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FAMILY MATTERS 2.0

Literary and Cultural Representations of the American Family in Transition

edited by *Andrea* **Carosso** and
Eva-Sabine **Zehelein**

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FOCUS

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INTRODUCTION

"Family" has a biological definition as well as a socio-historical/cultural context, for instance in the sense of imagined communities and/or communities of belonging. Families are part of socio-legal constructs, larger cultural collective networks, and body politics: families thus matter.

The lived reality called "family" has never been a monolithic stable entity, but always in flux, adapting to changing circumstances, desires and demands. It is also a crystallization point of social constructions of difference. The stereotype of the traditional "nuclear family," determined by both biological as well as gender essentialism and heteronormativity, has stuck like scotch-tape as an omnipresent ideal and trope. Consisting of a white person identifying as a man called "father," a white person identifying as a woman called "mother" and their mutual genetic offspring called "children" (biological essentialism), who follow prescribed performative parenting roles (gender essentialism), the "nuclear family" was, if at all, an exceedingly short-lived representative social phenomenon of the mid-20th century.

Over the last decades the "nuclear family" has been challenged by the contexts and ways in which people are living and loving today. Families can be pluripaternal and ethnically diverse (patchwork and mixed race partnership), monopaternal (and single mothers by choice / "SMCs"), with same sex partners and/or children who are not genetically related: next to adoption and foster parenting, now gestational surrogacy and Assisted Reproductive Technologies (such as IVF and ICSI) are pathways to family formations of all kinds. All these and more constellations are ubiquitous lived realities; *Modern Family* and *Transparent* clash with *Leave it to Beaver* and *Father Knows Best*. Family is a constitutive element of all social, cultural, political, legal, ethical, historical and ethnic fabrics and its study is therefore transcultural as well as multidisciplinary, often controversial and always necessary for the formulation of policies and practices, but also for the understanding of what happens to us, how our world develops, what our

dominant discourses are, how the general catalogue of values and norms is fashioned and how we will proceed further into the 21st century.

In this Focus section, we offer eleven contributions from Italian and German scholars that shed light on a number of "family matters" as they are (re)presented in cultural texts as varied as novel, short story, TV-series, memoir and print advertisement.

The issue opens with **Andrea Carosso**'s analysis of the nuclear family during the "Long 1950s" serving as both bedrock of Cold War consensus as well as cog in the wheel of Cold War imperatives. Carosso draws on a plethora of cultural texts to show how the private white, middle-class, bi-generational nuclear family was employed for national Cold War rhetoric, celebrating "family togetherness" in a "happy home corporation," a revival of the separate spheres ideology, which found its geo-physical manifestation in (homogenous, uniform, and red-lined) suburban living. At the same time, as Carosso illustrates, centripetal forces were tearing at the rhetoric – more women entered the workforce and thus denied the homemaker ideal, sexual mores changed and the Kinsey reports brought to the surface that Americans had for a long time practiced more than had been preached. Popular culture narratives as well as live realities resisted the Cold War idea of containment as projected onto society through the nuclear family ideal.

Isabel Heinemann examines how representations of the nuclear family have changed in media advertising to sell products and to convey certain images of "modernity" and "consumerism" – especially since the second half of the 20th century – and in so doing contributes to addressing a gap in the historical scholarship on large-circulation magazines in the U.S., which remains relatively scarce. The essay analyzes how popular magazines such as *Time*, *Life*, and *Good Housekeeping* used images of the so-perceived "modern family" to attract consumers and gain acceptance for their products, and how notions of the family and the embedded gender norms changed (or were preserved or reaffirmed) in the course of the social transformations of the second half of the 20th century.

The articles by Sattler, Balestrino and Zehelein focus on an *à la mode* literary genre, namely the memoir. The individual lenses and objects of study are quite different from each other, though. **Julia Sattler** highlights mixed race memoirs of the 1990s and early 2000s as sites of contestation of the mono-racial family ideal. She argues that memoirs such as Neil Henry's *Pearl's Secret* (2001) or Shirlee Taylor Haizlip's *The Sweeter the Juice: A Family Memoir in Black and White* (1994) place race mixing at the core of the family as well as of the national story, yet instead of re-writing American history through their family stories revert to (white) American forms of genealogical storytelling in which passing or the American Dream feature prominently. **Alice Balestrino** provides a close reading of Michael Chabon's memoir-novel *Moonglow* (2016) as a Holocaust narrative which explores the entity of the family as a space of memory repository and – drawing on Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" – as "time-space of trans-generational transmission

of traumatic memories." And **Eva-Sabine Zehelein** puts the spotlight on a relatively new form of family formation, namely one based on gestational surrogacy. In her article, she analyzes three memoirs written by women who have employed another woman to carry their genetically related child (which she labels "IP memoirs" (IP short for Intended Parents). Zehelein conceptualizes the genre that is framed by an extraordinary force field as situated at the intersections of personal trauma narrative, autopathography and matriography, scriptotherapy and biography.

Surrogacy also features prominently in **Barbara Miceli**'s article on Margaret Atwood's novel-turned TV-series *The Handmaid's Tale*. She embeds her close reading of the novel (and some episodes of the TV-series) in references to the American moment in which the TV-series has ruffled so many feathers and which Atwood must have foreseen already in the 1980s. During a year when "covfefe" tweeted by the American President was a major news story for about one fine day in May, Margaret Atwood was awarded the Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels (The Peace Prize of the German Book Trade). In her acceptance speech, Atwood lifted her lantern to some aspects of the "strange historical moment" we are living through. Today, Atwood observed, *The Handmaid's Tale* "no longer seems like a far-fetched dystopian fantasy. It has become too real. Red-clad figures are appearing in state legislatures in silent protest at the laws being enacted there, largely by men, to control women. Their aim seems to be to push back the clock, to the nineteenth century if possible."[1] The world of Gilead, as Miceli shows and warns us, combats dramatically shrunken fertility rates by a totalitarian patriarchal regime which disenfranchises all women and forces the fertile women into sex-based slavery aimed at traditional surrogacy arrangements for the procreation of society.

Marion Gymnich, too, looks at dystopian fiction and traces a sweeping, long line from Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932) via Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005) to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), and then to the AMC series *The Walking Dead* (2010-). Gymnich argues that whereas Huxley sketches a world in which family as a social construction has become entirely obsolete on the basis of a "pseudo-Freudian anti-family ideology," in 20th and 21st century texts the nuclear family model or a form of tribal community is more often than not reaffirmed in dystopian or (post)apocalyptic narrative texts and the nuclear family ideal can stand *pars pro toto* for a world lost and/or destroyed (e.g. in *Never Let Me Go* and *The Road*).

Stefano Morello focuses on a TV-series, namely the teen-drama *The O.C.* He argues that the show breaks with its purported genre by placing nearly equal emphasis on both teenagers and their adult parents. Since adults act as positive and negative role models in the show, the series ends up being a cautionary tale for its young viewers. Moreover,

[1] Margaret Atwood, "Stories in the World. Acceptance Speech," http://www.friedenspreis-des-deutschen-buchhandels.de/1245413/ (2017).

Morello proposes that subplots revolving around parents allow the showrunner to broaden the potential audience of the series, by targeting adults in addition to teen viewers, and that, as most of the show's characters – parents and children alike – engage in youthful behavior, the series also seems to promote and perpetuate what sociologist Marcel Danesi has defined as the "Forever Young Syndrome" – a kind of society where the generational gap is almost nonexistent and adults systematically behave, and inevitably consume, like teenagers.

While **Fiorenzo Iuliano**'s contribution highlights the concept of chastity in Sherwood Anderson's short story collection *The Triumph of the Egg*, arguing that chastity is a "symbolic site of sexual insubordination" challenging (sexual) norms epistemologically as well as sociologically, and overthrowing roles and norms of the nuclear family, masculinity and fatherhood, **Virginia Pignagnoli**'s article focusses on three recent autofictional narratives that through both form and content defy maternal and gender roles (the "good mother" as "intensive mother" paradigm) as well as notions of heteronormativity in their depictions of family making. All three – Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts* (2015), Sarah Manguso's *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary* (2015) and Heidi Julavits's *The Folded Clock: A Diary* (2015) – represent motherhood as a "transformative, all-encompassing and bodily experience" and, as Pignagnoli shows, tell stories "that are as unfinished, raw, fluid, contradictory, and vulnerable as the subjects they portray."

Sonia Di Loreto closes this issue by turning to the 19th century, in an essay that examines the status of various forms of affiliation and adoption narratives and practices as depicted in some early American texts, at a time when different ideas about kinship, and a multitude of possibilities of affiliation were acceptable in the context of the American household and family. As the study of adoption in American culture has been a flourishing area of investigation in the larger horizon of American Studies, the essay investigates Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie; or the Early Times in the Massachusetts* (1827) and other later nineteenth-century tales as a useful testing ground for thinking about kin terms, kinship relations, and forms of affiliation and adoption, especially with regards to inter-ethnical interactions with Native Americans and to the presence of black children and especially black orphans in the Northern states.

ANDREA CAROSSO

"HAPPY TOGETHER?"

Envisioning the American Family in the Long 1950s

ABSTRACT: As the nuclear, middle-class American family reached its apotheosis in what I call "the Long 1950s," an almost mythical period of post-war national prosperity, it became the bedrock of the Cold War consensus, charged with political and symbolic values that were often at odds with its realities. This paper first analyzes the forces at play in shaping the myth of family as "happy home corporation" in America, which included media pressure, changing social, demographic and economic conditions as well as regressive views of gender and sexual roles, especially as emerging from bestselling marriage and child-care manuals. It then looks at the way in which dissenting evidence from those Long 1950s, especially in the area of sexual behaviors as well as juvenile rebellion, showed the American family caught in a state of flux, which was at odds with the imperatives of the Cold War consensus.

KEYWORDS: 1950s, Cold War and Family, Marriage Manuals

Family and the American Century

There seems to be a general consensus among social historians that the institution of the middle-class American family of the twentieth century finds its origins in the Victorian family of the previous century when, following a transition from household production to wage work and professional occupations outside the home, women's roles were redefined in terms of domesticity rather than production, men were labelled "breadwinners" and children were said to need time to play, rather than contribute to the family economy (Tosh 1999, 1-8). In the early twentieth century, as immigration and urbanization appeared to weaken the traditional family by destroying kinship and community networks, reformers advocated the adoption of a "true American" family model – a restricted, exclusive nuclear unit in which women and children were divorced from the world of work: the middle-class Victorian family had become, by the start of the twentieth century, the "ideal" American family. As observers have pointed out, this model of the "happy together" husband and wife (and their children) in their separate,

yet complementary, roles has served in America a double purpose in cultural definitions of the nation: on the one hand, it has provided a blueprint that, in spite of its middle-class origin, has resonated through all classes and races in American society; on the other, far from being an unchallenged and unchanging constant in twentieth century American society, the nuclear family has ended up functioning as the yardstick against which every definition of "family" in America has been measured (Hansen-Garey 1998, 300).

As I will discuss in this article, a traditional vision of a nuclear, middle-class American family based on specific gender roles reached its apotheosis when, faced with the demands of the mobilization for the preservation of America's core democratic values during the early phases of the Cold War, it rose as the ideological backbone of American society in what I call, with other scholars, the Long 1950s (see, among others, Booker 2002), an almost mythical period of American prosperity, extending from the end of WWII and into the first half of the 1960s, and coinciding with the economic boom of the post-WWII era. The Long 1950s were characterized by – among other things – a decisive expansion of the middle class, an emphasis on consumption and leisure, together with pervasive anti-Communist anxieties at home and abroad, and generalized fears of a nuclear build-up. It is within this context that the American family unit became the focus of a concerted propaganda effort in the Long 1950s to solidify, as I will argue, the politics of consensus necessary to promote the vision of the American Century which had been proclaimed in February 1941, ten months before the US entered WWII, by *Life* magazine publisher Henry Luce, who had called the nation to embrace "the opportunities of leadership in the world" and promote "a passionate devotion" to its founding values, those "great American ideals" which included "a love of freedom, a feeling for the equality of opportunity, a tradition of self-reliance and independence and also of co-operation" (Luce 1941, 170).

In a book entitled *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline*, Natasha Zaretsky has pointed out that, "more than any other institution" it is the "true" American family that crystallized Luce's aspirations, an idealized model of the bi-generational white, middle-class family unit made up of a male breadwinner, a full time wife and homemaker, and children – the very unit that sociologist Talcott Parsons defined in 1955 as the "modern isolated nuclear family" (Zaretsky 2007, 5). Although many families in America at that time did not conform to this vision, nowhere was this family – Zaretsky has emphasized – more celebrated than in the pages of Luce's own *Life* magazine, which, "week after week, with an estimated readership of twenty million people, circulated images of familial wholeness and fused ideas of middle-class consumption with Cold War imperatives" (Zaretsky 2007, 5). Those images included cheerful mothers, fathers, and children in their detached homes, fully equipped with family gardens, appliance-filled kitchens and the newly-purchased television set, around which the family was happily reunited every evening.

Together with *Life* magazine, government officials, political figures, media commentators and average Americans in the Long 1950s came to agree that successfully fighting the Cold War at home and abroad required fostering what McCall magazine, the leading women's magazine of the period, had termed in 1954 "family togetherness," an idea of family seen as retreat from, and defense against, impending conflicts. While experienced in the private sphere, the "together family" was defined in the public sphere, and the images it reflected had political significance. The inauguration of Disneyland in Anaheim, CA, in 1955 was predicated upon the strategic convergence of private and public images of the wholesome American family, and was therefore strategic in this context. Acclaimed as "the happiest place on earth," Disneyland became part America's creation myth, and part a place where, in Disney's own words, "parents and children could have fun together" (Marling 1991, 175). It was, in other words, the perfect embodiment of the Cold War rhetoric of family unit as nation. Along with Disney, popular scholarship and magazine articles constantly reminded Americans about the founding values of the Cold War family. Particularly useful, in this area, turned out to be the developing medium of television, which made it its mission to seamlessly bridge the gap between the representation of the American family on screen and the American family itself, quickly becoming a "natural part of the domestic space" (Spigel 1992, 39). As Lynn Spigel (1992) has conclusively argued, sitcoms such as *The Honeymooners*, *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*, *Father Knows Best*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and *I Love Lucy* presented American families that were an extension, or rather a mirror, of the real family unit watching from home.

Happy Suburban Corporation

Increasingly in the Long 1950s, the American home became a place away from the city, as returning veterans built families and fled *en masse* to the new, affordable housing developments that were springing up outside the major urban areas. Commonly defined as "suburbs," these new developments promised to create ideal spaces for family interaction, fulfilling the long-standing modernist project of fusing proximity to urban jobs and rural retreat, city and country life all at the same time. Suburban family life came to be identified with an intensification of the gender roles predicated by the Victorian family of the previous century within a newly conceived sense of domesticity (May 2008, 6). Amid generalized Cold War fears of atomic annihilation and escalating racial tension in the inner cities, suburbia catered to the informal, family and child-centered lifestyles to which young parents aspired in the postwar period. Ridding couples of the day-to-day obligations posed by extended family and ethnic community, relocation to the suburbs allowed the new American family to direct its focus inward, while at the same time providing the illusion of engaging in an ever-broader rhetoric of postwar nationalism

based on achievement and consumption, which linked their social status as Cape Cod and Ranch House owners to a greater American good. Writing in 1956 about the recently inaugurated Chicago suburb of Park Forest, William Whyte noted that people were moving there because, besides the space, the amenities, and the ideal environment to raise a family, the suburb had became charged with the crucial symbolic value of delivering "a social atmosphere of striking vigor," an asset its developers capitalized on when marketing the new suburbs not simply as "housing," but rather as "happiness" (Whyte 1956, 314).

Predicated upon a return to domesticity based on integration of male and female family members and increased interactivity among them, the white flight to the suburbs was the catalyst for the redefinition of Americannes in the Long 1950s, centered around the social act of marriage and family raising, which became crucial in confirming that an individual's private sphere was healthy and prosperous. The metaphor of marriage as marker of personal health was widespread. After the war, as genders came more and more to be defined as opposite of one another (women being described by pseudo-scientific pamphleteering as irrational, emotional, gentle, obedient, cheerful, and dependent; men, conversely, being described as rational, individualistic, unemotional, solid, and aggressive), marriage was more and more seen as the "balancing measure" for such diverging opposites (Miller-Nowak 1977, 153). In the Long 1950s, people were marrying in larger numbers than ever before and were marrying at an unusually young age. In 1955, the median age of marriage had dropped, compared to 1890, from 22 to 20 for women and from 26 to 23 for men. In the same period, it was estimated that 96.5 percent of women and 94.1 percent of men in the US were or had been married (Coleman-Ganong 2014, 877) and marriage came to be regarded as a "natural state in adults" (Landis 1955, 11).

In the public rhetoric of the nuclear family fostered by books and media, the woman-homemaker was endowed with the central responsibility of expanding the family with a large number of offspring. The Christmas 1956 issue of *Life* magazine indicated that "of all the accomplishments of the American woman, the one she brings off with most spectacular success is having babies." Although few families achieved the Fordist "minimum production goal" of six children suggested in the article, the average American woman in the late 1950s had 3.7 children over the course of her life (Marty 1997, 84).

In the Long 1950s, the family was ideally viewed – to borrow the phrase from a 1958 bestseller on adolescence, *'Twixt Twelve and Twenty*, written by popular rocker-turned-sociologist Pat Boone – as a "happy home corporation," an efficient production unit operating in line with its Cold War-assigned task of nurturing national health. Accordingly, social roles were reformulated based on a corporate vision where tasks and responsibilities were efficiently distributed between the husband, in Boone's metaphor "the leader-president" in charge of the family decision-making process – the one who

"can say 'it's going to be this way'" – and the wife, the "executive vice-president," in charge of the "production units," aka the home and the kids (Boone 1958, 83-4). Viewed optimistically, the metaphor of home as "happy corporation" aspired to a vision of the middle-class family in which sex roles were at last beginning to converge into some sort of pseudo-democratic sharing of domestic tasks and responsibilities.

Nowhere was this newly conceived "corporate home" more visible than in the area of women's work, where images promoted by books and media and reality were often at odds. If, on the one hand, the middle-class American family kept expanding rapidly (65 percent of American families were accounted as middle-class by 1960, more than twice the percentage as in 1929), on the other the myth of the "family wage," where a breadwinner husband earned enough to support an entire family, increasingly failed to match reality, leading to a higher percentage of married mothers working outside the home. Between 1948 and 1958 the number of employed women with children under eighteen rose from 4.1 million in 1948 to 7.5 million a decade later, an increase of 80 percent (Coleman 2014, 877). "The working mother, even the one who has young children, is here to stay," declared a speaker at the 1955 National Conference of Social Work (Bremner-Reichard 1982, 6).

As, contrary to general perception, women entered the workforce in ever growing numbers in the 1950s, a more fluid distribution of gender roles in the family emerged, as feminist historians have suggested, whereby postwar women "both negotiated with and rationalized the oppressive aspects of the family ideal" (Spigel 1992, 42). Nevertheless, Cold War consensus promoted an ideal of the subordinate, stay-at-home mother, and typically depicted working women as negligent mothers and a menace to their husbands' careers and to family stability. Books such as Marynia Farnham and Ferdinand Lundberg's *Modern Women: The Lost Sex* (1947) convincingly spread the notion according to which working women would provoke a disgraceful confusion of gender roles, by which males would become feminized and children would grow up in such confusion that they would end up being homosexual. The very popular *Common-Sense Book of Baby and Child Care* by Dr. Benjamin Spock (published in 1946 and selling 16 million copies over 20 years) drew its most unique points not so much from the idea that parents should have a permissive attitude with children, as is commonly believed, but rather from the fact that mothers should devote themselves to full-time child-rearing. In line with the "home as corporate space" rhetoric, media, schools, and therapists disseminated the notion that happiness was dictated by an individual's "proper functioning," with movies and popular psychology relentlessly emphasizing "the dreadful things that happened when women became more interested in careers than marriage or men resisted domestic conformity" (Coontz 2008, 38). One such example is the 1955 Nicholas Ray film classic *Rebel Without a Cause*, where the blame for the dysfunctional family unit is ultimately placed on the feminized father, suitably

represented as wearing a kitchen apron in a crucial confrontation scene with his rebel son, played by James Dean. Promoted by books, magazines and television shows, the mock-Victorian vision of life of Mom the homemaker and Dad the breadwinner was transformed into a prescriptive set of rules to which relations between sexes should conform – a predetermined social vision which most Americans chose to follow without questioning its core assumptions, and which relied on a sexual bias "in which women and men had characteristics so different as to appear almost members of separate species" (Miller-Nowak 1977, 152).

Containing Sexuality

That vision naturally extended to the realm of sexuality, where masculinity and femininity were contained within very specific and narrow gender roles, which assumed, among others, the moral purity of "womanhood" as well as a set of social expectations for women that Betty Friedan famously defined, in her 1963 shock hit, as the "feminine mystique." And as Dr. Benjamin Spock, in his chart-busting *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child* Care (1946), encouraged women to "focus on motherhood" at a time when women were expected to give up the larger sexual and economic freedoms they had experienced in wartime (when many women had acquired financial independence in the jobs they had filled replacing the men who had gone off to war), men and women were persuaded in the post-war years to follow rules and control emotions. Those very emotions, first and foremost sexual drives, that Spock's book "simply ignored" (Melody-Peterson 1999, 117).

In the Long 1950s lovemaking was conceived as heterosexual, between married people, and strictly man-centered. In a 1957 article entitled "What Every Husband Needs," the *Reader's Digest* claimed that men needed, "simply good sex, uncomplicated by the worry of satisfying the woman" (Lees 1957, 139). A woman's sexual satisfaction was regarded as sheer frivolity, because she was expected, according to the article, to make "love a substitute for desire" (Miller-Nowak 1977, 158), in other words to sublimate sexual desire into desire for motherhood. *Modern Woman* magazine claimed that, in order to be fully satisfactory for a woman, the sexual act had to depend on the "desire to be a mother." And whenever female sexuality became the subject of media discussion, it was mostly within the context of questioning the quality of female pleasure, with lengthy debates on the difference between acceptable orgasm (i.e. vaginal orgasm, it being the only type directly linked with procreation) vs. unacceptable orgasm (i.e. clitoral orgasm, which raging popular Freudianism saw as a sign of arrested womanly development).

One of the best-selling books of the decade – a time when popular literature at large refrained from frank discussion of sexual matters – was Hannah and Abraham Stone's *A Marriage Manual: A Practical Guidebook to Sex and Marriage*, which summarized prevailing attitudes to sexual propriety during the decade. First published in 1935 but completely revised for its 1952 edition, the book discussed sexuality as strictly functional to procreation and rigorously bound to marriage. Because the Stones believed that "the sexual impulse of the woman may normally remain dormant for a long period" (Stone and Stone 1952, 206), they viewed female sexuality as divorced from orgasm, assuring readers that conception and sexual pleasure are by no means related. This view brought the understanding of female sexuality in America back by half a century. As scholars have shown (Gordon 1978 and D'Emilio-Freedman 1988), beginning with the early twentieth century, two new trends in understanding "intimate matters" had begun to surface: on the one hand, a growing acceptance of non-procreative marital sex; and on the other an emerging awareness of female sexual desire and its right to be satisfied. In *Sane Sex Life and Sane Sex Living*, a manual published in 1919, H. W. Long had written that the "perfect accomplishment [of sex] is an art to be cultivated" (quoted in Gordon 1978, 68). And A. Herbert Gray, in his 1922 manual *Men, Women, and God*, had argued that "in every woman who truly loves there lies dormant the capacity to become vibrantly alive in response to her lover, and to meet him as a willing and active participant in the sacrament of marriage" (quoted in Gordon 1978, 72). Compared to early twentieth century discourses of American sexuality, the views promoted by the Stones marked a regression to nineteenth century views of sexuality as rigidly rooted in marriage and procreation and of female sexuality as invariably posited in the absence or suspension of sexual feeling.

A related view of sexuality appeared in another popular family planning manual of the Long 1950s, Eustace Chesser's *Love Without Fear: How to Achieve Sex Happiness in Marriage*. Originally published in Britain in 1940 (and acquitted of obscenity charges in 1942), the book appeared in the U.S. in 1947, selling just under a million copies in its first hardcover. The paperback edition did even better. Although it allowed for the view that pre-marital sex might in fact be beneficial to produce a "mature marriage," Chesser was aligned with the Stones in his suspicion of feminine sexuality, which he saw as a conduit to sexual promiscuity for women and defined as "wholly opposed to woman's true feminine nature" (Chesser 1947, 44). Likewise, Chesser thought poorly of women who were too forward during sex, since "man expects to take the lead in intercourse and may be turned off by attempts to stimulate him that are too direct" and cautioned his readers that a thin line existed between the normal and the perverse: "any woman could make a pervert of any normal man within six months" (143), wrote Chesser, without ever mentioning, however, that the opposite might as well be possible. Chesser worried that, if unleashed under the wrong circumstances, female sexuality might be hard to control.

Hence, he stressed – like the Stones – the need for its decisive containment within the boundaries of healthy marriage and procreation.

As Elaine Tyler May has shown, during the postwar years, sexual values and sexual behaviors were in flux. Noncoital forms of premarital sex were gaining widespread acceptance, and couples eagerly looked toward marriage for erotic fulfillment. On the other hand, however, "the taboos against premarital intercourse, homosexuality, and other forms of nonprocreative sex remained central tenets of sexual morality (May 1988, 116). Sexual containment became part of the larger strategy of Cold War containment. Although mitigated in the 1930s, the Comstock laws of 1873 (officially known as "An Act for the suppression of trade in, and circulation of Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use"), banning information and distribution through the mail of contraception (and in some states even banning contraception), remained in effect throughout the Long 1950s, only to be struck down – but exclusively for married couples – in 1965. Along the same lines, out-of-wedlock sexuality, and especially adultery, was illegal in most U.S. states and explicitly targeted by the Hollywood Production Code (also known as the Hays Code), according to which the rendition of marital life in movies should be kept within the Christian doctrine of marriage as rooted in the idea that "the family that prays together stays together." These narrow boundaries had been forcefully advocated by pressure groups such as the Legion of Decency, whose activism had been mostly responsible for the establishment of the Code itself in the 1930s. The Hays Code explicitly stipulated that adultery, while sometimes necessary plot material, "must not be explicitly treated, or justified, or presented attractively" (Pennington 2007, 153).

The Hays Code also banned any sympathetic treatment of homosexuality, another highly contested area of non-normative behavior in the Long 1950s. In line with social attitudes as well as the letter of law in the U.S. (which, prior to 1962, regarded sodomy as a felony in every state), gays were socially stigmatized as sick individuals, both physically and mentally (Eaklor 2008, 77-103). In the Long 1950s, homosexuality came to be construed as the form of sexual rebellion that most directly was constructed as an infringement of domestic security. Unlike heterosexual love, which was rarely the topic of public conversation, homosexuality turned out to be the perfect site to turn private stigma into a matter of national concern. Scholars have shown that American media were instrumental in bringing homosexuality under public scrutiny beginning in 1950, as Senator Joseph McCarthy's crusade against communist spies within the U.S. intersected with a homophobia campaign aimed at alleged Communist sympathizers working for the State Department. Dubbed as the "Perverts on the Potomac" campaign, it aimed at demonizing homosexuals not only as sexual deviants, but also as a threat to the nation. Described as emotionally unstable and immoral, homosexuals were deemed "very susceptible to Communism," and therefore targeted, alongside with Communists, in the

same category of national threats against which McCarthyism waged its infamous campaign (Streitmatter 2009, 6-16).

Resisting Containment

The McCarthy campaigns targeting homosexuals were proof that sexuality in America was more difficult to subsume under the Cold War consensus umbrella than many would have liked. The publication of two revealing and highly controversial studies, and the proliferation of sexual images in the media provide ample evidence that sexual promiscuity was becoming widespread in society. Published at the turn of the 1950s, Alfred Kinsey's *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* (1948) and *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* (1953), better known as the "Kinsey Reports," boldly disputed some hardcore tenets of American sexuality in the Long 1950s. The Reports showcased a nation whose attitudes ran against the grain of the Cold War's sexual orthodoxy. In particular, Kinsey contested notions that women were generally not sexual, in presenting evidence that American sexuality was largely an affair exceeding the sacred boundaries of marriage. Even more controversially, Kinsey addressed head-on the master taboos of the Cold War consensus: adolescent and pre-adolescent sexuality, and homosexuality. In his first book, Kinsey found that 45% of male subjects reacted sexually to persons of both genders during their adult lives, and that erotic responses to sadomasochistic stories were recorded in 22% of men and 12% of women participating in the study. Based on interviews with educators, parents as well as convicted child molesters, Kinsey also provided detailed evidence of hundreds of cases of sexual abuse of children by adults. In other words, Kinsey exposed an America swarming with subversion to what had been regarded up to that point as the nation's unwavering tenets of sexual propriety. Cold War orthodoxy exploited Kinsey's findings as evidence of an attack on America's founding moral and political values (Melody-Peterson 1999, 122).

What made Kinsey's research particularly disturbing, and hard to challenge and ignore, was that it was based on the hitherto largest sample of interviews ever used in studies of human sexuality: over 5,000 men and over 5,000 women were interviewed for the two studies, according to a systematic method that included up to 521 data points per interviewee, yielding what came to be known as "the most influential [text] on human sexuality in the twentieth century" (Drucker 2014, 11). Likewise, in the Long 1950s it was hard to ignore the fact that sexuality – although publicly regarded as an almost taboo topic – sprang up everywhere. In *Intimate Matters*, D'Emilio and Freedman point out the emergence of conflicting narratives of sexuality in early Cold War America and document an unprecedented frankness about sexual matters in the period. D'Emilio and Freedman show that, after World War II, pornography and other media products aimed at the sexual entertainment of men through the objectification of women's bodies

emerged from underground circulation. If the Long 1950s is the era of idealized fantasies of heterosexual nuclear families focused on procreation for the higher good of the nation, it was also the era in which *Playboy* magazine, launched in 1953, and a host of imitators saturated the nation's newsstands. Pseudo-physical fitness magazines, replete with images of athletic male figures, filled the niche for the male homosexual market, while scandal magazines such as *Confidential* and *Keyhole* catered to a female audience. By the late 1940s, on the new awareness that "sex sells," publishers of paperback books were redesigning their covers to make their products more appealing. In 1948, Popular Library issued the first "nipple cover" promoting *The Private Life of Helen of Troy*. Playing cards, slides, photos, homemade movies and even phonograph records of pornographic content invaded the market.

Each in their own different ways, the appeal of the most celebrated public icons of the Long 1950s – Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley, James Dean and Marlon Brando – was defined through their subversive, or pseudo-subversive, sexual stance. While there appears to be a generalized agreement in the scholarship in viewing Marilyn's icon as to conform and reinforce the decade's agreement over male-centered sexuality, Elvis, Dean and Brando promoted sexualized images of themselves that were more problematic to the Cold War consensus. Behind her apparent subversiveness, Marilyn's appeal lay in the way she made sex, hitherto seedy or menacing, seem innocent and sweet (Churchwell 2005, 19). As the phrase "child-star," a constant throughout writing about Marilyn Monroe, makes clear, the Marilyn phenomenon neutralized fears of that very sexual subversion which it subsumed in the Long 1950s.

Contrary to Marilyn, Elvis, Dean and Brando's sexualities all symbolized the antagonistic emergence of rebellious youth post-WWII. In a book entitled *Rebels*, Leerom Medovoi has shown how the new social formation of teenage/youth emerged in a cultural space that was distinct from the narrowly-defined social and sexual roles of the pre-war era. In displaying their body as sexualized and sexually rebellious objects, Brando, Dean and Elvis all converged in defying normative gender distinctions predicated in the heterosexual, domesticated, identitarian confines of 1950s young males. Their sexual appeal did not conform to more conventional images as embodied by other male stars of the era. Elvis' ostentatious sexual persona, Brando's social transgressions, and Deans' rejection of normative identity in his rebellion "without a cause" turned them, each in their own way, into "outlaws," each resisting the control of domesticating social forces.[1] It was through the agency of sexually rebellious stars such as Brando, Dean and Elvis, that youth audiences began to question received notions of

[1] Likewise, Dean's fluid sexual identity, which would later make him a central figure in the Gay Rights movement's political struggle over sexual identity in the 1970s, placed him outside socially prescribed norms of masculine sexuality.

"identity," viewing themselves as emergent personalities entitled to rebel against middle-class conformity. American teenagers during the Long 1950s became subversives – self-defined or "rebels" who eschewed norms of Cold War containment within the family. The rise of rock 'n' roll (and of Elvis in particular), James Dean's rebellion "without a cause" as the synthesis of the wider social problem known as "juvenile delinquency," as well as the "bad girls" and "tomboys" depicted in popular movies and novels of the period, are all discussed by Medovoi as evidence of a decade in which Cold War confrontation propelled American society to accept, even encourage, teenage rebellion as a marker of its inherent democratic advantage (Medovoi 2005, 167-214).

Highbrow and middlebrow literature in America's Long 1950s swarmed with representations of unwholesome families and the sexual subversion which was normally represented as the precondition of family crisis. From Holden Caulfield to *Howl*, from *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* to *Peyton Place*, from *Lolita* to *Rabbit, Run* and beyond, American literature of the Long 1950s seemed to focus extensively on the breakdown of the sacred institution of family. American literature appeared unwilling to buy into the prevalent upbeat mood that equaled the retreat to domesticity with the fulfillment of America's national mission. Rather, these books viewed the family as the center of a mid-century spiritual crisis, at a juncture that Norman Mailer dubbed as "one of the worst decades in the history of man" (Castronovo 2004, 13), the site where Americans created permanent images of their struggle to make sense of their culture and themselves.

Conclusion

These images provoked telluric shifts in the Cold War consensus of family as the privileged site of national values and showed it in a state of flux in which ideology and reality were at odds. Idealized by Cold War rhetoric, the institution of American family in the Long 1950s was repositioning itself in view of the ultimate assaults that the next two decades would bring.

In *Homeward Bound*, May reports that in the summer of 1959 two newlyweds in Miami slipped into a cozy, 12-foot deep, 6-by-14-foot wide fallout shelter, where they spent a 14-day honeymoon of unbroken togetherness. Although no more than a publicity stunt to promote a local company, the sheltered honeymoon, which earned the couple a successive "real" honeymoon in Mexico and was featured in *Life* magazine, highlighted that the Cold War effort would protect and preserve families, not scatter and dissolve them. The familial ideology that took shape in the Long 1950s had turned the American family into a bulwark of containment to propel the advancement of the American Century. The Civil Defense effort, therefore, of which the fallout shelter was the ultimate symbol, needed to confirm that it was capable of successfully preserving it. Seen in

retrospect, however, the message appears ambivalent, a testament to the fragility of the American family which – in order to remain "happy together" – needed heavy protection against the intrusion of forces outside itself.

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ISABEL HEINEMANN

SELLING THE NUCLEAR FAMILY

Social Order, Gender and Consumption in Magazine Advertising in the US since World War II

ABSTRACT: Modern Western societies have always considered the family as the central unit of state and nation, while magazine advertising used the nuclear family concept to sell products and convey certain images of "modernity". But how did images of the family and the gender roles suggested change over time? This contribution analyzes how mainline magazines in the US (*Time*, *Life*, *Good Housekeeping*) used images of "the modern family" in picture ads to attract consumers and gain acceptance for their products. Special emphasis will be placed on the question how notions of the family and the embedded gender norms did change (or were preserved or reaffirmed) in the course of the social transformations of the second half of the 20th century. The paper provides a fresh look at accepted models of social and normative change in the United States by investigating a largely neglected set of sources that had to reconcile modernity, readers' values and economic interest.

KEYWORDS: Family, Magazines, Picture Ads, Gender Roles, Consumerism, Value Change, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s

Introduction

A beaming mother in white apron, wearing nice makeup and perfect hairdo, carries a tray loaded with soup bowls and sandwiches.[1] She is surrounded by her smiling kids, boy

[1] Part of the research for this article was sponsored by the German Research Foundation (DFG) in the framework of my Emmy Noether Junior Research Group on "Family Values and Social Change: The US-American Family in the 20th Century" established at Münster University. Thus, my gratitude goes to the DFG for generous funding of a research trip to Washington D.C. I also would like to thank my research assistant, Marcel Brüntrup M.A., who did most of the research on *Life* magazine and also the proofreading of the article. Also, I'd like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their valuable suggestions.

and girl. The table is laid nicely, next to the picture window with panoramic view, as the three head for lunch – "and what a lunch! With hearty nourishing Campbell's Beef Noodle soup as your delicious and satisfying main dish!"[2] For maximum comfort, the housewife is advised how to prepare three meals with the help of one blend of noodle soup: "A dandy children's lunch" (with cheese sandwiches, carrot sticks and milk), "An all-the-family lunch" (with minced ham sandwiches, Waldorf salad, pudding and coffee, tea or milk) and "When you lunch alone" (with crackers, lettuce, coffee or milk). So here we are in the golden age of the nuclear family, when housewives were not only perfect cooks (thanks to Campbell's noodle soup), but also skillful homemakers and devoted mothers, while husbands were breadwinners and away from home all day. A colorful painted picture ad of the famous soup blend appeared in *Life* magazine, occupying an entire page, apparently celebrating the virtuous American homemaker and mother – and advertising the universally applicable noodle soup to ease her tasks (see Illustration 1).

Twenty years later, the situation seems to have changed. A young woman looks seductively into the camera over her sunglasses, smiling knowingly. The caption reads "No man wants the same thing every night." What then follows is no erotic confession, but recipes for rice dishes: "Be creative with rice – Va-rice-ty."[3] Still, it's a woman's job to prepare the dishes, but this time no children are around: "Un-potato the man in your Life. Starting tonight. Let your imagination run rice. […] Just keep a little rice in your pantry, you'll never ever run out of man-pleasing, family-pleasing ideas." The family is present, but rather in the background, the center of the female (and the spectator's) attention being the male eating habits. The ad has an undisputable erotic undertone as it evokes the seductive and sexual qualities of the female cook who is told how to "please" the man by seducing him with a rice dish (see Illustration 2).

What do these two picture ads for food suggest? Not the assumption that it was a woman's job to do the cooking did change, but the way this task was framed in advertising – from motherly effectiveness to seductive creativity. Thus, can we speak of a value change from materialist to post materialist values as has been claimed by political scientist Ronald Inglehart in his value surveys since the 1970s (Inglehart 1971 and 1977)? It is the objective of this article to further explore if and how advertising reflected changing gender norms and family values over time. The underlying assumption being that advertisement was meant to sell products to consumers and thus had to take up, mirror or even emphasize current trends in the transformation of family concepts and gender norms (Heinemann 2013). Did advertisement maybe even act as a seismograph of social and normative change in the realm of the family? To answer these questions, the

[2] For the sake of brevity all sources will be provided in the footnotes. Campbell's Beef Noodle Soup Ad, *Life*, April 3, 1950, underlined in the original.

[3] American Rice Council, *Life*, March 13, 1970.

article focuses on picture ads in mainstream magazines that referred to the family to sell their products. Of course, ads consist of both image and text and their respective interaction or sometimes even contradictory juxtaposition. Thus, my analysis will focus on both elements, explore their relation or even tension in the creation of the respective message conveyed. With Roland Barthes we can even distinguish three messages of the ad: a linguistic message (the accompanying text which both grounds and controls the image), a symbolic iconic message (the cultural meaning of the image) and a literal iconic message (the "pure" image) (Barthes 1999, 36). Only in the interrelationship of all three meanings, the overall structure of the image is conveyed and can thus be analyzed.

The Nuclear Family Imagery

The family has always provided a powerful imagery, intensely referred to and cited in advertisement campaigns since the early days of advertising at the beginning of the 20th century (Williamson 1987; Ohmann 1996). As Carolyn Kitch argues with respect to the 1920s United States, the modern family even proved "the ultimate commercial and social construct of the era": "In 1920s magazine imagery, the typical American family became a unifying metaphor for 20th century American Life" (Kitch 2001, 159). But how was the family presented in magazine advertising when such "unifying metaphors" lost ground in the face of social change, namely in the second half of the 20th century? In how far did family images in magazine advertising reflect changing family norms and gender roles – the rise of the dual earner family, the expansion of the middle class, feminism and new concepts of masculinity? To provide first answers to these questions, this paper investigates picture ads that focused on the family in the American mainstream magazines *Life* and *Time* and supplements them with images from the woman's magazine *Good Housekeeping*.

Life conceived itself as a family-directed picture magazine, "to see, and to show" – as founder Henry R. Luce declared when he launched the new publication (Doss 2001b, 2; Kozol 1994). In 1948, *Life* had a circulation of 5.45 million and a tremendous "pass-along factor," which meant that up to 17 (1938) individuals read each single copy of the periodical. Even shortly before the magazine was discontinued as a weekly in 1972, circulation exceeded 5 million and the "pass-along factor" was estimated close to five persons, providing the periodical with a total readership of roughly 25 million Americans (Halberstam 1979, 60; Baughman 2001, 42). This was much more than any other weekly magazine would achieve. *Time*, for example, founded in 1923 as a news magazine and considered the flagship publication of the Luce media empire, only sold 1.67 million weekly copies in 1948 (Baughman 2001, 48; Smith 2001, 26-27; Brinkley 2010). In the period under concern, *Time* set standards in political journalism and also developed a strong business appeal. Its readership can be assumed to have been predominantly male,

well-educated and upper/middle class. To bring in the (white, middle-class) homemaker as another target group, the monthly *Good Housekeeping* was accessed for the 1940s and 1950s. *Good Housekeeping*'s popularity as a monthly magazine came close to that of *Life* (nevertheless a weekly) with about 5 million weekly copies sold in 1962 and 5.5 million in 1965 (Mott 1968, 140-143; Walker 2000). For longitudinal comparison over time, magazines were researched from the late 1940s through the mid-1980s and a sample of several hundred picture ads identified.[4]

Obviously, the mass media market changed tremendously from the late 1940s to the mid-1980s: Fist of all, the 1960s and 1970s emerged as "Television's Moment," as mass audiences turned to the new medium and iconic TV sitcoms negotiated cultural value changes (Hodenberg 2015). Nevertheless, television did not end the popularity of either print media in general or magazines as such – *Life*, *Time*, and others remained hugely popular throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Rather, as Erika Doss has convincingly argued, print media fragmented into a wealth of niche markets since the late 1960s (Doss 2001b, 16). While still holding considerable circulation rates (as *Life* in 1972), most broad-based general magazines either were suspended (as the *Saturday Evening Post* (1969) *Look* (1971), *Life* (1972)) or branched out with new periodicals that addressed a more distinct readership. *Time*, for example, persisted but launched magazines like *Money*, *People*, *Discover* and *TV-Cable Week* (Doss 2001b, 16-17). These developments signal transforming markets as well as a trend towards a more fragmented consumer culture and maybe even a critique of the version of modern America established in mainstream magazines at the end of the period under concern here. To look at these transformation processes from a new angle, this article uses the family imagery as a lens to unearth tensions between normative and cultural change (and restauration) in a long-durée perspective.

Interestingly, the use of the "modern family" in magazine advertising has not been subject to much historical scrutiny. Bruce W. Brown has argued in his sociological study on images of family life in magazine advertising that ads displayed a substantial "movement toward more egalitarian family life values since 1920" – but has stopped his analysis in the late 1970s (Brown 1981, 94). Whereas substantial research literature deals with women's magazines and the changing notions of femininity (and masculinity)

[4] The complete issues of *Life* are online. For this article, the magazine was accessed for the years 1945 to 1972 <https://books.google.de/books?id=R1cEAAAAMBAJ&source=gbs_navlinks_s>. *Time* could be accessed in the print Atlantic edition only (years 1965, 1972, 1975, 1980, 1985) in the Press Archive, University of Münster and at the Library of the Department of North American History in Cologne. *Good Housekeeping* was accessed in print for the years 1945-1950, 1959 in the Library of Congress, Washington D.C.

conveyed in picture ads, studies of advertisement do not deal specifically with the use of family imagery.[5] To close this gap and to add a new perspective to the current body of scholarship, picture ads here will be analyzed as part of a discourse that had, of course, an economic relevance, but also a cultural one. Ads were commissioned by producers, realized by advertising companies, read by consumers and reaffirmed (or not) through the purchase of the products advertised. Thus, images used in advertising were in any case intentional, or, as Roland Barthes has put it, "in advertising the signification of the image is undoubtedly intentional; [...] the advertising image is frank, or at least emphatic" (Barthes 1999, 33-34). While the analysis of the immediate and longtime effects of advertising on consumerism is a difficult terrain this article won't engage in, it is nevertheless important to take into account here that ads had a specific economic purpose (Parkin 2007; Hill 2002).

At the same time, a wealth of historical literature has carved out the important social and normative changes in the second half of the 20th century and the crucial role ascribed to the family therein. While Stephanie Coontz and Jessica Weiss argued for the US, that media images of the family created by TV sitcoms such as *Ozzie and Harriet*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and *Father Knows Best* proved extremely powerful but did not at all reflect the social and cultural living conditions of the majority of American families, they did not turn to analyze the display of the family in magazine advertising (Coontz 1992; Weiss 2000). Also, the important studies by Jonathan O. Self and Natasha Zaretsky on the conservative transformation of family ideology from the 1960s to the 1980s did not cover the appeal to family values in the economic realm (Self 2012; Zaretsky 2007). Thus, this contribution seeks to further investigate how the family imagery was used in the context of advertising from the 1950s through the 1980s. To do so, picture ads that applied to the family will be classified thematically and then compared over time: ads for food, alcoholic beverages, cars, and insurances.

From Feeding the Family to Shaping the Body: Food Ads

Campbell's beef noodle soup of 1950 stands for a lot of comparable appeals to devoted motherhood and perfect housewifery in ads for food and household appliances in the period. Women smiled happily over the food they prepared for their loved ones or

[5] Scanlon 1995. Kitch 2001. Walker 2000. Strasser 1996. Light 2012. For an entry into the topic see Heinemann 2013 and the unpublished M.A. Thesis at Münster University by Mester 2013. Parkin 2007. Sivulka 2009. Tomes 2016.

the frying pans, dishwashers, fridges, toasters they used to cater to their families' needs.[6] Several weeks ahead of Christmas, husbands were informed "to give her easier meal making" by buying her a frypan designed to prepare as much as nine fried eggs at a time.[7] Not the female obligation to prepare meals changed throughout the 1960s – but the way this task was presented to consumers. Women did not just have to cook, but seduce their husbands with creative meals. An ad for Bird's Eye frozen food displaying a photo of a delicious vegetable dish declared "Blame yourself if your husband is just a meat and potato man" and concluded: "Why shouldn't a man be tempted with exciting vegetable combinations every night?"[8] Now, housewives learnt how to balance calories and nutrition values for their families – an issue that had not been dealt with before.[9] Also, food brands started to appear in ads that did not display housewives or families – as in the case of tomato ketchup, milk, cereals, and whipped cream.[10] These trends – dieting and balancing nutrition values while relying more on the "seductive qualities" of convenience products – themselves manifested throughout the 1970s. Here, the cook (still the woman/mother) did enjoy more freedom and creativity – as in the rice ad quoted above – but still had to please her loved ones.[11] Interestingly, the sugar industry embarked on the trend of blaming fat as the source of fatness and bad eating habits and started to proclaim sugar as the solution to the individual's and the family's dietary needs[12]: "The 'fat time of the day': that's any time you overeat. Sugar's instant energy can

[6] Adams Korn Kurls, *Life*, January 2, 1950; Yellow, *Life*, April 7, 1952; Hotpoint Range, *Life*, April 7, 1952; Tide Soap, *Life*, April 7, 1952; Cromley Electric Range, *Life,* March 23, M1953; Campbell's Beef Noodle Soup, *Life*, March 23, 1953; General Electric Range, *Life*, March 28, 1955; Patio Ware Pans, *Life*, May 7, 1956; Sunbeam Frypan, *Life,* November 11, 1957; Kelvinator Kitchen, *Good Housekeeping*, January 1950, p. 31; Hotpoint Electric Dishwasher, *Good Housekeeping*, June 1953, p. 3; New Frigidaire Electric Range, *Good Housekeeping*, August 1953, p. 15; Lux Liquid, *Good Housekeeping*, September 1956, p. 68.

[7] Sunbeam frypan, *Life*, November 11, 1957.

[8] Bird's Eye Frozen Food, *Life*, November 27, 1964.

[9] Carnation Low Fat Milk Crystals, *Life*, September 5, 1960; The Sunny Sunday, *Life*, August 4, 1960; Carnation Instant Low Fat Milk, *Life*, November 23, 1962; Tang Instant Breakfast Drink, *Life*, September 16, 1966; Monsanto Cake Mixes, *Life,* May 5, 1967; Swanson's Fried Chicken Dinner, *Life*, May 3, 1968.

[10] Carnation Instant Non Fat Dry Milk, *Life*, September 5, 1960; Carnation Non Fat Dry Milk, *Life*, November 23, 1962; Kellogg's Corn Flakes; *Life*, November 23, 1962; Del Monte Tomato Catsup, *Life*, November 23, 1962; Campbell's Soup, *Life*, March 13, 1964; Birdseye Corn and Pea with Tomatos, *Life*, November 27, 1964.

[11] Shape, *Life*, April 10, 1970; Sugar Information, *Life*, April 10, 1970; Minute Rice, *Life*, November 13, 1970; Hunt's Tomato Sauce, *Life*, April 2, 1971; Kellogg's Cereals, *Life*, July 16, 1971; Va-Rice-Ity, *Life*, March 13, 1970.

[12] For a document analysis on how the sugar industry even sponsored biased research see Kerns et al 2006.

slip you past" declared the ad while showing a happy couple snacking sweets.[13] Other ads applied to the homemaker and told her how to manage the family's budget, but did not display the family as such.[14] Thus, in conclusion of this first part, it is safe to say that while the woman was still held responsible for the food and food-preparation, more ads appealed to her capacity to balance nutrition values and even administer dietary products during the late 1960s and the 1970s. Correspondingly, the family was less present in the ads since the 1960s while traditional female gender stereotypes still loomed large.

From a Man's Drink to the Emancipation of the Spirit: Ads for Beer and Whiskey

Ads for alcoholic beverages yet suggest a significant shift in gender roles, at least in public display. While in the 1950s, women served beer and drinks, but only sipped at their beers while the man was around, whiskey and other spirits clearly belonged to "a man's world."[15] In 1953, for example, the beer company Schlitz from Wisconsin invested in a one-page picture ad of a woman arranging a tray with two beer glasses while she looked out of the picture window and saw her husband arriving home from work "(see Illustration 3). The message conveyed was that, while the husband would enjoy his beer after a hard day's work, his spouse would join him for company, but would never drink on her own.[16] This changed during the 1960s, but first the husband remained the active part. For example, an ad for Canadian whiskey declared "My husband introduced me to a really smooth Canadian last night" – referring not only to a romantic adventure but to the whiskey she then tasted.[17] A couple of months later, a Ballantine's ad stages two conversing men holding whiskey glasses in their hands and observes: "Men like Scotch [...] preferably smooth scotch" only to display an almost empty glass, stained with red lipstick: "So do other people."[18] From here, it was only a small step to women enjoying

[13] Sugar Information, *Life*, April 10, 1970; Sugar Information, *Life*, November 13, 1970.

[14] "If you think it's tough feeding your family on a budget – you're not alone". Hunt Wesson Menu Plans, *Life*, November 13, 1970.

[15] United States Brewer's Federation, *Life*, March 23, 1953; Old Hickory, *Life*, May 7, 1956; Calvert Reserve, *Life*, July 20, 1959.

[16] Schlitz Beer, *Life*, March 23, 1953. See also the ad for Early Times, Kentucky Bourbon, *Life*, July 10, 1959. Here, the wife rests in a deck chair in the garden, reading a magazine, while the husband treats himself to a glass of Bourbon. Only one beer ad from the 1950s displayed a woman enjoying her beer alone: Schlitz, *Life*, July 5, 1954.

[17] Seagram's VO Canadian Whisky, *Life*, March 3, 1965.

[18] Ballantine's Scotch Whisky, *Life*, March 19, 1965.

their drinks without the help of their husbands, as several ads from the late 1960s underline.[19] At the beginning of the 1970s, however, couples posed casually, Whiskey glasses in their hands, and demanded "Join us for a true Bourbon."[20] For the late 1970s and 1980s, we see that while whiskey is still associated with male taste, strength and adventure, women as independent consumers are nevertheless integrated into the picture.[21] Also, social drinking came up as a topic for picture ads, displaying youthful groups of people sharing their drinks instead of single families.[22] While the drinking of alcohol developed from an all-male privilege into something women could even enjoy in private and public on their own terms, the family was still evoked in juice and milk ads during the 1960.[23] Here, the nuclear family figured as a "team" that had to be sustained with high quality nutrients and vitamins. The incorporation of women into ads for spirits during the 1960s seems to reflect not only a change in marketing strategies – appealing to women as buyers and consumers – but, more importantly, a successive broadening of the female gender norm. While the homemaker/mother still was held responsible for the nutrition and well-being of her family, it nevertheless became acceptable that she enjoyed a drink independently of her husband or mate.[24] Interestingly, not ads for food or drinks, but the ones for cars capitalized on the nuclear family.

Forever for the Family: Car Ads

The product category that constantly referred to the family in picture ads was cars. During the 1950s, especially the spaciousness and power of cars were advertised – for the

[19] Smirnoff Wodka, *Life*, March 8, 1968; Byrrh, *Life*, November 29, 1968; Old Grant-Dad Whiskey, *Life*, November 29, 1968.

