ISSN: 2980-2962

Hacettepe University
Department of English Language and Literature

Journal of British Literature and Culture

Issue 2

Feb. 2024

About the Journal

JBLC (The Journal of British Literature and Culture) is an open access and double-blind peer-reviewed international journal devoted to British literary and cultural studies published annually by the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters, Hacettepe University. The journal publishes original research articles, explications, and reviews of literary and critical publications in any aspect of British literature and culture and relevant subjects including, but not limited to, films, animations and soundtracks. The articles must be submitted in Turkish or English according to the guidelines provided in "Instruction to Authors" at our website.

Peer-Review Policy and Process

The manuscripts submitted to the JBLC are evaluated through a double-blind referee system. The editor reserves the right, upon the approval of the Editorial Board, to choose not to send manuscripts to referees and reject submission on the grounds of inappropriate subject matter, quality, length and major noncompliance with the designated submission requirements. Submissions that are deemed appropriate are sent to two anonymous referees, and in the case of persistent disagreement between the first two referees, the review of a third referee is asked, after which the Editorial Board makes the final decision considering all three reviews.

Copyrights

Owner: Merve Sarı Tüzün

Correspondence: jblc@hacettepe.edu.tr

ISSN: 2980-2962

Type of Publication: Periodical

Address: Hacettepe Üniversitesi, Edebiyat Fakültesi; İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü 06532 Beytepe, Ankara, Türkiye

Date of Publication: February 2024

Foreword

We introduce the second issue of our online journal *Journal of British Literature and Culture* with great pleasure. This journal continues the successful publishing tradition established by the *Journal of British Literature and Culture* (1990-2010) and intends to keep up the standards of publishing quality scholarly articles about British literature and culture.

We would like to thank you all who made this issue possible, namely the contributors and their reviewers, the editorial board and especially Dr. Merve Sarı Tüzün and Research Assistant Onur Çiffiliz for their enthusiasm, energy and time they very generously devoted to the publication of this issue.

The second issue of Journal of British Literature and Culture offers five articles on a variety of literary genres and periods of British literature. These articles illustrate the wide scope and variety of methods of analysis JBLC advocates.

We expect your contributions as readers and authors to the future issues of our journal. We accept your contributions throughout the year via jblc@hacettepe.edu.tr.

With best wishes

Prof. Dr. Huriye Reis
Editor

Articles

Articles

Journal of British Literature and Culture
2024.2, 1-18

Hacettepe University,
Department of English Language and Literature

"Unravelling the Threads of Historiographic Metafiction: A Comparative Exploration of History in John Fowles's *A Maggot* and Graham Swift's *Waterland*

"Tarih Yazımcı Üst Kurmacanın Doku Çözümü: John Fowles'un *A Maggot* ve Graham Swift'in *Waterland* Romanlarının Tarih Açısından Karşılaştırmalı Analizi"

Özden DERE*

Abstract: Debates on history and its relation to narrative theory had its reflections on the novels of 1980s and 1990s. Linda Hutcheon calls these novels "historiographic metafiction" which stake a claim on historical events and characters even though they are characterized by their self-reflexivity and their consciousness of history and fiction as human constructs. Graham Swift's *Waterland* and John Fowles's *A Maggot* are among these novels which utilise unique narrative forms, locales, and thematic emphases to delve into the complexities of history, identity, and the relationship between the individual and society. Both novels are dedicated to exploring the intricacies of human existence within historical settings. However, Fowles delves into the realms of mystery and metaphysics, employing a complex narrative style, while Swift concentrates on the Fens, crafting a character-centered, non-linear story that examines the impact of historical forces on individual lives. This comparative analysis aims to clarify the distinct stylistic and thematic contributions that each novel brings to the genre of historiographic metafiction.

Keywords: Historiographic metafiction, John Fowles, Graham Swift, self-reflexivity

Özet: Tarih ve tarihin anlatım teorisi ile olan ilişkisine dair tartışmalar 1980 ve 1990'lı yıllarda yazılan romanlara da yansımıştır. Linda Hutcheon bu romanları "tarih yazımcı üst kurmaca" olarak adlandırmaktadır ve bu romanlar tarih ve kurgunun insan yapısı olduğuna ilişkin farkındalıkları ve özdüşünümsellikleri ile karakterize olmalarına rağmen kurgularında tarihsel olaylar ve karakterlerden faydalanırlar. Benzersiz anlatı formları, mekanlar ve tematik vurguları kullanarak tarihin, kimliğin ve birey ile toplum arasındaki ilişkinin karmaşıklıklarını inceleyen Graham Swift'in *Waterland* ve John Fowles'un *A Maggot* eserleri bu romanlardandır. Her iki roman da insan varoluşunun tarihsel bağlam içindeki inceliklerini keşfetmeye adanmıştır. Ancak Fowles, gizem ve metafizik alanlarına girerek karmaşık bir anlatı tarzı kullanırken, Swift Fens'e odaklanır ve bireyin yaşamları üzerinde tarihsel güçlerin etkilerini inceleyen karakter odaklı, lineer olmayan bir hikâye tasarlar. Bu karşılaştırmalı analiz, her iki romanın tarih yazımcı üst kurmaca türüne getirdiği özgün stilistik ve tematik katkıları irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar sözcükler: Tarih yazımcı üst kurmaca, John Fowles, Graham Swift, özdüşünümsellik

* Dr., Research Assistant
Department of Western Languages and Literatures
Iğdır University
05376522802
ozden.dere@igdir.edu.tr
Orcid ID Number: 0000-0002-4742-704X

Postmodern historiography is closely related with the narrative theory and it is mainly based on the movement called "the linguistic turn" and the French post-structuralism. According to American social theorist Steven Seidman, poststructuralism is a product of the rebellious attitude of French intellectuals who embraced a critical stance following Marxism, particularly after the events of May 1968 (18). Poststructuralism arose as a result of the linguistic shift in post-war Western philosophical and social thought. This transition began in the early twentieth century, influenced by theorists such as Ludwig Wittgenstein, Martin Heidegger, and Walter Benjamin. Language, for these thinkers, was not just a tool for social interaction, but the essential foundation of social practice (Fynsk 8914). The deconstructive tactics used by poststructuralists originating from later Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida pushed postmodernism into a poststructuralist orbit during the 1970s. This poststructuralist orbit is primarily textual in nature. It focuses on the function of discourse and language in constructing social subjectivity and power relations. Berlatsky states that the emphasis of linguistic turn is on "the ways in which reference to the object of the past (or even the present) is impossible" and on the fact that "all our experiences of reality (and particularly of history) are mediated by *language* and *discourse* which are always . . . value-laden and ideological" (emphasis added). Thus, the major focus of linguistic turn is on mediation as reflected in Derrida's accent on the fact that "there is no outside-text" into a world of referentiality (158-159) or in Lyotard's association of the postmodern with "the withdrawal of the real" (79) and his observation that the discourses of science including history that are generally regarded as objective have been reduced to language games. Language games are the infinite and arbitrary extensions of the "interplay of signification" (Derrida 2) in the absence of the transcendental signified, i.e. metaphysical

meaning. Derrida also emphasises the direct result of this process, the absence of the centre saying that,

> From then on it was probably necessary to begin to think that there was no center, that the center would not be thought in the form of a being-present, that the center had no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. This moment was that in which language invaded the universal problematic; that in which, in the absence of a center or origin, everything became discourse-provided we can agree on this word – that is to say, when everything became a system where the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the interplay of signification ad infinitum. (2)

The critic here underscores the process of displacing meaning, the influence of language in moulding comprehension, and the lack of stable bases. He questions the concept of a permanent centre, proposing that there is no stable, intrinsic meaning or source. The idea that the center is a function rather than a natural locus, including an endless number of sign-substitutions highlights the diverse and dynamic nature of meaning in language. The lack of a transcendental signified therefore implies the absence of an ultimate, unchanging meaning or point of reference.

These notions related to the lack of a singular reality, and the influence of language on our comprehension of the past have led to questions about the possibility of objective narration, and particularly, historiography. Hayden White, who was influenced by the linguistic turn's emphasis on and scepticism towards narrative and historiography, has concentrated on narrative as an obstacle for objective reference in his works. In his "Historical Text as a Literary Artifact," he suggests "[w]e do not live stories" but "we give our lives meaning by retrospectively casting them in the form of stories;" (43) which means there is no inherent meaning in a collection of

historical events selected from the past; it is much more the act of narration which endows them with meaning, generating a consistent whole, in other words, a meaningful story. Therefore, what historians do is to endow meaning to past events through narrating stories, a process which White calls "emplotment" (46). These debates on history and its relation to narrative theory had its reflections on the novels of 1980s and 1890s of a generation of writers who were born in 1940s and 1950s; in the post-war era (World War II), as an act of foregrounding a "consciousness of history . . . most often through a dual or even multiple focus on the fictional present and one or more crucial pasts" (Janik). The novels of Peter Ackroyd, Kazuo Ishiguro and Graham Swift may be given as examples to this kind of novels. Linda Hutcheon calls these novels "historiographic metafiction" which are "both intensely self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages" and are marked by their "theoretical self-awareness of history and fiction as human constructs" (5). Hutcheon in her book *A Poetics of Postmodernism* dedicates a whole chapter to define in detail what historiographic metafiction is. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to clarify the distinct stylistic and thematic contributions that Graham Swift's *Waterland* and John Fowles's *A Maggot* bring to the genre of historiographic metafiction.

One of the common grounds of the above-mentioned examples of historiographic metafiction may be said to be their endeavour to blur the line between fiction and history even though they do it through different techniques. Hutcheon explains the rationale behind this endeavour through the following words:

> Historiographic metafiction refutes the natural or common-sense methods of distinguishing between historical fact and fiction. It refuses the view that only history has a truth claim, both by questioning the ground of that claim in historiography and by asserting that both history and fiction are discourses, human

> constructs, signifying systems, and both derive their major claim to truth from that identity. (93)

It is for that reason historiographic metafiction questions and subverts the established grand narratives; in other words, meta-narratives and foregrounds the fact that there may be different interpretations or discourses; that are, mini-narratives that deviate from the mainstream established facts. However, it does that not for the purpose of degrading history to something that has nothing to do with reality or real events but for the purpose of making the reader ask both epistemological and ontological questions about it such as "How do we know the past (or the present)? What is the ontological status of the past? Of its documents? Of our narratives?" (50). Considering both novels, it may be said that they both make the reader ask these questions even though they use completely different methods. Both novels install and then blur the boundary between fiction and history and lay bare the fact that there may always be personal mini-narratives (or local narratives) apart from the facts suggested by history as a grand narrative. *Waterland* starts with an epigraph including definition of the Latin word *historia,* underlining its meaning as a form of narrative: "Historia, ae, f. 1. inquiry, investigation, learning. 2. a) a narrative of past events, history. b) any kind of narrative: account, tale, story." At the very beginning of the novel, the problematic relationship between history and storytelling is foregrounded; and, in a way, this reference to the double meaning of the term history may be regarded as a signal for the fact that the novel is to deal with this relationship. The problematic relationship between history and fiction is particularly reflected and questioned through pluralizing the idea of history via the major character Tom Crick and through foregrounding the personal history narrated by him throughout the novel. Tom Crick is a history teacher, who is about to lose his job in an age when History comes to an end under nuclear threat due to people's reluctance to explore the past as a reference point and their attempt to look for "Here

and Now" in this threatening age, which is a recurring theme in the story representing Tom Crick's introspection on his current situation and environment. Tom frequently used the phrase to anchor himself in the present moment and place, stimulating contemplation on his life, the historical transformations in the Fens, and the influence of individual and social history. 1980s was a period when the Cold War between the West and the Soviet bloc meant that the nuclear threat would certainly lead to World War III (Bentley 133). Price, one of Tom Crick's students, raises this issue in class emphasizing that there is no point in studying the past, when civilization appears to be on the point of destruction: "The only important thing about history, I think, sir, is that it's got to the point where it's probably about to end" (Swift 5) and the school management decides to cut out history as a major department. Tom Crick, who formerly listened to stories of his father and his mother when he was a child, chose history as a branch mainly because of his aspiration for "an explanation" for history as a grand narrative (80). Having seen that "by forever attempting to explain, we may come, not to an Explanation, but to a knowledge of the limits of our power to explain," (Swift 81), and particularly because of his personal traumatic past revealed to the reader gradually through the end of the novel including the reason for the murder of one of his friends, Freddie; his wife Mary's past abortion and her abduction of a baby; his brother Dick's suicide; his father's death during a rise of water in the Fenlands; he decides to transform from a history teacher to a story-teller mainly in order to come into terms with his own past because as Price suggests "people only explain when things are wrong," so does history (126).

It is a personal change, reflected in the transformation of the protagonist, Tom Crick, into a story-teller, that foregrounds the plurality of history in *Waterland*. The plurality of history may be said to be embodied in Tom Crick because he continually questions and subverts the

meaning of history and reminds the reader of the fact that there may be countless interpretations or discourses through narrating his own version of history throughout the novel. In the class, he tells his students, and also the reader, when he is asked "What is the point of history? Why history? Why the past? . . . [H]e used to say "[b]ut your "Why?" gives the answer. Your demand for an explanation provides an explanation" (Swift 80). However, now he comes to an understanding that "for ever attempting to explain we may come, not to an explanation, but to *knowledge of the limits of our power to explain*" (81). He realizes that history as a grand narrative neither provides us with explanations nor does it give pure facts to us; our knowledge of the past is only limited to our power to explain; in other words, our narration capability. It is for that reason; Tom Crick changes the curriculum of his course on the French Revolution and starts to tell his own version of the histories in class.

He starts out creating a new world from the geographical place he once lived in: the Fenland, which he describes as a "fairy tale land" (Swift 14). He also defines how people in Fens manage to come to terms with reality in the following manner: "To live in the Fens is to receive strong doses of reality. The great, flat monotony of reality; the wide, empty space of reality . . . How did the Cricks outwit reality? By telling stories . . . Suckers for stories" (Swift 13). In a setting like the Fenland, people have to create stories to make meaning from the empty space reality provided by history as a grand narrative for them as Tom Crick does in class. Man is "a story-telling animal" trying to fill the gaps of history as grand narrative and to bestow meaning to it (47). Many of his descriptions of the events narrated in the novel form a juxtaposition of history as a grand narrative and history as a personal narrative. They are mostly in the following pattern; first the narrative of history as grand narrative is given and then the narrative of Tom Crick's own mini-narrative is given. For instance, the description in the

chapter titled "And Artificial History," includes both the events presented by history and Tom Crick's story:

> In the late summer of 1940, while Hitler sets up shop in Paris and makes invasion plans, while other southern skies history inscribes itself in white scrolls and provides ample material for the legends of the future, he rummages amongst the books his mother left behind her. . . While the inhabitants of London and other large cities are forced to take refuge within the solid fabric of air-raid shelters and underground stations, he takes refuge in the fanciful fabric of Kingley's yarn, in which in misty Fenland settings . . . history merges with fiction, facts get blurred with fable. (157)

In the above-given quotation, Tom Crick first relates what history as a grand narrative gives; and then as an alternative to it, mentions his own story; that is, what he was doing when Hitler made plans for invasion (World War II). Throughout the novel, events of history as a grand Narrative and of local history of Fenland are given side by side so as to emphasize the plurality of history. In the same vein, the story of the Atkinsons and the Cricks is interwoven with World War I taking place in the background; the reader is introduced with Tom Crick's ancestors going to fight in the war. Hence, it may be said that the plurality of history and the problematic relationship between the history and fiction are foregrounded through the emphasis on mini-narrative of Tom Crick; and his and Fenland people's obsession with story-telling in the novel, respectively.

As to *A Maggot,* it is also marked by an emphasis on the plurality of history in the form of mini-narratives and on the problematic relationship between history and fiction. However, this time, the existence of mini-narratives as opposed to history as a grand narrative is foregrounded through presenting different viewpoints or stories of different people about the same event. As opposed to *Waterland*, there is not any reference to great public events such as

the French Revolution or World War I affecting a large amount of people in this novel; the main concern of it is the mysterious disappearance of a young aristocrat in a cave in Devonshire in the eighteenth century. Like *Waterland, A Maggot* starts with a reference to the problematic relationship between history and fiction; but this time, with an epilogue which includes a symbol underlining the fictional quality of the novel: "This fiction is in no way biographically about that second woman, though it does end with her birth in about the real year and quite certainly the real place where she was born. I have given that child her historical name; but I would not have this seen as a historical novel. It is maggot" (Fowles 4).

Fowles here overtly states that this novel is neither a historical one nor does it have any relationship with the real events at the time in which the fictitious events take place, even though the novel includes a historical figure like Ann Lee who is the founder of a sect called Shakers. The novel is rather a maggot the definition of which is given again in the epilogue by Fowles in the following manner:

> A MAGGOT IS the larval stage of a winged creature; as is the written text, at least in the writer's hope. But an older though now obsolete sense of the word is that of whim or quirk. By extension it was sometimes used in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century of dance-tunes and airs that otherwise had no special title ... Mr Beveridge's Maggot, My Lord Byron's Maggot, The Carpenters' Maggot, and so on. (3)

The above excerpt is especially striking in terms of its reference to the fictive elements inherent in the construction of history. It establishes a comparison between the term "maggot" in its literal meaning as the immature form of a winged organism and the written text, implying a metaphorical association between the two. The juxtaposition of the maggot and the written text suggests a process of metamorphosis. The maggot undergoes metamorphosis to convert into a winged creature, mirroring the transforming nature of the written language as it progresses from

raw material to a completed narrative. This metaphor corresponds to the concept that historical narratives undergo an interpretive and constructive process, converting unprocessed historical information into a cohesive narrative. The allusion to a previous connotation of the term, as whim or quirk, introduces an additional dimension to the metaphor. This implies that historical narratives, much to a maggot, may encapsulate arbitrary or peculiar characteristics. Within the framework of historiographic metafiction, this suggests that the recounting of history is not a direct and unbiased procedure, but rather is shaped by the author's viewpoint, prejudices, and imaginative decisions. Thus, the definition given engages with the metaphorical possibilities of the term "maggot" to explore the transformative and whimsical nature of written texts, including historical narratives. It reflects a consciousness of the fictive elements inherent in the construction of history and resonates with the themes often associated with historiographic metafiction.

Mini-narratives, in other words, discourses other than grand narratives in *A Maggot* are foregrounded in two ways. First is the consecutive use of testimonies, extracts from the Gentleman's Magazine and letters written by Ayscough to the Duke; father of the disappeared aristocrat called Lord B. throughout the second half of the novel. The novel, in the first half, presents the reader four people travelling on horseback in the eighteenth century; even though their identity is not clear at the beginning, in the second half, the reader learns that they are the disappeared lord and people who accompanied him during his travel. Ayscough, a constable, who was appointed by Lord B.'s father to investigate the disappearance, carries out an investigation which entails the interrogation of all the characters the reader sees in the first half of the novel. The significant point is that all testimonies differ from each other in one way or another. For instance, David Jones tells a demonic version of what Rebecca narrates about what

happened in the cave. Later on, it is revealed that Rebecca has told lies to him in order to protect herself. Again, the testimonies of the owner of the inn where they stay and of the maid working for the inn differ from each other and they can only give a limited account of the events since they do not know much about these characters apart from what they see in the inn. The extracts given between the testimonies also provide different but limited accounts about the events in question. There are also letters dispersed among these testimonies and extracts. Within this context, it may be said that three different accounts; in other words, three different layers of reality about the events are juxtaposed so as to emphasize the plurality of history. This juxtaposition and accent on the plurality of history in terms of its narrative aspect may be illustrated with an example. At first level, in the extract from the magazine, the reader only reads a news report revealing that Dick was found hanged on a tree. Later on, at second level, the testimonies also give detailed information about his personality, his life and his relationship with Lord B. For instance, David Jones says that he hanged himself due to his fear of what he had seen in the cave. Finally, at third level, Asycough tries to evaluate his death from a different perspective which would provide him with a reasonable explanation for it. This way, the novel underlines the problematic relationship between history and fiction implying that there may be different accounts of the same event; the narrative may change depending on the person's, or in the case of history, the historian's knowledge and his narrative capability.

