings established the cultural frames of reference that contributed to the articulation of African American culture. Edward Casey (1997) suggests that “a *communitas* is not just a matter of banding together but of *bonding together* through rituals that actively communalize people—and that require particular places in which to be enacted” (p. xiv). Apart from their aesthetic or recreational role, the porch-related cultural activities were psychological devices with a therapeutic value, a means of survival for the individual and the entire community (Blassingame, 1979). Personal and collective memories were encoded in the stories told on the porch and validated in the act of speaking and answering back—a distinctive feature of African American cultural expression, known as the call-and-response tradition.

Group identification, implying specific behavioral values and positive self-concepts, delineated a communal site of resistance located precisely on the porch.<sup>1</sup> The isolated microcosm of the Black porch excluded the control of the master; no laborious tasks were to be performed here, no color lines to be crossed and negotiated with, but most of all, no disruptive intrusions. Given such a relaxed geographical setting, one understands the multi-faceted positive functions that the porch acquires in African American culture and literature as well. A pseudo stage on which African folk culture was perpetuated, this site becomes the recipient of cultural heritage, hence a vital presence in the life of the social group.

The porch is present in African American literature as an integral part of the rural experience and as one of the most appropriate settings for telling stories. For Trudier Harris (1996), porch-sitting is historically and literally a Southern institution. It resembles another primordial locale within the black community—the barbershop. The two sites act

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<sup>1</sup> These values were characterized by unique cultural forms in religion, music, storytelling, dancing and conjuring. As Blassingame (1979) explains, the African heritage constituted the catalyst of the Black slave community on the North American continent.

as way stations, points of contact, and ultimately, universal provisional homes. By extension, any place where people congregate may be seen as a variation of the porch. Harris (1996) astutely observes that “the power of the porch is the power of spoken language” (p. 58). When language comes into discussion, we must reflect upon the linguistic disempowerment of African peoples during times of slavery.<sup>2</sup> The separation from value-defining factors, such as their native languages and oral literatures, also entailed a psychological disempowerment. Moreover, the African oral cultures were transplanted into an adopted language, the language of the master, which was attempting to immobilize them as slaves. Nevertheless, the uprooted slave maintained the link with Africa through folk tales, music, re-enacted customs, and religion. The faithful preservation of the African cultural heritage is most evident in the rich Gullah culture of the African American communities located in the southeastern United States, more precisely in the coastal regions and the sea islands of South Carolina and Georgia. Storytelling is a vital element of the vibrant Gullah oral tradition and is faithfully portrayed in Naylor’s book.

*Mama Day* is a story told on the porch *par excellence*: the readers are informed from the first lines: “we’re sitting here on Willow Springs” (Naylor, 1989, p. 10); everything takes place on the island, more precisely on the porch. The audience is invited to listen to the recreated communal stories of Willow Springs, a fictive sea island located off the coast of Georgia and South Carolina. The readers are on the porch and beyond it, separated by space and time, voluntary extensions of the authorial voice (Harris, 1996), while the book becomes a contact zone between writer/narrator and reader.

The strategy Naylor employs in the novel is that of the first-person narrator directly addressing the audience. This omniscient voice plays a tripartite role: narrator in the text, representative of the community, and storyteller in relation to the readers/listeners. It occupies a vital part in the narrative texture by establishing himself/herself as a legitimate oral historian of the community who intimately knows Southern traditions and customs. By using the first person plural, the island voice also conveys the locals’ perspective on the narrated events;

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<sup>2</sup> The African and the European cultures came in contact first in the Caribbean and then on the American continent. Blassingame (1979) explains the disappearance of the traces of African languages after two or three generations, while the acquisition of the European languages was very slow and lasted for two centuries (the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup>). This process of intercultural cross-fertilization subsequently crystallized in unique configurations in African American culture. The Creole spoken in the Caribbean or the Gullah spoken on the Sea Islands, in South Carolina and Georgia, has undergone a peculiar fate, its survival defying the passage of time. These Sea Islands have been the home of West African slaves, ex-slaves, and their free descendants for centuries. The paradoxical survival of the Gullah was possible because of the unique setting: independent and self-sufficient islands, cut off from the mainland and free from outer influence. While only superficially addressed in this paper, the vibrant and unique Gullah cultural heritage deserves to be credited more extensively in subsequent research endeavors.

it, therefore, creates the impression of reliability and the degree of trust required in the relation between reader/listener and storyteller. Harris (1996) identifies three stages in the validating process employed by the omniscient narrator: it avoids rejection by being superficially democratic, it draws upon the notion of inequality in slave culture through the use of sharp irony, and finally, it invites the hearer to listen to the fantastical story of Sapphira Wade, the African ancestor of the community. The narrator adroitly enters a dialogue with an outsider audience from “beyond the bridge” tactfully establishing the porch connection which “serves as an interactive metaphor for tellers and listeners” (Harris, 1996, p. 57) and provides a sense of real-time and reliability.

In addition, Naylor skillfully employs interactive patterns of the porch talk in the structure of the novel to convey a sense of immediacy by actively involving the reader/listener/spectator. This strategy of inviting the readers to become ‘hearers,’ is prevalent in African American literature as “a storytelling paradigm” (Stepito, 1991). By mastering the orality specific to the Black Southern tradition, the narrative voice in *Mama Day* manipulates reality, bringing the porch talk to the level of art. Active listening is required, and the directives “[u]h, huh, listen. Really listen this time” (Naylor, 1989, p. 10) given to the audience establish the connection between the author, characters, and audience.

A consideration of the main features of the porch would not be complete without a note on verbal art as performance, albeit superficially addressed in this paper. Storytelling involves performance in African and African American cultures: “it’s acting out [...] and everybody is in the play” (p. 63), claims Zora Neale Hurston (1937). More specifically, performance is an organizing principle which implies an artistic action as well as an artistic event (Bauman, 1975). Folkloric performance is understood as a communicative phenomenon, as “a unifying thread tying together the marked, segregated esthetic genres and other spheres of verbal behavior into a general unified conception of verbal art as a way of speaking” (Bauman, 1975, p. 291). Performance follows speaking, drawing together the members of a community: it is inclusive of both myth narration and the speech expected by the social group. Acting, in Bauman’s understanding, is a behavior rendered meaningful with the help of relevant contexts—the communal porch in this paper.

From an experiential point of view, we distinguish two types of porches, or contact zones, in Gloria Naylor’s *Mama Day*: the communal porch and the porch of the house. The first is the center of the community, while the second creates the link between public and private (the front porch) or between home and nature (the back porch). The public porch, the focus of the present paper, represents the privileged gathering place of the community,

the stage upon which cultural activities are enacted and where group bonding is reinforced. The porch of the general store is a supportive milieu, a retreat from home and from the world outside, where people can communicate beyond everyday pressure. Conversely, the more private porches of dwellings appear as comfortable and comforting sites of repose and retreat after the hard day's work: "sitting on our porches and shelling June peas, quieting the midnight cough of a baby, taking apart the engine of a car" (Naylor, 1989, p. 10). Both contact zones are settings where the communitarian "eternal return" to an ancestral past takes place; they are dialogic (linked to storytelling and memory) and rhizomatic (existing in several places on the island).

Naylor's novel presents a jolly, gregarious community which revolves around the matriarch Miranda—a direct descendant of Sapphira. This self-sufficient social group displays an ideal balance between memory, time, and space. For its members, traveling through memory amounts to a proud reassertion of their African roots, according to the porch talk:

we was being un-American. And the way we saw it, America ain't entered the question at all when it come to our land: Sapphira was African-born, Bascombe Wade was from Norway, and it was the 18&23'ing that went down between them two put deeds in our hands. And we wasn't even Americans when we got it—was slaves. (Naylor, 1989, p. 5)

Two main activities unfold on the public porch: the coming together of people and storytelling. Memory, as the place where the past lives, is reactivated and put to the test in this polyphonic setting; audience participation is expected and encouraged. The many voices and perspectives recreate a multi-vocal communal mind, their memories invoking a multi-vocal past. The sense of belonging to the community is therefore constructed in the overlapping of these versions of the collective stories and memories of its members.<sup>3</sup> Thus, multiple perspectives are not only welcomed but also necessary; they delineate a palimpsest porch, which echoes Edward Soja's *thirdspaces* which are sites where "everything is seen as a simultaneously historical–social–spatial palimpsest, [...] in which inextricably intertwined temporal, social, and spatial relations are being constantly reinscribed, erased, and reinscribed again" (Soja, 1996, p. 18). The notion of palimpsest implies a temporal coordinate, as much as it requires material support—the communal porch in this case. This *thirdspace* is not only a fixed point of reference for the community, it also is a sacred site due to the many functions it plays for the collective memory of the island.

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<sup>3</sup> The sense of community, claims Page (1999), exists in each member's mind, as the totality of possible voices, thoughts and dreams. Individual and collective memories are encoded in the stories told on the porch and are validated in the act of speaking and of answering back.

In *Mama Day*, three rather contradictory versions of the island's myth of origin coexist as part of the collective memory reiterated on the porch:

And somehow, some way, it happened in 1823: she smothered Bascombe Wade in his very bed and lived to tell the story for a thousand days. 1823: married Bascombe Wade, bore him seven sons in just a thousand days, to put a dagger through his kidney and escape the hangman's noose, laughing in a burst of flames. 1823: persuaded Bascombe Wade in a thousand days to deed all his slaves every inch of land in Willow Springs, poisoned him for his trouble, to go on and bear seven sons—by person or persons unknown. (Naylor, 1989, p. 3)

The omniscient narrator indiscriminately presents these layers of the island's cosmogony as early as the first page. The stories are, in fact, variations on the same theme—the female ancestor and 1823 recorded as the year of her great deeds. According to the island voice, it is a heuristic approach to myth “depending upon which of us takes a mind to her [Sapphira]” (Naylor, 1989, p. 3). The didactic repetition of the ancestor's brave exploits reinforces Willow Springs' collective identity which is crystallized in the contact zone of the porch along with the community's sense of place and time.<sup>4</sup>

People congregate in front of the general store or the barbershop, strategically located at the crossroads, in “the little L-shaped section of stores in the junction of the road that heads toward the bridge” (Naylor, 1989, p. 185). They gather here for a variety of interactive purposes: to talk and to listen, to discuss and to debate, to see and to be seen, to analyze and to judge. There is always a welcoming atmosphere and a congenial audience for stories to be told or for information to be transmitted. This contact zone is indeed the heart of the island.<sup>5</sup> “The folks” come for fellowship, conversation, and companionship paired with Dr. Buzzard's famous moonshine,<sup>6</sup> useful in untying tongues. The front porch has an overt and strategic setting: it is a world from which the passers-by cannot hide. The townsfolk parade in front of it and are challenged by those who are seated there watching “the human comedy.” Since the porch is community-oriented, everyone knows

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<sup>4</sup> As a rhizomatic and palimpsest locale, the contact zone records and sediments layers of stories (or of the same story/myth), which are all versions of the collective memory, delineated by Leichter's reading of Ricoeur as “sediments and habits of a shared life, and can be the site where memories of what happened are recounted, exchanged, revised, and challenged. [...] Communal memory appears to arise through the places we inhabit” (Leichter, 2012, p. 126).

<sup>5</sup> The communal porch is the center of the male world, but it is by no means restricted to women; on the contrary, the island voice depicts a democratic matricentric society on Willow Springs. Private porches tend to be female-oriented, however.

<sup>6</sup> Very illustrative is the name of the protagonist—Dr. Buzzard. It is reminiscent of the African American trickster tales recounting of Brer Buzzard who, instead of working for food, tricks the other animals until he encounters wittier animals, such as Brer Monkey or Brer Rabbit (Myers, 1996).

everyone else's business and comments upon and judges it, sometimes with a dose of malice: "yeah, the folks can say all the mean things they want" (p. 134). Along with the barbershop or the beauty parlor, the porch is the center for the dissemination of scandal and gossip. "Small places live on small talk," admits the omniscient narrator, and people like to "get the fat out of happenings and chew it over" (p. 132).

The witty porch extends towards the community and is an active contact zone, providing the site for the discussion of political, social, and moral issues. Dialogic<sup>7</sup> in nature, it is characterized by openness and free exchange of information among its members: they judge and analyze to an extent that would be unacceptable or, at least awkward, outside this communal environment. Interestingly enough, the reader is never presented with the actual porch talk as the island voice monopolizes the exchanges, yet (s)he provides without any discrimination the faithful rendition of the captivating conversations. These discussions are not necessarily founded on divergent opinions—the arguments are only generators of the dialogue. The simple act of congregating can alone reinforce the existence of the community as a set of firm connections between people, place, and the oral history of the place.

The use of hyperbole is very common in these verbal exchanges and is required to maintain the interest of the listeners/readers. There are fantastic accounts of the cosmogony of the island since "it got spit from the mouth of God" (Naylor, 1989, p. 110) or supernatural deeds which punctuate its history. These myths are now part of the collective memory; for example, the ancestor of the island, Sapphira, who "[c]ould walk through a lightning storm without being touched; grab a bolt of lightning in the palm of her hand; use the heat of lightning to start the kindling going under her medicine pot" (p. 3). Anchored in imagination, one of Dr. Buzzard's personal stories recounts his brave fight with the demons: "there was six of them suckers: two hanging off an oak tree, [...] two growing big as cows with gleaming yellow teeth and trying to stomp his still to pieces, and the other two raising general hell" (p. 92). Due to the repetitive nature of these stories, the verbal exchange is potentially ritualizing as well as re-actualizing.

Even if it is not presented *per se*, the porch performance on Willows Springs serves as a crucial element in facilitating humor. This burlesque aspect of the dialogue is important

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<sup>7</sup> We approach here Bakhtin's theory pertaining to dialogical relationships that are contained within the chronotope, seen as the intersection of the novelistic space and time: "The general characteristic of these interactions is that they are dialogical (in the broadest use of the word). [...] It (this dialogue) enters the world of the author, of the performer, and the world of the listeners and readers." (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 252).

in releasing tensions and conveying a relaxed atmosphere of credibility, further used by the narrative voice to describe supernatural settings and events in a way that most audiences could find acceptable.<sup>8</sup> There are stories being told and there is one active dynamic spectator: the crowd on the porch or “the same group hitched up on chairs outside of Parris’s barbershop” (Naylor, 1989, p. 160). Humor is created by inherent distortions and exaggerations—strategies for providing the audience with a good story and an appropriate subject that may be chewed over later on.

The narrative voice does not hesitate to present his/her own opinions and heartily indulges in the conversation. In his/her ironic hilarious way, the island voice shares with the reader some of the hot topics of discussion for which “there’s no end to what could be said” (Naylor, 1989, p. 133). Such is Cocoa’s marriage with “a big-time railroad man, some say. An engineer and all—owns his own train. Some argue back that an engineer only *runs* a train” (p. 132). Ruby (the villain of the story and the voodoo practitioner) and her future marriage are also the talk of the season, therefore “Willow Springs owes Ruby a debt of gratitude” (p. 133) in that respect. Details about the event receive close attention, as is, for instance, Ruby’s wedding dress: “[t]alk had it that she needed three bolts of cloth, but that’s just being evil. One bolt will surely do it—it’s to be a short dress” (p. 133). The porch-sitters have a joke for every pound on Ruby, the island voice admits, “yet, you couldn’t rightly call Ruby fat—she’s amazing” (p. 134). That is the way of things to “go out loud like that inside the beauty parlor or in front of the general store” (p. 133). No member of the community is spared from the sharp-witted scrutiny of this public forum, which acts as a regulator and evaluator of the community itself.

The communal porch is pure wit and mockery, and the omniscient voice deliberately engages the reader in the discussion, transforming even the most common events into comic tales: “there’s something new each week to carry talk along” (Naylor, 1989, p. 133). One of the most entertaining stories is related to the “new hotshot deputy [who] wanted to show off his badge while it was still shiny” (p. 80). It happened, of course, on the porch in front of the store on Willow Springs. The incident also serves as an indirect validation of the porch as the nexus of the community, and this, by an external white party. “The rest is history” (p. 80) or again, porch talk: the deputy losing his way in the cypress marsh, scared by one of the most terrifying lightning storms Willow Springs had known in a decade. As if the story were not comic enough in itself, its aftermath

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<sup>8</sup> The main issues that the audience must accept are: the pseudo-dialogue between Cocoa and her late husband, the miraculous events taking place on the island or the story itself whose narrative time is August 1999 while the novel was published in 1988.



is converted into another humorous tale. The would-be trickster<sup>9</sup> of the island, Dr. Buzzard, a harmless hoodoo man, claimed that the event was due to his remarkable magic:

A week later Dr. Buzzard done drawn himself twice the crowd in front of Parris's barber-shop and tripled the number of haints he fought off in the south woods. Started out selling his mojo hands for a dollar-fifty—genuine graveyard dust and three-penny nails in a red flannel bag—when he'd used it to scatter two of them demons out of his sight. (Naylor, 1989, pp. 91–92)

The most suitable place to show off is yet again on the porch but in front of Parris's barbershop this time. Even though nobody takes Dr. Buzzard for granted, the folks listen to him for the sake of entertainment, which is amplified even more when high-witted persons like Mama Day put him to shame: "Miranda leaves the crowd laughing and stamping its feet" (p. 92). The adjectival pronoun "*its*" used instead of the more appropriate one "*their* feet" confirms the cohesion of the group. Moreover, the fact that "Dr. Buzzard's sales was certain to fall off a little this afternoon" (p. 92) exemplifies how receptive and sensitive the porch sitters may be in taking the side of the wittiest speaker. Dr. Buzzard's humiliation by a woman, even though she is the matriarch of the island, is yet another situation, but the omniscient narrator refrains from commenting upon it since Mama Day is a highly respected figure.

The communal porch on Willow Springs is a site of encounter with a touch of a mock courtroom as well. When long-absent natives return, they first meet with the porch, as it happens with Reema's son, "the one with the pear-shaped head" (Naylor, 1989, p. 7). The native turned-ethnographer is not even named in the novel and all his efforts of "putting Willow Springs on the map" (p. 7) are scrupulously ridiculed when "[he] came hauling himself back from one of those fancy colleges mainside, dragging his notebooks and tape recorder and a funny way of curling up his lip and clicking his teeth" (p. 7) or when "he rattled on about 'ethnography,' 'unique speech patterns,' 'cultural preservation,' and whatever else he seemed to be getting so much pleasure out of" (p. 7). Yet, the results of the ethnographer's fieldwork are worthless for the community: "didn't mean us

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<sup>9</sup> A complex protagonist, Dr. Buzzard appears very close to Esu, the trickster-figure in Yoruba mythology, extensively analyzed by Henry Louis Gates Jr. (1998) in *The Signifying Monkey*. According to Gates, the theme of the trickster transmitted in black vernacular tradition functions "as a sign of the disrupted wholeness of an African system of meaning and belief that black slaves recreated from memory, preserved by oral narration, improvised upon in ritual—especially in the rituals of the repeated oral narrative—and willed to their own subsequent generations, as hermetically sealed and encoded charts of cultural descent" (Gates, p. 5). A mediator, a disruptor, a Dionysian prototype, as well as an "expert in medicine or magic" (Gates, p. 5) or moonshine, Dr. Buzzard is omnipresent on the communal porch of Willow Springs.

a speck of good" (p. 7). More so, to the general entertainment, the narrative voice adds that he "put his picture on the back of the book so we couldn't deny it was him" (p. 7).

On occasion, the porch can become the scene of confrontation between its members and outsiders. Paralleling Pratt's definition of a contact zone,<sup>10</sup> the communal porch and the bridge located in its vicinity block the inevitable intrusion of the outside world in the island community: "we done learned that anything coming from beyond the bridge gotta be viewed real, real careful" (Naylor, 1989, p. 7). These outsiders must learn to cope with the crowd's scrutiny and evaluation if they are to be granted entry to the island.<sup>11</sup> It is the case with the new deputy who "[c]ome on up to the general store and stumbled across a jar of Dr. Buzzard's moonshine and figured he was on to bigger game" (p. 80) or with the entrepreneurs who tried to buy land on Willow Springs: "them developers [who] started swarming over here like sand flies at a Sunday picnic" (p. 6). The communal voice, always employing the first person plural, indicates: "we knew to send 'em straight over there to her [Mama Day] and Miss Abigail" because if "uh, uh. Mama Day say no, everybody say no" (p. 6); the two sisters being the community's pillars. Mostly confrontational as a site of encounter, the porch and its folks are more distant to intruders and their first impulse would be to ridicule rather than extend a warm welcome.

There is one communal porch on Willow Springs but there are many other pseudo-porches, all fulfilling the same functions in the community. The barbershop, the prayer meetings, or the South woods where men accompany Dr. Buzzard to play cards, drink moonshine, and sing gospel songs are described with the same wit and humor. The barbershop, a standard substitute of the porch, is the place where folks "will wander in and talk about what ain't been brought into the general store for them to buy if they had the money. Will even get into hot arguments about the quality of goods that ain't on the shelves" (Naylor, 1989, p. 132). This is simply because "more than talking about what is, the folks love to talk about what might be" (p. 132), always eager to add an element of curiosity and engagement to yet another highly-anticipated story.

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<sup>10</sup> Pratt (1992) borrows the term "contact" from linguistics, where the concept of "contact language" refers to creoles languages (see the Gullah culture). In Pratt's definition, a "contact zone" is synonymous with "colonial frontier" and is regarded as the space of colonial encounters, the place in which geographically and historically separated people interact. These contacts, claims Pratt, are founded usually on coercion, radical inequality, and conflict. Pratt's definition of 'contact zone' as 'colonial frontier' cannot be fully applied to Naylor's novel which depicts a self-sufficient Gullah community that proudly rejects any form of oppression.

<sup>11</sup> If the intruders manage to enter the island community, they are "deconstructed" piece by piece (first on and by the communal porch): Reema's boy's conduct is closely scrutinized and ridiculed, "dragging his notebooks and tape recorder," "talking in his little gray machine" (MD 7), the deputy chased off by a sudden lightning storm, or the entrepreneurs driven away to Mama Day.