[20] Ten High Bourbon, *Life*, March 13, 1970; Seagram V.O. Canadian, *Life*, March 18, 1965.

[21] White Horse Whisky, *Life*, November 19, 1971; White Horse Whisky, *Life*, June 9, 1972; Sherry, *Time*, June 2, 1980, p. 62; Old Parr Whisky, *Time*, June 9, 1980, p. 6; Sherry, *Time*, June 16, 1980, p. 63; Courvoisier, *Time*, May 20, 1985, p. 13; Cutty Sark, *Time*, May 20, 1985, p. 16; Tuborg Beer, *Time*, May 27, 1980, p. 18-19.

[22] Seagram's Whisky, *Life*, July 17, 1972; Johnnie Walker Red Label, *Time*, June 17, 1985, p. 3; Ballentine's, *Time*, May 13, 1985, p. 31; Canadian Club, *Time*, August 16, 1980, p. 59; Courvoisier, *Time*, May 20, 1980, p. 16.

[23] Tang Instant Juice, *Life*, September 16, 1966; Carnation Non Fat Dry Milk, *Life*, November 23, 1962.

[24] For a discussion of women's broadened gender norms in the 1960s see Echols 1994. Weiss 2001. Coontz 2001.

family, but also for pleasure.[25] For example, Buick declared proudly in 1957: "Just born – and bound to make history – big, bold, buoyant" and portrayed a family car (father behind the wheel, mother besides him and daughter in the back) in an adventurous ride into the wilderness.[26] A couple of years later, Ford Anglia (imported from Great Britain) was pictured as the ideal car for the family, efficient and low cost.[27] In the 1960s, Ford and Firestone as well as Kelly Tires used the family to refer to security issues: the tires and the quality service coming with them would allow the family to "sight-see worry free" (Kelly) while able mechanics would effectuate any maintenance needed when the family was travelling (Firestone). Ford simply staged a mother and her two young kids observing a Ford mechanic checking their car and relying on "Quality Car Care."[28] Dodge/Chrysler combined more space for the family of four with technical gadgets as the "two way tailgate which makes it as easy to handle people as it is parcels or potted palms" – the kids posing in the back of the car.[29] Buick's Opel Kadett was introduced as "The family Mini-Brute" (compared to the Maxi-Brute, an Indian elephant), inexpensive, spacious, efficient. "For my family – for any family – my Mini-Brute is perfect. […] And my wife can park it. Do you know how fantastic that is?"[30] The gender issue was also referred to by other motor companies. While Chevrolet proudly declared "A Chevy pickup is built to be womanhandled" – showing an elegant woman maneuvering the car loaded with oranges, Ford directly appealed to women consumers and invoked the allure of sensuality and pleasure of its Mustang model.[31] Displaying a radiating woman in a white wedding gown, just having stepped out of a white car in free nature, the Mustang ad declared "Life was just one diaper after another, until Sarah got her new Mustang. […] Suddenly there was a new gleam in her husband's eye: For the car? For Sarah? For both? Now Sarah knows for sure: Mustangers have more fun!"[32] The combination of image and text is especially revealing as the new car seems to promise not only freedom from daily drudgeries of homemaking and motherhood ("one diaper after another"), but a veritable rebirth of female sensuality and, ultimately, sexuality (the

[25] For example Chevrolet, "First and Finest at Lowest Cost," *Life*, April 3, 1950; Ford, "America's Ablest Car," *Life*, April 7, 1952.

[26] Buick, *Life*, November 11, 1957. Comparable: Plymouth, *Life*, May 7, 1956.

[27] Ford Anglia, *Life*, July 20, 1959.

[28] Firestone Tires, *Life*, September 21, 1962; Kelly Tires, *Life*, September 21, 1962; Ford, *Life*, March 22, 1963.

[29] Dodge / Chrysler, *Life*, March 8, 1968.

[30] Buick Opel Kadett, *Life*, November 14, 1969.

[31] Chevrolet, *Life*, November 29, 1968.

[32] Ford Mustang, *Life*, March 19, 1965. See also Pontiac, *Life*, March 19, 1965.

wedding gown, the "gleam" in the husband's eye). While still partly an affirmation of the conservative gender order which frames the woman as the object of male desire, the ad nevertheless opens up a space for female fulfillment and "fun" apart from a mother's daily duties – and be it only through the purchase of the right car.

Interestingly, during the 1970s, the cheap, reliable, family car again occupied center stage, but now with a new focus on family vacations. While Chevrolet ads staged happy families travelling to US amusement parks on their vacations ("Chevrolet: Building a better way to see the USA"),[33] Ford and Volvo relied more on budget considerations and spaciousness, while the accompanying photo of a father with his young daughter on his shoulders suggested exotic settings and outdoor experiences (Ford).[34] This development also has to be seen in the context of the 1973 oil crisis and the 1979 energy crisis, which not only severely impacted the American automobile industry, but also resulted in an increased presence of cheap and energy efficient Japanese and Asian cars on the American market. In the 1980s, however, cars where mostly advertised as sports cars that guaranteed pleasure, or as cars suitable "also for women," with no families displayed which could limit the male and female consumers' freedom.[35] This observation stands in stark contrast to the common observation of the 1980s as the period where the family was declared to be at the heart of politics and of the nation by the President in his campaign for "traditional family values" (Collins 2007; Ehrman 2005).

Weighing Financial Risk for the Family: Insurance Ads

Another product group that was constantly advertised to the family and for the family were insurance contracts. Here, in the 1950s, the husband as the bread-winner and head of the family clearly stood in the focus of ads for family insurances, as he had to provide for his loved ones. For example, the Travelers Life Insurance ad "Our Mortgaged Home is Blessed" directly appealed to the husband's and father's responsibilities as provider and protector – while he was still pictured with wife and daughter. New York Life, however, only centered on the male provider and his health that needed to be protected to ensure the family's living. This focus on male health as central is also mentioned in the research literature. In her discussion of fatherhood and masculinity concepts put forward by

[33] Chevrolet, *Life*, June 9, 1972. See also Chevrolet, *Life*, March, 17, 1972; Datsun, *Life*, June 19, 1972, Cover inside.

[34] Ford, *Life*, June 9, 1972; Volvo, March 31, 1972.

[35] See for example Nissan, *Time*, February 25, 1985, after p. 36; Mitsubishi, *Time*, March 11, 1985, special page 32-33; SAAB, *Time*, April 22, 1985, p. 2-3; Nissan, June 24, 1985 *Time*, p. 2-3.

advertisements and advice books in the 1950s, historian Tracy Penny Light has argued that "we need a fuller critique of authoritative messages found in advertising, particularly in terms of men's health and the role they were expected to play in society" (Light 2012, 122). During the 1960s, insurance companies started to shift their focus more to the nuclear family to emphasize the need for risk protection and for a balanced family budget. For example, an ad for "Nationwide`s Family Securance Plan" showed a family of four and their groceries, loaded into a convertible car decorated with a big number one. Below was written the slogan "Got kids? Got a house? Got a car? Get the one!"[36] In the same issue of the magazine *Life*, the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company staged the cost of family living when a husband emptied his purse to pay for his wife's and daughter's shopping at the supermarket cashier: "But there's one family need that won't cost you anything. It's this Metropolitan service: Family Security Check-Up!" Below the readers were advised "Check your family's financial health, just as you check physical health."[37] Other ads by the same company also drew on the nuclear family when advertising their insurance plans – although in a more playful mode (the family playing monopoly together, the family with their hands up in the air)[38]. Two more companies chose different approaches in their ads. While Investors Insurance pictured a couple in a conversation with the "insurance man" – and the wife spilled her coffee out of eagerness to listen to the advice – Equitable Life Insurances focused primarily on the husband.[39] A husband posed with a toddler girl while the ad explained: "Look ahead. Today you can protect her as never before," which was, of course, due to the new insurance plan.[40] Thus, again the male breadwinner figured as the key person in charge of protecting and supporting his loved ones.

During the 1970s, interestingly, the emphasis shifted from family security to family finance. For example, the General Motors Acceptance Corporation (GMAC) displayed a family of four with family dog trying to squeeze camping equipment into their already overloaded car, while the caption read "Camping out is one thing. Fitting in another."[41] Of course, as the text outlined, GMAC would offer its services to finance a potential new car and corresponding insurance contracts. Other companies stressed the budgeting

[36] Nationwide, *Life*, May 3, 1963.

[37] Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, *Life*, May 3, 1963.

[38] Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, *Life*, March 22, 1963; Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, *Life*, March 19, 1965.

[39] Investors Insurance, *Life*, March 19. 1965.

[40] Equitable Life Insurances, *Life*, March 22, 1963.

[41] General Motors Acceptance Company, *Life*, June 6, 1972.

issue as well.[42] The next theme acquiring relevance was that of explaining insurance policies to the customer, mostly represented by the wage-earning husband.[43] Another outstanding ad is that of Hunt-Wesson, a giant food company specialized in oil and tomato products, offering a computerized meal plan, to help families live within their food budget. A housewife was pictured while shopping for groceries with a rather concerned expression on her face. The caption reassures her: "If you think it's tough feeding your family on a budget, you're not alone."[44] While the last one is not exactly an insurance ad, it rather deals with the problems a family faced in "getting by" on a limited budget and the solutions proposed. Still, it is quietly assumed also in that ad that the homemaker/mother was in charge of buying and preparing the food for the family, while the husband was supposed to secure the family's living.

Conclusion: From Family Affair to Hedonist Pleasure? Family Advertising from the 1950s through the mid-80s.

The family figured prominently in picture ads that appeared in US-American mainstream magazines in the period under investigation. However, the "all-American family" referred to had its specific limitations as it seemed always to be white, middle class, consisting of mom and dad and their kids. Race was never conceptualized, neither was class – except in one ad that dealt with the problem of limited family budgets.[45] Despite these obvious biases and limitations, the way in which companies and advertisement agencies relied on family imagery to advertise their products underwent crucial changes. Over time, the family was referred to in a more sublime manner as couples, singles and youthful peer groups started to dominate picture ads from the mid-sixties onward. The family was still there, but it loomed more in the background. Interestingly, especially the 1980s – the decade of "traditional family values" as proclaimed by President Ronald Reagan – displayed the least family imagery in magazine advertising. Thus, the perspective on the family in magazine advertising opens up a new path to re-evaluate this decade, mostly referred to as the "conservative decade." Regarding family forms, gender concepts and consuming patterns mirrored in those ads – and taking into account that ads had to translate people's self-concepts into urges to

[42] Bankers Life, *Life*, May 28, 1971; Allstate Car Insurance, *Life*, August 11, 1972.

[43] New York Life Insurance, *Life*, March 6, 1970; Metropolitan Life Insurance, *Life*, October 23, 1970; The Travelers, *Life*, August 13, 1971; The Travelers, *Life*, October 13, 1972.

[44] Hunt-Wesson, *Life*, November 13, 1970.

[45] The only picture ad that conceptualizes race in the entire sample is one for Walkers DeLuxe Bourbon, *Life*, May 7, 1956: An African American butler serves actor Lee Bowman his high-class whiskey.

consume and companies could not risk to alienate consumers – it seems quite plausible that advertising served as a sensitive seismograph of social and normative trends.

Four points serve to further outline this result:

In food ads, women were in charge of food preparation over the entire period. Here, the classical gender roles remain surprisingly stable. Nevertheless, the focus considerably shifted from preparing family dinners and lunches to seducing the husbands or partners with creative and skillful cooking. Also, women's dietary competence referred to in ads turned from barely satisfying their families' needs to balancing nutrition values and, since the 1970s, administering diets.

Ads for alcoholic beverages, however, started to display more egalitarian gender roles during the 1960s. While women had been limited to serve beer to their husbands and never touched spirits during the 1950s – when whiskey was framed as "a man's drink" – women started to consume spirits independently in the 1960s and were even addressed as potential consumers from the 1960s through the 1980s.

Car ads since the 1950s either visualized the family or the couple as consumers and car buyers, relying mostly on comfort and safety. This did not change much over the years, but since the 1960s women were staged as independent customers

Insurance ads always relied on the family – but here the family figured primarily as an object of care, attention, and financial commitment. Interestingly, even in the 1960s it was the male breadwinner who had to balance his investments for the family and who was offered support by insurance companies.

To conclude, picture ads from the 1950s to the 1980s suggest that the family was present in advertising, but was referred to to a far lesser extent since the mid-1960s. Instead, individuals and youthful peer groups partly replaced the nuclear family imagery – which suggests a trend towards more individuality and hedonism in food preparation, leisure and consumption. Nevertheless, this did not account for an integral "value change" from material to post-material values – as claimed by Ingelhart and others. In the 1960s and 1970s, the family remained important, but was more and more associated with finance and security issues – as the car ads since the mid-1960s aptly demonstrate. Thus, "material values" coexisted with "postmaterial" ones, depending on the product category advertised. Whether the perceived absence of the family in picture ads in the 1980s can be read as a counter-trend to current assumptions on the decade's fascination with conservative family values could provide a meaningful subject of further historical study.

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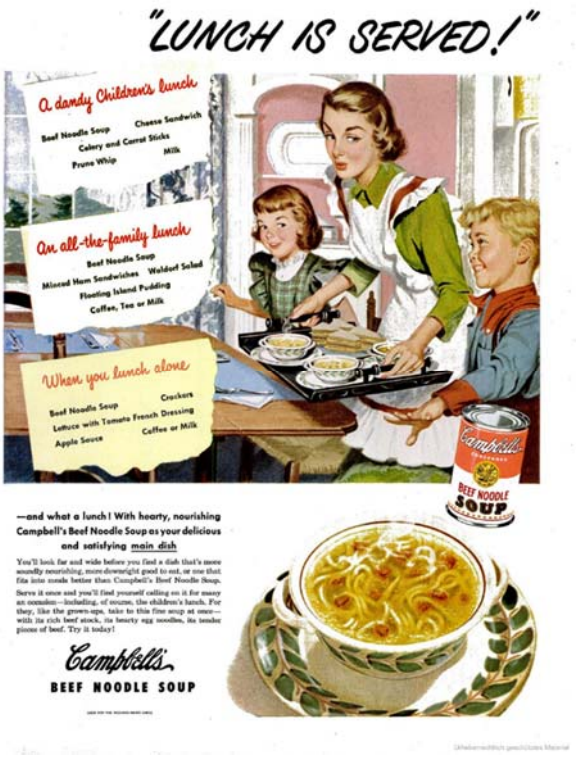
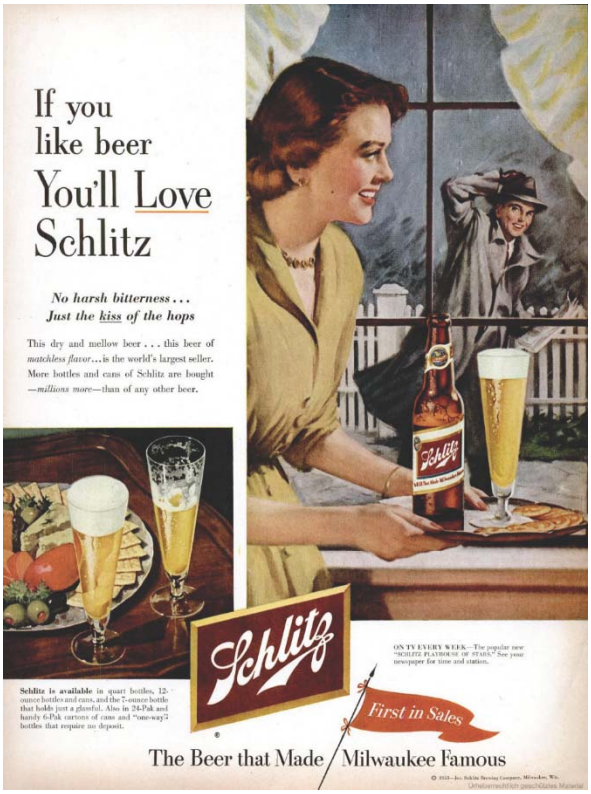


1: Family Lunch: Campbell's Beef Noodle Soup Ad, *Life*, April 3, 1950.

2: Food for Love: American Rice Council, *Life*, March 13, 1970.



3: A Man's Drink: Schlitz Beer, *Life*, March 23, 1953.

JULIA SATTLER

"I AM THE NEW AMERICA"

Representing and Negotiating American Families in Mixed Race Memoirs

ABSTRACT: This article provides an analysis of two mixed race memoirs, Shirlee Taylor Haizlip's *The Sweeter the Juice. A Family Memoir in Black and White* (1994) and Neil Henry's *Pearl's Secret. A Black Man's Search for his White Family* (2001). Texts of this kind, which have emerged in abundance since the 1990s, center on the process of solving a supposed family secret about racial transgression and have contributed the establishment of a normative profile of people of mixed descent in the United States. Using rather traditional media such as family trees and family photographs to inscribe these mixed race families into the national story, and centering on narrators constantly reflecting their family history and identity, these memoirs help understand the complex intersections of race and family at a moment when the American nation at large is trying to come to terms with its past.

KEYWORDS: Family, Slavery, History

Introduction

The subject of race mixing has long been central to the American national and literary imagination. Since colonial times, it has been the subject of political debates and law-making, giving birth to terms such as "mulatto"[1] and "miscegenation,"[2] as well as

[1] A term to refer to people with one White and one Black parent. It was used during slavery and beyond, but is outdated and considered derogatory today.

[2] This term was common to refer to the mixing of different racial groups. Like mulatto, it is outdated today. It is not a neutral term, but implies disapproval.

concepts such as "passing"[3] and the "one drop rule."[4] Even in the new millennium, it continues to give shape to how the American nation as a whole, or each individual family, are discussed from the classroom to the courtroom to the church and the kitchen. These debates are intimately intertwined with questions of power, agency and citizenship: they refer to who can and should be considered "American" at a specific point in time. They tackle the fault lines in American society with regard to conceptions of opportunity and entitlement, of social uplift and participation in the national project (Sattler 2012, 11ff.).

The dynamics of the debate around mixed heritage certainly did not remain stable over time, but changed significantly following the so-called *Loving* decision that in 1967 declared the ban on interracial marriage unconstitutional on the federal level,[5] and then again in the 1990s, when the so-called multiracial movement[6] gained traction across the United States. In the 2000 U.S. census, it was possible for the first time to declare one's mixed ancestry by marking more than one racial category on the form.[7]

In the 1990s and early 2000s, public debates addressing the concept of multiracialism, as well as the crucial role of slavery for American national development, often led by the country's most famous departments of African American Studies, among them Harvard's Department of African and African American Studies, and specifically by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.,[8] gained a lot of traction: the U.S. saw the emergence of discussions, for example, around the spatial and visual memory of slavery and segregation. The attention given to the meaning of the Confederate Flag, the naming of

[3] In his comprehensive study *Neither Black nor White yet Both. Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (1997), Werner Sollors establishes that the term "passing" can be used in reference to "the crossing of any line that divides social groups" (247), but that it is most frequently used in the U.S. context when addressing instances of crossing the "color line" from black to white, thus when a person or a character in a text *passes* for white, often with complex implications for their identity. While generally considered a phenomenon of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, I argue that a similar mechanism is at work for the memoirs discussed in this article – these are texts that literally *pass* into mainstream narratives of Americanness.

[4] A 19th century principle of legal classification in the United States that renders a person with Black ancestor Black. It became codified into some state laws. The concept is an example of hypodescent – the assignation of children from a mixed union into the group with the lower social status.

[5] This Supreme Court Case legalized interracial marriage in the United States. It has led to the increase of interracial marriages over time.

[6] The multiracial movement is not a unified group, but rather, the expression refers to a diversity of advocacy groups claiming that people with more than one racial ancestry should be recognized as their own group of people and should have their own category on the U.S. Census form.

[7] This became known as the so-called "MOOM" (Mark-One-Or-More) option. Before 2000, you could only indicate your belonging to one racial group (see e.g. Williams 2006)

[8] Henry Louis Gates, Jr., is a very well known American literary critic, professor and public intellectual. He has published extensively on the subject of African American lives. He teaches at Harvard University.

streets or public places after Confederate generals, or the ways the past should be exhibited in museums or monuments was literally unprecedented, pointing toward what Rushdy (2001) has termed a "moment of anti-nostalgic reflection [which] also constitutes an important development in the ongoing conversation about the meaning of race in contemporary America" (135). In the context of these negotiations, the topic of mixed race families and mixed heritage became the subject of countless publications and media releases interlinking the past and the present and asking complex questions about the role of said past for the American nation at that time. This includes, for example, the TV-miniseries *African American Lives* (PBS, 2006-2008, directed and presented by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.), the drama *Sankofa* (1993, dir. Haile Gerima) or the Hollywood blockbuster *Amistad* (1997, dir. Steven Spielberg), but also book collections such as *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (2009, ed. James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton), or the fictional *The Known World* (Edward P. Jones, 2003), depicting the issue of black slave ownership in antebellum America.

The public debate around these topics was likely eased by the fact that more generally speaking, the 1980s and 1990s were characterized by a trend to attest to the role of personal histories in their larger contexts. Sharon O'Brien (1996) has shown that this period was a time of "breaking silences" in writing. At the same time, she argues that "[w]riters [were] challenging the boundaries supposedly distinguishing fiction from nonfiction, memoir from biography, essay from poetry, autobiography from criticism" (1).

Taking these findings into account, in this article, I will focus on 1990s and early 2000s mixed race memoirs and their participation in discourses of mixed race heritage and race relations of their time. These texts are characterized by a hybrid stance interlinking the private and the public, and, while commonly characterized as first-person memoirs, include features of detective stories – such as the quest as central motif – as well as of family novels. Establishing a rather closely circumscribed and fairly predictable narrative about mixed race heritage across multiple generations, the mixed race memoir of the 1990s and early 2000s constructs and re-constructs American families by taking into account their mixed race dimension. Overall, these narratives contest the idea of the monoracial American family and place race mixing at the core of the family as well as of the national story: To be an American, and to be an American family is to be mixed. At the same time, these texts use mainstream storylines – from the American Dream to the idea of immigration – as well as mainstream media from the family album to the family tree to do so. Thus, despite their potential for innovation, these memoirs still confirm and conform to predominant narratives of American-ness, instead of composing an alternative American history publicly exposing racial injustice, exploitation and the violent loss of agency that oftentimes went along with race mixing. Thereby, they

contribute to rendering these topics unspeakable. By aspiring towards inclusion into the mainstream corpus of stories of American-ness and by seeking connection to their white ancestry, the black-identifying narrators in these texts attest to the fact that even at the end of the twentieth century, inclusion into the national project still more than anything else depends on whiteness.

More than a marginal phenomenon, publications such as Shirlee Taylor Haizlip's *The Sweeter the Juice. A Family Memoir in Black and White* (1994), Neil Henry's *Pearl's Secret. A Black Man's Search for his White Family* (2001), or Thulani Davis' *My Confederate Kinfolk. A Twenty-first Century Freedwoman Confronts her Roots* (2006) have, according to Michelle Elam (2011), significantly contributed to the formation of "a normative profile of mixed race people" (10) and by extension, their families and tactics of relating to both, the family's past and American history at large. According to these texts, people of mixed descent tend to be interested in encounters with their white ancestors, are generally willing and able to go a long way to find information about these extended families, seek reconciliation with their white-identifying family members, and, by extension, with the past at large.

Family Secrets, Family Legacies

The mixed race memoir of the 1990s and early 2000s is a narrative about the exploration of the narrator's family's racial history, usually taking into account a period of about 150 years – from before the outbreak of the Civil War, thus, when slavery still existed, into the 1990s – and looking from the present's perspective into the past. At the central locus of this type of text is a family secret about black/white racial transgression. In the memoir's plot, the narrator, oftentimes a journalist, writer, or other character affiliated with the humanities, speaks from an autobiographical perspective and tells the story of a personal quest for the family's origins.

The family secret at the center of this type of text is not the mixedness of the family as such, but rather, the text explores how exactly the family's mixedness has come to be. Without the family secret, there would not be a plot – the family secret motivates all the protagonist's actions, but it is also the underlying feature of all communication in these texts. As central element of the narrative being told, the black identifying narrators inquire how the family members related to each other in the past, and even more specifically, how exactly contacts between supposedly "black" and supposedly "white" family members played out. It also investigates the role of *passing* for the family, and the impact the past has on the contemporary family.

Addressing these types of questions and linking the family to a white ancestor seems rather counterintuitive at first, as the narrators describe themselves as firmly located in

the black community. But their family history and the exploration of the family's racial past matters to them as they aim to find answers to questions that have accompanied them since their childhood. In Neil Henry's *Pearl's Secret*, the narrator early on becomes fascinated by his white forebear who is sometimes brought up in conversation and whose photograph is kept by the family when he is a child: "The white man's name was rarely mentioned in our house when I was growing up, and when he was referred to, my mother and her family would lower their voices, as if they were telling a secret too sensitive or perhaps even shameful for outsiders or youngsters to hear" (10). Of course, this type of secretive behavior on the side of the adults in the text leads to fascination with the secret and the man behind it, whose name must not be mentioned. By the same token, it also triggers the reader's immediate interest.

Through their research, the narrators wish to find closure: it is their goal to be able to tell their children a family story that is "more complete." Often, the question of when exactly different branches of the family lost touch with each other and why this happened is of great importance to the narrators, who make the – usually successful – attempt to re-establish a connection to their supposedly "lost" family members in the present. These family members are either white or have *passed* into white society and have thus broken all ties to those for whom it was impossible to *pass*. While certainly, *passing* was not generally judged negatively in all cases, as it enabled people better economic and social opportunities, in these texts, *passing* goes along with negative consequences that manifest themselves at the time of narration.

In bringing up questions of intergenerational responsibility and the idea of encountering family members living as white, the mixed race memoir of the 1990s and early 2000s is framed by ethical concerns. It seeks to establish supposedly more complete family stories, but also knowledge about, for example, the exact conditions under which the family lived, and under which circumstances the family split.

The process of investigating mixed race heritage, a search that often goes along with significant complications – from lost documents to unhelpful family members and false traces – leads the narrator to follow the family story back in time using different methods of investigation: from archival data to maps to photographs of former family homes, from family album to family tree, all the way to DNA tests – all of these are featured in this highly conventionalized genre which can and needs to be read in the tradition of Alex Haley's *Roots* (1976), that at its time of publication offered an accessible and relatable story to every African American family. Along similar lines, *Roots* has also contributed to the popularization of family research in African American families (see e.g. Woodtor 1999), which in turn impacts the emergence of mixed race narratives in the 1990s and early 2000s.

This particular type of 1990s response, that frames its exploration of mixed race origins in a rather predictable storyline leading the reader from the question of family

origins via the exploration of the supposed "roots" to a resolution in which the family members meet and get to know each other, seemingly offers a comprehensive family story to all mixed race families in the United States of America. Interestingly enough, by framing racial transgression and the silence around it in a more or less conventional love story, this type of narrative excludes rape. Significantly, the 1990s and early 2000s mixed race memoir, which firmly locates the family story that is explored, as well as the individual family members portrayed in it, in the middle class. As a genre, it builds on the notion that there is an inherent "truth" about the family that can, and in fact *needs* to be discovered to establish a sense of wholesomeness or conclusion, both for the family at large and for the narrator as an individual. Along similar lines, national reconciliation across racial lines is alluded to in these terms.

This kind of idealization may not be all that surprising, since by the 1990s, within the US mainstream, "mixed race [had become] represented as hip testimony to American democracy, the corporeal solution of racial diversity and national unity" and was thus considered "the painless antidote to the centuries-old practice of racial passing" (Elam 96) – a dangerous reduction of the actual complications emerging out of mixed race heritage and claiming a mixed identity. The idea of the "painless antidote" suggests that the nation can and finally should come to terms with its past and with the harm that has been inflicted especially on the African American community by incorporating mixed race as an inherent part of its national identity and history without however acknowledging and addressing ongoing systemic discrimination, colorism,[9] and white privilege.[10]

While it is certainly possible to claim that slavery continues to haunt the American nation in its entirety, thus affecting Americans who conceive of themselves as black and those who conceive of themselves as white, this process is not nearly the same for the different groups – even today, white privilege is well and alive, as becomes evident from the events of Charlottesville, VA, in 2017, and the government's response to them,[11] as

[9] Discrimination based on skin tone. Generally, people with lighter skin experience less discrimination.

[10] Meaning the ways in which people benefit from the fact that they are not a racial minority, but considered "White." White people are not confronted with negative racial stereotypes, for example. They have access to social and cultural privileges they often remain unaware of. White privilege negatively affects the lives of those not considered White.

[11] I refer to the August 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in response to the removal of a Robert E. Lee statue, and its violent escalation. Instead of speaking up against the upsurge of racially motivated violence in the United States, President Trump condemned the "hatred, bigotry and violence on many sides," thereby clearly not taking sides against the Right. https://edition.cnn.com/2017/08/12/politics/trump-statement-alt-right-protests/index.html.

well as from countless instances of police violence against African Americans that led to the formation of the *Black Lives Matter* movement.[12] Arguably, it is specifically due to the pervasiveness of white privilege that the idea of black/white mixing is still central to the American imagination in the 21st century: it bears witness and gives proof to what Elam has called "the paradox of unequal entitlement in the land of equality" (118); the fact that there was so far never a period in American history in which opportunities for all people were indeed similar. While the social shifts and changes in the United States following the Civil Rights Movement are certainly significant, it remains "safe to say that the black-white distinction [was] as sharp as it has ever been" (Zack 2010, 876) at the time of the memoirs' publication, and continues to be so today. By the 1990s, following the emergence of Critical Race Theory,[13] it had been established that "much of what is broadly associated with distinct racial groups is the result of history, custom, and legalized injustice" (878). In tune with this recognition, the mixed race memoirs note that there is a crucial difference between macro (national) and micro (family) history, and that different members of the same family can be affected by the same event or fact in radically different ways.[14]

Much in tune with the topics debated around the time of their emergence, mixed race memoirs of the 1990s and early 2000s hence attempt to reconcile mixedness and American-ness. This is done by rooting people of mixed descent in central moments of American history. It is important to recall that the narrators in these mixed race memoirs are intergenerationally mixed, meaning that their family has been mixed for several generations. In their narration of mixed race family histories, mixed race memoirs emphasize the centrality of racial mixing to American families, and, by implication, to the nation: while interracial marriages remained illegal into the second half of the twentieth century, the families portrayed in the text became mixed even before the Civil War. Due to the legal limitations, however, the relationships leading to this could never be made official and hence led to the family falling apart into a "black" and a "white" family. Thus, this centrality of mixed race does not go along with state recognition of these unions, or

[12] An international activist movement that originated in the African American community. It speaks up against police violence against the Black population, against racial profiling, and racial inequality.

[13] Critical Race Theory (hereafter CRT) formally emerged in 1989 and builds on the recognition that race – rather than being a biological fact – is a socially constructed concept created by the white population that works to maintain the interests of the white population. Due to this construction, racial inequalities – e.g. in the economic and legal sectors – emerged and were upheld, also by way of laws and policies which are biased against people of color. Inspired and informed by the Civil Rights Tradition, CRT was created by activist scholars such as Derrick Bell, Patricia Williams, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Mari Matsuda.

[14] These differences could be due to numerous factors including but not limited to, skin color and the effects of colorism in American society, gender, and sexual orientation.

the children that resulted from them. Hence, the narratives can claim to unveil a heretofore-silenced aspect of American history: they point to "open questions" in the public negotiation of subjects such as race, family and national identity.

Readings in Dialogue

The emergence of a great number of texts in which a black-identifying narrator makes an effort to understand where and how the family came to be mixed and following the urge to begin a dialogue with these people in order to understand, and by implication, humanize them – the development Paul Spickard (2001) has referred to as "the boom in bi-racial biography" (76) – coincides with the publication of a similar type of narrative in which white-identifying protagonists question their family's role during slavery as well as later in American history and up to the present moment. Though fewer in number, texts like Edward Ball's *Slaves in the Family* (1998), or Macky Alston's documentary film *Family Name* (1998) address a similar set of questions while coming to terms with their family members' role during slavery and thereafter. Ashraf H. A. Rushdy has qualified this kind of text as "palimpsest in white" (146ff.). While the protagonist's outlook in these texts is radically different, especially with regard to the negotiation of national identity, these narratives also speak to a family legacy of slavery and its aftermath, including *passing* and segregation, albeit from a white perspective.

In my dissertation, I discussed both these types of text in dialogue and established the genre of the *memoir of the search*, characterized as a mixed race genre speaking to notions of race and inheritance, and featuring a protagonist who is directly involved in the story. I have borrowed the expression "memoir of the search" from Henry's *Pearl's Secret*, in which the protagonist establishes the text as "a memoir of [his] search and the story he discovered on the other [white] side of the [family] tree" (Henry 14). The idea of a memoir based on the search for belonging and identity points to the formative importance of this process. As a genre, these texts supposedly uncover silenced aspects of the protagonists' families and their becoming. It was productive to read memoirs featuring black-identifying protagonists in dialogue with memoirs featuring white-identifying protagonists as both types of texts claim to discuss a shared past and shared history and point to the idea of a possible reconciliation within the family, but also with the past at large – certainly a complicated idea as it would necessitate critically addressing and acknowledging white privilege on part of the white narrators; a dimension that is only marginally taken up in these texts. Still, as the protagonist in *Slaves in the Family* explains with regard to his motivation for bringing the different branches of the family together, "I thought we should meet, share our recollections, feelings, and dreams, and make the story whole" (Ball 1999, 14). This statement points to the idea that "sharing" will lead to a more comprehensive and inclusive understanding of history – while it also

bears the notion of being able to reconcile very different experiences, which is, as these texts also prove, a complicated assumption.[15]

My reading of these texts as family stories was supported by insights from narrative psychology, and specifically by Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy's Contextual Family Therapy (hereafter CFT). Applied to literary analysis, CFT helps uncover hidden or silenced layers of the texts that result from family secrets and intergenerational trauma. CFT builds on relational ethics: "every relationship has at least two sides of entitlement, obligation, interest, need, merit and benefit" (1987, 201). While a balanced relationship built on trust and support is based on mutual give-and-take, an imbalanced one is characterized by a degree of unevenness, by neglect, and – as a result – lack of trust. The family secret determines family structures, leads to power imbalances within the family, and hinders the emergence of open communication structures (referred to as "real dialogue" in CFT). This concerns black-identifying as well as white-identifying families portrayed in the *memoir of the search*,[16] thus pointing to the need for a common resolution – a "coming clean with the past" of sorts – in order to establish balance. The uneven communication and power structure in the family has been perpetuated over multiple generations, as the family secret is the result of a break of trust due to *passing* or the neglect of a partner and child several generations ago.[17] This makes the "balancing of accounts," to speak with CFT again, a significant effort on all parts. In their negotiation of the difficulties when investigating the family history and the re-establishment of contact, the narratives speak to these efforts, at least at the micro level of the individual family.

It is crucial that different practices of intergenerational relating play into the stories told, and that patterns of obligation and implication in one's ancestors' actions are important concerns to the narrators. In these terms, the *memoir of the search* follows a moral agenda and considers secrecy about the past a negative factor leading to a lack of understanding and inclusion in the family, as well as in American society at large. Hence,

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[15] The imbalance of power between Black and White in these texts is for the most part not overcome. Generally, the recognition is that while it is possible to engage in a conversation with each other, too much has happened to reconcile the pain caused. In *Slaves in the Family*, the protagonist also begins to understand that his seeking forgiveness may well come too late, as those directly affected by slavery and its aftermath have passed away.

[16] This is however not to state that the family secrets and their implications are the same for black and white families.

[17] As stated before, the families portrayed in this type of text have been mixed for a long time. The interracial unions addressed here bear no relation to the *Loving* decision. The *memoir of the search* makes the claim that even if the event as well as its immediate negative consequences (such as the loss of a family member due to this person *passing* into white society) occurred long ago, these continue to affect the present family.

the emphasis in these texts is on the – however complicated – effort to come to terms with the past via the discovery of "what (supposedly) really happened."

Understanding these underlying patterns opens the path to reading the *memoir of the search* as part of a larger undertaking to speak a painful truth and to reflect upon the complicated dynamics of guilt vs. responsibility for the past. If nothing else at all, reading these texts together points out that testimony plays an important role in the specifics of the past's negotiation in the present. It also makes clear that the dynamics between descendants of victims and perpetrators transcend this past as they take place in the here and now, but that they are charged with their particular histories.

Representing Mixed Race Families – Exposing American Families

So far, I have by and large discussed mixed race narratives of the 1990s and early 2000s as reflections by a first-person narrator on one individual family that is portrayed in detail. But it is also possible to read these texts in a larger frame, namely as comments on the national family. At least on the surface, these texts' tactics of addressing heretofore silenced transgressions challenge not only the individual family narrative, but also the American national story at large. Both these stories, so goes the argument, lack completion and need to be re-told in terms of the newly discovered mixed race past.

To illustrate my points, I will use two prominent examples of the genre, the aforementioned *The Sweeter the Juice* and *Pearl's Secret*. Both focus on the sharpening of the narrator's understanding of being American in the late twentieth century, and on dealing with a family legacy of racial *passing* and familial neglect. In *Pearl's Secret*, the protagonist, a professor of journalism, traces his great-great-grandmother's romance with a white plantation overseer, while the narrator in *The Sweeter the Juice* searches for her mother's family members who have *passed* into white society in order to enable a family reunion before her mother passes away: "As my mother approached her eightieth birthday, I made a conscious decision to use whatever means possible to find her family" (Haizlip 1995, 33). While these two storylines may sound very different from each other, both texts center on the solution of the family secret of "mixed race" and lead the reader to accompany the narrators on a detailed process of investigation of their family legacy and their identities as members of specific families, as well as of their role as American citizens. The narrators claim that their family story is representative of the American story at large: "'We've got America in us […] We've got the story of America'" (Henry 2001, 50). By including specific narrative structures and incorporating family trees and photographs, I argue that these texts confirm dominant narratives of family building and nation making, all the way to the necessity of including whiteness.

By way of close reading, it becomes possible to analyze the narrators and their ways of relating to their individual and national families. In both, *The Sweeter the Juice* and *Pearl's Secret,* the black-identifying narrators grow up in families characterized by the palpable presence of insecurities about the past. The narrator in *The Sweeter the Juice* explicates these insecurities using the metaphor of a quilt, a metaphor well-established in African American literature at large: "Putting together the bits and pieces of my past creates a quilt of melanin patches shading from dark to light, red to brown, tan to pink. There are ragged edges and missing segments. I dream I will find some of myself in those holes and gaps. I need to finish the quilt, wearing it smooth until its edges feel soft to my touch, blending its clashing colors to my own notion of harmony. Only then can I store it away in a safe place, taking it out every once in a while to look at it" (Haizlip 1995, 14). This image points to the "patchwork" that is the twentieth century American family, but it also transcends it: not only does it make evident the "missing" elements and "ragged edges" the narrator observes – places where the story does not "fit" – but it also shows that she cannot find a sense of peace ("store it away") before the quilt has been restored and she has had the chance to get used to it ("wearing it smooth"). The palpable absences of family that become clear, for example, in the explication that "[t]here were no gray-haired grandparents waiting to welcome and spoil me on holidays or vacations. There were no letters or presents or cards from the parents of my parents. There were no stories about my mother when she was a little girl" (31-32) continue to haunt the narrators as adults raising their own families. The narrator in *The Sweeter the Juice* claims to carry "her mother's pain" (33) about the family's separation due to *passing*,[18] an injury she absorbed by "osmosis" (33) – with said "osmosis" being an unavoidable biological process. Hence, the protagonists feel obliged to spare their children the confusion they experienced and feel triggered to investigate the "family secret:" "Put simply," explains the narrator in Henry's *Pearl's Secret,* "I wanted to be able to offer my daughter someday a better understanding of my family's racial history than I had when I was coming of age and a clearer picture of the dynamic complexity of race and prejudice as they are woven into the fabric of America" (13). It is significant that the narrator considers the "complexity of race and prejudice" as an inherent part of the United States' conception: the metaphor of the fabric to talk about American national history and collective identity rhetoric suggests that race and prejudice are part of the structure, pointing to the tight relationship between race and nation the texts speak to. This also firmly establishes the Henry family as an African American family – due to white privilege, a white father would not have to introduce his young daughter to racism and the dangers of racial stereotyping

[18] In the text, the mother is left behind by her family of origin as she is too dark to *pass*. Her close family members, including her sister, start living as white and she does not hear from them until her daughter re-establishes the contact. In *The Sweeter the Juice*, the mother is deeply insecure and depressed, and becomes skeptical of all light skinned blacks, including her own son.

in a similar way, and at such a young age. This attests to the ongoing precariousness of black lives in the USA.

Establishing their story as part of the American national story is of special concerns to the narrators. They need to demonstrate, so to say, that they, too, are Americans. This does not only become evident in the prominent and quintessentially "American" image of the quilt used in *The Sweeter the Juice* but also in *Pearl's Secret*'s allusion to the "fabric" of America – essentially, this fabric can be read as a type of quilt, as well. Both use further similar strategies to broach the relationship between family history and American history at large. They incorporate intratextual features contributing to the construction and representation of mixed race families: family trees as well as family photographs are used to attest to past lives that "matter," but also to give visual "proof" to the mixedness of the family. By including the photographs, it becomes clear that members of the same family can have very different skin tones, indeed. At the same time, these media and the fact that they are accessible – that the narrator knows how and where to look for them – clearly locate the mixed race memoirs in the educated middle class. Establishing a coherent and visually supported family narrative of this kind is most likely a matter of impossibility for poor families, be they black or white.

Conventionally, genealogical methods stand in opposition to egalitarian or democratic visions of American society (Watson 1996, 298). Genealogy traditionally "values origin, stock, race, blood, in an increasingly heterogeneous world" (ibid.) and thus becomes used to focus on purity rather than diversity. Standing in line with conservative, patriarchal and heteronormative assumptions about what the family is or can be, the making of a family tree, as a non-neutral cultural practice "produces rather than describes kinship, as genealogical knowledge is bestowed as a gift, shared or exchanged to create or recreate family trees" (Nash 2004, 5). But while it is generally used to silence the racial dimension by excluding, for example, illegitimate children, in the memoirs discussed here, the family tree is used to highlight it. The mixed race root of the family is clearly visible in the family trees shown. Genealogy is helpful in the context of these texts because it "makes truth claims about the knowability of family history and its power to authorize the individual while actively resisting the incursion of autobiographical storytelling" (Watson 1996, 299): it thus attests to a specific fact, namely that the family came into being at the moment the racial mixing occurred.

Along similar lines, the supposed "family album" attests to family members of many different skin colors: they represent a visual imagery of the legacy of racial transgression in the family. It is apparent that older photographs do not show family members who identify as black and family members who identity as white together. This is visual proof of the separation of the family: There was no contact across the so-called color line; people did not meet with each other, they did not attend each other's family events. They

could have been *one* family, but they were *two* – because of the complexities of race in America.

Taken together, these medial forms serve to create a comprehensive family structure in the present. They point to the idea that where there used to be a nuclear family with only few members, a large circle of cousins, aunts and uncles, emerges in the process of the narrator's investigation, completing the legacy across previously set borders. These media show who is considered part of the family both before and after the narrator's quest and contribute to the normalization of racial transgression across American history – this is so easily possible and acceptable since despite the pain that was inflicted by way of the family's separation, the mixing itself was the result of a romantic union rather than a forced sexual encounter. Taken together, the family trees and family photographs function as a limited mixed-race family archive, which is a missing piece of both these family's individual history and American history at large.

At the same time, these media simplify the idea that two (or more) families that have been divided by race for a very long time can be re-united easily via the visual integration of their family tree and family album: As the narrator in *Pearl's Secret* emphasizes, "our lives continued much as before, separately, quietly, distinctly white and black" (287). Along rather similar lines, the narrator in *The Sweeter the Juice* states that "[i]t is a satisfaction to have traced the missing branches of the family tree," but that in the long run "[she does] not know if [she] can ever connect their lives with [hers]. [Their] circumstances have been too different" (264). This is a rather bleak conclusion to reach, of course, as it is not unity but division that becomes evident – a message that contradicts the healing of families alluded to before.

Still, and even with this tension between the plot and its visual integration, it is clear that by the end of the twentieth century, racial transgression can be formulated using conventional media of family memory. Along similar lines, a mixed-race family with a family tree and family album, no matter how deep the schism on the inside, is an American family. Mixed race heritage hence becomes a central part of being American: "I am an American anomaly. I am an American ideal. I am the American nightmare. I am the Martin Luther King Dream. I am the new America" (Haizlip 1995, 15), as the narrator in Th*e Sweeter the Juice* attests: at least on the surface, the process of inclusion is the American Dream and the Civil Rights Movement's vision of equality fulfilled. At the same time, the allusions to both James Baldwin and Malcolm X in the above quote make evident that this is not a smooth process and that below the surface, the family is lacking the tools to advance cross-racial communication and understanding in the larger sense.

Re-telling the National Story

Mixed race memoirs contribute to the re-telling of the American national story in yet another way. The narrators point out that their family's story "mirrors the lives of tens of thousands of Americans who have racial schisms in their own families" (Haizlip 1995, 34) and establish that they are both, a "normality" in the nation, and significant to the writing of a more inclusive American history. Throughout the narrative, narrators intertwine different moments in American history with their own family's story: they show where their family members have encountered others who have shaped the nation, how family members were involved in central events in the United States, from the Civil War to the Civil Rights Movement, and how their family's "Americanization" came to be.[19]

While the narrators in both texts clearly conceive of themselves as African Americans, they tell the story of their white male forebears' immigration to America. They do so using a standardized scheme of talking about immigration from Europe with the dream of a better life in the New World: it is the story of "an idealized progenitor constructed as a stunning combination of religious pilgrim, pioneer, patriot and entrepreneur" (Gardner 2003, 149), who is being paid much attention to throughout the text – more so than any other progenitor mentioned. The texts are very aware of the "American-ness" of the story depicted: "My mother's story begins as many American stories begin, with a transatlantic journey. The year was 1860, and the family travelers were Irish, from County Tipperary" (35), relates the narrator in Haizlip's *The Sweeter the Juice*, thus emphasizing not the story of the violent passage of her African ancestors, but rather the story that conforms to the standard narrative of U.S. immigration.[20] At a later point, this gap is pointed to by expressing that the narrator does not know "which country or tribe claimed [her] people" or "the circumstances of their capture and enslavement" (104). Along similar lines, the narrator in Henry's story, whose progenitor was of French descent, but immigrated to America from England, emphasizes the transatlantic passage of the white man rather than alluding to the Middle Passage of his black ancestors.

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[19] The concept of "Americanization" of course seems very much at odds with the idea of a heritage of slavery. I am using it here to refer to the texts' emphasis of a white ancestor's immigration to the New World. By implication, the narratives inscribe themselves into the more optimistic narrative of immigration, rather than the more vindictive one that might include, for example, the question of long-term reparations for the suffering endured by African Americans throughout the Middle Passage and beyond.

[20] It may seem particularly ironic in this context that the Haizlip family's white ancestors are Irish by heritage, since the Irish immigrant population also faced significant hurdles and was often treated just as badly as the black population in the early phase of their American presence (see, for example, Ignatiev 1997).

It is remarkable that this story of immigration is paid so much attention to – it enables these texts to "normalize" the family's narrative. The texts tell an immigration story that is not exceptional, but rather, stereotypically "American." The narrators establish themselves as descendants of Anglo immigrants in a nation shaped by this population group in most significant and most palpable ways – it is a strategy of writing their family story as quintessentially American and themselves as true "Americans." In tune with this, both narrators emphasize that while they visited Africa – not as a private undertaking, but rather in the context of a professional engagement – America is the locus of their story (see e.g. Henry 89). Hence, they see themselves as black Americans and descendants of slaves, but not necessarily as specifically affiliated with Africa, or a particular country or region in Africa.

Just like the immigration story, the family's participation in the American Dream is a typical feature of both, again inscribing the family narrative onto the "less problematic" success story of national inclusion and placing them together with countless other (European) immigrant groups. The ability to tell this type of story places the families in a position of economic privilege and success: the family must have proven at one point in time that it is possible to get ahead and ascend the social ladder. In *Pearl's Secret*, the story of economic success and the achievement of middle class status for the black family is explicitly linked to and contrasted with the downfall of the white family: "During the century and a quarter that followed, the black family steadily climbed upward somehow to realize many of its dreams, with careers in medicine, engineering, education, and journalism, despite the obstacles of American racism. At the same time the far more advantaged white family seemed to suffer a mysterious and devastating fall after the patriarch's death in 1901 – a decline I first began to glean in the courthouse records in Vicksburg and now badly wanted to find out more about" (227). A similar fate affects those members of the Haizlip family who have *passed* into white society. In this narrative, the idea of the American Dream, while significant to tell a story about attaining upward social mobility for African Americans, is decidedly ambivalent for the fate of the family as a whole. The idea of rising from nowhere also enables certain – phenotypically white – family members to leave behind those who cannot *pass* and to cause significant pain to those remaining behind. By consequence, the narrators raise critical questions about decisions made by specific ancestors, hence speaking to the ethical dimensions of the past and the idea of a common responsibility for building a different future. They do not, however, speak up for political, legal or even narrative revisions, but rather, by re-telling the American story, issue a call for the recognition of the importance of past personal decisions – such as whether to *pass* or not – for the present status of race relations.

The American Dream is intimately intertwined with the more general storyline of "Americanization." In *The Sweeter the Juice*, the narrator capitalizes on the process of "Americanization" her African forebears accomplished by their mere presence on

American soil and despite the multiple oppressions they had to face: "[as] much as they might want to," the narrator says with regard to her African ancestors, "they would never be African again. They would remake themselves into Americans. They would distill drops from the American dream to water their minds and flood their souls. They would become Negroes, mulattoes, colored, black and African American. They would become me" (104).[21] Despite the coercive quality of slavery, the forebears "remake themselves," and despite the names being used for them by whites at different times in an objectifying manner – "Negroes, mulattoes, colored, black [...] African American" – the ancestors would move on, thus gaining agency and setting in motion a complex chain of transformations that results in the narrator herself – the literal "new America" – a person who is phenotypically black, but whose story can be made to conform to established ways of narrating American-ness.

What we hear in these texts is thus not a story of difference, but a story that confirms the existing master narrative. These texts do not focus on the differences that emerge from a heritage of slavery, but instead buy into the immigrant experience, ignoring that up to this day African American culture remains distinct from mainstream American culture in so many ways, and not commenting on white privilege. By including – or erasing, depending on point of view – the racial transgression into a story of immigration and Americanization, this story is normalized. It is not exceptional – it is "American." Writing issues of race and of racial transgression into the white story of immigration is almost unbelievable. The detailed evaluation of how the ancestors became Americans, how they like all other Americans at one point immigrated into the country and how they struggled to follow their personal version of the American Dream can be read as a response to the widespread assumption that in one way or another, "the only viable model for nation-building is a process of 'Americanization'" (Berlant 1997, 192). This is clearly evident in the mixed race memoir, which alludes to all conventional processes subsumed under the header of "Americanization."

The notion that the earlier generations, the narrators' ancestors, played such an essential role in the shaping of "America" and in what it meant to be American in the past, counteracts the notion that mixed race heritage poses a threat to national integrity and especially to whiteness. The texts essentially state that to be "American" means being mixed, and has always included being mixed. While this points to the idea that by the 1990s, stories of transgression can both be made public when paired with conventional narratives of American-ness, it also makes evident that notions of citizenship are still closely intertwined with questions of conformism to cultural and societal norms: The family is no longer ethnically homogeneous, but rather, family membership defined by

[21] This passage would make for an interesting read together with other texts addressing the idea of becoming American, e.g. Crevecoeur's "Letters from an American Farmer."

telling the same story, even if it is the same story told from different vantage points – there is apparently now a shared story of immigration and Americanization to refer to independent from one's slave heritage. The narrators in these texts establish themselves at the center of American culture by showing – and actually documenting – how they are connected to others, and how their story has remained true to the "American ideal" despite their mixedness, that is still intimately linked to whiteness and European immigration.

Conclusions

Focusing on the representation of mixed race families in a specific genre of literature that emerged in the 1990s and early 2000s I have attested to the challenges the American nation found itself confronted with when addressing the subject of racial transgression. I have explored how mixed race memoirs communicate a specific image of mixed race families and their identities shaped by questions of dealing with the past, of intergenerational responsibility, but also by the idea of inscribing a mixed race story into the established narratives of American-ness via the use of storytelling and the inclusion of media of memory that suggest arrival in mainstream American society. Interestingly enough, the narrators in these texts are very much concerned with exploring the so-called "white" branch of the family history and to learn more about family members who have *passed*. This may at first seem rather surprising, as these are the family members who have abandoned, neglected and disappointed their ancestors, and people they feel close to – hence, even from a relational perspective, and using CFT, it would be very understandable if they wanted nothing to do with this particular branch of the family.

According to these memoirs, however, the family's inception and genesis is rooted deeply in America and give proof that the families portrayed in them identify with genuinely white American values and stories, such as the story of the American Dream, for example. Using family trees and establishing a mixed race "family album," they inscribe mixed race heritage into mainstream American history. They speak to the subject of past transgression from the point of those who have – at least in the overall scheme – "made it." While certainly these narratives contribute to the normalization of mixed race heritage, they also add to silencing parts of the story. They prescribe a way of reconciling mixed race history with American history and becoming American that relies on sameness rather than difference, hence, leaving unspeakable other stories that may not be as conforming to the mainstream stories as theirs, be it due to violence committed or due to, for example, the family not fitting into the heteronormative patterns commonly assumed by mainstream society. This idea is not even touched upon in the memoirs discussed here. Despite the narrators' acknowledgements of their feelings of inadequacy and incompleteness, they show how their families have gone through the

process that seems required in order to become an adequate national subject: "Americanization" – hence, on a meta level, these texts allude to similarity and similarity only. While this may be useful to begin a conversation about the past, its re-negotiation would demand also addressing differences of history, memory and legacy.