The two novels may be regarded as different in terms of their narrators and narrative structures. Hutcheon, in her *Poetics of Postmodernism*, suggests that "historiographic metafictions appear to privilege two modes of narration, both of which problematize the entire notion of subjectivity: multiple points of view (as in Thomas's *The White Hotel*) or an overtly controlling narrator (as in Swift's *Waterland*)" (117). As she also points out, in *Waterland,* there is an overtly controlling first person narrator, Tom Crick, and the reader is made to see all events

from his perspective. The reader observes his childhood, the story of the Atkinsons and the Cricks, the story of his family through his lenses; therefore, what he tells may be regarded as subjective, and in Hutcheon's terms, as problematizing the entire notion of subjectivity. As opposed to *Waterland*, *A Maggot* may be considered to be of the second type mentioned by Hutcheon. Particularly in the first half of the novel before the interrogations take place, the third person narrator tells the reader what happens; however, in the second half of it s/he sees multiple points of view by means of interrogations, the letters written by Ayscough to the Duke and the third person narrator commenting on the events from time to time. Again, in this novel, the notion of subjectivity is problematized but in a totally different manner. At the beginning of the novel after the epilogue, the third person narrator describes the group travelling on horseback. At first, the reader hopes and believes that he is a reliable source but later he proves the opposite. S/he realizes that the woman described by the narrator at the very beginning of the novel as "She is evidently a servant, a maid" becomes first Louise, the girlfriend of Lord B and then Fanny, the prostitute; and finally, Rebecca (9). In fact, all the characters described by the narrator at the beginning have been proved to be wrong in later parts. Lord B., for instance, is not a nephew to Francis Lacy who is introduced as uncle to him at the beginning. Along with this, this third person narrator frequently makes comments on the events starting generally with phrases such as "A twentieth-century mind" or "A modern man". Especially his comments during and between the interrogations marked by their eighteen-century language remind the reader of the fact that the novel is about the eighteenth century but it is a fiction written in the twentieth century.

> A modern person would not have had a shadow of doubt that Rebecca was lying, or at least inventing. Gods, except for an occasional Virgin Mary to illiterate Mediterranean peasants, no longer appear; even in Ayscough's

> time such visions were strongly associated with Catholic trickery, something good Protestants expected and despised. Yet his England, even his class of it, was still very far from our certainties. Ayscough, for instance, believes in ghosts. . . (Fowles 497)

This shift between the twentieth-century narrator and the eighteenth-century dialogue and the above-quoted juxtaposition of two points of view both problematize the subjectivity in the novel and underlines the fact that there are different perspectives in the novel; it is therefore another indicator of the self-reflexivity of the novel reminding the reader this is a fiction in the eighteenth century and readers observe it through the lenses of a modern man.

Moreover, it may be said that there is no pretence of reality in both novels; even if realist techniques may seem to be installed at the beginning, they are subverted later and may be regarded as a part of the postmodern parody which may be observed in both novels. In her *Poetics of Postmodernism*, Hutcheon says:

> Fiction does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel. (40)

As in the definition given by Hutcheon, neither *Waterland* nor *A Maggot* has a claim to truth; or in its simplest sense, neither of them claims that it reflects the reality or real life as it is. Tom Crick, in the majority of the novel foregrounds the problematic relationship between the history and fiction. In a sense, his existence and storytelling in the novel may be interpreted as an indication of the novel's refutation of history and fiction as reflections of reality and its acceptance of both as human constructs. Similarly, in *A Maggot,* in both epilogue and prologue parts, it is overtly revealed that it has nothing to do with reality; it is a fiction. Despite the strong

emphasis on the fictitious quality of the stories included in both novels, one may observe that both novels employ and exhibit some of the styles and characteristics used in the traditional realist novels of the previous centuries. However, in both novels this cannot be interpreted as a sign of the novels' claim on mimesis because all these techniques are employed for the purpose of parody. As in Hutcheon's definition of parody in her *Politics of Postmodernism*, in both novels parody, "through a double process of installing and ironizing. . . signals how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference" (93). *Waterland*, for instance, starts like a realist novel as if Tom would relate his story retrospectively in a realist manner. The novel, particularly the parts in which the rise of the Cricks and the Atkinsons is narrated and the idea and language of progress are foregrounded, may seem very close to those narratives of the nineteenth century when the false Victorian pride of Great Britain; *the empire upon which the sun never sets* was still on the air. In *A Maggot,* the language and discourse of the eighteenth century may be observed. With its epilogue and prologue, it may be claimed that it starts like a traditional realist novel; a third person narrator describing the travel of various characters in a wilderness.

Both novels work on irony. The language of progress first installed in *Waterland* is subverted later through Tom Crick's discussions on human beings' futile effort to make progress as in the French Revolution which ends in the rise of Napoleon instead of freedom and in the fall of the Cricks and the Atkinsons. The same installation and subversion may be observed in *A Maggot* as well. Onega, in her *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles*, reveals the reason of the use of elements such as letters, newly-discovered diaries, epilogues and prologues reinforcing the reality in the first English novels:

> When the English novel emerged in the first half of the eighteenth century, it did so by fighting its way out of history and out of other literary genres. Acknowledgement of its fictionality would lead to confusion with the romance, thus threatening the novel with devaluation of its moral capacity, a fact that would preclude the recognition of social utility for the new genre. In order to assuage this danger a series of reality-enhancing mechanisms quickly developed. (137)

Thus, the elements mentioned by Onega which was formerly used for the purpose of enhancing reality are employed to exactly the opposite of this; that is, to subvert the idea that the novel is a reflection of reality in these two novels. In both the epilogue and the prologue, Fowles says that the novel does not have any relationship with real characters; letters, extracts from the Gentleman's Magazine and testimonies which are reminiscent of detective novels emphasize the impossibility to decide which discourse or interpretation is true rather than providing the reader with explanations and reality behind the events. In short, it may be said that both novels install and subvert the past representations observed in former periods in the novels to ironically accentuate their being ideological and human constructs.

In addition, in a different manner than it has been done in *Waterland*, more than one grand narrative is problematised in *A Maggot*. Religion as a grand narrative is also challenged and questioned through the dialogues between Rebecca and Ayscough during the interrogations. In almost all interrogations of Rebecca, the clash between the mini-narrative of Rebecca; that is, of Shakers as a sect and the mainstream religion as a grand narrative as it represented by Ayscough is reflected. In Rebecca's mini-narrative, there exists a female part in the Holy Trinity which may not conform to the Holy Trinity represented by the Bible; the Father, the Son and the Soul. Ayscough, frustrated by what Rebecca has recounted, considers it to be nothing but blasphemy on the grounds that it does not conform to what is told by religion as grand narrative.

The dialogue extracted from one of the interrogations; "A. I cannot, in thy alphabet/Q. Mistress, there is one and one only alphabet, that is plain English. How are you certain of this?" highlights the opposition between these two characters (Fowles 505). Through the word "alphabet" here, the discourse adopted by Ayscough is referred to and Rebecca tries to say that what I have told you cannot make any sense because our *alphabet*s, meaning our *discourses,* are different (emphasis added).

The metaphysical undertones through the enigmatic and supernatural parts of the story contributes to the problematisation of religion as a grand narrative in the novel. Inclusion of a Christian sect known as Shakers due to their ecstatic behaviours during their rituals and of such a mysterious character like Rebecca in the storyline provoke contemplation on the gaps within the story. Rebecca's version of the story during the interrogations, which at first, shows that she has been raped by the Satan in the cave, contributes to the three major attributes of "vagueness, uncertainty, and mystery" (Acheson 80). Thus, the inclusion of metaphysical aspects in the narrative results in a blending of boundaries between the material and the fanciful. The journey's enigmatic essence and the encountered individuals obscure the traditional line between the empirical and the supernatural. The blurring of the line between the empirical and the supernatural witnessed in this context displays a postmodern sensibility that questions conventional categorizations and challenges the notion of objective truth. The incorporation of metaphysical components enhances the complexity of the novel and corresponds with the characteristics of the historiographic metafiction genre in multiple respects.

In conclusion, both John Fowles's *A Maggot* and Graham Swift's *Waterland* contribute substantially to the genre of historiographic metafiction, although they employ different narrative styles. In *A Maggot*, Fowles employs metaphysical and enigmatic themes to subvert

traditional historical narration, resulting in an intricate narrative that challenges readers to scrutinise the demarcation between reality and the supernatural. Conversely, Swift's novel *Waterland* skilfully investigates the historical landscape of the Fens. It employs a character-focused, non-linear storytelling approach to examine the relationship between personal and historical tales. Both novels demonstrate a dedication to dismantling conventional historical structures, incorporating intricate layers of intricacy, and highlighting the subjective aspect of historical portrayal. Fowles and Swift make significant contributions to the continuous development of historiographic metafiction by employing inventive narrative approaches and exploring complex themes. Their works challenge readers to re-evaluate readers' perceptions, constructions, and interpretations of the past.

Works Cited

Acheson, James. *Modern Novelists: John Fowles*. Macmillan Education, 1998.

Berlatsky, Eric. "The Swamps of Myth. . . and Empirical Fishing Lines": Historiography, Narrativity, and the "Here and Now" in Graham Swift's *Waterland*." *Journal of Narrative Theory*, vol. 36, no. 2, 2006, pp. 254-92. *Project MUSE*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/30224648

Bentley, Nick. *Contemporary British Fiction*. Edinburgh UP, 2008.

Derrida, Jacques. *Of Grammatology*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1976.

Fowles, John. *A Maggot*. E-book. Little, Brown, 1985.

Fynsk, Christopher. "Linguistic Turn." *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. Edited by Neil J. Smelser and Paul B. Baltes. Elsevier, 2001, pp. 8913-16.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, Routledge, 1988.

---. *Politics of Postmodernism*. Routledge, 1989.

Janik, Del Ivan. "No End of History: Evidence from the Contemporary English Novel." *Twentieth Century Liteature*, vol. 41, no. 2, 1995. p. 160-189. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/441645

Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Translated by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi. Manchester UP, 2005.

Onega, Susanna. *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles*. UMI Research Press, 1989.

Seidman, Steven. *The Postmodern Turn: New Perspectives on Social Theory.* Cambridge UP, 1998.

Swift, Graham. *Waterland*. Washington Square, 1985.

White, Hayden. "The Historical Text as a Literary Artefact." *The Writing of History: Literary Form and Historical Understanding.* Edited by R. H. Canary & H. Kozicki. U of Wisconsin, 1978. 41-62.

Journal of British Literature and Culture
2024.2, 19-36

Hacettepe University,
Department of English Language and Literature

Katherine Mansfield's "Pictures" as a Post-mortem Photograph[1]

Ölüm Sonrası Bir Fotoğraf Olarak Katherine Mansfield'ın "Pictures" Adlı Öyküsü

Şebnem KAYA*

Abstract: Katherine Mansfield's 1919 short story "Pictures" has largely been read in a realist way as the tale of a day in the dispiriting life of a middle-aged singer-actress with limited financial means, trying in vain to find work as a bit performer in the film industry and having to turn to prostitution. The present article, however, suspends the said orthodox approach and proposes a new, subjective interpretation of the short story in which the hapless protagonist, Ada Moss, is around the transitional moment of death and recalling scenes from a previous day that turn out to be what pushes her towards suicide. The rationale for this is to italicize the fact that the short story permits non-traditional readerly analyses, too, which can provide countless insights into the single set text, though perhaps rating the way the reader views the narrated event above the writer's intent.

Keywords: Katherine Mansfield, the short story, "Pictures," post-mortem photograph

Özet: Katherine Mansfield'ın 1919 yılına tarihlenen öyküsü "Pictures" (Sinema), genellikle gerçekçi bir şekilde, film sektöründe ümitsizce küçük de olsa bir iş bulmaya çalışan ve fuhuşa yönelmek zorunda kalan, maddi imkânları kısıtlı, orta yaşlı bir şarkıcı-aktrisin hüzünlü hayatından bir günün anlatısı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bu makalede ise, söz konusu geleneksel yaklaşım askıya alınarak öykü talihsiz başkarakter Ada Moss'un ölümün eşiğinde olduğu ve onu intihara sürükleyen geçmiş bir günden kesitler hatırladığı yönünde yeni ve öznel bir yorumla okunmaktadır. Buradaki amaç, öykünün okuyucuya özgü, alışılmışın dışında incelemelere de açık olduğu olgusunu ve her ne kadar anlatılan olaya karşı okuyucunun bakış açısını yazarın kastının üstünde tutsa da bu türden incelemelerin tek ve belirli metne sayısız şekilde ışık tutabileceğini vurgulamaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Katherine Mansfield, öykü, "Pictures," ölüm sonrası fotoğraf

[1] I dedicate this article to the loving memory of my mother Hatice Kuşhan Kaya and my brother Şeref Kaya. You are forever alive in my heart.

* Prof. Dr.
Department of English Language and Literature
Hacettepe University
sebnemk@hacettepe.edu.tr
Orcid ID number: 0000-0002-5566-140X

Katherine Mansfield's 1919 short story "Pictures" has largely been read in a realist way as the tale of a day in the dispiriting life of a middle-aged singer-actress with limited financial means, trying in vain to find work as a bit performer in the film industry and having to turn to prostitution.[2] In this article, however, I suspend this orthodox approach and propose a new, subjective interpretation of the short story in which the hapless protagonist, Ada Moss, is at the juncture between life and death and recalling scenes from a previous day that turn out to be what pushes her towards suicide. Here the story is personally responded to and re-imagined as a rendition of the last minutes of life as well as the experience and the aftermath of death, or an ambiguous purgatorial space in which Ada's soul can be, though faintly, sighted or sensed via small textual details reminiscent of classical precedents, Jewish folklore, and post-death body states.

The rationale for this reading – which neither implies that the canonized critiques of "Pictures" fall short of interpreting the text correctly nor claims to be amendatory – is to italicize the fact that the short story permits non-traditional readerly analyses, too, in the first place due to the aesthetic values the writer herself upheld. To be more exact, no matter how marginal it may be, a subjective analysis looks like a sensible match for Mansfield's modernist piece of writing in which she creatively narrativizes her central character's subjectivity. Such an approach, which perhaps rates the way the reader views the narrated event above the writer's intent, is also inescapable because though Mansfield stopped writing long ago, readers continue to peruse her work, catching textual clues, tracing – text-to-self, text-to-text, and text-to-world – connections, and processing all these in their own ways to make individual inferences. That being the case, they can furthermore provide countless meaningful insights into the single set text, which can –

[2] See, as examples of this mainstream strand, Morrow 58-59, Kaščáková 138-40, and Stepniak 20-23.

entailing conscious thought and cognitive reasoning and therefore worthy of regard as scientific – enrich the studies in this field, a payoff significant enough to justify, or even argue for subjective readings, which do not repeat epistemic, and at times formulaic, analyses.

To start off, pursuant to the preliminaries above, in a key scene late in "Pictures," set in a café, Ada meets the only "person" who truly acknowledges her existence in the short story.[3] This "stout gentleman wearing a very small hat that floated on the top of his head like a little yacht" (99)[4] seems to be interested only in her body in a sexual sense. Yet, while it would be unjustifiable to dismiss that strong possibility, I posit that there may be a gloomier subtext running through the scene. To be specific, being yacht-like, the hat adverted to in the quote, as an example of text-to-self and text-to-text connections, makes me think of a mythical vessel of death and the character wearing it, the ferryman of the dead, Charon, who carries souls across the river Styx in the Greek Underworld and who Michelangelo depicts in the *Last Judgement* – the altar-wall fresco of the Sistine Chapel, Vatican City – as a solid psychopomp with a blatant tuft of hair on top of his forehead, which looks more like a diminutive hat than hair, and in command of a winged boat able to float not only in water but also in the air. As a result, Ada's soon-to-be hookup may be held as a tangible representation or an anthropomorphic personification of death, whose virtual target is Ada's immaterial, immortal soul.

Based on this assumption, their dialogue, along the lines of a *memento mori*, takes on a new significance and starts to prefigure death and death-related phenomena. To clarify this link between the fictional text and the reality external to it, when the man "bl[ows] a puff of cigar smoke full in her face" (99), for instance, Ada no doubt finds herself shrouded by a white

[3] Ada's landlady, Mrs Pine, too, converses with her meaningfully, but their exchange is, in accordance with the fundamental hypothesis of this study, conceptualized here as part of Ada's memories.
[4] All references to "Pictures" will henceforth be to Katherine Mansfield's *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield* (Wordsworth, 2006).

"darkness." The thick white vapor the man ejects breaks the air as a current in the shape of a tunnel, hits Ada's face, visibly but intangibly, and diffuses into the surrounding air, which must be, for Ada, an outward experience with inward repercussions. It allegedly makes her feel drawn into and pass through an irregular vortex ring, which is akin to "[t]he tunnel experience," an oft-reported near-death experience that, Moody claims, "generally happens after bodily separation" (32) and marks the starting point of one's passage into another dimension or realm.

Additionally, the man calls Ada's attention to "[t]hat ... tempting bit o' ribbon" (99), which may carry out more than one function. It may be more than an aesthetic, sexually inviting object – made of maybe silk, maybe satin or velvet – if used for practical purposes, as a band around one's neck. Upon this reference to her intriguing ribbon, Ada "blushe[s]" (99) as if, on the one hand, shamed by a salacious scene of seduction that crosses her mind but Mansfield prefers to bowdlerize from the text, and, on the other, stricken with hypoxia, that is "lack of oxygen to the body's cells,"[5] which is possibly induced, in Ada's case, by a traumatic event like strangulation obstructing her breath and thus causing her heart to speed up to pump extra blood into the vein[6] and meet the oxygen need of the cells. What the man utters next, "I like 'em firm" (99), alludes – once again with a sexual innuendo – to *rigor mortis* which, in Latin, in Bennett and Hess's phrase, "translates … [as] 'stiffness of death,' … a stiffening of the joints of the body after death due to partial skeletal muscle contraction" (244). This stage of death, "occur[rent] anywhere from 10 minutes to several hours post-mortem" (Bennett and Hess 244) and contingent on "a number of factors such as muscle mass, activity before death and temperature" (İşcan and Steyn 42), commences first in the face and neck muscles and then goes down into the trunk and ultimately the limbs (İşcan and Steyn 42) to rigidify the entire body, including the anterior of the

[5] The quoted definition of hypoxia is extracted from *Mayo Clinic*, p. 19.
[6] One of the symptoms of hypoxia is "increased heart rate" (*Mayo Clinic* 19).

chest. Hearing the gentleman's forthright remark about "firm" breasts or a hardened chest, Ada "g[ives] a loud snigger" (99), which may be seen as a coping mechanism that relieves her stress triggered by the shaming experience and, more importantly for this study, Ada's sense of superiority over or audacity in the face of death or her blithe acceptance of it, at the least. Therefore, when the man, evocative of death by dint of his hat, invites her to his place, the covert climax of their chat and the overall plot, Ada does not hesitate to "[sail] ... after the little yacht out of the café" (99). She follows or chooses to be closer to him, tantamount to moss clinging to the hull of a ship, as her surname adumbrates, which is possible to count as her attempt to not lose the comfort she has only just found in intimacy with death, figuratively speaking.

As the manifest stratum of the story makes it clear, Ada's life is marked by challenges she can neither solve nor ignore. The character is, first and foremost, lonely. She has no choice but to be her only friend and family, as is revealed when she looks into the mirror and calls herself "old girl" (94) endearing herself to herself. She furthermore "lives" in a boarding house room that "smell[s] of soot" (92), not having the wherewithal for wood or coal to put into the open fireplace in the room and so the fireplace, being unburnt, downdrafts, forcing the acrid, toxic odors of smoke, soot, and ash, built up in the chimney, into the room. To compound her failure to reverse the draft, Ada cannot even pay the rent for this room where she is left in the cold, in a haze of poisonous particles. Just as she yearns for a warm room she can afford, she misses nutrient-dense, steaming, and savory meals and on this account imagines "Good Hot Dinners pass[ing] across the ceiling" (92), celestial and out of her reach, in preference to the humble food she is obliged to eat, as can be inferred from the evidential "paper of fried potatoes she brought in for supper[7] the night before" (92). Worse yet, Ada's hopes of being better off are

[7] "[F]ried potatoes," inexpensive but unhealthy food rich in fat and calories, just about account for why she is a "[f]attie" (95) though trying to scrape by.

diminishing in inverse proportion to her age since she is, as a singer, in showbusiness which, as the short story highlights, puts a premium on youth and vitality. The character is at the onset of late middle age, a pointer of which are the varicose veins in her legs. She looks vacantly at the "great knots of greeny-blue veins" (93) that stand out, offensive to the eye, set against and contrasting with the white background of her skin. Blood, instead of flowing smoothly as it used to, now pools in her veins that protrude and so turn into a source of discomfort, not only physically but also psychologically. Ada is, it seems, estranged from her own limbs, now in an inferior state down to the enlarged twisted veins.

