# Crossing borders between countries, scholars and genres: Commemorating the late Kathleen E. Dubs

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# Countries, Scholars and Genres in Tribute to Kathleen E. Dubs: An Introduction

*Katalin Balogné Bérces, Janka Kaščáková and Tomáš Kačer*

This book has grown out of a collaboration between Catholic University in Ružomberok (Slovakia), Pázmány Péter Catholic University (Budapest, Hungary), and Masaryk University (Brno, Czechia), with the aim of fostering cross-border cooperation among these countries in the field of English Studies. It is centred around the legacy of Kathleen E. Dubs (1944–2011), a distinguished mediaevalist and literary historian who worked at two of the universities, and whose influence is still felt at – and beyond – all three. Our initiative seeks to honour her memory and continue her legacy, particularly as 2024, when the idea of the project came up, marked what would have been her 80th birthday. This volume, therefore, brings together scholars, researchers and students to build and strengthen professional ties and personal bonds: some of us are Kathleen's close colleagues and friends, some still consider her their academic mentor, some have greatly benefited or learnt from her teaching or her research – some simply acknowledge her for her achievements, without having met her.

We aim, therefore, to commemorate Kathleen through a publication that highlights her academic legacy and facilitates the dissemination of recent scholarly achievements in her fields of interest. A unique aspect of our project, we believe, is its dual focus on scholarly research and the personal-emotional connections within academia, inspired by Kathleen's impactful career. Her work at universities in two Visegrad countries (Hungary and Slovakia) and her personal connections in a third (Czechia) provide a foundation for this initiative, which seeks to unite a community of researchers who share both professional interests and a personal appreciation for her contributions.

Kathleen E. Dubs was a university professor, mediaevalist and literary historian. She was born an American, but after the first half of her academic career she moved to Eger, Hungary, and worked at Pázmány Péter Catholic University and Catholic University in Ružomberok until her death in 2011. This book is compiled from papers produced over 2024 and 2025, contributing to Kathleen's scholarly fields: literary studies, mediaeval literature (both Old and Middle English), Chaucer, mediaeval philosophy (especially Boethius), early American literature (especially Benjamin Franklin), Frederick Douglass, the works and legacy of J. R. R. Tolkien, and teaching writing. With this, we aim to pay tribute to her achievements and exceptional personality, and promote her legacy as someone whose academic activity crossed borders in several senses of the word.

The book opens with László Munteán's touching imaginary letter to Kathleen, in which he speaks, in a deeply personal tone, about how Kathleen's eccentric but at the same time rigorously professional attitude left its mark on his formative years. Though the letter, as well as the personal memories in it, come from László, it stands at the outset of our book as a representative of the sentiments and recollections of many of us, and as such, it lays the foundation for the rest of the volume.

The academic content of the book starts with the first section entitled "The Tolkienesque and Fantasy" since an important part of Kathleen's scholarship and professional interest is tied to the work of J. R. R. Tolkien and the genre of fantasy in general, and the papers in this section approach these topics from many different perspectives. Janka Kaščáková discusses topics very close to the heart of both, Kathleen Dubs and Tolkien: academia and the Catholic Church. She demonstrates how Tolkien's deep knowledge of classical and mediaeval philosophy is reflected in the character of Saruman who, as she argues, embodies the dark and corrupt side of teaching and the priesthood. Then, Ildikó Limpár offers an analysis of a contemporary Hungarian "religious science fiction" series by Raana Raas (Etelka Görgey), *Csodaidők* [Miracle Times] (2006–2010) and *Időcsodák* [Time Miracles] (2012–2022). Apart from offering an insight into the workings of Raas's invented world, she traces and examines the many parallels between these two tetralogies and Tolkien's oeuvre, whether on the religious, linguistic or world-building levels. Károly Pintér's contribution deals with the genres of fantasy and science fiction in general; more specifically, he examines the varieties of "mindscapes", fictional phenomena present in fantastic fiction, showing their great and ever-growing variety. He maintains that rather than rejecting them as escapist or irrelevant, they should be perceived as a form of valuable insight into the workings of the human mind, society and the concerns of both. The final paper in this section is Laura Škrobánková's discussion of the stages of development of H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos from its original literary form into a multi-author, multi-genre and multi-media phenomenon. The author demonstrates that even though it had more humble origins than other mythoi, Lovecraft's philosophy of cosmicism, his Pantheon and its different elements inspired the works of a wide range of contemporary authors and intellectuals.