The garrulous prayer meetings and the church appear as another replica of the public porch on Willow Springs. Mama Day sarcastically remarks that one has to be present there regularly in order to find “what folks is doing in the evening” (Naylor, 1989, p. 93). Winter is a dead season on the island when nothing spectacular worth gossiping about happens; even Reverend Hooper in his church “gets down in the mouth them winters. All that hell and brimstone in his sermons don’t carry the same kinda sparkle when there ain’t no likely candidates to feed the fires” (p. 132). These variants of the porch, when placed on a Deleuzian rhizomatic<sup>12</sup> map, appear as places of confluence, adjacent to the main road and the communal porch. They are nucleated places which define the community of Willow Springs and much of the plot is related to them. The pseudo-porches are an intragroup phenomenon—they are restricted to this congenial community and emerge as its authentic illustration.

The porch and its substitutes are an outgrowth of the island in *Mama Day*; constant practices and experience have infused these places of transition with a symbolism beyond mere functionality. The front of the barbershop is not only a site where people congregate; it elicits a constant, daily renewal of community ties. A way station, the communal porch is strategically situated in the heart of the community and requires a brief sojourning. It is an open and active space where individual itineraries intersect and mingle; a veritable site of encounter for the island community. Marked by dialogism and “highly charged with emotion and value” (Bakhtin, 2010, p. 248), this place urges communication and provides the setting for collective and personal expression. The role of the porch in facilitating community cohesion is manifest in the didactic rehearsal of collective memory, emphasized in the narration by many other ritualistic practices and processions that are not discussed in this paper.

This small secluded island, a replica of a Gullah community, survived through storytelling and preserved its cultural heritage through the spoken word. To add to its inherent complexity, the porch is best described as a dialogical rhizome; it exists in several locations on the island as an authentic yet repeating site, as an outcome of repetitious gestures (Lefebvre, 1991) which involve and rely on verbal interaction. The audacious and gregarious

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<sup>12</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) develop their theory from the vegetal rhizome as the principle of connection and multiplicity while insisting on its proliferating character. The metaphor of the rhizome denotes a decentralized, democratic, non-hierarchical structure which befits our analysis of the communal porch in Naylor’s novel. Furthermore, the rhizome is also stratified; it is a set of plateaus, implying a verticality, which calls to attention the factors of time and memory, not unlike the Bakhtinian chronotope. In light of Deleuze and Guattari’s analysis, we claim that the porch is also a palimpsest, recording layers or versions of collective memory, an endeavor which is reserved for further research.

community portrayed in the novel elegantly revolves around these dialogic and rhizomatic communitarian nodes, mirroring the rhythm and nuances of the Black vernacular specific to the rich Gullah culture of the Lowcountry in South Carolina, and Georgia. The polyphonic porch is indeed the building block of this small community, the stage upon which the locals use their rich storytelling tradition and prowess to preserve their cultural heritage, entertain, and strengthen the fabric of their community.

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## "It's a Shadow Life"—Zadie Smith's *Swing Time*

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### Abstract

Shadow and limelight constantly, often imperceptibly change places in Zadie Smith's 2016 novel *Swing Time*. This is a fictional world where the narrator/main character can never become a true protagonist, and her namelessness gives her both universality and invisibility. Appearances deceive, success and failure are not separated, and binaries are questioned, even erased. Zadie Smith is a young English novelist born to a Jamaican mother and an English father; she spent her childhood and early adulthood in Northwest London—a place defined by hybridity and poverty—and recently moved to New York. Her oeuvre to date is a complex insight into questions of race, friendship, personal identity, belonging, and other issues, all connected to life in a globalized world. Her *Swing Time* presents a mature, objective outlook on various lives connected through race, dance, and fates.

Zadie Smith's latest novel is a representative work of literature for tracing the manifestations of (in)visibility in a globalized world. This novel builds on visibility: movies, songs, and dances from the swing era come to life, it features a Madonna-like international pop star and two young protagonists who attempt to define themselves through dance. Here the visible and the invisible are interlinked, and superior and inferior are interchangeable. The novel actively challenges readers' preconceived notions of character, good and bad, progression and degression, and it prompts an unbiased look at the fates of its various characters. The investigation of the ways the visibility–invisibility binary is redefined through the novel leads us to a view into current social phenomena, such as race in a global world, (post-) diaspora, minorities, class hierarchy, political agency, mobility, and identity.

**Keywords:** literature, race, mobility, cosmopolitanism, identity

## Introduction—"Now Everyone Knows Who You Really Are"

Zadie Smith's *Swing Time* (2016) ends where it begins: the unnamed protagonist is a 30-something woman recently fired from her job, returning to London after ten years spent traveling as the personal assistant of a Madonna-like pop star. The quote from the heading: "Now everyone knows who you really are" (Smith, 2016, p. 5) sets the tone and the theme of the entire novel: the reader follows the narrator (from here on out "N") from childhood into her thirties, and they together try to figure out who this person actually is. The quote promises an answer to this search for identity; however, the issue proves to be quite complicated: N is the child of an English father and a Jamaican mother, situated between two races, trying to find her own "tribe." Her search for identity is always related to various role models she chooses for herself, women who are supposed to help her define who she is. This goal, though, is never attained, as the narrator proves to be a person living in the shadow of others, mainly defined by what and who she is not.

Smith's literary output to date clearly shows the transformations of her literary persona. While *White Teeth*, her debut, was written by a young and optimistic writer, critics see in *Swing Time* a different approach to multiethnicity, cosmopolitanism, race, and the various other issues her novels are concerned with. For instance, Marta Figlerowicz, upon comparing her latest book to the earlier ones, concludes that it is "much darker and more polemical" (2017, p. 155). Reviewer Adam Kirsch writes lengthily about a deeper thematic, even philosophical discouragement that is palpable in her 2016 novel. As he claims, the liberal Anglo-American "hope that pluralism can be a source of joy and creativity rather than hatred and frustration" (2016) has been under growing tension for some time, one that can be sensed in the shifts in Smith's prose.

Her first novels center on/in London and present an intimate and at once global picture of this metropolis Smith calls her home. For instance, besides the *White Teeth*, *NW* is also a great example of her local engagements, with a distinct focus on a private and personal experience of London. However, many of her works have gradually started to show a pre-occupation with a spatial in-betweenness, manifesting in the form of a movement between two cosmopolitan cities: London and New York. Starting with *On Beauty* (2005), a novel that juxtaposes not just the two cities but two families, too, basically, as a pattern of dichotomy she utilizes in almost all her literary works, her subsequent works present a growing interest in the two countries, two cultures, and the self often stranded between them.

Smith paints a world peopled by individuals compelled to define themselves through a binary system, only to realize that the experience of in-betweenness is the most defining one. *Swing Time* continues in this vein, with such dichotomies gradually refuted as the ones

defined along the lines of popularity, visibility, mobility, race, talent, gender. “*Now everyone knows who you really are*” situates the individual and their identity questions at the core of the novel and this analysis. The sentence sounds ironic, a banalization of one’s identity, and thus, it hints at the impossibility of figuring out who N truly is. This already points to the need to discard the binary system meant to define the protagonist.

N is supposedly at the center of *Swing Time*: we read about her life, her aspirations, her school years, her friendships, her struggles, her search for herself, her travels. Despite the detailed, journal-like accounts of all these data, despite the first-person narration that is supposed to convey a personal, intimate rendering of one’s life, N is elusive. In her namelessness, she becomes both an “everywoman” and a no-one, a person stuck forever in the shadows. The question is whether she wishes to come out of these shadows or prefers to stay there. By implication, whether this is the state of the cosmopolitan self in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

N’s trajectory in the novel could eventually be proven to function as a kind of diagnosis of our times: she is a young woman who manages to overcome her fate (which stems from her family, racial identity, environment), but the complete breakthrough is eluding her. She is presented with multiple possibilities, she has mobility and connections, and she is a cosmopolitan, but maybe it is exactly this richness of impulses, of possibilities that debilitates her.

I believe that *Swing Time* is indeed a critique of the cosmopolitan subject. Smith’s novel lines up various characters, typically female, through whom it manages to problematize the contemporary phenomenon of cosmopolitanism and disperse its utopian understanding. Therefore, in the following, I wish to investigate two interconnected aspects of this novel—one materialized in the cosmopolitan experience, and the other one in the novel’s engagement with its characters’ identity formation, with a particular focus on biracial identity as featured in *Swing Time*.

### **Identity in *Swing Time***

In *Swing Time* we encounter a first-person narrator, an amalgam of various selves: the biracial girl, the woman, the working-class social subject, the performer, the assistant. She is a complex person, and the novel revolves around her identity crisis. Consequently, in the following, I put emphasis on her identity formation, or rather its failure, and the various factors contributing to it.

From among the myriad identity theories and approaches, I wish to narrow the scope by analyzing N primarily through the lens of biracial identity, by also choosing as a starting point some of the findings of psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson, whose theory of the eight stages



of development, in the context of society, proves insightful when considering N's biracial origin and the effect of her environment on her identity formation. As Erikson is interested in how social interactions and relationships affect the development of human beings, his approach proves helpful in analyzing the fictional character of N, whom we always witness in conjunction with other characters of the novel.

Erikson defines identity as "a sense of who one is as a person and as a contributor to society" (Hoare, 2002). As Justin T. Sokol formulates it, "[i]t is personal coherence or self-sameness through evolving time, social change, and altered role requirements" (2009, p. 142), and as such, it allows the individual to know their place in the world. It provides one with a sense of well-being, a sense of being at home in one's body, a sense of direction in one's life, and a sense of mattering to those who count (Erikson, 1968). According to Erikson, having a solid sense of identity is crucial, and hence the question arises: what happens if the development of this identity is unsuccessful?

Erikson's fifth stage of psychosocial development—identity v. role confusion—captures the period of adolescence. It takes stock of the various factors complicating the formation and strengthening of a young adult's selfsameness. These factors include one's family, friends, schoolmates, social groups, pop culture—basically, various social factors that we encounter in *Swing Time*, too. N, the nameless protagonist, is stranded among these people, these influences, in the form of her parents, Tracey—her classmate and childhood friend,—her home in Northwest London, and Aimee, the Madonna-like pop star, who starts as the girls' childhood idol, and later turns into N's employer.

As family relationships are crucial in the formation of a stable identity, a child's biracial identity creates by default a sense of confusion, a failure of belonging. In biracial children, such as N, there is a palpable tension to conform to one racial identity over the other. Theories, for a long time, used to favor the choice of a singular racial identity, but nowadays, they have evolved into supporting a more fluid, multidimensional racial identification.<sup>1</sup> The possibilities of choosing from border, protean, and transcendent identity would provide young people with the necessary freedom to figure out where they belong, thus leading to a successful fifth stage in Erikson's scheme of identity development, and to the formation of a strong, confident identity. In the following, I will consider what factors lead to N's failure to achieve this solidification.

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<sup>1</sup> Various models outline biracial identity in the contemporary psychosocial context. For the sake of simplicity, and because I consider it thorough and all-encompassing, I resort to briefly outlining K. A. Rockquemore's multidimensional model, which argues that biracial individuals can choose from among four different racial identities: singular (Black or White), border (biracial), protean (sometimes Black, sometimes White), and transcendent (no racial identity) (1999, p. 200).

## **An Elusive Narrator-protagonist**

Swing Time presents a narrator-protagonist who sounds inauthentic, insecure with no distinct identity. We see her environment—the other characters more clearly than herself. Franziska Quabeck calls her not simply unreliable but “inauthentic,” as she remarks that the heroine’s unreliability “results from her split self and lack of identity” (2018, p. 469). This manifests in the form of a clear discrepancy between her experiences and the stories she tells (herself) about them. She seems to constantly lie to herself and shelter herself from a reality she might be negatively affected by. What is important to consider is why these two personas never meet: why she is alienated from her own experiences and not in control of her own life. The narrator’s inauthenticity and insecurity seemingly stem from her experiences as a biracial girl/woman, someone who feels that she does not belong exclusively to either of the binary categories others seem to be able to choose from. Several instances from her childhood testify to a weakening in her self-identification.

As both Erikson’s theory and those concerned particularly with biracial identity formation emphasize, parents play a crucial role in the development of their children’s identities. One of the paradigmatic examples of this influence in N’s childhood is her black mother. As a Jamaican immigrant woman, she embodies all the hardships and struggles in gaining autonomy over her life, and she feels like her family holds her back. Despite her husband and child, she shows great ambition, is a self-made woman, and even succeeds in becoming a member of Parliament. Her advice to N reflects on her own life path, as she cautions her daughter to avoid being tied down by children: “I promise you, you’ll end up a shade of yourself. Catch a load of babies, never leave these streets, and be another one of these sisters who might as well not exist” (Smith, 2016, p.188). These words follow N everywhere, as her life will be greatly defined by the dichotomy of limelight and shadow, by the duality of mobility and immobility.

However, as she recognizes herself as one of the restraining forces her mother evokes, the effect of this advice is rather complex. N escapes this life, but, ironically, the novel and N seem to wish to prove her mother wrong; it is indeed possible to “end up a shade of yourself” even without children, without being tied down. N is never the protagonist of her own life. Instead, we see her in the shadow of other women, such as her childhood friend Tracey, or her employer, the Australian pop star Aimee.

Thus, N’s choices in life all gyrate around her, unconscious, wish to rebel against her own mother. N will actively fight against her mother’s version of feminism—ironically, through remaining largely passive. As Sarah Jilani remarks, the young woman “quietly rebels against her mother (...) by disappointing with her chosen university, her PA job,

and her more color-blind, but perhaps also more naïve, understanding of identity" (2016). Quabeck goes even further by remarking how her job as a PA, which "requires an existence in service at the constant disposal of someone else and at the cost of giving up her own life completely" (2018, p. 466), is the greatest refutation of her mother's fears and ambitions.

N's biracial identity is first and foremost complicated by her own mother's identity and expectations, as the quote above shows. In addition to that, her family—a black mother and white father—continues to further complicate it in various instances. She feels out of place, stranded between two races. As N considers herself not dark enough, she spends most of her childhood "on our balcony on any hot day, aiming at exactly the quality [Tracey] seemed to dread: more colour, darkness, for all my freckles to join and merge and leave me with the same dark brown of my mother" (Smith, 2016, p. 179). She experiences her lighter skin tone as a shortcoming, which makes her a mere shadow of her mother, who embodies "the essence of Blackness" (2016, p. 212).

Her desire to be black manifests most strongly in a scene in the Gambia, during one of the few moments of, supposed, authentic experience. While she identifies herself as black and dreams of finding her roots, maybe even a family in The Gambia—"I thought: here is the joy I've been looking for all my life" (2016, p. 165)—she is considered white:

I was, in the strictest sense of the term, good-for-nothing. Even babies were handed to me ironically, and people laughed when they saw me holding one. Yes, great care was taken at all times to protect me from reality. They'd met people like me before. They knew how little reality we can take. (Smith, 2016, p. 178)

Thus, her sense of inauthenticity is further complicated by this experience, as in London she is deemed brown, whereas in the Gambia she is white. Consequently, there seems to be no place for her: neither in Africa nor New York or London, her hometown.

During celebrations, women take turns and dance to tribal music; when it is N's turn, she easily copies the movements of the women of the tribe to the amazement of her audience. The women exclaim "*Toobab*," with which they are saying: "Even though you are a white girl, you dance like you are a black!" (Smith, 2016, p. 417).<sup>2</sup> With this, even a rare authentic moment is tainted by the realization that she does not and never will belong here. This instance thematizes her need and failure to belong to a community, and thus, her being defined by in-betweenness and alienation.

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<sup>2</sup> Interestingly, this (as many other details of the novel) is based on Smith's actual visit to Africa, quoted by Jeffrey Eugenides. Smith remarks that while she had thought she was having a profound, "spiritual experience," she came to realize that the black people she encountered in Africa thought she was white (2016).

While her mother considers N's lighter skin tone a privilege, "wasn't I so much freer than any of them—born in England, in modern times—not to mention so much lighter, so much straighter of nose" (2016, p. 212), N is visibly confused and frustrated. This frustration follows her into her adulthood, when she chooses to cater to a white woman's every whim, and meanwhile tries to define herself in connection/as opposed to her.

These details of her life show very strong identity confusion in the young girl/woman. Her mother's wish for N to identify as white can be explained by the often-experienced pressure of interracial couples "to align their biracial children with one racial group," often White, "in hopes that the child will avoid discrimination and gain advantages of White privilege" (Weaver and Masalehdan, 2020, p. 14). N's confusion and experience of constantly feeling out of place is further complicated by the effects of choosing one racial identity over another and, consequently, siding with one parent over the other. As Weaver and Masalehdan remark, this often causes distance between child and parent and can lead to feelings of guilt and shame (2020, p. 15).

For instance, in a scene where her white father's children from a previous marriage visit their family, upon looking at her half-brother, N feels that "[i]t was right that he should be my father's son, anyone looking at him would see the sense of it. What didn't make sense was me" (Smith, 2016, p. 46). This time, she feels too dark-skinned and, consequently, excluded from her white father's family.

Despite her strivings to conform to one or the other racial identity, N still often has to identify as biracial, which leads to further complications with her family and also with her relationships in her wider social context. According to Dorcas D. Bowles, this difference between children and their parents results in a lack of role models and further confusion, leading to a strong feeling that they do not belong (1993, pp. 422–23). In the distinct case of our protagonist, this could be the key to understanding why N chooses to be in the shadow of other women, in constant search of role models, of people she could finally belong to.

N stands for various people who fail to recognize themselves as conforming to the social system, which is supposed to help them define who they are. She cannot identify with her own self. Zadie Smith, being biracial herself, expressed some of her own insecurities through this narrator. In the essay titled "The I Who Is Not Me," she confesses: "I understood myself, as a child, to be a third, impossible option in an otherwise binary culture: neither black nor white but both" (2018, p. 337).

As Smith states, a child can suffer due to this state of in-betweenness, experiencing a "feeling of impossibility: anger, sadness, despair, confusion" (Smith, 2018, p. 337).

I believe *Swing Time* captures the various manifestations of these feelings and how they affect the self. Smith refuses to create a protagonist for her novel; instead, what we encounter is this inauthentic character—one that will feel real exactly because of her insecurities, because of her anger, envy, vindictiveness, and even fakeness.

## Dance and Identity

As we can see, Zadie Smith complicates the life of her protagonist by giving her a biracial background and a post-diasporic existence. For a further analysis of this identity, it is useful to take a closer look at dance and how its meaning shifts and changes for N in the novel. When she first attends dance classes, the racial and class differences are palpable: she is the only one whose ballet shoes do not have the characteristic pink color, she is lacking in equipment, and she is trying to learn the dance of the white people, often feeling out of place.

Starting from the novel's title, which invokes the 1936 American musical featuring Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers, Smith's novel is not only infused with dance, but it centers on dance as the key to the approach to identity. Dance defines the lives of N and her friend Tracey, the two working-class biracial girls, and their greatest questions referring to their identity are also rooted in dance. For these girls, one particular dancer from these musicals, Jeni LeGon, becomes the symbol of their own lives. LeGon, in N's words, is more than a dancer, she is a "person, actress, dancer, symbol" (Smith, 2016, p. 427). An elusive dancer, talented, a living and breathing symbol of identity, race, and invisibility, but also of the possibility of freedom provided by this very invisibility. Is this what N aspires for?

The words of N's mother—"you'll end up a shade of yourself" (2016, p. 188)—echo throughout the novel. However, despite the negative charge of the mother's words, it seems for a long while that N dreams of being as invisible, as elusive, as free as a shadow. This dream of hers materializes through her wish to become a dancer, who, in her understanding, embodies the rootlessness she craves. To her, dancing gives the opportunity to become unattached, autonomous, a free-floating individual who enjoys this freedom. This may be the reason why, despite her lack of real talent, she is still obsessed with dancing and movement. She dreams of becoming a dancer, whom she defines as "a man from nowhere, without parents or siblings, without a nation or people, without obligations of any kind" (2016, p. 24). To her, the dancer embodies an ethereality and mobility she desperately craves: "a great dancer has no time, no generation, he moves eternally through the world" (2016, p. 38). This would be the opportunity for her to cut all ties with her past, with the fate she was predestined to have.

Her epiphany comes with the musicals she becomes infatuated with, and one in particular: *Ali Baba Goes to Town*, in which she notices Jeni LeGon. LeGon's fate, despite the girls' impression of her success, represents the shattering of illusion and a realization

of the racial discrepancy and power dynamic in show business. Although the two girls see in her the successful artist in the limelight, N's later realization will confirm LeGon's incapacity to get out of the shadow.

LeGon, the image of this mesmerizing dancer proves to be fiction. When older, N has the opportunity to research her childhood idol—the girl who looks like them, who is a talented and accomplished dancer, a star—, and the mirage suddenly disperses. As N confesses:

I'd imagined, for example, a whole narrative of friendship and respect between LeGon and the people she worked with, the dancers and the directors, or I'd wanted to believe that friendship and respect could have existed, in the same spirit of childish optimism that makes a little girl want to believe her parents are deeply in love. (Smith, 2016, pp. 427–28)

But she realizes, as an adult, that LeGon was only hired for “maid parts,” and after a while not even those. This meant

that the person Tracey had imitated so perfectly all those years ago [...]—that was not really a person at all, that was only a shadow. Even her lovely name, which we'd both so envied, even that was unreal, in reality she was the daughter of Hector and Harriet Ligon, migrated from Georgia, descendants of sharecroppers, while the other LeGon, the one we thought we knew—that happy-go-lucky hoofer—she was a fictional being, born of a typo, whom Louella Parsons dreamed up one day when she misspelled ‘Ligon’ in her syndicated gossip column in the LA Examiner. (2016, p. 429)

This is how the fantasy of this successful dancer suddenly evaporates. And with it, the failure of the girls' search for their identity is even more pronounced. They both work for their attainment of success—and, by implication, of an identity—but they also actively sabotage it again and again. According to Fleur van der Laan,

*Swing Time* dislodges what identity is or should be. It presents something plural, the ‘I’ as a range of possibilities, albeit a limited range: one's race, class, gender, and location in place and time determine the limits of this dance of multiple identities. (2018, p. 23)

Musicals are central symbols in Smith's 2016 novel. *Swing Time*, *Ali Baba Goes to Town*, and other iconic shows become the artistic representations of the two girls' formation and the various changes they undergo as they mature. The girls' interpretation of these musicals, though, proves rather problematic and even shifting. For instance, *Ali Baba Goes to Town* is a musical through which the novel captures a shift in perspectives: N first wants to see in it the possibility of equality, of blacks and whites happily dancing together, finding common ground in a language that is represented by the famous song

of "*Hi dee hi dee hi dee hi!*"—the call of Cab Calloway, which the Africans recognize, and cry out the response: "*Ho dee ho dee ho dee ho!*" (2016, pp. 190–191). While N recognizes a beauty in this scene and the origins of tap dancing, her date, "a conscious young man called Rakim" (2016, p. 287), provides a sobering parody of the actual situation: "*Oh massa, I's so happy on this here slave ship I be dancing for joy*" (2016, p. 290, emphasis in original).