Given these circumstances and the fractured or segmented nature of the chain of events, abundant in gaps to fill, the reader is driven to construct, out of persistent textual hints, a backstory for the protagonist. One might hypothesize that when in a dark mood or less concerned over death than the worldly things with which she is beset, Ada – who repetitively uses the verb "go," an apparently harmless but alarming word, evincing subconscious feelings about the tragic act – may have suspended herself by the neck with her "tempting ... ribbon." The ribbon – Mansfield keeps as a mysterious object by refusing to describe it and not indicating what clothing or part of her body to which it belongs, leaving those details and meaning-making, together with her supreme authority as the writer, to the imagination of the reader – may be imaged as her ligature with a secure knot. Likely to be sturdy enough not to snap,[8] it may have twisted around and gripped Ada's neck tenaciously, as she loses her grip on life and breathes her last.

After the heart ceases to pulsate and the body is dead, Griffin writes, according to the findings of a 2017 medical study carried out by a group of Canadian scientists from the

[8] In contrast to the general misconception, ribbons are not necessarily delicate. On the contrary, they can be extremely durable if the fabric contains synthetic fibers and is woven in a ribbed, zigzag or checkerboard pattern.

University of Western Ontario, "[b]rain activity may continue for more than 10 minutes." The electrical activity, the delta waves in the brain, persevere (Griffin); the mind or consciousness goes on working, though steadily declining, and keeps alive its RNA, the much-debated memory molecule. Reckoning with all this data, one may postulate that Ada, lying face up and "staring up at the ceiling" (92), ostensibly goes through something beyond a morning awakening comparable to a near-death experience. She in fact lacks a pulse and reactive pupils from the very beginning. She may have faced her mortality and been found by Mrs Pine, her unnerving landlady – who has been trying to dispense with her, though not exactly thus and so – hanging from an anchor point in the room. The whole story, or the snapshots of Ada's life in the story, may then be a reflection of what her brain, still alive and cognizant, remembers subsequent to the death of her body, which has just been lowered and is now shackled to a bed. Put differently, "Pictures" may well be a story of memories returning, which is also suggested by the repetition of the word "back" seventeen times, four being "come/came back." It could be that the ribbon she last saw in the context of her room matches her memory of the café involving the very same ribbon, a retrieval cue, which pulls a cascade of memories of the original events into awareness without her having to search for them, while she is still halfway between life and death. These miscellaneous pictures of varying degrees of vividness that invade her final thoughts constitute what may be termed a "slice-of-life review," in line with, though a constricted miniature version of, the description Moody gives: "When the life review occurs, there are no more physical surroundings. In their place is a full color, three-dimensional, panoramic review of every single thing the NDErs [near-death experiencers] have done in their lives" (33).

Proceeding from this premise, the narrator of the short story shapeshifts into Ada's brain skipping backward to reconnect with her past and regain pictures from the then and there, which introduces a subtle nuance or an innovative sort of the modernist stream-of-consciousness

technique that discloses what goes on in a physically dead character's mind. This can be called the "stream of altered-state consciousness" or "alter-consciousness technique" since the narrator talks in the third person and operates within Ada's mind to present a comprehensive rendering of the character's inner world, to retrospectively translate part of Ada's whole life which still exists in the form of consciousness, or to put her "slice of life review" into words, in accord with the life-review experience, which, to quote Moody, "usually takes place in a third person perspective and doesn't occur in time as we know it" (33). The cerebral narrator in Mansfield's work brings the past and present together in a flash, before Ada's mental processes slow down and her memories eventually fade out, besides looking at her and her physical context from the outside.

Nevertheless, Ada's brain may well be anatomized as a first-person narrator that merely uses the wording of a third person, which is more complexly redolent of what Kimber expresses in her qualifying remark about Mansfield's narrators in most of her short stories: "the narrator is not an emotionally neutered entity, but rather one or other of the characters. Stories are presented through the thoughts of someone experiencing the events taking place" (168). The first- and third-person narrative voices in "Pictures" are nested together or are one and the same in essence. Even in the parts where Ada is seen in polyphonic interaction with the other characters, the narrative mode is not dialogic but monologic or single-minded as well as retrospective. It features a monopolized diegesis by a single, though cracked, voice, which is both internally and externally focalized and which recounts objects, actions, and/or past impressions of these from the same but simultaneously several perspectives. So, the seemingly third-person narrator who tells about Ada "l[ying], staring up at the ceiling" is tenable to be Ada's own mind's eye floating over her own flesh, conveying an in and out of body experience in concert.

In direct connection with the narrator's dual material and ethereal state, while Ada's eyes, left open at the moment of death, are fixed on the ceiling, as she does not have the blink reflex

anymore, and are still seeing – as "[t]he retina," Strettoi and Parisi elucidate, "is essentially a piece of the brain [though] with a peripheral location" (4), and retinal neurons can remain functional for about two days after cardiac functions stop[9] and continue to collect and send information to the brain[10] – while Ada is looking up from within to visually perceive things, her mind's eye is looking down at her own eyes from above, the two lines of sight – one physical, the other mental – intersecting.

The mind's eye also describes the lifeless setting in which the character is contextualized. She is lying "in a black iron bedstead" (92) – which, made of metal, connotes a cold clinical slab indispensable to *ex vivo* autopsy – in "her nightdress ... slit down the back" (93), fit to be compared to a loosely tied, coarse winding sheet. On a par with these revealing phrases in which death can be envisaged and haptically felt, the rest of the description summons up the smell. Ada's room is portrayed as "a Bloomsbury top-floor back," which, as indicated earlier on, "smelled of soot and face powder and the paper of fried potatoes she brought in for supper the night before"[11] (92). It is a claustrophobic, stagnant room in the course of getting even more airless since it is inside or conceived of by Ada's brain, which too will, sooner or later, be left bereft of oxygen.

[9] Maureen L. Condic relates that "cellular life persists in the body for hours or even days after an individual has been declared dead by current medical standards ...; live cells have been recovered from ... retina ... up to 48h after death, with cells remaining viable in the human cornea for up to a week" (258).

[10] One should note, at least parenthetically, that this is a process Strettoi and Parisi explain in comparison to, and as "much more complex than," the working principles of a "photographic camera": "[P]hotoreceptors, the specialized sensors, transmit light-initiated signals to a cohort of about 60 types of neurons, arranged in exquisitely ordered architecture, altogether extracting from light information pertinent to intensity, chromatic content, contrast, movement, and position. This bulk of data is then conveyed to the visual centers of the brain by the optic nerve using a complex (and partially undeciphered) code" (4).

[11] This is the way Ada recollects the setting and how it used to smell because, now dead and not breathing, she no longer physically smells anything. And her ability to bring back three distinct – pungent, musky, and starchy – odors, intimates that she died an abrupt death because losing the sense of smell is, say neuroscientists, a near-death experience associated with either the gradual ageing process of the brain or, as averred by Lewis et al., the progression of a disease (156).

The description also unveils that the room into which the individual smells of many things from the past have permeated in different slices of time is remembered to be inwardly united by a single mind in the present, stipulating the temporal, as well as spatial, wholeness of both settings, the "external" setting of the room and the internal fabric of the mind. This and the other analogous details imparted retrospectively in "Pictures" underlie the Bergsonian notion of "pure duration," which is, as "internal" moments "heterogeneous to one another," comparable to "the notes of a tune melting, so to speak, into one another" in the mind (Bergson 233, 100) – congruent with or inextricable from the idea of death which also is timeless. Throughout the short story, characterized by a heterogeneous conflation of the past and present, Ada is in many instances treated as invisible or immaterial. That she exists as a nebulous image or ghostly presence is crystal clear, for example, in the passage below:

> [W]hen she came to the ABC she found the door propped open; a man went in and out carrying trays of rolls, and there was nobody inside except a waitress doing her hair and the cashier unlocking the cash-boxes. *She stood in the middle of the floor but neither of them saw her*. ...
> 'Oh, I say,' gurgled the cashier, running back into her cage and *nearly bumping into Miss Moss* on the way. ...
> *'Can I have a cup of tea, Miss?' she asked.*
> *But the waitress went on doing her hair*. (94-95, emphasis added)

Ada is no more in the metaphorical sense, too. As a case in point, Mr Bithem, looking for "young" actresses "able to hop it a bit" and who "know something about sand-dancing" (97), overlooks her. The North-East Film Company is, by the same token, interested in "*attractive* girls" (97), not anyone of Ada's age group or physical features.

The short story embraces a cluster of other death-related specifics. To start with, Ada says, "I am cold. ... My knees and feet and my back – especially my back; it's like a sheet of ice" (92), a grim reminder of *algor mortis* or "the chill of death" (Aggrawal 118), an early stage of

decomposition during which, as Dix and Graham put it, “the body equilibrates with the surrounding environmental temperature” (6). Similarly, Mansfield writes, “Miss Moss shuddered” (92); the twitches in her body tally with a post-mortem reflexive action of muscles which, Scutti tells, can occur in the first twelve hours after death. Also, that she “disappear[s] under the bedclothes” (92) is feasibly a passing reference to the tradition of pulling the sudarium, or other item, up over the dead person’s face and an indicator that Ada crossed the Styx. Moreover, the character’s inability to move and “get out of bed” (93) to grab her “private letter” (93) from the landlady can be reckoned an akinetic state tending to evoke a motionless body, though the putative excuse is “her nightdress[’s being] slit down the back.” As another relevant detail, the letter in question is an anonymous rejection message “from a manager” (93), a dismissive personal note, exclusive of even the recipient’s name and made up of extremely few, direct words. Stating Ada’s picture has been “filed for future ref” (93), it kills all hope, so corresponding to a letter of condolence. Besides, the way Ada hears, or recalls hearing, the landlady when she says, “And I’ll keep this letter” (93) needs to be underlined. “Here,” the passage reads, “her voice *rose*. ... And ... here it *fell*, *sepulchral*, [emphasis added] ‘*My lady*’” (93). She perceives and qualifies the voice as alternating between high and low, alongside associating it with gloom and doom. This gives the impression, on the one hand, that she has sensitive, keen ears, and, on the other, that maybe she now has an impaired auditory system, that her perception of sound is receding, which can be explained by physical means, with the drop in the level of oxygen in the blood sustaining cerebral activity. Ada’s consciousness, and hence narrative, is becoming less and less reliable as her brain becomes more and more starved of oxygen. It loses its empirical consistency and veracity in parallel with the physical state of her moribund brain and its neural structures. And there may be a profound gap between the subjective reality, or the way Ada’s elusive consciousness in the process of finally becoming

blank experiences perception, and the outside reality – which leaves the reader compelled to pick up clues for an understanding of the potentially true state of affairs.

In addition to what has been said so far, there is the memory of a self-addressed song of exhortation Ada used to sing with her once imaginably rich and pleasant – though at the same time melancholic and therefore subtly resonant of the grave – "low contralto voice" (94), that is: "Sweet-heart, remember when days are forlorn / It al-ways is dark-est before the dawn" (94). When closely, or somewhat creatively, unpacked, these gnomic lyrics confide Ada's hope that she will see the light after darkness, being, or so it can be proclaimed, another sign of impending death, which perhaps promises a better future for her. To be precise, people who had the previously mentioned tunnel experience on the threshold of death recount that they went "through a passageway toward an intense light," that "at the end they c[a]me into brilliant light" and encountered "beings of light … [who] glow[ed] with a beautiful and intense luminescence that seem[ed] to permeate everything and fill[ed] the person with love" (Moody 32). This is an expression of love, felt deeply and softly in the chest, a sensation too-invisible-to-be-loved Ada cannot enjoy in her lonely life and, on the face of it, hopes to feel at least as a near-death experience or in an afterlife. Furthermore, that the character finds hope or solace in death, alienating herself from the fear of death, and embraces the relief and comfort death may bring, withdrawing her from the demands of everyday life and a steadily worsening body, makes the song elegiac in tone. Finally, "Sweet-heart" may be deemed a literal reference to Ada's heart, in which case the lyrics metamorphose into the bereaved brain's song, or rather dirge, for the heart which is no longer beating. It is the dirge of the organ in the body that dies last, for the organ that dies first.

Still another point germane to the present analysis is the "person" in the mirror Ada makes eye contact with and sees "ma[k]e an ugly face at her" (94), inciting her to leave the scene,

presumably unsettled. This segment of the short story, where Ada confronts her aging self momentarily, has overtones of the Kabbalist tradition of covering mirrors[12] – which, as described by Frankel and Teutsch, are "[i]n folklore ... connected with the spirit" (112) – in the houses of the mourning so that evil spirits may not creep in to fill the vacuum left by the deceased person (Moss). According to this tradition, even though "[t]hese demons cannot be seen by the naked eye[,] … when looking in a mirror, you may catch a glimpse of their reflection in the background" (Moss), thus offering an alternative interpretation of Ada's interplay with the mirror.

These, and perhaps other similar sections incorporated into the text, coupled with the workings of a narrated mnemonic of death, trigger a comparison between "Pictures" and a post-mortem photograph. Mansfield's piece of fiction can be envisioned as the verbal description of a post-mortem photograph taken and displayed by the seemingly dual, but actually single, narrator. To put matters in more concrete terms, the snaps once captured by Ada's retina and processed and stored by her brain are now shared by the same brain as a post-mortem photograph, with corollary attention to detail.

Several properties of post-mortem photographs run through "Pictures." To sketch some of these, first, the short story subdues the corporeality of death and gives the lifelike portrait of someone who is, conceivably, no longer alive. Second, the character's body is laid out on a bed made of iron, recalling the posing stands of the time which, Vatomsky explains, were "made of cast iron," and, as Groom writes, have since then been known as "the *Brady stand* (after the photographer Mathew Brady[13])" (241). This technical medium of photography "could anchor

[12] The tradition is mentioned in Aron Moss.
[13] The nineteenth-century American photographer, much acclaimed for his photographs of the American Civil War (1861-1865) in addition to daguerreotype portraits of politicians, including that of Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)

heads and limbs into fixed positions" (Groom 241). Ada remains quiescent in her metal bed, as if riveted, like the subject of a camera on a stationary photographic surface, exposed to the narrator's, or rather her own, mind's eye, which allows an unblurred picture of her. And third, this is a picture that eternalizes or freezes the character in time. Ada, posing once and for all in the short story, a verbal mourning portrait into which she is embedded, or buried, will probably be forever kept alive in the many copies already produced and will be made from the "negative" of the written picture or the manuscript of "Pictures" Mansfield once personally crafted. The picture of the seemingly moderately successful contralto that came from the writer's pen will be kept in circulation through each new publication and thus preserved for posterity.

In précis, it has generally been argued that Ada Moss in "Pictures" resorts to selling her body for want of money, but, in the light of the above discussion, aside from Patrick D. Morrow's comment that "[a]s her health began to decline,[14] Mansfield focuses increasingly on the 'mystery' of death" (138), the downcast character, as far as one can subjectively discern, appears to have opted for more than just that. The short story – written in the modernist tradition, with a higher regard for the subjective than the objective, to be processed by the reader's mind spurred by the insistent, albeit minute, details in the text as well as the impressionistic narrative – is open to a reading beyond its conspicuous line of action and meaning, and Ada Moss's story

---

taken on the day the President delivered the Copper Union speech in New York City (27 February 1860) (Marien 106-07).

[14] Jeffrey Meyers states that the writer "was frequently ill during 1910-11, and the serious decline of her health began at this time" (56). She had, in Brice Clarke's words, an "abdominal operation in 1910, the second pregnancy in 1911," compounded by "the comfortless racketing life in the bohemian world of London and Paris with insufficiency of food, heating and possibly even suitable clothing" (1031). Consequently, physically defenseless against the disease, she in all likelihood succumbed to tuberculosis in this period (Clarke 1031) – though Claire Tomalin indicates that she could have contracted it from D. H. Lawrence in 1916 (163), an assertion which, in David Ellis's opinion, appears to be without proof, "apart from the fact that Lawrence was [then] frequently ill and with symptoms" (205). Mansfield penned "Pictures" in 1917, when she was diagnosed with tuberculosis, which no doubt made her especially conscious of and preoccupied, if not obsessed, with death; the short story was published in 1919, when her health had been even worse.

can also be construed as Ada Morte's story. Or, as forecast by her palindromic name from the onset, Ada is in fact hovering between life and death or talking back from somewhere beyond in flashbacks, but still looking the same, as if alive and situated in a chronologically progressive time, a sense created by post-mortem photographs, too. Therefore, "Pictures," containing the plurality of those snapshots of Ada's life, can be seen as pertinent to a single slice of liminal life drawn by a pure consciousness not yet, or not wholly, isolated from the body, or a brain sailing through death and experiencing a final jolt to remember, report, and eternalize. From this point of view, all is, in the final analysis, one three-dimensional picture with a depth of ulterior meaning, the character's post-mortem picture of a different artistic medium and materiality, a picture captured and committed to the two-dimensional flat surface of a sheet of paper by Katherine Mansfield, in ink instead of light, as a permanent still image of Ada, inert in bed as a dead weight, while at the same time free to float and ideate.

Works Cited

Aggrawal, Anil. *APC Essentials of Forensic Medicine and Toxicology.* Avichal Publishing, 2014.

Bennett, Wayne W., and Kären Hess. *Criminal Investigation*. 8th ed., Wadsworth Publishing, 2007.

Bergson, Henri. *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Translated by F. L. Pogson, Dover Publications, 2001.

Clarke, Brice. "Katherine Mansfield's Illness [*Abridged*]." *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine*, vol. 48, no. 12, 1955, pp. 1029-32. doi.org/10.1177/003591575504801212. Accessed 30 Aug. 2020.

Condic, Maureen L. "Determination of Death: Scientific Perspective on Biological Integration." *The Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: A Forum for Bioethics and Philosophy of*

Medicine, vol. 41, no. 3, 2016, pp. 257-78, doi.org/10.1093/jmp/jhw004. Accessed 4 Apr. 2018.

Dix, Jay, and Michael Graham. *Time of Death, Decomposition and Identification: An Atlas*. Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2000.

Ellis, David. "Explaining the Abnormal: D. H. Lawrence and Tuberculosis." *Writing the Lives of Writers*, edited by Warwick Gould and Thomas F. Staley, St. Martin's, 1998, pp. 204-11.

Frankel, Ellen, and Betsy Platkin Teutsch. *The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004.

Griffin, Andrew. "Brain activity appears to continue after people are dead, according to new study." *Independent*, 9 Mar. 2017, www.independent.co.uk/news/science/what-happens-die-brain-activity-life-heart-beating-death-after-eeg-study-research-a7620131.html. Accessed 4 Apr. 2018.

Groom, Amelia. "'Objects Moving are Not Impressed': Reading into the Blur." *Time in the History of Art: Temporality, Chronology and Anachrony*, edited by Dan Karlholm and Keith Moxey, Routledge, 2018, pp. 240-48.

İşcan, Mehmet Yaşar, and Maryna Steyn. *The Human Skeleton in Forensic Medicine*. 3rd ed., Charles C. Thomas, 2013.

Kaščáková, Janka. "'My Flowerless Ones': Representations of Unmarried Women in the Short Stories of Katherine Mansfield." *Brno Studies in English*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2009, pp. 137-45, digilib.phil.muni.cz/handle/11222.digilib/105124. Accessed 30 Aug. 2020.

Kimber, Gerri. *Katherine Mansfield: The View from France*. Bern, Switz.: Peter Lang, 2008.

Mansfield, Katherine. "Pictures." *The Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield*. Wordsworth, 2006, pp. 92-99.

Marien, Mary Warner. *Photography: A Cultural History*. 2nd ed., Laurence King Publishing, 2006.

Mayo Clinic Guide to Living with a Spinal Cord Injury: Moving Ahead with Your Life. Demos Medical Publishing, 2009.

Meyers, Jeffrey. *Katherine Mansfield: A Darker View.* Cooper Square Press, 2002.

Moody, Raymond. "The Light Beyond: The Experience of Almost Dying." *The Near-Death Experience: A Reader*, edited by Lee W. Bailey and Jenny Yates, Routledge, 1996, pp. 25-38.

Morrow, Patrick D. *Katherine Mansfield's Fiction*. Bowling Green State U Popular P, 1993.

Moss, Aron. "Why are the Mirrors Covered in a House of Mourning?" *Chabad.org*, www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/2969340/jewish/Why-Are-the-Mirrors-Covered-in-a-House-of-Mourning.htm. Accessed 15 Mar. 2018.

Scutti, Susan. "What A Forensic Scientist Doesn't Tell You: 7 Postmortem Responses Of A Dead Body." *Medical Daily*, 15 Dec. 2014, www.medicaldaily.com/what-forensic-scientist-doesnt-tell-you-7-postmortem-responses-dead-body-314404. Accessed 4 Apr. 2018.