The next section, "Across Genres and Ages", touches upon several other areas that lay within Kathleen's sphere of interest and her influence on her students, such as various mediaeval and later historical themes. Yet the most significant aspect of this section is that it goes beyond these themes and develops them in a perspective that crosses genres and centuries. In this way, this section pays tribute to Kathleen as a teacher and guide, because established and rising scholars alike apply her varied views to their own areas of research.

Beatrix Balogh enters into a direct conversation with Kathleen's own paper on Benjamin Franklin's satires, published in the late 18th century. Balogh's analysis of Franklin's texts shows that he understood well "both his audience and the power of media", being the commanding and forceful public voice of his times. Then, in her comparison of literary fashion styles spanning six hundred years, Katarína Labudová finds fascinating parallels in characters' clothes in *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Handmaid's Tale*. While Chaucer's characters' outfits express their social status, Atwood evocatively uses a range of styles and colours as "a weapon of political control". Nora Júlia Levická approaches Atwood's prose from yet another angle, one that underscores a feminist approach to literary criticism, which goes hand in hand with the author in question. Levická performs a reading of *The Penelopiad*, Atwood's rewriting of *The Odyssey*, framed in trauma theory with a particular focus on the issue of motherhood as an internalized wound. Nóra Séllei pays her tribute to Kathleen by studying mediaeval female figures in books by the contemporary biographer Victoria MacKenzie. She highlights MacKenzie's ability to bring to life Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe, who become familiar despite remaining in the "foreign country" of the past. In the last chapter in the section, Ianina Volkova ventures into contemporary fantasy in an effort to connect the genre's defining features with some of the most innovative works of the celebrated contemporary author Neil Gaiman. While finding several common features with classic representatives of the genre such as Lovecraft, she reaches beyond the genre of literary fantasy in her study of graphic novel *The Sandman* and a collaborative work, *Good Omens*, showing how in these works dreams function as liminal, ritualistic spaces.

The final section of this volume speaks about a totally different aspect of English Studies, paying tribute to a special side of the multifaceted academic that Kathleen was. It is titled "Language in Transition and Transfer" as it highlights the ways in which Kathleen the scholar and Kathleen the teacher found interest in and contributed to linguistic matters. Being a mediaevalist, Kathleen had a thorough grasp of Old and Middle English – the periods in the early history of the language that the contribution by Katalin Balogné Bérces and Shanti Ulfsbjorninn examines. They explain, with support from both empirical and theoretical perspectives, that the contradictory accounts of the sound change called *h*-dropping actually reflect a familiar property of linguistic structure, expected to especially characterize patterns in transition and flux. Another form of transition and transfer for a language happens via translation: Dóra Pődör's paper addresses various facets of this process in a very special and intriguing field, the adaptation of personal names. It does this, in perfect accord with Kathleen's enthusiasm, through the Irish Gaelic translation of Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, pointing out the difficul-

ties translators face in their attempt to convey the original connotations in such a manner that the shapes of the words fit the phonological and grammatical peculiarities of the target language. Finally, with the intention of honouring Kathleen's dedication to teaching, and the teaching of writing in particular, Csilla Sárdi discusses in her case study the methodological issues raised by, and students' perceptions of, the process of essay writing skills development in university language classes. She concludes that not only the product of writing but its process, too, needs focussed attention in the form of careful task design, with a realistic and clearly defined purpose and audience, with constant feedback, and with group-focussed and individual guidance both before and after the writing task.

The chapters of the book, as shown above, survey all the major fields of interest of the late Kathleen E. Dubs, through either tangential relevance or direct reference to her and her oeuvre – showing how both her cherished themes and her own work on them live on in current scholarly research. We hope that our initiative will serve as an exemplar of academic collaboration and knowledge sharing across genres, crossing country borders and passing beyond traditional academic boundaries.