At the time, however, not even this wake-up call can shake N out of her illusion of dance having this freeing and equalizing power. Several years need to pass, and another experience, that of working for Aimee will prompt her to recognize: Fred Astaire in the 1936 musical *Swing Time* is wearing blackface, and this is undoubtedly "an instance of the stereotypical, racist portrayal of people of color by white actors with their faces painted black. It depoliticizes race and asserts white dominance over the discourse about race. Actors in blackface 'play' black as spectacle and keep black actors off stage and screen" (Kürpick, 2018). This paradigmatic scene in the movie is largely based on a game of shadow and light, a multiplication of the dancer's body, and a dance competition acted out among these bodies. Whereas it first seems like Bill 'Bojangles' Robinson is the centre and winner of this scene, N's (late) realization reveals the blackface-wearing Astaire to be the actual center and protagonist.

As reflected in these musicals, N is struggling to see a possibility for her biracial self to be autonomous, to prove history wrong, or at least create a world, out of time and out of space, where she can be equal, strong, herself. Dance is supposed to be a universal language, one that can transcend race, sex, class, and even time, but history shatters this vision and instead proves how even dance fails when it comes to social and racial barriers. As Suzanne Scafe remarks, dance in the novel represents a diasporic resource used to "map the complex and uneven histories of American Hollywood musicals of the Swing era on to the lives of its protagonists in contemporary North West London" (2016, p. 108). N wants to believe in the ethereality dance promises, in the freedom she wishes to attain, but wherever she turns, it proves to further confuse her instead of bringing clarity and the coveted freedom.

Dance fails, it is incapable of suppressing racial inequalities, so the cosmopolitan life is the other means by which N tries to find her autonomy, herself. But her visits to Africa reveal the constructed and commodified nature of black identity. N is considered the wealthy white privileged "savior," all authentic experiences are tainted, and the true extent of her rootlessness comes to the surface. Such further examples evoked by the novel—as Michael Jackson's skin bleaching or the representation of slavery in museum tours—all point not just to N's failure to find an authentic self, but to a more global issue of race and its representation, too. N's in-betweenness and problematic cosmopolitan identity reflect a universally experienced disorientation and insecurity.

## **Cosmopolitanism in *Swing Time***

The identity crisis witnessed in *Swing Time* is rooted in a combination of factors exerting their influence on our protagonist. The above-discussed biracial identity and its challenges, her relationship with her parents (especially her ambitious black mother), London, and its council-housing estate, all contribute to a tension within the child and later woman, whose distinct self fails to materialize, instead being always tied to the shadows of other women around her. Her fight against her mother's pressures, against her working-class background, and a wish to escape her fate are what together contribute to another major aspect of her self: her cosmopolitan life. Therefore, in the following, I will take a closer look at the formation of this cosmopolitan identity and N's complex relation to mobility in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The compendium of multiple cosmopolitanisms coexisting is a well-known fact today—see, for instance, the extensive list Robert Spencer provides in his book (2011, p. 2). Furthermore, in their introduction to *Cosmopolitanisms*, Bruce Robbins and Paulo Lemos Horta remark that cosmopolitanism was born out of a mixture of two impulses: negative and positive. According to them,

the negative impulse asserts detachment from one's place of origin or residence, a refusal of the jurisdiction of local authorities, a stepping outside of conventions, prejudices, obligations. The positive impulse asserts membership in some larger, stronger, or more compelling collective. (2017, p. 2)

This duality they recognize proves helpful in approaching *Swing Time*'s unnamed protagonist, whose struggle, as I intend to show, is rooted in this dual effort of distancing herself from her environment and her allotted fate, and of belonging to a different collective, one defined by the freedom and mobility cosmopolitanism promises.

### **N and the Utopian Cosmopolitanism**

Cosmopolitanism is still largely understood as "utopianism, escapism, and condescension" (Spencer, 2011, p. 2)—the privilege of the jet-setting elite. Cosmopolites are thus described as free, careless, and largely untouched by the realities of the places they visit, inhabiting a perfect bubble comprised of the airports, hotels, resorts, conference rooms, and restaurants they frequent. They embody luxurious mobility, contrasted with the restricting immobility of people stuck in one place, constrained by their economic, racial, and social background.



N's dreams of becoming a cosmopolite, her choice to leave her childhood home in London and work as the PA to an international star, all testify to her similar limited understanding of what cosmopolitanism entails. She dreams of being unattached, of limitless mobility, of freedom, and for a long time fails to wake up from this utopian dream. N's aspiration to become a cosmopolite is connected to the idea of cosmopolitanism as "uncritically celebrat[ing] hybridity and the exchange of commodified cultural products" (Johansen, 2014, p. 40). However, with characters struggling to climb the social ladder, who seem to embody success and cosmopolitan ideals, but gradually prove that they are lost and immobile, Smith paints a picture of how the idealized cosmopolitanism fails to materialize, what barriers one encounters, what struggles one needs and fails to overcome.

As we know, cosmopolitanism is traditionally defined as a "disruptive stance" as it is supposed to reject "some narrower claim—that of a tribe, polis, community, or state" (Ingram, 2013, p. 48). N's rejection of her community in London, in the council housing estate is evident. She, as a biracial girl, stranded between two races, feels like she does not belong to any tribe, she is the constant outsider, living a shadow existence. Thus, her rejection is already more complicated than it would seem at first glance: in her dream of mobility and freedom, she is dreaming of finding her own tribe, a community she would belong to. It is not surprising thus that the idea of a "tribe" functions as a leitmotif in *Swing Time*.

This, to an extent, was recognized by Beatriz Pérez Zapata too, when she remarks that "contrary to the alleged rootlessness of global and glocal societies, the fact is that roots do *still matter* in Smith's writings" (2021, p. 64, emphasis in original). Thus, while seemingly N aspires for rootlessness, she is searching for different roots, for a tribe where she could finally belong. Dancing is one of the stronger manifestations of this dream. She recognizes the possibility of reinventing oneself through dance, the appeal of the free-floating individuals who are autonomous and comfortable in their bodies. This may be the reason why, despite her lack of real talent, she is still obsessed with dancing and movement.

N's dream of utopian cosmopolitanism seems to be manifesting with the help of Aimee, the Madonna-like pop star who embodies the free-floating cosmopolitan ideal N wishes for herself. As Pérez Zapata remarks, Aimee presents N with an opportunity not just to escape but to move "from her suburb to Aimee's centre, perceived as an unreal place that amounts to a different world altogether, 'the centre of the centre' (Smith, 2016, p. 103)" (2021, p. 69). Conversely, though, it is also going to be Aimee who hinders N from belonging to a new tribe, and from the liberating feeling she is dreaming of. Thus, the utopian vision of cosmopolitanism gradually disperses in *Swing Time*.

## Disillusionment

"How do we think about cosmopolitanism when it is no longer a utopian possibility that lies beyond the limiting horizon of a national culture but a limiting condition in its own right?" (Stević & Tsang, 2019, p. 3). Zadie Smith is preoccupied by this question. Besides *Swing Time*, she shows a distinct preoccupation with the limiting conditions of cosmopolitanism in both her other fictional works and her non-fiction alike. In the case of *Swing Time*, N's trajectory could eventually be proven to function as a kind of diagnosis of our times: here we have a young woman, who manages to overcome her fate, and rises above it, but complete breakthrough is eluding her. She is the character who is presented with multiple possibilities, she has mobility, she has connections, she is a cosmopolitan, but maybe it is exactly this richness of possibilities that debilitates her.

We witness a character who tries to find her own "tribe," and her own self in the process, but they both seem to elude her: she is out of place, between two races, between mobility and immobility. Mobility is an integral part of the cosmopolitan experience. As a privilege, it is understood as belonging to the wealthy elite who can afford luxurious trips and an escape from the confinement of their space. However, this is only one facet of mobility.

It is helpful to consider the three prototypes of the cosmopolitan mindset that Vladimir Zorić introduces in his chapter written for *The Limits of Cosmopolitanism*: the *flaneur*, the exile, and the traveler. What is most in focus in *Swing Time* is the prototype of the traveler, which, according to Zorić, "negotiates and reconciles" the previous two categories (2019, pp. 14–15). N's complex background and her life testify to this combination, especially when considering her biracial origin on the one hand, and her relation to the spaces she inhabits, on the other.

N's mother, though we do not get substantial details about her previous life, can be understood as the exile in this framework, who "reaches a liberal metropolis from a political and economic backwater and effectively surrenders to its class mechanism, accepting the necessity to become a nobody before *becoming a somebody*" (Zorić, 2019, p. 15). This process of becoming a somebody is captured as her life path materializes in conjunction with her daughter's: she is first a nobody (or at least in her definition): wife and mother, confined to her home, with no prospects; but fights for her autonomy, attends university and succeeds in becoming a member of Parliament. Her life path seemingly captures a kind of mobility that leads to her liberation, however, as we see in the cases of all characters of *Swing Time*, this proves illusory: at the end of the novel, we find her on her deathbed, realizing that London, filled with promises at the beginning, ends up being a kind of prison, a site of her immobility.

She wishes for a more privileged life for her biracial daughter, one in which she is not tied down by children, by a family, and can practice free mobility. She fears that N will be tied to the estate, which would be a failure, an identity-less existence, but N's high mobility, her job as a personal assistant—so basically the idealized life of a cosmopolitan citizen—proves to lead to this exact thing. So luxurious mobility becomes nothing better than the immobility experienced by her mother, or Tracey even, who both remain stuck in London.

This is a novel about movement. It is about dance, about the history of dance, it is about travel, movement in space and time, an escape from one's past, a return. As Songyun Zheng contends, through a character that embodies an exploration of the self, existential crisis, and controversy, *Swing Time* presents a "deromanticized cosmopolitanism" (4). N's idealism comes off as naivety, and it is systematically dispersed by the events of the novel. Cosmopolitanism is presented as more complex and more problematic than the utopia of mobility for pleasure.

### **Aimee, the Cosmopolitan Traveller**

Aimee is a pop icon N used to idolize; a woman she looks up to, one who seems to materialize everything N is dreaming of, and everything N's mother is not. As the various details showcase, she is the embodiment of cosmopolitanism. For instance, the narrator describes her thusly:

The palest Australian I ever saw. Sometimes, without her make-up on, she didn't look like she was from a warm planet at all, and she took a step to keep it that way, protecting herself from the sun at all times. There was something alien about her, a person who belongs to a tribe of one. (2016, p. 97)

Aimee does everything in her power to not belong to a particular culture, to a particular part of the world. She is originally from Bendigo, Australia, but has left it behind, traveling across the globe as a successful pop star. She is described as "uncontained by space and time" because "all ways were her ways" (2016, p. 74). Everything about her is global, even her speech: she abandoned her Australian accent and instead speaks like "New York and Paris and Moscow and LA and London combined" (2016, p. 95).

To N, this kind of fluidity, the prospect of becoming a "world citizen" must be really appealing, especially because N comes from a world of binary oppositions where she felt "wrong" all her life. As Anna Arslanova remarks, "those expressions of 'cultural transcendence' (Dieme, 2018, p. 114) that Aimee possesses seem to open the possibility of a new version of identity for the narrator, one that is not based on choosing, but rather denying" (2019, p. 56).

Aimee is indeed the epitome of the careless, blind cosmopolitan. She is either an idealist or an ignorant: she refuses to recognize economic, social, and political differences, as she perceives them as “never structural or economic but always essentially differences of personality” (2016, p. 111). She prefers empty non-places, as it happens with the prototypical cosmopolitans who fail to see the real place, and instead encounter the same airports, hotels, restaurants, everywhere they go.

Even though for a while, N lives in the illusion that she shares the center with Aimee—meaning that she could accomplish this cosmopolitan existence and erase all her roots—after years she comes to the realization that her life is governed by Aimee, and her identity never manifests itself. She trusts that a change of scenery, a different place will gift her the identity and authenticity she is searching for, but the epiphany fails to come. Instead, what she gets is the painful realization that she is alone, uprooted, with no career and no support system.

## **Conclusion**

By the end of the novel, N’s thoughts about the character of the dancer need to change: her initial understanding of the dancer embodying freedom and a coveted rootlessness reveals her own wish of becoming free and finding herself—of being capable of defining herself despite or through her biracial identity. This approach changes as a result of a series of failures and realizations she has in her childhood and adulthood, disillusionment happening in her life, and mirrored in the musicals she feels closest to.

The figure of the dancer, the supposedly unshackled self that incorporates everything N is dreaming of, is manifested in the characters of dancers and stars from the past and present, flesh-and-blood human characters who disprove the supposed freedom and present struggling individuals who cannot succeed against racial stereotypes, against art as commodity, or simply against the laws of the world. Thus, Jeni LeGon, Fred Astaire, Michael Jackson, Tracey, and Aimee all represent the illusion of success, of mobility, of a strong identity, only to reveal the complexities of the self and the manifold injustices one faces.

*Swing Time* makes us ask hard questions, questions that destabilize the idealized image of the successful, happy cosmopolitan. Taiye Selasi formulates it thus:

By the rules of the 21<sup>st</sup>-century success story, blessed are they who can reinvent themselves. *Swing Time* asks us to reconsider. Does one who succeeds in leaving home gain power or lose it? Has one necessarily bettered oneself by moving, say, into a more impressive house or do the truly powerful feel at home just where they are? (2016)

Different kinds of movement comprise the center of *Swing Time*: dance as a manifestation of the girls' search for identity, and international travel—the cosmopolitanism embodied by Aimee, and also adopted by N. This 2016 novel, commonly recognized as striking a more pessimistic chord in Zadie Smith's oeuvre, with a more mature approach to people, chooses as its protagonist a woman who is a true citizen of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—a cosmopolitan. However, despite expectations, despite Aimee—who embodies the textbook example of the privileged, oblivious jet-setting cosmopolitan—, *Swing Time* manages to paint a complex picture of the downside of this life. With a character who is lost between various parts of the world, lacking a stable home, and losing—or even abandoning—her roots, N comes to embody some of the greatest fears in today's world.

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# Spaces of Initiation in Washington Irving's Stories

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## Abstract

America has always been a space of challenges for the ones who wanted to discover more things about it. Space becomes a special place in which destinies are made and in which man can find a proper initiation. The wish to know more about the New World pushed man to explore and assimilate the land and the cultures he encountered. American literature undertook the mission to render in symbolical terms the space in which its characters evolve. The paper will analyse two of Washington Irving's short stories, *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow*, showing how initiation can be obtained in various circumstances.

**Keywords:** Washington Irving, space, Puritans, identity, Transcendentalism

American literature represents one of the most challenging spaces of culture in the literatures of the world. Much of its appeal resides in the fact that it is closely linked to the mentality which created it. From the beginning of the Puritan Age until the modern and postmodern epochs, American civilization has always impressed by its national and symbolical value. In American culture, space has identified with the frontier that needed to be conquered. The frontier is of two types: real and imaginary. The real frontier coincides with the concrete representations of the spatial construct. In the years of the early settlement, the frontier was the margin of the village beyond which lay the wilderness. For the Puritans, it was the delimitation between the known land and the one of dangers lurking in the forest. The imaginary frontier raises more challenges as it coincides with the fears troubling the human soul. As religion was all-powerful for the Americans, and they interpreted everything in spiritual terms, the wilderness was the place of the devil where man could lose his immortal soul.

In time, this belief changed. An important role was played by transcendentalism, the philosophical and literary trend characterizing the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the Puritan Age, the main concepts were those of self-denial and self-humiliation. Man had to obey the commands of the leaders, to be aware of his sinful nature, and to be ready to face the punishments brought upon him by God. Though the Puritans believed that they had been chosen by God to settle the New World, they had the conviction that the appropriate retribution awaited all of them. The hope to go to Heaven was based on the virtuous life man had on earth. Transcendentalism opposed this doctrine, and instead of self-denial, it brought self-awareness and self-reliance. Nature was no longer a place of unknown dangers but became a teacher and a guide on the road toward spiritual revelation. Nature was the intermediary between man and the Over-Soul, the name given by the transcendentalists to the divinity. Space was enlarged, and it represented the whole universe. It was no longer the confined space of the Puritan community, but it contained the immensity of the New World.

Literature followed in the footsteps of philosophy, but it added its own connotations to the symbol of space. It concentrated on the concept of initiation seen in cultural terms. Initiation coincided with the forging of an identity, characterizing man in his quest. Several types of space can be found in American literature. One of them is the magical space in the works of Washington Irving. His two famous stories, *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* describe places that are opposed to the common space of the community. In the first story, the protagonist, Rip Van Winkle, is attracted to the supernatural world when he watches the crew of sailors playing nine pins in the forest. The woods are an important place where magic rules the land.

From an anthropological perspective, the forest is a place of challenges and initiation. According to Gilbert Durand (1977), the forest is a closed space in which specific events happen. It is also a space of intimacy as it closes down on the protagonist and offers him shelter. Magic plays an important role in the course of the adventure. It can be benefic or malefic. As James Frazer (1995) notices in his book, benefic magic has a curative role in the sense that it purifies the protagonist of all the links with the common corruptive world. It offers man the possibility to develop spiritually by offering him access to the supreme revelation. Malefic magic is the instrument of evil because it traps man in a dangerous illusion and makes him believe that he can control the representations of the otherworld. In the end, man will discover that he was tricked and becomes disappointed with his revelation. In both cases, what matters is the degree of initiation in the mysteries of the universe. The lesson which is learned is of utmost importance for the protagonist.



The description made by the supposed author Diedrich Knickerbocker (actually an alter ego of Irving himself) underlines the specificity of the place where the action happens. It is characterized by magic and a feeling of curiosity as to the features of the surroundings. "Every change of seasons, every change of weather, indeed every hour of the day, produces some change in the magical hues and shapes of these mountains" (Irving, 1988). The author creates a dream-like atmosphere as if the land were out of time, belonging to a supernatural environment. Thus, he anticipates the strange adventure his protagonist will have. The nature of Rip is in accordance with the uniqueness of the place since he is different from the other villagers. He prefers the forest instead of the village, the walks in the woods, and not the work at home. "The great error in Rip's composition was an insuperable aversion to all kinds of profitable labor" (Irving, 1988).

In Irving's story (1988), Rip Van Winkle finds himself included in the magical space which is the forest. The purpose of Rip is to escape his nagging wife and to have the possibility to enjoy himself in the tranquility of the forest. Space becomes for him a shelter where he can express himself and find the peace he needs. When he meets the ghost of Hendrik Hudson and his crew, he is not surprised at all, and accepts to drink from the liquor offered to him. In his case magic is beneficial because he will escape the tormenting life at home. The forest is the place of adventures and of the ultimate fulfillment. It is the space in which he can find his true identity as there is no one there to tell him what to do. The adventure whose meaning is chance comes quite unexpectedly to Rip.

In a long ramble on a fine autumnal day, Rip had unconsciously scrambled to one of the highest parts of the Kaatskill mountains. Panting and fatigued, he threw himself, late in the afternoon, on a green knoll, covered with mountain herbage, that crowned the brow of a precipice. (Irving, 1988)

Besides the magical qualities it possesses, the forest is a space of liberty and the unknown. The forest is alluring and beautiful, a place of imagination and the supernatural. In his book *The King and the Corpse*, Heinrich Zimmer defines the forest in the following way: The forest flickers in an enchanting light, there are new dangers, new initiations. It is the realm of the soul itself which the soul can decide to know and explore to find in it the most intimate adventure (Zimmer, 2016). The protagonist is called by a strange man, sounding out of nowhere. The peculiarity of the scene lies also in the fact that he is in a special spot, the highest and the most beautiful.

He thought his fancy must have deceived him and turned again to descend when he heard the same cry ring through the still evening air—Rip Van Winkle! Rip Van Winkle! Rip now felt a strange apprehension stealing over him. (Irving, 1988)

The stranger's appearance is peculiar, too. He wears old clothes and talks like one of the first Dutch colonists. The fact that he carries a *stout keg* full of liquor makes him more peculiar. He acts like an instigator, introducing the protagonist in the adventure. The description identifies him with the goblins living in the forest and populating the German folk tales. They can be benevolent or evil, depending on the merits of the protagonist. They are usually befriended if a certain incantation is used. In Rip's case, the stranger comes himself to the protagonist because the fantastic dimension willingly opens for the hero. He is lured into accepting the gift of the stranger. It is an instance of a personal choice, just like in the folk tales when the hero is offered the alternatives of reality or fantasy. The place where magic is performed on Rip resembles the enchanted forests of mythical spaces. Its uniqueness stands for the special initiation of the protagonist. At the same time, it is beautiful and admirable as it is similar to the romanticism of the German tales.