Stepniak, Anthony. "'Cast Aside' – An Extra in the Pictures: Mansfield's Modernist Representation of the Marginal." *Tinakori*: *Critical Journal of the Katherine Mansfield Society*, no. 1, 2018, pp. 19-27, www.katherinemansfieldsociety.org/tinakori/. Accessed 30 Aug. 2020.

Strettoi, Enrica, and Vincenzo Parisi. "Fundamental Retinal Circuitry for Circadian Rhythms." *The Retina and Circadian Rhythms*, edited by Gianluca Tosini et al., Springer, 2014, pp. 3-26.

Tomalin, Claire. *Katherine Mansfield: A Secret Life*. Viking, 1987.

Vatomsky, Sonya. "Clearing Up Some Myths About Victorian 'Post-mortem' Photographs." *Atlas Obscura*, 27 Nov. 2017, www.atlasobscura.com/articles/victorian-post-mortem-photographs. Accessed 4 Apr. 2018.

Journal of British Literature and Culture
2024.2, 37-61

Hacettepe University,
Department of English Language and Literature

The Destabilisation of Essentialist Views on Gender in Patience Agbabi's Rewriting of the Sestina

Patience Agbabi'nin Sestina Formunu Yeniden Yazımında Cinsiyet Üzerine Özcü Görüşlerin İstikrarsızlaştırılması

Melih KURTULUŞ*

Abstract: The poetical works written and performed by the contemporary British poet Patience Agbabi shed new light on the nature and function of poetry in that they raise questions on the topics of racial, gender, and sexual identities. In her rewritings of the sonnet, the dramatic monologue, and the sestina, Agbabi interrogates and extends the limits of these forms by reimagining the common themes in them. In this respect, this article presents a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which Agbabi introduces a pluralist approach to gender identity in her rewriting of the sestina in her "Seven Sisters," a group of seven poems from her collection titled *Transformatrix*. As a poetic form introduced into the literary scene in the Middle Ages by the French poet Arnault Daniel, the sestina heavily relies on the operation of its end words and nonmetricity. The distinctive feature of this form is the reordering process of its end words or teleutons. Agbabi instrumentalises this formal quality in order to highlight the instability in the meanings of the concepts that appear as end words in the poems. Hence, the major aim of this article is to elaborate mainly on the two of the end words, "girl" and "boy," and how they acquire new meanings as their places keep changing in Agbabi's rewriting of the sestina. In doing so, it is argued in the article that the strict formal qualities of the sestina provide Agbabi with a framework whereby the poet challenges the essentialist views on gender.

Keywords: Patience Agbabi, "Seven Sisters," the sestina, gender, identity

Özet: Çağdaş İngiliz şair Patience Agbabi tarafından yazılan ve sahnelenen şiirler ırk, cinsiyet ve cinsel kimlik konularına ilişkin soruları gündeme getirerek şiirin doğası ve işlevine yeni bir ışık tutmaktadır. Sone, dramatik monolog ve sestina formlarının yeniden yazımlarında, Agbabi bu şiir formlarındaki ana temaları yeniden ele alarak geleneksel şiir formlarını irdeler ve sınırlarını genişletir. Bu bağlamda, bu makale Agbabi'nin *Transformatrix* başlıklı şiir koleksiyonunda yedi şiirden oluşan "Yedi Kız Kardeşler" isimli eserinde sestina formunu yeniden yazarken cinsel kimlik konusuna çoğulcu bir yaklaşım getirmesinin kapsamlı bir analizini sunmaktadır. Bir şiir formu olarak Orta Çağ'da Fransız şair Arnaut Daniel tarafından edebiyata kazandırılan sestina yoğunluklu olarak uyakların şiir içerisindeki hareketine ve metrik olmama özelliğine dayanır. Bu formun en ayırt edici özelliği uyakların veya teleutonların her kıtada yeniden sıralanması işlemidir. Agbabi, şiirlerde uyak olarak karşımıza çıkan konseptlerin anlamlarındaki istikrarsızlığı vurgulamak için sestinanın bu özelliğini kullanır. Dolayısıyla, bu makalenin temel amacı Agbabi'nin sestina yeniden yazımında uyaklardan iki tanesi ("kız" ve "erkek") üzerine yoğunlaşmak ve bu iki uyağın nasıl yerlerini değiştirdikçe anlamlarını da değiştirdiklerini ele almaktır. Bunu yaparken, makalede sestinanın biçimsel niteliklerinin Agbabi'ye toplumsal cinsiyet konusundaki özcü görüşlere meydan okuyabileceği bir çerçeve sağladığı iddia edilmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Patience Agbabi, "Yedi Kız Kardeşler," sestina, cinsiyet, kimlik

*Research Assistant
Department of Western Languages and Literatures
Kırklareli University
melihkurtulus@klu.edu.tr
Orcid ID Number: 0000-0003-3476-6517

Patience Agbabi (1965 -) is a contemporary British poet who aims to challenge the traditional practice of privileging written poetry over its spoken form. As Broom points out, Agbabi's emphasis on spoken or performance poetry "questions … the poststructuralist-generated emphasis on the text and suspicion of the implied immediacy and authenticity of the spoken word" (256). Agbabi also employs traditional poetic forms such as the sonnet, dramatic monologue, and the sestina with the aim of discussing contemporary politics of race, identity, gender, and sexuality. On this matter, Engel argues that Agbabi's experimentation with traditional forms of poetry and her role-acting during the performances of those poems underline the idea that "identity is performative and unfixed" (156). In this way, Engel presents Agbabi as a postmodern poet who "invokes binaries like Black/white, male/female, tradition/innovation only to ultimately move away from 'an old either-or' to an 'and-also of multiplicity and difference'" (162). Along the same lines, Ramey lists Agbabi among Black British poets "using trickster identities" through which they "hold up British culture to a mirror, providing knowing reflection and pinpoint critique" (111). What Agbabi reflects in her poetry that incorporates traditional poetic forms is the denial of "any conflicts in what might be perceived as differing identities, believing that pre-inscribed roles and sets of influences are themselves the problem" (Ramey 128). That is to say, Agbabi's poetry sheds new light on the subjects of gender and racial identities by incorporating the elements of traditional poetic forms.

Patience Agbabi's rewritings of the conventional forms of poetry received extensive attention from critics in relation to contemporary politics of identity. For instance, Coppola proposes in an analysis of Agbabi's use of the sonnet form that "[t]he classical conventions of [the sonnet], celebrating the platonic love for an angel-like woman, are … radically revitalized by the poet's full exploration of the potentials of the erotic" (374). Correspondingly, Broom suggests that Agbabi employs the elements of the dramatic monologue so as to "create [in her

spoken poetry performances] ironic distance between 'speaker' and performer" (256). Similar to the analyses of the poet's rewritings of other traditional poetic forms, this paper analyses Patience Agbabi's take on the sestina, a poetic form that is mainly based on the reordering process of end words, or teleutons, in her "Seven Sisters," a chapter in her second poetry collection *Transformatrix* (2000). The poems in discussion give voice to the experiences of seven historically marginalised women. As a contemporary poet who blurs the distinctions between dominant and marginalised subjects, Agbabi, in accordance with the requirements of the form, uses the same six end words in all of the seven sestinas of the chapter. Four of the teleutons ("time," "end," "dark," and "child") that are indicative of the transience of time reflect the changing significations of the remaining two end words that are also gender markers ("girl" and "boy"). As Coppola states in an analysis of "Ms Demeanour," a poem in "Seven Sisters," identity becomes fluid and defies any definitive meaning "precisely like the word endings, which, by repeating themselves line after line, slip from one meaning to another, changing and chasing each other in a constant performance" (378). To put it differently, the reordering process of the teleutons in the sestina provides Agbabi with a framework through which she can reconceptualise the traditional totalising understanding of identity. In this respect, this paper argues that Patience Agbabi employs the sestina's quality of reordering its end words in all of the poems in her "Seven Sisters" to both move away from essentialist patriarchal views on gender and introduce the fluidity of the same concept.

Agbabi's preoccupation with gender identity becomes apparent in her rewriting of the sestina form. First practiced by the medieval French poet Arnaut Daniel, the sestina is a highly stylised poetic form that relies on nonmetricity and the process of reordering the end words, or teleutons, in subsequent stanzas. Based on a reverse of the rhyme scheme of Provençal lyrics, the sestina follows the *abcdef*, *faebdc, cfdabe, ecbfad, deacfb, bdfeca, eca* structure (Davidson 19).

The formal qualities of this form are so much in the foreground that the critical accounts of its thematic concerns vary. In fact, one critic argues that the sestina "gives more structural pleasure to the contriver than to the apprehender" (Fussel 145). That is, for some, the sestina carries little structural but no thematic significance. Still, some critics have attempted to find recurring themes in the form. For example, in his historical analysis of the form, Kilbane focuses on the use of the sestina by such poets as Sir Philip Sidney, Edmund Spenser, Algernon Charles Swinburne, Edmund Gosse, and Elizabeth Bishop and argues that the form "dramatis[es] situations in which a poetic speaker is at pains to make sense of something they can't quite fathom" (203). According to this view, the sestina deals with ontological and epistemological uncertainties. Caplan shares the same view and further elaborates on the form by pointing out the paradoxical nature of its political aspect:

> In English the form entered the twentieth century during the Great Depression, as poets grappled with the dilemma of how to address the day's most pressing social concern but not compose (in Elizabeth Bishop's phrase) ''social conscious' writing.' The resulting poems taught younger metrical writers the form's modernity, its ability to confront the age's urgent challenges. (14)

To expand upon Caplan's observation, it can be suggested that twentieth-century poets aimed to write on political issues of the day without seeming to do so by means of employing the sestina's elaborate qualities.

In a way that combines different views on the thematic concerns of the sestina, Jernigan suggests, in his detailed analyses of the examples by Arnaut, Francesco Petrarch, Dante Alighieri, and Sidney, that regardless of the different contents of these poets' works, the sestina depends mainly upon a detailed concentration on the teleutons "which grow in meaning and value as they proceed through the poem" (263). Similarly, Spanos observes that the early examples of the sestina by Arnault, Dante, and Petrarch do not "negate the constant and disturbing change which

the poet sees but embodies it in the constant shifting of its rhyme patterns, yet simultaneously draws it toward the stability of potential resolution" (554). The emphasis on the change in the meanings of the end words syncs with Kilbane's focus on the theme of ambiguity. In other words, the words or concepts chosen as the teleutons defy any definitive meaning. It also clarifies Caplan's contention that the sestina provides twentieth-century poets with a particular poetic structure through which they can problematise the purported comprehensibility of meaning in modern times (24). In this view, the reordering process of the end words in the sestina enables poets to deal playfully with the essentialist understanding of identity.

In a similar way, Agbabi employs the sestina to present a fluid understanding of gender identity. Unlike its first practitioners, Agbabi brings a postmodern perspective to both the employment of the form and the concept of gender. In other words, like in the early examples of the sestina, one can observe, in Agbabi's poems, the constant change in the meanings of the teleutons by shifting their places in the subsequent stanzas. However, Agbabi's attitude toward arriving at "the stability of potential resolution" (Spanos 554) at the end of her poems is paradoxical; the stable resolution in Agbabi's rewritings of the sestina form is the embracement of the instability of the views on gender. Thus, the intricate formal structure of the sestina offers Agbabi the opportunity to present a fluid understanding of gender in "Seven Sisters."

All seven poems in "Seven Sisters" centralise female characters that are historically marginalised. In terms of their setting, all of the poems take place in North London. In fact, the title of the section is a reference to a district with the same name in South Tottenham. However, each sestina focuses on women who are temporally distant from each other. While some of the characters in the poems live in the contemporary age, as in the case of "Martina," "Ms De Meanour," "The Tiger," and "Samantha," the characters in "The Earth Mother" and "Leila"

belong to the world of fairy tales. Still, as Murphy argues, the stories of these women convey the underlying message that "no one identity can ever be satisfactory" and that they contest "a reliable, stable, and authoritative voice telling ['their'] story" (77-78). Undoubtedly, "Seven Sisters" as a whole problematises the essentialist understanding of gender identity. Agbabi makes use of the sestina's quality of changing the rhyme scheme in a particular way to introduce the multiplicity of significations of gender.

In Agbabi's use of the form, there seem to be two groups of teleutons in the sestinas. The first group includes "time," "end," "dark," and "child," and these end words register the temporality of time. The remaining two teleutons, "girl" and "boy," constitute the second group. The gender markers selected as two of the six end words in these poems have historically been defined in an essentialist manner. As Gove and Watt put forward, the essentialist view "reduces gender to one factor" and that "[a]ll other gender characteristics … would simply be consequences of having this essence" (52). The one factor in question is the biological one based on the reproductive organs. However, this view has been challenged in the twentieth century with the addition of "social, and possibly even genetic, factors" in the formation of gender identity (Gove and Watt 54). In this view, gender becomes a socially constructed concept and thus acquires more than one signification. This constructed nature of gender, Robinson observes, is one of the important subject matters in contemporary British poetry where poets endorse "think[ing] of gender as relational and biologically indifferent, varying in its connotations from one culture to another, one age to another, and refer to a 'feminine subject position' to emphasise the instability of what may be assigned as gender characteristics, whose single constant factor is their marginalisation by the masculine" (162). The relationality of gender observed in contemporary British poetry is also a feature of postmodern poetry which marks "the sense of an ending of what Lyotard … calls the 'master Narratives' or 'grand Narratives' of [one's] culture

and society" (Kennedy 80). As a contemporary British poet, Agbabi incorporates this pluralist approach to gender in her "Seven Sisters" by employing the formal qualities of the sestina. In accordance with the requirements of the form, Agbabi's choice of two gender markers as teleutons and her attempt to assign new meanings to them in the following stanzas destabilises this grand narrative called gender. As the analysed poems will exemplify, the sestina provides Agbabi with a structural framework through which she introduces a relational approach to gender.

"Martina," the first sestina in "Seven Sisters," emphasises the constructed and transient nature of the qualities of gender by revealing how the meanings of "boy" and "girl" change over time. Although the poem is expected to be about a female character named Martina, it actually centralises the life story of its titular character's mother. The poem takes place in North London in the twentieth century during a war period that is not specified. The central character of the poem is a person who experiences casual sex with soldiers. However, her attitude towards sexual affairs is contrasted in the poem by the patriarchal society in which she lives. She is marginalised by her society, particularly by her father who can be seen as the representative of that society, when she gives birth to a daughter, Martina, out of wedlock. She eventually acknowledges the difficulties of being a single mother and decides to marry another man for the sake of her daughter's welfare. Simply put, the poem recounts her transformation from being an uncompromising woman to her yielding to the norms for survival. However, the female speaker of the poem, who used to be a neighbour of Martina's mother since childhood, deliberately avoids judgment towards her lifestyle while giving voice to her memories related to the story presented in the poem.

Before the analysis of the changes in the meaning of "girl" and "boy" in "Martina" it is necessary to examine how the other four teleutons function in the poem. These four end words, which are "time," "dark," "child," and "end" both help contextualise the recounted story in history and reflect the change of time. In the first stanza, "time" is used to situate the poem in the past: "I must have been sweet sixteen at the time" (1). Later, the same end word details the setting of the poem by explaining that it was "wartime" (8; 27). Eventually, it brings the story of Martina's mother to the present. Specifically, it shows that "[i]n time," she complies with the gender norms and marries a man to maintain Martina's social and financial security. Similarly, "end" specifies the setting of the poem by referring to the time and place that the recounted story takes place. It explains the spatial closeness of the speaker and Martina's mother in the first stanza; she was "living at the dark end / of the street …" (3-4). Along with "time," it points to the reality of the war. In other words, it refers to the soldiers' families' wish for the end of the war (12-13), the end of Martina's soldier father's "two-month leave" (28), and his eventual death at the battlefield (35). In the same way, "dark," when used to describe the setting in detail, gains different meanings in different stanzas. It refers to the scary darkness of the "nights pierced with blitzkrieg pyrotechnics" (15) while darkness gives Martina's mother the opportunity to "French-kiss GI lovers" (22). However, with time, the "dark" nights acquire negative meaning for Martina's mother as she is punished, due to her unconventional lifestyle, by her father who "threw her out into pitch-dark / November's clutches" (29-30). Finally, "child" signifies the transition in the life of Martina's mother from childhood to maturity. While its first usage refers to the change in her physical appearance (she is described as "the fat ugly duckling child / who grew up gorgeous" (4-5)), later on, it reveals her coming of age and maturity as she gives birth to a child, that is Martina. As the given remarks suggest, these four teleutons constantly change their meanings, and they suggest the passing time in the poem.

In addition to these four teleutons, the connotations of the other two end words, "girl" and "boy," vary as their places change throughout the poem. For instance, the placement of the word "girl" in different lines in each stanza enables it to escape any essentialist definitions. This teleuton is used to describe both the different characteristics of the speaker and Martina's mother and the change in its meaning in the life of the latter. In the second stanza, for example, the speaker articulates the difference between herself and Martina's mother as follows: "… I was a grown-up girl, / she was woman …" (10-11). Here, "girl" is employed to emphasise the level of the female characters' maturity. In other words, the speaker differentiates between the terms "girl" and "woman" in order to explain her inexperienced status when compared to Martina's mother. Later, the speaker uses the same word to describe Martina's mother as a "good-time girl / growing voluptuous from man and boy" (17-18) and a "midnight-rogue glamour girl / who French-kissed GI lovers in the dark" (21-22). Eventually, "girl" stands for the patriarchal society's perception of the kind of woman Martina's mother is. Having learned about the fact that her daughter had got pregnant by a soldier as a result of an extramarital affair, Martina's grandfather throws her out of his home. The speaker gives the grandfather's words without completing them; presumably, he says "'No girl / of mine …'" can have a child out of wedlock (30-31). As can be seen, "girl" does not refer to a specific kind of femininity. From the speaker's perspective, which does not include any judgment, "girl" can signify femininity or masculinity in a female person. It may refer both, as in the case of Martina's mother, to a woman who freely sleeps with other men and, as in the case of the speaker, to a masculine woman. Additionally, it may stand for a detestable kind of woman when viewed from the perspective of Martina's grandfather. All the different meanings attributed to the teleuton are accompanied by the fact that it keeps changing its place as a structural part of the sestina. When the end word explains the sexual experiences of Martina's mother, it is in the fifth line of the third stanza while it appears

in the sixth line of the fifth stanza when it reveals Martina's grandfather's conception of a woman. In the former, Martina's mother is described as a woman who "… found time / to party in new nylons, good-time *girl* / growing voluptuous from man and boy" (16-18) (emphasis mine). However, in the latter, the poem provides Martina's grandfather's denigration of promiscuity when he declares that "… 'No *girl* / of mine …'" (30-31) (emphasis mine). These lines suggest that the ideal woman, according to Martina's grandfather, does not engage in sexual affairs out of wedlock. Based on the differences in perception, the poem underlines the various significations of the term "girl." The universality of the patriarchal views on "girlhood" or "womanhood" is undermined by displaying the plurality of meanings attached to the gender marker. Martina's grandfather's conception of a woman signifies a female who does not have sexual freedom outside marriage. It suggests that any act of sexual activity is condemnable. However, the multiple meanings that the word "girl" acquires as it changes place as a teleuton undermine the grandfather's patriarchal and foundationalist understanding of gender.

In the same way, in "Martina," though less significantly, the word "boy" does not describe a specific kind of male identity. Rather, it is employed to explain the lifestyle of Martina's mother who sleeps with "[a] different boy / for each day of the week" (5-6). The word is even used to describe the female speaker who "was tomboy / running errands, climbing trees till the end" (19-20). Even when "boy" suggests a traditional conception of a man who is responsible for taking care of the woman who is pregnant with his child ("we all expected the boy / to marry her" (26-27)), the essentiality of such conception is undermined in the following lines which explain that the fulfilment of such expectations is hindered by social realities. The same lines inform the reader that the boy had to leave Martina's mother when his "two-month leave came to an end" (28). The reality of the war once more interferes in the substantiation of such traditional expectations when "the soldier boy / tortured by fate's ken bullet till the end, /

bleeding dry on a battlefield" (34-36). That is, the cost of the war, which is the death of the soldier "boy," prevents him from fulfilling the roles that this patriarchal society expects from his gender. The interjection of the gender expectations and the reality of the war reflects the social factors' impacts on the formation of gender identity. The soldier boy cannot marry Martina's mother and be a father in a traditional way because of the fatal obstacle occasioned by the war. Thus, none of the two gender terms relates to a specific kind of gender in "Martina." Rather, with the change in their places in the next stanzas, they acquire different meanings. "Girl" becomes a sign that refers to women who are nonconforming in terms of their attitude towards sexuality and appearance. It also reflects its patriarchal perception that invokes a specific kind of woman who should not be free in her sexual relationships. Similarly, "boy" pertains to both the patriarchal expectations from a male person and to men who cannot fulfil these expectations because of social conditions. These two gender markers acquire plural meanings while their places change in subsequent stanzas. It is this quality of the sestina form, that is its practice of changing the places of end words in subsequent stanzas, that provides Agbabi with the opportunity of presenting the significations of gender markers as unstable.