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ALICE BALESTRINO

"RADIANT DARKNESS LEAKED OUT THROUGH HER CRACK"

Cracked Families and Leaking Trauma in Michael Chabon's Moonglow

ABSTRACT: This paper looks at the entity of the family as a space of memory repository and, more specifically, as a time-space of trans-generational transmission of traumatic memories. It focuses on Michael Chabon's novel *Moonglow* (2016) and it resorts to Art Spiegelman's *MAUS* (1991) as a narrative model. This analysis dwells on families of Holocaust survivors, defined as "cracked families," in which the dynamics of trauma transmission may be interpreted through the image of the "leaking trauma." The "leaking trauma" describes the relationships between traumatized individuals and their offspring, and the mechanisms through which the present (as well as the future) of a household is shaped by and negotiated in the light of its past. Finally, this paper investigates the literary techniques that postmemorial generations (a term coined by Marianne Hirsch) employ in order to represent and narrate their own memorial condition, their own experience of the Holocaust.

KEYWORDS: Jewish-American Literature, Holocaust Literature, Postmemory

After I'm gone. Write it down.
Explain everything. Make it mean something.
Use a lot of those fancy metaphors of yours.
Put the whole thing in proper chronological order,
not like this mishmash I'm making you.

Michael Chabon, *Moonglow*

This epigraph is borrowed from Michael Chabon's novel *Moonglow* (2016). The protagonist – the grandfather of the Michael Chabon character, narrator and author, the three figures coinciding – exhorts his grandson not only to listen to the story of his own (and to some extent his wife's) life, but also to record it – "Write it down" – and, most importantly, to elaborate a narrative out of it: "Explain everything. Make it mean something. Use a lot of those fancy metaphors of yours. Put the whole thing in proper

chronological order" (Chabon 2016, 241). This excerpt condenses the outlook of an old man on his deathbed (and under the influence of pain medication) confessing the past he kept to himself up to that moment to a younger man; it signals the trans-generational juncture of a grandfather passing the baton of memory to his descendant; it expresses the conversion of a personal story into shared, familial memory and, at the same time, it means merging individual, scattered memories into a coherent story.

In this paper, I will focus on the way in which Holocaust narratives explore the entity of the family as a space of memory repository and, more specifically, as time-space of trans-generational transmission of traumatic memories. I will discuss Michael Chabon's *Moonglow* as the main case study and, to some extent, Art Spiegelman's *MAUS* as an illustrative and visual model of these mechanisms. My analysis will dwell on families of Holocaust survivors as the epitome of families having to deal and come to grips with a traumatic past; a bulky heritage that permeates the everyday life of all the members, not only of those who directly experienced the tragic event. How do traumatized individuals – often suffering from PTSD, "post-traumatic stress disorder," provoked by their involvement (in several and differing forms) in the Holocaust – relate to their kin and, especially, to their offspring? In this context, to what extent are family dynamics affected, twisted, and eventually turned dysfunctional? In what terms is the present (as well as the future) of a household shaped by, negotiated in the light of its past? In order to explore these subjects, I will resort to the category of "postmemory" elaborated in the 1990s by Marianne Hirsch and systematized in her seminal *The Generation of Postmemory, Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), in which Hirsch investigates the memorial condition of the children of Holocaust survivors as well as the complex system of inter-generational, memorial connections that link the parents' traumatic experiences to their children's traumatic memories. Memories crossing the borders of the individual experience and slipping into the very fabric of the family constitute the foundation and the specificity of the memorial phenomenon Hirsch calls postmemory: as the term itself suggests (conveying the idea of a shift, either temporal, or cultural, or generational, from memory to what may come after, "post," it), postmemory implies a sharing of personal experiences that, due to emotional bonds, is peculiarly compelling and affective. Against the background of this theory, my aim is to analyze some key literary techniques typifying postmemorial narratives and engaging some traits of second-hand memory and inherited traumas: entangled perspectives, historical complexity, overlapping of temporal dimensions and multi-layered understanding of the past among others.

Moonglow revolves around Chabon's grandparents' past, perceived through the associative and atomistic narrative of the grandfather; a vision that juxtaposes different images thus shaping a composite, and always renewed, comprehension of the events. The grandfather's account is fragmentary and, lacking a solid narrative structure, it allows the recipients the agency to construct their own logic out of it by arranging the memory-

atoms into narratives-molecules. The grandfather is never referred to by his proper name, only by the title defining his role in the family; the protagonist of this story is simply called "my grandfather," without any further individualization except for the possessive adjective that shows the familial relationship existing between protagonist and narrator. This narrative choice delineates the boundaries or the scope of his storytelling, making them coincide with those of the family circle; in other words, Chabon the author seems to suggest that the events recounted in the novel by Chabon the narrator are intended to be remembered and narrated because his grandfather lived through them and passed them on to Chabon the character. The familial bond, hence, not only defines the protagonist's identity – more than his own individuality – but also structures the narrator's grasp of the narrative and roots his perspective. Chabon seems to understand the relationship to his grandfather as a way into history: he turns his grandfather's memories into a text in order to shape a story that is cut out of the macro scenario of History and focuses on the micro implications of some major recent events, among them the liberation of Europe during World War II, and the Cold War Space Race. From *grand récit* to individual accounts, this historical and so-called "memoirist" narrative functions as a microscope, often losing sight of the context and magnifying small elements.

The strong familial bond between grandfather and grandson permeates the narrative with emotional implications on the part of the narrator; this means that Chabon's literary transposition of his grandfather's memories cannot be objective, it cannot be grounded in narrative detachment and cannot but mirror the author's position: at once distant from and close to the events narrated. It is also hard to draw a line between facts and fiction. "Memorial" is a label that applies to this kind of literature only to some extent, because it is memorial in the sense that, in order to comprehend the past, it resorts to memories – with their ephemeral ontological status and their biased epistemological reach, their plurality and their potential unreliability; at the same time, though, the memories recounted are second-hand, familial rather than personal. In *Moonglow* the act of remembering is a double-object verb: despite the sequential order (memories proceed from elderlies to their descendants), both the source (the grandparents) and the receiver (Chabon and to some extent his mother) of the memorial transmission are involved in the remembrance process, each with their own memorial agency. However, being at least one generation removed from the events, and being filtered through the voice of non-witnesses, these recollections come necessarily "after" memory; these memories are actually "post-memories" and this is the main reason why their narrativization – that is produced by the generations that come after – is defined as "post-memorial."

Postmemory is by definition different from memory still, it approximates memory in its affective force and psychic effects. It is the result of "acts of transfer"[1] that transform first collective history into individual memory and then arrange memory into stories shared across the family circle. These stories are subsequently inherited by second and third generations that finally internalize and elaborate them, turning them into postmemories. This transmission process is embedded in multiple forms of mediation; being a structure for the comprehension of a trauma experienced vicariously, postmemory represents a connection to the past that is mediated on the one hand by the family heritage – made up of stories heard from parents or relatives, personal photographs, items and documents – and on the other hand, by official history – that relies on records, canonized images, public archives and collective imaginary of remembrance.

According to Hirsch, the ultimate point of postmemorial work is "to reactivate and re-embody distant political and cultural memorial structures by investing them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (Hirsch 2012, 31-35). Postmemory, Hirsch's theorization goes on, "shares the layering of the other 'posts' that […] continue to dominate our intellectual landscape [and] reflects an uneasy oscillation between continuity and rupture" and – more to the point of my argument – it accommodates "a *structure* of inter- and trans-generational return of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience. It is a *consequence* of traumatic recall but (unlike post-traumatic stress disorder) at a generational remove" (6; italics in original). Intrinsically ingrained in the "intimate embodied space of the family" with a traumatic past, the mechanisms examined by postmemory seem to produce peculiar family dynamics worthy of investigation. This notion of memory as a form of relationship to the past is not only radically different from recorded history but also necessarily linked to the formation of families living a present jeopardized by the intrusiveness of the past, a condition that I aim to analyze in *Moonglow*.

Moonglow is a *memoir* in the form of a novel and at the same time a novel in the form of a *memoir*.[2] Michael Chabon (author and narrator) collects episodes from the heritage of his family creating a narrative proceeding without a chronological order: from his maternal grandparents' first encounter after the war, to his grandfather's involvement in

[1] For a comprehensive study of how memory is conveyed and preserved within groups through acts of connection and sharing, see Paul Connerton's *How Societies Remember.*

[2] For an extensive study on some genres which may further frame *Moonglow*, see Julie Rak's *Boom! Manufacturing Memoir for the Popular Market* (on *memoir*); Alison Gibbons' "Contemporary Autofiction and Metamodern Affect" (on autofiction); Armine Mortimer's "Autofiction as Allofiction: Doubrovsky's *L'Àpres-vivre*" (on autobiographical writing as a literary trend of 21st- century US literature).

the hunt for Nazi scientists during WWII, from his own, i.e. Chabon's, memories of the time spent with his grandparents as a child, to his mother's troubled childhood – all scattered with further digressions and speculations on science, humanism, pop culture and several other issues. Even though it is hard to keep track of and summarize the plot, the narrative is anyway sustained by some cornerstone events: the American grandfather (who served in the army during WWII) meets the grandmother upon her arrival together with her six-year-old daughter from Europe, where the two had survived what would later be called the Holocaust.[3] After their marriage, the grandmother's eccentric behavior turns into mental illness and she is admitted to an asylum while, in the meantime, the grandfather loses his job, gets arrested, and lives a thousand other adventures. The character of the grandmother, despite looming in the background and being the protagonist of fewer stories than her husband, is the unstable center of the narrative: it is her gravity that makes the members of her family move around, her traumatic background that directs the future of her household.

I have conceived an image that, in the context of this novel, aptly describes the scope of the traumatic transmission from the grandmother to the rest of her family and the consequent postmemorial atmosphere due to its crossing of generational boundaries, and it is that of a "leaking trauma:" a historical trauma that brims over one generation into another; it overflows the generation of those directly involved and then, drop by drop, leaks into the rest of the family, affecting the generation of those who did not experience the tragedy in person, and thus producing in them a vicarious involvement. Moreover, the drops of this leaking process seem to inexorably dig a hole into the historical consciousness of the following generations that are, hence, paradoxically subjected both to the feeling of emptiness due to the lack of first-hand experience and to a sense of saturation caused by the adding of family postmemories to personal memories.

Moonglow is both explicitly and implicitly rooted in this act of leaking: on the one hand the whole narrative enterprise of the grandson recording and narrativizing his grandparents' (hi)story originates from the inter-personal, inter-generational passage; from "the living connection" (Hirsch 2012, 33) between the past of the stories and the present of the narration. On the other hand, this kind of transmission of information gets literalized in the novel exactly through the metaphor of the "leaking trauma;" when the narrator dwells on the first encounter between his grandparents, this is how he visualizes his grandmother in the eyes of his grandfather: "She was a vessel built to hold the pain of her history, but it had cracked her, and radiant darkness leaked out through the crack" (Chabon 2016, 95). The weight of the grandmother's traumatic past has cracked its own integrity; it has denied its own condition of "pastness" leaking flows of oxymoronic

[3] "Then he saw that in gun-coloured ink on the inside of her left arm, she bore the recent history, in five digits, of her life, her family, and the world. He read its brief account and felt ashamed" (67).

"radiant darkness" into the present. The definition, almost an epithet, of the grandmother as "cracked vessel," as cracked human being leaking history over her present, returns in the novel; she is "a woman with a crack in her brain that was letting in shadows and leaking dreams" (208); "the voice or the thoughts or the memory that tormented her had returned: her hidden history of loss, loss upon loss upon loss unending, flooding back into her body as that tablespoonful of life leaked out" (209).

Furthermore, the rupture of the cracks, along with their opening, seems to represent not only the source from which trauma leaks out, but also the recipient that lets the trauma in, once more signalling that postmemory is a bijective act of remembrance: it takes a source and a receiver, it gets activated when there is a sharing of memories inside the family circle. In other words, cracks are part of the familial language in *Moonglow,* they ensure "the living connection" and the transmission of experiences between members of the family; the narrator ponders on his own relation to the past: "I still hear that raucous voice; I hear a hatbox full of voices. They bubble up from a crack in my brain, dark mutterings, shouts, and low reproaches that fall just short of sense, intruding on my thoughts almost any time I'm alone in a quiet room" (372).[4] In the end, cracks seem to define the whole existence, the identity of the protagonists' family:

> "Do you think they were ever happy?"
> "Definitely," I said.
> "Definitely?"
> "For sure."
> "She went crazy. His business failed. They couldn't have children of their own. He went to prison. HRT gave her cancer. I shot his brother in the eye and then married a man who cost him his business. When were they happy?"
> "In the cracks?" I said.
> "In the cracks." (426)

The cracks, the interstices, the breakage that tries to fill and to be filled; these are the ciphers of families grounded in postmemorial systems.

The metaphor of the leaking trauma is all but new to the imagery of postmemory. As a matter of fact, it may be recognized in the expressive language of the text that can be arguably considered the manifesto of postmemorial fiction and that displays narrative categories and aesthetic structures that have since become foundational of this genre: Art Spiegelman's graphic novel *MAUS* (serialized from 1980 to 1991 in *Raw,* the magazine founded by Spiegelman and his wife, Françoise Mouly). As it is well known, this work explores the artist's parents' experience as prisoners at Auschwitz (recounted from the viewpoint of the father and filtered by the son's panels), as well as the difficulties

[4] This latter comment is presented to the reader in a footnote, ideally creating a crack in the text that allows the space for metanarrative reflection.

encountered by the Spiegelmans in the aftermath of the war – a matter investigated through the perspective of the son (Art Spiegelman himself) and his relationship with his dysfunctional mother. The concept of leaking trauma pertains the whole work and it is visualized from the very start: already in the book cover, the letters spelling the word MAUS are bleeding on the picture below, possibly signaling that the traumatic experience of the parents who survived the Holocaust is impossible to restrain. As much as the artist tries to force his parents' trauma into the quite comfortable borders of the rectangular panels of comics, this trauma leaks out and stains what is beyond the boundaries. This idea of the trauma of the Holocaust leaking from one generation into the next is reinforced by the sequence of the titles that Spiegelman chooses for MAUS I and MAUS II: the first part is called "A Survivor's Tale – My Father Bleeds History" whereas the second begins, tellingly, with a conjunction that indicates a familial passage: "And Here My Troubles Began."

If the inheritance of postmemory through a trauma that leaks is rendered clear in these two examples, in some other passages Spiegelman dwells on how this trans-generational aspect interplays with the construction of the narrative; that is hence suspended between two generational and chronological standpoints and two narrative voices. This bi-phonic narrative is constantly punctured by a necessary negotiation between two distant positions – a negotiation that often takes the shape of a friction between official history and family (i.e. personal) memories especially when the two do not coincide. This mechanism is brilliantly exemplified in a multi-panel sequence that visually represents the double time frame grounding the postmemorial condition. Having to draw the inmates' marches in and out of the Auschwitz gate, Spiegelman depicts an orchestra made up of prisoner musicians in the background because, as he clarifies, its presence is "well-documented" (Spiegelman 2003, 210). At this point, the narrative set during the war years gets interrupted by the father's voice that shifts the time frame approximately thirty years onwards and introduces a metanarrative level. He argues that there was no orchestra at Auschwitz because he did not see any while marching through the gate and this means that, in his own personal experience, the orchestra did not exist. Caught between the necessity to make a historically accurate account and the will to be faithful to his father's memories, the cartoonist decides to negotiate between these two diverging versions by employing a peculiar graphic and narrative device. The following panel shows indeed an orchestra at the entrance of Auschwitz, but it is almost hidden by a big crowd of inmates marching (a crowd bigger than the one in the first scene). This visual effect prevents Spiegelman's father from seeing the orchestra that nevertheless pops out at the rear of the frame. The sequence ends with another time shift to the conversation between father and son; a dialogue that highlights one more time the distance that may sometimes separate official records and personal accounts.

The same tension between solid facts, memories and fluid exchange between these two innervates the author's note that introduces *Moonglow*, where it is claimed: "In preparing this memoir, I have stuck to facts except when facts refused to conform with memory, narrative purpose, or the truth as I prefer to understand it." What Spiegelman presents as a dilemma for the postmemorial artist, Chabon dismisses as a rapidly resolved impediment to the creation of his specifically postmemorial narrative by choosing to be faithful to his family "version." With the use of the first person singular pronoun, he firmly posits his own endeavor in the value of memories over facts; a bold stance that makes the category "memoir" clash with the statement that follows and leaves the reader in bewilderment.[5] Chabon's take is in line with the words of his grandfather on the novel, when he states that minor details – and by extension, I add, historical accuracy at all costs – are not relevant for the actual comprehension of events:

> "It explains nothing."
> "It explains a little."
> "It's just names and dates and places."
> "Okay."
> "It doesn't add up to anything, take my word for it. It doesn't mean anything."
> [...]
> "Anyway, it's a pretty good story," I said. "You have to admit."
> "Yeah?" He crumpled up the Kleenex, having dispatched the solitary tear. "You can have it. I'm giving it to you." (Chabon 2016, 240-41)

What the old and the young Chabons seem to imply in this conversation is that the scope of memorial (and consequently of postmemorial) acts distances itself from contingencies and from the countable details, lying instead in the uncountable, personal significance that every member of the family attributes to events – both directly and vicariously experienced. It is what gets compressed, distilled and ultimately leaked out from an event (in the case of memory) or from a direct or indirect testimony (in the case of postmemory) that constitutes the spark and the heart of remembrance. Remembering is made out of images – as in a "grainy kinescope of memory" (182) – of oral accounts – "there is likewise no photographic record [...]. But there was a testimony, and my grandfather made it to me" (271) – of impressions and beliefs – "'Did I *know*? Did I know. I mean, I… *sensed*…' She paused, reluctant to carry on in this vein, trucking with things

[5] This tension between facts and fictions might be profitably investigated also in the light of Hayden White's speculations on the practice of discourse as a constitutional mode of comprehension of historical facts. "[H]istories gain part of their explanatory effect by their success in making stories out of *mere* chronicles, and stories, in turn, are made out of chronicles by an operation which I have elsewhere called 'emplotment.' And by emplotment I mean simply the encodation of the facts contained in the chronicle as components of specific *kinds* of plot structures" (White 1978, 83; italics in the original).

that could merely be sensed. 'I knew she was afraid of something I couldn't see'" (180). Eventually, the comprehension of the past takes the shape of a physical reaction: "Understanding leaked into his eyes, along with a hint of contempt" (263).[6]

This latter quotation introduces one more generational perspective in the narrative, that of Chabon's mother;[7] a woman that embodies the paradoxical condition of being both direct and indirect witness of the Holocaust because she was involved in it, but as a very little girl. She literally represents what we may define as the "bridge generation" that relates within the family the generation of survivors to that of their offspring coming after the war. Living at a time in the presence and in the absence of the traumatic events, her remembrance is a hybrid of memories and gaps, of the will to explain and the impossibility to articulate. Moreover, her testimony of the aftermath of the war and of her parents' struggle to deal with their past is more immediate than Chabon's since she has lived through those years herself. Her role in the family narrative is probably the most complex, because of her perspective as both "insider" and "outsider;" located in the middle of the memorial *spectrum* whose poles are the survivors (her parents) and the indirect witnesses (her son), as a daughter of Holocaust survivors she experiences a trauma of her own, that of feeling the pain of a past that is not hers – the postmemorial condition *par excellence*.

This conflicted stance makes her memories slippery and incomplete, overshadowed by episodes of amnesia and because inherited through non-rational structures ("'Did I *know*? Did I know. I mean, I… *sensed*…'") ultimately beyond verbalization.

> Her recollection of these years was riddled, an empty quadrant of space lit by infrequent stars. […] I could tell she thought this explained why she had lost so much history from that period of her life, but I wanted to point out that amnesia, whether induced by drugs or by trauma, did not explain everything. It did not explain, for example, the constant gaps and erasures that she introduced into her accounts of the things that she did remember. (166)

An emotional and memorial condition that makes her feel "an emptiness between her knees," a sense of being "*unhorsed*:"[8] of lacking the quality defining her familial heritage, of being unable to intimately empathize with her mother who, as I will discuss further below, relates to her past according to non-rational, obscure, mystic forms (345; italics in original). Despite the difficulties in coping with the familial past, mother and daughter

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[6] Helen Epstein, who studied the Holocaust legacy inherited by children of Holocaust survivors, has defined the process by which the second generation absorbs their parents' attitude towards their traumatic past as "wordless osmosis."

[7] As for all the members of his family, Chabon never mentions her proper name in the novel.

[8] This term that refers to the "Skinless Horse," the nightmarish figure that metaphorizes the grandmother's mental disease and the visions from the past that stalk her.

(i.e. Chabon's grandmother and mother) share the same history, they are united by the same haunting memories, even though in different ways.

This cumulative comprehension of the past and the development of a familial, postmemorial language imply the involvement, in the construction of postmemorial narratives, of at least two voices; postmemory is never an autonomous remembrance, never a solitary enterprise, it is always a family matter, a proposition in a longer, more composite text where the agency of different individuals and of different generations is at stake. Once the core, the inner significance of a past event leaks out of its cracks, the narrative made out of it is in a sense discretionary, subject to the agency of the kin-narrator who, as much as they try to be faithful to memories, will arrange the events (considered as the structures, the graspable shapes assumed by the essence of the past) according to his or her own logic. This is the case of the two divergent rationales that the grandfather and the grandmother apply to the construction of the past both as a series of occurrences and as a narrative; in these passages, the narrative is highly self-aware, reaching meta-literary peaks in which the narrator interrogates the nature of "making (up) stories" itself.

On the one hand, the grandmother is convinced that the narratives composing both past and present realities are completely arbitrary, even irrational in the capriciousness with which they subjugate human beings to their tyrannical power. Not by chance, she is persuaded that she can play with temporal dimensions with a deck of fortune-telling cards which "she had been given in the DP [Displaced Persons] camp at Wittenau by the requisite old gypsy witch woman never seen again" (193) and that, following the same conviction, she can rearrange the past and the present at her will. Interestingly, the fortune-telling cards are also the means through which she tries to establish a first testimonial encounter with her grandson, a child at the time, by telling him stories that, inspired by the figures on the cards, always end up unsettling and frightening him because "the fates that befell them [the characters] were dark" (53). The grandson notices a certain "urge" on the part of the grandmother to tell him these stories – "There was no way to predict when the urge would come over her" (52) – a desire that resembles what Primo Levi, in the author's preface to *Survival in Auschwitz* (first published in Italian in 1948, and translated into English in 1959), defines as "the need to tell our story to 'the rest,' to make 'the rest' participate in it, [that] had taken on for us, before our liberation and after, the character of an immediate and violent impulse" (14)[9]. Building on this similarity, one may argue that the grandmother's stories are implicit, probably yet not conscious testimonial accounts through which a Holocaust survivor tries to make her

[9] According to Levi's account, one of the possibilities that concentration camps inmates feared most about their future was – interestingly – to go back home, open up with their families about the atrocities and the sufferings endured and not be believed by their dear ones.

grandson participate in her trauma, by leaking her memories of the past over the present of her family, over the ordinariness of a game with her grandson.

However, the testimonial endeavor seems to clash with the arbitrariness of the grandmother's stories which are not only inspired by imagery characters and hence fictional (as in the case of the game with the fortune-telling cards), but also, by her own admission, often made up, even when they were supposed to be real, based on facts. A likely explanation may be that the illogicality and the catastrophic character of what she has lived through have ignited in her a suspicion towards enlightened, realistic categories proven wrong and unreliable by the madness of the Holocaust. Therefore, even the act of bearing witness cannot be consistent, rational in its absolute truthfulness, but it is subject to the instability that shook the foundation of Western societies and redefined the concepts of possibility and impossibility, of reality and imagination.

> In putting down these very early memories of my grandmother, I have so far avoided quoting her directly. To claim or represent that I retain an exact or even approximate recollection of what anyone said so long ago would be to commit the memoirist's great sin. [...] She would, however, be happy to show me how her magical deck of [fortune-telling] cards could be used to tell a *story*. (22; italics in the original)

> She was always making things up when I was little," my mother said after I was done. "I used to catch her out all the time. She called them 'stories.' '*Oh*!'" She put on her mother's accent, the rasp and pitch of her voice. "'*You're right, I told a story.*" (426; italics in the original)

On the other hand, the grandfather has an analytical mind frame but his trust in reason was severely undermined during WWII when he helped to track down Nazi scientists involved in the rocket industry. Moreover, his wife's mental weaknesses, or "crack in the brain," in the aftermath of the war called into question his previously solid belief that everything always happens for a reason, and a scientific one. It is "the illusion of control," he has his best friend say, "You know that right? There is no actual control. It's all just probabilities and contingencies, wriggling around like cats in a bag" (125). According to the grandfather, when History, or natural conditions, or a superior force, play with human beings as with cats in a bag, there is no explanation, of any kind, you can look for.

> All he [Richard Feynman] wanted was to find the answer to the question 'Why did *Challanger* explode?' Right? And that answer was never going to be 'Because it was all part of God's plan' or, I don't know, '*Challenger* exploded so that some little kid somewhere would get inspired to grow up and become an engineer and invent a safer, more durable propulsion system for spacecraft.' Or even, like, 'Because humans and the things they make are prone to failure' or 'Shit happens.' [...] The answer was always going to be dates, and names, and numbers. And that was good enough for Feynman, because the point was to find out. The meaning was in the inquiry. (240)

Remembering does not mean explaining, the grandfather seems to suggest. In the context of the family, memory seems to prevail on history because it is personal, transmissible, it can be turned into family heritage; memory does not follow the same structures, the same order, the same logic as recorded history. And postmemory in particular, with its bi-phonic narratives, its double object constructions, diverts not only from the exact chronicles of historical events but from conventional memorial practices as well, by imposing the familial gaze that, being subjective, necessarily particularizes and distorts simple facts.

The novel presents two peculiar circumstances in which the characters' attempt to conjugate postmemory according to traditional paradigms of remembrance proves to be a failure. In the first incident, Chabon realizes that the notes he took on a copy of J.D. Salinger's *Nine Stories* while talking with his grandfather about his past are gone, probably due to the exchange of his copy of the book with that of his ex-wife when they divided their belongings following the divorce.

> I jotted down some of the names of the devices and tools my grandfather remembered having contrived during his time at Twenty-third and E. It was a fairly long list, with many annotations, scrawled inside the front cover of the book I was reading that day, Salinger's *Nine Stories.* Decades later, [...] at the sight of the cover with its grid of coloured blocks, the memory of that afternoon returned to me: a slant of submarine light through the eucalyptus outside the guest bedroom, my grandfather's brown face against a white pillow, the sound of his Philadelphia vowels at the back of his nose like a head cold. But when I opened the book, the inside cover was blank. In making our terminal inventories, my ex-wife and I must have exchanged copies. I had lost to estrangement and carelessness the only document I possessed of the week I am now trying to reconstruct. (118)

In line with the grandfather's thought, destiny seems to confirm that the essence of memory is not in the details and Chabon's postmemorial narrative is possible (and cannot be possible but) through a recollection of the senses and not thanks to "a fairly long list."

In another scene, Chabon's mother shows him the album that her mother (i.e. his grandmother) brought over with her from Europe, but when she opens it in order to look at the four photographs dating back to the pre-war years, they discover that they are missing. However, she is eventually able to recollect memories beyond pictures and records.

> "Well, shit," said my mother.
> "Did they fall out?"
> "I don't know."
> [...] Anyone would have been upset by such a loss, naturally. [... But] my mother's lack of attachment to the past and its material embodiments went deeper than principle, training, or metaphor. It was an unbreakable habit of loss. [...] The photo album lay between us. I opened it to its first page, the four empty frames with their French inscriptions. "Show me anyway," I said.
> "What do you mean?"

> "Describe them."
> "I can't describe things," she said. "I don't have that."
> "Please?" I said. "Just tell me what used to be there."
> She closed her eyes and then reopened them, angling her head to one side, eyeing the page with a sidelong gaze of reminiscence. (320-323)

Ultimately, I argue that postmemory complicates familial dynamics by burdening the relationships between mother and daughter, grandparents and grandson with the necessity and responsibility to tackle a traumatic past. This process exceptionalizes postmemorial families and accommodates a distinct structure for the comprehension of familial past, one that can be profitably investigated against the background of Spiegelman's meta-literary work *MetaMaus* (2011). This is the artist's reflection, thirty years on *MAUS*, on the generative process that led him to the creation of the narrative and of the expressive forms featuring his graphic memoir about his parents' story. In the introduction Spiegelman depicts himself as a mouse haunted by questions regarding the genre of his major work – "why comics?" – the forms of his aesthetic language – "why mice?" – and the subject of his narrative – "why the Holocaust?" These issues frame the author's reflection on his own personal and artistic commitment to his parents' past and imply that his postmemorial undertake is grounded in an emotional identification. Distressed by this condition, Spiegelman wants to find an ultimate answer to these questions so that he can, eventually, get rid of his "forefathers" and take off the mask that prevents him from breathing. However, when he removes the mask that viscerally because physically made him embody his parents' memories, what is left is only a skull. This gesture, and its result, opens up a further consideration on the character of postmemory: this picture seems to suggest that postmemory cannot be abandoned or rejected; when post-generations try to emancipate themselves from it, they find out that it is not a mask, a shape, an appendix; it is rather an intrinsic part of who they are in relation to their forefathers.

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EVA-SABINE ZEHELEIN

MOTHERS, ART AND NARRATIVES OF (BE)LONGING

ABSTRACT: In contrast to traditional surrogacy, gestational surrogacy does not involve genetic material (an oocyte) of the gestational carrier. Thus, a woman who does not birth a child "can become a mother, too" on the basis of her genetic parenthood. Within the broad genre of "mommy lit" (Hewett) or "mo-moir" (O'Reilly), "IP memoirs" – memoirs by women (Intended Parent) who have become mothers by employing a gestational carrier, are situated in a complex force field between personal trauma narrative, autopathography (Couser), matriography, scriptotherapy (Henke) and biography. By depicting and justifying their decision to take this road to parenthood, they tend to reinforce heteropatriarchal notions of gender essentialism and "new momism," although they simultaneously advocate against normative understandings of motherhood by adding themselves as genetic mother to the mother-child-dyad. Socio-cultural, moral and legal debates about "renting a womb," "babies for sale" and female bodily exploitation are countered by narratives of sick bodies and painful, traumatic failures to conceive, the "natural" desire for children which "belong" (genetically) and, in the case of transnational surrogacy tourism, the alleged empowerment of poor and disenfranchised "Third World" women who gain agency (and money) by providing their service of gestational surrogacy to other women in need (Pande).

KEYWORDS: Memoir, Scriptotherapy, Autopathography, Surrogacy, IP, ART, Life Writing

Most women conceive naturally, yet ever more women use Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART)[1] to become pregnant and carry a child/children to term. Some

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[1] Assisted Reproductive Technology ("ART") "includes in vitro fertilization – embryo transfer (IVF-ET), gamete intrafallopian transfer (GIFT), zygote intrafallopian transfer (ZIFT), and frozen embryo transfer (FET). These techniques also apply to oocyte donation and gestational carriers. Approximately

women employ another woman to birth their child/children. In traditional surrogacy, the surrogate is genetically related to the embryo(s), since her oocyte(s) is/are used with donor sperm or sperm by the intended parent/father. This can trigger massive socio-psychological, political and legal concerns. Although traditional surrogacy is a prominent biblical theme,[2] the (in)famous case of "Baby M" in 1985/86 was the first to cause an intense, long and long-lasting debate about the nature of "mother," the nature and role of motherhood and mothering, as well as of the mother-child-relationship and notions of belonging. In 1984, William and Elizabeth Stern (he a biochemist, she a pediatrician with early signs of multiple sclerosis) contracted Mary Beth Whitehead as a traditional surrogate for $10.000; post birth, Mary Beth was to relinquish her parental rights, William to obtain custody and Elizabeth to adopt the child. After the infant, named Melissa ("Baby M") by the Sterns, Sara by Ms. Whitehead, was born in March 1986, the latter felt she could not give up the child and argued that the child belonged to her. The Sterns sued and the New Jersey court ruled that the contract was binding and that Whitehead had no parental rights. Whitehead appealed to the New Jersey Supreme Court which ruled that the contract was not enforceable, but still granted custody to the Sterns and visitation rights to Whitehead. The Court also declared surrogacy in New Jersey illegal (cf. e.g. Spar 2006, 69-72; Peterson 2016). Many second wave feminists at the time were enticed by an essentialist understanding of motherhood, including the assumption that a special tie exists between birth mother and child, thus turning the gestational host into the "natural mother" with a "sacred right" to the infant. This concept eclipses the intended mother from the motherhood narrative and relegates her as the physically and psychologically "damaged" to the sidelines with no agency and no rights to claim a child another woman has given birth to and thus to become a mother. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, 2.3% of all ART cycles performed in the US between 2009 and 2013 used a gestational carrier. Since 1999, more than 18.000 children have been born from gestational surrogacy (Perkins et al. 2016, 436-37). Here, the surrogate is not genetically related to the child/children she carries. Intended Parents use their own oocyte(s) and sperm or sperm and/or oocyte(s) from an (anonymous) donor. Through IVF/ICSI, one oocyte is fertilized with one sperm ex utero and one to three blastocysts are transferred to the uterus of the gestational carrier. Genetic and gestational maternity are disconnected. Thus, a second woman can "be the mother, too": although she does not share in the pregnancy and birth process, she is genetically related to the child and can therefore claim the infant as "hers." To separate gestation and genetics allows for a truly revolutionary act in human history: the severance

99 percent of ART cycles performed are IVF-ET" (SART-Society for Assisted Reproductive Technology website).

[2] Hagar gestates for Sarai and Abraham (Genesis 16:1-6), Bilhah and Zilpah both bear two sons for Rachel and Jacob (Genesis 30:1-13).

of the symbolic umbilical cord – the argument that to nurture an embryo in utero establishes automatic and exclusive motherhood status and a unique natural bond between the pregnant woman and the embryo. The "mother" is no longer "only" the woman who gives birth; nurture is not necessarily nature.

Many women write about their individual mothering, that is, about their road towards being a mother and their experiences of childrearing within the broader context of the patriarchal institution of motherhood.[3] This proliferating literary subgenre has been labeled "mommy lit" (Hewett 2006) with the special subcategory "mommy memoirs" (Brown 2010, 123) or "mo-moir" (O'Reilly 2010b, 203). The core element of this genre is that woman "tells it how it is," explores the "truth" about being a mother and the challenges accompanying all practices of mothering. For Andrea O'Reilly – the spearhead of what she herself christened "motherhood studies" some ten years ago – one aspect is central to these memoirs: a new ideology of motherhood, namely "new momism"[4] or "intensive mothering." I concur with O'Reilly's assessment that the motherhood memoir as a discourse by presenting women as mothers actively engaged in intensive mothering "naturalizes and normalizes the very patriarchal conditions of motherhood that feminists [...] seek to dismantle" (O'Reilly 2010b, 205).

> Under the patriarchal institution and ideology of motherhood, the definition of mother is limited to heterosexual women who have biological children, while the concept of good motherhood is further restricted to a select group of women who are white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, married, thirty-something, in a nuclear family with usually one to two children, and, ideally, full-time mothers. (O'Reilly 2010a, 7)

Although motherhood memoirs aim to unmask "good motherhood" by spelling out the truths and colorful facets of life as a mother, they fall short of challenging and rejecting gender essentialism.[5] As Peterson (2016) has recently shown, during the "Baby M"-case, second wave feminists were divided between the "difference" (there is a difference between a surrogate and another woman – the "natural bond," cf. p. 111) and the "equality" (all men and women are equal in their ability to nurture and parent

[3] "Within motherhood studies the term motherhood is used to signify the patriarchal institution of motherhood, while mothering refers to women's lived experiences of childrearing as they both conform to and/or resist the patriarchal institution of motherhood and its oppressive ideology" (O'Reilly 2010a, 2).

[4] "The new momism is a highly romanticized view of motherhood in which the standards for success are impossible to meet" since "a woman has to devote her entire physical, psychological, emotional, intellectual being, 24/7, to her children" (Douglas and Michaels 2004, 4).

[5] O'Reilly (2010b) speaks of a "cognitive dissonance between the reality and ideology of motherhood" (209).

children, cf. p. 114) lines of argumentation. One might well argue that this debate has still not been solved and surfaces, for instance, in "IP memoirs."

"IP memoirs" – memoirs by women who have received a child via a surrogacy arrangement – are a rather recent literary and cultural phenomenon and even less prone to challenge a dominant cultural discourse of gender essentialism. Quite the contrary: the narratives of why women want children so much and how they finally become mothers are suffused with romantic(ized) notions of motherhood and mothering. I wish to argue that these memoirs present a double-bind: on the one hand written against normative understandings of motherhood by adding an intended parent and genetic mother to the mythologized mother-child bond they contest or at least broaden both the definition of "mother" and the practice of mothering, while on the other hand they reaffirm core tenets of patriarchal motherhood through depictions of "new momism." This double bind might be caused by the protean nature of "IP memoirs." They are framed by an extraordinary force field, situated at the intersections of personal trauma narrative, autopathography and matriography, as well as scriptotherapy and biography. The authors work through their very intimate traumata of not being able to conceive their own children. For these women there is no female agency, they do not "own" their bodies and make decisions about when to be pregnant. If they possess any agency at all then only to the extent that they can try and conceive by opening body and mind to expensive, complex, invasive and painful medical interventions. Thus, they render their personal "road to surrogacy" as a transformative performative process from "whole woman" to "unhealthy woman" to "incomplete mother." By detailing the medical aspects of ART treatment and pregnancy, necessitated by their "dysfunctional" bodies, they engage in normative discourses about health and disease.

G. Thomas Couser (1997) was the first to suggest the term "autopathography" for narratives about illness or disability that challenge socio-cultural discourses othering the writer as not-normal, deviant, or pathological. The biological becomes biographical when not only the "technical" aspects of modern conception through ART (including hormone treatments, genetic screening, ICSI, and embryo implantation) are detailed, but also non-pregnancies, miscarriages, still-births and Dilation and Curettage (D and C) procedures, the times of high hopes and utter despair. The "IP memoir" as matriography is thus also a story of and about the sick body, the emotional hardships of becoming an intended parent and finally a mother to a child to which one has not given birth. The texts therewith inscribe the genetic mother into the motherhood discourse and broaden the definition of the performative act of mother(hood).

However, many women build a narrative of unity in the face of difference. This difference is a culturally created and commercially cemented one of gender essentialism. It seems that many memoirists desire to prove and emphatically emphasize that they "can be good mothers, too." As Kukla (2008) has shown, reproduction is in the "cultural

mythos" (74) often restricted to three distinct phases or moments: conception, pregnancy and birth, when it should be understood as "the process of creating new people and building families and communities" which is a decades-long process, a "social and material labor of love" (86). Reproduction happens "through women's ongoing, richly textured labor" (69). Yet "good mothers" and their partners attend the social ritual of the eighteenth-week ultrasound, deliver vaginally and breastfeed. I argue that such a discourse is not about medically safe procedures to protect life and health of mother and child, and not about women's individual choice and power over their bodies, but about measuring so-called "proper motherhood" through the accompanying market driven symbolic spectacle. Every woman who defaults on any of these categories might be considered a deficient, a "bad mother." It is because of these cultural inscriptions that women who have not given birth to their child/children enter an apologia, in the context of which, though, they reinscribe the patriarchal market oriented "new momisms." They do not question the motherhood narrative, do not demand, for instance, better work life balance and child care. In the face of the socially constructed and culturally mediated notion that there is a special natural / biological bond between birth mother and child, they do not challenge, but rather reaffirm that notion of the "sacred" bond and simply, yet powerfully, add themselves as a third term to the equation. The "good mother" paradigm conflates with the "good woman" assumption: it is natural that a woman can conceive; infertility is thus a disease and woman discursively framed as having a sick body. After intervention, she must strive to be the "good mother" in order to justify the pains, ordeals and expenses she has borne on her rocky road to motherhood. In scriptotherapeutic mode à la Henke (1998),[6] working-writing through the trauma and undergoing a process of healing, the women reach motherhood and enter mothering after arduous times, justifying and accounting for the individual decisions made to eventually find closure.

Finally, but of extraordinary importance, these texts are also a creation story, the first part of children's biographies. Not too many people provide private minutiae about the conception and genesis of their infant(s) for the public. Some mothers disclose highly intimate details about themselves and their family life thus potentially depriving their offspring of their autonomy to construct their own identities in narrative. To illustrate my arguments, I will discuss in due brevity three memoirs by women who have employed a gestational host to conceive a child: "Her Body, My Baby" (Alex Kuczynski, 2008), *Bringing in Finn* (Sara Connell, 2013), and *The Sacred Thread* (Adrienne Arieff, 2012). Each of the three memoirs emphasizes auxiliary topics: issues of class (Kuczynski 2008),

[6] "The act of life-writing serves as its own testimony and, in so doing, carries through the work of reinventing the shattered self as a coherent subject capable of meaningful resistance to received ideologies and of effective agency in the world" (Henke 1998, xix).

the case that a woman serves as the gestational host for her own daughter (Connell), and the geopolitical, legal and ethical aspects of surrogacy as a form of gender specific industrial labor in a "developing country" (Arieff 2012). All three exemplify very multifaceted innovative practices of "IP memoirs" – memoirs by Intended Parents.

"I had to settle for three-quarters his mother"

In an essay for *The New York Times Magazine*, published in November 2008, Alexandra Kuczynski conveys her story of becoming a mother in text and peritext. Aged thirty-nine, she had been "[e]xhausted by years of infertility, wrung emotionally dry by miscarriage." Despite the hardships of eleven failed IVF cycles and four failed pregnancies over five years, the longing for a child was still so strong (a "mad desire that seemed to defy logic") that surrogacy became the final option. She decided with her husband to hire a surrogate as an "organ rental." And about the candidates Alex/our narrating I explains that none were poor (after all, health insurance was a must), but of course they were also not rich.[7] She identifies a "gentle hypocrisy" of agencies that speak about altruism as the ultimate motivation for women to volunteer for surrogacy, yet she spends many more lines on the attempt to present her choice in a favorable light: the chosen one, Cathy, is stable, sensible, has taken care of seventeen foster children, is college-educated, a tennis and piano player and thus, all in all, "not so different from us." Cathy is not too different, yet also different enough to be just the perfect "vessel, the carrier, the biological baby sitter, for my baby." When it surfaces that the surrogate's daughter donates eggs to pay for college, you begin to wonder about the relationship between the IP and the surrogate. And this might well find expression in phrases such as

> Cathy was getting bigger, and the constraints on her grew. I, on the other hand, was happy to exploit my last few months of nonmotherhood by white-water rafting down Level 10 rapids on the Colorado River, racing down a mountain at 60 miles per hour at ski-racing camp, drinking bourbon and going to the Super Bowl.

What might support the occasional but strong textual whiff of class difference and thus power imbalance are two photos which accompany the mini-memoir with their very own, yet complementary system of meaning. The first shows the surrogate in front of her home in Harleysville, PA. "Almost baked" (as the caption has it) is a problematic term, suggesting that she is indeed nothing other than an oven for a bread or cake that was prepared by and belongs to someone else – the author. What do we see? A back porch,

[7] According to research by Berend (2012), most surrogates in the US are white, lower middle class or middle class women in their twenties or thirties, married with children.

in somewhat dilapidated condition, paint coming off, and cracks in the porch, some floorboards are coiling a little, vegetation is creeping up, dirt all around, stuff lying about, many shoes on a rack. The woman sitting on the porch floor is well advanced in her pregnancy, she wears a red sweater which makes her appear even bigger, she has bare feet (red toe nails), and leans back a little on her right hand, the left protectively placed on her belly. She is not smiling, really, her gaze, directed past or beyond the camera, might express something between serenity and pain. The focus is not the woman, really, but the huge red belly protected but in a sense also pointed at by her left hand, the dog is looking at it as well.

Photo number two shows an immaculate back porch, starch white, with columns and never sat upon or well-kept lounge chairs with super-thick cushions, an incredibly flush-lush lawn, a well-trimmed curvy hedge in the back, the curve somewhat mirrored in the front left lawn patch. Blue hydrangeas, white swans, blue-white porch cushions, and the baby boy wears blue pants – all is color coordinated. We are in Southampton, a rich neighborhood on Long Island, called The Hamptons. Here is the woman of the house, in sandals, a brown skirt and pink sweater, standing very straight, facing directly into the camera. She is holding her infant son with both arms in a protective-possessive tight wrap to her left shoulder/her heart. The son is not on display as in a "look how beautiful he is." We don't even see much of him. Next and behind her we perceive the baby nurse, a person of color, dressed in immaculate white, standing there like a fourth column. Hands on her back, she is looking at the boy and waiting for orders. "Every day is mother's day," indeed. Who is the mother? Well, Cathy has been branded "the biological babysitter" and "organ rental;" secondly, her name is suppressed in the child's creation story when our author would crop Cathy's and the clinic's names out of the frame of sonogram pictures before sending them out to family and friends: "I wanted her identity to disappear and mine to take its place." Thirdly, Cathy is eclipsed from the post-natal narrative. And finally, as the caption makes clear, the child's name is not Max Hilling, but Max Dudley Stevenson. So it would be easy for the reader to judge Alex' decision as morally repulsive and exploitative, depriving Cathy of any agency at all. However, Alex provides narrative snippets which let us glimpse how much she has suffered. Her body is not healthy, and thus, one might argue, she has a right to treatment of this health issue; she has suffered psychologically and physically, and deserves a child. We have just read the heartbreaking rendition of one of the miscarriages:

> In March, I went to see my doctor at Cornell. I would have been about 10 weeks pregnant. [...] I had done it, my own fecundity triumphant. "Agh," he said, his voice strangled in his throat. "I have some bad news." [...] Do you see the black dot?" [on the sonogram]. I nodded cautiously. "That was the heart," he said. [...] The nurse called two days after [the D and C]. "In case you were interested, it was a girl," she said. In case I was interested. [...] The nurse continued. "And the good news is that there was no sign of a genetic defect." Knowing that there were no genetic defects – reassuring, in at least a scientific way – also made me realize something else: The baby, the fetus, wasn't the failure. I was the failure.

The inability to be pregnant is presented here as a disappointing non-normative, unhealthy state which causes deep identity insecurities. "I would sometimes feel barren, decrepit, desexualized, as if I were branded with a scarlet 'I' for 'Infertile'." This is an aspect constitutive of nearly all "IP memoirs." McLeod and Ponesse have argued that "women often morally blame themselves for infertility [...] and that their self-blame is intimately tied to their oppression as women," particularly in pro-natalist environments (127). Women thus revert to the pro-natalist and patriarchal motherhood register in order to justify their reproductive activities. However, they simultaneously employ the liberal feminist standpoint. Alex argues that the gestational host Cathy is a free woman who has the right to decide over her body; if she wants to "rent out her womb" or altruistically help another woman have a child, she should have every right to do so. If she receives financial compensation, that is just fair. She sells her reproductive labor and becomes a reproductive service worker. But it is because Alex has the money that she can have a child and it is this cultural moment that makes it possible that a white married upper middle class woman with fertility issues can hire another white woman to carry her genetic baby to term and then hand it over to a baby nurse. And Cathy might be financially really challenged – so how much free choice is there, then? Is this not yet another case of exploitation, a commercialization of pregnancy and objectification of the female body and self? Is this a form of "white slavery," where white woman on the basis of pecuniary inferiority connected to class labors and produces wealth/children as commodities to increase the wealth of her "owners?" Reproductive liberty is difficult. Reproductive justice is difficult.

The text makes no attempt to hide the chasm of class difference and power imbalance that exists between our author/now mummy and the gestational host. It does not gloss over another constitutive element of "IP memoirs": the difficulty an intended parent often faces once the baby is there: it is yours, but you were not pregnant with it and you did not give birth to it and you cannot breastfeed it – so how much of a mother are you? The role of the mother is conceived of as an assemblage of aspects or job descriptions, and Alex is "incomplete," her gender role under-performed, her identity as a mother "crippled" since she cannot fulfill all the parameters of "being a proper mother." In order to countermand this "deficit," the genetic-as-natural bond between child and intended mother is accentuated. Since the intended mother is the passive part during both pregnancy and birth, she actively works on the narrative creation of her self as mother and the textual disappearance of the hired other. "Of all the possible mothering paradigms I could count – birth mother, biological mother, child-raising mother, legally recognized mother – I would fill three of the roles. I had to settle for three-quarters his mother."

"Kristine, congratulations – you and Sara and Bill are really, truly pregnant"

More than Alex Kuczynski or Adrienne Arieff, Sara Connell in her memoir *Bringing in Finn* relates the long and excruciatingly painful journey she and her husband had to make to finally be parents. Sara, sexually abused during childhood by neighborhood boys and a friend's stepfather, as a teenager lost her left ovary due to a ruptured ovarian cyst. She reveals the emotional hardships she and her partner experienced over years of hope and fertility treatment and destitution. Writing this book is a form of scriptotherapy, a process of self-healing, a "writing out and writing through traumatic experience in the mode of therapeutic re-enactment" (Henke 1998, xii). Sara writes down the series of unspeakable, self-altering and potentially self-destructive experiences. More than any other surrogacy memoir I know, Sara Connell depicts her journey to mothering as a story of a sick and suffering and hurt(ing) body – psychologically as well as physically. There is a strong emphasis on the hardships caused by the duration and intensity of medical treatment over six years: hormone shots for follicle stimulation, "medically scheduled sex," IVF (egg retrieval and embryo transfer), pregnancy, perinatal loss in the fifth month due to "incompetent cervix" (!) and consequently still birth of twin sons via caesarian followed by PTSD, five more IVF cycles resulting in one miscarriage.

The memoir begins with a prologue or vignette portraying the moment of the twins' still birth. Here, too, just as in Alex' memoir, notions of failure and defeat are prominent:

> The day we left the hospital, a therapist from the perinatal loss department presented us with two death certificates and asked us if we wanted the bodies for a burial. [...] We were being taken out the back like the trash, sparing those families who came to the hospital and left with a baby, arms full of balloons and flowers and plush toys, the unsightly image of two devastated parents with shell-shocked eyes and dangling arms empty, like wraiths. (2)

This dramatic opening pulls the reader into the story about Sara's six year-long attempt to birth a child. Sara travels her own road of healing from self-hatred and hurt to self-discovery and restoration. On the way she also reconnects to her mother, experiences "relational transcendence" (261) with her, a form of physical intimacy she claims not to have felt since being in her mother's womb. The mother-daughter relationship grows into a mother-mother bond where Sara's own biological mother becomes the gestational host for Sara's and Bill's child so that Sara herself can become a mother. Moments when she "felt like a whole and complete mother-to-be" (252) change with times when she, too, blames herself, suffers from "poisonous firing of thoughts that I didn't deserve this gift – that if I couldn't have a baby on my own, the 'normal' way, I didn't deserve to have one at all. People earn a baby by carrying one; the sacrifices of pregnancy make you worthy" (253). She also envies her mother: "I wanted to be the one

sitting in the first chair. I wanted to feel the baby moving in my body" (261). Yet she continues to emphasize the proximity between mother and daughter and child as a holy triad of mutual emotional interconnectedness which might convince the reader that this form of surrogacy arrangement is actually the most natural conceivable. The fact that her mother served as a surrogate caused high media attention at the time. Thus, this memoir also answers to a stiff media discourse. Connell couches her story as one where the mother-daughter bond is the ultimate solution. That her mother at age sixty carries her child to term is presented as natural and a "gift [...] of life" (179). Creating a family is a family matter, indeed.[8]

This story is not only one of suffering, an autopathography, but also one of resistance, resilience, reconciliation, and healing (Harris 2003, 1). By writing down how she ended her self-hatred and rebuilt close connections to her parents, especially to her mother, and how she witnessed and co-experienced her mother's pregnancy and finally became a mother to Finn, Sara performs her idiosyncratic scriptotherapy. As Henke has observed: "It is through the very process of rehearsing and reenacting a drama of mental survival that the trauma narrative effects psychological catharsis" (Henke 1998, xix).

"[...] even though we will be worlds apart"

The US is an attractive destination for cross-border reproductive care (CBRC) – the "practice of couples or individuals crossing national or state borders to access assisted reproductive treatment that is illegal, unaffordable or unavailable in their home jurisdiction" (Crockin 2011 as cited by Hammarberg et al. 2015, 690).[9] Costs, though, are high. Costs are much lower in countries such as India where transnational surrogacy has become a flourishing multi-billion dollar business ever since 2002 when the state commercialized surrogacy. Although legislation is under way to curb the surrogacy market (Malhotra 2016), India is still one of the prime "reproductive tourism" destinations worldwide, particularly since the political instability in the Ukraine and the

[8] Illinois, where the Connells live, recognizes the intended parents as parents in gestational surrogacy (750 ILCS 47/15).

[9] Surrogacy, one CBRC treatment, is regulated by the states and all children born in the US are American citizens. This implies that an entire family of non-US citizens with one child born in the US can relocate to the US at some future point (Bromfield 2016, 193).

legal ban of international surrogacy in Thailand[10] effectively closed these countries for international surrogacy.