Passing through the ravine, they came to a hollow, like a small amphitheater, surrounded by perpendicular precipices, over the brinks of which impending trees shot their branches, so that you only caught glimpses of the azure sky and the bright evening cloud. (Irving, 1988)

Rip becomes part of the supernatural also because he deliberately accepts the gift of the mysterious man. He acts as if it were normal to find the ghostly crew in the woods and to witness its entertainment. The liquor he drinks is a magical potion that causes him to sleep and awaken after twenty years. The story implies that Rip had already been part of the supernatural dimension and only needed to be invited to discover it. Space becomes thus a place of knowledge because Rip learns about his true identity. After he returns from the forest, he becomes the recipient of memories, and he is perceived as an exemplary model by the villagers. There are two spaces which confront each other. The magical space of the forest opposes the common realistic space of the village. The latter is unchanged as it is concrete and monotonous. The former is attractive, modeling itself on the needs of the protagonist. The otherworld is fascinating and beautiful, mirroring the protagonist's true nature. Space is associated with time, which is dual too. It is the time of the community which follows the habits of its inhabitants. It opposes magical time, which is static and unchangeable. Both time and space have decisive influences on the protagonist, who must correctly decipher them.

There are three types of space in Irving's (1988) story. The first one is the space of the community, which corresponds to the profane space analyzed by Eliade (2000). It is a dimension of stability, of predictable events in which everything is ordered according to customs and laws. Rip does not feel at ease in this space—he longs for peace and a quiet existence. The tavern is a space within another space, representing the inner aspects of the community.

In the tavern, the protagonist feels free by identifying with it and getting the respect he needs. The outside space is menacing, as Rip cannot relate to it at all. The second space is an intermediary one, corresponding with the forest in which Rip has an encounter with the supernatural. It coincides with the rites of passage the protagonist goes through.

According to Arnold Van Gennep, the rites of passage refer to three stages of initiation. They are separation, transition, and reincorporation. In the first stage, the hero withdraws from his current status and prepares to move from one place to another. During this stage, he abandons all the links with the community. Leaving behind daily routines would be leaving the village and going to the forest, where he meets the strange man. In social terms, it means abandoning his position as a husband and becoming a free man. The transition or liminal stage is the period between levels during which one has left the former status but has not reached the third stage of transformation. At this point, the hero is at the threshold of experiences; it is a very vulnerable position since evil can attack and deviate him from his quest. In the case of Rip, such an initiation corresponds to his sleep in the forest. It is a personal transformation occurring unconsciously and preparation for the new reality awaiting Rip. In ritual terms, his sleep is a spiritual purification from the common daily existence and a gate towards reintegration. The third stage is the one of reincorporation. It is a moment in which the passage is consummated by the ritual subject. After passing through the previous stages, the hero can return to society. In the case of Rip the rites of passage presuppose abandoning a false mask and reintegrating into the community as a new man. Rip becomes an effigy of the past, a symbol of collective memory. He finally obtains the social position he has always longed for. Initiation is complete when he realizes the importance he has for the community.

When he finds himself in the forest Rip enters the space of illusions and of the supernatural. Magical space opens to him because he accepts the potion offered to him by the captain. The liquor is the means by which he gets integrated into the supernatural space. The potion is an instance of the water symbolism analyzed by Eliade (2000) in a dual way. He considers that water can be beneficial or malefic. In the first example, he identifies it with the water of life which is regenerating and fertile. He believes that in all religious systems waters preserve their fundamental function: they disintegrate, they abolish all forms, being purified and regenerating (Eliade, 2000). Waters are the universal matrix where all begins and all ends. The waters of death correspond to natural disasters, to the complete annihilation of every form. They can be identified with floods, implying the destruction of space. Waters of death also include magical potions that bring the protagonist to the realm of the unconscious and ultimately to death. Immersing in water implicates the hero

in the eternal process of death and regeneration. Being a cosmic function, water stands for the plurality of forms and a perpetual process of change.

In Irving's (1988) story, the aquatic symbolism is represented at two levels: the microcosm in the magical potion and the macrocosm at the level of the river along whose banks the ghastly crew plays its game of nine pins. The magical potion is offered to Rip by the strange man, and the protagonist accepts it immediately. He never asks questions regarding the origin of the potion or the man who gives it to him. This deliberate gesture shows that Rip was already part of the fantastic world without knowing it. Rip drinks from the liquor as if it were his own.

He was naturally a thirsty soul and was soon tempted to repeat the draught. One taste provoked another and he reiterated his visits to the flagon so often that at length his senses were overpowered, his eyes swam in his head, his head gradually declined and he fell into a deep sleep. (Irving, 1988)

The offer of the drink is not made openly, but it is more of an unconscious temptation Rip cannot resist. The objects of the otherworld fascinate and represent the essence of magic and the supernatural. Rip feels at ease in the woods as he finds the peace and the solitude he longs for there. The passage in the forest, corresponding to an integration into the realm of the sacred, is a sort of prologue for the new life awaiting the protagonist. It is an intermediary space, corresponding to a rite of passage.

The fact that Rip feels uneasy in society is proof of his belonging to a superior dimension. Due to his presence, the two types of space intersect each other, finding a common ground for their evolution. The latter corresponds to the dimension the crew comes from. Rip has only a glimpse of the sacred when he watches the game the crew plays. He is not completely integrated into the sacred because he must return to society and tell them his story. As a recipient of memories, Rip is needed to initiate the others in his turn.

Sacred space is also the place of games. The crew plays a game of nine pins as if nothing could distract them from their activity. Games correspond to the magical space because they have a ritual connotation. Space becomes thus a projection of the inner wishes of man, who tries to give a common shape to the supernatural. Games are also tests for human moral values. Any such game can be decoded in a mythological and psychological manner. From a mythological perspective, a game is the equivalent of a descent into the primordial chaos, in the stillness that precedes the act of creation. In his book *Homo ludens* Johan Huizinga (1998) analyzes the ritual functions of games. Games provide man

with sacred knowledge, a secret and magical science as for him any knowledge lies in a direct relationship with the very cosmic order (Huizinga, 1998). Space acquires, thus, a magical connotation because it contains the elements of a ritual. In this space, the common rules of reality are suspended as new rules must be obeyed. The game of nine pins the crew plays is a gate towards contemplating the mysteries of the sacred. Rip sees one of the forms of the supernatural that is in accordance with his vision of the world. The game and the potion given to him are both symbols of the magical space. The fact that Rip watches the game and takes it for granted is another proof that he was already part of the fantastic dimension.

In many folk tales, the protagonist is invited to enter the mythical space of adventures. The hero must cross the threshold since in the absence of adventures he cannot pretend that he is one. The supernatural space opens to him, alluring him in it. The hero must accept everything that happens to him, otherwise his initiation fails. The one who offers him access to the fantastic land is a being belonging to this other space. In the book entitled *The Morphology of Fairy Tales*, Vladimir Propp (1970) calls this function the donator. He makes the difference between donator, hero, and instigator and assigns each term with specific values. Due to the donator, the hero is allowed to enter the otherworld and partake in the secrets of the divine. The donator is a person who has already been initiated in the fantastic and who is able to guide the hero in his quest. Space becomes thus familiar, like a shelter for the hero. He has to decipher the signs, being helped by the donator. He offers the hero either magical objects or advice needed to accomplish the adventure. The donator changes the hero in a beneficial way.

In the case of Rip, the donator is the strange man who accompanies him to the place of the game. He acts like a guardian of the threshold, guiding him in the unknown. He is a donator who calls Rip by his name and confers him much power. To call somebody by his name implies knowledge that comes from a deep understanding of magic. At the same time calling someone by his name means that the donator gives an identity to the other person, and this confers him a high degree of authority. Not only is the strange man aware of Rip's identity, but he also knows exactly who Rip is. Thus, the act of providing him with a drink is compensation for the years in which the hero had been mocked by the community. Sacred space opens to Rip, providing him with a home that is appropriate for his well-being. Magical space is the place in which Rip can be himself, in which he gives up his false mask of a man who was forced to wear it in the community. His identity is found in the woods, where he is free to be what he really is. Space transforms into a place of initiation and wisdom because Rip will learn many things about

himself when returning to the village. It is a welcoming space that provides man with the ultimate knowledge about the human self.

At the end of the story, Rip becomes a living relic of the past, contributing to the history and destiny of the community. The adventure he had becomes part of the collective memory of the village. The ghostly crew itself turns into a group of characters haunting the mountains and valleys of the region. The story he tells the others is evidence of the strange events that befell him. "Even to this day they never heard a thunderstorm of a summer afternoon about the Kaatskill, but they say that Hendrick Hudson and his crew are at their game of nine pins" (Irving, 1988). The end is proof that magic and the supernatural control the human world in all its details.

In *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* the protagonist Ichabod Crane enters a malefic space, risking the life of any human traveling through it. The frightening rumor of the headless horseman transforms space into a deadly trap. Those not initiated in the local lore are caught in this place. Space represents a labyrinth where there is no way out except in death. It is the place of evil and threat. "Certain it is, the place still continues under the sway of some witching power, that holds a spell over the minds of the good people, causing them to walk in a continual reverie" (Irving, 1988). The effect on the inhabitants implies hallucinations, a dream-like experience, and visions. There is a classification of the spirits haunting the place, among which the most frightening is the headless horseman. "It is said by some to be the ghost of a Hessian trooper, whose head had been carried away by a cannonball in some nameless battle in the Revolutionary War" (Irving, 1988). The power of the ghost extends to other places as well, making it a master of enchantment.

Space is no longer compact as in the story of Rip, but it is fragmentary and unsure. In *The Sacred and the Profane*, Mircea Eliade (2000) makes the difference between the two types of space. According to his view, sacred space is fragmentary; namely, it is organized around a center of the sacred. Space is oriented according to this center, which gives it unity and concreteness. On the contrary, profane space is homogeneous and relative. It can trap man in a labyrinth of illusions. The purpose of profane space is to annihilate the sacred one and keep man in its trap forever. Sacred space can be enacted if Man has deep faith that gives him the strength to reverse the effects of the profane. To enter the sacred space, man needs to know its rules and accept the limitations imposed by the sacred.

In Irving's (1988) story, two spaces oppose each other. There is the space of the village and the one of the forest. The first one offers protection and confidence to the inhabitants. It is the place where the school, the church, and the houses of the community are.

Nothing is strange about it. Life goes on peacefully in the profane space of the village. It is interesting to mention that though the community gathers around the church, it is not a sacred space, the one that encompasses it. The people of the Hollow seem to be as respectable as the others living in the state of New York. However, they are prone to fall under the spell of the horseman and become part of his actions. The profane space is represented by the attitudes and the mentality of the people.

The protagonist of the story is Ichabod Crane, who comes to the village to be the school teacher of the local children. He is different from the other inhabitants as he comes from a different state (Connecticut) and does not share the superstitious beliefs of the locals. Irving describes Ichabod in detail, underlining his physical appearance which goes very well with his family name, which refers to a bird. The approach is ironic as if Irving laughed at his own creation.

To see him striding along the profile of a hill on a windy day, with his clothes bagging and fluttering about him, one might have mistaken him for the genius of famine descending upon the earth, or some scarecrow eloped from a cornfield. (Irving, 1988)

Ichabod becomes the victim of the prejudice of the villagers because he is eccentric and keeps on singing religious hymns. Irving (1988) satirizes the Puritan tradition of mingling daily activities with religion. In a Puritan community, nothing happened without having a religious connotation. Since the object of the story is to criticize the habits of an early American settlement, profane space comes to dominate the space of the community. Given its relativity, profane space does not allow the protagonists to escape the limits of the village. Ichabod fits in the community by doing some housework, by which he repays the lodgings he receives from the farmers. He becomes popular and is accepted by the families that take him in. The habit of singing religious hymns is part of his attempt to gain more money, as the salary he gets is small. By performing all these activities, "the worthy pedagogue got on tolerably well and was thought to have a wonderfully easy life of it" (Irving, 1988). Though in the beginning, he is treated with suspicion, he eventually integrates into the community despite his eccentricities.

Ichabod is a stranger, he is English in origin and not Dutch like the rest of the people. He comes there in order to become the teacher of the local school. He teaches the children mostly religious matters. Ichabod is described as vane, full of himself and proud of his knowledge. He has the dream of marrying Katrina Van Tassel, the daughter of the richest family in the village. He imagines himself the master of the community, without realizing how ridiculous he is. Ichabod belongs to two worlds, the real one

in which he is a simple teacher and the one of his illusions where he is all powerful. The second one dominates him and he considers that the members of the community should respect him. Illusions are a dangerous element because they offer the protagonist the feeling that reality is replaced by imagination. He lives in a space of his own that is populated by his dreams of power. His secret wish is to be married to a rich girl through whom he will climb up on the social ladder. "Our man of letters was peculiarly happy in the smiles of all the country damsels" (Irving, 1988). His wish to spring up adds to his ridiculous attitude. Beside that he also spreads information from other parts of the country, contributing to the gossip of the village.

Paradoxically, Ichabod spiritually belongs more to the sacred space of the forest than to the profane place of the village. The members of Sleepy Hollow are caught in a time and space that never changes. They are caught in a routine that coincides with their daily duties. The villagers are not able to detach themselves from the limited common existence. Space is always the same to them, and they accept it as it is. Each family has its own private space represented by the house and the field. There are two types of space: a small one and a large one. The small one coincides with the house and the enclosure of the family. The large one belongs to the community. Each of the two spaces is governed by specific rules which define them. To the small space belong the habits of the family and their routine. To the large one belong good manners and the construction of a certain image that should offer the villager the position he deserves. In the home, the inhabitant behaves in a natural and simple way. In society, he adopts a mask that coincides with his position.

In the case of Ichabod, there is a double mask that he wears. The exterior one reflects his occupation as the teacher of the children in the village. He does not appear different from the model of a teacher in his epoch. He treats the children honestly and tries hard to give them a certain education. The mask he wears is a genuine one and corresponds to his status. The second mask is the one of the man he pretends to be. Profane space obliges him to hide the second mask because it is inappropriate for the others. He believes that he is a courageous, confident, and self-reliant man. He makes the mistake of taking the imaginary mask for the real one. Dreams and illusions replace the commonsense aspects of his life. He gets lost in the labyrinth of his wishes as he is unable to make the difference between the two dimensions. Profane space swallows him and transforms Ichabod into an instrument of destiny.

One of his characteristics is the fact that he believes in witchcraft and magic. In a paradoxical way he proves to be part of the supernatural dimension because of his attitude.



He fits very well into the fantastic realm represented by the forest and the ominous horseman. What Ichabod does not understand is the fact that the forest is a different space, having its own specific rules. He believes that if he sings religious hymns he will be the master of the unknown and he would even defeat the ghost itself. He uses inappropriate means in order to tame the dangerous woods. He does not see that the forest is the place of imagination where his down to earth solutions do not apply. "His appetite for the marvelous and his powers of digesting it were equally powerful. Both had been increased by his residence in this spellbound region" (Irving, 1988). The fact that he feels at ease in the middle of nature tells of his capacity to integrate in the mysterious unknown. He confuses reality with imagination, assimilating his dreams with practical matters. Irving (1988) mentions insects and birds which fill his imagination. Sometimes Ichabod himself is taken for a spirit of the woodland as he sings religious hymns, much to the awe of the local farmers.

Ichabod's wish is to please the rich and beautiful Katrina Van Tassel, whom he marries in his dreams. Ironically, Irving (1988) considers her more dangerous than the horseman himself. He is also eager to describe the farm she lives in and the great prospects she has. Ichabod's vanity turns the situation to his own advantage, and he lives the illusion of becoming the master of the house. "His heart yearned after the damsel who was to inherit these domains and his imagination expanded with the idea how they might be readily turned into cash" (Irving, 1988). The author profits from the situation in order to describe the house of the Van Tassels. Thus, he introduces another space, namely the domestic one in which specific rules apply. The detailed description configures the image of a pioneer home, having all the advantages of a well-to-do homestead. It is a space of the family that is neither sacred nor profane, a sort of inner dimension containing the members of the family. It is the only space not affected by the threat of the ghostly horseman. Family rules are more powerful than superstitions.

Domestic space is set in opposition to the space of the community. Each dimension is represented by specific people who act as its guardians. Among Ichabod's rivals is the most vocal one, Brom Van Brunt, also called Brom Bones, due to his massive appearance. He is an intermediary between the two spaces, linking them by his presence. Irving (1988) describes him in detail because he is everything that Ichabod is not. Brom and Ichabod are the two main masculine characters, each evolving in his own space. These two personal spaces center around the two protagonists, containing all the moral values they presuppose. Brom opens himself to the space of the forest as well, proving that he is initiated into the secrets of the woods. He is individualized by his physical force that, like in any folk tale, singles him out from the rest of the community.

A special type of space is configured by the mixture of the public space of the community and the private space of the protagonist. In his case, the public space is represented by the school where he teaches the villagers' children. It is an inner, intimate space that corresponds to the personal wishes and achievements of Man. Ichabod is the master of this space, which is at the edge between the sacred and the profane dimension. It is also the space where the dreams and illusions of the hero take shape. Ichabod makes the mistake of confusing the two spaces, believing more in imagination than reality. On the contrary, private space represents the true self of the protagonist, comprising the life he leads. When invited to the Van Tassels' party, Ichabod believes that the space of his inner wishes and the public space mix. Reality and imagination become one, confusing even more the hero. Initiation is not yet achieved because he is unable to make the difference between the two.

Irving (1988) makes the difference between the exterior space, namely the village on a fine autumnal day, and the interior space of the protagonist who has dressed up for the event. It is a contrast between the beauty of nature and the ridiculous appearance of Ichabod. The two instances mingle in order to underline even more the vanity and arrogance of the school teacher. The name of the horse he rides, Gunpowder, is also in accordance with the pompous attitude of the hero. Ichabod has a limited approach to nature which, for him, is represented only by the prospect of eating well. Irving (1988) enumerates different kinds of fruits, cereals, and vegetables. They are all part of the domestic space of the village, which is an image of the profane space seen in its abundance of harvest. The description is very lyrical, carrying a transcendental tinge. The beauty of nature is perceived in the evening when day and night mingle, creating the compact space of the twilight.

A few amber clouds floated in the sky, without a breath of air to move them. The horizon was of a fine golden hint, changing gradually into a pure apple green and from that into the deep blue of the mid-heaven. (Irving, 1988)

The beautiful landscape is set in opposition to the ominous presence of the ghostly horseman. Irving keeps the reader in suspense, pretending that nothing dangerous may happen.

The passage towards the world of the supernatural is made softly by the narrator, who introduces it through the tales the people tell at the party. Irving (1988) concentrates on the specificity of the stories, making a difference between the people living in Sleepy Hollow and the ones in the village. The tales they tell are also different because they belong to diverse spaces. The power of the supernatural is felt in the attitude

of the narrators as well. The attraction was made by the stories about specters, fantastic creatures, and mysterious objects. Irving (1988) ironically presents the pretended religious faith of the inhabitants that is dominated by the belief in the supernatural. The hypocrisy of the people is thus underlined. He also mentions that the influence of the fantastic is so powerful because of the vicinity of Sleepy Hollow. Hence, the space of the ghostly presence overwhelms the domestic space of the village. It is a transformation of one space into the other, given the superstitious beliefs the people have. "There was a contagion in the very air that blew from that haunted region; it breathed forth an atmosphere of dreams and fancies infecting the land" (Irving, 1988).

Sacred space is represented by the forest. Ichabod is sent to the forest by the desire to please Katrina and show her how courageous he is. The journey he takes in the forest on his way back home is an exploration of the supernatural. Space is formed of two elements, belonging to reality and imagination. The latter makes Ichabod turn every landscape he sees in an instance of the fantastic. His superstitions change the forest into a recipient of dark magic and dangerous spells. The presupposed presence of the horseman only increases the tension. Real space becomes an extension of the narrative space created by the tales of the inhabitants. It is as if the stories have turned real. Fear and apprehension govern the episode. "In the dark shadow of the grove, on the margin of the brook, he beheld something huge, misshapen, black and towering. It stirred not, but seemed gathered up in the gloom" (Irving, 1988).

The forest is a labyrinth, and only the initiated can go through it. According to Eliade (2000), sacred space is fragmentary and is represented by islands where the sacred rules apply. Sacred space also contains rules that must be respected. A sacred space implies the existence of a center around which it is concentrated. Much of the spiritual initiation depends on the correct reading of the signs. The forest where Ichabod gets lost represents a reversed instance of the sacred space. It lures the protagonist in its depth and gives him no chance of salvation. It is a new kind of space with its own specific rules. The common laws that usually apply to the sacred or profane space disappear and are replaced by the chaos brought by evil. The forest is the dominion of the headless horseman, the ghost that takes humans with it.

The concept which the text refers to is the one of challenge. Such provocations include appropriate behavior on the part of the participants. What Ichabod does is to interpret wrongly the challenge he makes. Entering the forest alone and without hesitation is an instance of folly and vanity. In a challenge, the opponents must be of the same value, otherwise it is not a fair contest. The two participants must be equal in what represents

the weapons they have. Ichabod makes the mistake of considering himself superior to the horseman. What he lacks is a measure that would have stopped him from undertaking the adventure. Measure is a classical value, providing equilibrium to man. Once it disappears, excesses follow, and the initiation cannot take place. At the same time, Ichabod does not understand that he is in a different place than the ones known to him. He crosses the limit without being aware of it. The horseman becomes the guardian of the threshold as he allows people to enter the forest or not. Survival is the aim of his opponents. He is the master of the forest, and he dictates the rules. It is important to notice that his existence is taken for granted by the villagers who instinctively know how to behave when approaching the woods. Ichabod pushes the limit, and he is punished.

Ichabod meets the horseman in the woods and tries to escape from him. The description made by Irving (1988) concentrates on terror, frightening pursuit and eventually punishment. Space turns into a world of nightmares and dread. The two dimensions, the human and the non-human (the ghost is called a goblin) mingle, riding one along the other, uniting and yet being adverse at the same time. The space of the fantastic invades reality and includes the horseman in the terror of the human.