Likewise, "The Earth Mother" as another example of the sestina reveals the constructed nature of gender by juxtaposing biological sex and its social attributions. In the poem, Agbabi recounts the story of "a wise old woman" who wants to give birth to a son (2). The process of childbirth in the poem does not require any male presence. Rather, a magic soup made with particular ingredients collected from the nearby forest enables the old woman to bear a male child. The task of collecting the required materials for the soup is given to "Girl" who is either the old woman's daughter or her granddaughter although this is not clearly explained in the poem. Due to a mistake in the ingredients, the old woman gives birth to another girl although she names the child "Boy" before realising its biological sex. After the realisation, the old woman

still raises her new-born as a boy who performs acts that are understood to require masculine qualities. Throughout the poem, "girl" and "boy" as end words bear multiple meanings. Moreover, the meaning of the word "boy" becomes more ambiguous after the old woman's realisation as it begins to refer to a biologically female person.

In "The Earth Mother," "girl" is a term that is given multiple meanings. In the first stanza, it refers to the physical qualities of the old woman and "Girl." Maintaining the patriarchal categorisations of women, it initially describes the two female characters by their physical maturity: "Once upon a time / there lived a wise old woman and a young girl, / one at the beginning, the other at the end / of ripeness" (1-4). However, these two characters do not conform to the gender norms determined by the same discourse. As stated above, the old woman is self-sufficient in the act of procreation. She does not need any man to give birth to a child. Similarly, when the teleuton "girl" describes "Girl," it depicts her as a nonconforming character. With the instructions of the old woman, she leaves the domestic sphere to collect the required ingredients for the potion. In addition, "… Girl / converse[s] with snakes and conquer[s] trees" in her leisure time. Structurally, the same end word appears in the first line of the first stanza when it explains girlhood from the patriarchal perspective. However, it moves first to the fourth and then to the fifth line of the second and third stanzas respectively as it starts signifying the ways "Girl" departs from the traditional gender expectations. In other words, the signification of the term "girl" varies as its place as a teleuton changes throughout the poem. Hence, Agbabi's rewriting of the sestina challenges the normative perceptions of gender markers' significations by employing the form's characteristic quality of reordering the places of its teleutons.

More importantly, the meaning of the other gender term "boy" both changes and complicates itself with the disclosure of the biological sex of the new-born. Until this realisation,

"boy" refers to a specific kind of male identity. In the earlier stanzas, for example, the old woman explains that she wants to have a son in order to make him "chop the wood and mend the roof" (5). Later, the word refers first to "the special Boy / ingredient" which is "the skinned tail of an Alsatian pup" (9-10; 10). These lines refer to the traditional understanding of gender attributions' innate position. During fetal development, the assumed "Boy" "gr[ows] restless" from being confined in the womb, and his activity indicates the arrival of the time of giving birth (20). In other words, the term "boy" contains two different meanings until this point. First, it refers to a specific biological sex. Secondly, it signifies a socially constructed gender that is associated with particular social and physical actions. Although the biological sex and gender are almost inseparable in the earlier stanzas, the old woman's realisation that "her baby Boy [is] girl" and her decision to raise her biologically female new-born as a boy highlights the constructed nature of gender. From this point on, whenever "boy" as an end word is used, it refers to a person who is female at birth. The poem explains that even after the disclosure of the biological sex of the new-born, the old woman "gave praise and raised this girl-child / to chop the wood and mend the roof" (32-33). With this decision, the essentialist view on the affinity between biological sex and socially constructed gender, which is explained in the earlier stanzas through the old woman's desire to have a son to perform the tasks mainly associated with the male sex, is completely shattered. Thus, "boy" as the teleuton not only changes its meaning but also becomes ambiguous as it complicates the normative association of gender with biological sex.

As in "The Earth Mother," Agbabi destabilises the normative attributions of gender in another rewriting of the sestina form titled "Ms De Meanour" by making the two end words "girl" and "boy" signify the same person. This sestina is a reworking of the folktale titled "Cinderella." Following Charles Perrault's folktale, the biologically male speaker of the poem turns himself into a woman at night to have fun in the West End: "It's midnight. Party time. /

Time for a girl to hit the West End. … Time for boy / who meets girl / in the mirror" (1-3; 9-11). Different from the traditional Cinderella, Ms De Meanour, probably a nickname that the speaker uses for her drag performances, has nothing to worry about staying out after midnight. Besides, the speaker deliberately states that s/he still has masculine qualities even when she is transvestite. For instance, s/he describes herself as "the bastard child / of Barbara Cartland and Boy / George," which refers to her/his extravagant outlook although s/he still wears a Rolex watch (25-27). In this respect, as Coppola argues, the title of the poem carries a playful meaning since the pun on the word 'misdemeanour' "playfully engages with a 'transgressive' subjectivity that is constantly shifting and performing" (378). The amalgamation of two socially constructed genders challenges the normative and essentialist conception of gender identity.

In "Ms Demenaour," the blurring of gender distinctions is foregrounded by playing with the meanings of the teleutons. From the perspective of the poem's speaker, the two gender terms, girl and boy, are intertwined and thus it is not possible to decide on their meanings within a stable frame. It should be noted that the end words "girl" and "boy" always refer to a drag performer in the poem. Even when the speaker uses the word "girl" to refer to the transgender woman, s/he still emphasises that this character is "harder than a brickie," which denotes that she still has the traditional male outlook even in drag outfits (20). Through such attribution of elusiveness to "girl" and "boy," the poem undermines any unilateral understanding of gender.

The problematisation of conventional views on gender that limits human beings to two categories is enforced through the subversion of the story of Cinderella. In the fairy tale, Cinderella has to watch for the boundaries determined by her fairy godmother in order not to expose her real identity to the attendees in the ball. However, night-time is the time when the speaker in "Ms De Meanour" becomes the "boy [who] / meets girl / in the mirror" (9-11). It is at

night-time again that the speaker "hit[s] the West End" for performing at drag shows (3). While the fairy tale warns women of the danger of staying out at night, the poem presents it as the ideal time for the historically marginalised Ms De Meanour, which reflects the unconventional confidence of the character. In this way, the poem not only challenges the gendered expectations imposed on women but also subverts the conventional double standards that allow men to stay out at night-time. As the speaker makes clear, "the dark / is every boy's / sheat." (33-35). For the male character, the night hours become the ideal time to transform himself into a woman so that as a transgender figure he can enjoy his time in the West End. By reworking the fairy tale from within, the poem calls the supposed finality of gendered ideas into question. The revelation of those ideas' synthetic aspects underlines the poem's claim about the instability of traditional gender attributes. This view is also emphasised through the project of blurring the distinction between male and female, which is reflected in the multiple significations of the words "girl" and "boy."

Similar to "The Earth Mother" and "Ms De Meanour," "The Time Traveller" also complicates the referent of the end word "girl," and in this way, it destabilises the essentialist views on the feminine gender's semantic attributions. The speaker of the poem, who is also its main character, is a transgender attendant for a time-traveling craft. Pankratz and Tönnies argue that, in this particular poem, "entering new time zones means crossing cultural, linguistic, and conceptual borders" (1). Undoubtedly, "The Time Traveller" crosses the borders related to gender as the gender identity of its main character reveals. Throughout the poem, the reader is invited to different kinds of speeches uttered by her and distinguished by typographic differences. To expand upon it, the words that the attendant articulates to a person other than the passengers are given in an unmodified writing style. The poem starts with the attendant announcing the take-off of the craft to the addressee: "Fasten your seat belts. We're now entering a new time / zone.

It's six hours to New York" (1-2). Besides, while her direct addresses to the passengers are written in italics, her real unspoken opinions on them are put in parentheses. For example, she greets one of the passengers with "*Weekend break, madam?*" but expresses her real opinion of that passenger when she says "(Ritch Bitch)" (2-3; 3). While the poem mainly reveals the contradiction between its speaker's outward kind behaviour towards the passengers and her real rude opinions of them, the teleuton "girl" firstly refers to a female person who is biologically male. The disclosure of her biological sex happens when she announces that she is "… the porcelain T-girl / the bone-china babe. …" (30-31). These lines that employ slang terms imply that the attendant is a transgender woman who has undergone gender affirmation surgery. The fact that it is only "girl" that refers to the attendant, and not "boy," underlines the instability of the meanings attached to them. Her biological sex, which traditionally calls for the usage of "boy," is changed through a gender-affirming surgery. Thus, the permanency of the term's reference to boyhood is problematised.

Another example of the sestina form in "Seven Sisters" is "The Tiger" which underlines the fluidity of gender identity through the image of tattoos. The poem is about foolish mistakes made by young people during their inexperienced years. In this case, it centralises the story of Tracy whose experiences with tattoos involve her attempts to reveal her emotions and identity through bodily inscriptions. The speaker of the poem, Tracy, recounts her experiences of getting tattoos. Each tattoo is related to a specific experience in her life. Her first one, which says "Tracy loves Darren" (17), refers to her attempt to come over the shameful feelings stemming from her first sexual intercourse with the alluded male character "somewhere along the beach" (5). Following a break-up shortly after getting her first tattoo that reveals her feelings for Darren Smith, Tracy goes to see a tattooist whom she refers to as "Cruella De Villa," which might refer, based on its source of allusion, to the extravagant appearance of the tattooist. This time, she gets

a tattoo in the shape of a tiger, and from the tattooist's remark on Tracy's first tattoo ("'We'll cover him up in no time'" (36)), it is understood that the second one is to erase the present inscription on her body that reveals her love for Darren. Thus, the poem eventually brings forward both the possibility of covering the engravings on the body with new ones and their impermanence.

Following the statement on the body and the temporality of its imprints, the poem shows that the attributions of a particular gender are not permanent. The speaker carefully implies the affinity between tattoos and socially constructed gendered views:

> … I was a child
> bride, married to the needle and our child
> was the fine-line distinction, like girl, boy,
> the miracle of the living flesh. Time
> was exquisite subcutaneous pain and the end
> marked the beginning, a jet-dark,
> old-gold tiger, draped across my shoulder. No girl
> is fully dressed without one. (24-30)

The analogy drawn here between the replacement of a tattoo with another one and the interchangeability of the two gender identities implies that neither bodily inscriptions nor the social associations of genders are fixed. A tattoo's supposed permanence is undermined by another tattoo that covers the first one just as the perpetuity of girlhood can be thwarted by boyhood or vice versa. Likewise, the changes in gender identities happen over time. As Agbabi puts forward in the given lines, the distinction between the gender markers is subtle. That is why the given lines refer to time as the pain felt under the skin (26-27). In effect, just like the touch of a needle can change the shape of artificial marks on the body, a person's perception of the concept of gender might change over time.

In fact, the poem discloses the transient nature of essentialist views of gender identity by means of the sestina form's tendency to change the places of its teleutons. As in other examples

in "Seven Sisters," "girl" and "boy" are two of the six end words in "The Tiger." In each stanza, the gender terms acquire new meanings. This is especially applicable to the term "girl" as the poem gradually reveals the transition from the speaker's shameful feelings internalised from the standardising views on gender to her depiction as an independent and powerful woman. The first usage of "girl" as an end word in the poem is when a certain Miss Carter, presumably Tracy's schoolteacher, writes a note which says that "Tracy is a very bright girl / but she plays the fool like a veteran" (2-3). Tracy's alleged 'foolish' behaviour is her inscribing the words "LOVE HATE" on her body (1). This is definitely not a regular tattoo, and it might be that she has written these words with pens since the words are written "in black and blue" (1). Another experience of Tracy which is perceived by her society as a 'misbehaviour' is her first sexual intercourse with Darren Smith. This experience leads to the occasion on "the last day of school when some boy scrawled SLAG on my graffitied blouse" (9-10). The reactions of a teacher and a student at her school point out the gendered views on sexuality in Tracy's society; while Darren Smith is never addressed in any manner, Tracy becomes the target of these views. Additionally, Tracy herself absorbs the same views, as the articulation of her feeling of embarrassment shows. After her first sexual intercourse, she wears "a black polo neck for weeks" which reiterates the poem's main idea that the body displays traces of personality (7). In other words, the poetic persona expresses her love for Darren through inscriptions on her body. Also, the clothing she chooses after the sexual intercourse reflects her emotional condition at that time. This means that Tracy feels the need to cover up her body which otherwise might expose, in her view, the fact that she has engaged in a sexual intercourse. Also, following her exposure to bullying at school, she "marche[s] to the end / of the pier, the bleach-blonde end / of an era, wishing for the anonymity of dark" (12-14). Evidently, although she is a non-conformist female figure, she still feels ashamed when subjected to social criticism about her sexual affairs. However, later she

decides to reclaim her sexual liberation by getting her first tattoo declaring her love for Darren. This happens in 1979, which is a period referred to in the poem as the year of "… girl / power …" (17-18). These lines propose that the traditional views on girlhood and expectations from a woman are being contested at that time. Eventually, the poem furthers this contestation through the presentation of Tracy's encounters with the tattooist and with her receptionist called "Tank Girl" (22). These encounters introduce Tracy to the idea that gendered expectations can change with time and place. In this respect, it can be argued that "girl" as a teleuton acquires different meanings in each stanza. The end word is in the second line of the first stanza when it points out the traditional understanding of a woman conveyed through Tracy's teacher. It moves to the third line of the fourth stanza referring to "Tank Girl" and her unconventional appearance. The plural meanings attached to the given gender term both debunk the totalised views on gender and demonstrate its fluid nature.

Another poem in the section, "Samantha," deals with the subjects of prostitution and teenage pregnancy experienced by its titular character. The poem is thematically similar to "Martina" in which Martina's mother is marginalised due to the fact that she gives birth to a child out of wedlock. Samantha's story is conveyed to the reader through the medium of the poetic persona who is watching a visual document in which the eponymous character speaks of her past experiences. She informs both the speaker and the reader that she is a free woman in her choice of sexual affairs. She describes herself as "a girl / who knows how to give a boy / a good time" (17-19). It is also understood from the document that she has been subjected to sexual abuse in the past. She remembers that she "was still a child / when [her pervert stepdad] did it" (25-26). Currently, Samantha is pregnant with her second child, and although she is dating a married man, the visual document ends with her articulation of determination about taking care of her kids.

Various representations of Samantha's unorthodoxy in the poem, which is given through varying significations of the word "girl," point out the fact that there cannot be a totalised meaning of the end word "girl." For instance, a card that shows up on the visual document describes her as a "naughty schoolgirl," apparently due to the fact that she freely engages in sexual affairs (2). The attribution of bawdiness to Samantha reveals the discrepancy between what society demands from women and her real experiences. The fact that she has "[g]ot a child / of three, another on the way" at the age of eighteen makes her society regard her as a despicable human being (4-5). She resembles Tracy in "The Tiger" in the way she shows her awareness of gender norms. For this reason, she considers her job as a prostitute to be an opportunity for her since people "can't see my bump in the dark" while she "work[s] Stamford Hill mostly" (7; 8). The reference to the location in these lines explains the degree of her marginalisation since Stamford Hill is known for being occupied mainly by practising Jewish communities. In this way, the poem demonstrates Samantha's unconventional gender identity that defies any singular conception of how a woman should live.

Apart from the rejection of the normative views on womanhood, in "Samantha," Agbabi saves Samantha from being described as a stereotypical prostitute by making use of the playfulness of end words inherent in the sestina form. Although she works as a prostitute and has an affair with a married pimp, Samantha still cares for her kids. While working with "The Handsome Pimp," they occasionally "… call half-time / at midnight and I check on my kid. You can't leave a child / home alone. Pervs. …" (23-25). These lines reveal that Samantha does not fit into the patriarchal conception of prostitutes as unmotherly[1]. Drawing on her own experience

[1] The stigmatisation of prostitutes in Western societies is explained by Pheterson as follows: "If a [girl] should engage in sexual relations before marriage, then she becomes unchaste and, in some cultures, uneligible for a marriage of standing" ("The Social" 237). Elsewhere, Pheterson observes that "whores are reduced to one image which is neither wife nor mother" ("The Whore Stigma" 56). The given remarks

of being sexually assaulted by her stepfather, Samantha is considerate about the life of her child. In other words, the manifold meanings that the teleuton "girl" acquires throughout the poem as it changes place in subsequent stanzas show that Samantha is not simply an unconventional woman. Her story reveals that she possesses the qualities that are both applauded and criticised by the patriarchal society. She has the characteristics of a woman in the traditional sense since she cares for her child. However, her occupation casts her a marginal figure in the view of the patriarchal society. In this way, through the sestina's propensity to provide its end words with multilayered meanings as they move to new lines in each stanza, "Samantha," introduces a fluid understanding of gender.

The last poem in "Seven Sisters," "Leila," partly follows its predecessors in terms of problematising gender norms by employing the opportunity that the sestina form provides through its practice of reordering the end words. The poem reads as an adolescent girl's dreams about a life that resembles fairy tales in which men and women are expected to have certain qualities to fulfil the roles of the prince and the princess. For this reason, unlike the other poems in the selection, the meanings of the teleutons "girl" and "boy" remain the same throughout the poem. In other words, "girl" and "boy" as the end words always define characters who follow the traditional gender roles. They never acquire new meanings as they appear in new lines in following stanzas. For instance, whenever "girl" appears as the end word it refers to a traditional type of woman who is always in the passive role as expected by patriarchal societies; she "surrender[s] to womanhood," or she "leav[es] a trail for boys to find her" (3; 5-6). She waits for her prince until a particular age, and it is only then she "… lets down her braided longing" (12). Like Cinderella, she "dream[s] all night of her shoe-shine boy, / their diamond ring, / that happy

---

underscore the conventional idea that emphasises the incompatibility between prostitution and motherhood.

end- / ing. …" (34-36). In addition to a traditional depiction of womanhood, the given lines also make clear that the teleuton "boy" always refers to a particular male figure that has an active role. He initiates the affair by pursuing the girl or the princess. He is imagined by Leila as a prince who "climb[s] into the dark, / damp chamber, the witch's brainchild" in the pursuit of his beloved (14-15). The fact that these two end words never acquire new meanings other than their traditional connotations seems to contradict Agbabi's attempt to subvert the essential ideas concerning gender norms by making use of the opportunities that the sestina form provides. However, it can be suggested that "Leila" accompanies the earlier six sestinas in its presentation of the fluid nature of gender. This is achieved by the narration of Leila's dreams as fictional. Hence, overall, the poem argues against the essentialism of traditional views on gender by laying bare their fictitious nature. In other words, the poem regards the conventional belief that women passively wait for their male pursuers as fiction.

In conclusion, Patience Agbabi employs the formal qualities of the sestina in order to reconceptualise gender identities. The poems in her "Seven Sisters" present ideas that challenge the normative assumptions on gender by pointing out the fluid nature of and the complexities inherent in gender identities. Agbabi makes use of the sestina's disposition to change both the spatial location and the meanings of its teleutons. Through this method, Agbabi inserts new meanings to the two gender terms "girl" and "boy," which in turn problematises the singular meaning attributed to each term by patriarchal societies. Such poems as "Martina," "The Tiger," "Samantha, and "Leila" depict unconventional women who do not comply with essentialist views on gender. While the centralised characters of "Martina," "The Tiger," and "Samantha" do not submit to society's gender expectations, Leila's wish to be a passive receiver of a love experience proposed by a prince is presented as a dream. The same poems also reject displaying these female characters as simply marginal figures, which contributes to Agbabi's attempt to

highlight the fluidity of gender identities. Similarly, “The Earth Mother,” “Ms De Meanour” and “The Time Traveller” underline the fact that any claim over the absoluteness of gender norms is fictional. In these poems, Agbabi highlights the plural meanings of gender markers, “girl” and “boy,” by making them the end words in the examples of her rewriting of the sestina. Hence, the respective attribution of masculinity and femininity to the terms “boy” and “girl” is problematised. When all of the seven examples of the sestina are taken into consideration, it becomes apparent that the process of reordering end words in the sestina form provides Agbabi with a framework through which she underlines the fluidity in the significations of gender markers.

Works Cited

Agbabi, Patience. *Transformatrix*. Payback P, 2000.

Breeze, Jean Binta, et. al. “A Round-Table Discussion on Poetry in Performance.” *Feminist Review*, no. 62, 1999, pp. 24-54. *JSTOR*. http://www.jstor.org/stable/1395643

Broom, Sarah. *Contemporary British and Irish Poetry: An Introduction*. Palgrave MacMillan, 2006.