# Letter to Kathleen

Dear Kathleen,

The academic event organized by my dear colleagues on the occasion of your 80th birthday gives me the golden opportunity to look back on the past two and a half decades and try to reflect on your role in my coming of age as a student and later as an academic, as well as to express my gratitude to you, which I know is late in coming.

I think I first met you in 1998, shortly after I came back to Hungary from a year of studying in the US, a year that transformed me in so many ways and ultimately led me to focus on American literature and culture in my studies. I was full of energy and curiosity, filled with some newfound self-confidence and then boom, I'm sitting in your course on Middle English, sweating, trying my best, and at the same time also wondering why you pronounced the word "literature" *litritchoore* and donned those strangely colorful ties as part of your teaching attire. These were some of your idiosyncrasies many of us students were pondering at the time and they still characterize the Kathleen that I remember today.

Our conversations started during those endless bus rides from Piliscsaba to Budapest. I was attending some of your courses on American culture and our conversations on the bus largely centered around Benjamin Franklin, George W. Bush, *Lord of the Rings*, skyscrapers, my thesis, and later my Ph.D. project. To be honest, I was often a bit apprehensive about these conversations as I knew you would ask some fundamental questions that often wrongfooted my approach, which was probably overly influenced by certain poststructuralist theories I was reading at the time – theories you either didn't approve of or found outright pointless. Still, it was these fundamental, piercing, often uncomfortable questions that helped me rethink and sharpen my arguments, even if I knew you wouldn't be convinced. I want to thank you for these long conversations, your interest in my academic endeavors, your candid and constructive criticism, and especially your support during my first years as your colleague at the English Department at Pázmány.

Let me recall a memory from these early years of my teaching career that I hold close to my heart. The first seminar course that I had the chance to develop on my own was called "Architextura Americana," a special seminar (or spec. col.) geared toward intersections of architecture and literature within the context of American culture. I was excited and passionate but also nervous, not because of the course but because you wanted to sit in and help me out if needed. It was nothing less than frightening at the outset. But already in the first class, something truly great happened. You were sitting there not so much as an older colleague or my former professor judging my perfor-

mance as a teacher but as an enthusiastic visitor, even a curious friend, fully immersed in a subject matter we would keep discussing and debating throughout the weeks and years to come. At that moment I felt that we really crossed borders, moving from you being a teacher and me being a student to us becoming colleagues. "This is great stuff" – I remember you said to me after a class. And hearing this from you meant more than a lot to me. Your persistence in attending each and every class of this course and continuing our discussion afterward was a sign of true mentorship, collegiality, and a continuation of the support and inspiration that I had been receiving from you ever since I was a student. I hope you'll accept my belated thanks for all this.

Kathleen, in your short life you have crossed so many borders, both geographical and academic, and you have done so in your idiosyncratic ways, always standing behind your decisions, never afraid of standing up for what you believed was right and, by doing so, also inviting your colleagues and students to become your fellow travelers and border crossers. At the same time, you also built several bridges – bridges that connected countries, institutions, intellectual traditions, and people. And you accomplished all this with a sense of genuine kindness, one that has little to do with social niceties and everything to do with true respect and loyalty to your colleagues and students. Your optimistic view of life, spiced with poignant humor and sharp criticism, definitely added a great deal to the good vibes that our English department was, and I believe still is, known for.

Dear Kathleen, happy 80th Birthday in Heaven,

Your student and colleague,
Laci Munteán

# The Tolkienesque and Fantasy

# 1.

# The Corruption of the Best is the Worst: Saruman as an Academic and a Priest

*Janka Kaščáková*

## Introduction

J. R. R. Tolkien's life and work display many dichotomies and tensions, which make the study of his oeuvre all the more fascinating. The most obvious and most frequently commented on are the clash between his love of predominantly pagan traditions and his devout Catholicism; and between his admiration of Scandinavian mythologies full of violence and sexuality and his own very proper sensibilities. The scholarly work of recent decades also demonstrates that many of the writers, such as Shakespeare (Croft 2007), or traditions, such as French language and literature (Flieger 2014; Smith 2017), or modernism (for example Jarman 2016),[1] that he often openly criticized and rejected, still influenced his writing, and that he is, as Dennis Wilson Wise, commenting on Tolkien's background in the Classics, aptly put it, "a wider and deeper writer than even we Tolkienists have realized" (Wise 2016, 33).