The concept of the frontier functions in his case. There are three types of space in the story. They correspond to the three parts of an initiation process: departure, adventure, and return. The departure represents abandoning the community, severing the ties that link the protagonist to the common world. Only when the ties are cut can he start on the adventure. The departure is willing and quite easy. The fantastic world is attractive, it fascinates and conquers. Once the protagonist enters the otherworld, he must be careful to read the signs appropriately. He must make the difference between the real world and the supernatural one. The second part of the initiation process is represented by the adventure proper. The protagonist has unexpected encounters, meets several opponents, and has to free people from traps or evil places. Initiation depends on the success of the adventure. The protagonist learns a moral lesson during the tests that await him. Passing the tests is a sign of a spiritual revelation. The adventure must be faced as courage and moral values are essential for the change of the protagonist. He grows spiritually and becomes a different man, wiser and more profound. The return is the most difficult part of the initiation. It is hard to leave the fantastic world behind. Its fascination is hard to endure. The protagonist must return to the common world because he has a moral lesson to teach. Narrating about his adventures, he makes the others part of his own revelation.

In Ichabod's case, the pattern of initiation is incomplete. From the very departure, he makes the mistake of considering himself fit for the adventure. In an initiation process,

the protagonist must start in a state of humility, ready to accept his limits and eager to learn about his surroundings. The departure is a recognition of the lack of knowledge that has to be obtained during the initiation. Ichabod goes to the forest proud and vane, considering himself as already being the winner of the contest. His superficiality condemns him to failure. Deciding to face the horseman contradicts the rule that the people the protagonist meets during the adventure must be the same size as himself. The horseman is obviously a ghostly spirit, having powers that humans do not have. Ichabod should have been more careful when entering the space of his opponent. The adventure is also a failure because no moral lesson is taught during it; on the contrary, Ichabod disappears and is never seen again. The third part, namely the return, does not take place anymore. Ichabod gets lost in the labyrinth of the forest without being saved from his fate. Singing religious hymns cannot protect him from the presence of the horseman.

Space becomes a malefic environment in which evil rules. Its sacredness is changed into a trap closing down on the protagonist. The adventure becomes a nightmare as fears and dangers assault the character. The wilderness becomes a place of punishment for the one entering it. The fantastic is linked to crossing the limit, bringing danger and death. The one who foolishly challenges its evil master must pay. Irving (1988) does not explicitly say if Ichabod became a victim of the horseman. His disappearance is proof enough that something unusual happened. The way he explains the hero's disappearance is made up of rumors and tales with no evidence related to them. Irving (1988) is ironic when he says that Ichabod has not been spirited away by the ghost and has instead moved to another part of the country where he prospered. The whole atmosphere of the story is too much connected to the supernatural to believe that something else has happened.

Another mistake made by Ichabod is that he considered himself the center of the world to which everybody should bow. He imagines himself as the master of the community as he feels that he should be obeyed by all. The challenge he sets against the ghost is wrong because he is not the appropriate authority to be in such a position. The margin tries to become the center. The profane space attempts to replace the sacred and this brings disequilibrium to the world. Only a truly religious man can reach the sacred center. Eliade (2000) mentions that a forest can be the center of the universe because of the tendency of the trees to grow upward. The known world is always in the middle as it brings the difference between the cosmic areas. The forest is an intermediary space between the earth and the sky. Through it, the three dimensions can communicate. The known world as a familiar space is opposed to the forest, the non-familiar space. When entering the center,

man must be aware that the true world is always in the center, in the middle because the communication between the three dimensions takes place here (Eliade, 2000).

The initiated man must take into consideration that all attempts at order are concentrated around a dual difference. The two spaces, which in Irving's (1988) story are the village and the forest, are set in opposition. There is an implicit opposition between the inhabited land and the unknown and undefined space that surrounds the known one. The first is the world, also called cosmos; the other is not a cosmos, but a different world, an alien, chaotic space, full of demons and strangers associated with spirits and ghosts (Eliade, 2000). For Ichabod, the forest is just another place where he can travel. The frontier is represented by the margin of the forest, an imaginary line separating the two dimensions. Lacking the moral value to confront himself with the ghost, Ichabod is punished accordingly.

In the story, the supernatural dominates the space of the village. It influences it both in a direct manner (by the presence of the horseman) and indirectly (by the legends it brings about). Initiation is reversed since no superior knowledge is achieved by facing the unknown. Ichabod's pursuit by the ghost is narrated in a vivid way as if the narrator and the reader were there at the same time. The confusion between the two spaces is increased by the chase, bringing the end of the protagonist. The accent is placed on moving with great speed, reflecting the hero's wish to escape from his ghostly follower. The two spaces become one as Ichabod is dragged away from his journey.

The final blow brings Ichabod to the ground, being hit by the head hurled by the ghost. The supernatural wins because not even the presence of the church saves him. The space of reality gets a spiritual tinge, transforming the opposition into a matter of religion. The church cannot save the one whose pride pushed him to catastrophe. Reality (space, actually) changes according to its protagonists. The power of the ghost is not of human size, and it is invincible even on sacred ground. In this perspective, religion no longer matters, and superstitions take over. Sacred space is defeated by profane space because there is no possibility to escape one's doom. Irving's (1988) conclusion is that magic and the supernatural rule the world. However, he does not plainly say what happens to Ichabod, leaving the reader to come to his own conclusion.

The description made by Irving (1988) points in the direction of magic and superstitions. The alternative proposed by the locals about Ichabod's career is only a diversion. The meeting with the headless horseman is the end of Ichabod, who is never seen again. The pursuit identifies with the German folk tales about demons chasing away humans.

In Irving's story, the ride is set in parallel. "Away then they dashed, through thick and thin; stones flying, and sparks flashing at every bound" (Irving, 1988). The manner in which the pursuit ends is equally frightening. Ichabod's space is invaded by that of the horseman. When he receives the blow on the head the protagonist is symbolically included in the space of his opponent.

He saw the goblin rising in his stirrups and in the very act of hurling his head at him. It encountered his cranium with a tremendous crash—he was tumbled headlong in the dust, and Gunpowder, the black steed and the goblin rider passed by like a whirlwind. (Irving, 1988)

The fearful ending of the adventure corresponds to the emphasis placed on the supernatural in the story.

In both of Irving's (1988) stories, space is perceived in a dual manner, opposing the known and the unknown. If in the case of Rip, the magical space and the sleep help the protagonist to escape his daily problems, having a benefic role, in Ichabod's case, space is like a cage catching him and taking him to his doom. In both stories, the protagonists undergo radical experiences that will affect their future. Rip learns a lesson while Ichabod disappears. Both of them meet the supernatural due to the encounter with the guardian of the threshold. In Ichabod's case, the situation is more sinister because the guardian is also the punisher. Rip's story is more amusing and luminous, while in Ichabod's case, darkness prevails. Space is shaped according to the identity of the protagonist. It can be responsive or repulsive, depending on their adventures. It is the place of revelation and magical encounters. In both cases, space transforms into an image of the universe as it is understood by the protagonists. At the end of the stories, there is only the certainty of the supernatural encounters. Both stories depict the initiation of Man into the deepest mysteries of the human self. It is a moral lesson that Irving (1988) shares with his readers.

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# Embodying Space: The Inside and the Outside of Soma in a Creative Process

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## Abstract

Space is neither a “passive, three-dimensional container” nor a “backdrop for something more dynamic” (McCormack, 2013, p. 2). Space is a process, and so is the body; especially, since the body itself—or the soma, the living body—contains inner spaces, which can and do relate to the spaces outside the body. How do we perceive space and embody space on this multiple scale? How do we feel space, objects, and other bodies while we co-exist? What do those inside spaces transmit while the performers move or stand still through their presence? How can the director envelope and contain these dimensions and be “holding the space” in and around the process? Using Body-Mind Centering® vocabulary,<sup>1</sup> how to be the membrane around the fluid space? The BMC® embryological development studies open a new and even closer perspective to this space within “because it is the embodiment of space versus the embodiment of structure” (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p. 163). How to move from this multilayered/multiscale space utilizing diverse viewpoints of embodiment: taking actions from embodied spaces while holding the space and letting intuition enter the creative process because “space holds the information.” This article seeks to answer these questions and explore the relationship with space, particularly from the perspective of performing art and sculpture.

**Keywords:** embodying space, sensing space, sculpture, performing art, the space between

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<sup>1</sup> “Body-Mind Centering® (BMC®) is an integrated and embodied approach to movement, the body, and consciousness. Developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, it is an experiential study based on the embodiment and application of anatomical, physiological, psychophysical, and developmental principles, utilizing movement, touch, voice, and mind.” Source: <https://www.bodymindcentering.com/about/>



## Introduction

Dance and performing art, in general, is one of the professions or disciplines that deals a lot with space and the body. Through movement, dancers constantly intervene with space and, at the same time, receive information from it. What spectators see is the motion in the outside space, but in embodied performing art, the internal spaces are as important as the outside ones and play a significant role. Even if someone cannot consciously see and name these qualities, they can feel them in their bodies and resonate with the embodied qualities, most probably unconsciously, whether we speak about live performance or “choreographic moving image.”<sup>2</sup>

As I write this text, I am in dialogue with two practitioners and thinkers, namely with Robert Morris<sup>3</sup> sculptor and Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen<sup>4</sup> somatic pioneer, through their texts, while I am also in real-time reciprocal dialogues with friends, colleagues, artists, somatic practitioners from Hungary and Europe. “The 1970s have produced a lot of work in which space is strongly emphasized in one way or another”—writes Morris in the first paragraph of *The Present Tense of Space* (1995). The same 1970s was the time when the first boom in somatics occurred, and when Thomas Hanna invented the term itself, ‘somatics’ (1976) to “describe and unify these processes under one rubric” (Eddy, 2009, p. 7). Somatic practice is about embodied presence and awareness, and it feeds not only into the dance and performance art world, but into other art fields, design, and further disciplines. In this article, I focus on ways to embody space, and artworks in *real* space (e.g. sculptures, performances, installations). The examples I am citing in this text are primarily, but not exclusively, from two sources: artworks from artists living and working in the Eastern-European region and Hungary, and/or works from artists with Body-Mind Centering® somatic background. These are works that I had a chance to meet with and experience.

## Space as Concept, Space as Notion

Space is a scale.

Space is a difference in density.

Space is relation.

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<sup>2</sup> Term invented by Réka Szűcs, in her doctoral dissertation; *On Choreographic Moving Images*, SZFE, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> U.S.; 1931–2018; sculptor; “one of the defining voices in the first wave of American Minimalism” (Laermans, 2015). Among other musicians and visual artists, for example, John Cage, Robert Dunn, and Robert Rauschenberg, Morris also collaborated with Judson Dance Theatre (1962–1964), the iconic group, marking the beginnings of contemporary dance.

<sup>4</sup> U.S.; born in 1941; movement artist, researcher, educator, and therapist and the developer of Body-Mind Centering® somatic school.

Space and its boundaries—meeting  
through the surface.  
Trespass.

—Bernadett Jobbágy

## **Space of the Mind, Space in the Mind, Mind of the Space**

You are standing still. With a breath in, the hands rise and open to the sides, hugging your front space. You bring them closely together in front of your forehead. You stand with relatively straight arms, relaxed. Palms are not touching; you can see through the corridor that they create. What is needed is a strong but narrow focus, accompanied by this hand gesture and a feeling of compression or condensing in the head. Holding the breath—a little pause. Then, while letting the breath out, you softly open the arms sideways upwards and let this condensed feeling spread with the movement—let it expand, open in all directions. With this gentle exhale, guide your arms back down to the outside of the thigh. Feel the sensation of spaciousness enveloping you and permeating your whole body. You can repeat it a few times. If giving attention to breathing is too much, stop focusing on that and keep moving with the compression of the space in front of you and inside and the expansion of the space in and around. It is a physical sensation, a tightening, thickening, condensing in the middle of the brain, then with the opening arms, a 3-dimensional opening, softening, expanding towards the skull and beyond into the space around. Far away. Later, with the hands going down, a sensation of softening in the body from top to down.

Letting the space flow on and around myself.—Is this the space of the mind? I don't want to narrow it down this much.

As I am trying to write down precisely what I do, *what*, *how*, and *where* I feel, I repeat the action, and words come out of my experience. Your felt experience will be your truth. This principle is there in the somatic work and every encounter with art. As art critic Barbara Rose said about Robert Morris's *Glass Labyrinth* in a public talk in 2014: "That is genuinely democratic, in the sense that you have your experience there. It is not his experience, it is not my experience, it is your own experience." (Titusvideo, 2021; The Nelson–Atkins Museum of Art, 2014). This is also about embodiment: it is always personal, besides any similarities or resonance. You have to own your experience.

We have narrow or wide spaces in our minds and can have space between our thoughts. There is space (time) before the response and space (time) between action and reaction. When we are able to just receive information without either actively going for it or acting

upon it, we are “sitting in the synapse” (Bainbridge Cohen, 2013). She continues, “nerves communicate with each other through spaces between them called synapses,” (2013) and that is a physical space in the nervous system. This goes fast; however, embodying the space in the synapse gives one a wider range of choices. A place from where you can go in multiple directions, not just one familiar way.

A space, where something belongs to, a space that something inhibits, a space which lives inside of something, and the space which is unfolding. The space which is in transformation, and space that informs.

We need distance from ourselves, in order to let go. Space to see the larger picture.

## The Emptiness

One of the explanations given by the Cambridge Dictionary of space is “an empty area,” and it is easy to feel and understand space with a sense of emptiness: something about levitation, dilation, expansion, and sparseness. However, space is not empty. Nevertheless, density plays a role in differentiating space and object: there is a mostly denser *substance* or *matter*—the boundaries of space and/or the *objects* within it—and there is what we feel as *space* itself, which is mostly lighter, sparser and has a different quality than the substance. It can be air-filled, fluid-filled, denser, or very sparse, but never empty—even though it may feel so sometimes.

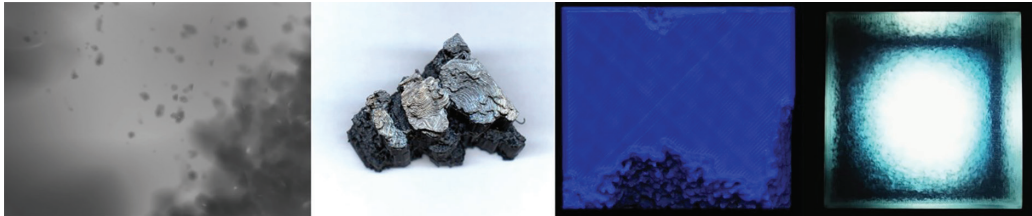
In his art project *1/0*, Zoltán Vadászi is questioning objective reality by reflecting on the physical reality experience through the processes that take place inside the human mind. For the series of *1/0* (see fig. 1), Vadászi uses medical imaging modalities (e.g., CT, MRI, Ultra Sound) in an indirect way and—as he mentions on his website—he scans “abstract[s] of pre-defined physically not presented air entities in 3D, functioning as objective reality fragments.”<sup>5</sup> He visualizes these DICOM (Digital Imaging and COmmunications in Medicine) elements as photographs or video loops, and also creates 3D objects, using different printing techniques. As Vadászi explains, these scanned air entities, as during the scan process everything is continuously changing, reflect onto the superposition—onto “the presence of non-perceptible realities by representing the complexity of decision-making situations.” His artwork also speaks about the perception of emptiness and space and shows that what we may perceive as empty is so much not.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.zoltanvadaszi.com/1-0>

## Figure 1

Images of 1/0 by Zoltán Vadászi



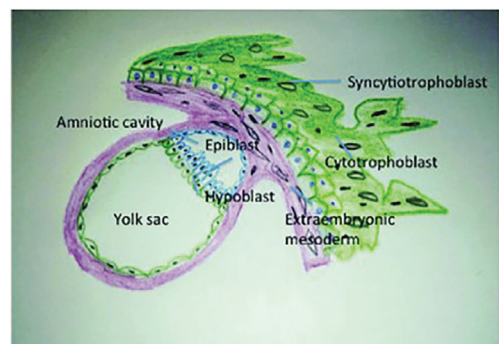
## Space, Structure and Fluids

We need both space and matter, emptiness and substance just like activation and resting, experience and digestion, challenge (stimuli), and comfort (safety, base, home, etc.). One without the other does not work properly.<sup>6</sup> I need to reach out for external impulses, to meet the outside, after I need to go back and inward, to digest. Belonging similarly together, the communication and interaction between space and matter, flow and structure are there from the very beginning of our embryological life.

From the beginning, as the *one cell being* starts to multiply after conception, we immediately start to create our support system. At the blastocyst stage, we already have a differentiated structure of Trophoblast and Embryoblast. Trophoblast after further differentiation will develop supporting structures of the embryo (extraembryonic mesoderm and even the later placenta). Embryoblast will develop the spaces of Yolk sac, and Amniotic cavity with the two-layered Embryonic disc on the meeting surface (see fig. 2). These two layers of cells will be the place where our actual body starts to develop. So, we create, and we are both space and substance, space and structure. It presents a purely relational situation, a dialogue. We need the one for the other as a reference. Furthermore, as there is *substance* in *space* (see Vadászi, 1/0), so there is *space* in the *substance*.

## Figure 2

Bilaminar embryonic disc at 14 days in the implantation site in endometrium (Chakrabarti & Sharma, 2018)



<sup>6</sup> With somatic practice and also through my art, I try to go far beyond this kind of dualism or dichotomy, still, I use these opposites here for an easier explanation and understanding.

The architect and urbanist Tamás Meggyesi writes in his book, *A Külső tér* [The outside space], that contrary to the classic container analogy, where space is what the container encloses, we feel that the container itself is part of the space (Meggyesi, 2004, p. 33). In other words, we are shaping not only the inside but the outside space as well while containing space within itself (e.g., window niche, spaces within the building blocks).

The first space(s) we experience and create in our journey on Earth is (are) fluid-filled. The environment of the cell—internal and external—is a fluid space: an alive space that expands and condenses simultaneously, where nutrients and by-products are transported in fluids. From the moment of conception, we start to create fluid-filled spaces and structures. This very early space is already in transformation, and as we grow, the overall container, the womb, becomes gradually small. With birth, we arrive in the air-filled space and start to experience gravitational force the way we feel it now when reading this text. From this point on, skin, and mucous membrane, are the border between the fluid-filled inner spaces and the air-filled outer spaces.

### How Space Feels?

The way spaces feel, the sound and smell of these places, has equal weight to the way things look. (Holl, 2005, as cited in Pallasmaa, 2005)

This ability to sense and feel, and to base actions upon these felt qualities is one of the powers of being human—not only humans do so. Being aware of that or not, we are affected by this felt quality of space and the spatial arrangement.<sup>7</sup> According to McCormack:

The relation between moving bodies and spaces is more than physical because it is always more than a relation between two discrete things: it is a relation between things already in process. [...] Certainly, space is not reducible to the status of a passive, three-dimensional container within which the intentional action of an embodied, moving subject unfolds. Space, in other words, is never a backdrop for something more dynamic. (2013, p. 2)

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<sup>7</sup> An example comes to my mind from an educational situation: I studied film editing during the pandemic, and it became professionally and emotionally hard, as it was poisoned by the experience of loss in many ways. After the end of the course, on the celebration of receiving our certificates, the team of teachers tried to dissolve unpleasant experiences, so as to get closer to one another as future colleagues. This effort failed, and among the reasons, one significant circumstance was the spatial arrangement of the room. Somewhere in the middle, there was a row of tables strung in a straight line, with chairs behind them, facing to the entrance door. Opposite, in front of the door, there were chairs in an irregular semi-circle, some in two rows, some as a single row. It could be guessed that the teachers sit behind the desk, and we had to sit “unarmoured” on the chairs without even armrests. The whole experience felt rather like a court interrogation than a symbolic act of being made a colleague, which led to an event that worsened the situation.

We have the capacity to feel space itself and be affected by its quality. Often space and places inspire certain pieces of art to be born, or significantly modify the process of becoming.

## Scale and the Body as Reference

As for many artists and theoreticians, my reference point in the scale continuum between macro and micro is the human body. Morris claims “in the perception of relative size the human body enters into the total continuum of sizes and establishes itself as a constant on that scale. One knows immediately what is smaller and what is larger than himself” (1966b, 2<sup>nd</sup> para.). Morris works in space with and through objects, and on his scale, the reference is rather the relationship between the object and the human body. The object can be smaller than the body—we can hold it in hand, we surround it; it can be around the size of the body or a little bigger—the viewer still should be able to perceive it as a whole—that is the *sculptural space* in his understanding; or larger—so it is not possible to perceive the whole object from a single point—the object surrounds us. “At the extreme end of the size range are works on a monumental scale. Often these have a quasi-architectural focus: they can be walked through or looked up at” (Morris, 1967). As a choreographer, I am working with and through the moving body, or bodies, unfolding in space and time, so for me, the body itself is the reference, even when I speak of space. The body relates to space and relates to another body or object through space. The performer’s body also relates to the audience’s bodies and the other way around. The dialogue with *space* is happening towards the *inside space* and towards the *outside space*, pretty much at the same time, and the skin lays there, as boundary and borderland.

The skin itself consists of different layers, which come from different embryological origins: the superficial layer, epidermis, originates from the ectoderm, and the deeper layers—dermis and hypodermis or subcutaneous layer—originate from the mesoderm (mesenchyme). Therefore, the skin is a meeting of layers that orient us both towards the outside world and the inside world. Spaces are related to each other and are also within or around each other. Space is like onion leaves, or the Matryoshka Doll, which denotes a recognizable relationship between ‘object-within-similar-object’ and the relationship of ‘space-within-(similar)space.’ For me as a choreographer and movement educator, the spaces close to the body, and even within the body, have an absolute relevance in the creation process and in the way I think of the perception of the work. Meanwhile, visible movement happens in the kinesphere, the space around the body, or the outside space, and there is a constant dialogue with the inside spaces. Furthermore, the inside spaces may be where the movement is initiated.