Caplan, David. *Questions of Possibility: Contemporary Poetry and Poetic Form*. Oxford UP, 2005.

Coppola, Manuela. “Queering Sonnets: Sexuality and Transnational Identity in the Poetry of Patience Agbabi.” *Women: A Cultural Review*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2015, pp. 369-383. *Taylor & Francis*. https://doi.org/10.1080/09574042.2015.1106252

Davidson, F. J. A. “The Origins of the Sestina.” *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 25, no. 1, 1910, pp. 18-20. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2915934

Engel, Katharina. "Diversifying the Genre: Postmodern Strategies in Patience Agbabi's (Performance) Poetry." *Poem Unlimited: New Perspectives on Poetry and Genre.* Edited by David Kerler and Timo Müller. De Gruyter, 2019, pp. 155-170.

Fussel, Paul. *Poetic Meter and Poetic Form*. Random House, 1979.

Gove, Jennifer, and Stuart Watt. "Identity and Gender." *Questioning Identity: Gender, Class, Ethnicity*. Ed. Kath Woodward. Routledge, 2000, pp. 44-79.

Jernigan, John Charles. "The Sestina in Provence, Italy, France, and England (1180-1600)." Diss. Indiana U, 1971.

Kennedy, David. "'Just Facts, Just the': A Rough Guide to British Postmodernism." *New Relations: The Refashioning of British Poetry, 1980-1994*. Mid Glamorgan, 1996.

Kilbane, Matthew. "The Sestina." in *An Introduction to Poetic Forms*. Ed. Patrick Gill. Routledge, 2023, pp. 203-212.

Murphy, Catherine. "Performing, Transforming, and Changing the Question: Patience Agbabi – Poet Enough!." *Intimate Exposure: Essays on the Public-Private Divide in British Poetry Since 1950*. Edited by Emily Taylor Merriman and Adrian Grafe, McFarland, 2010, pp. 67-84.

Pankratz, Anette, and Merle Tönnies. "Introduction: Performing the Future." *Journal of Contemporary Drama*, vol. 9, no. 1, 2001, pp. 1-19. *De Gruyter*. https://doi.org/10.1515/jcde-2021-0001

Pheterson, Gail. "The Social Consequences of Unchastity." *Sex Work: Writings by Women in the Sex Industry*. Edited by Frederique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, Cleis P, 1987, pp. 231-246.

---. "The Whore Stigma: Female Dishonor and Male Unworthiness." *Social Text*, no. 37, 1993, pp. 39-64. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/466259

Ramey, Lauri. “Contemporary Black British Poetry.” *Black British Writing*. Edited by R. Victoria Arana and Lauri Ramey, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, pp. 109-136.

---. “Patience Agbabi.” *Dictionary of Literary Biography: Twenty-First-Century Black British Writers*, vol. 347. Edited by R. Victoria Arana, Gale, 2009, pp. 1-14.

Robinson, Alan. *Instabilities in Contemporary British Poetry*. Macmillan, 1988.

Spanos, Margaret. “The Sestina: An Exploration of the Dynamics of Poetic Structure.” *Speculum*, vol. 53, no. 3, 1978, pp. 545-557. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/2855144

Wojcik, Bartosz. “Cherishing Chaucer, Choosing Chuck D: Patience Agbabi and Cultural Tradition.” *Lublin Studies in Modern Languages and Literature*, no. 33, 2009, pp. 78-90. https://bibliotekanauki.pl/articles/606311

Journal of British Literature and Culture
2024.2, 62-78

Hacettepe University,
Department of English Language and Literature

Cycle of Evil and Wrongdoing in the Face of Judicial Corruption: An Analysis of "Branch Va: The Lawsuits of Isengrim and Bruin the Bear" in *The Romance of Reynard the Fox*

Adli Yozlaşma Karşısında Kötülük ve Haksızlık Döngüsü: Tilki Reynard Romansı'ndaki "Va: Isengrim ve Ayı Bruin'in Davası" Başlıklı Öykünün Analizi

Ulaş ÖZGÜN*

Abstract: This article aims to explore evil at both individual and societal levels in "Branch Va: The Lawsuits of Isengrim and Bruin the Bear" from *The Romance of Reynard the Fox*. Drawing on the perspectives of philosophers such as Claudia Card and John Kekes, this study examines evil as the infliction of harm to others and culpability. The focus centres around Reynard, the wily fox, whose intentional harm propels the narrative, and the administrative shortcomings contributing to societal evil. The article contends that evil in "Branch Va" extends beyond individual actions to encompass systemic flaws, particularly within the justice system. Ultimately, the true evil lies not only in individual transgressions but also in a corrupt justice system perpetuating wrongdoing and hindering accountability.

Keywords: *The Romance of Reynard the Fox*, Reynard the Fox, Beast Epic, Evil, Culpability, Wrongdoing

Özet: Bu makale, *Tilki Reynard Romansı*'nın "Va: Isengrim ve Ayı Bruin'in Davası" başlıklı öyküsünde bireysel ve toplumsal düzeyde kötülüğü irdelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Claudia Card ve John Kekes gibi filozofların bakış açılarına dayanarak, bu çalışma kötülüğü başkalarına zarar verme ve suçluluk olarak ele alır. Çalışmanın odağı, hikâyeyi başlatan kurnaz tilki Reynard ve toplumsal kötülüğe katkıda bulunan idari eksiklikler etrafında şekillenir. Makale, "Branch Va"daki kötülüğün bireysel eylemlerden öte, özellikle adalet sistemine dair sistemsel kusurları içine alan bir boyuta uzandığını savunur. Sonuç olarak, gerçek kötülük yalnızca bireysel ihlallerde değil, aynı zamanda yanlışları sürekli kılan ve sorumlu olmayı engelleyen bozuk bir adalet sistemindedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: *Tilki'nin Romansı*, Tilki Reynard, Hayvan Destanı, Kötülük, Suçluluk, Yanlış Yapma

* Res. Assist. Dr.
Department of English Language and Literature
Tekirdag Namik Kemal University
uozgun@nku.edu.tr,
Orcid ID Number: 0000-0003-3565-8059

Christian exegesis, the beast epic as a relatively secular tradition lends itself to analysis from a non-religious perspective on the concept of evil. Thereby, the primary focus of analysis benefits from secular perspectives on evil, particularly, the formulations of theorists, Claudia Card and John Kekes. Their philosophical perspectives on evil converge in terms of their emphasis on the infliction of harm and culpable wrongdoing as essential components of the concept. Culpability introduces the role of agency or lack thereof to the concepts of wrongdoing and harm. Thereby, evil can arise either through the intentional infliction of harm or by neglecting to implement preventative measures. From this perspective, "Branch Va" features Reynard, the wily fox figure, whose harmful actions are the main catalyst for the story to move forward. However, various governmental facets of the mock feudal world featured in the work also contribute to the prevalence of evil. Consequently, it is argued that the presence of evil from a secular perspective in "Branch Va" is not only credited to Reynard's persistent habit of intentionally harmful behaviour to others but also the by-product of administrative shortcomings that contribute to the perpetuation of his abusive behaviour.

The examination of the concept of evil may initially appear incongruous in the animal literature of the Middle Ages. However, animals were customarily used as representatives of an established set of virtues and vices observable in humans. These repositories of symbolic meanings had been established by complex and reciprocal influence over a very long period. By the twelfth century, the utilisation of animals as shorthand for particular character traits or moral standpoints was solidified in the common culture of medieval people. Therefore, even for the uninformed, the use of animals in medieval literature often provided them with recognisable character traits, leading them to anticipate the tone, style, and direction of the text. Fox was an in/famous example whose reputation as a trickster figure could be traced back to the Aesopic

fable and later on, spread across medieval art and literature.[1] Beryl Rowland presents a detailed survey of the fox's representation in "ecclesiastical sculpture and carvings, on tiles, croziers, embroidery, and in illustrations in Gothic manuscripts" (76).

The fox's popularity had branched out a distinct tradition of *Roman de Renart* in France by the late twelfth century. Also referred to as beast epic, this work was comprised of episodic and short animal stories composed over some time by "over twenty writers, whose styles, personalities, talents, and preoccupations were certainly different" (Lair 86). These distinct cycles of tales were loosely bound together with the character of Reynard the fox whose trickery was the driving force of these narratives. According to Lucien Foulet, Branches I, II, III, IV, Va, VI, VII, VIII, IX, X, XI, XII, XIV, XV, XVI, and XVII were composed around 1174 and 1205 (118) whereas the other ten branches could be dated between 1205 and 1250 (474). *Reynard*'s most obvious source was the fable tradition. However, for Jan Ziolkowski, the Latin clerical tradition of animal tales is another prominent source: "such poems as Leo of Vercelli's "Meter," the *Ecbasis captivi*, and the *Ysengrimus* are … prototypes of the *Roman de Renart*" (Introduction 3). *Reynard* immediately soared in popularity and "the linguistic change" in French concerning the name fox "from "goupil" to "renart" was a testament to its acclaim (Amer 11).

Reynard offers a vivid panorama of medieval society, representing a refracted world of medieval society with all the estates. "Branch Va: The Lawsuits of Isengrin and Bruin the Bear" encompasses a diverse array of characters, including peasants working on farms, the judge Sir Bruin, the constable Isengrin, and nobles such as Sir Tiecelin and Sir Bruin. Religious saintly figures such as Saint Riquier indicate deep religious lore and the presence of King Noble

[1] The trickster animal figure can be found in every culture with variations such as the coyote in the tales of *Panchatantra* or the master rabbit or the great hare in the American Indian folktales. Fox is just another equivalent of this tradition in the West popularised by the fables of Aesop (Rowland 76).

presiding over the animal kingdom establishes an affinity to the feudal system and its hierarchical organisational structure. Moreover, the contextualization of the tales within a quasi-realistic setting "takes us down the highways and more often byways of rural France, offering glimpses of real townships and villages sometimes identified by name" (Owen, Introduction xiii). These details bring the narrative to a more humane dimension, concurrently reinforcing the narrative's satirical commentary on evil and judicial corruption.

From a narrative standpoint, "Branch Va" also depicts a criminal incident and its subsequent legal proceedings that might have happened within the historical context of the period. It begins with Isengrim's rant about the rape incident between Reynard and Hersent, the wife of the wolf Isengrim. The incident happens in "Branch II: Reynard and Chantecler – Reynard and the Tit – Reynard and Tibert – Reynard and Tiecelin – Reynard and the She-Wolf." Jean Subrenat notes that the compositional details of the texts are revealed through the intricate and interdependent relationships of the stories: "there has been general agreement that the two branches known as II and Va together comprise the original base of a group of texts to which Branch I was very soon added by an author who was explicit in regarding it as an essential adjunct" (17-18). Therefore, the evil act of rape and its intricate web of effects and consequences reverberate in three separate branches of *Reynard*. Unable to overcome the psychological trauma of the rape, the couple seeks justice from King Noble. Despite the king's initial reluctance to convict Reynard, whom he perceives as acting "out of love" (94) he defers the judgment to his private council to avoid appearing negligent. The incident is discussed by the judicial members who foreground their grievances, biases, and personal preferences over the matter. Faced with the absence of an objective witness, however, they finally propose a resolution through an amicable agreement: "'let us now fix a day for this agreement. Have Reynard take the oath and pay compensation according to the terms he has promised Isengrin" (100). The king is now

relieved to be free of responsibility and delegate the final judgment. This time Isengrin disrupts the agreement by bribing Roenel, the witness of their agreement, to feign death and ambush Reynard. In the end, Reynard perceives the trick, refrains from swearing an oath under compromised circumstances and successfully evades the trap and judicial punishment.

Indeed, the resemblance of the world in *Reynard* to the real world allows for commentary on matters of evil and justice. The blurring of the boundaries between humans and animals is a clever and satirical take on humanity's fluid status within the Christian cosmos, formulated extensively as a hierarchical system, famously referred to as the Great Chain of Being.[2] Accordingly, humans may rise to the level of angels or degrade themselves to an animal-like state by un/subscribing to the instructions of God, Christian virtues and rationality. They performatively determine their conditions via their actions that are harmful or conforming to God's law. Hence, the character's dispositions as animal with human attributes in the beast epics is an explicit criticism of their evil nature. Furthermore, the fluidity facilitates alternative readings of the incorporation of trial in "Branch Va." In this regard, John Aberth states that "[t]he main object of the Reynard romance is to parody through its animal characters human institutions and customs, such as the legal system … but it does also show that medieval culture could easily envision animals as equally subject to the law, even if only in a literary way" (221).

[2] Originally, the concept of categorising entities based on a hierarchical scale of significance was not a Christian tradition. Arthur Lovejoy conducts an extensive study of the "Chain of Being" concept in Western philosophy which reveals that its roots date back to ancient Greek philosophy. It identifies the notion as not stemming from a single core idea but as an amalgamation of three key ideas: Plato's concept of "plenitude," along with Aristotle's principles of "continuity" and "gradation" (O'Meara 17; Lovejoy 52). Only during the Neo-Platonist philosophers' era were these three individual concepts fused into a single cohesive idea. The set of ideas that greatly influenced the medieval Christian perspective was derived from Neo-Platonist thinkers, particularly through the writings of Augustine and Pseudo-Dionysius during the fifth and sixth centuries. Augustine's well-known epigram also played a significant role in shaping the early Christian fathers' outlook: "*non essent Omnia, si essent aequalia*: 'if all things were equal, all things would not be; for the multiplicity of kinds of things of which the universe is constituted – first and second and so on, down to the creatures of the lowest grades would not exist'" (qtd. in Lovejoy 67). Subsequently, theologians and Church Fathers such as Pierre Abelard, Peter Lombard, Thomas Aquinas, and John Duns Scotus provided commentary and engaged in discussions on this subject, contributing to the firm establishment of the concept in medieval thought (Lovejoy 59).

Aberth insinuates that animals in the Middle Ages can sometimes be represented as possessing the capacity for agency and culpability in their wrongdoing. Be they humans or animals or something else between the two, narratives of the beast epic emphasise the concepts of moral agency and culpability – aspects that are absent in fables and bestiaries – in discussions of justice and evil.

In this regard, Claudia Card's definition of evil is crucial in understanding the close relationship between evil and justice. She defines evil as the infliction of "foreseeable intolerable harms produced by culpable wrongdoing" (Card 3). Apart from the essential component of harm, her definition brings forth the concept of culpability which introduces the discussion of agency or its absence in discussions of evil. Card expands the frontiers of culpability by allocating equal importance to the neglect of implementing preventative measures that might in the end lead to evil. Evil is, thus, produced when "agents either engineered it or failed to intervene to prevent it when they could and should have" (5). Therefore, the failure to enact justice within the legal system can also constitute evil and this theme is mainly addressed in "Branch Va." Conversely, in the traditions of fable and bestiary, the agency of the animals is mostly looked over and animals are encapsulated within Christian theology only as vehicles for moral edification.

In the fable tradition, this is usually undertaken by supplying Christian morals to the animal narratives in the morality section. Historically, the fable genre is attributed to the legendary figure Aesop. Yet, the first extant verse collection of Aesopic fables was *Liber primus fabularum Aesopiarum* by the Roman poet Phaedrus in the first century (Holzberg 11-12). Following Phaedrus, the Greek poet Babrius emerged with his collection as a subsidiary tradition to Phaedrus' work. Later, in the fourth or fifth century A.D., Avianus translated a significant portion of Babrius' text into Latin using elegiac verse. Phaedrus' prose rendition known as

"elegiac Romulus" also became very popular. This Latin text circulated widely throughout Europe during the Middle Ages, primarily due to its suitability for students to practice translation at school (Mann, Introduction 4-6). In addition, preachers and orators recognised the potential of the genre as a source of exempla mainly because "they were short and striking" (Fox, Introduction xlii). Especially from, the twelfth century onwards fable writers and exegetes such as Berechiah ben Natronai, Odo of Cheriton and Robert Henryson incorporated Christian perspectives into the moral sections of their fable collections (Henderson 68).

For instance, in Odo of Cheriton's fable entitled "The Fox, the Wolf, and the Well-Bucket,"[3] the narrative part recounts a fox's plight after it falls to a well. The wolf who is passing by is deceived by the fox into descending to the bottom of the well with the promise of fish. The wolf is invited to the bottom by using one of the two connected buckets. Hopping onto the bucket, the wolf goes down while the fox goes up and saves himself. In the moral section, Odo interprets the fox as a sign of "the Devil who says to man 'Come down to me, down into the well of sin, and you will find delicacies and an abundance of other good things'" (89). The fox's stereotypical characterisation as a trickster figure is conveniently transposed over to the Christian cosmology as the Devil, the arch-enemy and the temptation figure. Beryl Rowland provides examples of the fox's frequent representation as the devil figure in medieval art: "This fox feigning death is the Devil, and it is depicted on a misericord at Chester, over the church doorway at Alne, Yorkshire and elsewhere" (78). Similarly, Hans-Jörg Uther demonstrates the fox's evil representation from the legends of saints where "the devil appears in the shape of a fox (TOLDO 1902, 331-32) to Dunstan (Ireland, tenth century) and to the blessed Coleta of Flanders

[3] Odo of Cheriton (c. 1185- c. 1247), the son of an affluent family around Kent, probably received his master's degree and doctorate in Paris (Jacobs, Introduction 12). His possible education in France also explains his familiarity with beast epic. The fable given as an example above also features in the "Branch IV: Reynard and Isengrin in the Well" of *Reynard* without any moral commentary. As a cleric of theological exegesis, it is clear that Odo's interests mainly lie in moral edification.

(fifteenth century)" (139). Hence, modern readers today might perceive the fox as a wily comic figure, mainly indebted to his portrayal in the beast epic tradition, but its association with the Devil is a recurring motif in medieval art and literature.

Likewise, the fox as the embodiment of the devil also finds expression in bestiary tradition. Similar to the fable tradition, animals in bestiaries are used primarily in the context of conveying Christian symbolism through their physical attributes or habits. Closely following the accumulated animal lore in the Middle Ages, "the lion is the symbol of God or the King; the lamb that of Jesus Christ or the victim; the fox that of the Devil or evil preachers" (Amer 9). Bestiaries can be traced to the anonymous text called *Physiologus* which dates back to "the second century A.D., in or near Alexandria" (Wirtjes, Introduction lxx). It is a work that delves into the characteristics and behaviours of animals, birds, and insects, including both real and mythical creatures. Gradually, several "folklore, legend, pseudoscience, and rudimentary scientific observation of an assortment of real and imaginary animals" were included in the text. The new expanded versions were called bestiaries and "provided complex readings of the animal world that combined abstract ideas and legitimate observations about animal habits with interpretations of their moral significance" (Page 33). As it is clear, the fox is again intricately bound up with the Devil. However, they are convenient only for their representational value which is, in this case, the religious concept of evil. In Christianity, evil is basically "an extension of the notion of sin and so to define it in terms of the [violation] of the will of God" (Worseley 12). Therefore, the primary focus of the two aforementioned traditions is not centred on the examination of agency and culpability in evil wrongdoing. Rather the animals, particularly the fox, signify the conceptual framework of moral decay and evil in the Christian context.

On the other hand, the beast epic tradition offers an unequivocal opportunity for examining culpability and agency for evil in a medieval context. The absence of morality at the end places full responsibility on the animal characters for their actions. Their individuality is further reinforced by furnishing the narrative with "lengthy dialogues, [which] brilliantly capture the varying tones of human speech, and rhetorical embellishment of every kind" (Mann 267). The detailed characterisations of the animal figures in the beast epics negate any attempt to reduce the concept of evil into a singular symbolic character. Instead, the scope of evil is broadened to encompass a more extensive social context.

Accordingly, the primary focus on evil in the "Branch Va" of *Reynard*, lies in the act of rape and the slow pace of rendering judgments, or in this case, the complete absence of delivering any verdict in the court about Reynard's rape of Isengrin's wife, Hersent. For John Kekes, evil is a harmful act "serious enough to damage its victims' capacity to function normally" and this act "must be unjustified, because not even serious harm is in itself necessarily evil, as it may be just punishment for crimes committed or the means of preventing even greater harm" (*Against Liberalism* 26). King Noble fails to understand the gravity of Reynard's wrongdoing, listens to the accusation with "a slight smile" and believes that he "would in no way have anyone wrongly treated in his court when charged with a matter of love; so he supposed Reynard was not guilty" (94). However, from a moral perspective, Reynard's action is disturbingly evil in its infliction of undeserved harm "aggravated, supported, or produced by culpable wrongdoing" (Card 6). It is a deeply traumatic and distressing experience for the survivor who sustains physical and psychological harm for life. The wolf Isengrim's wife, Hersent is a survivor of this wicked deed. Besides the trauma; however, Hersent has to put up with the incessant psychological and physical abuse from her husband, Isengrim, whose "heart" fosters "grievance against his wife" (92) and Reynard. He frequently "hurl[s] insults at her,

kicking at her as if he were drunk" (92) and insinuates Hersent's consenting attitude to which: "Hersent almost goes mad with rage" (92). Therefore, strained relations between the couples and frequent arguments are other by-products of this unfortunate incident.