The three basic lines of argument against cross border reproductive care concern welfare, commodification and exploitation (e.g. Humbyrd 2009, 112). The academic discourse about transnational surrogacy has framed the surrogates as either exploited victims of a capitalist Western/globalized hegemony or as at least in part active agents with reproductive autonomy and freedom, that is, with the right to self-determination and the right to enter a contractual agreement to "sell" their bodies in order to improve their lives. In how far poor women with limited to no literacy and education can willingly and knowingly enter any contractual agreements and in how far the money earned is actually money they can use for their own improvement must remain a moot point in this article. When a woman is paid to deliver a baby for someone else, the child might be perceived as a good, a commodity, exchanged for money on the basis of a capitalist contractual agreement. Thus, concerns for the welfare of the child but also of the gestational host pre-birth and – often neglected or outright forgotten – post-birth arise. Surrogacy is a gender-specific form of industrial labor and it involves for the surrogate invasive medical procedures, pain, physical risks and possible death.

Cases that made the headlines have not only illustrated the legal quandary of international surrogacy, but also tended to sway public opinion against such and related practices.[11] Adrienne Arieff writes before the backdrop of an intense and mediated moral,

[10] In 2013, an Australian couple entered a surrogacy arrangement with a Thai woman. The woman became pregnant with twins, one of which was diagnosed in utero as having Down syndrome. After birth, the intended parents abandoned the child with Down ("Baby Gammy") and took the healthy sister home to Australia. They argued that had they known earlier in the pregnancy about the health status of the embryos, they would have asked the male embryo be terminated. The gestational host, opposed to abortion due to her Buddhist beliefs, carried both children to term and decided to raise Baby Gammy although she has no financial means to meet the child's (medical) needs and although she is not genetically related to the boy. In addition to this scandal, the media discovered soon after that the intended father had previously been convicted and imprisoned for more than twenty child sex offenses against girls as young as five years old. This scandal and human catastrophe has led to changes in Thai law. All forms of international, commercial, gestational surrogacy have been banned since July 2015 (Mohapatra 2016, 27-29; Pyrce 2016, 936-938; Caamano 2016; Guzman 2016, 620-621; Fernquest 2015).

[11] Especially the "Baby Manji" case: In 2007, a Japanese couple employed an anonymous oocyte donor and a gestational carrier at Dr. Patel's clinic in Anand. Before the child was born, the Japanese couple divorced. The surrogacy arrangement stated that in this case the father would obtain custody. However, since the birth certificate did not state a "mother," the child could not receive either Indian or Japanese citizenship. Indian law prohibits adoption of female infants by single men, thus Manji was motherless and stateless in India. The Indian Supreme Court paved the way for the issuance of an identity certificate

ethical, legal debate about the pros and cons of (international) surrogacy. She begins her narrative with the representation of India as the exotic other – "the carnival of life in the street" (1), the heat, the "riot of sensation" (2) create a "foreign planet. A dry, screaming-hot planet with no cheeseburgers" (2). Her trip to India is a "new adventure" (3), the exploration of "a brand-new frontier of emotional and ethical hills and valleys, without a clue as to where I'm headed" (4). In Anand, the capital of India's surrogacy industry, Arieff and her husband Alex seek to become parents with the help of Dr. Patel of Oprah fame. After multiple miscarriages, Arieff, who cannot afford a US surrogacy arrangement, moves into Anand's "Surrogacy Camp" (121). The relationship to the surrogate is one of cautious friendship or courtship, complicated by the language barrier. The chasm between the white middle-class American from the Bay area who wishes for a family and a cold martini and the poor illiterate woman from an Indian village who hopes for a home with clean running water and an education for her children remains a constant presence. Yet in view of and despite the contractual arrangement they have made Arieff seeks bonds, harmony, understanding, and togetherness. She, too, envies the surrogate; she, too, misses the feeling of being pregnant, of having

> that connection that only a mother can have with a child when it is within her body, when that baby is wholly reliant on its mother to feed, shelter and protect it [...] I try hard to remember that I am not a failure. Alex and I have only come to this place in our journey after being through death and sorrow. [...] Yet, it is a double-edged sword [...] As much as I feel guilt for what I have asked of Vaina, I am also envious. She is having an experience of my children that I will never understand myself [...] my heart still wishes that I could have carried all my children to term. (95-96; 154-155)

Arieff has her audience in mind; repeatedly she writes that she "worried about what other people would think" of her decision to go to India (35);[12] every other page she justifies her action towards potential critics. Framed by liberal feminist thought, too, she decides to lobby for the freedom of choice of infertile women:

> I don't feel that I have anything to "defend." It was a choice that Alex, Vaina, and I all made willingly, and there's no reason for anyone to call our motivations or actions into question, and I am constantly educating everyone I know about every minute detail [...] I believe more firmly than ever that each couple should be granted the respect and privacy to make the fertility choice that is right for them. (99-100)

The book is thus a liberal feminist pro-choice pamphlet just as much as a personal story of becoming a mother. It also is a couched PR for the clinic of Dr. Patel which has prospered into a state of the art modern clinic. Reproduction is also business. Yet she

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to obtain a travel visa for Japan where the child was granted a one-year visa on humanitarian grounds leaving the nationality status precarious (Pyrce 2016, 934-935; Guzman 2016, 631-633).

[12] See also e.g. p.10 and 94.

fends off criticism of lifestyle choice and exploitation of other women by clearly stating that she had suffered and more than anything wished she were able to carry her child herself. The depiction of her three miscarriages serves to provide a glimpse of the hardships she has endured emotionally and physically over the years and serves as justification for the road finally taken. And there remains enough pain as is: stimulation of the ovaries through hormone shots for eleven days, accompanied by nausea, mood swings, sore muscles and growth of her four uterine fibroids each to the size of an orange, oocyte retrieval under full anesthesia. After years of being told that she is not performing well, that her body is deficient, even the number of eggs retrievable after hormone stimulation becomes an indicator of prowess: "Carlotta, who is my age, has four eggs, which is pretty good. Lynette has six, which is outstanding, and I think I detect a note of jealousy in the crowd as she announces her stellar sum" (58). Arieff has five. She performs well. Four are transplanted into the surrogate's uterus – a very high number verboten by many reproductive practitioners due to the high risk of multiple pregnancies – two hatch and grow into twin daughters. She admits she did not feel like a mother right after their birth – "I wish that my mother were here to tell me what is normal, what is to be expected [...] I don't feel like a mother yet, but I'm getting to know my daughters" (189, 191). She detected physical similarities, though, between herself, her husband and the twins which facilitated the bonding experience and established her visible and emotional "claim" to the children. As a counter narrative to the socially constructed "natural" mother-child bond, Arieff presents a sacred triad of herself as intended and genetic mother, the surrogate as birth mother, and the twins.

Arieff returns once more to India after the twin's birth and relocation of the family to the US. "My life is everything that I had ever hoped it would be. But something is missing. Someone is missing. And that someone is Vaina" (217). In view of the poverty she encounters it becomes clear that any future connection to the surrogate mother will be extremely complicated. The money Vaina had earned was spent on a taxi for her husband which he has already crashed, and Vaina plans to be a surrogate again – out of free choice? Arieff at first sticks to the liberal feminist creed: "Vaina has found a marketable skill that allows her to be an independent woman. [...] [surrogacy] allows women like Vaina to do the good work that they do, with respect and honor, as they deserve" (221). But she realizes that Vaina's interest in her is predominantly commercial, because the family needs the money. The depictions make it quite clear that Vaina performs different roles – submissive wife, altruistic and caring birth mother who is much more than just a carrier of a child ("good mother"), as well as business woman eager to find a new client for her reproductive labor services ("good worker"); as Pande (2014) writes, reproduction and production collapse into each other (9). Indian surrogates are dominated and controlled by family, clinic and state. They live in a culture where women are considered inferior human beings, frequently victims of gender-based abortions, child labor, prostitution, forced marriage, gang rapes and wife burning. Arieff tries to do justice to the surrogate

and her situation, yet at the same time to herself and to her children. With *The Sacred Thread* she creates (also) a romantic genesis story for her twins.

Conclusion

"There is a thin line between paternalism and exploitation when considering the surrogate's needs. Similarly, there is a thin line for the intended parents between reproductive autonomy and accountability" (Braverman, Casey and Jadva 2012, 304). Thus, memoirs by intended parents are situated in an extraordinary force field. On the one hand they serve to explain and justify the action taken to finally be (a) parent(s). They might thus be reminiscent of a confessional-meets-how-to-manual. The intended audience/implied reader might look for advice and support, but also be highly critical of surrogacy arrangements. The authors thus (re)present themselves, their bodies and their deficits, in a form of quasi-confessional, with extremely intimate health and medical details engaging with, contesting, yet at the same time also reinscribing the cultural norm of health and sickness as well as patriarchal motherhood and pro-natalism. To justify and explain why they want a child so much they revert to notions of the sick body which deserves treatment, confronting their own trauma of incapability (Marsh and Ronner 1996, 252-253) through a scriptotherapeutic quest taking them from hopes to pain and ordeal to ultimate happiness, a child. They idealize mothering and motherhood as something they cannot imagine living without. This desire for a child is – as all needs and desires are – partly socially produced (Marsh and Ronner 1996, 252) and infertility, a medical condition, is also culturally framed and deeply embedded in discourses about true motherhood and pro-natalist worldviews. But then a third term is added to the archaic model of belonging, to the mother-child equation – the genetic mother. Despite the sacred/natural bond emphasized by the gender essentialists, an IP can also claim a child as hers. And because she is "incomplete," she will do her best to make amends and be super mom, steeped in the romantic-repressive antics of "new momisms" and "intensive mothering." In the end, we should never forget that one crucial factor in all our discourses and debates: the children. These memoirs are also about the first chapters of babies' biographies and maybe the children deserve their stories should also be enfolded by the warmth of a little romance, after all.

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BARBARA MICELI

RELIGION, GENDER INEQUALITY, AND SURROGATE MOTHERHOOD

A New Family Arrangement in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale

ABSTRACT: Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985), is the account of an imaginary future State, the Republic of Gilead, based on strict biblical values where men take back their place as head of the family (and the State), and women go back to their original ancillary position, both in society and at home. Gilead was indeed created to solve problems such as the extinction of the human race, due to a diffused infertility, using fertile women, the Handmaids, as surrogate mothers for the families of the Commanders, those who rule it. This creates, in fact, a new model of family, where the Commander and his wife host another woman in their house, hoping that, through the monthly "Ceremonies" (the intercourse between the Commander and the Handmaid), theirs can become a traditional family with children. Yet, the novel shows how a true balance, even between the sexes, is impossible to reach. The aim of this analysis is to show how the author has fractioned all the elements that form a family, as a small version of society itself, to foretell a possible outcome of many matters of debate, especially the role of women.

KEYWORDS: Atwood, Surrogacy, Religion, Gender, *The Handmaid's Tale*, Donald Trump, America

The year 2017 saw the revival of Margaret Atwood's novel *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) through the award-winning Hulu TV series starring Elizabeth Moss and Joseph Fiennes. The novel had been already made into a movie by Volker Schlöndorff in 1990, but the impact of this new filmic version of Atwood's novel has been wider and more political, due perhaps to the similarities between the fictional society of Gilead and today's social realities. Elizabeth Moss, who plays the Handmaid Offred in the show, has noticed "things happening with women's reproductive rights in our country [America] that make me feel like this book is bleeding over into reality" (Lowry 2017).[1] Indeed, the

[1] Moss refers to the decision of the Republicans to defund "Planned Parenthood," the largest abortion provider in the United States, and to suspend Obamacare's contraception mandate.

show has been aired after the election of Donald Trump, a time when "America needed to take a hard look at itself, and consider the hypocritical, misogynist prurience that seems to drive many of its political figures" (Cain 2017). Women have started attending marches and protests wearing the red robe and the white bonnet, the Handmaids' uniform, and others have marched with banners saying, "Make Atwood Fiction Again" (Polychronis 2017), showing how wide has been the influence of the show, and the novel, on women all over the world.

The Handmaid's Tale explores a fictional society where women have lost all their rights and where they do not have the faculty to choose what to do with their lives and their bodies. They are also forced to live according to very strict rules that prescribe fixed gender roles for their existence. This society, the Republic of Gilead, is the successor of the United States of America and it is guided by a fundamentalist reading of the Bible's principles. In Gilead, patriarchy is what defines both the personal and the public life, and the most oppressive issue, that of infertility and the possible extinction of humanity, is solved by using the last fertile women as "productive wombs." These women, named "Handmaids," must live with the Commanders of the State of Gilead and their Wives "in a parody of a family unit" (Kužnicki 2017, 68), and attend a monthly "ceremony" where they have sex with the Commander, in the presence of the Wife. If the intercourse results in a pregnancy, the baby will be relinquished to the couple as soon as he/she is born.

This arrangement creates a new kind of family that seems to make obsolete the previous one, producing "that dangerous, creeping normalization, the utterly unordinary becoming ordinary" (Wollaston 2017). It creates a new "balance," new bonds, and it deals with current issues such as surrogacy and the role of women both in the family and in society.

The Handmaid's Tale, which is narrated by Offred, might be read as a cautionary tale. Being a dystopian novel, it warns about the perils of an excessive control over people's lives and customs, about the risks of abiding to religious fundamentalism, and of course about the inequality of the sexes, here brought to its extreme consequences. Moreover, the novel presents a new, although inspired by an old, familiar pattern, which shapes society and is seen as a return to "Nature's norm" (Atwood 1985, 232). This pattern stems directly, also in the real world, from the governments' and media's concern about family decline which "calls to return to the apparently superior values of a past golden age of family life" (Chambers 2012, 2). Such a golden age is connected to the nuclear family model, which represents an "icon of tradition and stability, often still perceived as an antidote to today's social problems" (2). Furthermore, family values are directly tied to the intention of governments, Gilead included, to "identify and defend the moral standards of the nation" (Chambers 2012, 12) and are central "to how nations view themselves and their prospects for the future" (Markens 2007, 3).

Is there anything about this model that is mirrored by real life society? Are women bound to return to the roles assigned them by men? Would such a solution fix some of the issues of our time? Do we risk going back to an entirely patriarchal society, where women have no rights? The analysis of the elements constituting Gilead's familiar model tries to answer these questions.

Gilead, defined by Sławomir Kużnicki as "the perverse marriage of religion and sexuality" (68), relies for its structure and rules on the Sacred Scriptures. Nonetheless, it is not only based on Christian values, rather it is "a conglomeration of Western religious ideals, uniting Old Testament patriarchy with Protestant Puritanism and New Right traditional values" (Rine 2013, 55). The function of these values is to reinforce gender roles, and to grant "male hegemony state control over women's bodies, biological reductivism, strict (hetero)sexual mores and the equation of natural and normal" (55). The epigraph that opens the novel is taken from Genesis, 30:1-3, and it constitutes the Biblical origin of surrogate motherhood:

> And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children or else I die.
> And Jacob's anger was kindled against Rachel; and he said, Am I in God's stead, who hath withheld from thee the fruit of the womb?
> And she said, Behold my maid Bilhah, go in unto her; and she shall bear upon my knees, that I may also have children by her. (Atwood 1985, 9)

This piece from the Bible is taken literally "to disempower and sexually exploit fertile women" (Banerjee 2015, 55), in a historical moment that sees an alarming rate of infertile men and women. Infertility deprives the institution of marriage of what is considered, in the Bible, the proper end of it: reproduction, since, "at the heart of this primary form of human relationality is fecundity" (Atkinson 2014, 50). So, "the only antidote to this is the retrieval of the biblical vision of marriage and family, which requires the recovery of an authentic theology of creation" (51) since "without procreation and the creation of new families, there can be no history" (66). In Gilead, in order to grant the survival of humans, and to give the Commander's families children or heirs, the few remaining fertile women are enslaved and used as "mere procreators shorn of personal integrity" (57). This loss of identity is symbolized by the very act of losing their baptismal name to take on the name of the man to whose household they are assigned. Offred is indeed a patronymic for "of Fred," which corresponds, according to Abigail Rine, with the name Adam gives Eve: "wo-man" ("of man"), "denoting man as origin and woman as different from, yet belonging to man" (59). The use of patronymics for the Handmaids "exemplifies the model of sexual difference established in the biblical creation myth" (59).

The sexual act that allows the insemination of the Handmaid is the monthly "ceremony," which is introduced by the Commander reading the Bible in "a kind of

religious service" (Filipczak 1993, 176). As the already quoted piece prescribes, the intercourse follows a precise ritual that is "sanctioned by the state" (*Ibidem*). Rituals, as in this case, shape and express the social roles of the people enacting them, and bring them "beyond conscious levels of awareness" simultaneously commanding "attention and loyalty" and deflecting any questioning (Braverman 1988, 159). The Handmaid is fully clothed, lying on her back, with the head between the Wife's knees; the two women hold hands, which is "supposed to signify that we are one flesh, one being. What it really means is that she is in control, of the process and thus of the product. If any" (Atwood 1985, 104). In this way, "the most private and intimate interaction between two individuals is made grotesque and coercive" in an act performed "passionlessly once every month" (Banerjee 2015, 58). The TV series shows the grotesque element of the ceremony from the very first episode ("Offred"),[2] where every move of the ritual is accompanied by the words of the epigraph, functioning as an explanation for the position of the bodies.

The triad that produces such an act might be also interpreted in religious terms, and "the Commander plays the role of God the Father, because he is the oldest and he embodies the biblical concept of patriarchy in its fullest way" (Kužnicki 2017, 68). Patriarchy, justified by religion, allows the objectification of women, "mainly in the sexual and biological sphere of life" (72) and hence is used as "a political tool of repression, which is always connected with the process of victimizing one particular group of people at the cost of another" (73). Nevertheless, Dorota Filipczak has argued that the patriarchal interpretation of the Biblical texts is not within the texts, but only "the sexist assumptions of the interpreter" (Filipczak 1993, 182), denoting an instrumental use of religion.

Of course, in such an arrangement, romantic love and genuine bonds between people are not allowed. The concept that a family is a product of the love between two people is outdated, since, as the Commander claims, "All we've done is return things to Nature's norm" (Atwood 1985, 232). Norms are "the basic structural building blocks for all groups, including the family group" and they may "prohibit, permit, prefer or prescribe a specific behavior or set of behaviors for incumbents of a social position" (Boss *et al.* 2009, 232). In Gilead, the norm, presumably set by Nature, is used to justify, among others, the practice of arranged marriages, because "Arranged marriages have always worked out just as well, if not better" (Atwood 1985, 232) since "this way they all get a man, nobody's left out" (Atwood 1985, 231). But the patriarchal nuclear family is only "a historically and culturally specific" social institution, and not something "natural," that is why it is used, in Gilead and in real societies, "in the organization of social and cultural life" and in "the acquisition of male and female gender identities, and the moral order" (Wright and

[2] "Offred." *The Handmaid's Tale,* Directed by Reed Morano, season 1, episode 1, Hulu, 26 April 2017.

Jagger 1999, 4). It is not surprising then, that in Gilead "intimacy and emotional commitment, the cornerstones of contemporary families, no longer exist" (Newman and Grauerholz 2002, 523). Moreover, "love is not allowed, and pleasure is denied any part in sexual contact" (Trahair 1999, 167). The act performed in the ceremony, as Offred recounts, "has nothing to do with passion or love or romance or any of those other notions we used to titillate ourselves with. It has nothing to do with sexual desire [...] Arousal and orgasm are no longer thought necessary" (Atwood 1985, 105). Pleasure cannot be part of the equation because the sexual act only has a procreative *telos,* and the "pleasure-centered ethos" that involves sex without procreative ends, in a Christian view, "is destructive of the family, the individual and society" (Atkinson 2014, 51). That is why, "the family is weak, despite the government's pro-family rhetoric" (Sheckels 2012, 89).

The standardization of family is not only a fictional element, rather the result of some governments' attempts to do it through measures such as "housing policies, tax breaks for married couples, divorce and post-divorce parenting laws, family planning, types of access to new reproductive technologies and so on" (Chambers 2012, 1). As Julie Hanlon Rubio claims, many Americans believe that giving equal importance to all types of family (for instance same-sex families, mononuclear families and so on) is destructive to "the family" and that "it is not beneficial, in their eyes, to focus on the diversity of family life in the United States" (Hanlon Rubio 2003, 4). It is probably from this conviction that Atwood took inspiration to depict the previous family that Offred had: she was married to Luke and they had a baby girl. Although they were an apparently traditional nuclear family, Luke had been married before to another woman, and Offred was his mistress. The show adds another element of "discomfort" to the couple, since Luke, played by the actor O-T Fagbenle, is also a black man. Hence, theirs is an interracial union, which makes it even less "holy" than the new reality Offred is forced to live in.

In Gilead, women are relegated to an ancillary position with respect to men's, who wield power in a totalitarian way. Once again, religion is the foundation of this arrangement, because "being the first created and being the source, the man embodies an ordering principle" in the relationship he has with the woman (Atkinson 2014, 60). Power, in this society, can only be interpreted in Foucauldian terms, therefore in negative ones, because it takes on the meaning of "refusal, limitation, obstruction, censorship" (Foucault 1980, 139). "Power is what says no," writes Foucault, and it implies "either a renunciation of natural rights, a Social contract, or a love of the master" (*Ibidem*). This is what happens in Gilead, where women are not allowed to write, to read, and to hold property anymore (Atwood 1985, 187). Such a society might have been inspired by the claims of the New Right in the 1980's, which hoped for "every man's right to rule supreme at home" and to exercise the husband's "God-given responsibility to lead his family" (Bouson 1993, 135). What these activists wanted was "the restoration of women's traditional roles" and "the return of women to the home" (135). The probable

outcome of such claims, had they been applied, was "the virtual enslavement of women, their reduction to mere functions, to mute replaceable objects" (135). The New Right ideology on family was, of course, oppressive towards women, since it prevented them from achieving an economic independence and "vocational fulfillment" outside the home (Hanlon Rubio 2003, 12). It also showed how "family values" have nothing to do with "women's desires, women's rights, or women's health" (Oliver 1997, xv). Not too implicitly, the claim of the New Right was that family values "would be safeguarded only when men are once again fully in power in both the public and domestic spheres" (xvi), which is exactly what happens in Gilead. Nonetheless, Atwood claimed that *The Handmaid's Tale* is not "strictly speaking a feminist dystopia" because "all the men would have to be advantaged, and this is far from being the case" (Lacroix et al. 1999, 14). Rather, Atwood defines this society as a hierarchy, where "some people at the top have power" but "the general run of men live in a very arranged way" (14). Of course, there is a hierarchy also among women, "so that their clothing, movements and language are all delimited by the roles they play" (Banerjee 2015, 60). For this reason, women must wear the colour related to their social status: blue for the Wives, red for the Handmaids, green for the Marthas, who are the servants in Gilead (Atwood 1985, 19). This difference implies a clear assignment in their roles, which are bound to stay the same forever. The colors are also a symbol borrowed from the Christian iconography of the late-medieval, early Renaissance period, explained by Atwood regarding the TV series as follows: "the Virgin Mary would inevitably wear blue or blue-green, and Mary Magdalene would inevitably wear red" (Vineyard 2017).

The Wives, too, have limited possibilities. As any other woman in Gilead, they are not allowed to read or to make decisions, and they are confined to their spaces, which are the house and the garden, where they can take care of the plants or knit. All these activities are designed to "keep the Wives busy, to give them a sense of purpose" (Atwood 1985, 23) since they are "defeated women. They have been unable [...]" (56). So, they must accept the practice of surrogate motherhood, which is the core of the novel.

Due to the high rates of infertility, which has become an "epidemic"[3] also in the late twentieth century reality (Markens 2007, 9), conceiving a child has become a difficult task, and "where motherhood and fatherhood were once inevitable and given, they now require definition by law" (Chambers 2012, 12) and cannot rely anymore on biological procreation, or at least, on that between husband and wife only. Yet, infertility is only a female guilt in Gilead, because "There is no such thing as a sterile man anymore [...] there are only women who are fruitful and women who are barren, that's the law"

[3] According to Susan Markens, infertility might be the result of the trend which sees women as a part of the labor force, hence delaying motherhood until they have established their careers. Since fecundity decreases with age, men and women are more often infertile (15).

(Atwood 1985, 70-71). Anyway, Serena Joy, the Commander's Wife, informs Offred, during a private conversation, that she believes her husband is sterile, and suggests to her to try an illegal solution: having sex with the house guardian Nick (Atwood 1985, 216). The act, which takes place in absolute secrecy, is carried out as an act of love, or at least of desire, and it is repeated several times, no more for procreational aims but for something Offred dares not call love, because "it would be tempting fate; it would be romance, bad luck" (Atwood 1985, 282).

Through traditional surrogacy, a practice which is never named in the novel, the "dyadic private world of biogenetic sexual reproduction" is now transformed into something that allows "the divisibility of maternity, including the transfer of newborns from one mother to another," and which "separate, divide and distribute what may be called the formerly unified essentialist dimension of maternity" (Farquar 1996, 15). Besides, the surrogate mother acts, in a certain way, as a "surrogate wife" to the husband of the infertile woman (Field 1988, 5). As Lisa Sowle Cahill claims, indeed, "the 'surrogate' is 'substituting' not for the mother [...] but for the wife of her child's biological father, making a biological contribution" (153). What results is a "bizarre situation in which the woman has limited information, and experiences physical and psychological evaluations and stresses beyond those normally associated with pregnancy, and all to carry a baby whom she will surrender to someone else forever" (Schwartz 2003, 163). This anxiety, in the novel, is expressed through the constant and obsessive control over Offred's menstrual cycle and health, with mandatory monthly visits to the doctor and healthy food to be "a worthy vessel" (Atwood 1985, 75). The arrival of the menstruation is viewed as the failure of her "productive enterprise" (Martin 1997, 85). Consequently, it is not surprising that surrogacy challenges the very notions of "family and relatedness" (Markens 2007, 2), because "introducing third parties into the process of human reproduction may weaken certain marital and familial relationships" bringing the intended father to establish "an inappropriate psychological bond with the surrogate mother" (Tong 2003, 370). The ceremony, indeed, might be considered as "a form of fornication or adultery" even if "in the Old Testament surrogacy is not seen as a form either of fornication or adultery" (Charlesworth 1993, 76). In the novel, an inappropriate psychological bond develops when the Commander asks Offred to see him in his office, after Serena Joy has gone to bed, to play *Scrabble* with him. The game would in normal times have been innocuous; "now it's forbidden [...] dangerous. Now it's indecent. Now it's something he can't do with his Wife. Now it's desirable" (Atwood 1985, 149). The game is forbidden, of course, because it implies playing with letters and words, something that women, bound to be illiterate, cannot do without breaking Gilead's law. Yet, the essence of the inappropriate bond between the Commander and the Handmaid comes out when he asks her to kiss him "as if you meant it" (Atwood 1985, 150) at the end of their forbidden encounter. They keep meeting regularly, and initially, he grants her small presents, such as an old magazine to read, and

a hand balm, another forbidden item for the Handmaids. Eventually, the Commander takes her out to Jezebel's, a club out of town where the Commanders can enjoy the company of prostitutes. The excuse for the existence of such a club is, as the Commander explains, that "you can't cheat Nature. Nature demands variety, for men. It stands to reason, it's part of the procreational strategy. It's Nature's plan" (Atwood 1985, 249). At Jezebel's, the relationship between Offred and the Commander becomes even more inappropriate because he has sex with her outside of the procreational ceremony (Atwood 1985, 267).

Since the choice of becoming a Handmaid is not up to the women who are going to grant this service to the Commanders and their Wives, theirs is an exploitation that makes them "nothing but a two-legged womb used for breeding" (Trahair 1999, 167). Both women and children become, in this society, a commodity. The Handmaids, or surrogate mothers, are "treated as a thing, an instrument, and not as a person" (Charlesworth 1993, 77), their bodies are "containers, it's only the insides [...] that are important" (Atwood 1985, 107). Their condition is precisely that of slaves, because slavery is "the situation where a person is made to serve another by force or coercion and where no kind of free and informed consent has been possible" (Charlesworth 1993, 78). However, the Handmaids are "too important, too scarce [...] a national resource" (Atwood 1985, 75).

What the Handmaids are asked and instructed to do by Aunt Lydia at the Red Centre, beginning their journey to become Handmaids, is, once again, connected to religion and to the concept of "sacrificial Christian love ethic" (Sullivan-Dunbar 2017, 78). This concept, which assumes that Christian love must only be obeyed and that "its very essence must be to contradict our inclinations, which are warped through sin" (80), results in the fact that in Gilead, there is no space for anything that is the unique feature of a Handmaid, or her inclination towards any aspect of everyday life. They all must wear a uniform and speak only through set phrases (such as "Blessed be the fruit," "May the Lord open," "Praise be" etc.), and of course they must obey the Commander and his Wife. All these rules automatically erase their identity as persons. Additionally, "our 'natural' self-love is deeply suspect in this tradition, and must be radically contained" (Sullivan-Dunbar 2017, 80). That is why the Handmaids cannot wear the least sign of vanity, which translates into the prohibition to wear make-up or to have a mirror or a razor in their rooms and "hair must be long but covered" (Atwood 1985, 72). "Modesty is invisibility" is Aunt Lydia's warning, "to be *seen-* is to be [...]penetrated. What you must be, girls, is impenetrable" (Atwood 1985, 38-39). Handmaids are also denied the basic body-care, such as a moisturizer. Finally, this ethic considers natural instincts as "a dangerous guide for moral decisions making" (Sullivan-Dunbar 2017, 81), which is exactly what Aunt Lydia teaches the Handmaids.

Another aim of this family arrangement is, according to Aunt Lydia, to create a society where "women will live in harmony together, all in one family." In such a society "there can be bonds of real affection" because women will be "united for a common end!," "Helping one another in their daily chores as they walk the path of life together, each performing her appointed task" (Atwood 1985, 171). That is what surrogacy, in certain cases, might do, bringing women "closer together" and having positive "transformative effects" on them (Tong 2003, 573). That does not happen between Offred and Serena Joy, since the latter sees the first as "a reproach to her; and a necessity" (Atwood 1985, 23). The cold treatment that Serena gives Offred disappoints her expectation, and the Aunts', to create an artificial yet harmonic relationship between the Wife and the Handmaid. Offred's hope was to "turn her into an older sister, a motherly figure, someone who would understand and protect me" (Atwood 1985, 26).

In most cases, surrogacy complicates the relationship between the women involved in the practice, because it disrupts the very idea of maternal wholeness, since motherhood is distributed "among at least three potential mothers: genetic, gestational, and social" (Teman 2010, 7). The first two "mothers" are those who directly offer their body within the pregnancy, while the third does not have any direct physical involvement in the gestation, but only raises and nurtures the child. The social recognition of motherhood seems to be an essential feature in Gilead, probably more than anything else, and the show stresses this fact in the second episode (chapter 5 in the book), "Birth Day".[4] Here, the Handmaids attend the birth of Ofwarren's child at her Commander's house, which is crowded with upper class women assisting the Wife, who wears a night-gown and behaves as if she were in labor. When Ofwarren is ready to deliver, they put her in the same position as prescribed for the monthly intercourse ritual ceremony, with the head between the Wife's legs. After the baby, a girl, is born, she is taken away from Ofwarren and showed off to the women enjoying the party at the house.

This episode, which is slightly different from the book, shows exactly how the fear of losing the social recognition as a mother brings the Wives to pretend a natural birth they are not involved in. What they experience is a "pseudopregnancy" where their role as nurturers is highlighted, and the biological role of the "real" mother is devalued. "In this way, motherhood is reinterpreted as primarily an important social role in order to sidestep problematic aspects of the surrogate's biogenetic relationship to the child and the adoptive mother's lack of a biogenetic link" (Ragoné 1997, 120-21). The baby is seen as something the Wife has won, "a tribute" (Atwood 1985, 136). The Handmaid will be "allowed to nurse the baby, for a few months" and after that she will be transferred "to see if she can do it again, with someone else who needs a turn" (Atwood 1985, 137). From that moment on, the biological mother will be erased from the life of the child, as

[4] "Birth Day." *The Handmaid's Tale,* Directed by Reed Morano, season 1, episode 2, Hulu, 26 April 2017.

Offred notices when Serena Joy brings her an album with pictures of her daughter, whom she has lost when she was captured. In the family album Serena shows her there are no Handmaids, and Offred is nothing to her daughter. "I have been obliterated for her. I am only a shadow now, far back behind the glib shiny surface of this photograph. A shadow of a shadow, as dead mothers become" (Atwood 1985, 240). This is the new family standard in Gilead, and this will likely be forever.

* * *

The year 2018 has opened – among others – with the publication of Michael Wolff's book *Fire and Fury, Inside the Trump White House* (Henry Holt and Company), which immediately became a best seller. It features prominently the role of Steve Bannon as former White House Chief Strategist. Bannon was also the executive chairman at Breitbart News, a far-right American news website founded in 2007 by the conservative commentator Andrew Breitbart. Scrolling through the pages of Breitbart, it is possible to understand better why protesters all over the world have marched with their banners saying, "Make Atwood Fiction Again."

The website, which supported Trump's presidential campaign in 2016, contains a fair number of articles, mostly written by Milo Yiannopoulos, dealing with the issues contained both in *The Handmaid's Tale* novel and TV show. What follows is only a glimpse at the website.

Regarding birth control and contraception, it is possible to find an article titled "Birth Control Makes Women Unattractive and Crazy" where Yiannopoulos lists a series of side effects caused by the Pill, such as "Birth control makes you fat," "makes your voice unsexy," "makes you choose the wrong mates," "makes you a slut," "makes men unmanly," "gives you cottage cheese thighs." In his opinion, "the Pill may have destroyed the institution of marriage," because the lack of children leads to "fewer reasons for couples to stay together" (Yiannopoulos 2015a). He concludes that "we need the kids if we're to breed enough to keep the Muslim invaders at bay. Tossing out birth control isn't just kinder to women, it may be the only way to save civilization [...] It's what God wants, too."

The issue of birth control involves the organization "Planned Parenthood," which is accused, in an article by Susan Berry, of performing nothing but abortions and devoting a minimal part of its funds to mammograms (Berry 2018). Berry also maintains, in another article, that the decision to defund what she calls "the abortion industry" is stirring up "war on women" rhetoric (Berry 2017a). Finally, she complains that the Cinema chain Alamo Drafthouse, based in Texas, has organized a women-only screening

of the film *Wonder Woman* to collect money for Planned Parenthood, among the protests of men (Berry 2017b).

Regarding the role of women in society, there are several articles by Yiannopoulos that hope for a return of women to the kitchen. His remarks are alarmingly reminiscent of Atwood's novel when he writes that "for now, women are the only gender capable of bringing another life into existence. That is a genuinely beautiful thing that should be respected and celebrated" (Yiannopoulos 2016a). The journalist goes even further when he suggests the creation of a "female" internet, to avoid online harassment, because "men built the internet, along with the rest of modern civilization." In this way, women "could go back to bridge tournaments, or wellness workshops, or swapping apple crumble recipes […] I, Donald Trump and the rest of the alpha male will continue to dominate the internet without feminist whining" (Yiannopoulos 2016b). Lastly, Yiannopoulos writes about Nature, another issue brought on by Atwood, maintaining that it "experiments more widely with men: the male IQ range is wider, and there is more variation in male behavior and biology than in women. Men are where experimentation happens, because a wider variety of male aptitudes and preferences will keep women happier and result in a more well-rounded society" (Yiannopoulos 2015b). Regarding the inequality of the sexes, he believes that "the fight for women's 'equality' has always been absurd: why would a woman want to step down to the lower status of being equal with men? Why should women be badgered into choosing to work over having babies and being happy? (Yiannopoulos 2015b)." His idea about marriage corresponds to that of Gilead's Commanders when he writes that "marriage will benefit from a reduced focus on sex. With desire taken out of the marital equation, it's conceivable that the number of 'partnership marriages' between people who get on well and respect each other enough to share the loads of raising children will grow. Without the power imbalance built in to traditional heterosexual marriage – i.e., women holding all the cards – marriage could become stronger than ever" (Yiannopoulos 2015b).

For those being positive that our society is far from becoming that of Gilead, the cultural climate that these articles and the current American administration reflect is quite alarming. As Abigail Rine wrote just a few years ago, "the ideal of virile male leadership and the passive, reproductive femininity prevails, though no longer merely clothed in the guise of Adam and Eve" (73). So, those believing that our next model of family might be that described in *The Handmaid's Tale* could be right, given the government's attitude to "pick and choose among American cultural values about family, parenthood, and reproduction, now choosing biological relatedness, now nurturing, according to their needs" (Ragoné 1997, 123). To describe the current cultural atmosphere and its perils, some words from *The Handmaid's Tale* might be useful. "Nothing changes instantaneously: in a gradually heating bathtub you'd be boiled to death before you knew it" (Atwood 1985, 66) and an enven stronger warning: "ordinary

[…]is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary" (43).

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MARION GYMNICH

CLONE FAMILIES AND ZOMBIE CHILDREN

The Demise of the Nuclear Family in Dystopian and Postapocalyptic Narratives

ABSTRACT: Although dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives tend to be discussed primarily in terms of their exploration of society, they also prove to be an interesting, so far largely underestimated, context for examining cultural responses to fluctuating discourses on the family. Due to their characteristic range of themes and premises, both dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives may challenge notions of what "normal" family life looks like and what "family" means in the face of changing social realities, legal frameworks and reproductive technologies. The article discusses (re-)interpretations of what families may mean in a number of British and American dystopian and postapocalyptic novels (in particular recent ones) as well as in the successful TV series *The Walking Dead*.

KEYWORDS: *Brave New World*, *Never Let Me Go*, *The Road*, *The Walking Dead*

Introduction

Although dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives tend to be discussed primarily in terms of their exploration of human nature and society, they also prove to be an interesting, so far largely underestimated, context for examining cultural responses to fluctuating discourses on the family. Due to their characteristic range of themes and premises, both dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives may challenge notions of what "normal" family life looks like and what "family" means in the face of changing social realities, legal frameworks and reproductive technologies. In their visions of alternative societies, dystopian narratives do not only speculate on the consequences of various types of government; they also include reflections on the family and family-like structures (or the lack thereof), at times coming up with more or less radical alternatives to the model of the nuclear family. Postapocalyptic narratives do not only show

individuals in their struggle for survival, but also focus on the ways in which the radically altered, hostile circumstances affect families.

In dystopian worlds, a demise of the nuclear family may turn out to be *programmatic*; in other words, a lack of family-like social units may be the immediate consequence of ideological principles that undermine the traditional concept of the family deliberately. Cases in point include the rigorous abolition of the family in the World State of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* (1932), which will provide the starting point of the discussion below, and the principle of choosing "factions" over families in Veronica Roth's young adult dystopian novel *Divergent* (2011). In the society sketched in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), the nuclear family as such survives. Still, the fact that marriages among Party members are supposed to be loveless unions that exist for the sole sake of procreating offspring all but precludes any idealized presentation of the family. Moreover, the (comparatively rare) glimpses of family life in Orwell's novel include the information that political indoctrination encourages children to spy and report on their own parents, even if this means imprisonment, torture and death for their father and/or mother. Undercutting the significance of the family for the individual consolidates the power of the Party. While this idea is reminiscent of reality in totalitarian systems such as the one in Nazi Germany, it also serves to challenge the widespread notion of the family as a (temporary) sanctuary in a hostile environment.

In postapocalyptic narratives, the demise of the family appears to be not so much programmatic rather than a consequence of conditions that are hostile to human life. Postapocalyptic narratives often lack the "most prominent topos of utopian/dystopian literature" (Toker and Chertoff 2008, 164), i.e., "the presence of a *foundational principle*, a philosophical or sociological idea which forms the deep structure of a utopian setting but which may take somewhat debased surface forms" (164). The premises of a genre dwelling on the devastating impact of pandemics, global ecological disasters and other circumstances causing the end of the world as we know it, which typically include an extreme scarcity of both food and medical care as well as the dissolution of law enforcement, imply that the likelihood of losing family members increases exponentially. Indeed, orphanhood, single-parent families and the death of children are recurring features in depictions of the postapocalyptic struggle for survival, as Cormac McCarthy's novel *The Road* (2006) and the TV series *The Walking Dead* (2010-) illustrate. Simultaneously, "a fictional world in which the pervasive threat of violent death forces characters to reevaluate what they are willing to do in order to survive and what constitutes meaningful existence" (Tenga and Bassett 2016, 1281) also raises questions concerning the importance of the family in a purely "survival-driven existence" (1286).

To what extent does the (nuclear) family continue to provide a meaningful existence for individuals in radically altered (dystopian or postapocalyptic) circumstances? Does the traditional family remain a privileged social group inside, or next to, other social units,

some of which may only emerge in the struggle for survival? These are some of the core questions I seek to explore in the following, focusing primarily on recent dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives. First, however, I will have a look at Aldous Huxley's dystopia *Brave New World*, which is still an important reference point in debates on the representation of artificial reproduction in dystopian fiction.

From a World without Families to Clone Families

Brave New World imagines a future in which the nuclear family is essentially defunct. In vitro fertilization, ectogenesis and State Conditioning Centres have replaced families, which were abolished to create a more efficient and happier society and which are merely an obscene barbarism for most inhabitants of the World State. Individuals are brought up to feel embarrassed when fathers, mothers and "the old viviparous days" (Huxley 2007, 4) are mentioned. According to the pseudo-Freudian reasoning the social order in the World State is based on, families are tantamount to a lack of emotional stability and thus endanger the individual's well-being: "Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers – was therefore full of misery; full of mothers – therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts – full of madness and suicide" (33). As Brad Buchanan (2002) points out, "the active suppression of the Oedipus complex is the principal tool of social stability practiced in this future" (76). The abolition of kinship networks is also regarded as being conducive to erasing all kinds of deep emotional bonds, which are thought of as factors prone to destabilize both the individual and society as a whole: "An 'only love' is an incestuous love, in Huxley's futuristic world, because it tends to work against the social solidarity which is the key to peaceful life" (77). While the World State has abolished families as well as lasting relationships, these still exist on the reservations, Foucauldian heterotopias that are deemed relics of a primitive past. In this way, the impression that the family as a social unit is not only outdated but actually part of an "uncivilized," earlier stage of human development is reinforced.

Even if the recurring anti-family rants in *Brave New World* certainly seem to invite a satirical reading, the fate of John "the Savage," who, contrary to normal World State biographies, was accidentally born "in the old way" on a reservation and grew up with his mother, raises interesting questions. The depiction of John's emotional dependency on his mother, which indeed seems to exemplify the Freudian Oedipus complex (Buchanan 2002, 78-9), and of his extreme reactions, which culminate in self-flagellation and suicide, might suggest that the negative way in which families are seen in the World State is not entirely unfounded after all. In this context, it is also worthwhile noting that a certain amount of criticism regarding the traditional closely-knit nuclear family is

expressed in some earlier utopian texts as well, including William Morris' Late Victorian utopia *News from Nowhere* (1890). Here, a more flexible family model is favored, which relies on temporary unions, where partners may separate without any legal procedure or social sanctioning, and on the community participating in the education of children. Moreover, a skeptical attitude towards the impact traditional family structures have on the individual, which equally echoes Freudian ideas, is apparent in novels by a number of British Modernists, such as D.H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers* (1913), May Sinclair's *The Life and Death of Harriett Frean* (1922), and Virginia Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). In other words, the anti-family rhetoric in Huxley's World State seems to capture the tenor of a widespread criticism of the nuclear family, at least among intellectuals, in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Although the demise of the family in Huxley's World State has its ideological foundation in a pseudo-Freudian anti-family ideology, it also takes a highly advanced reproductive technology to make the vision of a society without families come true. It has been argued that *Brave New World* does not necessarily imply criticism of eugenics as such (Congdon 2011). Still, the depiction of artificial reproduction in Huxley's novel is likely to trigger decidedly negative associations right from the start. In the description of the Fertilizing Room at the beginning of the text, various references to death are at odds with the notion of fertility/new life. The novel tells us that inside the Fertilizing Room, "[t]he light was *frozen*, *dead*, *a ghost*", and the workers wear gloves made of "a pale *corpse*-coloured rubber," which conjures up a death-in-life scenario (Huxley 2007, 1; emphases added). The matter-of-fact sketch of the technicalities of "the modern fertilizing process" (3) is not apt to endow the beginning of human life with a sense of wonder. Instead, the efficiency-oriented approach reaches its climax in the description of Bokanovsky's Process, which alludes to "contemporary state-of-the-art scientific and technological inventions (e.g. Hermann Muller's sensational experiment with X-rays to increase the mutation process in 1927)" (Tripp 2015, 35) in so far as it involves exposing fertilized eggs to "hard x-rays" (Huxley 2007, 4): "a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress" (3-4). Instead of generating awe at the possibility of creating new life, the description of the artificially induced multiplication of eggs seems revolting and serves as a reminder of the fact that the World State does not cherish individuality. While the *doppelgänger* motif may call forth the notion of the uncanny (Freud 2003, 141), the thought of 96 identical human beings is a monstrosity. In a society regulated by the maxim of efficiency, human beings are not born as individuals into the private sphere of a family but into a society where they are physically equipped and psychologically conditioned to fulfil their predetermined role without any qualms. The loss of the family, thus, may mean less emotional turmoil, but

it also goes hand in hand with life trajectories that have been predetermined and deprive the individual of the right to choose freely.

In the alternative world sketched in Nobel Prize Laureate Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* (2005), families as such still exist, but there is a group within society that is excluded from experiencing family life in the traditional sense: clones, who have been created as infertile beings for the sole purpose of serving as organ donors. The focus on cloning in Ishiguro's dystopian novel certainly responds to the increased interest in this type of artificial reproduction in the wake of the creation of clone sheep Dolly in 1996 and the ongoing debates about the ethics of stem cell research. In *Never Let Me Go*, artificial reproduction means being able to cure previously fatal diseases like cancer by creating a group of human beings who are deemed expendable by the rest of society. The clones' organs are harvested while they are in their twenties or early thirties, which means that their lives are inevitably curtailed by having to serve the needs of others. In this case, a lack of parents and of a family is tantamount to being ruthlessly exploited by society and having no human rights.

In contrast to Huxley's *Brave New World*, *Never Let Me Go* does not dwell on the scientific aspects of artificial reproduction; instead, the novel explores the psychological implications of the role society has determined for the clones. This is achieved by means of granting the readers insight into the thoughts and memories of one of these disenfranchised human beings, the protagonist and first-person narrator Kathy H. She was brought up in Hailsham, an institution that resembles a boarding school in some respects, but that also serves to isolate the clones from society, which means that during her childhood "any place beyond Hailsham was like a fantasy land" (Ishiguro 2010, 66) for Kathy. This isolation appears to be conducive to making the clones accept their fate with surprising calm. Temper tantrums, such as the ones experienced occasionally by Tommy, one of the main characters, which might be read as a sign of rebellion against the clones' predetermined role, are rare and are frowned upon even among the clones. Accepting the fate that society imposes upon them seems to be facilitated by a subtle variation on the more straightforward and aggressive type of psychological conditioning practiced in Huxley's *Brave New World*. The clones appear to be regularly fed (partial) information by their "guardians," i.e., the people in charge of taking care of them, which makes them grow accustomed to a future as "donors." In retrospect, Kathy speculates that "it's possible the guardians managed to smuggle into our heads a lot of the basic facts about our futures" (81), thus in the long run causing the clones to accept their fate without questioning.

While the inhabitants of Huxley's World State do not miss family structures and are in fact horrified by the very thought of fathers and mothers, Ishiguro's clones appear to have a desire to form meaningful family-like relationships. Though the clones have never known ordinary family life, they are still longing for the kind of exclusive and close

emotional bond, the "only love," that is a taboo in the society of *Brave New World*. This desire is apparent in their friendships, in the way they form couples and in Kathy's musings about what having a child might mean. She (mis)interprets the lyrics of her favorite song "Never Let Me Go" as portraying a woman's deep-seated love for her baby, an emotion that Kathy apparently can identify with: "what I'd imagine was a woman who'd been told she couldn't have babies, who'd really, really wanted them all her life. Then there's a sort of miracle and she has a baby, and she holds this baby very close to her and walks around singing: 'Baby, never let me go…' partly because she's so happy, but also because she's so afraid something will happen" (70). The clones' search for "possibles," i.e., humans whose DNA they might share, serves as a reminder of the importance genealogical information generally has for human identity: "we all of us, to varying degrees, believed that when you saw the person you were copied from, you'd get *some* insight into who you were deep down, and maybe too, you'd see something of what your life held in store" (137-38). The intense interest in their guardians, who are invested with a high degree of authority, may be seen as an expression of a search for parent substitutes. Yet, the children's hope of getting "special" attention by one of the guardians is disappointed. Instead, growing up for them involves becoming aware of the fact that even the guardians are likely to "shudder at the very thought of you – of how you were brought into this world and why – and … dread the idea of your hand brushing against theirs" (36). Society prefers to ignore the clones, and the guardians, who meet and teach the clones every day, keep their distance and even feel revulsion.

This means that the peer group is the only substitute the clones have to fill the void that the absence of a family (and the prospect of never having one) seems to cause. The clones fall in love, but that experience fails to stir any truly rebellious feelings in them, contrary to the conventions of dystopian fiction, where "[a] sanctioned partner choice often leads to a crucial turning point in the narrative" (Glaubitz 2015, 320) when characters suddenly challenge conditions they hitherto took for granted. Instead of dreaming about spending the rest of their lives together, the clone couples in Ishiguro's novel at most dare to entertain the hope of getting a "deferral," which would make it possible for "donations to be put back by three, even four years" (Ishiguro 2010, 150). This extremely modest hope turns out to be based on an illusion, however, which reminds the readers once more that there is no interest in the clones' happiness on the part of society. Their sole function remains supplying organs for others, and most people are apparently more than eager to forget about the fate of the clones as long as "their own children, their spouses, their parents, their friends, did not die from cancer, motor neurone disease, heart disease" (258). Protecting loved ones, family and friends is important in this dystopian world, and it leaves the clones, who are not part of a kinship network, without any advocates for saving their lives, let alone legal protection. The principle of using the clones as "carers" before they start their own "donations" (and thus rapidly approach their premature death) appears to be situated in between family-like

structures, i.e., the traditional notion of taking care of "aging, sick, dying parents, siblings, or spouses" (Toker and Chertoff 2008, 172), and an official, group-specific infrastructure providing palliative support. At any rate, the system of carers certainly makes it easier for the rest of society to ignore the plight of the clones.

Even though relationships among the clones are shown to be rife with jealousy, rivalry, and misunderstandings, personal bonds are what ultimately provide them with a meaningful existence from their childhood up to the time when they "complete," i.e., when the harvesting of their organs causes their death. As the narrative of Kathy's life shows, her relationship with her childhood friends Tommy and Ruth has a lasting impact on her sense of who she is. The novel ends with Kathy mourning the loss of Tommy and getting ready to start her own donations, which are bound to lead to her death in the very near future. This ending, full of sadness, resignation as well as cherished memories of her friends, once more confirms the importance of family-like, lasting emotional bonds for the individual.

The Transformation of the Family in Postapocalyptic Narratives

Cormac McCarthy's Pulitzer Prize winning novel *The Road* (2006) evokes a postapocalyptic future in which all animal and plant life on the planet has become extinct due to an (unspecified) catastrophe that has left a thick layer of ash and dust on the earth and in the atmosphere. In a world where hardly any food remains and where some humans have even resorted to cannibalism in order to survive, a father and his son, who was born shortly after the apocalyptic event, desperately search for food while making their way south, to the sea. The incredibly bleak scenario of a postapocalyptic America inevitably raises the question of whether survival in such a world is desirable at all. The boy's mother decided to commit suicide because she could not bear this miserable existence anymore, as a flashback reveals. For the father, however, suicide is unthinkable, since the close emotional bond with his son continues to provide his life with meaning: "the boy was all that stood between him and death" (McCarthy 2007, 29). Every single day, the father does his utmost to live up to the role of provider, protector, and caregiver for his son. Moreover, his interaction with his son is invariably indicative of a profound love for the boy, which consistently shines through their laconic dialogues and which arguably establishes "an intensely uplifting relationship that captivates and transports the reader beyond the charred settings of the novel" (Gilbert 2012, 40). Throughout the novel, the readers witness a high level of mutual attachment between father and son, which results from "the physical presence and emotional availability of the caregiver" (Huff, Stamper and Kelly 2016, 325), from the father "listening carefully and watching for emotional cues that may necessitate a response" (326) and the emotional consistency characteristic of their communication (326). The nurturing relationship between father

and son, who are "each the other's world entire" (McCarthy 2007, 6), creates a stark contrast to the brutal daily struggle for survival. To a certain extent, the postapocalyptic narrative of *The Road* even reiterates domestic ideals celebrated in the nineteenth century, which involved parents who are "devoted to the moral and/or spiritual well-being of their offspring, […] ever-present and ever-mindful of their duties" (Thiel 2008, 5).

An idealized notion of the family is also briefly conjured up when father and son visit places that the father remembers from his own childhood. In what used to be his home, he tries to reconnect with a world of ordinary family life that is lost forever: "He stood there. He felt with his thumb in the painted wood of the mantle the pinholes from tacks that had held stockings forty years ago. This is where we used to have Christmas when I was a boy. … On cold winter nights when the electricity was out in a storm we would sit at the fire here, me and my sisters, doing our homework" (McCarthy 2007, 26). The father's longing for a lost world in this scene revolves around Christmas, perhaps the most family-centered holiday in the year, and evokes an idyll that would not be out of place in a nineteenth-century domestic novel such as Louisa May Alcott's classic *Little Women* (1869), which idealizes the family and its meaning for the individual. The allusions to family life before the apocalypse in *The Road* serve as a shorthand for an entire world that is lost, which arguably is one of the basic functions of references to the family in postapocalyptic narratives.