## The Outside

I am lying down. Lying down and grow.  
I feel the coolness of the floor,  
and I feel as past my body,  
the micro distances glide by.<sup>8</sup>

—Bernadett Jobbágy

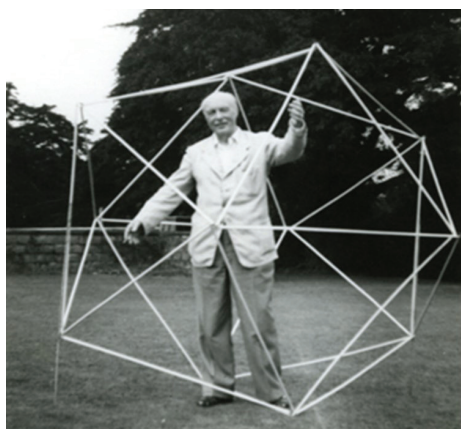
If the body is the reference point in the space continuum, the spaces outside the skin are the outer spaces, and the spaces inside the skin are the inner spaces on this scale. The dancer and theoretician Rudolf Lábán (Rudolf von Laban) worked with this outside space in a structured way. During the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, he created his theories based on the space-time-force trinity of the movements. He related human movements to geometrical forms and

built constructions based on the Platonic solids. [...] The icosahedron was the polyhedron most used by Laban and, in the field of dance, is often referred to as 'Laban icosahedron' (see fig. 3). Photographs of dancers, practicing and performing inside an icosahedron, date back to the second decade of the XX century (Bertol, 2015)

—before Robert Morris, Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, and most pioneers of postmodern and contemporary dance or dancefilm were born.

Laban, among other things, also invented the notion of Kinesphere, which is “the sphere around the body whose periphery can be reached by easily extended limbs without stepping

away from that place which is the point of support when standing on one foot” (Laban, 1966). “This spherical space around our body shifts as soon as we shift our weight. It is also the first area of movement exploration before going into ‘space in general’” (Thiriot, n.d.).



**Figure 3**

Image of Rudolf Laban  
in icosahedron from 1955  
(Bertol, 2015)

<sup>8</sup> The poem originally written in Hungarian by the author, in 2002. In original language: “Fekszem. Fekszem, és nővök./ Érzem a padló hűvösét,/ és érzem, ahogy suhannak testem mellett/ a mikron-nyi távolságok.”



Mátyás Fusz, with his recent sculptures, is also addressing the spaces close to the body, the spaces connected to the skin—but a special part of these spaces: the hidden ones. Fusz, on the one hand, reflects on the “representation of reality,” and “the question of reality as a common language,”<sup>9</sup> on the other hand, he deals with the subjectivity of vision: how we perceive the world, each other, and the objects in it. His works depict “the grey zones of perception and space that subconsciously affect our daily lives [...] the sparsely perceptible details of space that hide from us in our own bodies, in the bodies of others, or in the world.”<sup>10</sup> Therefore, similarly to Vadász’s work, *1/0*—Fusz transcribes the unseen space visible. He manifests something which is hidden, and in the case of his works *My father was not a glassmaker*, *Rückenkopf* (see fig. 4) and *Dead Space Shield* these are the invisible parts of space, the “perspectival shadows and dead spaces,”<sup>11</sup> which are out of the body, but also touching the skin. József Mélyi (2002) art historian poses the same question of how the artist can present the forms of his own body that he hides from himself when viewed from a certain point; and continues by wondering how the part of an object, a living being or a space that is hidden from the viewer’s eye from one angle can become visible, and also wonders about the way a 360-degree view or a tour of a room/a city be perceived in a single object or a series of objects.

### Figure 4

Works of Mátyás Fusz. Left: *Rückenkopf*; right: *My father was not a glassmaker*.



<sup>9</sup> <https://www.leopoldbloomaward.com/nominees/2023>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.fuszmatyas.com/myfather>

<sup>11</sup> <https://kisterem.hu/exhibitions/ruckenkopf/>



## Intimacy and Publicness

Fusz's sculptures have a certain intimacy because of their closeness to the skin, even if their size is beyond or on the edge of the *intimate mode*, according to Morris, as he writes about scale: "[t]he quality of intimacy is attached to an object in a fairly direct proportion as its size diminishes in relation to oneself. The quality of publicness is attached in proportion as the size increases in relation to oneself" (Morris, 1966b). For him, "the intimate mode is essentially closed, spaceless, compressed, and exclusive" (Morris, 1966b) as in this case the subject, the viewer, is embedding the object. On the other end of his scale, if the space is on the architectural scale, the object is embedding the viewer; they do not have their own space but coexist. "In the first case, one surrounds, in the second, one is surrounded" (Morris, 1995, p. 182). Morris considers space larger than or of human size but smaller than the architectural scale as sculptural space. It is the scale, where the object–subject relationship can be maintained.

In performing art, especially live performance, the scale is similar to the *sculptural space*, and the relationship between the performer(s) and the audience is maintained. The situation is unique, though in contemporary dance, more and more often, the performer enters the *kinesphere* (personal space) of the viewer, or vice versa; therefore, they are in an intimate closeness. At the other extreme, while the size and scale of stages widely vary, it is also unique to have a dance or theatre performance on the *architectural scale*. While the size and the atmosphere of the space are part of the overall action, the scale of intimacy differs from Morris's sculptural reading. In a performative situation, the scale starts from where a body-to-body relationship is interpreted because of the difference between a chamber performance—something in an intimate and/or small space—and a performance in a large theatre hall. Such elements as the distance between the performers and the audience—the smell of their bodies or the wind their movements stir up; the acoustic characteristic connected to the scale of space; and also, the number of people who view the performance become part of our experience and also create or modify the feeling of intimacy or publicness.

The place of a performance is always a public space, at least for the time of the event (or semi-public because you have to pay to enter). Yet there is a difference between indoor and outdoor performances on stage or in a specific location. There are so-called environmental performances in which the chosen space of the performance is an even stronger part of the artistic vision and a defining part of the piece. These environmental performances can be either site-adapted, like *Légszükséglet* [Urgent Need to Breathe] by Ziggurat Project (fig. 5), when the already performed choreography was adapted

to an empty pool,<sup>12</sup> or site-specific, like Anja Gysin's *HOFFNUNG* [HOPE] (fig. 6) where the performance (or *dance installation*, as the artist calls) is imagined into that specific site. Gysin's work is not only site-specific but also time-specific. Anja Gysin is a choreographer and somatic movement educator with Body-Mind Centering® background who creates embodied performances in nature. The work *HOPE* was placed in nature and timed for dawn, so the growing natural light was an integral part of the performance. At the end of the piece, the performers offered coffee and tea to the audience, as part of the event, therefore, the smell and warmth of the fresh drinks were part of the experience (Kanton Solothurn, 2021). In such artistic choices, the audience is invited to connect to the place itself, while being in the real space. The intention of the shared moment is honest and, in a way, more 'real' than in traditional theatre performances. That is one way to embody space—to be with it. Such a performance is an intimate one, besides the scale and openness of the site.

### Figure 5

Environmental performances

*Urgent Need to Breathe* (Légszükséglet, 2018)



Photo: Attila Balogh.

### Figure 6

Environmental performances

*Hope* (Anya, n.d.)



Another direction is that of the private places. Numerous theatre, dance, or music performances are placed in private properties, in many cases in the creator's home. This *residential theatre* form directly addresses the *quality of intimacy*—even though the scale of the space is again beyond what Morris calls intimate—the scale on which the body surrounds the object.

<sup>12</sup> "The piece was inspired by free-diving. In the performance, we breathe together, but at the same time, our deep breaths focus our attention on our own bodies and spirits. We dive into space together."—says the synopsis of the piece. Its premiere in 2018 was in a theatre space—although already not in a classic black box situation. In line with the original idea, the piece was later adapted to the space of an abandoned swimming pool. In both versions, the space of the audience and the space of the performers overlap and meet each other. <http://zigguratproject.com/projektek#/legsukseglet-teradaptalt-verzio/>

In Budapest, this form dates back to 1972, when the Kassák House Studio's production, entitled *The Murder in the Skanzen* was banned, so the company could only continue its activities in the private apartment of Péter Halász and Anna Koós, at Dohány Street. At that time the private home as a protected space, as the sanctity of the private sphere, was a political refuge and a necessity. Today it is more of an economic constraint or a play with the privateness and publicness of space. However, it may again be an effect of recent cultural policy processes, of which the independent scene is one of the most vulnerable actors. Some examples of this form in the contemporary dance scene in Budapest are *MAJDHALESZIDOM* [WHENI'LLHAVETIME] (2018) by Anna Réti (fig. 7), also *IITTHONN* [Here at Home] (2019), and *OOTTHOONN* [At Home] (2023) by Dávid Somló and Imre Vass.

### **Figure 7**

Residential performance. Anna Réti: *WHENI'LLHAVETIME*  
(Réti, n.d.)



Photo: Máté Lukács.

The intimacy in these cases comes from the fact that we are in a personal space and that the number of audiences is limited. The space itself is smaller than a usual performance venue, and how to get there and enter already requires a personal interaction between the artist and the beholder. We might see small details, like close-ups in a film, which again gives the feeling of closeness and intimacy. Similarly to being invited to someone's home, it feels different to see a performance in the space (venue) of the company from seeing the same piece somewhere else on a theatre stage. Somehow, there is an additional quality when we enter someone's space compared to when the work is staged out of it, somewhere where the performers and the audience are both strangers.

## Embodied Reality of Space

"One of the conditions of knowing an object is supplied by the sensing of the gravitational force acting upon it in actual space. That is, space with three, not two coordinates" (Morris, 1966a). Gravity is one of the basic and general forces acting upon us, so it is a key element in embodying space because it offers a very physical sensation of reality, the existence of the body on Earth with its weight and presence. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, new dance trends liberated the body from previous forms—ballet in a way a complete illusion of weightlessness—and let gravitational force become visible in dance. Poetically, "Merleau-Ponty suggests that the body is not only a settlement for the mind, but it is the center of gravity for human's existence in the universe" (Ghahramani et al, 2014). Contact Improvisation (CI) technique developed out of the exploration of the human body, in relationship to others' bodies and gravity. This open-source (not trademarked) form of improvised partner dance roots back to 1972 and credited mainly to Steven Paxton. It's definition can be found in Contact Quarterly by Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith, and Lisa Nelson as: two bodies create a singular one through a point of contact (i.e., back to wrist, shoulder to thigh, head to foot, back to back) so they can share the weight equally between themselves and then create a movement dialogue that can last as long as both of them are completely engaged in it. Therefore, it is about the weight exchange with the other person and a dialogue with the floor and space. Moreover, dancers are aware not only of their individual center of gravity but also of the center of gravity of the dance itself, in the duo/trio. Today, Contact Improvisation is an essential part of the curriculum in every dance school, and is also used in actors' training, or in a coaching context. Becoming aware of weight, gravity, and space is fundamental in performing arts, but also to feel the embodiedness of our physical reality. Therefore, another way of embodying space is through working with gravity and anti-gravity—relating to earth and heaven—, and to 'horizons' as it is the field of connections. This entails sensing, feeling, and acting upon the weight of the body, or being pulled by the space around.

"Most of us walk around in a split universe, the sensorial one in which the sun rises, and the rational one in which the earth turns"—writes Steve Paxton in his book *Gravity* (2018, p. 41). In physics, gravity is a fundamental interaction that causes mutual attraction between all bodies with mass or energy. This is such a strong force upon our bodies that we feel it is stronger than the centrifugal force by the turning of the planet. We feel *up* and *down*, but it is a subjective sensation. *Down* is towards the center of gravity, which in the case of the Earth–body relationship is practically the center of the Earth, and *up* is the away from the center of gravity. Theoretically, each human is being pulled by the Earth, and vice versa. With our minds, we can easily see this, if we imagine people standing

on the ground in different spots of the globe. Each of them feels the same subjective and relative *down* towards the earth and *up* towards the sky, but the objective directions are towards the center of the Earth or away. In other words: “our own individual accesses meet in the center of Earth” (HumanTurn, 2020, 01:27). This also may give a sensation of connectedness with each one of us.

## Space and the Senses

This gravitational force is registered in the inner ear, in the labyrinthine system, and also in every cell of the body. Perception of touch, proprioception together with the vestibular system is the first sense to develop and underly the development of other senses (Bainbridge Cohen, 2005). Later, the development of our movement toward space is supported by all senses—the taste and smell orient us in the near space,<sup>13</sup> while hearing and vision connects to the space further away. Based on and supported by the senses, our reflexes develop:

primitive reflexes, righting reactions and equilibrium responses are a continuum of automatic patterns of movement that underlines our volitional movement. These patterns develop in response to the interaction between our internal state of being and gravity, other people and space. (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p. 124. originally published in *Contact Quarterly* (14)2, 1989)

Being on Earth underneath holding our weight, with the air-filled space around is not only a basic realm that we cannot ignore or escape from, but also a basic experience we all share.

## What the Body Remembers

This quoted dialogue between Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen and Nancy Stark Smith is far too long for a “normal academic paper,” but here I wish to have space for it in its wholeness:

NANCY: In Contact [Contact Improvisation, or CI—the author], in terms of head righting reaction, one stimulates a kind of spatial disorientation (along with a more spherical sense of space) by letting the head feel its own weight and move around on the spine, not always keeping it on top but looking at things sideways, etc. It is a key in how

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<sup>13</sup> Newborns have an amazing ability to locate their mother’s breast, which ability is strongly supported by sensory cues, especially smell, which is highly developed in newborns. Some animals are adapted to olfaction much more than humans. For them, olfaction is maybe like vision is for us in navigation. In animals and in humans too, our sense of smell is also tied to memory and to memory of a place (Poo and colleagues, 2022).

people are dancing. A lot of things seem to kick in when people can move with their heads in different relation to their spines and to gravity. I've experienced differences too between just letting my head be a weight and using it spatially like a limb, which really seems to open imagination.

BONNIE: What you are describing is letting go of the head righting reactions, which are controlled at the midbrain level, and not very imaginative, in the sense that head righting is kind of a one-response: the head always stays vertical in relationship to gravity no matter what the rest of your body is doing. Staying in the righting reaction, not experimenting, might be an example of the 'there is only one correct way' attitude.

I feel what happens when you just let your head go heavy is that you're actually going below the righting reactions, you are trapping into even lower responses. So in a certain way you're more primitive and have even less choices because you don't have any response except for the yielding to gravity [Tonic Lab]<sup>14</sup> which is controlled by the low brain. When this occurs, one loses the enlivening nature of the RRs [Righting Reactions] and the equilibrium responses. In order to come out of that state, one simply has to remember or become aware of these other possibilities.

If you want to go above the RRs to the ERs [Equilibrium Responses], then the head becomes an extremity in its own right, so that it can move into space in the same way that the arms and legs do. I would also say that the tail becomes a limb. With the equilibrium responses you go to forebrain control in which case everything is possible. Using the head as another limb allows more possibilities; it opens up cortical imagination.

NANCY: So you think the imagination is cortical?

BONNIE: I think imagination is the function of cortex. What often happens is we imagine something with the cortex and the cortex also tries to figure out how to do it. I think that is the mistake. The rest of the nervous system can handle how it is done. The function of the cortex is to imagine and then let the rest carry it through. When we internalize a movement pattern, it becomes subcortical and then we are able to open up the cortical, the imagination. We work at all these subcortical levels so that they can efficiently carry out our imaginings, our inspirations. (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p. 133, originally published in *Contact Quarterly* (14)2, 1989)

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<sup>14</sup> Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex [Tonic Lab] is the one that draws us towards the Earth by increasing the postural tone (a sense of aliveness and weightedness) of the muscles on the underside of the body (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p. 127).

Speaking about the process of dance and creation, I'd like to highlight two elements of this conversation. One thing is, reflecting on the last paragraph, that in a learning process, dancers practice movements (choreography or training material) again and again, as many times, that they don't have to *think about it*—that's the moment when they actually learned it, embodied it: the moment from when the body remembers. The pattern is created and already sunk to subcortical levels. What has entered, or *passed into the body* can be recalled in a faster response cycle. It is the way to master any movement-based skill, from drawing to dance, and the way to release higher brain capacity for creative thinking. The other thing I wish to point out is that in our developmental process, we embody and integrate primitive reflexes, righting reactions, and equilibrium responses, but oftentimes dancers have to unlearn (re-write) some, to make themselves able to do multiple movement patterns and qualities. The head righting reaction is definitely one to unlearn—*letting go*, as Bonnie<sup>15</sup> says, so that the head can drop if we imagine so, or explore space as a limb.

## The Inside

With each breath, I am getting in contact with the space outside, and the space inside.

—Walburga Glatz

One possibility is to embody the anatomical structures and spaces that exist in our adult bodies, the containers and contents—for example, the skeletal-muscular cave of the thoracic cavity (container) with the thoracic organs: the lung, heart and the thymus in it (content) with their fluid environments; or embody the muscular chambers of the heart (container) and the fluid flow through them (dynamic content); or to embody the pericardium and the pulmonary sac, and the peri-organ fluid space between them, the motility of the heart and lungs in the visceral joints, etc. That is the embodiment of a physical structure and a physical space: a cavity, an organ, or even the cells. The metaphor of the onion skins or the Matryoshka Doll is present here: one organ that is content in one case, if we zoom in, it becomes the container.

A different possibility is to embody the *sense of space* through working with embryological development because that is “the embodiment of space versus the embodiment of structure” (Bainbridge Cohen, 2012, p. 163). In the embodiment of embryological

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<sup>15</sup> In the Body-Mind Centering® community, even in the training programs, people and teachers refer to Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen on her first name, and mostly just notes ‘as Bonnie says.’ She herself is also a very accessible person, with whom I had chance to meet and talk and eat in person. So, in most cases I try to refer correctly to her as ‘Bainbridge Cohen,’ but this informal way feels more appropriate here.



processes, we go through a series of spaces and structures that disappear in our adult bodies but can still inform our movements. Such early spaces are the Yolk Sac and the Amniotic Cavity, for example, or structures like the Notochord or the primary and secondary kidneys.

## Working From Inside

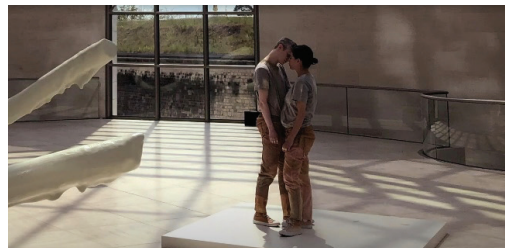
Artists have always been interested in the body, and recently, more and more towards soma (the living body) and the inside spaces of the body. The sculptor Nairy Baghramian speaks beautifully and from a very embodied space about the background of her works:

To take a pose, is in itself a temporary state, that needs the act of releasing to be able to formulate or form the next pose. You need a rest, at least to release the joints. The act between the two poses, that uncertain moment of contemplation captures my full attention. (BOSS, 2020, 00:21–00:47)

She connects the inner structure of the sculptural material with the inside spaces of the human body (fig. 8). That uncertain moment of contemplation she refers to is something Morris calls the *I mode* of the self—from the philosopher George Herbert Mead—in his text *The Present Tense of Space*. I can also relate Baghramian's thoughts to a state of mind that Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen names as sitting in the synapse. This is the pre-required state in performing art, especially working with improvisation or instant creation, and more generally, for being present in any action. Baghramian connects to the material itself: "I have a very classical way of working, a traditional way of thinking of materials to get the sense of the politics of the material, the shape, so I have to be very close. I have to understand it" (BOSS, 2020, 02:40–02:51). That contemporary artistic statement is an embodied philosophy of art.

## Figure 8

Stills from the video interview with Nairy Baghramian  
(BOSS, 2020)





The dancer and choreographer Zrinka Šimičić Mihanović is inspired by embryological development and transcribes this process into performative action and installation in the physical space. *Dobra voda* [Good Water] is a choreographic work that

starts from an embodied exploration of the history of one's own creation and the relationship between individual versus joint experience. [...] The processes of division, differentiation, transformation, migration, have equally shaped and are shaping the individual body of every one of us, [...] as well as the collective body. (Šimičić Mihanović, n.d.)

In this performative work, the Croatian artist uses a previously prepared paper material as a prop and set design (see fig. 9). The sounds these papers create in the space of the performance while the dancers are moving are as important as the moving bodies. In the choreography, the dancers start as a group close together, covered with the material. They move together, migrate, then move apart, and later come together again. The structure of the work is somewhere between the dance performance and installation: they set up the space, do the performance 2 or 3 times in a loop—the audience can enter and leave at any time—and after the performance is over, the space remains there as an installation. Sometimes, from this point on, the public can experiment with the material and the space. It is a beautiful example not only of using embodied inspiration but also of analog multimedia work.

### Figure 9

*Dobra voda* [Good Water] by Zrinka Šimičić Mihanović



Photo: Jasenko Rasol.

## Conclusion

As a dancer and performer, you know the abilities of your body. You know your limits. This knowledge is used consciously, and on purpose—even if we work with improvisation, and trigger intuition in the creative process, or even though often it is hard to speak about it or verbalize what is happening. Indeed, it is not only a cortical way of existing, but when we come to the application and appreciation of this embodied knowledge, it is already on a subcortical level. The framing of a process, and the holding of it, definitely needs cortical presence. The choreographer and director need to be the membrane around the work to keep it together. However, a membrane is also a fluid-filled special space in itself; a container and space at the same time. Staying fluid in the structure, and finding the stability of space, that's what embodied creation offers.

## Acknowledgements

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# Hydronyms of Ethnic Origin in the Körös River Area

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## Abstract

The subject of my study is the presentation of hydronyms of ethnic origin from a morphological approach. By processing the river hydronyms of the Körös region, which covers an area of more than 27,000 square kilometers, we can get an overview of the name-creating activities of the population of the studied area. From the history of Hungarian hydronym research, I mention the main registers, databases, and processings that contain ethnonyms, presenting the chronological and sociological diversity and variety of the region. In the lexical-morphological structure of two-part hydronyms, the most common are the extensional name parts that express the peculiarity (e.g., size, shape, color, temperature, age, condition, smell, taste, speed, sound, ethnic name). The role of ethnic names in hydronyms is determinative in inferring the occurrence of certain ethnic elements. Since the name itself identifies, the function of a place name is then the distinction from the environment, the separation from it. This method is also valid in hydronymy. As a result of this, we find such place names as Csehi, Oroszi, Tóti, Olaszi, and hydronyms such as Beseny-ér, Bosnyák-patak, Cseh-ér, Czigányi csermely, Kun-ér, Orosz-ér, Rác-patak, etc.