This paper deals with yet another set of tensions informing his work, based on the example of *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1993), and particularly on the character of Saruman. Tolkien's distrust and dislike of science and technology, especially when it was contributing to the destruction of the English countryside he loved so much, is a well-documented fact that found expression in many different moments of his books. What is, however, less obvious and not so often commented on, is that Tolkien, an Oxford university don, scholar and lifelong lover of education, infused his novel with uneasiness about the dangers of learning. Furthermore, as a devout Catholic, he nevertheless created a character that seems to comment on the negative practices of the Church and its highest representatives. As this paper argues, Saruman, who is often seen as

[1] Jarman argues that similarly to T.S. Eliot and other modernists, "Tolkien's novel responds to the culture shock felt by many in the early twentieth century. *The Lord of the Rings* pits a poetic and metaphorical system of language against a more Modern language of disorientation and shows the poetic system to be more powerful" (Jarman 2016, 153), and claims that there is a "strong relationship between [Tolkien's] work and that of the other modernists; similar to Eliot's attempts in *The Wasteland* to stabilize modern culture through his use of the grail myth, Tolkien sought to reinstate a cultural and linguistic touchstone by reuniting myth and language" noting "a linguistic upheaval creating a rift between" the languages of poetry and that of science (ibid., 157).

the "most contemporary figure in Middle earth" (Shippey 2002, 76) with a "mind of metal and wheels" (III.4, 462), could thus also be read as both an academic (a teacher) and a priest, in both cases an embodiment of the dark side of these two vocations. It further elaborates that to understand Saruman's downfall and Tolkien's view of it, it is necessary to discuss the various kinds of knowledge as presented in the Bible, the limits and correct motivation of the pursuit of knowledge expressed in the opposing medieval concepts of *studiositas* and *vana curiositas*, as well as Tolkien's views on rhetoric and sophistry, as illustrated in Saruman's speeches. Finally, it demonstrates how this interpretation finds further support in the metaphorical meaning of Saruman's residence, the tower of Orthanc, in the ring of Isengard.

## The Dangers of Wanting to Know

Saruman, together with Gandalf, Radagast and other two unnamed wizards arrived in Middle-earth during the Third Age, around the time when the Rings of Power were forged (Tolkien 1998, 503–4). They were referred to as *Istari*, Wizards, but were, in fact, *Maiar*, that is to say, angelic beings supposed to help the Free Peoples fight the evil Sauron (another Maia) and his supporters. According to Tolkien, the word *Istari* means "those who know" (Carpenter 2006, 202) and he translated them as "'wizards' because of the connexion of 'wizard' with *wise* and so with 'witting' and knowing" (Carpenter 2006, 207; emphasis in original). Their status as angelic beings, emissaries of Valar and possessors of superior knowledge, however, does not make them immune to evil and they too can fall. The greatest danger for them is impatience "leading to the desire to force others to their own good ends, and so inevitably at last to mere desire to make their own wills effective by any means" (Carpenter 2006, 237).

A crucial point that Tolkien made several times is that these emissaries were not to take on the task themselves and overpower Sauron with their supernatural powers, but were supposed to "*train*, *advise*, *instruct*, arouse the hearts and minds of those threatened by Sauron to a resistance *with their own strengths*" (Carpenter 2006, 202; emphasis added), which makes them the equivalent of both teachers and, due to their connection to the divine, also priests.