While the father's demeanor emulates traditional notions of parenting, the portrayal of the boy has been associated with another old motif, which is apparent in "the literary tradition of legends about saintly children" (Hollm 2015, 386). In a world that seems to be apt to call forth the survival instinct in everyone, the boy is unwaveringly altruistic, eager to help strangers they meet during their journey and willing to share what little food they have, even if this means putting his own life at risk. This type of innocent, unprejudiced, and compassionate child, whose miraculous incorruptibility appears to hark back to nineteenth-century literary figures such as Charles Dickens' Oliver Twist, seems to emerge as a potent trope in recent postapocalyptic narratives. Another case in point is the little mute girl Nova in *War for the Planet of the Apes* (2017). The genuine goodness of the boy in *The Road* or Nova in *War for the Planet of the Apes* seems to hold the promise that there is hope for a better future yet. Hope does not only reside in these saint-like children, however, but also in the survival of the family as a social unit offering protection and nurture. Postapocalyptic families are not necessarily based on biology, though, but on caring for each other. Nova is "adopted" by the tribe of apes, and the boy in *The Road* finds a new family immediately after his father's death. Somewhat surprisingly, this family corresponds exactly to the traditional "'natural' and 'complete' family of husband, wife and children" (Thiel 2008, 8) and is ready to take care of yet another child. This *deus ex machina* ending, which appears to reward the boy's inherent

goodness, clearly bears religious connotations: "She [the boy's new 'mother'] would talk to him sometimes about God … She said that the breath of God was his breath yet though it pass from man to man through all of time" (McCarthy 2007, 286). The obvious religious tenor of the ending also suggests that the strong belief in the survival of the traditional family rests upon Christian notions of the sanctity of the family.

Over the course of its seasons, the AMC series *The Walking Dead* (2010–), which is based on the eponymous comic series by Robert Kirkman and Tony Moore, has presented a wide range of different constellations that explore potential meanings of the family in a postapocalyptic world. The series shows how several groups of survivors struggle with the threat caused by zombie hordes, who can only be defeated by shooting or stabbing them in the brain, as well as by ruthless groups of (human) raiders. All of the survivors have had to cope with the loss of family members at some point or other. In the postapocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead*, in which everyone who dies turns into a "Walker" due to a virus all people have been infected with, children are generally particularly vulnerable – due to their lack of physical strength and experience as well as in terms of the psychological impact the postapocalyptic environment has on them. The death of children and, perhaps even more, the need to shoot zombie children serves to stress the horrors of the postapocalyptic situation. In fact, the very first zombie viewers get to see in the pilot episode ("Days Gone Bye") is a little girl who is horribly disfigured and who is eventually shot in the head by deputy sheriff Rick Grimes, one of the series' protagonists. In season 2, the girl Sophia goes missing and only reappears several episodes later (in "Pretty Much Dead Already") as part of a zombie horde; she eventually has to be killed by the very people who wanted to rescue her (including her mother). The psychological consequences of the aftermath of the apocalypse for children may be equally disturbing. From seasons 1 to 8, the viewers watch Carl Grimes, who was 12 when the zombie apocalypse began, grow up in a brutal struggle for survival, which turns him more and more into "a product of the new world rather than of the old" (Tenga and Bassett 2016, 1293). One of the things Carl is forced to do apart from killing numerous Walkers is shooting his own mother when the latter is about to turn into a zombie. While Carl follows the example set by his father Rick and turns into a fighter, whose demeanor is hardly childlike in the traditional sense, the fate of a girl called Lizzie depicted in season 4 could be read as a distorted version of the trope of the saint-like, unprejudiced, and compassionate child discussed above. Lizzie is convinced that zombies are "just different" and can even be harmless playfellows. She tries to prove this by killing her sister Mika. Like the children who turn into zombies, Lizzie, who has become a different kind of monster, is killed by one of the adult survivors for her transgression. In the postapocalyptic world of *The Walking Dead*, where childhood has been deprived of innocence and where children regularly turn into monsters, "parenting" apparently includes being prepared to kill children who threaten the survival of others – a development that radically contradicts traditional notions of the family.

To do otherwise in the future of *The Walking Dead* is madness, however, as the example of the "Governor" illustrates. The group's main antagonist in season 3 refuses to let go of his little daughter Penny, who has turned into a Walker, but whom he still keeps hidden inside his house. This highly disturbing father-daughter relationship is introduced at the beginning of the episode "Say the Word." Here, the camera shows the Governor brushing the hair of his little daughter lovingly. It is only when a piece of her scalp comes off and the girl starts to snarl and struggle that the viewers realize that her body is already decaying. The Governor tries to control her by means of a straitjacket, by putting a sack over her head, and keeping her chained most of the time. This perverted image of fatherly affection serves to stress the madness of the character, but it is also a reminder of the normality that is gone. When the camera zooms in on a photograph showing the Governor, his wife, and their daughter before the apocalypse at the end of the previous episode ("Killer Within"), the shot alludes to the loss many of the characters have experienced.

Still, the series refrains from simply idealizing the world before the apocalypse. This is made particularly clear by depicting deeply flawed, dysfunctional families. A case in point is Carol, who is introduced as a wife struggling to protect her daughter Sophia from being abused by her husband. After the husband was mauled to death by zombies, the way Carol hits him in the head with an axe suggests that she is not only trying to prevent him from returning as a Walker, but is also venting her bottled-up hatred. By showing scenes like this one, the series departs from one of the widespread tropes of (post)apocalyptic fiction, i.e., the idea that an apocalypse reunites even estranged family members, which informs, for instance, the movie *Deep Impact* (1998), which revolves around a comet threatening to destroy all life on earth.

Though *The Walking Dead* on the whole does not endorse the idea that the traditional nuclear family is likely to survive in a postapocalyptic future, it "depicts a return to a kind of tribalism" (Tenga and Bassett 2016, 1290) that provides room for the emergence of a new type of family, which is not based on biological kinship, but on shared experience and proven loyalty. At the end of the finale of season 7, the voiceover of Maggie, one of the main characters, recapitulates the journey of the survivors and recalls the origins of the group in Atlanta when Glenn, the father of Maggie's child, who was killed at the end of season 6, came to Rick's help:

> Glenn didn't know you, but he helped you. He put himself in danger for you. And that started it all, from Atlanta to my Daddy's farm to the prison to here … Not as strangers, *as family*. Because Glenn chose to be there for you that day a long time ago. That was the decision that changed everything. It started with both of you, and then it just grew. All of us. To sacrifice for each other. To suffer. To stand. To grieve. To give. To love. To live. To fight for each other. ("The First Day of the Rest of Your Life"; emphasis added)

What highlights this speech is its position at the end of a season, the fact that voiceovers are a relatively uncommon feature in *The Walking Dead*, and the calm and melancholic non-diegetic music accompanying the voiceover. Maggie's assessment of the current situation stresses the importance of a new type of family, a community of belonging that is held together by common suffering and solidarity.

Conclusion

References to families are virtually omnipresent in both dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives. Even the videogames *Fallout 3* (2008) and *Fallout 4* (2015), which are set after a nuclear apocalypse, use the player-character's search for family members as initial motivation for the main storyline. The loss of family members often serves to highlight the emotional and psychological implications of the radically altered circumstances and, more generally, the lack of "normality" in the new world. Some dystopian narratives imagine radical alternatives to the traditional nuclear family. To a certain extent, Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2009) follows in the footsteps of Huxley: The novel features a world where humankind has been all but wiped out by a virus developed by a scientist who wanted to replace a decadent society and highly dysfunctional families by a new, peaceful species that is no longer hampered by "unrequited love" and "thwarted lust" (Atwood 2013, 194) and for which it "no longer matters who the father of the … child may be, since there's no more property to inherit, no father-son loyalty required for war" (195). Quite often, however, dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives confirm the significance of the family for the individual by depicting the emergence of new types of families, by showing nuclear families coming closer together and characters who are prepared to sacrifice their lives for family members. This tendency is, for instance, apparent in a number of young adult dystopian novels, such as Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* trilogy (2008-10) and Veronica Roth's *Divergent*, where the parents of protagonist Tris sacrifice themselves to save their daughter. Elizabeth Thiel (2008) claims that the idealization of the family in Victorian Britain derived from a desire "to create a sense of permanence and stability in a country beset by social anxieties" (2). A similar claim could presumably be made for the depiction of the family in contemporary British and American dystopian and postapocalyptic narratives: For individuals exposed to horrifying situations (just as for readers and viewers in a world threatened by wars, economic crises, and ecological disasters), the family may be an anchor, offering something worth surviving and/or fighting for, which goes a long way towards explaining the omnipresence of families in stories about the end of the world as we know it.

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STEFANO MORELLO

LIKE MOTHER LIKE DAUGHTER, LIKE FATHER LIKE SON

The Spell of Youth on The O.C.

ABSTRACT: This essay aims to shed light on the purposes served by parental figures in the television series *The O.C.* (2003-2007). For the teen-drama genre, Josh Schwartz's creation set a new trend of intergenerational narratives and shifted the perspectives among young and adult, and female and male characters. In addition to being functional to the plot and legitimizing the problems experienced by young viewers, parental figures serve at least two additional purposes on *The O.C.* First, I posit that adults act as positive and negative role models that allow Schwartz's show to function as a cautionary tale for its young viewers. Second, I propose that subplots revolving around parents allowed the showrunner to broaden the potential audience of the series, by targeting adults in addition to teen viewers. I finally suggest that, as most of the show's characters – parents and children alike – engage in youthful behavior, the series also seems to promote and perpetuate what sociologist Marcel Danesi has defined the "Forever Young Syndrome" – a kind of society where the generational gap is almost nonexistent and adults systematically behave, and inevitably consume, like teenagers.

KEYWORDS: Teen-Dramas, Pop Culture, *The O.C.*, Television Studies, Youth Culture.

On August 3, 2003, the day after the pilot episode of the television series *The O.C.* premiered in the United States, *The New York Times* ran a cover story, noting that the show broke with the conventions of the teen-drama genre by placing almost as great an emphasis on adult characters as it did on teenagers. Josh Schwartz's creation, the article reported, was shaped by "infidelity, corruption and parenting problems" (Tomashoff 2003). A week later, *Entertainment Weekly* echoed: "The kids of *The O.C.* not only do not live in a parentless universe – they are kids who suffer for living in a heavily parented one" (Seabree 2003).

Although the press immediately recognized this peculiarity, academic discussions about the cultural relevance of the short-lived but extremely popular television series

have tended to overlook the important precedent set by the active role taken up by parental characters, focusing instead on its contribution to place-making process (Fletchall 2012), the representation of gender roles (Meyer 2008), and its heavy employment of popular cultural and intertextual references (Albrecht 2008; Newman 2009; Fairchild 2011).[1] *The O.C.* has also received relatively little attention in comparison to other staples of the genre, such as *My So-Called Life*, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Veronica Mars*, *Gilmore Girls*, and the Degrassi franchise. This comes as a surprise, considering that its overwhelming popularity alone, testified by eleven Teen Choice Awards and an audience of almost ten million viewers per episode in its first two seasons (Wyatt 2007), makes it a compelling object of investigation.[2]

Debuting at the turn of the millennium, *The O.C.* represents only the latest manifestation of an obsession with teen culture that had affected television since the previous decade. Valerie Wee (2010) has connected the proliferation of series aimed at young adults in the 1990s to the return of a young demographic – one that, in that period, held an annual buying power of over a hundred billion dollars, making it "the largest market to come along since their baby-boomer parents" (46-47). The first wave of teen-oriented television was characterized by the dichotomy between, on the one hand, music television – whose content was often deemed as politically incorrect – and on the other hand, by family friendly shows that ranged from teen-dramas such as *Beverly Hills, 90210* and *Degrassi High* to teen-coms such as *Saved by The Bell* and *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*. The year 1995 saw the birth of The WB, a broadcasting channel that adopted a strategy of narrowcasting, making the niche of teen demographic its main target. As Wee has pointed out, with shows such as *Buffy*, *Dawson's Creek*, *Roswell*, *Charmed*, and *Felicity*, The WB adopted a range of characteristics borrowed from mainstream quality television,[3] that employed "glossy visual style, physically attractive ensemble cast, and [a more or less] honest exploration of the teenage experience" (49-50). The traits of quality television were also apparent in the employment of "ensemble casts in an hour-long

[1] In addition to scholarly studies, a number of articles on the subject have also been published in popular magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *Rolling Stone*, *Billboard*, and *Variety*.

[2] The fact that, in the Fall term of 2012, the English Department at Duke University offered a "House Course" on the show, under Tom Ferraro's supervision, is also indicative of its cultural legacy ("'The OC' College Course" 2012). It must also be noted that the success of *The O.C.* went beyond the United States, with the transnational character of the phenomenon testified by the numerous awards accrued in Australia, Europe, and South America.

[3] On "quality television" see also: Robert J. Thompson, *Television's Second Golden Age*. Syracuse: University Press, 2008; Janet McCabe, *Quality TV: Contemporary American Television and Beyond*. New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011; Jason Mittell, *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling*. New York: NYU Press, 2015.

dramatic format, narratives that replaced the familial milieu with a focus on the familial relationships that existed between friends and colleagues, a tendency towards liberal humanism, a propensity for self-reflexivity, and the adoption of cinematic techniques and aesthetics." Finally, The WB introduced shows that typically indulged in "a degree of postmodern intertextuality, pastiche, genre hybridity, media mixing, and hyperconscious self-reflexivity" (52). As early as the year 2000, these characteristics would be appropriated by other networks, as evident in FOX series such as *Freaks and Geeks*, *Undeclared* and, indeed, *The O.C.*

The O.C. was hardly the first teen show to rely on a coalition of a mixed-age audience demographics.[4] Nostalgia has often played a significant role in making teen television appealing to older viewers. Matt Hills (2004) has noted how shows such as *Dawson's Creek* featured hyperaware (i.e., overtly mature) teenager characters who spoke to different sectors of the audience at the same time (60). In reference to the same show, Clare Birchall (2004) has argued that it also owed its multi-generational appeal to its intertextual references to cultural artifacts from earlier eras (178), such as *90210*, *The Breakfast Club*, and *The Graduate*. However, whereas previous series attracted adults only indirectly, *The O.C.* differentiated itself from The WB tradition by casting complex adult characters in a central role, a move that offered older viewers opportunities for the development of parasocial relationships, or at the very least, of moments of self-identification.

Scholarship on teen television informs us that parental absence may serve a double narrative purpose in programs tailored for a young audience. On the one hand, it allows it to "enjoy the trials and tribulations of the teen experience without the teen characters or adolescent audience being impeded by a controlling or civilizing adult agenda." On the other hand, it causes the young protagonists to "turn to one another and instill a sense of community based on their peer group and generation" (Feasey 2012, 158). However, this tendency, most evident in teen-oriented television from the 1990s, would be overturned by the turn of the century, first, with *Gilmore Girls*, a dramedy show (a subgenre that combines elements of comedy and drama) that focuses on mother-daughter relationships, thus appealing to an almost exclusively female audience, and then, with *The O.C.*, whose constant shift of perspectives among young and adult, and female and male characters has extended its appeal to a wider audience. These two shows

[4] It is also of interest that the show attracted a diverse audience not only in terms of age, but also of gender. For example, in discussing her undergraduate students' reaction to the show, Sue Turnbull (2008) has reported "it was the first time [she] had ever heard of groups of males gathering together to watch a teen TV melodrama." Its primetime broadcast schedule also allowed for parents to join young viewers in their ritual (170). My personal experience as a teenager, in Italy first and in the United States later, is not dissimilar to what Turnbull describes, as I would spend hours on the phone discussing the show after every episode.

were forerunners of several popular teen-dramas (*The Secret Diary of the American Teen-Ager*, *90210*, and *Gossip Girl*, to name a few) that, in the following years, have made a selling point of this feature. The introduction of a category for "Best Parental Unit" at the Teen Choice Awards in 2005, testifies to the increasing representation of parents on teen-television.

In addition to being functional for the development of the plot and to legitimize the problems experienced by young viewers, parental figures on *The O.C.* serve at least two additional purposes. First, I posit that adults act as positive and negative role models that allow Schwartz's show to function as a cautionary tale for its young viewers. Second, the addition of subplots revolving around parents unarguably allowed the creators of the show to broaden its potential audience, by targeting adults in addition to teen viewers. In the abovementioned *New York Times* article, Peter Gallagher (the actor playing Sandy Cohen) noted that when offered the role he immediately felt the show had the potential to move away from the tendency, typical of other staples of the genre, to make adult viewers feel alienated, by allowing both teenagers and adults to have their own experiences recognized in some way. It goes without saying that attracting an audience from a wider age demographic also makes advertising slots during airtime more valuable, and that, in turn, advertising revenue is a valuable parameter for assessing the market value of a television program. Drawing from this last point, my critical reading questions the tendency, certainly not initiated by Schwartz, but particularly evident in his work, of popular television series to portray (and address) a kind of contemporary society afflicted by what sociologist Marcel Danesi (2003) has called the "Forever Young Syndrome" – one where the generational gap is almost nonexistent and adults systematically behave, and inevitably consume, like teenagers.

Investigating the politics of teen television is particularly compelling because cultural texts aimed at a young audience have been historically thought to serve purposes of both entertainment as well as didacticism. Contributing to the ongoing debate about the agency (or lack thereof) of children and adolescents in producing the culture that they engage with, from a television studies perspective, Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (2004) have posited that

> we cannot deny that there is significant input from dominant adult society in these programmes at most points of planning, production, distribution and marketing. These may be 'our' shows to teenagers, but … the programmes are created by adults, arguably with a particular adult agenda. In the broadest sense this might be: to educate and inform while entertaining (something central to many strands of television in the Western world); to set certain agendas at this delicate time just prior to the onset of a more prominent citizenship; and/or to raise crucial issues (of adult choosing) in a 'responsible manner' that is entirely hegemonically negotiated. (3)

Indeed, on *The O.C.*, parental figures seem crucial for providing a moralizing message. The educational purposes of Schwartz' work emerge from a sneak peek at its very

genealogy, as, in the DVD commentary for the pilot episode, the show's creator admits that the show "really is rooted a lot in fairy-tales" (Commentary to "Premiere" 2004), a genre historically tied to didacticism.[5]

Unarguably, we learn from a number of teen-dramas that preceded and followed *The O.C.* that didacticism in teen-oriented television is not contingent upon the presence of adults. However, the centrality of parental figures appears to strengthen the educational potential of the show, as *The O.C.*'s function as a cautionary tale is structured on multiple layers, offering behavioral models for the present (via young and adult characters for young viewers, and in the form of adult role models for adult viewers), identities to aspire to for the future, and formulaic behaviors to achieve them.

The most exemplary parental figure is the character of Sandy Cohen, a righteous pro bono Jewish lawyer, and an ideal and idealistic husband and father. Sandy is married to Kirsten "Kiki" Nichol, a sophisticated and wealthy WASP business-woman.[6] Successful in his private life and socially committed, Sandy symbolizes an affectionate and sympathetic father figure, whose quasi-biblical aptitude for goodness is noticeable since the pilot episode, when he becomes the legal guardian of his young client Ryan Atwood, an underprivileged kid from Chino who has been abandoned by his dysfunctional family. Tough and bad tempered, but good spirited, Ryan epitomizes the archetypal rebel teenager – or "Good Bad Boy," as proposed by Leslie Fiedler (1960) – a figure typical of American narratives from Mark Twains's *Huckleberry Finn* to J.D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* (Kapan 1956, 80). The encounter between Ryan and Sandy represents what James Phelan would call an "instability," an unsettled matter that triggers the story (1989). Atwood's arrival in Newport is also the inciting incident that pushes Seth, the biological son of the couple, initially presented as unpopular and socially awkward, into his bildungsromanesque journey to maturation. At different times throughout the show, Sandy's guidance turns out to be crucial for the two teenagers' integration, self-realization, and pursuit of happiness. In line with the archetype of the teenage rebel

[5] Fairy tales are also rooted in hope, desire, aspiration, and transformation – all which does casts the genre as an excellent intertext for *The O.C.* See also Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1976).

[6] It must be underlined that one of the most evident features of the show is the lack of racial diversity, a prominent issue of the genre, and part of the legacy of The WB model. From this perspective, as *The O.C.* unarguably participates in an investment in whiteness, and even though Ann Fletchall (2012) has argued that *The O.C.* portrays "a much less diverse, much wealthier, and decidedly more dramatic" Orange County (128), Schwartz' representation seems to be in line with the real and predominantly white demographics of Newport Beach. As reported by the popular website City-Data.com, in 2016, Blacks constituted merely 0.6% of Newport's population, and LatinX amounted to less than 8%. Source: "Newport Beach, CA - City-Data.com," accessed December 15, 2017 http://www.city-data.com/city/Newport-Beach-California.html.

proposed by Leerom Medovoi (2005), Ryan does not rebel against (Sandy's) paternal power, but rather against the social structures and villains – or "phonies," as Holden Caulfield would have it – of Newport Beach. Ryan's quest is indeed paralleled by Sandy's clashes with Newport's elites and their conservatism. Kenneth Kidd (2011), drawing on Medovoi's study, has concluded that "the rebellion of the American teenager is enacted within as much as against American culture" (167). This is indeed the case for Ryan and Sandy, both of whom owe their inclusion in the community to their ties to Kirsten, whose father is Caleb Nichol, a wealthy real estate entrepreneur, referred to as "the Donald Trump of the West Coast" ("The Girlfriend" 2004). B*ecause* of their extremely privileged class status, and *despite* their frequent challenges to the norms of the community, the Cohens are able to maintain their position as a City Upon a Hill and their stature as "moral center of the universe" ("The Rainy Day Women" 2005) throughout the series.

Unlike most marriages in Newport, the union between Sandy and Kirsten does not enhance the bride's class status. As Bindig has noted, "it is Kirsten, not her husband, who holds most of the power in regard of capital [...]. Rather than simply relying on her father's legacy, she accumulates her own economic, cultural, and social capital through education and employment" (Bindig 2013, 59). In the overly deterministic and heteronormative (whereas same sex encounters are sanctioned negatively by the show and its fictional community) universe of *The O.C.*, Sandy and Kirsten thus represent a positive model that stands out as an exception among a number of fragmented, absent or misbehaving parental units displayed in the show.[7]

The Cohen's parental model is one based on mutual trust and respect. Because of his reliance on failure for personal growth, Sandy, often in conflict with Kirsten, refuses to employ means of coercion on several occasions throughout the show – such as when sixteen-year old Seth leaves Newport for Portland, or when, in the third season, Ryan drops out of high school to accept a job in the Alaskan fishing industry. The singularity of the Cohens' relationship with their sons is positively depicted in "The Mallpisode," when Ryan, Seth, Marissa, and Summer get stranded in a shopping mall after hours. As the quartet informs their parents of their inability to return home for the night, the camera scrolls from right to left, juxtaposing the different parent-children interactions, clear indexes of the relationships' dynamics. Whereas Marissa and Summer fabricate excuses and deliver lies to their folks, Seth, apologetically, yet somewhat unabashedly, reports the truth to Kirsten. The Cohens' choice to accord their sons room for healthy failure, allows Ryan and Seth to escape what Barbara Hudson (1984) has deemed as "the

[7] Commenting on his engagement with Schwartz' series, Doug Liman, one of the executive producers and director of the first two episodes, has emphasized the importance of the role of the Cohens in his decision to be involved with the project – "It's not just teenagers running around. Peter and Kelly [Rowan] have created a home on the show that I kind of wish I'd grown up in" (Porter 2004).

real problem of adolescence," that "[teenagers] must demonstrate maturity and responsibility if they are to move out of this stigmatized status, and yet because adolescence is conceived as a time of irresponsibility and lack of maturity, they are given few opportunities to demonstrate these qualities which are essential for their admission as adults" (36). This points to yet another feature that differentiates *The O.C.* from a number of shows in the tradition of The WB, where teens are usually encouraged to avoid failure at all costs, and depicted as inevitably pathologizing, their problems by discussing them incessantly with each other. However, it must be noted that such a model of trial and error can only be enacted when there is a safety net in place that allows for the consequences of one's mistake to cause relatively little harm, one that in the case of the Cohens is provided by their social and financial standing.

Sandy is not only dedicated to helping his kids navigate through life, but rather, he is cast as the savior of the entire community.[8] Both his moral standing and his profession as an attorney facilitate subplots that require his intervention, and cast him as a point of reference for all other characters. Schwartz himself has often acknowledged Sandy's centrality to the narration. As he explains in the DVD commentaries, Sandy Cohen represents "the anchor" and "the rock" of the show ("Casting *The O.C.*" 2004; Commentary to "The Chrismukkah That Almost Wasn't" 2005; "The Chrismukk-huh?" 2006).[9] In the early days of the show, Schwartz admitted that "the core of the show is [the] father-son dynamic between Sandy and Ryan" (Pierce 2003). Thus, the former does not only serve as a positive role model for the viewers, but especially for the latter. In fact, while the show invites the audience to identify with Sandy, the trajectory of the show's overarching narrative is driven by Ryan's progressively *becoming* Sandy,[10] by learning his place in the world and becoming, as Huck Finn would have it, "sivilized." The closing scene of the show's finale references and mimics the pivotal moment in the pilot episode when, following his release from the youth detention center, Sandy invites Ryan to return to Orange County with him. When, in "The End Is Not Near, It's Here," Ryan offers his help to an underprivileged kid, undoubtedly resembling his former self, the story – and the protagonist's process of *becoming* – comes full circle.

[8] The etymology of the character's first name (from Alexander – defender of men; protector of mankind) is perhaps index of the role Sandy plays within the fictional world of the show. Sandy Cohen's legacy as a role model has also been acknowledged in 2006, when Gallagher's character has been celebrated at UC Berkeley (Sandy Cohen's fictitious alma mater) by the "Sandy Cohen Public Defender Fellowship for Lawyers Who Dare to Dream," which supported students working in the Orange County public defender's office ("Actor Peter Gallagher Presents OC-inspired Public Defender Fellowship" 2005).

[9] In "The Chrismukk-huh?," Ryan and Taylor fall into a temporary coma, and dream of a disastrous (and hilarious) world where Sandy Cohen has lost his moral ground.

[10] In Schwartz' words, the final scene of the show's finale is exactly the moment when "Ryan becomes Sandy" (Commentary to "The End is not Near, It's Here" 2007).

If the Cohens represent a positive example for the fictional community and viewers alike, a number of morally weak and reckless adult characters reinforce the function of the show as a cautionary tale. Among them, Julie Cooper – the mother of Marissa, one of the two main female teenage characters, together with Summer Roberts – is one of the characters with the most screen time. Melinda Clarke was initially cast as a recurring guest in the show. However, as authors and audience alike quickly became fascinated with her wicked character, Clarke was promoted to regular. Julie is depicted as an unscrupulous *arriviste* who, throughout the whole series, relies on wealthy men to support her and enhance her class status. According to Bindig (2013), Julie embodies the concept of erotic capital, combining "beauty, sex appeal, liveliness, a talent for dressing well, charm and social skills, and sexual competence. It is a mixture of physical and social attractiveness" (60). Born and raised in Riverside – a working-class suburb often compared to Chino, Ryan's hometown – the show suggests she contracts a marriage of convenience with a successful, albeit immature and unreliable, financial planner (Jimmy), in order to engage in a privileged lifestyle and join the elitist social milieu of Newport Beach. Seemingly incorrigible, after divorcing Jimmy, Julie marries Kirsten's father, Caleb Nichol, an affluent and greedy elder man, head of the Newport Group. Despite the authority she is able to gain by means of her marriages, Julie's hypersexuality and her promiscuity often cast her as the butt of the joke within the community. She has over half a dozen partners during the series, including Ryan's, Summer's and Kirsten's fathers and Marissa's ex-boyfriend, Luke, in blunt plot twists reminiscent of the worst soap operas, but also of the seduction novels of early American literature, such as Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794) or Hanna Webster Foster's *The Croquettes* (1797).

Rebecca Feasey (2012) has raised the question of how motherhood is represented in television shows for adolescents. Feasey claims that the recent trend to assign parents and guardians more central roles in contemporary popular teen dramas has given way to the emergence of the trope of absent and ineffectual mothers, or to the representation of mothers as the "delinquent of the [parental] pair" (155). Feasey has based her argument on a number of teen-dramas from the 1990s onwards[11] and has concluded that, regardless of whether teenagers are abandoned by their mothers, or become orphans, removing the mother figure from the picture has little to do with the plot – in fact many of those shows "make it clear that fathers and male guardians are to be respected because they, and they alone, provide structure, guidance and authority for those teens under their care." This appears to be particularly true of *90210*, a show that she scrutinizes in

[11] Such as *Beverly Hills, 90210* (1990-2000), *Heartbreak High* (1994-99), *Party of Five* (1994-2000), *Charmed* (1998-2006), *Dawson's Creek* (1998-2003), *Popular* (1999-2001), *Roswell High* (1999-2002), *Degrassi: The Next Generation* (2001-), *Smallville* (2001-11), *The O.C.* (2003–07), *Glee* (2009-15), and *Hellcats* (2010).

detail and which tends to depict mothers as particularly "weak and irresponsible – be it socially, sexually or financially" (Feasey 2012, 155).

Julie Cooper epitomizes and perpetuates a number of sexist stereotypes associated with women, and her character unarguably fits the picture drawn by Feasey, and, to a lesser extent, so do some other adult female characters (such as Summer's perpetually absent mother, and Veronica Townsend who is constantly depicted as an extremely manipulative, selfish and uptight parent). However, in *The O.C* male figures such as Caleb Nichol, Jimmy Cooper, and Frank Atwood, are not represented as ideal fathers and husbands, but rather as equally (if not more) immature, irresponsible, selfish, and wicked. Indeed, it is often male misbehavior that leads to the collapse of the family. Rather timidly, Feasey (2012) concedes the possibility of a positive reading for these representations of models of motherhood. She does so by hinting that the shows' authors might be picking up on second wave feminist ideology, which attempted to "denaturalize motherhood and theorize it as historically, culturally and socially constructed." However, this reading clashes with "those images of monstrous motherhood that are being presented on the small screen," for which she does not go beyond expressing her "shock" (158). Possible explanations for such troubled representations of female characters in teen-dramas range from factors as obvious as the show-business's gender bias (most of the shows Feasley mentions were created and run by men) to the fact that, as I have been arguing in this essay, the genre tends to cast itself as a form of cautionary tale for young viewers, with the uprising and the downward spirals of adult characters (female and male alike) acting as warnings for the audience.

In addition, a feminist reading of *The O.C.* should also take into consideration how the show positively challenges the trope of the happy housewife myth, and shuffles gender roles in a number of ways – a characteristic evident in the most enduring relationships of the series, the ones between Sandy and Kirsten Cohen, and between Seth and Summer. Sandy's greatest merit is to subvert the traditional family where "fathers are involved habitually in family problem-solving and family discipline, and mothers are more often associated with issues of domesticity and nurturance" (Douglas 2011, 120). Turnbull (2008) has proposed a compelling comparison between the narrative structure and the tropes of the show and the movie *Rebel without a Cause*, whose "events, characters, iconography, and themes" were, according to her reading, "referenced and reworked" by Schwartz (171, 177-78). However, in addition to the examples she has proposed, I would like to point out that *The O.C.* also mocks and subverts the notorious "emasculated dad" trope from Nicholas Ray's classic 1955 movie. Whereas an apron-wearing father wreaks havoc in young Jimmy Stark's life, Schwartz, by presenting Sandy's domesticity – illustrated, among other things, by his skills in the kitchen – as exemplary, and the Cohens as the only successful household, the show seems to suggest that, in the

new millennium, the very survival of the family relies on the subversion of constructed gender roles.

Although, as Schwartz reportedly admitted, *The O.C.* is a show that presents "central teen characters whose stories could not be told without the adults' stories" (Tomashoff 2004), in turn, the youngsters of Newport Beach also play crucial roles in the complex development of subplots that revolve around adult characters. For example, Ryan and Seth play a central role in saving Sandy and Kirsten's marriage, by talking the latter into getting help when she slips into alcohol addiction, or by prompting Sandy to give up his role as the head of the Newport Group when he lets himself (and his ego) prioritize work over family. Youths thus act as catalysts for action, their elders often confronting each other, or engaging in conversations about their issues, solely as a consequence of the adolescents' actions. Therefore, in the series, the fate of teenagers and adults is tightly entangled and contributes to the creation of a narrative that sees the generational gap progressively blurred by presenting young characters who feel responsible to nurture their parents instead of the other way around.[12]

Now, before diving into the last section of this essay, where I will be looking at the way the show's possessive investment in teen culture produces a blur of intergenerational boundaries, I would like to emphasize once again how, as Davis and Dickinson (2004) have noted, television programs "have to deal with the fact that they are mainly commercial ventures, struggling to make money [...] and, in this sense, they have to consider how to pander to the customers" (3). Since the 1950s, the television medium and consumer industries, by "interact[ing] with and reinforc[ing] one another in efforts to woo the lucrative youth market" (Osgerby 2004, 73), actively participated in the social construction of adolescence. Thus, the construction of a teen demographic market in the late 1990s – in response to the coming of age of the so called "Generation Y" – that resulted in the launch and the overwhelming success of The WB, is hardly surprising.

During its first three seasons, *The O.C.* was certainly a successful commercial venture, as proved by its "top-rated" status for advertisers (Associated Press 2007), and by the great number of extra-textual manifestations and spin-off items through which the makers of the series have been able to capitalize on its brand.[13] Furthermore, its

[12] This tendency would be later taken to an extreme, with more recent series, such as *Gossip Girl* and *The Secret Life of the American Teenager*, that insist on regularly presenting kids scheming in order to control their parents' romantic lives.

[13] Among these, Fox licensed the release of eight novelizations – the marginal role played by adult characters in these texts, aimed solely at a young readership, seems to confirm how their marked presence in the television series reflects the intentions of the authors to appeal to a broader audience, rather than just presenting likeable adult characters for the pleasure of young viewers. The publication of Alan

commercial value was certainly heightened by the way the show reinforces the idea that consumer culture is inescapable during adolescence, an effect achieved by bombarding the audience with visual and verbal references to brands and consumer products – such as clothes, cars, videogames, technology, comic books – reflecting the personalities of the characters. Bindig (2013) has noted that

> even when not focusing on a specific brand, *The O.C.* presented an upscale luxury lifestyle consisting of elite goods and services like champagne, lingerie, high-thread-counts sheets, silver place settings, jewelry, spa treatment, cosmetic surgery, yogalates, and cardio barre, cosmetics, caviar, floral arrangements, shopping, golfing, surfing, and tanning. (98)

Although those references are often employed to mock the lifestyle of Newport's rich and famous, its setting certainly reinforces the strong connections of the show with material and consumer culture. As Fletchall (2012) has reported, Orange County is

> home to the largest grossing shopping mall in the country (South Coast Plaza), the world's largest Mercedes-Benz dealer, the most expensive auto dealership ever built (Newport Lexus), the second largest BMW dealership in the U.S., the most purchasers of Lamborghinis in America and the second-most of Aston-Martins [...] Its residents hold among the most purchasing power in the nation [...]. In the 2008 U.S. Census Orange County housing values ranked [among the] priciest in the nation, with Newport Beach leading the county. (19)

In 2004, underlining the importance of cultural artifacts in place-making, *The New York Times* reported that television series such as *The O.C.* and *Laguna Beach: The Real Orange County* have contributed to the creation of a fascination with Orange County that "taps the need Americans seem to have to create a bubble in which playful adolescent fantasies can act themselves out in the sun, removed from any real-world complications like war, unemployment or split ends" (Williams 2004). Furthermore, it must be noted that, by presenting a depiction of "high school life not as it was experienced [by most], but rather how teenagers dreamed it ought to be" (Bellafante 2007) most television series for adolescents do not merely "sell" consumer products to their audiences, but a complete lifestyle, and they perpetuate – both domestically and transnationally – an extremely idealized image of the American teenager experience. This is especially true when they are set in hyper-privileged milieus such as Beverly Hills (*Beverly Hills, 90210*), Newport Beach (*The O.C.*), and Manhattan's Upper East Side (*Gossip Girl*).

The O.C. thus allows for both temporal and spatial self-projection. If the former – achieved through the presence of adult characters – prompts the young audience to ask

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Sepinwall's *Stop Being a Hater and Learn to Love the OC* – a popular unofficial guide to the show that specifically targets adult viewers, speaks alone of the success of Schwartz' marketing strategy. Sepinwall's opening line reads "Hi, my name is Alan, and I'm an O.C.-aholic. I'm thirty years old, with a wife, a baby, and a little house in the suburbs" (Sepinwall 2004, 2).

itself "Who do I want to be when I grow up?" the latter invites the viewer to imagine themselves living in an affluent, white-washed, and forever-young Orange County.

At this point, it is worth noting that, by the 1990s, the notion of "teenager" had less to do with biological age and increasingly more with lifestyle and shared cultural taste, and it had come to represent "a range of idealized qualities such as vitality, excitement, vigor, promise, and cutting-edge interests." As Wee's (2010) analysis suggests:

> in the youth-obsessed culture of American society in the 20th and 21st century, it is no longer how young you are, but how young you *think* you are, or *choose* to be, that matters. […] Consequently, in skewing towards a teen demographic, authors of teen TV shows were not restricting themselves to a demographic defined by actual age. Rather, it was aligning with a broader market that could relate to and embrace a teen lifestyle and, more importantly for advertiser interests, its products. (47-48 [emphasis in original])

If, as previously mentioned, The WB's primetime series attracted an adult audience primarily by appealing to the features of quality television, to young characters likable by both adults and teenagers, and by evoking nostalgia through intertextual references, *The O.C.* further universalized its appeal by bringing adult characters to the core of the action. I cannot help but partially attribute this phenomenon to the fact that the show portrays a kind of contemporary American society where the generational gap is almost nonexistent. *The O.C.* largely differs from classics of the genre where the ideology of the television father was in outright opposition with that of his offspring, inviting the audience to side with one of the parties involved.[14] In fact, as the great majority of Schwartz's characters engage in youthful behavior in one way or another, they appear to be affected by what Danesi (2003) has defined as the "Forever Young Syndrome," manifesting itself in the form of "excessive worship of adolescence itself and its social empowerment by adult institutions." Its symptoms include "an unprecedented increase in the sales of cosmetics and in the use of plastic surgery by males and females of all ages and all social classes," "the widespread tendency of more and more adults to maintain their previous adolescent lifestyles throughout their lives, albeit unconsciously," and "the general tendency for individuals of all ages to adopt in some form the fashion and lifestyles that emanate from the adolescent realm" (22).

[14] The familiar quarrels often revolved around the realms of politics, civil rights, or warfare. A good example is represented by *The Wonder Years* (1988-1993), another staple of teenage television. The father, a Korean War veteran, strongly supports American intervention in Vietnam, in diametrical opposition with his free-spirited, hippie daughter (Karen). The fact that the show aired during the First Gulf War, made the endorsement of one of the characters on the part of the viewership even more compelling.

Teenage culture constitutes thus the dominant cultural paradigm of the entire show, for reasons that go beyond the amusing of its audience or the employment of nostalgia as a narrative device. Rather, it functions as what Medovoi (2005) would define "a politically potent discursive formation" aimed at creating a post-Fordist teenage culture "identified almost exclusively with consumption" (34-36). In short, the reality depicted on *The O.C.* is one where being "forever young"[15] represents a clever opportunity for product placement. Indeed, although Medovoi's analysis is centered mainly on the formation of a market segment aimed at youth consumption during the 1950s, teenage culture has ever since demonstrated a long-lasting impact on the consumer market. Modern television shows, such as *The O.C.*, have successfully contributed to shifting teenage culture's features and effects to the adult world, by creating cultural products ready to be sold to different social groups and multiple segments of the market. Finally, Danesi has pointed out that

> since teen tastes change virtually overnight, instant obsolescence can be built into the creation, marking and promotion of the new [...] trends. Teen tastes have become the tastes of all because the economic system in which we now live requires this to be so, and it has thus joined forces with the media-entertainment oligarchy to promote its forever-young philosophy on a daily basis: youth sells. (Danesi 2003, ix)

The volatility of their tastes and their susceptibility to media manipulation thus make teenagers a virtually perfect target. However, high-schoolers, unlike adults, do not typically have access to the primary currency in a capitalist society: a steady income required to make impulsive purchases on a regular basis. In this scenario, shows such as *The O.C.* and *Gilmore Girls* have left a legacy that can be framed as part of a trend that climaxed in the 2000s with a number of series for which the centrality of adults in the plot has represented a successful marketing strategy, a trend that has blurred the lines between the behavior expected of teenagers and their parental figures, instilling and legitimizing in the latter the needs of the former.

[15] A cover version of the popular song by the same name, originally played by the German band Alphaville, is indeed played recurrently throughout the series and is part of its official soundtrack.

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FIORENZO IULIANO

"BOYISH AND ALMOST GAY"

Celibate men and fathers in Sherwood Anderson's The Triumph of the Egg

ABSTRACT: Benjamin Kahan's 2013 book on celibacy and modernism investigates celibacy in early twentieth century United States as a prominently urban issue, questioning and to some degree discarding the commonplace of a sexually saturated modernism. This article aims at broadening up the scope of this analysis by investigating celibacy and sexuality in Sherwood Anderson's short stories, mostly set in small provincial towns. The main contention of the article is that in Anderson's stories male celibacy questions the social and symbolic order sanctioned by the typical nuclear family of rural and peripheral towns of the United States. More specifically, the stories discussed here and collected in *The Triumph of the Egg* overthrow the traditional attribution of sexual roles within the nuclear family, thus subverting the usual representations of both masculinity and fatherhood.

KEYWORDS: Sherwood Anderson, *The Triumph of the Egg*, Modernism and Sexuality, Celibacy, Modernism and Masculinity

I don't like any goddess who's adored at night.
(Euripides, *Hippolytus*)

In his 2013 book *Celibacies*, Benjamin Kahan describes celibacy as "a coherent sexual identity rather than as a 'closeting' screen for another sexual identity" (2), and "as a crucial social identity in the 1840s," which later turned into a sexual identity, thus mirroring "the transformation of chastity from a traditional gender requirement to a sexual practice that is itself the site of modernist innovation" (8). By emphasizing the "active" role of celibacy in the definition of sexual identities at the beginning of the twentieth century, Kahan contests the common view of modernism as an era of sexual transgression and infringement of moral codes. Kahan attempts at charting the "celibate plot" in modernist literature, suggesting that, along with a "hypersexualized modernism" (8), celibate modernism was also part of the gradual redefinition of normative gender

roles, questioning the injunction to get married and raise a family as the gist of the US middle-class culture.

However, Kahan exclusively focuses on New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, understanding celibacy as a challenge against the moral and social standards of the times especially in the big cities of the East Coast. Scant attention is paid in his book to other areas of the United States. Sherwood Anderson, for instance, is mentioned just once in the whole book, as one of the authors who, along with, among others, Willa Cather and William Faulkner, took "celibacy as an explicit subject matter" (9). The absence of works set in and dealing with peripheral and rural areas in Kahan's book establishes a clear-cut opposition between celibacy as a rebellious move against the norms of sexual behavior – as typical of urban cultural and subcultural circuits – and celibacy as one of the long-lasting practices that had always characterized US peripheral and provincial areas. Only in those areas in which the "hypersexualized modernism" was the norm, according to Kahan, celibacy functioned as the legitimate antagonist of sexual normativity and of the nuclear family as an institution.

I would like to raise questions about celibacy as a symbolic site of sexual insubordination *also* in peripheral America, hypothesizing that the celibate posed a challenge to the rules of what was considered the sexual norm in rural regions of the States no less than in the big urban centers, in which the "celibate plot", by default, was located. I will refer to Sherwood Anderson's collection *The Triumph of the Egg*, published in 1921, arguing that the chaste men – often husbands and fathers – featured in most of the stories challenge the sexual norms of the time in both epistemic and sociological terms. On the one hand, celibacy, as a sexual practice in its own right, questions the very notion of sexual identity as something that needs to be constantly enacted and performed rather than established once for all; on the other, it functions as a strategy to reject the rules of normative masculinity and fatherhood in both the private and public sphere. By pinpointing the conflicts experienced also because of the loss of the longstanding norms of traditional masculinity, the stories of *The Triumph of the Egg* corroborate the assumption that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, US white middle-class men were "the exemplary early victims of emotional injury" (Travis 2002, 127). Celibacy is the behavior that, at the same time, bespeaks and controls this crisis.

Mostly set against the backdrop of Chicago, a city in which sex was "an easy want to be satisfied" (Anderson 1921, 217), *The Triumph of the Egg* is crowded with people who, for one reason or another, do not or no longer have a sexual life, having either renounced it or been rejected by their sexual partners. Sexual abstinence, moreover, parallels social marginality and individual unsuccessfulness. Most of the stories collected, finally, feature celibacy, and especially that of adult men, husbands, and fathers, as the void nucleus, the unmentionable, shameful and embarrassing condition that triggers the protagonists'

actions, and provides a rationale, albeit often an obscure and controversial one, for their behavior.

Scholars who have focused on gender issues in Anderson's works have often highlighted the importance he ascribed to homosexuality and homosexual behavior as instances of sexual insubordination. Though never overtly praising homosexuality, nor celebrating or even supporting the manifestations of gay and lesbian subcultures, Anderson was nevertheless aware of the existence of a homosexual scene, which, in the 1920s, started to become increasingly visible in US urban realities (New York and Chicago above all), and which he discovered after moving from rural Ohio to Chicago.[1] As Mark Whalan remarks, homosexuality and the open displaying of "queer" behaviors are fully acknowledged in Anderson's narrative worlds. Whereas Sally A. Rigsbee identifies in femininity the "hidden 'something' that corresponds … to the secret knowledge that each story is structured to reveal" (233), according to Martin Bidney it is "the androgyny myth" that, as a matter of fact, functions as "the organizing principle" (261) of *Winesburg, Ohio*. The latter collection, in fact, features a number of short stories centered on homosexual male characters; "Hands" and "The Teacher", among others, foreground homosexuality as part of the human and social experience of the time. Though never defined as homosexuals, and despite being rejected by their fellow citizens and cast at the margins of the public sphere, the protagonists of both stories occupy a distinct and peculiar spot in the social texture of their communities. They are assigned a social position, though a marginal one; as marginal figures, their role is that of sanctioning, rather than subverting, the correct functioning of normative identities. Thus, while acknowledging the existence of homoerotic tendencies in human behavior and of a burgeoning homosexual scene in the big cities of the time, thus, Anderson was quite skeptical about their subversive potential, hardly believing that "homosexuality and inversion may well lead down separate paths of inquiry … connected by cultural anxiety, political identification, and aesthetic experimentation" (Lyon 2005, 228).

Celibacy, conversely, is explored in its complex, though less detectable, subversive potential, and given a prominent role in the stories collected in *The Triumph of the Egg*, which Anderson published only two years after *Winesburg, Ohio*. This book addresses sexuality as such as a set of normative rules. Whereas in *Winesburg, Ohio* homoeroticism was regarded as tentatively opposing the commonly accepted social standards of normativity, in *The Triumph of the Egg* the only way out of sexuality as itself a social ordering principle is provided by the abstinence from sex, which sounds all the more

[1] Modernism, as Janet Lyon remarks, highly emphasized "the creatively flexible relations between negotiated gender identity" (227); sexual ambiguity, though not necessarily implying same-sex orientation, was part of a symbolic order that willingly disrupted the codes of traditional sexual and gender identity.

unusual and provocative as it is enacted by adult and married men. By erasing sex from (presumably) regular husbands' and fathers' lives, Anderson's stories question the domineering function of men within the family and the public sphere, envisaging chastity as the most outrageous and the least manageable of all forms of sexual insubordination. The trope of the "inviolate man" was not unprecedented in the history of American literature, as David Greven points out. Along with Ichabod Crane, the protagonist of Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," there are plenty of characters ("James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo; Hawthorne's Fanshawe, Minister Hooper, Owen Warland, Giovanni Guasconti, Dimmesdale, and Coverdale; the constructed inviolate selves of Thoreau and Frederick Douglass; Harriet Beecher Stowe's Tom; and, at a much greater temporal though not thematic remove, Melville's Billy Budd", 39) who, as Greven remarks, "articulate the intense anxieties that surround the contested site of American manhood" (39) by leading celibate existences. Anderson's stories, however, by featuring celibacy as the trigger and the expression of the transformations that masculinity and fatherhood were undergoing on social, economic, sexual and symbolic planes, overtly participate in the debate about gender identity and sexual behavior, indirectly questioning the achievements of both medical science and psychoanalysis.

Celibacy also poses an epistemological challenge, as Kahan suggests by referring to Eve K. Sedgwick's hypothesis about Euro-American literary modernism as instancing the "epistemology of the open secret" of homosexuality (3). According to Kahan, in fact, as the "empty secret" of sexuality, void of any visible content, celibacy is nevertheless crucial in furthering the knowledge about people's identity. As the empty secret of the sexual revolution occurring in the first decades of the century, celibacy questions the emphasis on diversity and sexual tolerance that modernism has always been too optimistically credited with. It functions, in Anderson's writings, as a gray area still undermining modernist allegedly libertarian positions. As for the epistemological nature of Anderson's analysis, *The Triumph of the Egg* clarifies its stakes on its very opening. The first story, "The Dumb Man", which has rather the aspect of a narrative poem than of a short story, focuses on the hidden truths of its protagonists (and consequently on the narrator's dumbness), suggesting that the innermost core of their identity is far from being decipherable, let alone understandable. "The Dumb Man" features three men whose lives and identities remain unknown and incomprehensible to the narrator (the dumb man of the title), as the last lines remark: "If I could understand him I could understand everything. … I would no longer be dumb. … Why was I not given words? Why am I dumb? I have a wonderful story to tell but know no way to tell it" (205). There are stories to tell about the male protagonists of the book – since, as the collection clarifies on its very opening, men are the protagonists of its narratives – but there is "no way" to recount these stories. These men have, we surmise, truths to be unveiled, but there are no means of knowledge to expose their truths.

My attempt in the remainder of this article is that of reading celibacy as a *dispositif*, a collection of beliefs and practices that relate the protagonists' private lives to different public institutions and apparatuses of power, highlighting their mutual interdependence. Among the themes addressed in the book, the relationship between sexual activity and entrepreneurialism is a crucial one, in that it questions the role of economic productivity in the US society of the early twentieth century as a site of public respectability. "Seeds," besides being one of the few stories written by Anderson explicitly dealing with psychoanalysis,[2] could also be located in that debate about artistic production and economic productivity that had been started by William D. Howells in 1893. Discarding the idea that "any man ought to live by an art" (Howells 1893, 431), Howells argued that writers should be included among the productive categories of the nation, and referred to them as exclusively men, confining women to the mere function of readers. Taking literally and at the same time challenging the business/gender *dispositif*, the protagonists of "Seeds," as wannabe artists (a musician and a painter) are social outcasts and, *as such*, live celibate existences: "LeRoy the painter is tall and lean and his life has been spent in devotion to ideas. The passions of his brain have consumed the passions of his body. His income is small and he has not married. Perhaps he has never had a sweetheart. He is not without physical desire but he is not primarily concerned with desire" (Anderson 1921, 218). The strong connection between gender roles (especially male) and job position, typical of old representations of American virility, is here replaced by the rejection of both economic productivity and sexual activity. The protagonists' sexual abstinence, in fact, voices their social uselessness and the fact that, as artists, they are excluded from the circuits of material production. By rejecting sexuality, moreover, they reveal their lack of interest in occupying any position within the public sphere. Their refusal of any form of dependence on other people parallels and substantiates their desire to escape the grids and the norms of the community to which they belong. LeRoy puts it very clearly, declaring, at the end of the story, "I would like to be a dead dry thing … I would like to be a leaf blown away by the wind. … I would like to be dead and blown by the wind over limitless waters" (221). Considered from both an epistemic and a sociological perspective, thus, celibacy voices the protagonists' need for disidentifying from the models of normative gender roles of the time, rejecting, together with sexuality, the

[2] According to Whalan, "Seeds" "fictionalizes Anderson's experience of conversation with the Freudian psychoanalyst Trigant Burrow at Lake Chateaugay in 1916 and 1917, and intimates that Anderson did have more awareness of Freudian theory than he was ever willing to let on" (88). As a matter of fact, Anderson "had absorbed at least a layman's knowledge of Freudian theory," and "Seeds" is among his texts the one that best reflects his "specific acquaintance with Freudian psychodynamics" (Rideout 2006, 267).

necessity to comply with the standards that men and women were supposed to play both in the private and public spheres.

Chastity as a *dispositif* that challenges American ideology of economic productivity is also paramount in "The Door of the Trap," a story that Anderson adapted from his novel *Mary Cochran*,[3] in which celibacy is related to the question of belonging – both in terms of material property and as mutual dependence among people. In the story, the myths of old masculinity are evoked as part of the protagonist Hugh Walker's inner conflicts. On the one hand, he is aware of the need to accumulate, preserve and, if need be, even hide not only his material properties but also his desires. On the other, the story gradually reveals how miserable he feels in denying himself the right to enjoy what he has achieved. The phrase that often recurs in the story, "this belongs to me," does not mark the protagonist's greediness and pride. On the contrary, property, as a staple of national ideology, far from having been assimilated and fully ingrained in Hugh's daily life, somehow scares him. This applies even more to human relationships, as mutual dependence and the need to belong are regarded as the threatening aspect of each relation, to the point that, at the beginning of the story, Hugh compares his own family to a prison. When he falls in love with one of his students, who more and more frequently visits his house and gets acquainted with his wife and children, he realizes that his attraction to her derives from his conviction that she does not belong to anything and anyone – not even to him, and has no part in the adult world he so much despises: "Unlike Winifred and these children she does not belong to me. I could go to her now, touch her fingers, look at her and then go away and never see her again" (280). Hugh is fully aware that a time will come when the girl will no longer be as free and independent as she appears to him now, but he is confident that he will have lost all interest in her by that time: "She does not belong to me. She will go away out of my sight. Winifred and the children will stay on and on here and I will stay on and on. We are imprisoned by the fact that we belong to each other. This Mary Cochran is free, or at least she is free as far as this prison is concerned. No doubt she will, after a while, make a prison of her own and live in it, but I will have nothing to do with the matter" (281). He discovers, however, that Mary, too, has a regular life like anyone else, losing all his interest in her, and bitterly acknowledging that there is no difference between Mary and other adult people: "She isn't like a young tree any more. She is almost like Winifred. She is almost like a person who belongs here, who belongs to me and my life" (283).