Indeed, the repercussions of the rape incident and subsequent domestic abuse imperil the foundation of their marriage, a concern underlined by Isengrim as he presents his case before the royal court and the king: "You issued the royal edict forbidding the wicked breaking or disruption of a marriage. Reynard has so little regard for you that he never accepted the validity of your declared ban" (93). Here, Isengrim implies that, beyond inflicting physical harm, Reynard's evil wrongdoing transgresses the sanctity of marriage, undermining both divine principles and royal decrees. Consequently, Isengrim demands an equivalent punishment to "obtain prompt compensation for this misdeed and dispute, [sic] so that no other idiot goes and imitates him!" (94). Isengrim's appeal to the royal court to ensure just punishment for evil wrongdoing is a reasonable demand that prioritises justice over a personal vendetta. Despite substantial allegations to the contrary, however, King Noble's reluctance to give due consideration to the accusers underscores the pitfalls of a justice system that lacks the presence of professionals responsible for assessing the relevant evidence. For Owen, there is a hint of parallelism in King Noble's representation with "the portrayal of Charlemagne or … King Arthur [who were] both revered for their supreme authority but often depicted by the poets as less than glorious in [their] exercise" (Introduction xii). The comparison with these historical figures underscores the nuanced and multifaceted character of leadership, while simultaneously highlighting the potential moral transgressions and acts of evil that may arise should the king display signs of inadequacy and corruption.

At the very least, the concept of the law's precedence over the king endures, prompting the king to refer the case for consideration by a private council in response to Isengrim's persistent appeals. In their discussions, the members of the council introduce essential elements of the justice system. The stag emphasises the importance of having witnesses: "otherwise, anybody could level a charge on a whim to the *detriment* of another" (96, my emphasis). Baucent agrees with the stag's point that having a close kinsman as the sole witness has the potential of "*harming* many people" (96, my emphasis). Therefore, a portion of the council is well aware of the relationship between culpability and harm as the essential components of wrongdoing, leading to their reluctance to pass hasty judgment: "that would be wrong and a grave injustice" (99). They are also aware that if not exercised with caution, the administration of justice can easily be used as an instrument for harming the innocent and instigating social unrest. This would in turn transform the justice system into a potential source of evil due to its infliction of "undeserved or disproportionate suffering" as in Kekes' terms (*Facing Evil* 29).

However, the rest of the council is motivated by the personal grudge each member has against the accuser and the accused. For example, Bruin the bear recounts how he was tricked "by this wicked, treacherous rogue," (97) that is Reynard, or how Reynard "attempted to get Tibert the cat caught in a trap" (99). Despite Reynard's narratively apparent wrongdoing, relying on personal history to reach a verdict tarnishes the reputation of justice. For Card, the central concern "in designing and maintaining criminal justice institutions" is that we should "*not* allow them to become evil" (18). Thereby, the court's discussion of events unrelated to the particular wrongdoing introduces uncertainties regarding the forthcoming decision. Reynard's unfair trial process also becomes problematic due to its adverse impact on the proper proceedings of legal cases. In the end, the private council members give their verdict. Jean Subrenat aptly summarises their verdict:

(i) Isengrin must be granted ‘all his rights’ (*tote sa droiture*, Va 905);
(ii) the testimony of Hersent is not admissible: there ought to have been two witnesses (Va 907–14);
(iii) the procedure of swearing an oath is the one they settle on;
(iv) to conclude, it is right and proper that Reynard should conduct himself so as to make ‘his peace in God’s name’ (*sa pes de par Dé*, Va 927). (24)

In essence, similar to King Noble, the private council thwarts the responsibility of exerting justice, basically rendering themselves passive. Their cautious avoidance of judicial error and inactivity can be considered a form of evil in the sense that they hinder the prevention of wrongdoing, thus perpetuating an unjust system that promotes evil.

Reynard finally makes an appearance towards the very end of the story. Despite his absence throughout the narrative, the persistence of evil and wrongdoing attests to the broader societal dimensions of the problem, transcending individual agency. He accedes to the council’s decision to swear an oath before Roenel the Dog and give a testimony of his innocence (102). However, the failure of the justice system to provide punishments in proportion to the crime perpetuates evil as it is Isengrim this time to commit wrongdoing. Disappointed by the judgment of the royal court, his pursuit of justice transforms into retribution and personal vendetta. He approaches Roenel and requests a fair judgment against Reynard for the wrongs he has suffered and bribes him. Roenel, in turn, promises to set up an ambush for Reynard to bite him (102-3). When Reynard does appear at the agreed place for the hearing, he detects the ambush and proceeds to flee to his den, Maupertuis. Yet, he does not escape unscathed and endures a substantial beating in the process. As is clear from Isengrim’s case and its aftermath, in a society marked by injustice towards undeserved harm through culpable wrongdoing, evil begets more evil, instigating an endless cycle of diverse forms of harm. Reynard is depicted as just a cog in

the machine struggling to survive in a world riddled with corruption and evil. The true evil lies in the corrupt justice system that enables wrongdoers to escape accountability and justice.

Consequently, the article aims to explore evil in “Branch Va: The Lawsuits of Isengrim and Bruin the Bear” from *The Romance of Reynard the Fox* by delving into manifestations of wrongdoing at both individual and societal levels. In contrast to traditional fables and bestiaries deeply rooted in Christian exegesis, the beast epic tradition provides a secular lens for analysing evil. This secular perspective is enriched by the philosophical insights of Claudia Card and John Kekes who emphasise the roles of foreseeable harm resulting in culpable wrongdoing. Their formulations serve as critical lenses for understanding the dynamics of evil from a secular perspective. The narrative complexity and interdependent relationships in the beast epic genre allow for a nuanced examination of the relationship between justice and evil. The depiction of a legal proceeding related to Reynard's rape of Hersent reveals the inadequacies of the justice system. King Noble's reluctance, compounded by the personal biases of the private council, raises questions about the efficacy of justice in curbing evil. In this regard, failure to administer preventative measures or impose adequate punishment leads to the repeated occurrence of evil which highlights the broader societal dimensions of the problem. The corrupt justice system and the lack of professionals for carefully assessing wrongdoings lead to a flawed system of government where justice is often compromised and evil is cherished. As a result, the tale in question satirises the larger system of organisation by shedding light on its flaws and implying that the perpetuation of evil is engendered by the judicial system. This might be exemplified by Isengrim's transformation from a seeker of justice to a personal vendetta. The article contends that the true evil lies not only in individual wrongdoing, such as Reynard's actions, but also in the corrupt justice system that allows perpetrators to escape accountability. Thus, "Branch Va"

provides a rich tapestry for exploring the complexities of evil, justice, and societal structures in a medieval context.

Works Cited

Aberth, John. *An Environmental History of the Middle Ages: The Crucible of Nature*. Routledge, 2013.

Amer, Sahar. "A Fox Is Not Always a Fox! Or How Not to Be a Renart in Marie de France's 'Fables.'" *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, vol. 51, no. 1, 1997, pp. 9–20.

Card, Claudia. *The Atrocity Paradigm: A Theory of Evil*. Oxford UP, 2002.

Foulet, Lucien, editor. *Le Roman de Renard*. Champion, 1968.

Fox, Denton, and Robert Henryson. "Introduction." *The Poems of Robert Henryson*, edited by Denton Fox, Oxford UP, 1981, pp. xii–cxxiv.

Holzberg, Niklas. *The Ancient Fable: An Introduction*. Trans. by Christine Jackson-Holzberg, Indiana UP, 2002.

Kekes, John. *Against Liberalism*. Cornell UP, 1999.

---. *Facing Evil*. Princeton UP, 1990.

Lovejoy, Arthur O. *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea*. Cambridge, 2001.

Mann, Jill. *From Aesop to Reynard: Beast Literature in Medieval Britain*. Oxford UP, 2009.

Odo of Cheriton, and John C. Jacobs. "Introduction." *The Fables of Odo of Cheriton*, translated by John C. Jacobs, Syracuse UP, 1985, pp. 1–63.

---. *The Fables of Odo of Cheriton*. Translated by John C. Jacobs, Syracuse UP, 1985.

Owen, D. D. R. "Introduction." *The Romance of Reynard the Fox*, edited by D. D. R. Owen, Oxford UP, 1994, pp. ix–xix.

O'Meara, Dominic J. "The Chain of Being in the Light of Recent Work on Platonic Hierarchies." *Jacobs Ladder and the Tree of Life: Concepts of Hierarchy and the Great Chain of Being*, edited by Marion Leathers Kuntz and Paul Grimley Kuntz, Peter Lang, 1987, pp. 15–30.

Page, Sophie. "Good Creations and Demonic Illusions: The Medieval Universe of Creatures." *A Cultural History of Animals in the Medieval Age*, Edited by Brigitte Resl, Bloomsbury, 2011, pp. 27–59.

Pearcy, Roy J. "'Connebert' and Branch I of 'Le Roman de Renart': The Genesis of a Fabliau." *Medium Ævum*, vol. 59, no. 1, 1990, pp. 73–90.

Physiologus. "Introduction." *The Middle English Physiologus*, edited by Hanneke Wirtjes, Oxford UP, 1991, pp. lx–xcii.

The Romance of Reynard the Fox. Translated by D. D. R. Owen, Oxford UP, 1994.

Rowland, Beryl. *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism*. Allen and Unwin, 1974.

Subrenat, Jean. "Rape and Adultery: Reflected Facets of Feudal Justice in the Roman de Renart." *Reynard the Fox: Social Engagement and Cultural Metamorphoses in the Beast Epic from*

the Middle Ages to the Present, edited by Kenneth Varty, Berghahn Books, 2000, pp. 17–37.

Worsley, Richard. *Human Freedom and the Logic of Evil: Prolegomenon to a Christian Theology of Evil*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.

Uther, Hans-Jörg. "The Fox in World Literature: Reflections on a 'Fictional Animal'." *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 65, no. 2, 2006, pp. 133-60.

Ziolkowski, Jan M. *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry, 750-1150*. U of Pennsylvania P, 1993.

Journal of British Literature and Culture
2024.2, 79-96

Hacettepe University,
Department of English Language and Literature

Tracing the Evolution of Sherlock Holmes Character in Holmesian Fandom[1]

Holmesian Hayran Topluluğu İçerisinde Sherlock Holmes Karakterinin Evriminin İzleri

Tuğçe SOYGÜL*

Abstract: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's (1859-1930) renowned character, Sherlock Holmes initiates a progressive pattern in the reinterpretation of the established detective stories and images, thriving primarily in fan communities by means of fan-fictions, written by both amateur and professional fan-authors. Through their community ties, fan-authors attribute themselves the power to produce their works of fan-fiction, creating an interplay between canon and fanon by providing innovative narratological alternatives to the stories. Thus, as a fan-fiction author, Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1974) challenges the canonical depictions of the detective by featuring Holmes as a severe drug user as opposed to the young and energetic hero, paving the way to the character's evolution within Holmesian fandom. Therefore, the major aim of this paper is to analyse Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* to discuss the transformative influence of fan-fiction in its reimagining of the Sherlock Holmes character, demonstrating the agency of fan-authors in shaping narratives and emphasising the dynamic relationship between fan culture and literary character evolution.

Keywords: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Nicholas Meyer, *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*, fan-fiction, Holmesian fanon

Özet: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle'un meşhur karakteri Sherlock Holmes, hem amatör hem de profesyonel hayran-yazarları tarafından yazılan ve topluluklarda üretilen hayran kurguları aracılığıyla, kökleşmiş dedektif hikayelerinin ve imgelerinin yeniden yorumlanmasında yenilikçi bir model başlatmıştır. Hayran-yazarları, topluluk bağları sayesinde, kendilerini yetkin kılarak hayran kurgularını üretip ve hikayelere yenilikçi anlatısal alternatifler sunarak kanon ve hayran-kurgu arasında bir etkileşim yaratmaktadırlar. Bu nedenle, bir hayran kurgu yazarı olan Nicholas Meyer'in *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* (1974) adlı romanı Holmes'u genç ve dinamik bir kahraman yerine ağır bir uyuşturucu bağımlısı olarak öne çıkararak dedektif imajının kanonik tasvirlerine meydan okuyup karakterin Holmesian hayran topluluğu içindeki evrimine yol açmaktadır. Bu sebeple bu makalenin temel amacı Sherlock Holmes karakterinin yeniden hayal edilmesinde hayran kurgusunun dönüştürücü etkisini tartışmak amacıyla Meyer'ın *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* eserini hayran yazarlarının anlatıları şekillendirme yeteneğini gösterme ve hayran kültürü ile edebi karakter evrimi arasındaki dinamik ilişkiyi vurgulama açısından analiz etmektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Nicholas Meyer, *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution,* hayran kurgusu, Holmes hayran-kurgusu

[1] This article is developed from an unpublished master's thesis with the title of "The Evolution of The Character Sherlock Holmes within The Fan Fiction Narratives and Discourse" completed in Hacettepe University Graduate School of Social Sciences Department of English Language and Literature British Cultural Studies Programme in 2019, Ankara, Türkiye.

*English Lecturer
Department of Common Courses
University of Turkish Aeronautical Association
soygultugce@gmail.com
Orcid ID number: 0000-0001-9267-0228

Right after Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859-1930) introduced the iconic character Sherlock Holmes as a consulting detective, in his work "A Study in Scarlet" (1887) published in *The Strand Magazine* (1891-1950), the character's popularity began to grow significantly. Featured as a private detective and celebrated for his sceptical mindset and remarkable abilities in logical reasoning, advanced observation skills and investigative prowess, Sherlock Holmes unravels the most intricate cases often with the support and encouragement of his close companion, Dr. John Watson who serves as the primary narrator in most of Doyle's stories, accompanying Holmes not only in his investigations but also in sharing an apartment with him at 221B Baker Street in London, which serves as the central setting for the majority of their adventures.

The fact that Sherlock Holmes is regarded as a cultural icon of Britain and that his reputation transcends the century has a significant impact on popular culture and detective novels written ever since. Even though Holmes is instantly understood and recognisable by many, it is challenging to identify a dominating portrayal of the character due to different depictions of the character that have been produced by many fans and authors throughout time. Therefore, authors who identify themselves as fans and fan-fiction[2] writers or more specifically as fan-authors[3] have attempted to rewrite and reconstruct the adventure stories of Holmes by shaping not only the character but also the canonical stories according to their desires. Thus, the major aim of this article is to analyse Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution: Being a Reprint from the Reminiscences of John H. Watson, M.D.1*[4] (1974), to discuss the significant changes the character has undergone in the hands of fan-authors in terms of its portrayals in fan-fiction narratives and discourse such as the depiction of Holmes as a drug addict, and the bringing into

[2] Fan fiction or fan-fiction are used interchangeably, referring to the same genre of creative works produced by fans to explore, expand, or reimagine elements of their favourite original works.
[3] In this article, the terms fan author(s) or fan writer(s) are combined with a hyphen to emphasise the hybrid identity of a fan-author, going beyond the limitations of a passive reader, and creating a bridge between reading and writing by being a fan-author.
[4] This article will use *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* in a shorter way to refer to Nicholas Meyer's fan fiction novel.

play his problematic familial upbringing, which are then followed by the altering of the antagonistic dynamics between Holmes and Moriarty, as well as the changes to the relationship between Holmes and Watson that underlines Holmes' reliance on Watson, thereby presenting Holmes in a more humanistic light. Accordingly, these alterations exemplify the power of fan creativity in expanding, humanising, and redefining the iconic character within the realm of fan-fiction.

Fan studies, also known as fandom studies, is an interdisciplinary field of scholarly research that focuses on the examination of fans. Through engagement within fan cultures and fan communities, "individuals . . . maintain a passionate connection to popular media [to] assert their identity through their engagement with and mastery over its contents, and experience social affiliation around shared tastes and preferences" (Jenkins "Fan" n.p.). Although its origins lie in cultural studies, fan studies has developed into a diverse interdisciplinary field that explores how individuals or groups interact with various forms of media, such as literature, film, television, sports, or music since its emergence in the mid-1980s. Within the context of fan studies; therefore, "fandom . . . refers to a shared cultural space that emerged from science fiction fandom in the early 20th century, . . . which has since expanded to incorporate forms of cultural production mostly by women around genre entertainment" (Jenkins "Fan" n.p.). Moreover, fan studies involve scholarly studies, regarding fan communities and how they establish and express their identities through different media forms. This field, which has its origins in cultural studies, analyses the interactions between texts, fans, and various cultural aspects like literature, sports, music, games, and even politics. In this vein, fans congregate within fan cultures, forming interconnected networks through which they engage with textual experiences and look for like-minded individuals, sharing connections with the same media.

In addition to the definition of a fan and fandom within fan studies, it is also crucial to grasp the essence and purpose of fan production. This entails understanding how and why fans engage in creative production. To this end, the existence of contradictions, gaps, and dualities within the established canon[5] serves as a catalyst for fan productivity, encouraging the creation of fan-fiction and other self-produced texts, which can be regarded as earliest forms of fan-created content for analysis. Additionally, during the late 1960s, the publication of stories in "fanzines"[6] provided an opportunity for fan-writers to demonstrate their work, thus asserting their presence and granting them the ability to transform, modify, and influence the content being presented to them in canonical works. In this light, fans utilise various elements, such as settings, plots, characters, and other materials taken from published texts, commonly known as source texts, in order to create new narratives. These fan-generated stories play a role in enriching and expanding the fictional universe of the original work, thus going beyond the boundaries set by the established canon. This process of transforming the text paves the way for fan-writers to continuously invent fresh storylines and explore alternative versions of existing plots. Through the creation of ever-growing fan-fiction stories that incorporate diverse voices and multiple storylines, fans actively participate both in the production of cultural elements and in their transformation. In this genre, there exists a rejection of the prevailing notion that the audience is passive and lacks power. Fan-writers challenge the conventional perception of being "mindless consumers" (Jenkins *Textual* 24) by claiming the position of authors to assert their agency,

[5] In fan studies, the term canon is frequently used to refer to the earlier works of literature. Nevertheless, the same term will also be used throughout this article in an encompassing way in order to refer to the facts inside the fictional world of the source material. For example, in the Sherlock Holmes canon, the author resurrects famous detective who dies in his last battle with his nemesis, Professor James Moriarty. In contrast, non-canonical fan-fiction, may break from those facts and convert Sherlock into a zombie or construct a sexual relationship between Sherlock Holmes and another character, whereas canonical fan-fiction preserves the facts within the fictional universe of the original material.

[6] Fanzine, a term coined in the 1930s by science fiction enthusiasts, refers to a magazine created by fans for themselves. These fan-made publications served as a prevalent medium for sharing fan-fiction until the 1990s when the digital era began to emerge (Fiesler 729).

power, and authority over the creative process. Moreover, fan-authors possess the autonomy to not only reestablish and replace canon with fanon[7] but also restructure it by crafting their tales, which paves the way to the transformation of the pre-existing fictional universes of the narrative. As expressed by Kim Bannister, a writer of fan-fiction:

> I find that fandom can be extremely creative because we have the ability to keep changing our characters and giving them new life over and over. We can kill and resurrect them as often as we like. We can change their personalities and how they react to situations. We can take a character and make him charming and sweet or coldblooded and cruel. We can give them an infinite, always-changing life rather than the single life of their original creation. We have given ourselves license to do whatever we want and it's very liberating. . . . If a story moves or amuses us, we share it; if it bothers us, we write a sequel; if it disturbs us, we may even re-write it! We also continually recreate the characters to fit our images of them or to explore a new idea. We have the power and that's a very strong siren. If we want to explore an issue or see a particular scenario, all we have to do is sit down and write it. (qtd in Jenkins "Reading" 140)

Consequently, fan-fiction writers possess an autonomous agency since they are allowed to publish stories and create characters however they deem fit. Through this process, they successfully convert the one-dimensional published text into a multi-layered narrative archive, indicating the participation of fan-fiction writers. This practice also shifts the perspective of fans from being mere consumers to active producers, negating the longstanding dichotomies separating readers and writers.