**Keywords:** onomastics, hydronyms, ethnonyms, localization, denomination

## Introduction

Place names play a significant role in the history of the Hungarian language, since the earlier and the present water names as scattered forms in a foreign language environment give an image of the written state of the Hungarian language, and their development sheds light on the changes in the language as a whole. For this reason, a systematic examination of the nomenclature allows general conclusions to be drawn through the monographic processing of the area's nomenclature.

In this paper, I will examine the names of the small and large rivers of the Körös area in the light of the linguistic contacts of the peoples living or once living alongside them. The aim of the research is to show how naming has worked from the beginning up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, according to the occurrence of the following peoples: Pecheneg, Bosnian, Roma, Czech, Greek, Cuman, Hungarian, Moravian, Italian, Russian, Rhacians, Romanian, Szekler and Tatar. The structure of the paper is divided into three major sections: (a) a presentation of the territory and the associated literature on the water names; (b) a classification of the water names containing ethnonyms by territorial occurrence; (c) a summary and conclusions.

## Hydronyms in the study area

### Introducing the region

The Körösök catchment area was chosen because of its large geographical area, which gives it a very rich nomenclature and a diverse population of different ethnicities. My PhD dissertation (*Name Taxonomic Analysis of the Körös Rivers Basin*), which analyses more than two thousand river names, provides the linguistic community with important conclusions that give a credible picture of the changes in the linguistic state reflected in the hydronyms. From this corpus, the present research paper will systematize only the vernacular water names in this paper. The river water names of the 27,000 square kilometres of the area under study provide a reliable overall picture of the naming activity of the inhabitants of the region, which is essentially clustered around the Hungarian and Romanian languages.

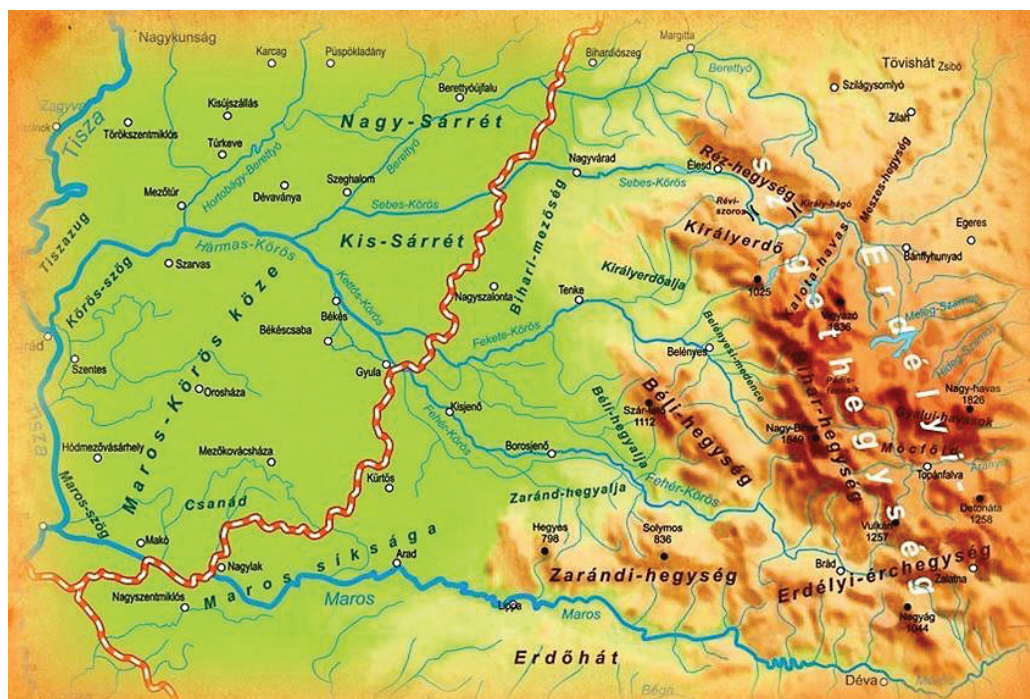
The hydronym of *Körösök* itself includes the names of the major *Körös* branches, namely the *Sebes*, *Fekete*, *Fehér*, *Kettős* and *Hármas-Körös*. It is probable that the *Hármas-Körös* in Hungary is simply referred to as *Körös*, but the three larger branches in Romania are also identified separately by this name by its users within a certain region. The total length of the rivers known as the *Körösök* is 741.3 km, and 200 km after the branches originating in Transylvania join, they flow into the Tisza, in Hungary. The Berettyó-Körös region is one of the south-eastern central plateaus of the Great Plain, largely in the northern part of Békés County in Hungary and the southern part of Hajdú-Bihar County. It has a small strip in the south-eastern part of Jász-Nagykun-Szolnok County and its eastern part is in the south-western part of Bihor County and the north-western part of Arad County, the latter two located in Romania. It covers an area of 4361 km<sup>2</sup> in Hungary, on the plain between the Hortobágy–Berettyó, Berettyó and Körösök. Its most important settlements are Gyula, Békés and Berettyóújfalu in Hungary, and Nagyvárad (Romanian: Oradea; German: Grossvardein), Nagyszalonta (Romanian: Salonta; German: Grossalontha) and Margitta (Romanian: Marghita; German: Margarethen) on the Romanian side.



The Körösvidék (Romanian: Crișana; German: Kreischgebiet) is a geographical and historical region in Romania, but in old Hungarian sources the name Körösország (Körös country) is found as a popular name for the Körös region of the former Bihar County, largely in the Partium area. The illustrative map below shows the extent of the Körösök catchment area.

### Map 1

The water catchment area of the Körösök



Source: <https://www.korosoknaturpark.hu/a-korosok-volgye-terseg/>

### Onomastic studies

The history of Hungarian water names research spans several centuries. Because of their linguistic bridging role, water names are best suited to shed light on the ethnic history of the given area. And major rivers are not only a bridge between languages in time but also in space, as they provide an excellent opportunity for linguistic contact between the peoples living alongside them (Hoffmann, 2009, pp. 210–211). As Lajos Kiss puts it, the names of such major rivers are in reality international property (2000, p. 7). This extremely complex and colourful topic is continued by Rita Póczos, who summarises

the development of the oldest layer of water names in the Carpathian Basin, complemented by the history of recent international research (2010, p. 83), and Erzsébet Györffy, in her monograph published in 2011, which provides an excellent summary of the history of Hungarian water names research and theoretical issues of water names research.

In the early period of classification work, the collection and classification of water names was not separated by sharp boundaries from the research aspects of other place-name types. In addition to the extensive works of Attila T. Szabó (1944), Lajos Lőrincze (1947, 1949), Mihály Hajdú (1999 and 2002), Miklós Hints (1995, pp. 45–46) and István Hoffmann (2003) summarised the results of Hungarian place-name research.

The gazetteers were created thanks to the systematic collection of place names in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These works included the lexification of place-name material in the synchronic language state and in historical sources. János Lipszky set himself the goal of producing a 1:470 000 scale map of Hungary consisting of a detailed map (*Mappa Generalis*, 1806), a name index (*Repertorium*, 1808) and an overview map (*Tabula Generalis*, 1810)—it is commendable that the name index includes major water names among its macrotoponyms. Also, a product of the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century is the multi-volume work by Dezső Csánki (1890–1913) on the historical geography of the Hunyadi era, which, with its interdisciplinary character, is linked to a number of other disciplines. Frigyes Pesty, a historian and member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, collected a huge amount of place names in 68 volumes between 1862 and 1867 with the help of the Austrian administration of autocracy, using a questionnaire system, which probably provides the last overview of place names in the Carpathian Basin (Kiss M., 2009). The Bihar County, which is relevant for the Körösök, has appeared in two volumes published by István Hoffmann and Tamás Kis, and the Hungarian Linguistic Directory Programme will continue to publish the Pesty manuscripts in print from 2023, first Máramaros, and soon the Kővár region and Central Szolnok will be published.

In his work entitled *Geographical Dictionary of Hungary* (1851), Fényes Elek published names of towns, villages, steppes and waters. Another equally important linguist, Szabó T. Attila has long been associated internationally with the *Database of Transylvanian Historical Place Names*, which is rich in original archival and historical publications, and in the most varied contemporary genres (estate and service censuses: urbaria and inventories; wills, class letters, registers of deeds and objects, records of interrogations, exchange and sale documents, receipts, registers of expenses, public letters, legal documents, princely decrees, church visitation, etc, legislative, town council, chair minutes, registers of births, letters of serfs, account books of the various guilds,



correspondence, court records, family archives, chronicles, diaries, meditations, missals). The data thus cover not only the official language, but also the various dialects in Transylvania, including the language of the leading men, craftsmen, farmers, innkeepers, etc., people of various ranks and classes who were tried or interrogated as witnesses. The material of the *Database of Transylvanian Historical Place Names* is the result of more than half a century of archival research by the author and contains more than a million records of an extraordinarily wide variety of languages.

It is always worth reviewing the geographical names, because they often have a high informational value compared to the strictly enumerated names in the data archives, although we will see that the two modes of communication in the early country descriptions are by no means mutually exclusive. András Vályi's three-volume local history work, namely the *Description of the Hungarian Country* (1796–1799) is the first alphabetical gazetteer of localities published in Hungarian, listing more than 12,500 settlements and describing their most important economic and demographic data. Among the geographic works, the second volume of János Hunfalvy's series on the history of geography and country studies, entitled *Describing the Natural Conditions of the Hungarian Empire* (1863), described the entire catchment area of the Körös in detail. The author also makes use of a considerable number of settlement names not shown on the maps to identify water names, so that new water names or rather occasional water names and water name circumscriptions are created for many hydronyms. With this in mind, I have compared the water names of Hunfalvy with other relevant data in the processing and only included them in the analysis if the name had no variant from other sources and appeared only in Hunfalvy. Lajos Haán (1870) presented the history of Békés County in his monograph entitled *The History of Békés County*, based on data from 1715, with a claim to authenticity. Although some ethno-etymological interpretations can be found in the description, the value of the work is indisputable. The turn of the century saw the publication of the Samu Borovszky series of scholarly publications (26 in all), namely *The Counties and Cities of Hungary*, the sixth book of which included a mountain and hydrographic section in the description of Bihar County by József Korbély. A particular advantage of such geographic works is that they provide a wealth of water names, but the water names are not only listed but also presented, thus in many cases eliminating misunderstandings which might not be avoided by the mere occurrence of a name.

The first dictionary containing only proper nouns denoting water was the two-volume glossary of Tivadar Ortvy (1882) entitled *The Old Hydrography of Hungary Until the End of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century*, in which he attempted to reconstruct the hydrography of Árpád-era

Hungary on the basis of processing articles of the contemporary water names. Ortway did not give the reading or the present-day colloquial form for the title of each vocabulary article, but highlighted one of the forms of the alphabet. This was followed by the occurrences of the name: the spelling, the year and subject of the document, and then the references in the literature. This rich collection of names includes many variants of the Körös, such as: *Chrysims, Cris, Crisus, Crisyius, Crys, Gerasus, Gilfil, Gilpit, Grasia, Grisius, Grissia, Keres, keurus, Kewres, Iris, Irisius, Krisus, Iriss, Kyrus, Grissia, Sebea-Köröat, Crisius Albus, Feyer keres, Feyrkyrus*, etc.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the appearance of place-name dictionaries describing the initial state of the Hungarian language, which mainly recorded the place-name material of macrotoponyms, larger bodies of water and settlements. The base of Old Hungarian place-name research is currently at the Department of Hungarian Linguistics of the University of Debrecen. The research group has targeted a hitherto neglected place-name type, the microtoponyms, and launched a project to process the completed volumes of Györffy György's *The Historical Geography of Árpád-period Hungary 1–4*. (1963–1998) in accordance with the requirements of modern data repositories. One of the series is entitled *Historical Data on Place Names From the Early Old Hungarian Period*, and this publication is presented together with the corresponding place names of the individual counties, which the researchers have made even more illustrative by publishing name maps. Among the sources of the Early Hungarian place-name dictionary 1000–1350, Györffy's *Historical Geography* has a special place, and has been an authoritative source for researchers of Hungarian language history for decades.

These repositories have served as the basis for numerous water name processings from the 20<sup>th</sup> century onwards. One of the representatives of the Budapest school, János Melich, presented the ethnic composition of the Carpathian Basin in the *Hungarian Occupation Period by Means of Place-naming* (1925–29), and his (linguistic) historian followers carried on the results of his previous works. One need only think of István Kniezsa's monograph, namely *The Peoples of Hungary in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century* (1938/2000), in which he arrived at far-reaching conclusions mainly through the analysis of place names. In his next major study (*The place-names of Eastern Hungary*, 1943/2001), he processed and classified all the present-day place-names of historical Transylvania and its northern and western border regions appearing in documents up to 1400, stating that of all the peoples that can be identified by place-names (Slavs, Hungarians, Saxons, Romanians), the Romanians were undoubtedly the latest to arrive, which is justified by the fact that only exceptionally are there place-names before 1400 that are of Romanian origin.

Kniezsa's study entitled *Water Names of Slavic Origin in Szeklerland* (1948) described the etymology of water names of Slavic origin. Kniezsa's conclusions on the topic were expanded by Loránd Benkő's comments. In his summarizing study, Deme warned (1948) that although maps often use abbreviations, the researcher cannot arbitrarily shape his name material to his own intentions. It is not enough to quote from a military map, one must also consult Pesty's collection. Lajos Kiss has presented the water names of several regions (Transylvania, Transdanubia) using the same method, in which two aspects meet: the chronological (ancient, medieval, modern) and the aspect of descent stratification (Indo-European, Slavic, Hungarian, German, Turkish) (1997/1999b). Examining the water names of Transylvania, he finds that almost without exception they are either of Hungarian (Northern Transylvania) or Slavic (Southern Transylvania) origin (cf. Kniezsa 1943, 66).

The more recent syntheses of place names, including water names, analyse and organise the historical data based on the multi-level place-name typology model developed by István Hoffmann (1993/2007). The applied model discusses names from two perspectives: one of structural analysis and the other of origin-history analysis. These main categories naturally include additional subcategories, the more detailed presentation of which is presented in the theoretical section. Many of the analyses in the *Hungarian Names Archive Publications* follow this pattern, but also in several studies researchers apply the Hoffmann nomenclatural procedure, especially to the old Hungarian place-name material (Reszegi and Győrffy, 2003; Tóth 2003; Póczos 2003; Kovács 2008; Kocán, 2008ab, 2009; Sebestyén, 2015, 2016, 2017).

The sources of water name collection and the methodological issues of material dissemination were defined by Attila T. Szabó (1934, pp. 160–168), laying the foundations of modern place-name collection not only in Transylvania, but in the entire Hungarian language area. He emphasized that the basic requirement in the method of collection is that we should never collect only the characteristic or interesting place names, but the totality of place names of a certain settlement unit. In the case of rivers, it is more natural to group water names in the catchment area of the river according to the direction of its course. Accordingly, name collections that had detailed descriptions of the historical geography of the whole territory of Hungary have proved to be the most reliable data, as well as works that describe a single major water section.

In line with the above, I have used three main sources to collect the names of the water bodies of the Körösök: geographical descriptions, data bases and dictionaries, and older and more recent maps. Among the geographic works, the works of Hunfalvy, Haán and Borovszky provided a detailed overview of the area under study, which I supplemented

with the relevant parts of the historical geography of the Árpád period by Györffy (1963–1998). I collected relevant water names from HA. 1–3, ETH. volumes 3, 10 and 11, and from the manuscript place-name collection of Frigyes Pesty for Arad, Békés and Bihar counties. In addition to the geographical dictionaries (FNESz. and KMHSz.), I also included Ortway's Old Hungarian water names in the research, and Anita Rácz's historical-etymological dictionary of Bihar County (Rácz, 2004). Since most of the catchment is located in Romania, I added all the river names from the present-day database of the cadastral water names register of the Romanian administration (ANAR.), which of course contains data in Romanian, because these names help to navigate on administrative and hydrographic maps (Kiss M. 2013, p. 491).

Initially, landmarks were named only through a natural process, when the people who named them named the stream, mountain or settlement. In a multilingual environment, the groups of people living there adopted the name from each other or developed their own names, but there may also have been parallel place-naming. The study and interpretation of this process is mainly a matter for linguistics. With the worldwide development of infrastructure (in Transylvania from the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century), public administration and geography increasingly interfered in the naming process: the names of settlements were usually determined by law, which meant that the involvement of specialists in this work was rather marginalised, giving way to the newly established, current political power. In contrast to the variability of oral nomenclature, the names recorded on maps show a somewhat greater constancy, so that diachronic changes in names can be well traced by comparing several maps, which differ in time. The use of language and names on maps has led to the highlighting and canonisation of some of the names, even with the invention of new ones, to the atrophy of other varieties. Thus, when considering the linguistic character of a map nomenclature, several aspects must be taken into account: the official and/or used language of the reader or of the area depicted; the purpose of the map (orientation in a particular place); the type of name or text (water name, place name, explanatory text, etc.). When the map editor has to choose between the local official name or another local (minority) name, or the traditional name (exonym) of the reader's language for the geographical element in question, he or she is forced to highlight one of them. In Transylvania, the rearrangements of power (German, Hungarian and then Romanian) were soon followed by the transcription of geographical names, which had always been seen as a means of self-justification of power. Domestic, but especially foreign maps often had difficulty (and often did not intend to) to follow the changes, which meant that cartographic data also preserved the mentality of the period (cf. Bartos-Elekes, 2005, p. 4; Pásztor 2011, p. 133), e.g. *Nagyfalu* > *Nuşfalău*, *Fül-ér* > *Fuler*.

The interpretation of the water names in the sources was aided by monolingual and bilingual dictionaries; among the monolingual ones I used the Hungarian (CsnSz., CsnE., Murádin, ÁSznt., AnjSznt.) and Romanian (DOR., IORGU), family and first name dictionaries and interpretative dictionaries (ÉKsz.2, ÉrtSz., TESz.; DER., DEX.) and the ÚMTsz., and from bilingual dictionaries Béla Kelemen's Romanian–Hungarian dictionary for translation.

## **Systematic analysis of water-names containing ethonyms based on geographical occurrences**

### ***Categories of the systematic analysis***

In the rest of the paper, we will review the main models for naming and naming analysis. All naming acts are semantically conscious, so there is no such thing as an absolutely unmotivated name. While in natural naming, it is mostly the specificity of the denotation that is expressed, in artificial naming there are many more naming acts in which the need to adapt to naming models plays a role. At the time of their creation, all names are descriptive, and the motifs and semantic categories on which the naming is based appear in direct or indirect form (Hoffmann 1993/2007, p. 54). Accordingly, water names containing personal names convey various information about the people who live there. These names can be very diverse, but we cannot distinguish precisely from the surnames whether the stream is named after the owner, the person whose property it flows through, or the person who only received it as a lease.

From a structural point of view, lexical–morphological analysis can be used to divide water names into parts of names, which can be further subdivided into smaller units, the lemmas, i.e. the lexemes and subordinate morphemes. Lexical–morphological variations may differ not only from language to language, but also when a language is characterised by a variety of regional or divergent naming conventions. The first stage of name tracing is always to identify the elements that make up a name, and only then to assign them partial functions, continuing with the investigation of their historical, genesis and variation characteristics. These three phases can, however, of course only be separated theoretically in research, since the identification of the lexeme is provided by the function and the naming system (Györffy, 2004, p. 129).

The analysis of the water names of the Körös is methodologically presented according to the Hoffmann model. This procedure, starting from the lexeme categories, separates unipartite and bipartite names; unipartite names are divided into marked and unmarked groups, and bipartite names are divided into main and extension members.

The larger units dealing with one-part and two-part names are divided according to the following divisions: common noun, proper noun (personal name, place name), adjective-like word, number noun, word structure.

The two-part water names constitute the largest part of the names of the Körösök catchment, which is due to the fact that in the course of time the names, initially single-part, were often supplemented with a hydrographic base for a more precise denotation. This addition is the result of the situation that the vernacular origin of the water name has become obscured over time, or the foreign name has been supplemented by a geographical noun of internal origin. In addition to these two basic characteristics, other factors may of course have played a role in the forming and spread of the two-part water names. One needs only think of maps, where the two guiding principles of cartographers are accuracy and authenticity, i.e. the use of geographical common nouns that do not cause problems of identification in the perceptual thinking of the name users. This is the reason why extinct common nouns such as *séd, jó, sár, aszó*, etc. cannot appear on maps, they appear at most merged into the body of the name or more or less modified, e.g. *Székelyó, Hájó ~ Hejő, Hidegség*.

In the lexical–morphological structure of the extensional member of the water names, unmarked adjectival prefixes are the most frequently appearing elements. Among the categories of noun parts expressing specificity, the following categories contain the characteristic features of the watercourse that could have been the basis of the name (e.g. size, shape, colour, temperature, age, condition, smell, taste, speed, sound). The role of the vernaculars in water names is decisive in inferring the occurrence of certain folk elements. Since a name identifies, the function of a place name is nothing other than to distinguish it from its environment, to set it apart from it. If we apply this thesis to place-names of ethnonymic origin, we can see that the population of a village named after a particular ethnic group is distinct from the ethnic group that names it, i.e. the settlement is separated from the rest as an island of people (Kniezsa, 1938, p. 406). In this case, the accommodation of the ethnic group belonging to the minority within the same settlement is in the same part of the settlement, in the case of the Roma mostly on the edge of the village. The stream named after them is also located near the locality, usually on its periphery or among its peripheral water bodies, which is clearly shown on detailed maps, such as the map sections of the second and third military surveys or the sufficiently detailed manuscript maps before the water regulation (e.g. the relevant maps of Huszár).