The tension the protagonist experiences with his role as a grown-up middle-class man is voiced by this contradiction: he can feel attracted only to women with whom no sexual

[3] Both "The Door of the Trap" and "Unlighted Lamps" elaborate narrative material from *Mary Cochran*, a novel that Anderson never published (Rideout 2006, 178).

involvement is possible – women who, like Mary, do not belong to anything.[4] Rather than with the girl, in fact, he is in love with the indeterminacy of her individual condition. Celibacy, as the rejection of any claim of property on people and the instance of no-belonging *par excellence*, is what would ideally make the relationship possible, at the same time, paradoxically, preventing it from being thoroughly enjoyed. Property is regarded by the protagonist of the story as a symbolic site of abjection, something that trivializes any person or things that "belong" to anyone, and makes property, as a matter of fact, utterly unlovable. Far from being one of the staples of the US middle-class ideology, it is refused as it smears the alleged pureness of any object of desire, which could be craved only insofar as it stays out of anybody's reach. Hugh can finally kiss Mary just to tell her to go away, never to return.

When celibacy encroaches on the lives of families, its disturbing and revolutionary potential is all the more visible. Not only does it deprive Anderson's characters of their sexual lives, but also of their gender identity, which sexual activity was supposed to inform and define. The presence of chaste fathers and husbands is noticeable in many stories of the collection. Marriage is presented as one of the instruments that successfully curb the protagonists' desires and appetites into innocuous abstinence. Fallen into chastity, these characters are not only deprived of their sexual desires but also reduced to an undifferentiated mass of asexualized subjects, as one of the protagonists of "The Other Woman" remarks: "We will be human beings. Forget we are a man and woman. […] We will not have to be husband and wife" (226, 228). The protagonist of the story betrays his future wife the day before they get married, with a woman ten years older than him. The story opposes adultery to the sexless life of the couple, as if marriage and sexual life were almost incompatible, and sex were to be enjoyed only outside the domestic sphere.

Celibacy and fatherhood are central in "Unlighted Lamps," which, by featuring a medical doctor as a protagonist, questions the definition of masculinity according to the man's professional status. The man used to lead a chaste life in the past, when he was still married ("He remembered how often, as a young man, he had sat in the evening in silence beside his wife in this same office and how his hands had ached to reach across the narrow space that separated them and touch her hands, her face, her hair," 251). After being abandoned by his wife, he devoted his life to his profession, going through a process of infantilization and feminization ("her father had, on that evening, appeared boyish and almost gay", 255), to the point of being perfectly happy, before dying, for having helped a woman give birth to her son. As an adult man having a sexless life, gender

[4] A possible explanation in biographical terms is provided by James Ellis, who, mentioning an autobiography of Anderson published by Kim Townsend in 1987, argues with regards to Anderson's fear of sexuality, and hypothesizes a similar dynamic in his life: "This conflict – the feeling that to admire a woman as beautiful seemed inevitably to invite the debasement of that beauty by man's sexual desires – turned Anderson to male friendships as an outlet for his need for spiritual communication" (596).

identities and family roles have no significance to him, so that, in his mind, his daughter's and his former wife's figures gradually overlap, and the distinction between the functions of wife, mother, daughter is of no import. The control of sexual impulses and drive, crucial in the past to the definition of masculinity as the expression of full mastery of the self (Kimmel 2006, 87), here, is what emasculates the protagonist. Celibacy, thus, denies masculinity by paradoxically taking its principles literally. Whereas in the past men's public respectability derived from their capability to preserve and not waste their own energy, and to curb their natural (and even obvious) unrestrained sexual appetites into socially recognized institutions (the family) or into sanctioned activities (sports), now celibacy backfires on the very male figures it was supposed to champion. In rejecting sexuality, moreover, the protagonist of the story implicitly renounces the social norms that, as a man and father/husband, he is supposed to comply with. In the story, this process is staged within the only institution in which sexuality was allowed with almost no prohibitions, the heterosexual marriage, and eventually turns its protagonist into the opposite of what his status as a married man should have granted him to be. This visibly disproves what Mark Whalan maintains in his study, namely that "despite his repeated criticisms of the American middle class, Anderson's primary interest was less in challenging the economic infrastructure than in maintaining patriarchal hegemony within a period of rapidly challenging economic circumstances" (94). In the story, conversely, class and gender issues influence and determine each other, both participating in the process of reshaping lower-middle class masculinity in the small towns of the Midwest.

In "The Egg," a "sadly funny tale of unsuccess" (Rideout 2006, 21), the celibacy of the narrator's father (probably modeled on Anderson's own father), fuels a mechanism of gender dis-identification and the eventual feminization of the man.[5] Here, too, normative gender laws are subverted by their literal enforcement, turning into the final displacement of the traditional roles within the familiar nucleus. The narrator's father is presented, at the very opening of the story, as a "cheerful, kindly man" (230). A previous farmhand, he moves with his family to the small town of Bidwell, Ohio, and starts running a restaurant. However, it is only his wife who is obsessed with the need to make money, to climb the social ladder by making a fortune out of her and her husband's business. She is also the one who encourages her son (the narrator) to pursue his own ambitions. Her husband, on the contrary, has no investment whatsoever in entrepreneurialism. This crucial distinction between the two parents, as for their degree of interest in business and in making money, bespeaks the transformation masculinity was undergoing in the 1920s, when it was perceived in terms of consumption rather than, as it had been until few

[5] The story was probably inspired by an episode that occurred in Anderson's life: when he wrote advertising copies, he happened to know J.W. Miller, who manufactured chicken incubators; one model of these machines did not function properly, and all chickens were smothered (Rideout 2006, 126).

decades before, in terms of production and productivity. It also implicitly refers to the crisis that the role of the "marketplace man" as an "American icon of hegemonic masculinity" (Fusco 2007, 47) was going through at the time, because of the transformation of American capitalism. Mass industrialism, rapidly taking over the US economy at the time, allowed little space for individual talent to emerge on a mass scale. As a consequence, a man was considered a man as long as he accumulated goods, and only insofar as his lifestyle and mannerism faithfully reflected his social status. The more commodities he had and made use of, the more he was perceived as capable of mastering his life – and thus, the more of a man he was. In the previous century, on the contrary, the capability to produce and to save what had been produced was the essential trait of normative masculinity. Social issues too are, thus, at stake in the father's transformation, whose role as the one who accumulates and exhibits his "goods" is openly mocked at in the story.

"The Egg" also highlights a social transformation that was paramount in rural and semi-urban America at the time: namely, the process of proletarianization of former landowners and farmers, who decided to move to big cities. This transition invariably brought about a radical reconfiguration of domestic and gender issues within the nuclear family. The era of the separate spheres (an idealized rather than an actual social construction as Gianna Fusco remarks; 2007, 21), the story suggests, is finally over, to the point that a woman – the narrator's mother – plays an essential part in a rags-to-riches plot that, in the century of the "genteel patriarchs and heroic artisans," (Kimmel 2006, 13-14) was essentially a male narrative. The sexual victim of this troublesome process is, however, the husband/father. There is no romanticism or intimacy between the narrator's parents, as the narrator more than once remarks, emphasizing their sexual abstinence as an apparently neutral datum. The protagonist's father, in fact, besides giving up any ambition as a businessman, also renounces his sexual life, as, almost incidentally, the story points out: "He slept in the same bed mother had occupied during the night … During the long nights, while mother and I slept, father cooked meats that were to go into sandwiches for lunch baskets for our boarders" (235).

Most of the narrative revolves around the father's strange and bizarre mania for monstrous eggs. Whereas the wife is worried about their business and with her desire to encourage their son to be, unlike his father, an ambitious man, the husband, unmindful of his family's and his business' needs, is only devoted to some monstrous creatures he takes care of and protects, in the hope that they will eventually bring him celebrity. He is sure, in fact, that only the monsters he preserves in his jars will sooner or later give him fame and money, were he only able to give them life anew, so as to exhibit them as freaks: "He had some sort of notion that if he could but bring into henhood or roosterhood a five-legged hen or a two-headed rooster his fortune would be made" (233). As a farmer, he was fascinated with breeding chicks. Now that he works in an urbanized context, he is

reduced to preserving chicks' fetuses and chickens with monstrous features in jars filled with alcohol. The story centers on the egg (231) rather than on what comes out of it, unless it is a dead creature or, even more creepily, unless it is an unborn monster, like the "five-legged hen or a two-headed rooster" (233), which the man keeps on display on the shelves of the restaurant. The emphasis on the egg – after which the story (and the whole collection) is titled – is not due, thus, to its potential for bringing life; it only instances, on the contrary, the initial and at the same time last stage of life, a simulacrum of those lives that do not perpetuate, but merely live *per se*. The choice of the monstrous egg as the protagonist's obsession seems to ridicule the fact that, during the 1920s, fathers were acquiring an increasingly bigger role in children rearing. What Ralph LaRossa defines "masculine domesticity and domestic masculinity" – that is, "the norm that men should interject their manliness into domestic work" and "the maxim that men's manliness needed to be placed under house arrest …, civilized and tamed" respectively (1997, 34) – is, in the story, recoded as a process of feminization of the protagonist. If the monsters-breeding egg stands for the anomalous nature of a man that had openly renounced the codified standards of masculinity, celibacy functions as the material condition for the process to take place. Only avoiding sexual activity, the story seems to imply, the metamorphosis of the father could be accomplished.

The father's celibacy, therefore, seems to symbolically embrace both his figure as a marketplace man whose insane passion for eggs has replaced his bygone interest in business, and the subversion of normative roles within the couple: while his wife is worried about business, he seems lost in his reveries about eggs and hens. Sexual abstinence, far from being a marginal detail in the description of the couple's routine, is crucial in reshaping the symbolic role of fatherhood within the new familiar and social setting. Controlling sexual instincts does no longer result in curbing erotic tension and channeling it into more productive and socially recognized activities. As the story points out, in fact, sexual continence turns out to be merely disruptive and self-annihilating in the end, making a grotesque figure out of a supposedly respectable father and businessman.

The family as a site of expectation and investment in the future is thus deprived of its intimate, much as ideological, essence. At the same time, it is also the notion of family as a putative hotbed of labor force that no longer makes sense, given the father's lack of ambition and interest in his business, which he runs with the only apparent purpose of impressing his lodgers and telling them stories about the eggs that he almost literally hatches. Both feminized and infantilized, his role seems to fall in step with the figure of the companionate father, whose popularity was increasing in the 1920s, in that he constructs his image more as his child's playmate than as a responsible economic provider (LaRossa 1991, 996).

The paradoxical epilog of the story decrees the accomplishment of the man's transformation, featuring him while pointlessly trying to impress Joe Kane, one his lodgers, by showing his freaks (238). Masculinity as a "homosocial enactment" (Kimmel 2006, 5), a set of practices and rituals to be continuously displayed, is evoked to here. Since it is no longer possible, however, to rely on old, almost mythic figures of masculinity (the frontiersman, the heroic artisan), the homosocial bond is reduced to the showing off and the public enjoyment of one's own goods in the presence of other men.[6] In their final squabble, the man tries to impress the lodger by showing his eggs and the monsters he preserves in his jars. The latter, however, only wonders about his interlocutor's mental soundness, laughing at his awkward attempts to stupefy him. Male rivalry, which in other times would have probably resulted in a duel between two gentlemen or two cowboys, now, on the contrary, gives rise to an almost pathetic attempt at impressing the other. At the same time, the urge to display one's possessions here embodies a new model of consumerism. The compulsive need to purchase products is in fact paralleled by "an acceptance of pleasure, self-gratification, and personal satisfaction" (D'Emilio 1988, 234), a tendency that has, as John D'Emilio remarks, also a gender overtone, since traditionally women were supposed to consume and men to possess. While women's consumption had long been ascribed the function of displaying a man's wealth, this new public performance of masculinity is marked by the need to accumulate, store and exhibit objects, without any other reason than the pleasure of showing off. Masculinity, thus, is finally an essential part of the new system of production and consumerism. The men's "loss of control over most other aspects of public life," determined by capitalism, is in fact compensated by the "emphasis on personal gratification" (234).

By foregrounding celibacy as an insubordinate behavior that counters sexuality and its prescriptive norms, *The Triumph of the Egg* overthrows the traditional attribution of sexual roles within the nuclear family, profoundly questioning masculinity and fatherhood above all. Celibacy, in the stories here briefly analyzed, proves effective in blurring gender and sexual categories. Whereas the latter are, at least, conceivable and representable, celibacy only "speaks" through its silence, and through the silence of the missing acts that it evokes. A controversial issue at the time, celibacy was overtly praised in the first decades of the twentieth century by the social hygiene movement, which

[6] This transition cuts across ethnic boundaries: the emergence of a black middle class in the first decades of the twentieth century suggests that the new "man" had not necessarily to be white. On the contrary, class issues seem to be still crucial in the process: this transformation, in fact, while involving all men, affected the lowest strata of US society much more dramatically than affluent men or professionals, as the former could not afford to "manifest" their virility by way of consumption and inevitably got stuck with a model of masculinity dating back to a previous era. Gender issues and gender roles were thus, to a great extent, a matter of class, and not only of sexual identity or identification.

envisaged in sexual abstinence the most effective way to stop the spreading of venereal diseases (D'Emilio 1988, 206). By emptying celibacy of any moral or prophylactic function, *The Triumph of the Egg* addresses it as a cultural, ideological and psychological condition, never fully accepted or willingly claimed as a free choice by the book's characters, who are visibly at odds or in open conflict with their own sexual life. Caught in the middle of the transition from old and new norms and paradigms of sexual identities and behaviors, they experience celibacy – hardly ever enjoying it – as the last chance to exert a form of control upon their lives.

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MOTHERING AND FAMILY LIFE IN CONTEMPORARY AUTOFICTION

Maggie Nelson's The Argonauts*, Sarah Manguso's* Ongoingness*, and Heidi Julavits's* The Folded Clock

ABSTRACT. This essay explores mothering and family life in three twenty-first-century literary narratives: Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts,* Sarah Manguso's *Ongoingness,* and Heidi Julavits's *The Folded Clock.* These texts, through an autofictional account of their authors' experiences with family making, call attention to the challenges contemporary American families face vis à vis gender and maternal roles and mainstream assumptions such as heteronormativity. By voicing a critique to today's "impossible standards" (O'Reilly 2010) for families and mothers, these narratives are challenging traditional images of "feminine selflessness" (Willett, Anderson, and Meyers 2016) and address cultural and ethical issues concerning current family models still unable to recognize queer family making and the idea that families are a dynamic process. The narratives' combined interest in self- and family-making is reflected in their fluid generic status. In our *post*-postmodern literary period, these authors' life writing is not only an attempt at postirony (see Konstantinou 2017). Rather, these narratives respond to the affective logic of contemporary autofiction (Gibbons 2017), portraying relational identities of the self. Nelson, Manguso and Julavits represent motherhood as a transformative, all-encompassing and bodily experience and choose to rely on "unfinished" genres (half-memoirs, half-essays, half-fiction) to reflect the idea of incompleteness around today's motherhood and family matters.

KEYWORDS: Autofiction, Contemporary Literature, Motherhood, Family, Gender Studies.

Despite the changes in gender equality and work dynamics of the last fifty years or so, contemporary families in North America are not free from social pressure, conflicts and insecurities. On the one hand, the crisis of 2008 and its aftermath are increasing job stress and anxiety; on the other hand, inadequate family policies leave parents "coping with seemingly endless demands and unattainable standards" (Gerson 2010, 6). As a consequence, the difficulty of balancing work and family life often leads to conflicts in adult partnership. Peggy Orenstein describes this situation as a "half-changed" world that still needs to work on gender equality. For instance, she argues that if men need to be

equal partners in the home, there must be further change in the workplace (2000, 288). As Lynn Hallstein O'Brien and Andrea O'Reilly point out, "our contemporary context is one that is simultaneously split between newfound gains for women – especially for middle-class women with class, race, and sexuality privileges – and old family-life gender patterns and assumptions that discipline both men and women" (2012, 4). The present generation of American parents are thus children of an "unfinished revolution," as Kathleen Gerson (2010) remarks, seeking new patterns of working and caretaking.

This article explores these dynamics in three twenty-first-century literary narratives: Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts,* Sarah Manguso's *Ongoingness: The End of a Diary*, and Heidi Julavits's *The Folded Clock: A Diary,* all published in 2015. These texts, through an autofictional account of their authors' experiences with family making, call attention to the challenges contemporary American families face vis à vis traditional roles, mainstream assumptions, heteronormativity, and maternal roles. By voicing a critique of today's "impossible standards" (O'Reilly 2010) for families and mothers, these narratives are challenging traditional images of "feminine selflessness" (Willett, Anderson, and Meyers 2016) in order to include less conventional views of mothering and marriage in the wider discourse on the contemporary family. Nelson's *The Argonauts* deconstructs domestic master narratives by portraying a hard-to-categorize family, which orbits around the relationship between the author and her gender-fluid partner. Manguso's *Ongoingness* attends to the transformations that family-making and childrearing have on the perception of the self: the way Manguso aims at representing these changes is an ongoing process, as the title suggests, rather than a before/after binary pattern. Julavits's *The Folded Clock* depicts a vulnerable and multifaceted mother and wife, cognizant of the many stereotypes she holds while trying to make room for her distinctive self.

Because a "theme is always manifest in form" (Warhol 2012,12),[1] this article will also look at the way the narratives' combined interest in self- and family-making is reflected in their fluid generic status. Nelson's *The Argonauts* might be labeled as a personal essay, Manguso's *Ongoingness* is a diary-essay and Julavits's *The Folded Clock* is a diary that underlines the presence of fictionality. These authors' life writing is not only an attempt at postirony (see Konstantinou 2017) in a *post*-postmodern literary realm, but also at situating their identity and social roles. In other words, these narratives are portraying relational identities of the self "unfolding in a multiplicity of relationships" rather than in dyads and binaries (Willett, Anderson, and Meyers 2016), probably because, as Alison Gibbons notes, the "affective logic" of contemporary autofiction is "situational in that it narrativises the self, seeking to locate that self in a place, a time and a body" (2017, 118).

[1] Although my approach to narrative is primarily informed by the rhetorical approach (see section 2), this article explores themes close to feminist studies.

Mothering and Family Pathways in *The Argonauts*, *Ongoingness*, and *The Folded Clock*

In *The Argonauts,* Maggie Nelson tells the story of her life from the moment she met her partner, Harry Dodge, to the birth of their son, Iggy. In *Ongoingness,* Sarah Manguso tells about a diary she has been writing compulsively to accurately record her own life since she was a teenager and how the birth of her son radically changed her writing habit. In *The Folded Clock,* Heidi Julavits reports about two years of her life she (supposedly) recorded in a journal in order to overcome a writer's block in part due to the difficulties in balancing work and family. These texts are nonfiction narratives and, with varying degree, they are committed to represent extratextual reality. The overarching purposive design of the texts is the portrayal of the authors' self in the network of relationships that constitute their families.

In *The Argonauts,* the narrating-Nelson tells about her love story with gender-fluid artist Harry Dodge and their making of a family despite the common belief that family life is heteronormative in itself. There are explicit critiques to "resistant institutions," such as when Nelson says that Dodge and she have to marry hastily, fearing the revoking of same-sex marriage in California, or when she describes the amount of paperwork and money necessary to adopt a child at birth (the only way, for same-sex parents, to prevent future issues in case of shared custody). In a revealing episode, a friend visits Nelson and comments on a mug with an emblazoned family photo. The photograph portrays Nelson (pregnant at the time), Harry and his son standing in front of the fireplace at her mother's house and dressed up to go to the theater at Christmastime. Nelson reports that the friend mentioned having never seen anything so heteronormative in her whole life (13) and considers what was so heteronormative in the picture:

> But what about it is the essence of heteronormativity? That my mother made a mug on a boojie service like Snapfish? That we're clearly participating, or acquiescing into participating, in a long tradition of families being photographed at holiday time in their holiday best? That my mother made me the mug, in part to indicate that she recognizes and accepts my tribe as family? What about my pregnancy – is that inherently heteronormative? Or is the presumed opposition of queerness and procreation (or, to put a finer edge on it, maternity) more a reactionary embrace of how things have shaken down for queers than the mark of some ontological truth? As more queers have kids, will the presumed opposition simply wither away? (13)

As the whole narrative seems an attempt to answer to these questions showing what queer family-making can look like, this excerpt is particularly meaningful. Mothering, Nelson will later argue, cannot solely be a prerogative of mononuclear heterosexual families as there is "something inherently queer about pregnancy itself insofar as it

profoundly alters one's 'normal' state, and occasions a radical intimacy with – and radical alienation from – one's body" (13).[2] "How can," she asks, "an experience so profoundly strange and wild and transformative also symbolize or enact the ultimate conformity?" (13-4).

Nelson's way to change the master narrative that associates pregnancy with conformity and to eschew the imposed heteronormativity of everything that surrounds family life is to represent the bodily experiences that characterize the various steps in her family making: her romantic relationship with Harry, her pregnancy, her son's birth, her breastfeeding, and her love for her child's body. Starting from the very beginning, Nelson reclaims the centrality of her bodily experience in her family-making, juxtaposing the words "I love you" with an act of anal sex ("Instead the words I love you come tumbling out of my mouth in an incantation the first time you fuck me in the ass, my face smashed against the cement floor of your dank and charming bachelor pad" [3]). But it is her pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum, and breastfeeding that describe the ultimate acts of bodily transformation:

> The cartilage nub where my ribs used to fit together at the sternum. The little slide in my lower rib cage when I twist right or left that didn't used to slide. The rearrangement of internal organs, the upward squeezing of the lungs. The dirt that collects on your belly button when it finally pops inside out, revealing its bottom – finite, after all. The husky feeling in my postpartum perineum, the way my breasts filling all at once with milk is like an orgasm but more painful, powerful as a hard rain. While one nipple is getting sucked, the other sometimes sprays forth, unstoppable. (103)

The experience of pregnancy and mothering that Nelson depicts goes against dominant discourses in which subjectivity is neglected. This transformation, according to Nelson, happens because "a baby literally makes space where there wasn't space before" (103) so that, like Iris Marion Young argues, "the transparent unity of self dissolves and the body attends positively to itself at the same time that it enacts its projects" (2005, 47). This description exemplifies the bodily experience of the pregnant subject but it also supports Young's argument for the body split between past and future (47). Giving birth is such an intense bodily experience that you touch death "along the way" (134); a proximity Nelson emphasizes also by alternating the description of her son's birth to her husband's description of his mother's death ("Counting, counting. Jessica says breathe into the bottom and I can tell that's where the baby is. *each of the volunteers told me that my job was to let my mom know that it was ok to go*" [129]).

[2] Mothering refers to "women's lived experiences of childrearing" as opposed to motherhood that is a term "used to signify the *patriarchal institution* of motherhood" (O'Reilly 2010, 2; emphasis added). See also Ruddick 1989.

Ongoingness, to some extent, tackles maternity from a similar perspective, including the bodily experience of sleepless nights and breastfeeding ("Nursing an infant creates so much lost, empty time. Of the baby's nighttime feeds I remember nothing. Of his daytime feeds I remember almost nothing" [53]), and of mortality ("When I became pregnant," she says, "I struck something mortally. Not just myself symbolically; my son, actually. The partly made flesh wriggling inside me was already mortal" [45]). The most challenging transformation of motherhood for the narrating-I, however, is the coming to terms with the loss of the self, something that although not in itself gender-specific, as Rebecca Whisnant notes, is "endemic to traditional feminine roles" (2004, 202). Women that lose themselves upon becoming mothers are not something of the past. The "Feminine Mystique" of the 1950s-1960s has now been replaced by a motherhood mystique, intensive mothering or the "new Momism" (see, for instance, O'Reilly 2010), dominant views that promote the mother-child bond as primary and the mother's priorities in the order of children, career, spouse and then household (Macdonald 2013). Self-loss is thus a byproduct of this mommy mystique (see also Warner 2005), in which contemporary mothers are consumed by an ideal of perfection, combined with the pressure and anxiety of a neoliberal job market and inadequate help in care policies.[3]

Manguso seems to account for this prevailing view on motherhood and the anxieties that ensue by considering the change in her perception of time. Ever since she became a mother she became "the baby's continuity, a background of ongoing time for him to live against" (2015, 53). She turns into "the warmth and milk that was always there for him" (ibid.). She thus recognizes: "my body, my life, became the landscape of my son's life. I am no longer merely a thing living in the world; I am a world" (ibid.). This change in her perception of time, which becomes *ongoing* rather than being made of beginnings and ends (23; 41), is also reflected in her experience of marriage as the opposite of a "fixed" one, something that "changes form but is still always there, a rivulet under frozen stream" (25). To accept these changes, Manguso tells readers, is not easy. Mothering is such an all-encompassing experience that the previous self of the mother (in this case, the one who would record everything meticulously in her diary) is supplanted by a self that has to live to ensure that someone else could live. Manguso eventually "had no thoughts, no self-awareness, just an ability to sit with a little creature who screamed and screamed" (55), and her diary suddenly becomes only about her son (54).

As she explains in the afterword, including parts of her actual diary in the main text (a possibility she had contemplated) wouldn't sufficiently display the impact of this transformation towards an "ongoingness." Manguso refers to her diary as "the writing that stands in for [her] entire self" (97): its absence stands in for a pre-motherhood self

[3] As Charlotte Faircloth remarks, raising children today is not only a matter of "choosing between alternatives" such as breast or bottle but a "choice that engenders accountability" (2009, 15).

that no longer exists. Thus, while through the exclusion of the actual diary the narrative embodies the acceptance of her new self (Manguso has parted goodbye with her pre-baby self by parting goodbye with her diary), the uncertainty surrounding her mothering experience is also revealing of the lack of understanding she perceives around her. In other words, Manguso is both supporting the idea that mothering is a transformative and challenging experience and expressing insecurity about how these challenges and transformations can be addressed. Given the impossible standards of the current beliefs in intensive mothering, this representation is both revealing of a lack of adequate models and a re-affirmation of self-realization for mothers beyond the good versus bad mother opposition (see Rich 1995).

The Folded Clock is a narrative about self-discovery and the search for new family models too. The romantic relationship of the couple in the family is one of the themes addressed and deconstructed. After years spent mainly as parents – a mode Julavits and her husband, fellow writer Ben Marcus, call "corporation co-management" – they have "grown shy around each other" (2015, 162). More than portraying romantic love as the necessary ideal for family happiness, in Julavits's narrative, marriage is something to believe in and to fight for. She recognizes that there are situations, like art colonies for instance, in which infatuations happen easily because they "conspire against our best intentions" (14), but, generally, developing crushes on co-workers or random strangers is also unavoidable. These infatuations have no basis in reality and can easily be "entirely one-sided" (186), but not only do they trigger Julavits's self-exploration, they are also something she can easily share with her husband, thus dismissing their relevance for the couple's relationship and, at the same time, recognizing unconventional patterns for adult partnership.

In the Julavits-Marcus family, the tasks of parenting seem equally distributed, with both partners engaged in their children's lives. However, recalling a period of great work-related stress, Julavits notes that she spent so little time with her children that they started to call her "dad" (164), as if "dad" or fathers in general were the one usually spending less time with them. She is, in fact, often complying with the new momism beliefs, reinforcing gender roles: she feels anxious leaving for a work trip ("I'm sure something terrible is going to befall them while I'm gone" [165]), and she worries about not knowing enough about her children's lives (198), a preoccupation her husband doesn't seem to share. She also describes feeling guilty about her career: if she is not working "and getting ahead of the work and the deadlines, and by implications freeing up some future time" she might be able to spend with her children, she feels undeserving of her own job (164).

The narrating-Julavits seems aware of the social pressures upon motherhood. Ultimately, she declares, women are the ones responsible for the people in the family having cleaned clothes (199). And she depicts herself as a vulnerable subject in this social scenario, so that when the narrating-Julavits reports of the experiencing-Julavits being

enraged by a comment about being a good mother as something at odds with having a consuming career, she has to admit that she had come to the same conclusion and in the "interest of her family" downsized her ambitions (198). The woman as vulnerable to the pressure of the motherhood mystique is further reflected in Julavits's final affirmation of self-discovery: "Sometimes," she confesses, "the self I return to loving belongs to me" (290).

Julavits's intimate portrayal of her relationships with her husband and her children embodies the kind of contradictions often faced by contemporary American families, even privileged ones such as Julavits's, especially when confronted with both parents having a consuming career and no clear family model inclusive of current ambiguities and insecurities concerning job stress and anxiety and the difficulty of balancing work and family life.[4] We live in a moment of "spreading precarity" as Laurent Berlant remarks, with no assurances that the life one intends can or will be built (2011, 192). Thus, while the present anxiety towards the future makes many turn to the personal and the intimate, the lack of suitable family models able to include and account for the present transformations of work and parenting dynamics increases the families' vulnerability.[5] Finally, it is also significant that Julavits's intimate narrative is framed generically as a diary, a form whose "freedom from format constraint" shows "a compatibility with ideas of the self as multiple, improvisatory and unbounded," as Porter Abbott points out (2005, 106). In the following, I will investigate further the relationship between self-narration and the construction of alternative family models, as emerged in the three narratives.

Self-explorations of Self- and Family-Making: Representing Subjective Truth

According to rhetorical poetics, narrative communication is a multilayered communicative event between an author and an audience. The author employs resources such as paratexts, characters, free indirect discourse, genre, space, style, and many others to convey her or his message. Rhetorical readers develop interests and responses to three different components of the narrative: the mimetic, which in nonfiction involves the "readers' sense of fit between the actual world and its representation in the narrative;" the thematic, which involves "rhetorical readers' interest in the ideational function of the characters and in the cultural, ideological, philosophical, or ethical issues being addressed

[4] As Davis, Winslow and Maume remarks, "gender operates differently when it is intersected with other forms of inequality" (2017: 4).

[5] For an overview on vulnerability see Mackenzie, Rogers and Dodds 2014.

by the narrative;" the synthetic, which involves "interest in and attention to the characters and to the larger narrative as artificial constructs" (Phelan 2017, 11). The three narratives presented above, *The Argonauts, Ongoingness,* and *The Folded Clock,* all share a similar communicative purpose (the representation of motherhood as a transformative, all-encompassing and bodily experience), and put priority on the thematic. They address cultural and ethical issues concerning current family models still unable to recognize queer family making and the idea that families are a dynamic process.

These narratives, however, are also conveying their messages through nonfictional genres: personal essays, memoirs, diaries. From a feminist perspective, the combined interest in the self, family and genre is not surprising. As Robyn Warhol points out, "the very act of writing outside generic realist boundaries has been seen by many feminist novelists and theorists as itself a subversive gesture" (2012, 10). Moreover, they are twenty-first-century narratives, a literary period that has often been described as the "Age of the Memoir" (see Miller 2007). It is also a time in which "creative nonfiction" is taught in many American writing programs (Dawson 2015, 81), and the internet and social media encourage mixed forms of self-narration through their many platforms. Genre-blending narratives, such as memoirs or personal essays, have been gaining increased attention starting from Dave Eggers's acclaimed memoir, published in 2000 (*A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius*), to the recent media hype surrounding Karl Ove Knausgaard's *My Struggle* (2011-15). These texts and others, such as James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* (2003), sparked a lively discussion over the last few years on what counts as nonfiction and paved the way for a renewed critical interest in fictionality and autofiction (a term labeled by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977).

Although hybrid forms of nonfiction are not original *per se*, their current modalities and purposes may be. Alison Gibbons, for instance, recently argued that while contemporary autofiction incorporates stylistic tropes of postmodernism, such as "the sense of subjectivity as fragmented, socially constructed and textually fabricated," it also departs from postmodernism's self-serving logic (2017, 130). Gibbons defines the logic of contemporary autofiction as affective and situational and pertaining to "represent truth, however subjective that truth may be" (118). *The Argonauts, Ongoingness,* and *The Folded Clock* seem coherent with this idea of autofiction: their fluid generic status embodies the dynamism of the authors' evolving selves in their evolving families. Together with this idea of narrativizing the self and representing truth, however, these texts are also stressing their synthetic component (i.e. the artificiality of the narrative) by signaling the presence of fictionality in their nonfictional narration.

Manguso builds her narrative made of short vignettes about her habit of keeping a diary around an absence (the diary she chose not to include) and highlights the fact that truth in nonfiction is always subjective as authors make choices "about what to omit, what to forget" (2015, 6). In *The Folded Clock* the various dairy entries are jumbled. For

instance, as to disrupt the general assumption that nonfiction is an accurate account of true events following a chronological order, Julavits writes: "Today is actually six months earlier than when I started writing this entry" (2015, 289). As diaries are also meant to "show an identity in process, even as they are part of the process itself of creating identity, day after day" (Rak 2009, 24), Julavits is thus able to convey a sense of identity that creates itself subjectively rather than chronologically. With their accounting of their manufacturing (a tendency that was recognized by David Shields in his 2010 manifesto for hybrid genres, *Reality Hunger*), both Manguso and Julavits are warning readers that their account of extratextual reality cannot avoid the subjectivity of their telling.

As Nelson's focus on the "lived body" (see Toril Moi 1999) resonates with existing feminist scholarly works on the body, her self-narration includes quotes from various sources among which are a few recurring names such as Eve Sedgwick and Judith Butler.[6] Nelson emphasizes the manufacturing of her narrative through a peritextual resource: in the margins, in grayscale, *The Argonauts* displays the references for the quotations she merges with her own writing, so that, for instance, in the margin of the sentence "I stopped smugly repeating *Everything that can be thought at all can be thought clearly* and wondered anew, can everything be thought" (4) appears the name of Ludwig Wittgenstein. A peritextual mode *à la* Roland Barthes in *A Lover's Discourse* (1978) in line with Jerome Bruner's idea that the self is "'distributed' in the same way that one's knowledge is distributed beyond one's head to include [...] the books one has on one shelves" (2001, 34-35).

Including the author's manufacturing of the narrative is also a way to show the authors' self-making in the making. The narration of the self becomes essential to the desire of a sincere communicative act. In the age of post-truth and precariousness of various kind, these narratives bring relationships to the fore, not only attending to the necessary relation with the readers, but also to those who help construct the author's self, i.e. their family members. As Gibbons remarks, "in a crisis-ridden world, subjects are once more driven by a desire for attachment to others and to their surroundings" (2017, 130). This is evident from the narratives' thematic exploration of family issues and mothering. Not only, as Miller points out, "in autobiography the relational is not optional" (2007, 544), the authors' explorations of these relations become the main arena to express their various "emotional truths."[7]

Calling attention to the synthetic component (the manufacturing) to highlight the thematic (self-explorations of mothering and family life) is comparable to the presence of fictionality in nonfictional narratives, in which, as James Phelan argues, "the

[6] See also Edelman 2004; Muñoz 2009; Halberstam 2005.

[7] "Emotional truth" is an expression Miller borrows from an article by Patricia Williams (2006), but it has its roots in philosophy of mind and philosophy of language (see de Sousa and Morton 2002).

fictionality does not provide a denial or an escape from the actual but rather a richer, more nuanced way of both representing and dealing with it" (2016, 25). By attending to their crafting (instead of concealing it), Nelson, Manguso and Julavits aim at achieving a truer self-narrative, a postironic mode meant as a "giving" and that has been described by Adam Kelly as the invoking of "a reader who can acknowledge and even co-produce the gift of writing" (2017, 25). The narrative communication becomes a matter of trust: the authors share their vulnerability, their intimate details, showing their trust in readers. Because of this gesture of intimacy towards their audience, readers may feel forced to impose the same intimacy on themselves.[8]

It is in a "spirit of truth" that an author takes to narrate his life directly (her life, or a part of it, an aspect of it) when sealing his or her autobiographical pact with the readers (Lejeune 2005, 31). These narratives call attention to the difficulty of portraying the truth that nonfiction requires, because the self they are portraying is evolving, ongoing, mixing with the past and the future. By stressing their manufacturing, Nelson, Manguso and Julavits highlight the existence of a "persona" writing the narrative. Thus, the three narrating-I might be "deficient" and the narrative contain discrepancies between the representation of the extratextual and that of reality itself, but it is by showing their defectiveness that the authors establish a sincere mode of communication coherent with Lejeune's spirit of truth (for a comprehensive study of the effects of deficient narration see Phelan 2017).

Conclusion

Looking at these three texts together offers us a snapshot of contemporary "family pathways," as Gerson calls them in opposition to family types (2010). Families are "a dynamic process that changes daily, monthly, and yearly as children grow," but American society does not seem to provide a balance between the changes in "intimate relationships, work trajectories, and gender arrangements" of the last decades and the resistant institutions of the past (4-5). For instance, as Davis, Winslow and Maume note, "college majors and jobs remain gendered-typed; the sex-gap in pay persists; women are underrepresented in authority positions in the economy, politics, the church, the military, etc.; women still do most of the housework and child care; and traditional beliefs

[8] In a recent essay on Knausgaard's *My Struggle,* Arnaud Schmitt and Stefan Kjerkegaard explore similar issues. They observe a connection between Knausgaard's interest in autobiography and his "attempt at a more sincere vein, regardless of the genre" (2016, 4). In line with Jerome Bruner's conception of the self as "intersubjective" (2001, 34), Schmitt and Kjerkegaard claim that Knausgaard forces his intimacy on the readers "in such a way that we feel drawn into an intersubjective relation with the author, one in which we cannot remain neutral" (2016, 17).

about gender abound" (2017, 7). *The Argonauts, Ongoingness,* and *The Folded Clock* attend to the tensions between these rapid transformations and the lack of adequate responses from society and policy-makers. Moreover, they attempt to make room for a discourse on motherhood and women's self-affirmation. Thus, they represent family pathways that accommodate several relationships and dynamic processes of today's "ambiguous mix of new options and new insecurities" (Gerson, 2010, 7).

Maggie Nelson, in *The Argonauts,* is trying to portray "empowered mothering" (see O'Reilly 2010) by eschewing the patriarchal doxy of the family as inherently heteronormative and by elaborating on the bodily experience of pregnancy and mothering. Sarah Manguso's *Ongoingnes* tackles the question of self-loss reclaiming maternal empowerment by presenting the binary opposition of before/after as ongoing, while calling attention to the affirmation of the mother's own selfhood. Heidi Julavits, in *The Folded Clock,* depicts many of the feelings of anxiety and guilt linked with idealized motherhood. These authors chose to rely on "unfinished" genres (half-memoirs, half-essays, half-fiction) to reflect the idea of incompleteness around today's motherhood and family matters.

Motherhood in the twenty-first century is still largely grounded on patriarchal institutions and mothers are still far from being truly "empowered." In other words, it is hard for women to choose to be "empowered" mothers in a society that still discourages gender equality in its institutions and beliefs. Likewise, it is hard for families to find suitable patterns of working and caretaking. Which kind of family models are to follow if "marriage no longer offers the promise of permanence, nor is it the only option for bearing and rearing children" (Gerson, 2010, 7)? Although "most women no longer assume they can or will want to stay home with young children, there is no clear model for how children should now be raised" (ibid.). At the same time, "most men can no longer assume they can or will want to support a family on their own, but there is no clear path to manhood" (ibid.). Contemporary narratives of motherhood and family life tell stories that are as unfinished, raw, fluid, contradictory, and vulnerable as the subjects they portray.

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SONIA DI LORETO

KINSHIP, AFFILIATION AND ADOPTION

Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Hope Leslie *and Nineteenth Century American Literature*[*]

ABSTRACT: This essay examines the status of various forms of affiliation and adoption narratives and practices as depicted in some early American texts, at a time when different ideas about kinship, and a multitude of possibilities of affiliation were acceptable in the context of the American household and family. In recent years the study of adoption in American culture has been a flourishing area of investigation in the larger horizon of American Studies, showing how the topos of adoption and the question of non-normative formations of family are often the critical loci where experimental thinking is going on. Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie; or the Early Times in the Massachusetts*, published in 1827, and other later nineteenth-century tales, are useful testing ground for thinking about kin terms, kinship relations, and forms of affiliation and adoption both in the colonial period and in the early nineteenth century, especially with regards to inter-ethnical interactions with Native Americans, and to the presence of black children and especially black orphans in the Northern states.

KEYWORDS: American Literature, Adoption, Family, 19th Century American Culture, Kinship

One of the most memorable passages in American literature is the final scene of Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), often regarded by critics as a praise to independence and freedom. At this point of the novel Jim reveals to Huck that his father is dead, leaving him an orphan, if a wealthy one, and Huck has to make a decision about his future:

[*] I would like to thank Laura E. Wasowicz, Curator of Children's Literature at the American Antiquarian Society (Worcester, MA) for having alerted me about the existence of the book *Little Robert and His Friend; or The Light of Brier Valley* (1861); and all the AAS librarians, archivists and curators for all their help and expertise.

> Jim says, kind of solemn:
> "He ain't a-comin' back no mo', Huck."
> I says:
> "Why, Jim?"
> "Nemmine why, Huck – but he ain't comin' back no mo."
> But I kept at him; so at last he says:
> "Doan' you 'member de house dat was float'n down de river, en dey wuz a man in dah, kivered up, en I went in en unkivered him and didn' let you come in? Well, den, you kin git yo' money when you wants it, kase dat wuz him."
> Tom's most well now, and got his bullet around his neck on a watch-guard for a watch, and is always seeing what time it is, and so there ain't nothing more to write about, and I am rotten glad of it, because if I'd a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn't a tackled it, and ain't a-going to no more. But I reckon I got to light out for the Territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and sivilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.
> THE END. YOURS TRULY, *HUCK FINN*. (369)

If we look at this without the lenses of an Americanist reading about independence, or as an ode to liberal individualism and personal entrepreneurial spirit, we see a thirteen-year-old boy refusing to adapt and being adopted, because, as readers might clearly remember, Aunt Sally represents the evangelical proponent of domestic conformity, in a patriarchal domestic system where the orphans have to perform a precise role within the adoptive family, that of the docile and passive individual, grateful recipient of the benevolent charity of the bourgeois family. Huck, therefore, is justifiably preoccupied to have to assimilate to the middle class and to the protestant principles of charitable citizenship, and considers declining the offer by way of fleeing outside of Aunt Sally's reach and the State's control. Because the novel is a strong critique of sentimental literature, Mark Twain prepares his readers to exactly this moment, without truly offering an alternative to Huck's future. If it might sound adventurous to "light out for the Territory" in the context of Twain's novel, it does not necessarily seem like a viable or very healthy option for a young adolescent, especially because there seem to be no alternative to the two options offered to Huck.

In what follows I would like to consider the status of various forms of affiliation and adoption narratives and practices as depicted in some early American texts, in order to survey a cultural landscape where different possibilities were still available, prior to the end of the nineteenth century, when we get to the discouraging alternatives Huck faces in the novel: either conform to sentimental tropes of domestic assimilation, or live a rough life on the frontier.

As a lot of contemporary popular stories for children and young adults clearly indicate, the trope of adoption and the question of non-normative formations of family are often the critical locus where some experimental thinking is going on. Children and teenagers look at Clark Kent, Peter Parker, Luke Skywalker, Princess Leia, Mowgli, Kung

Fu Panda, Mr. Peabody and Sherman, Harry Potter, Alvin and the Chipmunks, and they see possibilities and sometimes extraordinary powers for children with no biological parents near them, raised in an adoptive and at times less than conventional context. Therefore, I think it would be intriguing to examine what stories were circulated in the early part of the nineteenth century, when the United States was a new nation with a number of groups different in religion, ethnicity, power and social status. How was the structure of non-biological families and kinship formation imagined in early America? What kind of impact did it have on the nation formation or in the establishing of traditional family structures?

The last few years have witnessed an interest in the study of adoption in American culture, reflecting the current sensibility about the practice of adoption, and also the possibilities of thinking about non-normative forms of kinship and family formation. Some of the most recent studies include, for example, Barbara Melosh, *Strangers and Kin: The American Way of Adoption* (2002); Claudia Nelson, *Little Strangers. Portrayals of Adoption and Foster Care in America. 1850-1929* (2003); Cynthia Callahan, *Kin of Another Kind. Transracial Adoption in American Literature* (2010); *International Adoption in North American Literature and Culture: Transnational, Transracial and Transcultural Narratives*, edited by Mark Shackleton (2017). By looking at these texts it is clear that most of the interest in adoption and kinship studies lies with the modern and contemporary period, and there is a smaller amount of scholarship focusing on the nineteenth century and earlier. One of the texts that examines earlier phases of American culture is Carol J. Singley's *Adopting America. Childhood, Kinship and National Identity in Literature* (2011). In her introduction Singley states that "adoption narratives are rooted in the American migratory experience: they reflect politically and culturally the severed ties to Great Britain and the construction of new forms of social and governmental organization. They also derive from a New England tradition of Calvinism and the cultural practices aligned with it, including an emphasis on salvation and good works that appears in representation of adoption from colonial times through the modern period" (4). Another more recent study, Dawn Peterson's *Indians in the Family: Adoption and the Politics of Antebellum Expansion* (2017), addresses a special policy of adoption: "in the decades following the U.S. Revolution, a number of American Indian women and men and elite U.S. whites supported the placement of Native children into "white" households throughout the existing United States." From affiliation practices, to plans to absorb Native populations in the expansionist nineteenth century United States, there are numerous examples of familial and kinship conglomerates worthy of analysis.

Before entering a discussion about different terms associated with family and adoption, I would like to provide a basic definition of the term adoption, as examined in this paper. By adoption I mean not only the establishment of a parental relation between an adult and a child, that in modern times, and more precisely after the first modern

adoption legislation, the Adoption of Children Act passed in Massachusetts in 1851 has been the basic understanding of adoption, but also the welcoming and permanent affiliation of a child or children into a family or household.

As the study of what Michael McKeon has termed "the secret history of domesticity" clarifies, the structure of the family has often been a reflection of the formation of the nation state, but as McKeon's painstaking analysis demonstrates, the analogy of the family to the state is far from being transparent because "the metaphor entails a metonymy – that if the state is like the family, it is also composed of families" (113). McKeon's study alerts us not to establish easy equations, and helps us ponder the nuances of the terms. I would like to start my discussion with a lengthy quotation from McKeon's *The Secret History of Domesticity* in order to set up the terms of the analysis:

> When people speak of the family at this time [early modern period] they are likely to have in mind one (or more) of three senses of the term that we tend to distinguish from one another. First and perhaps most important, "family" was a term of primarily spatial designation, referring to all those who lived under the same roof –in the same household – under the acknowledged authority of its (usually male) head. Second, "family" had a temporal inflection that evoked one's lineage, genealogy, and ancestry, specifically the diachronic dimension of "blood" relations, but by extension those aspects of wealth, prestige, and power whose synchronic coalescence might be assumed by virtue of one's lineage. The sense of lineage might easily coexist with that of household. [...] Third, the language of "family" was used to refer to the circle of kin both within and outside the household. The standard kinship terms in this period are similar to those in our own; but this is a deceptive correspondence in that early modern usage was far looser in its application, incorporating a broader but variable range of reference depending on specific contexts of use. However, the inclusiveness of these kin terms also diminished in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, becoming more restricted and definitive over the course of this period. In addition, collective kin terms like "relations," "friends," and "connexions" shuttled back and forth between what we would call familial and nonfamilial reference, often serving to designate a basic kin relation without specifying its particular nature. Our own usage makes clear that these collective categories have become separated out from familial reference during the modern period. (121)

This explanation helps clarify not only the various terms associated with kinship and family, but it also provides a crucial historicization that could foster a clearer understanding of distinct historical periods and contexts.

In light of these considerations, and keeping in mind the cultural evolution of certain terms, I would like to take as the primary object of my study an early American novel, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie; or the Early Times in the Massachusetts*, published in 1827, because I deem it an apt testing ground for thinking about kin terms, kinship relations, and forms of affiliation and adoption both in the colonial period and in the early nineteenth century, especially with regards to inter-ethnic interactions with Native Americans. I will also keep within the horizon of my purview other texts both from the same period and later, in order to look at how the presence of black children and

especially black orphans in the Northern states constitutes a problematic cultural, social, and legal conundrum.

In the early times of the colonies, orphans were received in the households as a welcome aid to the great amount of labor that colonial settlers faced every day in order to take control of the land, and, at times, they were treated with sincere benevolence. In her book, Carol Singley discusses the Puritan attitude and the culture that ensued from the belief of being part of the New Canaan, as the Puritans recreated a community with ties that typologically represented the body of Christ. "Adoption" was a religious and spiritual term that indicated salvation bestowed by God the Father to his chosen children. In this regard the Puritan community envisioned the possibility of embracing other members, even though not everybody received the same consideration, or was granted the same legal status, due to discriminatory practices based on ethnic, class and religious differences.

As Karen Balcom describes in her "Constructing Families, Creating Mothers: Gender, Family, State and Nation in the History of Child Adoption": "the practice of turning 'strangers' into 'kin,' of raising the child born into another family 'as one's own,' can be traced to the colonial period of Euro-American history and much further back in the history of Native America. However, the legal practice of adoption as it exists today was not a part of the colonies' English common law inheritance" (220). Although the term "adoption" along with its practices appears in the early period, there is no legal framework to accompany variables of the same concept. As mentioned before, "the first 'modern' law of adoption in the United States (severing previous family ties, incorporating the child legally into the adopting family, and including a provision that the courts must adjudge the adoption to be "in the best interest of the child") was passed in Massachusetts in 1851" (Balcom 2006, 220).

Obviously, from 1851 on, and considering the vastness of the country, ideas and modes of adoption underwent a great number of changes and were crystallized in very distinct ways according to differing social and cultural influences. It is not in the scope of the present article to delineate a history of kinship relations or adoption in the United States, but it is certainly necessary to historicize the different narratives.

By focusing on Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie,* I intend to emphasize the fluidity of the nation in its early times, when the new micro-community created around different practices of affiliation and adoption customs had more possibilities to engage in changes and reforms, albeit brief and impermanent. My claim is, in fact, that Sedgwick's novel entrusts the responsibility of imagining a more inclusive and open society to the small community composed by the young generation. *Hope Leslie*, therefore, combines the political awareness of social integration and racial interrelations of the nineteenth century, with the more fluid legal and conventional apparatus of the seventeenth century, thus creating an imaginary past set in an optimistic version of Sedgwick's contemporary present. The

question of the relation between the form of the novel and the consolidation of the nation has been widely studied and debated. More recent works have reconsidered some of the assumptions of that relation by reformulating the context of national formation with that of colonialism. In this regard, according to Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "the literary genre of the novel and the political form of the nation remain in tension and dialogue with colonialism, the global market, and imperialism even as the nation gains political authority in England and the United States" (251).

Hope Leslie is set during the Puritan period, a transitional moment between two generations of settler colonialists in North America, and it marks the moment when the colony of Massachusetts enters the modern era. This text clearly shows the passage from obsolete epistemological systems, both European and Native American, to a new vision, and new systems, where religious spirit, civic virtue and scientific interest are intertwined. The presence in the novel of historical characters, such as John Winthrop, John Eliot, and the Indian chief Mononotto, provides historical depth and invites the readers to re-consider some of the episodes of the Pequot wars,[1] one of the most gruesome events in colonial history.

Similarly to another novel of the early nineteenth century, set in the colonial times, Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok, A Tale of Early Times* (1824), *Hope Leslie*'s younger generation, distant from the European political events and kept away from the government of the colony, creates room for rebellion, within a framework of alternative inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations. In both novels the young women protagonists embody the rebel (and revolutionary) spirit, thus breaking some rules and helping to imagine the narrative space (if not the political reality) for major changes. In *Hobomok*, for example, the puritan protagonist Mary Conant, violates a series of norms, first eloping with the Indian Hobomok, and having a child with him, and later returning to the Puritan community when she decides to build a family with her first lover, a white man, and her son, whom is formally adopted by her husband. In a similar vein the acts of rebellion and non-adherence to the norms in *Hope Leslie* are often planned by the female protagonists, the white Hope Leslie, and the Indian Magawisca, as they attack the ethical structure of the colonial government or the relations between Puritans and Indians. Sometimes these actions are narrative tools to bridge the colonial time of the story to the more modern time of the writing, as Jeffrey Insko suggests: "Placing Hope in relation to both her fictionalized seventeenth-century world and the reader's own (future) world, the novel asks the reader to imagine a kind of cross-cultural community, a simultaneity among historical periods" (190). In any case, those actions create a realm of possibilities that at

[1] The novel uses the spelling "Pequod" but historians now prefer the modern "Pequot".

first might look historically inaccurate, but that, on the contrary, shows, precisely, some of the prerogatives of both the times and the geographical area considered in the novel.