Jenkins compares and contrasts the old and the new recipients of source material as follows:

> If old consumers were assumed to be passive, the new consumers are active. If old consumers were predictable and stayed where you told them to stay, then new consumers are migratory, showing a declining loyalty to networks or media. If old

[7] A collection consisting of numerous texts created by fans forms an archive that collectively offers new perspectives on the imaginative universe of the source material (Santilli 42).

> consumers were isolated individuals, the new consumers are more socially connected. If the work of media consumers was once silent and invisible, the new consumers are now noisy and public. (Jenkins "Convergence" 45-46)

Fan-authors are able to go beyond their former role as inactive readers by publishing their writings and asserting their agency as active producers. While acknowledging the value and originality of the source text, they purposefully deconstruct and reconstruct binary oppositions, separating producers from consumers, and authors from readers. In the same manner, fan-writers actively refuse passive consumption and engage in the creation and shaping of the cultural product. This issue can be witnessed among Sherlock Holmes readers, as they form a "Holmesian" or "Sherlockian"[8] community where they engage in active discussions and exchange thoughts with fellow readers instead of remaining in silence. Furthermore, this community provides a significant platform for readers to actively contribute and express their viewpoints by also encouraging them to create fan-fictions and produce additional stories featuring Sherlock Holmes with a changing degree of fidelity to the original story, characters and setting. As a result of their participation and production through these fan-fictions, enthusiasts have the chance to fill the gaps in the original stories, which leads to the evolution of the character Sherlock Holmes.

Within Holmesian fandom, narrative and aesthetic elements of the literary work also transform and develop in addition to the character's personality. In this fan-created universe, the iconic detective is depicted in various ways. Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*

[8] While the concepts "Holmesian" and "Sherlockian" are often used in exchange with one another, they both reside with fan communities centred around Sherlock Holmes character. These terms, therefore, encompass the body of canonical stories and scholarly writings. However, there are two main differences between the two terms. Firstly, the usage of Sherlockian is more prevalent among Americans, while Holmesian is favoured by British people in the UK, where it is used more formally. Secondly, Sherlockian tends to specifically refer to fans of the Sherlock Holmes Tv series and films, while Holmesian is primarily used in association with scholarly purposes. For the sake of clarity, this article predominantly employs the term Holmesian although the fandom more commonly makes use of Sherlockian.

stands out as one of the most notable reinterpretations since his work not only reimagines Sherlock Holmes' physical appearance but also redefines the essence of his personality. The narrative diverges from the canonical portrayal, exploring Holmes's vulnerabilities and complexities in stark contrast to the perfect image depicted in the canonical works, allowing for a profound exploration of Holmes as a character with human flaws by adding layers of depth and emotional resonance that were previously unexplored. Subsequently, the novel portrays the detective as a severe drug addict as opposed to the conventional depictions of hero by following a different storyline, where Dr. John Watson, concerned about Holmes' cocaine addiction, asks the help of Sigmund Freud, the renowned psychoanalyst, to cure Holmes of his addiction. Since the plot revolves around a conspiracy that Holmes believes is connected to his arch-nemesis, Professor Moriarty, Holmes, and Watson seek to unravel the mystery while Freud uses his psychoanalytic techniques to uncover the root causes of Holmes' addiction and address his underlying psychological struggles. In that sense, offering a blend of detective work, psychological exploration and the interplay between Holmes, Watson and Freud, the novel presents an alternative perspective on Holmes' character, diving into his struggles and providing a unique take on his famous deductive skills.

Despite holding the source text in high regard, the novel explores possibilities beyond the established canonical representation, seeking to expand and push the boundaries of the original story by filling some of the points left missing by Doyle. Through the portrayal of Holmes as a fallible human being, whose career and life are influenced by his drug-affected mind due to his cocaine use, Meyer turns the heroic detective into an average human being to challenge traditional depictions, as he asserts in one of his articles: "I believe that we have increasingly confused heroes with gods. Perhaps it is the influence of comic books and their so-called 'super-heroes,' but we no longer tolerate flaws in our great men and women . . . Once we learn our idols

have feet of clay, we waste no time in toppling their pedestals" ("Seven-Per-Cent" 27). Through his fan-fiction novel, Meyer seeks to emphasise Holmes' flaws, intending to humanise the character and portray him as a more relatable individual with human imperfections by diminishing certain aspects of the great detective as such:

> For you [Holmes] are suffering from an abominable addiction, and you choose to wrong your friends who have combined to help you throw off its yoke rather than to admit your own culpability. You disappoint me, sir. Is this the Holmes I have read about? The man whom I have come to admire not only for his brain but for his princely chivalry, his passion for justice, his compassion for suffering? I cannot believe that you are so subjugated by the power of this drug" (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 67).

Thus, Meyer shapes the story according to his preferences and vision, pointing out the capacity of fan-authors to expand and reinterpret the established literary world by altering dissatisfying elements in the canon.

In Meyer's novel, significant changes are made concerning the detective's upbringing and family, mainly due to the absence of information in the canonical stories, leaving Holmes' childhood memories unexplored as "an infinite universe to study and in which to speculate" (Klinger 17). Regarding this, Meyer introduces significant alterations in the transformation of Holmes' childhood stories by rewriting them with active participation in the form of a fan-fiction novel. One of the main objectives why Meyer addresses this gap in canon through fan productivity is to maintain the fans' ongoing interaction with the canonical Sherlock Holmes narrative. Accordingly, towards the end, the novel reveals a mystery about a shattering event wherein Holmes' father murders his wife due to her involvement in adultery, which occurred while Holmes was still a child, revealed during one of Holmes' therapy sessions: "'Have you known wickedness personally?' 'Yes.' 'What was this wickedness?' . . . 'My mother deceived

my father.' 'She had a lover?' 'Yes.' 'What was the injustice?' 'My father killed her'" (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 164).

This tragic incident profoundly impacts Holmes' life, manifesting itself during his period of melancholia, during which he seeks solace in the consumption of cocaine as an escape from reality. In the novel, Watson conveys his observations in this matter by saying, "I had known Holmes to go on cocaine 'binges,' sometimes of a month's duration or more, during which time he would inject himself thrice daily with a seven-per-cent solution" (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 7). Holmes begins using drugs because of this encounter as he lacks the ability to handle the psychological trauma of this occurrence; as a result, he pushes the facts into his unconscious while pursuing justice and hunting evil, which causes him to become a drug addict. To uncover further the causes of Holmes' cocaine addiction and, in turn, his childhood which is not dealt with in canon, Meyer includes this problem in the background story of his character. Thus, it can be claimed that the additional biographical details alter the protagonist, having an impact on his identity. Another reason why, Meyer rewrites Holmes' early life is to explain Holmes' dedication to his career, and his inability to fall in love. As a result of this interplay between canon and fanon, Meyer multiplies the meanings of the source text since:

> [I]f meaning is embedded in the text, the reader's responsibilities are limited to the job of getting it out; but if meaning develops, and if it develops in a dynamic relationship with the reader's expectations, projections, conclusions, judgments, and assumptions, these activities . . . are not merely instrumental, or mechanical, but essential. (Fish 2-3)

In this manner, fans have the ability to generate their meanings and creations, whereby they are not confined to passive consumption, but actively participate, and contribute as producers within their fandom.

The process of creating and reinterpreting existing texts, coupled with the act of generating new creative content, is characterised as textual poaching according to Henry, who Jenkins who further emphasises the role of fans as textual poachers in the sense that they are creative writers, utilising their agency to actively produce content. This notion aligns with the perception of fan culture being inherently participatory since "[f]andom here becomes a participatory culture which transforms the experience of . . . consumption into the production of new texts, indeed of a new culture and a new community" (Jenkins *Textual* 46). Due to Jenkins' research on the participatory culture of fans, numerous scholars start to characterise fan-fiction writing as poaching, and fans as poachers by borrowing from Jenkins' terminology and perceptions. Subsequently, "the reader in the case of . . . fan fiction then becomes the writer, creating more readers to interact with new texts, perpetuating the cycle ad infinitum" (Faye 6). Within Meyer's novel, this participatory aspect of fan culture is prominently illustrated, as the renowned detective, Holmes, transcends the limits imposed by canon. The novel exemplifies how fans, like textual poachers, venture beyond the confines of established storytelling, engaging in creative reinterpretations and producing content that expands and enriches the fictional universe.

In line with this, the dynamic relationship between Holmes and his sidekick, Watson, stands out as a significant focal point that captivates fans, giving rise to numerous alternative depictions in fan-fiction novels. This engagement stems from the active participation of fans within their communities, where knowledge is shared and creativity thrives through interaction. In the canonical stories, the friendship between Holmes and Watson, who is a war veteran with a medical degree, plays a significant role in their efforts of solving cases since Watson becomes an essential companion to their adventures, providing valuable assistance and support as well as keeping journals about the cases during their investigative pursuits. Hence, it is not solely

Holmes' remarkable wit and brilliance as a detective drawing immense popularity and attention of readers to these stories, but also the bond between the two characters. In essence, the complete existence of one character is intrinsically intertwined with the other, as they complement and define each other's identities. The bond shared by Holmes and Watson is integral to initiating their adventures, leaving readers wanting more of their collaborative brilliance. While the canonical relationship between Holmes and Watson is characterised by mutual dependence, Meyer's novel presents a different dynamic, wherein Holmes relies on his friend more than Watson depends on him. Unlike the all-knowing consulting detective portrayed in the canon, Meyer depicts Holmes as a vulnerable drug addict, incapable of effectively utilising his detective skills due to his excessive cocaine addiction. Throughout the story, as Freud attends to Holmes for the betterment of his condition, Watson observes his friend's distress, refusing to leave him during the whole treatment process. As a display of care and concern, Watson even attempts praying, despite not being accustomed to such religious practices, in hopes of finding solace and healing for his dear friend as narrated below:

> Sleep was impossible. Even had I not been able to hear the detective's piercing screams and wails through the walls, the simple knowledge of the torture he was enduring was enough to keep me awake. Was it worth it? Was there no other way of saving him except by so severe a trial that he might die in attempting to live? I am not a praying man, and I sensed the hypocrisy of my gesture; nevertheless, I knelt and grovelled before the Creator of all things—whoever and whatever he might be—and begged him in the humblest terms that came to mind to spare my friend. (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 82)

This portrayal in Meyer's novel highlights the depth of their bond and Watson's unwavering dedication to support Holmes through his struggles. Therefore, Watson's support and care play an important role in preserving Sherlock Holmes' human side and keeping him alive against his struggles with addiction. While Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's canon primarily highlights Holmes as

the intellectually superior character, Meyer draws attention to Watson's clarity of thought, presenting him thinking in a clearer way than Holmes by carefully crafting the relationship between these two men to place an emphasis on Watson's profound influence on Holmes' well-being. In relation to this, Holmes admits Watson's importance in his life in the novel as such, "I owe my life. To Watson, here, there will be a lifetime to repay the dept" (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 161). The portrayal of Holmes as the central character and his exceptional features in the canonical stories are being challenged. Hence, by elevating Watson's prominence, Meyer creates a transformation in both Sherlock Holmes and John Watson ultimately altering the dynamics of the canonical stories.

As an additional enrichment to canonical stories, Meyer creates a contrast between canon, in which compelling cases attract Holmes' attention, altering the monotony of his life, and fanon where a different approach is presented as a triggering point. In Meyer's version, despite Freud's success in healing the physical effects of Holmes' drug abuse, both Freud and Watson are unable to mend the detective's soul. Instead, Holmes becomes intrigued, when one of Freud's patients is mysteriously kidnapped, sparking Holmes' interest to solve the case as he utters, "'I should be greatly interested,' Holmes responded with alacrity, and proceeded to fold his napkin. Preparing to go as well, I remarked humorously that I had not thought the doctor's patients could be of any interest to him. He certainly had not evinced curiosity about them before" (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 96). Hence, Meyer adds layers of depth to the narrative while maintaining a point, aligning with the familiar elements of the canonical Sherlock Holmes stories. As the kidnapping case unfolds, Holmes, Watson, and Freud embark on a journey across Austria in search of a villain plotting to start a European war.

Despite the fact that the conclusion of the novel is written in the manner of a classical Conan Doyle writing of detective fiction, in which Holmes successfully unravels the case, locates the patient, and prevents a potential world war by uncovering the kidnapping plot with the help of Watson's assistance, in essence, the novel introduces intricate layers of storytelling while staying true to the original canon, presenting a compelling narrative that delves into the complexities of Holmes' character and the challenges he faces in pursuit of justice. All in all, Meyer's writing fills in the gaps left by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, delving into Sherlock's early life, family and personality. In relation to this, Moriarty mentions his memories regarding Holmes and his family as follows: "'I left University and accepted the position of tutor in mathematics in the home of Squire Holmes. There I taught Master Mycroft and Master Sherlock' . . . 'He and his family lived in North Riding – in Yorkshire – that's where Master Mycroft was born . . . 'I taught both boys,' Moriarty replied with more than a touch of pride, 'and brilliant lads they were, too, both of them . . . then the tragedy-" (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 17). These additions appeal to fan-fiction writers, who are drawn to fresh narratives and imaginative mysteries. As a result, since the characters' identity is no longer confined to the original works, this process transforms the characters and challenges the conventional narrative roles, allowing for their expansion outside of the traditional boundaries. Consequently, these evolutions and changes allow fan-authors and the Holmesian fandom the freedom to actively participate in shaping Sherlock Holmes as a character.

Furthermore, apart from the previously mentioned alterations, Meyer also changes the relationship between Sherlock Holmes and Professor James Moriarty. Even though Moriarty only appears in two of Conan Doyle's stories, he is regarded by many as the most well-known opponent in the stories. Interestingly, the absence of Moriarty in the canonical stories contributes to making him even more fearsome and prominent in the eyes of the readers. As noted,

"Moriarty's absence does not diminish his status – it actually enhances it. The professor is a sort of Sherlockian boogeyman, haunting the stories through to the end of the canon" (Doyle and Crowder 128). In the same manner, in Doyle's short stories, Moriarty is introduced as the most intelligent and talented criminal mastermind and a genius abstract thinker, Holmes has encountered thus far, personifying terror like a bogeyman. Therefore, in the canonical texts, he remains like a ghost, unseen by anyone other than Holmes himself. However, Moriarty frequently appears not as a ghost but as Holmes' antagonist in flesh and blood in fan-fiction novels, giving him a larger importance and function. According to Stein and Busse in their book *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom*, "[h]ow one reads the role of Moriarty may indeed depend on where one places agency . . . [because] in the hands of fans, Moriarty as fan metaphor becomes everything from the hero of the story to a central figure of agency" (230-31)**.**

In Meyer's novel, the interpretation of Moriarty is very different. He is depicted as an old man rather than a criminal:

> [A] small, shy personage in his sixties with his hat in his hand and a startled expression on his face that quickly subsided into a timid smile when I introduced myself . . . He was dressed well though not expensively, with the air of a professional man . . . His head added to most totally bald, with a few delicate wisps of white-grey hair circling the back and sides. (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 14)

Although Moriarty is portrayed as the formidable "Napoleon of Crime" (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 6) at the beginning of the novel, as the story progresses, it turns out that Moriarty was Holmes' math instructor at elementary school (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 16). Despite this, Moriarty is introduced to Watson as a criminal, accused of committing several crimes, by Holmes as a result of his drug-induced imagination. Relating to this, Watson indicates that "I had known Holmes to talk of Moriarty. It was when he was deep in the spell of his cocaine" (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 7).

Through this altered version of the story, the author puts forth the idea that readers purposefully change the characters' backstories to enhance the storyline and develop further characteristic traits. Since Moriarty holds a crucial role as the primary adversary in the original stories, Meyer takes the liberty of transforming the antagonist's background, narrating him as an innocent individual to change Holmes' portrayal as well, as he narrates:

> Moriarty was the appellation I had sometimes known him to mutter when he was deep in the throes of a cocaine injection. When the drug's effects had left him, he never alluded to the man, and, though I thought of asking him about the name and what significance it held for him, there was something in Holmes's manner that usually precluded such an enquiry. (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 5).

This choice serves as a testament to the active involvement of fans in the creative process, as they engage with the characters and narratives, showcasing their agency in shaping the story.

In addition to the narrative changes, revisions in Holmes' artistic appearance also play a significant role in transforming the character. Although Meyer is often acknowledged for remaining faithful to the character's physical appearance in the source texts, he makes personal additions to the portrayal through the exaggeration of a gloomier atmosphere surrounding the detective. Hence, he makes an emphasis to the unhealthy nature of Holmes' skin tone, suggesting a state of distress in the following manner: "[h]e seemed thinner and paler than usual, which was thin and pale indeed, for he was habitually gaunt and white. His skin had a positively unhealthy pallour and his eyes were without their usual twinkle. Instead, they roved restlessly in their sockets, aimlessly taking in their surroundings (it seemed) and yet registering nothing" (*Seven-Per-Cent* 4). In this portrayal, rather than depicting the lively and keen expression typically attributed to the detective in the canonical works, he is described as restless and unfocused, indicating physical and mental distress, suggesting a troubled or disoriented state of mind. In his approach, Meyer disrupts the conventional image of Holmes as an emotionless thinking machine,

choosing instead to portray him as a human being capable of experiencing mental problems as follows, “he appeared to be in one of those depressions I had seen overpower him before” (Meyer *Seven-Per-Cent* 55). This transformation adds depth and vulnerability to the iconic detective, making him relatable on a more emotional level.

To conclude, the evolution of Sherlock Holmes within fan culture and fan-fiction narratives represents a dynamic and transformative phenomenon that challenges established norms. Fan-authors, through works like Nicholas Meyer’s *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution*, engage in rewriting and reconstructing Holmes’ adventure stories, thus offering new narratological portrayals. Meyer’s work, for instance, adds layers to Holmes’ backstory, exploring his childhood, vulnerabilities, and struggles. The novel also redefines the detective’s relationship with Watson, portraying a more vulnerable Holmes, reliant on Watson for support. Additionally, the altered dynamics between Holmes and Moriarty in which Moriarty is being depicted as Holmes’ mathematics teacher rather than his enemy, exemplifies fan-authors’ involvement in transforming characters and narratives. Moreover, Meyer’s personal additions to the protagonist’s portrayal, humanise the character further, making him relatable on an emotional level. In essence then, the evolution of Sherlock Holmes within fan culture demonstrates the active participation of fans as well as the transformative impact of fan fiction in shaping and redefining established literary characters.

Works Cited

Busse, Kristina, and Louisa Ellen Stein, editors. *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom: Essays on The BBC*. McFarland Company, 2014.

Doyle, Steven, and David A. Crowder. *Sherlock Holmes for Dummies*. John Wiley & Sons Company, 2010.

Faye, Lyndsay. "Prologue." *Sherlock and Transmedia Fandom: Essays on The BBC Series*, edited by Louisa Ellen Stein and Kristina Busse, McFarland Company, 2014, pp. 1-7. doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12174

Fiesler, Casey. "Everything I Need to Know I Learned from Fandom: How Existing Social Norms Can Help Shape the Next Generation of User-Generated Content." Vand. J. Ent. &Tech. L., vol. 10, 2007, pp. 729.

Fish, Stanley Eugene. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Harvard UP, 1980.

Graham, Anissa M., and Jennifer C. Garlen. "Sex and the Single Sleuth." *Sherlock Holmes for the 21st Century: Essays on New Adaptations*, edited by Lynnette Porter, McFarland, 2012, pp. 24-34.

Jenkins, Henry. *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*. New York UP, 2008.

---. "Fan Studies." *Oxford Bibliographies Online Datasets*, Oxford Bibliographies, 29 Aug. 2012, https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199791286/obo 9780199791286-0027.xml

---. "Reading Critically and Reading Creatively." *Reading in a Participatory Culture: Remixing Moby-Dick in the English Classroom*. Edited by Henry Jenkins et al., Teachers College, New York, 2013, pp. 137-152. doi.org/10.11606/issn.1982-8160.v6i1-2p11-24

---. *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*. Routledge, 1992.

Klinger, Leslie S. "The World of Sherlock Holmes." *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes: The Complete Short Stories: The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and The Memoirs ofSherlock Holmes*, edited by Leslie S. Klinger, WW Norton & Company, 2007.

Meyer, Nicholas. "Seven-Per-Cent at Thirty: Memories and Reflections." *Baker Street Journal*, vol. 54, no. 2, 2004, pp. 26-30.

---. *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution: Being a Reprint from the Reminiscences of John H. Watson, M.D.* W.W. Norton, 1993.

Rich, Sarah C. "The Deerstalker: Where Sherlock Holmes' Popular Image Came from *Smithsonian*.

Santilli, Nicola. "Online Publishing: (Anime) Fan Fiction and Identity." *Journal of Digital Research & Publishing*, 2010, pp. 40-47.