## Hydronyms containing ethnonyms

### Slavic

Throughout history, there have been many migrations and expansions due to changes in political, economic or climatic factors. The Slavs probably settled in the forested zones of Transylvania in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, mainly on the borders of the mountains and forests, possibly along major waterways from Kalotaszeg through Hajdú-Bihar to Békés County, where later water names of Slavic origin can be found (Kniezsa, 1948, p. 22). The names of the villages of Csehi, Oroszi, Tóti and of the larger rivers of Slavic origin in the Sebes-Körös catchment area (Bisztra, Dragán, Kalota) also point to early Slavic settlement in Kolozs and Bihar counties. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the whole length of the Berettyó and Ér rivers was Hungarian territory, the valley of the Fekete-Körös was as far as Belényes, and the Sebes-Körös has scattered Slavic traces in its source, which did not play a culture-forming role. The presence of other Slavic elements is attested by the Bosnian stream (Bihar County), a tributary of the Berettyó on the left bank. Whether the water name was actually motivated by Bosnian or Croatian ethnic groups cannot be conclusively determined, because the Bosnians in Hungary were not Muslim but Catholic and considered themselves Croats.

On the right bank of the Hármaskörös, the name of the Czech ethnic group of the Western Slavs is preserved in the name of the *Cseh-ér* water. In this region, this name could even denote a Slovak ethnic element, unlike in the western part of the country, where ethnic groups of German nationality were called so (FNESz. Csehbánya, Cséhtelek). Also related to the Czech language and ethnic element is the ethnonym Boemi, which denotes the peoples living in the medieval Czech–Moravian areas and whose Hungarian equivalent is the lexeme Czech and Marót (Rácz, 2010, p. 400). The latter ethnonym appears as a personal name in the course of history in the form *Marót* or *Ménmarót*. In reality, however, (Mén)Marót was not an existing person, as *marót* is the old Hungarian name of the Moravian people, but it is also evidence of the historical fact that part of Hungary was once under Moravian rule (Györffy, 1959, p. 45). *Marótlaki-patak* is a water name of this kind in Cluj County, not a vernacular but a settlement name.

On the left side of the Hármaskörös, the eastern Slavic character of the *Orosz-ér* can be found in Békés County, near Gyomaendrőd. The mass settlement of the Ukrainian-speaking Rusyns, Ruthenians or Ruznyaks into the territory of Hungary may have started around 1320, but the Hungarians, like with all Eastern Slavs who called themselves by the ethnonym Rus-, used Russian ethnonyms to refer to them (Rácz, 2010, p. 405).

Immigration from the Balkans (Rhacians, Romanians, Croats), which increased in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, peaked in the period following the Battle of Mohács. Rhacians “a person speaking a southern Slavic language, residing mainly in Serbia or originating from there” (TESz.) became common as an ethnonym for Serbs fleeing from the Turks (Rácz, 2010, p. 396). These two ethnyonyms could function as synonyms for a while in the Old Hungarian period, then the Serbian ethnonym became exclusive. The prefix of the water name *Rác-patak* (Cluj County), a left branch of the Sebes-Körös, probably denotes a South Slavic ethnicity, because the suffix of the Hungarian surname form would have been accompanied by a possession signal.

### **Hungarian**

In the Hungarian water names of the Körös rivers, the Hungarian ethnic name prefix occurs only once (*Magyar-patak*) in Kolozs County, in the vicinity of Nagykalota, where out of the total of 19 water names, 8 are of Romanian origin, the rest are Hungarian. It is likely that Romanian population also lived in this area, because we also have a Romanian data for the same name, *Valye Unguruluj* (ETH. 10/C, p. 798).

### **Cuman**

In the territory of Transylvania and Hungary, several Turkic ethnic names have also left their mark in our water names. It is known about the Cumans that they were a tribal union consisting of Turkic-speaking peoples: Kipchaks, Yellow Uighurs, Asian Cumans. After the unsuccessful outcome of their alliance with Béla IV, they scattered across the Hungarian Plain, and assimilated into the Hungarians within a short time. The memory of this event was preserved by many of our place names, for example, among the Körös water names, the *Kun-ér* near Karcag in the Nagykunság region. In the territory of Transylvania, we can count on the presence of Turkic-speaking peoples since the time of the Huns.

### **Pecheneg**

The name of a people belonging to this language family is preserved by the *Besenyi-ér* located east of the confluence of the Berettyó and the Hármaskörös, and the *Besenyi-ér* hydronym flowing north of Érdiőszeg on the right side of the Ér. The Pecheneg who joined the Hungarians, in accordance with the nomadic fighting style, also formed leading teams in battle, alongside the Szeklers (Györffy, 1941, p. 41). In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, they still played a border guard role, but as a people group considered to be dangerous, they were also caught up in the resettlement of the country to all areas. We can find such place names



in almost every county, usually forming an island in the sea of Hungarian population. In Transylvania, they could only have lived in larger numbers at the bend of the Olt River, while in Bihar County, a total of seven place names can be associated with this ethnic element, where the Pecheneg who gathered around Várad were completely assimilated into the Hungarians by the 14<sup>th</sup> century (Rácz, 2004, p. 201).

### **Szekler**

One of the most controversial ethnic groups in the history of Hungary, the Szeklers, are a people with a unique legal status (border guarding), according to Benkő (1998a, p. 139; 1991/2003, p. 109), who played the role of vanguard and rearguard in battles during the Old Hungarian period. Later, when there was a greater need for border guards in the eastern part of the country, they began their migration in the direction of Baranya–Bihar–Telegdiszék. In the 13<sup>th</sup>–14<sup>th</sup> centuries, we find the most evidence of Szekler settlement primarily in Bihar County (Györffy, 1959, p. 74), and in terms of hydronyms, the names *Székelyjő* (now *Henc pataka*) and *Székely pataka* in Kolozs County can be mentioned.

### **Roma**

Both in Hungary and in Transylvania, the Roma people, who migrated to Europe in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, are still a living minority. Such hydronyms referring to this ethnicity occur in the upper catchment area of the Körös rivers, in singular or plural forms, along the Sebes-Körös and Berettyó: *Cigány-ér* (on the border of Tépe and Kaba, a right tributary of the Berettyó), *Cigányok pataka* (on the border of Szilágynagyfalu, a left tributary of the Berettyó), *Czigány-ér* (in the northwest of Szeghalom, a left tributary of the Sebes-Körös) and *Czigányi csermely* (one of the headwaters of the Sebes-Körös). I did not find any name data from the valleys of the Fehér, Kettős and Hármaskörös, that contained *cigány* (Roma) name element.

### **Saxon**

The Saxon ethnic name also appears in our water names. The Transylvanian Germans and the Szepes "Zipsers" (German: Zipser) are also called Saxons, whose ancestors settled in these areas of the Hungarian Kingdom from the 12<sup>th</sup> century onwards. As a result of the great colonization waves in the middle of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, the first waves of Transylvanian Saxons appeared after 1140, although their forerunners were the already assimilated Bavarians from the time of King Saint Stephen. The Saxons initially bore different names as "Teutons," "Flanders," and then remained in the public eye as "Saxons"

according to the charters. It is possible that the collective names *Flandrensis* and *Saxo* are artificial words of colonization and chancellery origin; the *Flandrensis* could have meant those who lived under Flemish law, while the Saxon originally meant miners, and later those who moved east. Since the incoming people were a homogeneous, peasant community, and neither a noble nor a significant military stratum can be shown in any of the waves of immigrants, it is unlikely that the king would have allowed their settlement for the purpose of border protection in Transylvania, which was already well-fortified. It was much more likely that the well-known industrious, good farmers and industrialists of German descent would be of benefit to the whole country.

One of the major tributaries of the Sebes-Körös river, the Sebes or Székelyjő creek, is also known by a third name of German origin, the *Henc* or *Henc creek* (Romanian: *Hențu*). From an etymological point of view, it can be traced back to the German personal name Hans, but the Romanian word *honț* "the nickname for the Transylvanian Saxons" (DER.) is also a possible explanation for the origin. This region does not belong to the larger Saxon settlements, such as the areas around Beszterce, Nagyszeben, Brassó, Meggyes, or Szászváros, so the creek name in Kolozs County may preserve the traces of those early times when Kolozsvár fell under strong Saxon influence for a short period in the 14<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Jewish**

The Jewish people lived in relative safety in Hungary in the Middle Ages and the early modern period, and their mass assimilation into the Hungarian nation began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The localization of this ethnic name in our creek names does not show any particular regional characteristics, since it occurs only twice: *Zsidó-patak* (the right tributary of the Sebes-Körös near Élesd), and *Zsidó-ér* (the left branch of the Kettős-Körös in the border area of Csaba, Doboz, and Békéscsaba).

### **Romanian**

The appearance of the Romanians in Transylvania is determined by two dominant views: the continuity and the Balkan origin theories. The continuity theory states that if the neo-latin peoples developed from the Romanization of the indigenous barbarian peoples before the Romans, the Romanian people also emerged from the mixing of the Dacians and Romans, which began in the first century, from 106 AD. The other view is attributed to Theodor Capidan, who identifies four main branches of the Romanian language: Daco-Romanian north of the Danube; Aromanian in Macedonia; Megleno-Romanian

in southern Bulgaria; and the westernmost branch, the Istrian Romanian population group in the Istrian Peninsula. An additional argument for the Romanians' Balkan origin is that although the Albanian influence is strong in all Romanian branches, it is not manifested most prominently in the Aromanian language, in communities living near the Albanians, but in the northernmost branch, namely the Transylvanian and Wallachian branch, within which the effect of the southern Albanian dialect is evident. If the Albanians have never lived north of the southern half of the Balkan Peninsula, the Romanian homeland cannot be located north of the vicinity of Lake Ohrid. An additional piece of evidence in favor of the Balkan origin is that the Romanians belonged to the Ohrid diocese until recent times, despite the existence of closer dioceses in Serbia and Bulgaria. The continuity theory states that the Romanians are descended from the mixing of the Dacians and the Romans, who began to mix with each other in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, after the Roman conquest of the Dacians. This theory suggests that the Romanian language and culture are a mixture of the Latin influences brought by the Romans and the ancient folk culture brought by the Dacians. The Balkan origin theory states that the Romanians lived in the Balkan regions until the 10<sup>th</sup> century, when they migrated to the Great Hungarian Plain due to the Hungarians' settlement. This theory suggests that the Romanian language and culture developed from mixing with the Balkan peoples. The debate between the two theories is still ongoing, and both theories have strengths and weaknesses.

It is wide-known that Anonymus' *Gesta Hungarorum* contains many elements that are characteristic of 13<sup>th</sup> century Hungary, but it also shows several discrepancies with the Greek source written at the same time as the Hungarian conquest, namely *De Administrando Imperio* by Constantine Porphyrogenetos.

Only two Hungarian water names of the Körös rivers refer to the Romanian ethnic element: *Olá pataka* (Kolozs County) and *Oláh Kis patak* (Szilágy County). A significant part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century names of the Körös rivers in Romania are in Romanian. One reason for this is the country's official language, and the other reason is the continuous assimilation of Hungarians in Transylvania, which leads to the gradual disappearance of Hungarian names.

If we ignored the testimony of the charters, which mention Romanians in Transylvania for the first time in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, more precisely in 1222 in the region of the Făgăraș Mountains (Fekete Nagy, 1941, p. 106), and would place the migration of the Romanian people in the pre-Hungarian period, we would have to take into account the Romanian origin of the oldest and longest-lived water names. However, among our larger waters there is no Romanian-originated water name, nor even such an ancient water name that would

have come to Hungarian or other languages through Romanian mediation. Bíró Sándor (1941, p. 171) showed the development of Hungarian–Romanian relations from the era of dualism to the 1930s, which changed almost every decade. These waves spread to both the upper and middle social strata, until they finally reached the population of the smallest villages. The survival of the Romanians in Transylvania also depended on the awakening and strengthening of their national consciousness, accepting as a historical fact the hypothesis that its development and strong impact fell on the 1910s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the free Romanian press was proclaiming that while Hungarians had been living in this territory for a thousand years, Romanians had been living here for two thousand years (Bíró, 1941, p. 183).

The linguistic stratification of the Körös rivers' hydronyms in later centuries, the development of the numerical ratio of Hungarian and Romanian names, is the result of the interplay of historical and ethnic relations, as a result of which the linguistic elements of the two populations have also left their mark on the hydronyms. The most colourful picture of hydronyms containing ethnonyms is found in the Berettyó and Sebes-Körös regions. At the source of the Berettyó, we find Roma, Romanian, then Bosnian ethnonyms, followed by Roma ethnonyms again before the confluence with the Sebes-Körös. The Sebes-Körös source region includes names with the prefixes Szekler, Roma, Romanian, Hungarian and Rhacians. Moving further west, the Hármas-Körös region includes lexemes denoting the Cuman, Russian, Greek, Saxon, and Jewish ethnic elements in the name formation.

## **Greek**

Among Indo-European languages, Greek also appears. The *Görög-fok* (Grecian Cape) flowing in the vicinity of Okány and Vésztő (Haán, 1870, p. 318) probably marked the settlement of 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> century Greek merchants or one of the points of their market route.

Among Romanian hydronyms, the Russian-originated Romanian 'țigan' 'Roma' ethnonym is the most widespread, appearing in total five times in the form *Valea Țiganului*, equipped with the Romanian possessive pronoun '-lui'. In terms of suffixes, water names with the meaning 'Hungarian stream' are similar in structure, with both singular and plural names appearing in the Kalota region, which belongs to the Sebes-Körös (*Valea Ungurului*, *Valea Ungurilor*). The meaning of the Romanian *danț* 1. 'folk dance'; 2. "Transylvanian person from the Vaskoh region" (DEX.) is reflected in the latter in the water name located in the Segyest area.

## **Turkish**

The Turkish ethnic name occurs only once, in the water name *Valea Turcilor*, on the right bank of the Fekete-Körös. In the same area, we also encounter the water name *Valya Készilor* meaning the Keszik stream; both names have plural suffixes, so it is likely that the name refers to a group, while the water names *Valea Sicula*, from the Romanian *sicul* meaning 'Szekler,' and *Valea Sovaruluj* (see Szovár clan name; Benkő, 2009, p. 83–86) are likely to be traced back to clan names. The main feature of the Romanian names listed here is that they have survived in the later Romanian-recorded name stock, as Romanians did not meet with the conquering tribes and clans.

## **Personal names**

The majority of the names that occur in this study are old Hungarian personal names, family names, and given names, such as *Bodójó*, *Bodó folyása* (ÁSzt. p. 130), *Csente-patak* (ÁSzt. p. 190), *Varsány-ér* (VárReg. p. 9), and *Isti-fok*, for which we have an Árpád-era record as well (1251–1281 *Ista*, *Usthe*, in ÁSzt. p. 431), but we cannot rule out the diminutive form of the name István either. We also find water names of similar form, such as *Hölgy ere* and *Kölgyes-ér*, in which the confusion of the capital letters "K" and "H" is likely.

Although Armenians were also present in Transylvania from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, no names related to this people have survived in the Körös region. One reason for this is that they did not settle in larger numbers in the Körös basin. Another reason is that they carried out their trade mainly in cities, and the third reason is that they became Magyarized relatively quickly.

## **Summary**

In the following part of the study, a short statistical summary is presented on the length of the Körös branches and the distribution of hydronyms containing ethnic names in the region. Of the tributaries belonging to the catchment area of the Körös rivers, which are more than 700 km long, the longest is the Fehér-Körös (236 km), followed by the Sebes-Körös (209 km), then the Hármas-Körös (91.3 km) and the Kettős-Körös (37 km). The total number of water names formed with ethnonyms is 32, of which the largest number occurs in the catchment area of the Sebes-Körös (20 data), followed by the Hármas-Körös (5 data), the Fekete-Körös (4 data), the Fehér-Körös (3 data) and finally the Kettős-Körös (1 data) closes the ranking. Of these names, the Roma (7) ethnic name appears the most often, followed by the *Ungur* or Hungarian (3), the *Olá* (2), the Szekler (2) and the Jewish (2), while only 1 data was recorded for the other names on the maps

and registers used (Bosnian, Slovak, Tatar, Rhacians, Turkish, Serbian, Czech, Cuman, Russian, Pecheneg, Moravian). Another interesting fact is the occurrence of tribal names, which also testify to the existence of human microcommunities, such as the 13<sup>th</sup> century Szovár tribal name or the place name derived from the Keszi tribe name.

## Conclusion

The onomastic study showed that the word biography of the water names was fundamentally determined by the geographical and ethnic characteristics of the area. The population processes and settlement policies of previous centuries have created such heterogeneity that determines the linguistic, geographical and historical features of the region. This trend is exacerbated by the fact that the Körös catchment area connects two countries, so we can gain a wealth of information about the situation and changes in the linguistic state reflected in the names. As a result of the border-crossing role of the Körös rivers, we could get an overview of the naming activity of the population of the study area.

The parallel analysis of the name material raises problems that affect the peculiarities of both Hungarian and Romanian (water) naming. However, the present study does not fully exploit the various scientific opportunities offered, because the details would exceed the limits of the scope. From the point of view of onomastics, it is also important to see the spatial and temporal location, movement, and changing role of the region's characteristic ethnic groups in naming. The analysis proved that the ethnic composition of the study area fundamentally influenced the development of all types of names, including hydronyms. The consideration of these external circumstances appears in several disciplines, for instance in historical geography, social history and ethnography. These scientific researches can eliminate many uncertainties.

The question arises as to where these hydronyms can be found today. Are they still part of the living language use, or are they just archival evidence from a bygone era? We can only get a credible answer to all of our questions if we have a modern, up-to-date and thorough living language place name collection available to us from the area. The MNHP (*Hungarian National Place Names Register Program*) will soon be able to implement the database display, which will compensate for this lack, but it is important to emphasize that field work is also essential in the authentic presentation of the current water name status.

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## Book Review: “A Scholar’s Delight”—Toma Sava’s Edition of Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone*

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Once upon a time, actually not long ago, I dreamt of establishing a *Creative Writing, Translating & Editing Workshop* in order to involve my fellow scholars and my students as well in projects meant to enhance and diversify creativity resources. However, latest developments in AI technology, as recently revealed to me through an intensive interaction with some very dedicated trainers, have seriously undermined my faith in the *writing* dimension of such enterprises.

*Translating* then might remain a more convincing undertaking, especially when performed by scholars with a flair for rare texts, texts that some people would snobbishly deem as worth falling into oblivion. Such scholars/translators are, in my opinion, akin to deep divers, as they explore (historical) depths to see if life and substantial meaning are still present (down) there. They bring to the new multicultural surface more or less monolithic layers and deconstruct them through, besides *translating*, proper and accurate *editing*.

Such an example is Francis Godwin’s *The Man in the Moone*, published (posthumously) in 1638, and whose author lived between 1562 and 1633 and was a bishop of the Church of England. An author who himself claimed to be only a mere translator of a first-person narrative belonging to a Spanish fictional author, *A Discourse of a Voyage Thither by Domingo Gonsales*. The book, drawing from the astronomical theories of Nicolaus Copernicus and Galileo Galilei & others, has been considered one of the first works of science-fiction. It did have a certain reputation in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, only to be neglected later, until recent times when scholars are re-valuating it due to its speculative/interpretative potential in what regards language, space travel, religion, otherness, etc.

Promoting such an old (post-Elizabethan) text in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society fancying post-modernism, while not exactly having reached the postmodern condition yet, could turn into a challenge. Who the addressee is and what could be its topics of interest? We have to admit that Toma Sava's work as translator and editor of Godwin's fantasy relates, first of all, to his fellow academics. A consistent introduction of almost 30 pages (Godwin's text has about 70) provides readers with very brief yet significant information on the bishop's biography, scandals included.

Still, the emphasis is laid on his anonymous productions, the most famous among them being *Nuncius Inanimatus*, apparently a mysterious treaty (Sava 2023, p. 6) on telegraphy. That was going hand in hand with the preoccupation for the development of an artificial language, and showed a peculiar interest in *communication*, a very hot topic nowadays. This work inspired the author of *Mercury, or, The secret and swift messenger*, John Wilkins, another bishop of the (a little bit later) time, from which Sava gives sample fragments. The translator/editor also points to the ideas about *communication* the two bishops had in common, placing them in the context of the 17th century openings.

The more interesting parallel is drawn by Toma Sava on the scientific concerns of both bishops in relation to astronomy and the possibility of life on other planets/celestial bodies. In 1638, John Wilkins published *The discovery of a world in the moone*, in which references were made to a text by a certain late bishop, yet claiming to have been written by a Spanish traveller, Domingo Gonsales. Again, (s)ample fragments from Wilkins' work are provided, with the just observation from the translator/editor that, while Wilkins' approach is more scientific, Godwin's is more literary, i.e embracing the perspective of both a moralist and a humorist.

Domingo, Godwin's picaresque character, whose colonial narrative is, up to a certain moment, due to its comforting and reassuring twists and details, very much like Defoe's Robinson Crusoe, manages to fly to the moon with the help of a very amusing device. He is the engineer/constructor of the device propelled by a good number of wild swans. Once on the moon, he encounters human-like creatures in a, of course, ideal society. A utopia that drew the attention of later authors and inspired, among others, Aphra Behn, Cyrano de Bergerac and even Jules Verne. Nevertheless, another just observation of the translator/editor is that Godwin's text survived due to its echoes through other works and it remains "that kind of writing which has been read without being read properly" (Sava, 2023, p. 17).

According to Toma Sava, we are presented an incredible story with a very credible internal logic/structure of the text, as the latter have been built on real events. Well informed

by the historical context of the Eighty Years' War and by the travel literature of the age, highlighting locations such as the Cape of Good Hope or the paradisiacal island of Saint Helena, Godwin's text resists over time as a crafted piece of fiction. It does have a quite innovative input, which makes it stand between Lucian of Samosata's literature and Plutarch's philosophy (Sava, 2023, p. 25).

Other works and authors are mentioned and discussed too, not only in the introduction, but in the copious footnotes, that being a distinctive mark of the scholarly endeavour. Hakluyt and Campanella, Kepler and Donne, Cavendish and Poe, and countless others have been woven in a web of references that makes the footnotes layer a parallel world in perfect resonance with the one above. A complex *editing*, offering both closures and portals to Godwin's unfinished story, what we have is in fact just a first part, and the *translating* of which brings delight to many scholars of literatures in English. We are thus kindly invited to a careful reading of a book that seems to be more than just a "literary curiosity."

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