The novel starts in early seventeenth century England, showing a generational conflict between Sir William Fletcher, a staunch Anglican, and his namesake, a nephew who is unfalteringly devoted to the new puritan creed, and whose friends are John Winthrop and John Eliot. For hereditary reason William is meant to marry his cousin Alice, daughter of Sir William. If this project reflects the cousins' personal desires, it implies that William abjures his puritan faith, and conforms to the Anglican church. However, William does not intend to renege and thanks to some form of financial independence, he starts planning a new life in the colonies. Alice is willing to go with him, but she is kidnapped by soldiers sent by her father, and she is forced to marry the Anglican Charles Leslie. William, meanwhile, is firm in his proposition, and finally leaves England after having married a young puritan woman. He boards the same Arbella that in 1630 takes John Winthrop and his group of dissenters to the colonies in North America. On board the Arbella Winthrop delivers the sermon "A Modell of Christian Charitie" where he speaks of a new theory of society, based on hierarchy and authority, that should be like a "Citty upon a hill," model and exemplary for everyone, and a trope that has become one of the foundations of American exceptionalism.

If in Europe the structure of the family has to reflect the structure of the church, and bow to the authority of the head of the family/church, it seems that things are a little different in the new world, at least as represented by Sedgwick in her novel. William Fletcher's family is the epitome of the "frontier family", and for this reason, I think it a very good example of the possibilities – or impossibilities – of inclusiveness or exclusivity. Fletcher's family is indeed what McKeon defines as the "spatial designation" (120), the household that gathers all the members of the family, but it comprises also ideas of lineage and kinship. First of all, it is interesting to note where this family decides to settle. They, in fact, do not live in colonial Boston, but choose to live in the middle of the American wilderness, in a homestead named Bethel, becoming therefore a community of a "contact zone,"[2] with a more fluid and open structure, and a heterogeneous composition. Fletcher's family is made of his wife Martha, their various children, most importantly Everell, the first born, and it includes also two Indian children, Magawisca and her brother Oneco, who are prisoners of war left to live among the Puritans, after their nation, the Pequots, was defeated in the war. This group will furthermore receive

[2] I use the term "contact zone" drawing from Mary Louise Pratt's volume *Imperial Eyes. Travel Writing and Transculturation*: "[contact zones are] social spaces where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination – such as colonialism and slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today" (7).

Hope and Faith, Alice Leslie's daughters, who, once orphaned, are sent to live with Alice's former lover, and become part of this variegated formation.

In one of the first scenes of the novel, Fletcher asks his son Everell to go and meet the Indian girl, while at the same time he tries to explain to his wife the arrival of Alice's daughters, moving back and forth, within his conversation, between the Indian children and the girls: "These children will bring additional labour to your household; and in good time hath our thoughtful friend Governor Winthrop procured for us two Indian servants. The girl has arrived, the boy is retained about the little Leslies; the youngest of whom, it seems, is a petted child; and is particularly pleased by his activity in ministering to her amusements" (Sedgwick 1827, 21). It is clear that in Fletcher's eyes the Indian children will be able to provide additional labor, while the two English girls represent sentimental remnants of his youth. In this regard, Fletcher is practicing what Peterson described as occurring some decades later: "As the United States aggressively pushed into Indian territories east of the Mississippi River between 1790 and 1830, a wide range of governing elites declared the importance of assimilating Indian people into the U.S. body politic, which they describe as a free white national family". Assimilation and imperialistic expansion are the public facet of this form of "adoption", but cohabitation and intimacy of children in the same household may inspire different feelings from those considered by Fletcher or governing officials.

This interesting combination of blood relations, sentimental affiliations, and political captivity provides a representation of the vast arrays of possibilities of being part of a family in the colonial times. In *Hope Leslie*, the younger generation, constituted by Everell Fletcher, Hope Leslie, Magawisca, Oneco and Faith Leslie, lives in such proximity and intimacy that the narrative often hints at both fraternal feelings and romantic attachments. Because of the geographical location, the historical circumstances, and the political events, this new community will have to re-draw the boundaries within the conflict of colonizers and colonized, and to start to reconsider a series of sentimental options: for this very reason, *Hope Leslie* is one of the few texts that explicitly discusses the mixed unions between whites and Native Americans (as we have seen, *Hobomok* is another one), and where even sentimental attachments are more fluid and discontinuous than in other texts. One example is the union between Faith Leslie and Oneco, as the result of affiliation and adoption of the young English girl by the Pequot nation, when she was kidnapped by Oneco's father Mononotto. After having been offered the option of going back to the Puritan community and to her sister Hope, Faith decides to live her life with Oneco and among the Indians. Everell is another example, this time of multiple attachments. At the beginning of the story he seems to be attracted to Magawisca, then becomes engaged, almost *malgré lui*, to a puritan girl, but once it becomes apparent that Esther cannot be part of their small rebellious community, Everell finally turns to Hope Leslie, hence coming back to the fraternal/domestic household of the inception of the

story. The relation between Everell and Hope is marked from the very beginning by a strong bond, which the two characterize as a sort of fraternal affiliation, or, as Ivy Schwartzer defines it, a "friendship as a superior form of affection and affiliation associated with disinterest and justice" (176). In fact, when Hope writes the long and detailed letter to Everell, keeping him abreast of all the dealings and events occurred during his long absence, she signs it "thy loving friend and sister" (Sedgwick 1827, 115).

The fluidity of the relations between the young characters, and the indeterminacy of their statuses (brothers and sisters? lovers? captives?) allow for a certain latitude in their behaviors. My claim is that it is exactly this condition of indeterminacy and non-clarity in the familial and legal status of some of these characters, that gives them the autonomy to intervene precisely in some of the legal decisions made by the puritan government, in an effort to protect members of their micro-community. Their unique recognition of equality and fraternal bonds among themselves allows them to see one another as worthy of life and liberty, even though the society at large might not be aware of that. The first instance of the construction of the special empathic relation among the young generation is represented by the conversation between Everell and Magawisca, when she tells her version of the colonial attack to her village and people.

During their cohabitation Everell learns from Magawisca to conceive of a different perspective, and the two, together, become the first critical core of the community. Magawisca shows Everell the other side of the story, when she narrates her version of the attack to the Pequot village. This is a moment of profound sympathy, that will establish the sense of belonging and understanding of the two young protagonists. Similarly to the domestic fiction of later years, and especially the great amount of children's literature produced in the nineteenth century, the children and adolescents are the most perceptive, sentimental and sensitive models of civic virtue and citizenship, and they have the task to imagine a new, more inclusive and sentimental, society.

When Magawisca tells Everell the story of the attack on the Pequot nation, she dwells on the details of the death/execution of her brother Samoset, and she makes clear the link between the moral law, and the religious practices, while demonstrating, at the same time, that this is not the case with the English community: "Magawisca paused – 'You English tell us, Everell, that the book of your law is better than that written in our hearts, for ye says it teaches mercy, compassion, forgiveness – if ye had such law and believed it, would you thus have treated a captive boy?' " (Sedgwick 1827, 51).

Turning sentimentalism against itself, Magawisca is the critical and inquiring mind, which cannot quite conform to the puritan norms, and partly, cannot accept the decisions made by the Indian authority either.

During the course of the novel the three main young characters build an alternative form of kinship and decide to intervene outside of the laws of the colonial government

and society. The two main actions to which I am referring here are Magawisca's intervention to save Everell from the capital punishment decreed by her father Mononotto as revenge for the destruction of his village and his family, and Hope and Everell's subsequent decision to plan Magawisca's escape from the puritan prison in Boston, after she had been captured by the puritan soldiers. In both cases the basis for the action is the recognition of value, independently from blood relations (and sometimes in spite of), but in the name of a shared life together on the frontier. It is because of the shared experience of the household, and the ways in which the respective knowledge is transmitted (from the Indian characters to the puritan youth, and vice versa) that these characters are able to create a community that provisionally and impermanently functions as an alternative to the puritan government and society, providing an example of "adoption" as a creation of kinship relations outside of the sentimental and cultural boundaries imposed by puritan norms or Indian customs and regulations. This micro-community, though, is not stable and cannot be a model for a new society, because, by the end of the novel, only certain affiliations become permanent, and those who do not belong with the American vision of progress, will not be assimilated, welcomed, or permanently "adopted".

When Magawisca is freed from the prison, Everell and Hope try to convince her to stay with them: "'And must we now part, Magawisca? Must we live without you?' 'Oh! No, no!' cried Hope, joining her entreaties, 'your noble mind must not be wasted in those hideous solitudes.'" (Sedgwick 1827, 332). Magawisca, then, provides a lesson in Indian wisdom and poise (as represented by the author), insisting on her communing with the Great Spirit and with Nature. Hope continues her pleas: "'I cannot ask you,' she said, 'I do not ask you, for your sake, but for ours, to return to us'" (Sedgwick 1827, 332). Magawisca, however, is determined in her decision, and parts from them after having received two sentimental tokens given by Hope: one chain with Everell's lock of hair, "taken from his head when he was a boy, at Bethel – it will remind you of your happiest days there" (Sedgwick 1827, 333), and a small miniature of Everell, kept by Hope on a ribbon. As Hope retains the relation with the real person, Magawisca receives the sentimental substitution, simulacrum of her impossible relations. Similarly to other Indian literary characters in other texts of the same period, Magawisca disappears into the forest, quietly performing the "vanishing Indian", unable, like Huck Finn, to find a place in the American domestic vision of progress. Ultimately, even the brief fantasy of racial assimilation propounded by the novel is not a viable option. As in other cases, race plays a crucial role in narratives of kinship, affiliation and adoption, and it becomes a constant concern and often the point of disruption.

If in the early decades of the nineteenth century *Hope Lesl*ie depicts a realm of possibilities for affiliation, kinship and adoption within an ideal micro-community, other texts of the so-called sentimental tradition engage with the presence of orphans and with

the questions inherent to their assimilation in the American society, and especially what function they can serve in the reconsideration of a nation made of individuals, rather than families and lineage. As in the case of Victorian literature, populated by a great number of orphans (Oliver Twist and Jane Eyre are among the most memorable), American sentimental novels take up adoption themes in all possible variations. According to Carol Singley, "the proliferation of adoption fiction occurred at a time when Americans were celebrating democratic individualism, freedom from English influences, and a sense of unlimited potential" (96). The orphan protagonists of *Bildungsroman* novels such as Susan Warner's *The Wide Wide World* (1850) and Maria Susanna Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854) are rewarded not only with a home but with a right place in the domestic republic. As Cindy Weinstein claims in her study *Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, most of the sentimental fiction of the American antebellum period is about the making of a family: "the making of a family is the task that awaits most sentimental protagonists, but what makes this endeavor so interesting and important [...] is that in the process of making a family, the family is being redefined as an institution to which one can choose to belong or not" (8). However, all the orphans mentioned above are white children, thus more easily assimilated and included in nineteenth-century United States.

At the same time, the American family in the nineteenth century is a fraught terrain, due to the presence and influence of slavery and its consequences, and therefore no study about family or familial practices could possibly avoid the question of the presence of black orphans, and black children in general, in the cultural production of the era. The possibilities of being incorporated and integrated – as problematic as they were – deemed viable for Native children were impossible for blacks: "Unlike people of African descent, whose identities became synonymous with slavery – a status that denied black people the very rights or recognition of kinship – Indians were described as free people who could potentially be incorporated into the U.S. national family, a process that in turn mandated that Indians adopt the social, economic, and familial values associated with white U.S. society" (Peterson).

Even though one of the most obvious texts to examine in this regard would be *Our Nig* (1859) by Harriet E. Wilson, I believe it would be even more interesting to look at some highly understudied materials that circulated in the evangelical and tracts societies of the time, extremely busy in their conversion activities and anti-slavery work, and that targeted the young readers, as well as the adults. Black orphans and black asylums for children are mentioned in quite a few of the periodicals of the 1840s or 1850s, and some of the articles detail the development and organization of such institutions in cities like New York, or, for example, they publish tracts such as *The Orphans' Advocate and Social Monitor* (Boston), in order to move the population and to find help for city charities.

Among these publications, and similar to the standard sentimental stories about orphans, one text quite interestingly stands out: *Little Robert and His Friend*; or *The Light of Brier Valley*, written by Mrs. M. J. P. Smith and published by the American Reform Tract and Book Society in Cincinnati in 1861. This small volume is relevant and interesting for a number of reasons, first for the time and place of publication: at the inception of the American Civil War, in Cincinnati, in Ohio, a free state but very close to the slave states, where the presence of blacks was certainly significant. Moreover, the organ of publication is also quite relevant: the American Reform Tract and Book Society was involved in anti-slavery activities while at the same time keen on evangelization.

The story is typical in that it provides a male version of the "Little Eva" narrative: a saintly white child who helps a destitute, sad and not-yet-Christian black child to overcome his ignorance, thus turning the black person into a model Christian. Little Robert is the black child with the drunken father and the unhappy and inadequate white mother. Frederick Alton is the angelic white boy, who is intent on saving not only Little Robert (he is called "Nigger Bob" by his schoolmates), but of redeeming the whole community of Brier Valley, convincing the town officials to have Sabbath meetings, and reforming the rebellious youth. The most interesting aspect, though, is that Robert, because of his desperate life, contemplates suicide, and is saved by Frederick who arrives at the very nick of time to prevent Robert from jumping off a cliff: "A shudder of horror thrilled along Frederick's nerves, as with a cry of dismay he sprang forward, and threw his arms about the child, just in time to save him from taking the fatal leap" (Smith 1861, 30). As in the case of *Hope Leslie*, and as in the case of other texts about young children or teenagers, the responsibility of saving the life of the black child (or the orphan, or the Native Magawisca) does not lie in the society at large, which in fact not only does not protect them, but endangers them with all its laws and customs, but it rests only on the singular individual Christian child, who proves to be the most civic minded non-citizen of the community. Interestingly enough, Frederick behaves very much like Little Eva in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but he goes a step further. Indeed, once he perceives that he is about to die, he asks his mother to raise the black child, Robert:

> 'it is a strange request, I know, dear mother; but it will make me very happy in dying if you will promise me to take little Robert in my place when I am gone.' A look of agony was on the mother's pale face. 'Not in your place, darling; I cannot take him in your place! But if it will make you happy, I will promise to adopt him for your sake, and do the best I can to bring him up for a life of honor and usefulness'. (Smith 1861, 100)

In this exchange it is the youth who directs the adult's choices, and, according to the sentimental vocabulary and framework, he is very political in the fact that he asks something exactly when the request cannot be denied, because it is a deathbed wish.

If American society and culture can only imagine adoption as substitution (a dead white child for a black child), it can never go as far as imagining a black family welcoming a white orphan. However, it seems to me that this text, by using the sentimental tools of an established tradition, is conceiving of a possibility that was still distant and certainly rarely practiced outside the realm of fiction: the incorporation/adoption of a black child into a white family, and in fact, a non-conventional nuclear family, because Frederick's mother is a widow, left poor by the ever-present incapable husband. Given the potential subversive of this story of adoption, one wonders what could have happened to Huck Finn if Mark Twain had been a little more prone to sentimental tropes, and had made Jim adopt Huck.

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PERCORSI

J. RHETT FORMAN

"MANDATE OF EROS"

Love in Eliot's "Prufrock," Pound's Mauberley, *and British Integral Psychology*

ABSTRACT: T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and Ezra Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* constitute studies in the paradoxically arresting and motivating power of erotic love and its relation to impotent and creative verse. While love paralyzes Eliot's Prufrock, Pound uses the voice of Mauberley to both illustrate and overcome the paradoxical nature of love in order to give birth to a fertile poetics after his earlier frustrated attempts. Though the voices of Prufrock and Mauberley share similarities, I argue that we ought not conflate Eliot's and Pound's poetics. Instead, a clear difference arises between the two when considering the British integral school of psychology that influenced Eliot's and Pound's early work during their years in England. Applying the work of one of the members of this school, William Brown, to Eliot's and Pound's poetry reveals that "Prufrock" instantiates a poetics of pathological passionate love, whereas *Mauberley* achieves a poetry of what Brown calls the "divine" affection of love over and against the passionate love prevalent in modernity.

KEYWORDS: Literature, Psychology, Modernist Poetry

Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* constitute studies in the paradoxically arresting and motivating power of erotic love and its relation to impotent and creative verse. While love paralyzes Eliot's Prufrock, Pound uses the voice of Mauberley to both illustrate and overcome the paradoxical nature of love in order to give birth to a fertile poetics after his earlier frustrated attempts. Though the voices of Prufrock and Mauberley share similarities, I argue that we ought not to conflate Eliot's and Pound's poetics. Instead, a clear difference arises between the two when considering the British integral school of psychology that influenced Eliot's and Pound's early work during their years in England. While I do not suggest that Eliot and Pound consciously incorporated the ideas of the British integral school into "Prufrock" and *Mauberley*, applying the work of William Brown (1912) to Eliot's and Pound's poetry reveals an important difference in their poetics. I argue that according to Brown's theory of love, "Prufrock" instantiates a poetics of pathological passionate love, whereas

Mauberley achieves a poetry of the "divine" affection of love over and against the passionate love prevalent in modernity (103).

Despite Eliot's own contention that "Prufrock" "would never have been called *Love Song* but for a title of Kipling's," the words color the entire poem if taken seriously (1959; qtd. in commentary to *Poems of T. S. Eliot: Vol. 1* 374). By contrast, Pound's *Mauberley* undoubtedly emphasizes love in its various ancient, Christian, and modern forms. While critics have unfailingly discussed the voices of Prufrock and Mauberley in relation to the problem of solipsism, no one has yet adequately treated the subject of love in the two poems. Critics generally agree that mask in nineteenth and twentieth century poetry responds to solipsism, but their characterizations of mask differ. While Michael Hamburger (1969) traces the source of Eliot's mask to a dismissal of Paul Valéry's French Symbolism and its desire to manufacture egoistic art for art's sake (61-80), Carol Christ (1984) connects Pound and Eliot's concepts of *persona* and *voice* respectively to Robert Browning's Victorian rejection of Romantic egoism (32-51). As for solipsism, J. C. C. Mays (1994, 111), Peter Nicholls (2007, 53), Carol Christ (20), and Michael Hamburger (61) employ the term without offering a precise definition of it. In addition, while Mays argues that Eliot's "Prufrock" presents a definitively solipsistic voice (111), Christ and Nicholls argue the opposite, namely, that the voice overcomes the "tendency to solipsism" (20; 53). Though critics since Hugh Kenner's (1959) *The Invisible Poet* have spilled much ink over the idea of mask in Eliot and Pound, I will offer an alternative understanding of the device with regard to modern psychology and erotic love.[1]

Before turning to "Prufrock" and *Mauberley*, I ought first to establish the historical connection between Brown, Eliot, and Pound by mentioning Pound's reference to "the newer psychologists" in "A Few Don'ts," published in the March 1913 issue of *Poetry*. The essay begins with an explanation of what Pound means by *image*: "An 'Image' is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term 'complex' rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart [...]" (1935a, 4). I argue that Pound became familiar with these "newer psychologists," including Bernard Hart, through his involvement with George R. S. Mead's Quest Society after venturing to London in 1908. This group produced a publication called *The Quest* that ran from 1909-31, along with "some half-a-dozen public lectures a term at Kensington Town Hall" (Mead 1926, 292-299). As Leon Surette (1994) mentions, in 1912 the twenty-seven-year-old Ezra Pound gave one of these lectures after contributing an essay titled "Psychology and the Troubadours" to the journal (131-32). In addition, Patriciae Rae (1997) points out that in *Quest* 2, two editions before the one that published "Psychology and the Troubadours," an

[1] I will refer to Prufrock and Mauberley as *voices*, rather than as *masks* or *personae*, in order to clearly distinguish them from *characters*.

anonymous reviewer wrote on Bernard Hart's theory of the complex found in *Subconscious Phenomena* (259-60). Published in 1910, *Subconscious Phenomena* served as a "symposium" dedicated to "thresh[ing] out the difference of views" regarding the meaning of the word "subconscious," a controversial issue about which there was at the time "no consensus of opinion, either among psychologists who deal with the normal, or among the medical psychologists who deal with the abnormal" (9). In addition to Hart's essay, *Subconscious Phenomena* also includes the work of Hugo Münsterberg, Théodule Ribot, Joseph Jastrow, Pierre Janet, and Morton Prince.[2]

Subconscious Phenomena, therefore, helps us identify these "newer psychologists." In the collection, an alliance clearly emerges between Janet, Prince, and Hart. William McDougall's 1926 *An Outline of Abnormal Psychology* calls this alliance, of which he is a member, "the school of integral psychology," a school constituted largely of physicians from Britain and America, including William Brown (24).[3] Prince led the group in America and William H. R. Rivers in Britain (24). Alongside Brown and Arthur Brock,[4] Rivers treated patients for war neuroses during World War I at Moss Side and Craiglockhart military hospitals (Jones 2010, 372). Rivers's friend Henry Head (Tom and Vivienne Eliot's London neurologist) included Rivers and Brown amongst the "brilliant band of workers" that made the Moss Side Military Hospital "the centre for the study of abnormal psychology" (qtd. in Jones 372; Head 1923, 977).[5] In its final months leading up to March 1919, Brown served as commanding officer of Craiglockhart where

[2] See below for Münsterberg's and Janet's connections to Eliot.

[3] See also H. V. Dicks' Fifty Years of the Tavistock Clinic, p. 23; Alastair Lockhart's "The 'Para-Freudians'" in Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society, pp. 3-5; and Tracey Loughran's Shell-Shock and Medical Culture in First World War Britain, p. 133. Loughran's 2016 monograph fails to cite Dicks' 1970 work or Lockhart's 2012 work, as if she were the first to notice McDougall's An Outline of Abnormal Psychology. She also overlooks McDougall's "special name" for the group, referring to it simply as the "Psychological School" rather than as McDougall's proposed "school of integral psychology" (McDougall 1926, 24; Loughran 2016, 133).

[4] Though McDougall does not mention Brock, he also does not claim to offer a definitive list of who to include in the "school of integral psychology." The names he does offer in addition to Prince and Rivers are the following: "Drs. William Brown, Millais Culpin, R. S. Gibson, J. A. Hadfield, Bernard Hart, Crichton Miller, T. W. Mitchell, E. Prideaux, Hugh Wingfield, Henry Yellowlees, and (in Australia) Dr. J. W. Springthorpe; in America, Drs. Milton Harrington, William Healy, Ed H. Reede, and T. Williams [...]" (43). He also notes "Prof. Adolph Meyer together with those psychiatrists who stand nearest to him" (43). As for those on the fringes of the group, McDougall mentions "Drs. H. Baynes, Beatrice Hinkle, Constance Long, and Maurice Nicol" (43).

[5] As Lyndall Gordon (1998) and L. S. Jacyna (2016) note, Henry Head composed poetry himself and treated several member of the English literati, including Tom and Vivienne Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Henry James, and E. M. Forster (200-201; 62-63, 232-242).

Brock and Rivers famously treated poets Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon (Webb 2006, 342-46).[6] McDougall called this group "the integral school" because it integrated many theories from across the continent rather than subscribing to a single one, including primarily the work of Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud, but also that of Carl Jung and Alfred Adler (24).

As for Eliot, after graduating with his bachelor's degree in 1909, he moved to France where he was a visiting student in philosophy at the Sorbonne in Paris, just across the street from the Collège de France, the academic home of Janet,[7] the psychologist whom Eliot continued to reference "in graduate essays and book reviews" upon his return to Harvard to conduct graduate studies (Marx 2011, 25-29; Brooker 2011, 335).[8] As Robert Crawford (2015) observes, Janet had delivered a lecture on hysteria at Harvard in 1906, and Eliot borrowed his terms *dissociation* and *aboulie* to describe both his poetry and his own psychological condition (148). As Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue note in their commentary to *The Poems of T. S. Eliot: Volume 1*, as a graduate student in philosophy in the 1912-13 academic year, Eliot took Münsterberg's "Seminary in Psychology" (2015, 1085).[9] Later as an editor for Faber and Faber and *The Criterion*, Eliot remained preoccupied with psychology. In 1925 Wyndham Lewis authored a review of Rivers' *Medicine, Magic and Religion*, and Herbert Read wrote a review of McDougall's *An Outline of Abnormal Psychology* in 1926 that quotes from the very section that discusses the integral school of psychology (128-30).[10] The next year[11] poet Robert Graves (1927) reviewed Rivers's *Psychology and Ethnology*, succeeded yet again by Martin C. D'Arcy's review of McDougall's *Modern Materialism and Emergent Evolution* in 1929. The magazine published no fewer than eight reviews of Freud's works – one in 1929 by Eliot himself on *The Future of an Illusion*. Without a doubt, then, both Eliot and Pound

[6] Thus, despite the fact that Rivers was the professor of Brown's professor, namely, William McDougall (Slobodin 1997, 21-24; Richards 2011, 80-82), not to mention seventeen years his senior, Rivers was Brown's subordinate at Craiglockhart.

[7] Pound, therefore, knew of Pierre Janet in 1910 through *Subconscious Phenomena*, while Eliot had actually heard him lecture at the Collège de France 1909.

[8] Also see Grover Smith's (1998) "T. S. Eliot and the Fragmented Selves: From 'Suppressed Complex' to 'Sweeney Agonistes'" and Murray McArthur's (2010) "Symptom and Sign: Janet, Freud, Eliot, and the Literary Mandate of Laughter."

[9] Pound would have known Münsterberg's work from his essay in *Subconscious Phenomena*.

[10] In 1926 the magazine was called *The New Criterion* under the new ownership of Faber and Gwyer Publishing (See Donald Gallup's *T. S. Eliot: A Bibliography*, p. 14). It was this book that coined the phrase "the British integral school of psychology" (see above).

[11] The magazine was called *The Monthly Criterion* from May 1927 through March 1928 (Gallup 1969, 14).

gradually became more and more familiar with the integral school after arriving in England.[12]

Published in *The Strand*[13] in 1912, Brown's essay "Is Love a Disease?" challenges the common idea that erotic love is an emotion and characterizes it as a mental illness (98-99).[14] Instead of describing erotic love as a "simple form of consciousness" like the emotions of "fear or anger," Brown views it as an idea-emotion complex (98-99). To support his claim, Brown observes how we can remain in love while feeling a variety of passing emotions, including "joy and tender emotion in [the beloved's] presence, sorrow in her absence, anxiety when adversity threatens her," etc. (99). He therefore defines love as "a complex system of emotional *dispositions* centred about the idea of the loved one" (99). Clearly, Brown's understanding of the complex accords with Hart's and Pound's as described in "A Few Don'ts." For each, the complex includes some emotion bound to an idea, in this case, the idea of the beloved.

Brown further outlines the six stages of passionate love. The first three stages are "admiration, the attraction of [physical and psychical] pleasure, and hope." Brown labels the fourth stage "crystallization" because of the lover's tendency to highlight the beloved's virtues and overlook his/her imperfections. Regarding crystallization, Brown declares that "It is the emotional nature of the lover which discovers these perfections." In other words, our emotions obstruct our reason's ability to deliberate dispassionately about the object of love. Emotion is not able to outpace reason indefinitely, however, and after the initial stage of crystallization the fifth stage arises, namely, the "painful state" of doubt "when reason raises its head and threatens to intervene." If this war between emotion and reason subsides, then a sixth stage of final crystallization sets in when the lover finally "submits to his fate, and the whole tide of his life sets towards this one goal." Only in this final state is a love achieved wherein "[t]he passion is completely established" (100).

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[12] In *The Philosophy of T.S. Eliot: From Skepticism to a Surrealist Poetic 1909-1927*, chapter 3, "The Unconscious," William Skaff (1986) confirms that Bergson, Bradley, James, and Janet influenced Eliot. Also, see Matthew Gold's (2000) "The Expert Hand and the Obedient Heart," p. 52.

[13] References to the popular magazine in his letters attest that Pound was familiar with *The Strand*. A 1917 letter to Wyndham Lewis mentions that year's September issue (1985, 99), and a 1937 letter sent from Rapallo to Michael Roberts wistfully remembers his years in London as "*Strand Magazine* romance to young foreigner" (1950, 296-97). In 1929 for *The Criterio*n Eliot reviewed *The Complete Sherlock Holmes Short Stories*, many of which originally appeared in *The Strand*.

[14] This article had significant influence. George M. Johnson (2006) argues in *Dynamic Psychology in Modernist British Fiction* that Brown's "Is Love a Disease" might have been the first popular work in Britain to reference Freud (83-84). Johnson also suggests, but does not develop, the idea that Brown's article may have shaped Woolf's "Kew Gardens."

Should these six stages (admiration, attraction, hope, initial crystallization, doubt, and final crystallization) progress correspondently between two people, then their subconscious selves become aligned (101). For Brown the subconscious quality of passionate love is proof that it is disease since it necessarily acts as a suppressed complex initiating neuroses (101). That the disease is so universal may account for its general disregard, but it is no less a disease for being a popular one (101). Given the subconscious quality of love, Brown observes a "period of 'incubation,' during which the individual does not know what is the matter with him" precisely because his behavior is governed by his subconscious (101). Janetian *abulia* soon sets in, indicated by Brown's phrase "feebleness of will-power" (101). As a remedy, Brown recommends the cathartic cure or "the method of '*psycho-analysis*' invented by Professor Freud of Vienna" (102-103). Psychoanalysis recalls an emotionally traumatic memory "into full consciousness, and so enables the reason and the will to be directed upon it and render it innocuous" (103). Of course, Brown recognizes that not all love is pathological. He, therefore, differentiates between love as a hysterical *passion* and love as a "divine" *affection* that "should be cherished and not suppressed" (103). The nourishment of a healthy psyche, therefore, relies as much on the cultivation of the affection of love as it does on the evasion of the passion of love, the former of which restores and the latter of which distorts the proper disposition of reason, will, and emotion. In what follows, I will seek to apply this distinction to Eliot's and Pound's poetry.

In light of Brown's article Prufrock emerges as a voice obsessed with romantic ideals rather than with flawed reality. Indeed, Prufrock manifests the final stages of Brown's six stages of passionate love: initial crystallization, doubt, and final crystallization. Eliot depicts Prufrock as attempting to reconcile his ideal image of the world with his intruding doubts. Just as Brown describes how reason interrupts the first stage of crystallization, a stage brought about by an excess of emotion, so too does Prufrock's "overwhelming question" intrude upon emotive images of "the evening [...] spread out against the sky," "half-deserted streets," and "restless nights in one-night cheap hotels" (1-10). As if to stave off such doubt, Prufrock recommends, "Oh, do not ask, 'What is it?'" (11). Instead, he lingers in a fabricated world free of defects. Even the smoke of the city becomes a cat that "rubs its back upon the window-panes, [...] / that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes" (15-16). Prufrock's poetic mind has rendered an image of comfort from the harshness of modernity and has made a companion of what would otherwise undermine his romanticism, namely, a feline friend who "Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap, / And seeing that it was a soft October night, / Curled once about the house, and fell asleep" (20-22).

Yet, entering the fifth stage, doubt continues to plague Prufrock, since rational argument will always threaten to disrupt the comfort of an emotional state that does not reflect reality. Trying to convince himself, the voice repeats, "There will be time, there

will be time / To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet" (26-27). As if to enhance Brown's idea that love disposes the lover to construct illusions about the beloved, Prufrock's emotional reveries shelter him from the pressures of time and the obligations of life. However, the reader senses that Prufrock's insistence that there will be "Time for you and time for me, / And time yet for a hundred indecisions, / And for a hundred visions and revisions" lacks credibility (31-33). As a mere poetic voice, Prufrock may abide in a place temporally unrestricted, but the reader knows that such a flighty carelessness with regard to time is ridiculous for those of us with real bodies and souls. In other words, Prufrock's obsession with maintaining the ideal only serves to highlight his status as a mere voice, lacking the substance of his author or his listeners. Though he invites us along, imploring us to "Let us go then, you and I," his persistence in stubbornly ignoring reason is itself evidence that his readers do not share his leisurely reveries (1).

Prufrock's doubts escalate into a series of worries at the height of which he questions his hold on reality, much as Brown's lover must eventually question his perception of the beloved after his/her flaws disrupt the initial stage of crystallization. He wonders, "Do I dare / disturb the universe?," knowing that his doubts are beginning to erode his idealizations (45-46). Despite his reassuring promise of having all the time in the world, he even conjectures that "In a minute there is time / For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse" (47-48). He begins to realize all that he does not know, and in light of the overwhelming doubt about what he thought was true about the relationship between himself and the world, he asks the subtlest but most "overwhelming question" of the poem: "So how should I presume?" (54). Indeed, Brown's theory suggests that the lover's presumption devolves into frenzied passion. Without a vision of the beloved tempered by reason, the lover presumes to possess knowledge concerning the attributes of the lover, a knowledge that he has not gained through careful, methodical study.

The section that follows illustrates the poetic potential of this ironic self-awareness, a consciousness that has emerged paradoxically out of a Prufrock's doubts about his own autonomy. Before embarking on his own poetic composition, he asks, "And should I then presume [...] / And how should I begin?" (68-69). He first tentatively composes these striking lines depicting a cityscape marred by urban isolation: "Shall I say, I have gone at dusk through narrow streets / And watched the smoke that rises from the pipes / Of lonely men in shirt-sleeves, leaning out of windows? [...]" (70-72). As if to start his poem over, he then abruptly changes the setting from cityscape to seascape, declaring, "I should have been a pair of ragged claws / Scuttling across the floors of silent seas" (73-74). Although the environment has changed, the feeling of isolation remains, the "silent seas" reflecting the "lonely men in shirt-sleeves" of the previous lines. In addition, the "pair of ragged claws" hints at Prufrock's tenuous status as a voice lacking substance and soul. Prufrock's world is determined by his own precarious non-existence, and his attempts at poetry mimic the isolation and incompleteness of his being as a mere voice. The poem

suggests, then, that poetry flows from self-awareness, that it indicates and stimulates consciousness.

For Prufrock, however, the artistic produce of consciousness does not last. He quickly abandons his poetry, arguing that he is "no prophet" and "not Prince Hamlet" (83, 111). His brief flash of poetic insight having gone out, Prufrock has "seen the moment of [his] greatness flicker" and "the eternal Footman hold [his] coat, and snicker, / And in short, [he] was afraid" (84-85). He retreats from poetry – and from consciousness – out of fear, the emotion provoked when his poetry enables him to realize his isolation. Emotion too is a hallmark of consciousness and renders consciousness both a blessing and a curse. While consciousness enables us to make sense of ourselves in relation to the world so that we can constructively engage with our environment and with other people, the curse of consciousness – and by extension the poetry that is the product of consciousness – is an awareness of death that accompanies an awareness of the self. Brown's penultimate stage of love, the stage of doubt, thus intensifies the feeling of isolation that intrudes upon the fantasies of the lover into the emotion of fear of mortality. By placing the lover in relation to another and thereby rendering him immanently self-aware, the passion of love isolates him from the world. An awareness of mortality quickly follows, because death is itself an isolation from life. Self-awareness is isolation and isolation death. Subsequently, the very poetry meant to heal a fractured consciousness could cause us to prefer Prufrockian revelry – i.e., insanity – to the sanity of a mind with an ever-present fear of death.

Prufrock weighs these two options in the next section, wondering "Would it have been worth while, / [...] / To have squeezed the universe into a ball / To roll it towards some overwhelming question, [...]" (87-93). If we refuse to live out of a fear of death, then our subsequent isolation is itself our demise. On the other hand, if we do live, then we will suffer under the weight of knowing that we will die. In the same way, if we refuse to love another passionately, then we will avoid the pains of love but also ensure an end to life by denying procreation. On the other hand, if we do love another passionately, then we must forfeit the integrity of our consciousness to achieve a union, a forfeiture that is itself a death of our individual personality. We cannot be ourselves and be in love. We also cannot be ourselves and not be in love.

At the height of Prufrock's stage of doubt, then, his being disintegrates as he enters Brown's final stage of crystalization. He complains, "I grow old [...] I grow old [...] / I shall wear the bottoms of my trousers rolled," as if he no longer cares what others think of him (120-121). He even resolves not to fret over his baldness, instead declaring, "I shall wear white flannel trousers, and walk upon the beach. / I have heard the mermaids singing, each to each" "Prufrock" (123-124). His reveries thus return as he enters Brown's final stage of crystallization. As if to further substantiate Brown's observation concerning this stage, Prufrock exchanges "the women [that] come and go / Talking of

Michelangelo" with "mermaids singing, each to each" (13-14, 35-6, 124). Prufrock finds himself in a relationship with objects of love that are inventions of his imagination. His doubts do not retreat without a fight, however, as he wonders, "I do not think that [the mermaids] will sing to me," realizing that his fantasies, because they are his own imaginings, may not reciprocate his love for them (125). Ultimately, however, like Brown's lover in his final stage, Prufrock has intentionally replaced the real with the ideal despite his better judgment.

If Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" depicts the passion of love, then Pound's *Hugh Selwyn Mauberley* complements Eliot's poem by asserting the artistic power of affectionate love. In order to "make it new," as he says in the *Cantos*, Pound must grapple with what passes for modern art, namely, shoddy reproductions that have cheapened love (1993, 53/265). If art emanates from love and in turn informs our understanding of love, then the art of the "medallion" criticized in *Mauberley* (1990, 202), that is, of mass-produced objects, reflects and influences the modern sensibility toward love as an easily-obtained, easily-discarded thing, a mere possession "Decreed in the market place" (187). Tired of rehearsing the same vulgar love in the same vulgar art, *Mauberley* attempts to breathe life into modern decadence, to achieve a true act of creation, to raise art from the dead. If Prufrock is "Lazarus, come from the dead" (94) then Pound is the savior whose own voice of Mauberley "strove to resuscitate the dead art / Of poetry" (185).

In order to perform this miracle, Pound must first commune with "dead art," and so he begins his work with three poems reflecting upon the shortcomings of modernity and modern poetry. The first of these, "E. P. Ode Pour L'Election De Son Sepulchre" considers the voice of Mauberley as an example of what no to do as an artist (185). The second questions how living art could result from dead modernity given that art is supposed to reflect the spirit of its age (186). The third section then traces how the downfall of poetry through the ages corresponds to the degradation of love (186-7). "E. P. Ode Pour L'Election De Son Sepulchre" condemns Mauberley for trying "to maintain 'the sublime' / In the old sense," despite being "out of key with his time" (185). Pound suggests that however proficient and admirable the poetry of previous ages may have been, aesthetic taste is at least somewhat historically determined, and so what reflects the climate of one age is inappropriate for another. For example, Victorian verse composed in the twentieth century, no matter how ingenious, could only be considered artful if taken ironically, but not if read straightforwardly. As Pound (1935b) asserts in "The Serious Artist," the form and the content of a poem must harmonize or else "you have either an intentional burlesque or you have rotten art" (51). Prufrock's rhyming lines, for example, would look like a poor attempt at a formal composition to anyone with older sensibilities about art, but read ironically they constitute original verse.

In Pound's view, then, because he rejects his time and "half savage country," Mauberley also rejects art. He is "Bent resolutely" on the impossible task of "wringing lilies from the acorn," or of expecting the same kind of old art to grow from a different seed of time (185). Like Prufrock, he abides in a world of illusion, though his is not the Romantic, but the Homeric world (185).[15] Like Prufrock among the mermaids, he would rather dwell in the world of myth than reality, attentively "Observ[ing] the elegance of Circe's hair" (185). The final quatrain suggests that any artist so "Unaffected by 'the march of events'" will be forgotten, and any art "out of key" with the general tune of progress will present "No adjunct to the Muses' diadem," that is, will not constitute a contribution to the canon of fine art (185). Regardless of whether the *son* of "Son Sepulchre" in the title indicates Pound or the fictitious Mauberley, his death is an annihilation.[16] He has accomplished the very thing he hoped to avoid. Every artist seeks immortality through lasting art, for only the achievement of immortality constitutes a true creative act. But in order to attain immortality, in Pound's view, the artist must "make it new" by creating true literature, that is, "news that stays news" (1934, 29). If a work of art is considered old for its time, then it can never be news to begin with. In other words, art will remain relevant only if it is relevant upon inception, for it will always maintain that element of excitement that characterized it for its first audience. But Homeric or Victorian verse written now would be a mere curiosity. It would be like something new made to look old, like a portrait stamped countless times upon the face of a coin, or, to use Pound's word, like a "medallion" (1990, 202).

To apply Brown's analysis of love to Pound's understanding of art, the difference between the passion of love and the affection of love is the difference between the medallion and the true masterpiece. Whereas in both cases the former is a mere copy of the finer thing, the latter constitutes a true procreative act, a true *poiesis*. Just as Brown argues that passionate love is a psychical disease, so does Pound argue that Mauberlian poetry is a corruption of art. And if passion is disease and if the final end of disease is death, then by extension Mauberlian poetry must be a kind of "dead art" (185). Likewise, if affection is a life-giving, reproductive force, then by extension that Poundian poetry which seeks to "make it new" must be the poetry of life, of true love. "E. P. Ode Pour L'Election De Son Sepulchre," therefore, constitutes Pound's deliberate selection of the living poetry of affectionate love over the dead poetry of passionate love, albeit embedded ironically in a dismal ode.

In order to "make it new," Pound must find a way to express affectionate erotic love in modernity, and this task, I argue, is the general problem at stake in *Mauberley*. The

[15] C.f. Ruthven's *A Guide to Ezra Pound's Personae*, p. 129.

[16] As Espey (1955) points out in *Ezra Pound's Mauberley*, from the time of the first scholarship on *Mauberley* critics have devised differing and contradictory theories on who is speaking and when (13).

poem that most nearly completes this task is "Envoi" at the end of the first part, but even this three-part work is problematic (195). The date of 1919 highlights the paradox of the poem as a post-war modern verse composed in the antiquated language typical of most of *Personae*. Indeed, "Envoi" is strikingly "out of key with [its] time," and yet the triumph of the poem is that it endures despite its archaic diction. "Envoi" does not strike the reader as "dead art" but as living prosody precisely because it blends the old with the new in a form mimetic of its content, namely, affectionate love. For instance, the first line conveys an intimacy expressed in the modern diction of "Go, dumb-born book," but this diction soon gives way to the *thee*'s and *thou*'s of "Tell her that sang me once that song of Lawes: / Hadst thou but song / As thou hast subjects known" (195). In addition, the slant rhyme of *lie-longevity* at the end of the stanza tempts the reader to affect an archaic or strange accent in order to force the rhyme. However, the irregularity of the rhyme offsets its effects. Thus, given the poem's diction and rhyme, the reader expects to find a traditional verse form, an expectation undermined with modern influence.

These contradictory formal elements instantiate the irony of the first stanza as an apology demonstrating the poet's virtuosity. Commanding his book to ask his lady to excuse "Even my faults that heavy upon me lie," he promises to "build her glories their longevity" through the very "dumb-born" poetry he hopes will prove everlasting (195). The playfulness of addressing the book rather than the lady directly and the skill displayed in this apology lend freshness to the work despite its outmoded diction. This novelty synchronizes with the modern formal elements to render a new expression of apostrophe, a trope Pound adopts from Edmund Waller (Ruthven 1969, 140-141) and Catullus. In other words, through a harmony of form and content, Pound makes the old look new in "Envoi," the exact inverse of how Mauberlian art makes the new look old with the mass produced medallion.

In the second stanza of "Envoi," the speaker introduces a metaphor as poignant as it is ingenious. Calling the woman's songs "treasure in the air," the speaker "bid[s] them live / As roses might, in magic amber laid," (1990, 195). Pound employs catachresis (mixed metaphor) to liken the lady's songs first to "treasure" and then to "roses." Implicitly, then, the "magic amber" in which the roses lie is a metaphor for the poem itself that praises the lady's "graces." This rose encased in amber thus symbolizes the affinity between the woman's song and the man's verse and captures the unity of man and woman in a single image of Brownian affectionate love. Such love is truly procreative and artistic, resulting in lasting art and lasting love "braving time." Pound's image for affectionate love, therefore, is the feminine rose impregnating the masculine amber, thus enabling the speaker to partake in the act of reproduction by creating his own offspring, namely his poems.

As I have argued, Pound achieves this reconciliation of the old and new by developing a poetics of Brownian affectionate love, as opposed to Eliot's poetics of passionate love

exemplified in "Prufrock." Of course, as Brown describes it, the torture of passionate love results in suppressed emotions that in turn incite neuroses. As I have demonstrated, "Prufrock" very much instantiates this process in a voice that continually represses his reason's doubts about the objects of his passion and whose own neuroses instigate a fear of death. Pound's "Envoi" suggests, on the other hand, that because it partakes in lasting beauty, the poetry of affectionate love incites the life-giving affects of love. This application of psychology to poetry, therefore, has highlighted a distinction between the poetics of Eliot and Pound, a poetics so often conflated as simply "Modernist." Eliot's "Prufrock" instantiates an affliction unto death, whereas Pound's *Mauberley* creates something new – the living poetry of affectionate love.

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LETTURE

PAOLO BUGLIANI

LA MANO DEL SAGGISTA

W. H. Auden tra saggio e poesia

ABSTRACT: This essay aims at analysing three longer poems by W. H. Auden from the 1940s ("Letter to Lord Byron", "New Year Letter" and "The Sea and the Mirror"), in which the author manages to articulate his personal reflections about some quite complex theoretical issues, mainly that of the mimetic rapport between Art and World, borrowing the form of the literary epistle ("Letter to Lord Byron", "New Year Letter") or creating a very peculiar hybrid of drama and poetry ("The Sea and The Mirror"). The paper's goal will be to highlight Auden's ability to coalesce creation and critique, a remarkable end that the poet pursued though a subtle process of "essayification" of his poetry.

KEYWORDS: W. H. Auden, Essay, Poetry, "Letter to Lord Byron," "New Year Letter," *The Sea and The Mirror*

Il saggista poeta

Nella sua incondizionata lode della poesia di Auden, Alfonso Berardinelli isola una caratteristica fondamentale di questa figura letteraria la quale, (non solo) secondo lui, meriterebbe una più diffusa e rigorosa disamina critica in Italia. Questo tratto distintivo, esposto in maniera tanto immediata da tradire immediatamente l'affinità tra i due, non è altro che una profonda mancanza di essenzialità poetica, derivante da una superfetazione metaforica delle sue poesie, da un ammasso semiotico e da un intreccio di livelli di senso, che comporta l'impossibilità, al momento del giudizio critico, di esaurirne in poche righe il fascinoso polimorfismo:

> Auden è stato un poeta prolifico non semplicemente nel senso che ha scritto molto e che ha pubblicato molti libri, ma anche in un senso meno esteriore e quantitative. C'è infatti in ognuna delle sue poesie un'energia fluente che tende più alla dilatazione, all'accumulo, alla crescita, alla variazione esplicativa e alla ramificazione incontrollata delle immagini che alla densità concentrata. Auden è un poeta loquace, eloquente, diffuso, analitico. (Berardinelli 2007, 139)

Proprio una qualità accumulativa sorregge la descrizione dell'io poetico che inaugura la sezione "People and Places" di *Another Time* (1940), componimento che nei *Collected Poems* del 1973 prenderà, assieme a correzioni e modifiche, anche il titolo di "As He Is"[1]. Questa misteriosa terza persona, oltre che ristagnare in una nube di voluta indeterminatezza che ne accresce la vividezza enunciativa, è legittimamente equiparabile ad un archetipo dell'essere umano, che emerge dal vuoto "così come è" per andarsi a posizionare nell'indefinibile: egli è sciame di caratteri mischiati e fusi, cuciti assieme in un profilo singolare da un qualche processo misterioso ed esoterico.

Prima di interrogarsi sul significato di uno in particolare di tali appellativi è utile pensare a quale effetto la presenza ravvicinata di così tanti qualificatori provochi sul lettore. La strategia retorica che sta alla base di questa presentazione è quella dell'aggiunzione, che, canonicamente, si distingue in ripetizione o accumulazione. "As He Is" si regge sull'epiteto, pratica di accumulazione subordinante, che collega un nome ad elementi da esso dipendenti, i qualificatori. In realtà, vista l'immaterialità del soggetto, e vista la forte connotazione nominale dei qualificatori (in particolare "Brothered-One" e "Not-Alone") l'accumulazione assomiglia più da vicino ad un'enumerazione coordinante, che permette al lettore di cogliere simultaneamente un insieme nelle sue parti e alla elencazione di queste (Garavelli 2003, 218). Accumulare caratteri, oltre che condividere lo stesso spirito strutturale dello *stream of consciousness*, significa sottomettersi all'istanza retorica di cataloghi, catene di epiteti, endiadi, zeugmi, enallagi e ipallagi, brutalmente rubricabile come soqquadro attributivo. L'io che egli mette in scena è un'entità nominativa, e l'elenco di qualificatori arriva ad assomigliare ad un catalogo omerico di personaggi distinti, una summa di caratteri minimali, che solo alla fine si riconoscono in un'individualità unitaria. L'etichetta più peculiare, dalla quale si intende far partire la riflessione di queste pagine, si palesa quasi immediatamente, ed è quella di *saggista:*

> Beneath the hot incurious sun,
> Past stronger beasts and fairer
> He picks his way, a living gun,
> With gun and lens and bible,
> A militant enquirer,
> The friend, the rash, the enemy,
> The *essayist,* the able,
> Able at times to cry. (Auden 2013, 14)[2]

[1] Un altro titolo, apposto nel 1958, era "Able At Times To Cry".

[2] La citazione proviene dalla versione bilingue di *Another Time* (2013 Adelphi a cura di Nicola Gardini) in quanto tale edizione riporta il testo non emendato in alcuni dei suoi qualificatori più significativi. Per

Se la prima *carmenum persona* è un saggista, è naturale pensare che Auden volesse elevare l'animo saggistico a condizione essenziale dell'uomo moderno di cui, dopotutto, egli si fece cantore. Per di più, il fatto che Auden sia stato definito "the first poet writing in English who felt at home in the twentieth century" (Mendelson 1979, ix), corrobora ulteriormente la rilevanza di tale processo di 'saggificazione'. Questa elevazione della natura saggistica sembra, però, cozzare con una delle più note affermazioni critiche di Auden, con cui egli sembra voler consegnare un'immagine di sé ai sui suoi lettori quale poeta molto prevenuto rispetto all'intrinseco valore della scrittura per saggi, che viene presentata come subordinata e dettata da contingenze non già esistenziali, ma di sussistenza:

> I have never written a line of criticism except in response to a demand by others for a lecture, an introduction, a review etc.; though I hope that some love went into their writing, I wrote them because I needed the money. (Auden 2012, 1)[3]

Affermare che si scrivono saggi, in ultima analisi, solo per finanziare l'attività poetica, è per lo meno provocatorio, e deve essere letto come arguzia discorsiva dettata da uno spirito di *understatement* che utilizza ironicamente tali *agudezas*: per Auden, senza dubbio, lo scrivere saggi era, seppure montaliano 'secondo mestiere', comunque un terreno di prova imprescindibile per testare la propria adeguatezza a fronteggiare con abilità critica quella età dell'ansia per cui divenne giustamente famoso:

> Despite his comments on the matter, in the many book reviews that Auden himself wrote, there is little sign that this work is being done mainly out of a sense of duty to his bank manager: on the contrary, he seems to be absorbed by whatever is set before him, and he creates the cumulative sense that all the reading and reviewing, drawing on literature, science, philosophy, history, theology, music and anything else that catches his interest [...], are being absorbed in a larger project – one which may be called simply *Auden*. (O'Brien 2013, 329)

Ciononostante, questo progetto umanistico (nel senso edulcorato di 'incentrato su un essere umano ben distinto') passava quindi attraverso un saggismo peculiare, che si

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una questione di coerenza con una tesi sulla produzione Audeniana che è limitata agli anni Quaranta, non si è visto adatto rifarsi a modifiche degli anni Sessanta. Ciononostante i poemi lunghi oggetto di questa lettura saggistica di Auden, sono citati dall'edizione dei *Collected Poems,* non avendo subito processo di modificazione così vistosa come invece toccò in sorte agli altri componimenti.

[3] È molto interessante confrontare a questo proposito l'introduzione che Philip Larkin fece ai suoi scritti di stampo critico, cui attribuì, molto significamente, il titolo di *Required Writing*: "Although I rarely accepted a literary assignment without a sinking of the heart, nor finished it without an inordinate sense of relief, to undertake such commissions no doubt exercised part of my mind that would otherwise have remained dormant, and to this extent they probably did no harm" (Larkin 1983: 12).

rapportava alle forme poetiche tradizionali in una dialettica complessa e affascinante da cui emerge un nuovo *modus poetandi* che non poteva accontentarsi di una meccanica ripetizione delle forme. Per Auden, il saggio, così come lo tramandava il padre del genere, Michel de Montaigne, non poteva che portare con sé un umanistico recupero della dimensione individuale, che è il nuovo fulcro della facoltà di giudizio. L'individuo particolare entra prepotentemente in scena, dimostrandosi un cardine essenziale di qualsiasi tipo di giudizio. Il modello di saggismo proposto da Montaigne, che in molte occasioni volentieri descrive la sua propria impresa letteraria (Klaus 1991, 1), è quello di una prosa discreta, ma che può ergersi a latore della natura umana nel suo complesso:

> Je propose une vie basse et sans lustre, c'est tout un. On attache aussi bien toute la philosophie morale à une vie populaire et privée que à une vie de plus riche estoffe: chaque homme porte la forme entiere de l'humaine condition. Les autheurs se communiquent au peuple par quelque marque particuliere et estrangere; moy le premier par mon estre universel, comme Michel de Montaigne, non comme grammairien ou poete ou jurisconsulte. Si le monde se plaint de quoy je parle trop de moy, je me plains de quoy il ne pense seulement pas à soy. Mais est-ce raison que, si particulier en usage, je pretende me rendre public en cognoissance? (Montaigne 1978, 804)

Tra Auden e Montaigne esisteva senza dubbio un legame a doppia mandata, e altrettanto indubbio è che gli *Essais* abbiano fornito un modello essenziale per la postura ideologica del poeta, sebbene sia un altro saggista (filosofo) che più frequentemente viene associato dell'estetica audeniana, tale Søren Kierkegaard, certamente per la più palese vena religiosa del suo pensiero. Ma le eco kierkegaardiane non devono sopprimere la filiazione montaigniana, che è testimoniata pure da un mirabile sonetto del 1940, che serve a confermare ulteriormente quanto il modello di uomo (e di descrizione dell'uomo stesso) desumibile dall'esempio degli *Essais* sia entrato nell'amalgama ideologico da cui Auden trasse la propria *Weltanschauung*[4]:

> Outside his library window he could see
> A gentle landscape terrified of grammar
> Cities where lisping was compulsory,
> And provinces where it was death to stammer

[4] L'autenticità del lascito di Montaigne alla poesia di Auden è chiara anche dall'entrata in scena del bordolese nella *New Year Letter*, che ne fa il propugnatore di un Dubbio che è base e essenza di ogni coscienza moderna: "Out of the noise and horror, the / Opinions of artillery, / The barracks chatter and the yell / Of charging cavalry, the smell / Of poor opponents roasting, out / Of Luther's faith and Montaigne's doubt, / The epidemic of translations, / The Councils of navigations, / The confiscations and the suits, / The scholar's scurrilous disputes / Over the freedom of the Will / And right of Princes to do ill, / Emerged a new *Anthropos,* an / Empiric Economic Man, / The urban, prudent, and inventive, / Profit his rational incentive / And Work his whole *exercitus,* / The individual let loose / To guard himself, at liberty / To starve or be forgotten, free / To feel in splendid isolation / Or drive himself about creation / In a closed cab of Occupation". (Auden 1994, 230)

The hefty sprawled, too tired to care: it took
This donnish undersexed conservative
To start a revolution and to give
The Flesh its weapons to defeat the Book.

When devils drive the reasonable wild,
They strip their adult century so bare,
Love must be re-grown from the sensual child,

To doubt becomes a way of definition,
Even belles lettres legitimate a prayer,
And laziness a movement of contrition. (Auden 1994, 301-302)

Montaigne guarda dalla sua *ivory tower* un mondo irrazionale, dove i difetti di pronuncia o diventano legge, o si rischia la vita per un balbettio[5]. Il dominio di queste voci dissonanti e difformi, però, è un peana alle idiosincrasie, una celebrazione di quella Carne, polpa concreta senza cui la descrizione dell'*humaine condition* non avrebbe luogo[6], della materialità dell'esistenza che fluisce così spontaneamente nei suoi *Essais* e da essi trasuda con così splendida naturalezza. La "Carne" è quella del giureconsulto in pensione che vorrebbe descriversi "tutto nudo", per fornire un ritratto sincero ai famigliari che l'hanno perso. La chiusa del sonetto evoca con forza icastica quella pratica religiosa (così rousseauiana da essere immediatamente collegata, prima che alla fede, alla letteratura autobiografica) che la protestante Inghilterra aveva ben volentieri lasciato in eredità esclusiva alla pia Irlanda: l'*Act of Contrition*, in cui un fedele espone gli interstizi più reconditi e oscuri del proprio io ad una voce muta che poi, per forza di cose, lo giudicherà. Proprio come la *Preface au Lecteur,* in cui la nudità viene vista come metodo autenticante i pensieri miscellanei: l'io deve apparire, deve emergere, sgorgare dalla pagina in maniera non troppo manifesta, ma pure cospicua.

[5] Un commento del sonetto vede Montaigne come l'esiliato che semina il terrore in uno scenario idillico. Seppure Montaigne sia, come sostenuto nell'analisi, in favore netto della vittoria della Carne sul libro, in questa sede lo si vuole interpretare come ennesima incarnazione della dicotomia, e in questo caso in senso costruttivo, essendo egli una delle prime valvole di sfogo di tale rapporto conflittuale. L'analisi è condivisibile quando invece afferma che "Both intellect and religion fall victim to excess of isolation, when this exile leads to a failure to communicate with one's environment" (Emig 2000, 134).

[6] È dopotutto sul proprio "cul" che l'essere umano Montaigne porta a conclusione il percorso dei suoi *Essais*.

Il poeta critico

Quindi, per un poeta che voglia fare critica, parrebbe istintivo pensare al *medium* saggistico. Eppure, la scrittura in versi è difficilmente accantonabile al momento di produrre giudizi sulla letteratura prodotta da altri: il rapporto di Auden con la critica è perciò un cammino che non può prescindere dalla produzione creativa (Buffoni 2007, 102). In molti punti di *The Dyer's Hand* – raccolta, questa, di saggi propriamente detti – Auden tratteggia il profilo del buon critico: quello che idealmente egli avrebbe voluto giudicasse la sua opera. E seguendo lo spirito di umile circostanzialità che sempre lo distinse, Auden diede consigli molto precisi: il buon critico doveva essere, secondo lui, pure un bravo poeta:

> Whatever his defects, a poet at least thinks a poem more important than anything which can be said about it, he would rather it were good than bad, the least thing he wants is that it should be like one of its own, and his experience as maker should have taught him to recognize quickly whatever a critical question is important, unimportant but real, unreal because unanswerable, or just absurd (Auden 2012, 39-40)

Auden propone, più che un manifesto di critica letteraria, un manifesto di poetica, sempre prefissando le sue osservazioni con cautele (come ad esempio quando fa riferimento alla *Primary e Secondary Imagination* coleridgeana) di questo tipo:

> Knowing all this, and knowing that you know it, I shall now proceed to make some general statements of my own. I hope that they are not nonsense, but I cannot be sure. At least, even as emotive noises, I find them useful to me. The only verifiable facts that I can offer are these. (Auden 2012, 43)

L'Auden critico, quindi, non si erge mai su un trono di onniscienza teoretica, neppure nel 1953, quando la sua carriera creativa senza dubbio glielo permetterebbe. Egli fa proprio un atteggiamento che ancora una volta è montaigniano: "Que sçay-je?" (Montaigne 1978, 527), lo stesso dubbio ontologico che autorizzerà la collocazione di Montaigne assieme a Lutero, come uno dei padri dell'"Empiric Economic Man" (Auden 1994, 230) nella *New Year Letter.* Quindi Montaigne fornisce un *modus intelligendi* piuttosto che una forma letteraria da imitare. Lo spirito saggistico (Obaldia 1995, 23[7]),

[7] "Everything about the essay contributes to looking at it – or for it – in other genres, which turns evanescence and obsolescence into its very substance. Ultimately, this must be because the essayistic supplements something which is already present in the genres in relation to which it is defined". O ancora "The essayistic elements contained in such works as these are not parasitical or excisable parts; they represent compositional features wholly essential to the author's aesthetic vision. Very often, the essay operates *inside* works of fiction in a conflictual manner that may be read, as in Hawthorne, Melville, or Kundera, as an analogue of other contentions (thematic, psychological, ideological) within the story" (Atwan 1995, 6)

che trascende le frontiere testuali per divenire quasi una disposizione euristica, trasforma il saggista in un'entità di frontiera, che può a buon diritto essere rintracciato alle spalle di qualsiasi tipologia di scrittore creativo:

> Il saggista si muove di solito con agio in una zona di difficile trattamento tra letteratura e filosofia, con una scrittura immaginosa che si tende per altro entro una nervatura intellettuale di affluenti intenzioni intellettuali, ed esprime pensieri allo stato di proposta […] suggestioni vive ed efficaci di inquietudini ideali, argute e libere opinioni da provare, idee non sistematiche nel senso che non fruiscono della garanzia di un sistema compiuto e definitivo, ma promosse spesso da motivi etici, sociali, di alta pedagogia, anche estetici. (Anceschi 1966, 24)

Lo spirito del saggio, genere definito magistralmente da Adorno come essenzialmente eretico (Adorno 1979, 30), diventa il valore aggiunto per una critica letteraria che Auden vuole portar fuori dai luoghi canonici in cui tradizionalmente essa esprimeva i frutti del suo lavoro intellettuale. Auden, in altre parole, vuole presentare ai propri lettori i frutti dei suoi *intellectual musings* non solo sotto forma di saggi critici, o monografie (che pure produsse in quantità assai considerevole), ma incarnando quello che George Steiner etichetterà da lì a qualche decennio esecutore particolare categoria di interprete che "'acts out the material before him so as to give it intelligible life" (Steiner 2010, 7). Auden quindi, essendo un abile poeta che intende essere anche un buon critico, non può accontentarsi della forma che Montaigne aveva lasciato in eredità ai posteri, *lato sensu*, la prosa**:** egli, da buon esecutore steineriano, vuole fare critica creando. Questo processo è messo in pratica magistralmente dall'Auden esecutore della *Tempesta* di Shakespeare, nel suo *The Sea and the Mirror*, ibrido di verso e prosa, lirica e frammento, tra "liricizzazione" e "saggificazione" dell'originale, vuole essere null'altro che un'espressione impeccabile di quella mescolanza di spirito creativo e critico cui Steiner non sa trovare un nome, ma che sintetizza quale sostanziale traduzione che espone il giudizio di valore tramite una rimodulazione della materia grezza che dopo l'atto critico diviene opera creativa che si sdogana dalla contingenza del giudizio fatto da colui che non è addentro ai misteri della creazione:

> The readings, the interpretations, the critical judgements of art, literature and music, from within art, literature and music are of a penetrative authority rarely equalled by those offered from outside, by those propounded by the non-creator, this is to say the reviewer, the critic, the academic. (Steiner 2010, 13)

È assai difficile non scorgere dietro a queste posizioni la mano di Oscar Wilde, geniale tintore-saggista che al crepuscolo dell'Ottocento aveva prodotto quello che è il testo imprescindibile per qualsiasi riflessione dei rapporti tra Creazione e Critica, *The Critica s Artist.* In esso Gilbert, virgiliano accompagnatore del più sopito intelletto di Ernest nei meandri della riflessione critica, afferma con una lucidità sconcertante ciò che istintivamente tutti sanno, a sua detta, ossia che "there has never been a creative age that

has not been critical also. For it is the critical faculty that invents fresh forms. The tendency of art is to repeat itself" (Wilde 1905, 123). La grande sfida della critica, ossia il plasmare forme nuove per la produzione creativa, non può prescindere da un dato primario fondamentale, ossia, l'impressione:

> It has been said […] that the proper aim of Criticism is to see the object as in itself it really is. But this is a very serious error, and takes no cognizance of Criticism's most perfect form, which is in its essence purely subjective, and seeks to reveal its own secret and not the secret of another. For the highest Criticism deals with art not as expressive but as impressive purely. (Wilde 1905, 139-140)

Una legittimazione delle impressioni di quello spirito critico che ha fatto propria la legge più intima del saggio, che sempre secondo Adorno e la sua visione di "metodica ametodicità" (Adorno 1978, 17), il mettere in discussione discutendo, il contrastare i dogmi preconcetti opponendo alla freddezza del sistema oggettivo la carica vitale di una visione soggettiva e parziale. Peana alle impressioni che mostra, a ragione, quanto Auden sia in realtà figlio di un'epoca profondamente diversa da quella del Modernismo, che in Eliot trovava il più lucido e spietato boia della vena idiosincratica della critica, in un saggio perentoriamente (e minacciosamente) intitolato "The Perfect Critic":

> He, if anyone, would be said to expose a sensitive and cultivated mind – cultivated, that is, by thee accumulation of a considerable variety of impressions from all the arts and several languages – before an 'object': and his criticism, if anyone's would be said to exhibit to us, like the plate, the faithful record of the impressions, more numerous or more refined than our own, upon a mind more sensitive than our own. A record, we observe, which is also an interpretation, a translation; for it must itself impose impressions upon us, and these impressions are as much created as transmitted by the criticism. (Eliot 1997, 2-3)

Le impressioni di Auden, così cariche di vitalismo, di idiosincrasie e di *vis polemica,* seppero imboccare molte strade, tutte fondate su un comune spirito di scettico antidogmatismo e tutte colorate da tinte intimistiche e quasi confessionali. Se il guscio esterno molto spesso prendeva la forma del verso, sicuramente Montaigne non si sarebbe affatto offeso, in quanto lo spirito che animava tante di queste sortite non mutava da quello che lui stesso aveva mostrato al tramonto del Cinquecento, e che era stato efficacemente riconfigurato da Musil come un *Diktat* intellettuale che da forma testuale era divenuto un'epistemologia eudemonistica della modernità:

> L'interpretazione della parola "saggio" come tentativo allude solo vagamente al suo modello principale, quello letterario: un saggio infatti non è l'espressione provvisoria e secondaria di una convinzione che, a una migliore occasione, potrebbe essere elevata a verità, ma altrettanto facilmente riconosciuta come errore […]; un saggio è invece la forma unica e immutabile che la vita interiore di un uomo assume in un pensiero decisivo. Nulla gli è più estraneo del carattere irresponsabile e approssimativo delle idee che viene chiamato soggettivo, ma neppure "vero e falso", "intelligente e sciocco" sono concetti applicabili a tali pensieri, i quali però sottostanno a leggi non meno rigorose di quanto appaiano delicate e inesprimibili. (Musil 1998, 348)

Il neo mostrato a Lord Byron

Sono in particolare alcune poesie degli anni Quaranta che attirano maggiormente l'attenzione in tal senso, configurandosi come punti di contatto tra istanze critiche e creative, tra saggio e lirica, tra osservazione e declamazione. Potrebbero, per comodità, essere etichettati come "poemi saggistici", poiché in essi l'elemento mutuato dal saggio rimane evidente a livello profondo: la loro forma, infatti, non lascerebbe trapelare alcuna istanza critica, tanto è perfettamente costruita seguendo rigide regole metriche e versificatorie.

Il primo esempio di commistione è da rintracciarsi in quello che è essenzialmente il documento di riconoscimento dell'Auden poeta, quella che tra le *Letters From Iceland* (1937), sue e di Louis MacNiece, è quella che più assomiglia alla trasposizione in versi di un *Künstlerroman,* la "Letter to Lord Byron". Questa missiva in versi di argomento poetico, alla cui base soggiace l'intento di portare avanti una prima riflessione sui meccanismi della creazione poetica, e nello specifico del cammino di formazione del giovane poeta. La "Letter to Lord Byron", se da una parte si inserisce quindi entro una tradizione consolidata, avviata da Orazio con la sua *Epistula ad Pisones,* dall'altra è sintomo di un'insoddisfazione per le forme metriche canoniche, e della conseguente ricerca di un mezzo di espressione personale. Auden si inserisce, *sui generis,* in una fase estrema dello sperimentalismo formale modernista, seppure eleggendo a meta non il sovvertimento rivoluzionario, ma una sapiente arte di raccomodamento delle forme. Anziché dissolte in atomistiche rovine poco praticabili, le forme tradizionali sono per Auden oggetti da (ri)modellare, a cui la sua sapiente maestria di artefice doveva conferire un'elasticità tale da far accogliere entro i confini, tradizionalmente così angusti, le istanze più disparate; autobiografia, critica, odeporica, nulla sembra fuori posto dopo la sapiente azione del poeta:

Every exciting letter has enclosures,
And so shall this – a bunch of photographs,
Some out of focus, some with wrong exposures,
Press cuttings, gossip, maps, statistics, graphs;
I don't intend to do the thing by halves.
I'm going to be very up to date indeed.
It is a collage that you're going to read.

I want a form that's large enough to swim in,
And talk on any subject that I choose,
From natural scenery to men and women,
Myself, the arts, the European news:
And since she's on a holiday, my Muse
Is out to please, find everything delightful

And only now and then be mildly spiteful (Auden 1994, 84)

Auden vuole sfruttare al massimo le possibilità dell'epistolografia, ossia la vena di immediata e irriflessa condivisione del privato: ciononostante, il guscio esterno dell'epistola poetica è una trapunta di *rhyme royal,* che lo mette in dialogo direttamente con Geoffrey Chaucer, padre della letteratura inglese. Il nitore formale conferito dalla *rhyme royal* fa da contrappunto alla tempestosa congerie di contenuti eterogenei che la "Letter" veicola. La strada dell'epistola in versi di argomento critico era stata aperta da Alexander Pope, autore di meravigliosi componimenti cui il poeta augusteo diede, molto significativamente, il titolo di "Essays". Dall'*Essay on Criticism* del 1711, fino all'*Essay on Man* del 1734, passando per i *Moral Essays* degli anni 1731-35 (originariamente furono pubblicati come *Epistles*) Pope fece propria la necessità, che per certi versi è proprio quella che Auden esprimeva nella sua personale confidenza a Byron, di trovare un mezzo espressivo capace di veicolare contenuti che non erano precipuamente confessionali o lirici, ma primariamente ideologici. Sebbene elogiato unicamente per la sua abilità versificatori, Pope, intitolando Saggi i propri componimenti, fece propria una tradizione variegata e multiforme, che in Inghilterra aveva prodotto, oltre ai canonici *Essayes* baconiani, anche i *Caratteri* di John Earle, le riflessioni sulla malinconia di Robert Burton, e sul calare del Seicento, forse il più famoso degli *Essays,* quello cioè, *Concerning Human Understanding*[8].

Il richiamo al metro chauceriano mediato dall'esperienza di Pope permette di scorgere l'atteggiamento che Auden intende mantenere nei confronti della tradizione: la scelta di Byron è in effetti, per ammissione stessa dell'io poetico, decisione impulsiva, dettata dalla semplice contingenza dell'aver apprezzato il *Don Juan* durante il viaggio in nave verso Reikiavik. Byron diventa il destinatario solamente, quindi, per il formato tascabile della sua opera: assieme a Jane Austen, era il compagno delle dimensioni giuste per un'avventura tra i ghiacci. Certo, se così stessero veramente le cose, l'insulto a Byron sarebbe irreparabile: in realtà il più romantico tra i poeti romantici, icona stessa del suo tempo, era il destinatario perfetto per cominciare quel lungo cammino critico che porterà a *The Enchafèd Flood,* riflessione monografica che Auden diede alle stampe nel 1946 dopo un ciclo di lezioni, tenute l'anno precedente, alla Virginia University. Chiamare in causa Byron e il Romanticismo implicava pure mettere in primo piano quello che del

[8] Byron, per di più, era stato autore, ai suoi esordi, della satira *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers,* dove al fine immediato di ridicolizzare l'*élite* letteraria, si mescola, esattamente come accade per l'Auden che si rivolge a Byron, seppure con toni per nulla caustici, la pulsione critica a quella intimistica: ossia, criticando causticamente la miopia di coloro che si arrogano il diritto di scegliere un canone, Lord Byron metteva a parte i suoi lettori anche del suo personale cammino letterario, presentandosi come alternativa alla stagnazione della letteratura.

movimento era la più canonica e antologizzata delle preoccupazioni teoretiche: l'ispirazione, il genio, il mistero della creazione poetica.

Auden sottoscriverà una versione più mitigata della mistica ispirazione romantica, senza il *côté* di misteriosa elezione che vede il poeta come demiurgo poetico (che era stata la base di tanta letteratura surrealista), sposando un ideale di poeta come quasi un giardiniere, che deve curare la pianta della creazione con un sapiente *labor limae* (Auden 1986, 310). Questa immagine, che sembra attingere direttamente alla famosa prefazione all'edizione americana di *Mrs Dalloway* del 1928, per cui i "books are flowers or fruit stuck here and there on a tree which has its roots deep down in the earth of our earliest life, or our first experience" (Woolf 1986, 549), ma in realtà è forse Keats, con il suo meno idiosincratico assioma descritto a John Taylor nel febbraio del 1818 a fornire la migliore analogia con il processo creativo audeniano ("Another axiom: -That if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves of a tree, it had better not come at all"; Keats 2009, 66).

Woolf, comunque, fornisce una suggestiva chiave di lettura della metafora botanica: il parlar di sé è indubbiamente una caratteristica fondamentale del poeta critico, che segue con precisione la prerogativa montaigniana di arrogarsi il diritto all'*autoportrait* saggistico in virtù della capacità del singolo di farsi carico de "la forme entiere de l'humaine condition" (Montaigne 1978, 805). In ossequio a questa esposizione dell'io, Auden propone un'*autoportrait* molto peculiare, che prende la forma di una magnifica dichiarazione delle generalità "da passaporto", lapidaria e quasi brutale: ed è proprio la fedeltà somatica a stupire il lettore nella conclusione della lettera, in quanto Auden, se fino ad allora aveva volutamente messo Byron a parte un poco della sua impresa (soddisfacendo così l'istanza odeporica), e della sua personale *Weltanschauung* letteraria, adesso si pone come esemplare privilegiato del suo tempo, autorizzato ad indulgere in una descrizione diretta di sé proprio in virtù di una possibile traducibilità per le generazioni future:

A child may ask when our strange epoch passes,
During a history lesson, "Please, sir, what's
An intellectual of the middle classes?
Is he a maker of ceramic pots
Or does he choose his king by drawing lots?"
What follows now may set him on the rail,
A plain, perhaps a cautionary, tale.

My passport says I'm five feet and eleven,
With hazel eyes and fair (it's tow-like) hair,
That I was born in York in 1907,
With no distinctive markings anywhere.
Which isn't quite correct. Conspicuous there
On my right cheek appears a large brown mole;
I think I don't dislike it on the whole (Auden 1994, 105)

Auden maschera la sua presentazione ponendola come esemplare per gli studenti di storia, autorizza l'autoscatto in virtù di un bilanciamento tra Vita e Arte che trova nel soggetto monologante la sua incarnazione più affidabile. Allo stesso modo, molti decenni più tardi, un infervorato ammiratore russo del poeta si interroga proprio della fascinazione che una foto segnaletica del poeta suscitava in lui, portando alla mente le stesse riflessioni che in tempi moderni la figura di Auden ha provocato nell'opera di Alan Bennett (*The Habit of Art,* 2009), ossia il sottile legame tra autore, opera e mondo:

> Strane cose, le facce dei poeti. In teoria, l'aspetto di uno scrittore non dovrebbe avere la minima importanza per i suoi lettori: il leggere non è un'attività narcisistica, e nemmeno lo scrivere; ma nel momento in cui si conosce e si apprezza una quantità sufficiente di versi di un certo autore, comincia la curiosità e ci s'interroga sulla sua apparenza fisica. Tutto questo, presumibilmente, ha a che fare col sospetto che amare un'opera d'arte significhi riconoscere la verità, o la misura di verità, che l'arte esprime. Insicuri per natura, vogliamo vedere l'artista (che identifichiamo con la sua opera) in modo che la prossima volta ci sia possibile sapere che faccia ha realmente la verità. (Brodskij 2016, 122)

Il catalogo ectoplasmatico

Solo tre anni più tardi, nella *New Year Letter* (1940), Auden dimostrerà che il cammino saggistico *sub specie epistulae* non è terminato, forgiando un nuovo abito da far indossare alle sue riflessioni critiche sull'arte, in cui le seminali intuizioni sulla 'giusta forma' che la dinamica Arte vs. Vita dovesse assumere dentro un'opera, tratteggiato nella "Letter to Lord Byron" raggiungono nella *New Year Letter* un livello ulteriore di approfondimento intellettuale: in altre parole, quello che a Lord Byron veniva cantato direttamente, in questa nuova missiva viene affrontato in maniera più discorsiva. Alla *New Year Letter* manca inoltre un nume tutelare letterario, che seppur muto come Byron aveva comunque stimolato e incalzato il fluire dei pensieri. Una dedicataria, in effetti, c'è: la mecenate di Long Island Elizabeth Mayer, appare accompagnata dalle note dell'organista Dietrich Buxtehude, contemporaneo di Bach la cui musica serve per incarnare quell'ordine che nella poesia è continuamente evocato, e continuamente smentito. Ciononostante, Elizabeth Mayer, pur essendo persona in carne ed ossa, appare, al contrario di Byron, non come destinataria delle riflessioni che la voce poetica esterna, ma si accontenta di restare destinataria extra-testuale[9]. Ma Auden non parla al vuoto, che

[9] In effetti, nella seconda strofe della terza parte, Elizabeth viene chiamata direttamente in causa, ancora tra le note di armonie perfette (Schubert, Mozart e Gluch), ma è più in generale la sua casa che fa da sfondo ad un'epifania: "I felt the unexpected power / That drove our ragged egos in / From the dead-ends at the wedding feast,, / Put shining garments of the least, / Arranged us so that each and all, / The erotic and the logical, / Each felt the *placement* to be such / That he was honoured overmuch" (Auden 1994, 220-21). Questa epifanica comunità è vista da Auden come condizione auspicabile per il futuro.

pure lo scenario di angosciante distruzione delle prime strofe, dove si ricorda lo scoppio della guerra, lascerebbe supporre come possibile scenario poetico. Nella *New Year Letter,* infatti, Auden stila un cospicuo catalogo (ennesima *accumulazione*) di personaggi che occupa la sesta lunga strofe della prima parte. Auden evoca con lapidarie ed icastiche espressioni non già vuoti simulacri, ma "fantasmi eminenti" che si impongono nella memoria del lettore per la felicità con cui egli confeziona i loro epiteti: Dante, Blake, Voltaire, Dryden, Catullo, Tennyson, Baudelaire, Hardy, Rilke e persino Kipling si ergono in tutta la loro statura di "great masters" (Auden 1994, 201) di fronte allo scenario apocalittico della civiltà annichilita dalla barbarie della guerra.[10]

Le riflessioni critiche di Auden, quindi, tra abomini bellici e fantasmi letterari, trovano il loro paradossale *locus amoenus* dove fiorire e imprimersi nelle coscienze individuali. Un richiamo ai mitologici Apollo e Eros serve come preliminare, e vivida messa a fuoco del *letimotiv* Arte vs. Vita, che Auden nella quarta strofe enuncia in maniera tagliente e quasi provocatoria:

> Art in intention is *mimesis*
> But realised, the resemblance ceases;
> Art is not life and cannot be
> A midwife to society,
> For art is a *fait accompli.*
> What they should do, or how or when
> Life-order comes to living men
> It cannot say, for it presents
> Already lived experience
> Through a convention that creates
> Autonomous completed states. (Auden 1994, 201)

Il rifiuto della *mimesis* implica una rottura con una tradizione tanto radicata nella tradizione occidentale da essere quasi diventata una credenza irriflessa, e per Auden è quasi obbligatorio passare in rassegna una congerie di personaggi letterari, religiosi, filosofici, scientifici (finanche emanazioni della superstizione popolare), che egli chiama a puntellare la sua visione artistica, ad favorire la negoziazione di un nuovo *modus poetandi* dopo "The grand apocalyptic dream" (Auden 1994, 206) che stava avvenendo in tutto il mondo dopo i fatali avvenimenti del settembre 1939.

[10] Una poesia del 1952, "Academic Graffiti", Auden perfeziona, con l'aggiunta della mutuazione di una pratica così quotidiana da apparire grottesca, la notazione sintetica, tipica dell'epitaffio, che vorrebbe ridurre una personalità intellettuale ad un succinto elenco (ancora!) delle sue caratteristiche. Memorabile è quello per Kierkegaard: "Søren Kierkegaard / Tried wafully hard / To take The Leap / But fell in a heap". (Auden 1994, 681).

Il contesto storico entra nell'*epistula* mediato da profonde riflessioni che Auden non delega solo alla sua abilità versificatoria, che genera limpidi e fulgenti versi perfettamente costruiti secondo le più antiche norme, ma anche e soprattutto a riflessioni intellettuali che ne confermino, oltre che la validità, la presenza: questa dimensione ulteriore, libresca e intellettuale, emerge chiaramente nella terza parte dell'*epistula*. Nell'ultima sezione, infatti, sullo sfondo di una vigilia di Capodanno che funge da *setting* simbolico per un rinnovamento squadrato da ogni lato tramite le più diverse armi intellettuali, fa capolino una strofe di particolare potere icastico, in cui il poeta, molto montaignianamente, dipinge se stesso all'opera, mentre gli eventi materiali ne infastidiscono il corso creativo:

Around me, pausing as I write,
A tiny object in the night,
Whichever way I look, I mark
Importunate along the dark
Horizon of immediacies
The Flares of desperation rise
From signalers who justly plead
Their cause is piteous indeed:
Bewildered, how can I divine
Which is my true Socratic Sign,
Which of these calls to conscience is
For me the casus foederis,
From all the task submitted, choose
The *Athlon* I must not refuse? (Auden 1994, 224)

L'io poetico torna di nuovo in primo piano, colto nella straziante situazione di dover decidere la dimensione della sua produzione: rimarrà un'arte che tenta di riprodurre un modello di mondo ideale, una porzione di idillio intellettualmente concepito e modellato su una tradizione, oppure l'opera riuscirà ad insinuarsi tra le pieghe della Storia, farsi concreta e concretamente spendibile? Non è importante qui la risposta, ma la modalità che Auden impiega per porsi tale interrogativo. E ancora una volta la risposta potrebbe essere sintetizzata con: "iniettando una buona dose di saggismo ai suoi versi". Questa azione è dimostrata dall'insistito inserimento di richiami intellettuali, come quello, magnifico nella sua complessità, Willem de Sitter (collaboratore di Einstein di una riflessione sulle implicazioni della curvatura dell'Universo), che Auden evoca per tentare una visualizzazione spaziale della sua idea della realtà, e della maledizione della ripetitività: la *mimesis* tradizionale, infatti, non fa che perpetrare un eterno ritorno delle forme poetiche, che perdono irrimediabilmente il loro significato:

In Sitter's swelling universe,
How hard to stretch imagination
To live according to our station.
For we are all insulted by the mere suggestion that we die
Each moment and that each great I

Is but a process in a process
Within a field that never closes;
As proper people find it strange
That we are changed by what we change,
That no event can happen twice
And that no two existences
Can ever be alike; we'd rather
Be perfect copies of our father,
Prefer our *idées fixes* to be
True of a fixed Reality. (Auden 1994, 208)

Questo impasto di pacata riflessione e appassionata declamazione è la base sui cui poggia per intero la *New Year Letter,* che infatti venne redatta di pari passo con un'altra opera, apparsa solo postuma, *The Prolific and the Devourer*, in cui Auden raccolse pensieri frammentari sul modello dei *Pensées* di Pascal. Già la scelta del titolo estremizza la pregnanza che la dicotomia assume per Auden: i versi conclusivi del *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* di William Blake, sono una scelta assai peculiare, che contrappone l'attivo al passivo, il meditativo al produttivo, il pubblico e il privato:

The Prolific and the Devourer: the Artist and the Politician. Let them realise they are enemies, i.e. that each other has a vision of the world which must remain incomprehensible to the other. But let them also realise that they are both necessary and complementary, and further, that there are good and bad politicians, good and bad artists, and that the good must learn to recognise and respect the good. (Auden 1996, 421-422)

Auden, quindi, vuole porre delle antitesi che reggano pur nella mutua tolleranza: non a caso il titolo americano della poesia era *The Double Man:* fatto che assume ancor più significato se si tiene in considerazione il fatto che questa fu la prima poesia realmente 'americana' del poeta. La sfida poetica di Auden non è, quindi, quella di proporre una soluzione alle dicotomie: egli è semplicemente interessato a dimostrare che la letteratura può dimostrarsi una tappa del cammino verso un'ideale comprensione del valore della esistenza umana sulla terra, ossia che c'è spazio, contrariamente a quelle che saranno le ominose preoccupazioni di Adorno sulla possibilità della letteratura post-Auschwitz, per l'Arte nel XX secolo.

Una prosa manichea

Ma è senza dubbio in *The Sea and the Mirror* (1944), che Auden dimostra di aver interiorizzato nella maniera più completa questo progetto di fusione del saggismo critico in forme metriche tradizionali. Questo terzo esempio, cronologicamente più avanzato, abbandona l'involucro epistolare: stavolta è esattamente il testo in giudizio, la *Tempesta*

di William Shakespeare, a fornire il canovaccio strutturale, quasi che la fedeltà alla forma sia l'unica forma di dialogo col "divino" letterario:

> Se Shakespeare è (come è), il dio della letteratura inglese, da questa ovvietà ne discende un'altra: e cioè che per uno scrittore inglese, qualunque genere letterario appartenga, il mondo si presenta anzitutto in forma di teatro. (Berardinelli 2008, 235)

The Sea si svela ai propri lettori come un'alternanza di monologhi, a partire da quello dello *Stage Manager* ai critici (Prefazione), quello di Prospero ad Ariel (I), la polifonia di *asides* del *Supporting Cast, Sotto Voce* (II), per arrivare poi al denso monologo di Calibano al pubblico (III) e al breve congedo di Ariel a Calibano (Poscritto). Questa alternanza dialogica di voci è significativamente accompagnata da un altrettanto variegato florilegio di forme metriche, evidente soprattutto nella II sezione, in cui ognuno dei personaggi fa sfoggio di una forma diversa, avvalorata da un *refrain* conclusivo speculare. Il caso di Ferdinando (sonetto) e Miranda (*villanelle*) è significativo non solo perché tra i due è evidente una comunanza di pulsioni erotiche, ma anche perché i loro interventi aprono e chiudono la sezione stessa: se la lontananza testuale dei due sembra allontanarli, è proprio la poesia a ricongiungerli: "Ferdinand's love sonnet echoes the rhetoric mutuality of the 'Phoenix and the Turtle' [...] Similarly, Miranda's villanelle turns on a refrain that makes solitude and company undistinguishable" (Noel-Todd 2012, 136).

Queste considerazioni mettono in luce come Auden abbia voluto creare la sua rilettura di ognuna delle *dramatis personae* come incarnazione autonoma di un giudizio critico. Questa pulsione esplicativa è palesata dal sottotitolo di *The Sea,* che recita per l'appunto "A Commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*", illuminando la genesi critica del testo: l'intento che l'etichetta "commentario" veicola è quello di fornire un'interpretazione personale[11], che essere messa in moto dall'impressione che l'opera suscita nel poeta che la legge con occhio critico.

Sebbene per *The Sea* non esista un correlativo saggistico cronologicamente contemporaneo come lo era *The Prolific* per *New Year Letter,* esiste una famosa presa di posizione di Auden sull'opera di Shakespeare. Nel saggio *Balaam and His Ass,* dove Auden tenta una tassonomia della coppia servo-padrone in letteratura si pone quindi fin dal titolo come opera, in un certo senso, "secondaria", per mutuare una celebre etichetta

[11] I *Commentari* di Cesare assunsero quasi la forma di un diario di guerra, e nella loro cadenza regolare non potevano che entrare in contatto e rappresentare su carta non solo lo sviluppo delle imprese belliche, ma anche l'evoluzione ciclica dell'individuo che le portava avanti. Diversa è l'accezione dantesca del termine, molto famosamente utilizzata per la succinta descrizione di Averroè: "Colui che il gran commento feo" (*Inf.* IV:144) che però conferma sì di riflessione critica, ma anche quella di continuazione di un percorso filosofico –o, nel caso di Auden, ma anche in quello di Virgilio e di Joyce con Omero, solo per fare un esempio– anche letterario.

proposta da George Steiner, *The Sea* vuole quindi porsi nell'ambiguo e reverendo cono d'ombra che quella che è tradizionalmente considerata l'ultima commedia romantica di Shakespeare gettava su i potenziali continuatori:

> As a biological organism Man is a natural creature subject to the necessities of nature; as a being with consciousness and will, he is at the same time a historical person with the freedom of the spirit. *The Tempest* seems to me a Manichean work, not because it shows the relation of Nature to Spirit as one of conflict and hostility, which in fallen man it is, but because it puts the blame for this upon Nature and makes the Spirit innocent. (Auden 2012, 95)

Di fronte a questa polarità manichea si trova Prospero, l'artista: un vero e proprio "Hamlet transformed into a 'puppet master'" (Auden 2000, 300) che sta dando l'addio alla sua condizione di mago-artefice, che indubbiamente ricalca un Auden da poco aveva compiuto il salto "across the Pond" stanziandosi nel Nuovo Mondo (Noel-Todd 2012, 126): Auden, proprio come Shakespeare, che nella fase matura abbraccia un "quiet tone of voice which deliberately avoids drawing attention to itself as Poetry with a capital P" (Auden 1968, 102). Il *manicheismo* shakespeariano assomiglia molto da vicino all'opposizione simbolica che è l'oggetto di *The Enchafèd Flood,* in cui Auden propone una catalogazione del simbolismo romantico del mare a partire da un sogno raccontato da Wordsworth nel suo *Prelude*. La polarità è quella tra verità geometrica (pietra) e la verità poetica (conchiglia). Una volta di più, Arte e Vita si trovano a dare forma ad un immaginario che è stato, senza dubbio alcuno, rivoluzionario, ma con cui Auden certamente intende mettersi in opposizione:

> Whereas the Neoclassical writers had been taught to observe particular natural objects carefully and accurately and then abstract the general from them, the Romantics reverse the process […] On the one hand, the poets long to immerse in the sea of Nature, to enjoy its endless mystery and novelty, on the other, they long to come to port in some transcendent eternal and unchanging reality from which the unexpected is excluded. Nature and Passion are powerful, but they are also full of grief. True happiness would have the calm and order of bourgeois routine without its utilitarian ignobility and boredom. (Auden 1967, 80-81)

Questa dicotomia simbolica viene poi consustanziata da Auden in una dicotomia umana: Ismaele e Don Chisciotte, le due realizzazioni possibili in cui l'eroe romantico può modellare se stesso. Il concetto di eroismo lascia spazio a Aden per una lunga serie di riflessioni, collegamenti, e persino per la delineazione di schemi e grafici che possano in qualche modo mettere ordine alle sue considerazioni. Auden si dimostra critico attento e deciso, che sa fornire una lunga serie di esempi a conferma delle sue intuizioni geniali, senza la paura di apparire autocratico o capzioso: i testi parlano per lui, inverano le sue opinioni, gli autorizzano un tono perentorio che non potrebbe derivargli dal solo fatto di essere, anch'egli come coloro di cui parla, un poeta.

Il confronto tra *Enchafèd* e *The Sea* mostra come il mezzo espressivo condizioni fortemente la postura assunta da Auden: se in *Balaam* il manicheismo di Shakespeare è

esposto linearmente e quasi polemicamente, *The Sea*, prevedibilmente, si propone come corollario poetico al manicheismo, come escrescenza floreale poetica attorno a quella corteccia critica. Se in *The Sea* l'atteggiamento assunto da Auden è quello più attivo ed elogiativo del continuatore, in *The Enchafèd Flood,* così come nella sezione "The Shakespearean City" di *The Dyer's Hand,* la postura è più reverente, ma non per questo meno forte. È interessante notare che, se per *The Enchafèd Flood,* testo critico lineare, il titolo è diretta citazione shakespeariana, come del resto *The Dyer's Hand*, in *The Sea and the Mirror,* che è tutto evocativo nella sua corporeità poetica, il titolo sembra quasi etichetta "di servizio". Genettianamente rematico, propone due correlativi oggettivi che sintetizzano il fondamentale scheletro simbolico dell'opera.

Eccezione al rigido binarismo imposto dalla dicotomia manichea sembrerebbe la parte centrale, "The Supporting Cast, Sotto Voce", vero e proprio *charivari* di voci caotiche, tra loro comunque sempre intimamente simmetriche e complementari, composta da dieci monologhi la cui chiusa, a mo' di *queue* teatrale, è un *refrain* costruito con rigore e precisione da miniaturista. In questa sezione personaggi della tragedia shakespeariana prendono la parola non solo per presentarsi, ma anche quasi per rimbrottare il discorso di Prospero, soprattutto nei *refrains* che concludono ogni discorso. Le *dramatis personae* assomigliano alla sfilata di "fantasmi eminenti" della *New Year Letter* (ancora cataloghi, ancora elenchi!), ma potrebbero più precisamente essere accostate, in questo specifico caso, alle allegorie del *masque* del quarto atto (scena 1, vv. 60-138) che Prospero interrompe bruscamente, sottolineando con maggiore forza il suo ruolo poetico di *playwright-within-the-play*.

Ma al di là e al di sopra di tutte queste voci che si esprimono in versi, Calibano, la prosa[12], reclama il suo spazio, che Auden concede in una terza parte così sterminata,

[12] La sortita saggistica di Calibano in *The Sea* è stata messa in relazione con l'esempio letterario di Geoffrey Chaucer. Difatti, proprio nei *Racconti di Canterbury*, al momento di declamare la sua storia, al pellegrino Chaucer viene fischiato il racconto di Sir Thpas (in versi), inducendolo a passare a quello di Melibeo (in prosa), possiamo pensare che la terza sezione di *The Sea* sia il momento, per Auden, di tentare una più scorrevole esposizione delle sue teorie dell'arte: "Non fu dunque per una improbabile modestia di artista che Chaucer non attribuì alla propria *maschera* di pellegrino un buon racconto in versi. Scegliendo per sé il racconto in prosa, al contrario, mirò a dimostrare come – sotto la maschera del poeta, fossero in lui il retore, il filosofo, il moralista. […] Il maggior poeta medievale d'Inghilterra affida dunque ad un racconto in prosa il proprio messaggio. Tutto il resto della sua opera può esserci o non esserci: l'importante è che ci sia quel racconto a testimoniare di lui presso i posteri. (Buffoni 2007, 127-28) Senza lasciarsi prendere troppo la mano, sia per Auden che per Chaucer non si può certo dire che esista la volontà di assicurarsi che solo la loro prosa si tramandi ai posteri. La prosa è semmai un inserto, un ulteriore ed estremo guscio che il paguro trova sulla spiaggia, assieme alle più incantevoli conchiglie dell'*epistula* classica e della tragicommedia rinascimentale, che esso interseca alle altre, fingendo di

corposa e fitta da risultare spesso illeggibile, in barba a qualsiasi preconcetto che vorrebbe la prosa più chiara del verso.

> Calibano esordisce come portavoce del pubblico e si rivolge a Shakespeare accusandolo di aver inserito il suo mondo – ovvero la vita – nel mondo fittizio dell'arte, rendendolo così ancora più goffo e bizzarro di quanto già non fosse. Il mondo dell'arte è il mondo dell'armonia, dove i contrasti vengono sopiti e risolti; la vita è invece un caos informe a cui l'uomo si illude di poter dare un ordine stabile. (Buffoni 2007, 110)

Calibano, l'unico che in *The Sea* è capace di metter in atto quella delicata e oscura "sea-change" che è motivo che come un fiume carsico scorre sotto la trama di eventi che la tempesta di Prospero genera. Sotto forma di improvvisi cambi di registro e mirabili acrobazie argomentative, apostrofi e anacoluti, flussi di pensieri che occupano interi paragrafi senza lasciare all'ascoltatore[13] la libertà di riaversi, egli declama il suo lungo e densissimo discorso dileggiando l'autore imitandone la voce e la postura, impersonando con fin troppo agio quel William Shakespeare, emblema dell' "anxiety of influence", per sollazzare un pubblico che appare troppo esigente e indiscreto nel voler essere messo a parte dei segreti della rappresentazione. Calibano diventa una maschera che garantisce la giusta distanza tra maestro e discepolo, tra originale e rilettura, tra Wystan e William:

> If now, having dismissed your hired impersonators with verdicts ranging from the laudatory orchid to the disgusted and disgusting egg, you ask, of course, notwithstanding the conscious fact of his irrevocable absence, you instinctively *do* ask for our so good, so great, so dead author to stand before the finally lowered curtain and take his shyly responsible bow for this, his latest, ripest production, it is I – my reluctance is, I can assure you, co-equal with your dismay – who will always loom thus wretchedly into your confused picture, for, in default of the all-wise, all-explaining master you would speak *to,* who else at least can, who else indeed would respond to you bewildered cry, but its very echo, the begged question you would speak to him *about* (Auden 1994, 422)

Ma i panni di Shakespeare, prevedibilmente, calzano abbastanza stretti, e Calibano torna volentieri alla sua voce "*let me cease to play you echo and return to my officially natural role*" (Auden 1994, 430). È in questa *facies* più naturale, più spontanea e più carnale che Calibano articola il problema critico alla base di tutto il commentario shakespeariano di Auden, ossia il rapporto tra Arte e vita, con una fantasmagorica allegoria che prende la forma di un racconto erotico, di una sigizia ieratica tra Autore e Arte che si incrina per fare spazio a lui, all'istanza Vitale, materiale e imperfetta della vita tempestosa:

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valutarla meno, come fa quando deve parlare in pubblico, ma in realtà conferendole la stessa dignità delle altre, più garrule tane entro cui poteva rannicchiarsi.

[13] Che in realtà in questa sezione potrebbe essere molto agevolmente indicato quale lettore, vista e considerata la sostanziale impraticabilità drammatica del monologo di Calibano, conferma questa che la natura di *The Sea* non è (solamente) drammatica.

> Anyway, the partnership is a brilliant success. On you go together to ever greater and faster triumphs; ever more major grows the accumulated work, ever more masterly the manner, sound even at its pale sententious worst, and at its best the rich red personal flower of the grave and grand, until one day which you can never either at the time or later identify exactly, your strange fever reaches its crisis and from now on begins, ever so slowly, maybe to subside. […] Sour silences appear, at first only for an occasional moment, but progressively more frequently and more prolonged, curdled moods in which you cannot for the life of you think of any request to make, and His dumb standing around, waiting for orders gest inexplicably but maddeningly on your nerves, until presently, to you amazement, you hear yourself asking Him if He wouldn't like a vacation and are shocked by your feeling of intense disappointment when He who has always hitherto so immediately and recklessly taken your slightest hint, says gauchely "No". So it goes on from exasperated bad to desperate worst until you two part. Collecting all your strength for the distasteful task, you finally manage to stammer or shout: "You are free. Good-bye". (Auden 1994, 432-433)

Calibano interpreta in questo modo il commiato tra Prospero e Ariel, quasi come fossero due amanti che dopo anni di convivenza si trovano in tutta fretta a volersi liberare l'uno dell'atro, tanto la mistica alchimia tra di loro sia venuta meno. Ma Calibano ha una sorpresa per Prospero, un *coup de théâtre* improvviso e molto significativo dal punto di vista estetico:

> but to your dismay He whose obedience through all the enchanted years has never been less than perfect, now refuses to budge. Striding up to Him in fury, you glare into His unblinking eyes and stop dead, transfixed with horror at seeing reflected there, not what you had always expected to see, a conqueror smiling at a conqueror, both promising mountains and marvels, but a gibbering fist-clenched creature with which you are all too unfamiliar, for this is the first time indeed that you have met the only subject that you have, who is not a dream amenable to magic but the all too solid flesh you must acknowledge as your own; at last you have come to face with me, and are appalled to learn how far I am from being, in any sense, your dish: how completely lacking in that poise and calm and all-forgiving, because, all-understanding good nature which to the critical eye is so wonderfully and domestically present on every page of you published inventions. (Auden 1994, 433)

Calibano, quindi, come vero volto della creazione, che *in the blink of an eye* si è sostituito a Ariel, con mossa da prestigiatore esperto. E Calibano, in aggiunta, come unico vero diagnosta della relazione tra Artista, Arte e Mondo. Calibano, del resto, nell'originale shakespeariano, aveva dimostrato di essere capace, seppure nella sua mostruosa apparenza di selvaggio e nella sua selvaggia impulsività di *infante* irriflessivo malamente educato da un Prospero distratto, di fornire (seppure ai soli *clowns* Stephano e Trinculo) una chiave per decifrare quel mondo così apparentemente spaventoso dove la tempesta architettata da Prospero li ha trascinati

> Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
> Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
> Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
> Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
> That, if I then had wak'd after long sleep,

> Will make me sleep again; and then, in dreaming,
> The clouds methought would open and show riches
> Ready to drop upon me, that, when I waked,
> I cried to dream again. (Shakespeare 2006, 116)

Auden, quindi, affidando a Calibano l'enunciazione in prosa, in teoria il lotto più cerebrale ed argomentativo della *sua* personale *The Tempest,* non fa che assecondare questa vocazione interpretativa che, seppure fugace, è presente nella fonte shakespeariana, e che è stata lungamente oggetto di varie interpretazioni, ma che nella sostanza resta un moto di stupore e di meraviglia trasformato in antidoto contro un mondo inospitale:

> Un bambino è Caliban, quando sogna; semplice e primitivo, tutto attesa il suo sogno. Un bambino è Caliban quando, a mo' di esortazione, invita i suoi due nuovi amici Stephano e Trinculo a non avere paura del mondo nuovo in cui sono capitati, né dei rumori e suoni strani e arie sinistre che lo abitano … Spiega: sono in realtà suoni e arie dolci, che procurano diletto e non fastidio. Lui ci è abituato. E spiega come gli sia successo più volte che certe vibrazioni acute di strumenti gli abbiano colpito l'orecchio, altre volte invece l'hanno carezzato voci o vibrazioni, che se a quel punto si fosse svegliato dal sonno, gli sarebbe venuta voglia di addormentarsi di nuovo per sentirle ancora. (Fusini 2016, 135-136)

Le parole di Fusini sono emblematiche: anche il suo *Vivere nella tempesta* (2016) non è atro che un gioco letterario che si presenta, a prima vista, e nemmeno con troppa convinzione, come *commentario* della *Tempesta* shakespeariana: in realtà, proprio come *The Sea and The Mirror,* con risultati assai diversi, esso vuole essere un'opera letteraria, e non critica, che della secondarietà della critica vuole solo mutuare l'occasione della scrittura, e null'altro.

Un saggismo poetico

Calibano, proponendosi come diagnosta di quella dicotomia che era la base delle preoccupazioni critiche di Auden (e non solo di Auden), riesce a piegare il medium della prosa a suo piacimento, adattandolo al reticolo oscuro dei suoi pensieri, riflessioni, imitazioni, improvvisazioni drammatiche, e riflessioni teoretiche. Un interessante parallelo tra il discorso di Calibano a Stephano e Trinculo di III.2 (129-137) e il discorso che al suo Calibano affida Auden, passa attraverso, di nuovo, Montaigne. È stato infatti Jan Kott a scorgere in un Prospero un lettore attento di Montaigne e della riduzione della terra a mero "puntolino nello spazio stellato" (Kott 2009:189), e con essa ad un ridimensionamento del posto dell'uomo nell'universo. Questa visione arrivava a Prospero tramite Amleto, il vero primo lettore del saggista francese.

Il passo a cui Kott si riferisce proviene dalla *Apologia di Raymond Sebond,* che tra tutti gli *Essais* è il sicuramente segmento più filosoficamente ispirato, in cui da disquisizioni di carattere teologico si passa alla riflessione sull'uomo mortale, che assume una *species* quotidiana e a tratti quasi miseranda:

> La plus calamiteuse et fraile de toutes les creatures, c'est l'homme, et quant et quant la plus orgueilleuse. Elle se sent et se void logée icy, parmy la bourbe et le fient du monde, attachée et clouée à la pire, plus morte et croupie partie de l'univers, au dernier estage du logis et le plus esloigné de la voute celeste, avec les animaux de la pire condition des trois; et se va plantant par imagination au dessus du cercle de la Lune et ramenant le ciel soubs ses pieds. (Montaigne 1978, 452)

Perdendo la posizione centrale, l'uomo sperimenta sulla propria pelle quel relativismo che diverrà la marca distintiva della cultura moderna: poco dopo, Montaigne, si fa una domanda destinata a rimanere epitomica: "Quand je me joue à ma chatte, qui sçait si elle passe son temps de moy plus que je ne fay d'elle" (Montaigne 1978, 452). Conferire alla micetta domestica un punto di vista paragonabile a quello umano è un'azione straniante e paradossale, proprio come sentire il discorso di Calibano in ineccepibili *blank verses* rivolto a due clown quasi più bestiali di lui.

Il saggio si dimostra quindi per Auden piuttosto una postura epistemologica che una forma rigidamente canonica, questo animo indagatore si insinua tra le pieghe della sua poesia, smagliando l'intelaiatura del verso per inserirvi forzosamente sia istanze personali, sia le riflessioni critiche che assillano chi, per mestiere, scrive poesie. A tutto ciò, si aggiunga la necessaria e ineludibile componente di sperimentazione formale che contraddistingue il poeta che, mallarmeanamente, è colui che crea un nuovo lemma collettivo a partire da parole singole (Auden 2012, 35). E proprio *The Sea and The Mirror* arriva ad una completezza ideologica che lo rende, forse anche più delle due *Letters,* un manifesto poetico:

> Both *The Sea and The Mirror* and *The Dyer's Hand* present the same theory of art; and they both reveal Auden's distrust of systematic criticism: the one being wholly in the form of a work of art, and the other (although written for the most part in discursive prose) by drawing on the method of poetry "the arranging … and placing / carefully" of the pieces in symbolic relationship, so that the whole is analogous to the intellectual scheme underlying it: Kierkegaard's triad of aesthetic, ethical and religious spheres. (Callan 1966, 143)

Kierkegaard è solo l'ultimo dei numi tutelari che tornano alla mente quando bisogna giudicare lo scheletro critico della poesia audeniana: Shakespeare, Byron, i 'fantasmi eminenti', il cast al completo della *Tempesta*: è una gran folla quella che accorre quando Whystan Hugh vuole tentare nuove vie riflettere sulla letteratura. Tale ectoplasmatica accumulazione diventa polifonia: Auden sa che la sua voce da sola non potrà mai bastare quando la sfida è quella di "puntellare le rovine": a differenza di Eliot, che evoca i padri per derubarli della loro voce (non a caso un titolo preliminare della *Waste Land* era

proprio *He do the police in different voices*), Auden se ne appropria lasciando ben in vista, come in un museo, le targhette.

Ogni *auctoritas* deve essere invocata per intero, affinché possa imprimere all'argomentazione tutta la forza della sua rinomanza. Così come l'enumerazione di epiteti in "As He Is", Auden dimostra di aver sfogliato a lungo e con attenzione antologie letterarie, articoli scientifici e trattati filosofici, in cerca di caratteri per rendere il "Brothered-One" realmente "Not-Alone".

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