Both teachers' and priests' professions are in different ways connected to knowledge and the search for truth; therefore, these concepts and the approaches to them are pivotal in this discussion. While our modern world and academia seem to view knowledge as the ultimate goal and essentially good, in spite of all the historical examples that prove otherwise, the very core of Christianity is based on the dichotomy of appropriate and inappropriate knowledge, the good and the forbidden fruit. The problem does not lie in knowing as such, but wanting to know too much, in the wrong way or

in the wrong circumstances. In the Bible, the danger attached to knowledge is inescapable, expressed metaphorically in the Tree of Knowledge that led to the downfall of humankind. By extension, knowing becomes the synonym for having a sexual encounter which, outside of strictly set boundaries, is a cardinal sin. While Tolkien studiously avoids sexuality in his work, the question of the necessary limits of knowledge is one of the leitmotifs of *The Lord of the Rings*. While in the Garden of Eden the instructions were clear and unequivocal: not eating from just one of many trees in the garden of Eden; the situation after the Fall became much more complicated. As a punishment for breaking the rule, for wanting to know too much, humankind no longer has the benefit of a clear answer; it is plagued with insecurities and has to constantly wonder about boundaries. Those potentially most in danger of making the fatal step too far are those closest to the source, or who go the furthest, testing the limits of knowledge: the Church officials and academics. As Benjamin Saxton argues, for the Wizards in *The Lord of the Rings*, "the space between wisdom and folly, salvation and destruction, is razor-thin" (Saxton 2013, 176).

## *Studiositas*, *Curiositas* and The Arts of the Enemy

It becomes clear very early on that one of the main reasons for Saruman's downfall was his dangerous "specialization". As Gandalf first explains to Frodo, still unaware of Saruman's corruption, "[t]he lore of the Elven-rings, great and small, is his province. He has long studied it, seeking the lost secrets of their making" (I.2, 47). Since the art of making the Rings of Power was something that the Elves learned from Sauron while he still pretended to be their ally, and in spite of the three Elven Rings having never been touched by him and being used for good, it is now considered as the art of the enemy and as Elrond points out during the Council "[i]t is perilous to study *too deeply* the arts of the Enemy, for good or for ill" (II.2, 258; emphasis added). According to Wise, "Tolkien's distaste for Saruman partially stems from a Christian tradition long distrustful of the pursuit of worldly knowledge and power, especially as revealed by the medieval legend of Dr. Faustus" (Wise 2016, 8). Indeed, the medieval philosophers, such as Thomas Aquinas or St. Augustine, just like their Classical predecessors and inspirers, had incessantly pondered the proper conditions of the quest for knowledge, though unfortunately they did not always agree, and often arrived at many different conclusions.[2] In the context of the discussion of Saruman versus Gandalf and their approach to knowledge, it is useful to mention the two opposing notions of *studiositas* and *curiositas* (or *vana curiositas* – empty curiosity), often contemplated by medieval

[2] For a detailed discussion of the topic, see Pappin (2014).

philosophers, where the former is a virtue encompassing the proper rules applied in the search of useful knowledge, while the latter often represents either unworthy or forbidden knowledge, going "too far" and resulting in complications and danger. *Curiositas* in the medieval period is seen as a vice; indeed, as Gladden J. Pappin points out, our modern notion of curiosity as being good and a starting point of research dates back to the 19th century and "[c]ritiques of medieval teachings against *vana curiositas* are commonplace among partisans of modern science" (Pappin 2014, 313).

However, the implication of the novel is that going into the dangerous territory – that is, studying the arts of the enemy – is to a certain point beneficial and necessary. The problem is determining where this "certain point" of no return is, and how to make sure one does not overstep. That even the wise do not have a definite answer is also expressed in Elrond's qualification of the necessity of not going "too deeply" into the territory, which is overly vague and general. As Wise (2016) interestingly argues, both Elrond and Gandalf expected and benefited from Saruman's findings and apparently had no problem with them until Saruman betrayed them and their cause. He thus perceives "Elrond's *post hoc* condemnation" of Saruman's research "as potentially hypocritical" (ibid., 8). I see it simply as the benefit of hindsight. Elrond and Gandalf themselves are surely not ignorant of the arts of the enemy either, and are aware that theirs is a situation in which the pursuit of knowledge is key. However, its positive or negative outcomes largely depend on the art of self-moderation, possibly anchored in one's own personal morality but with a great potential for mistakes. They, just like the medieval philosophers, constantly oscillate between the pursuit of necessary knowledge and the wisdom of knowing when to stop. As Pappin (2014) argues: "Not till one has access to the highest or most crucial knowledge would one rule out inferior sources of knowledge or the knowledge of inferior things" (ibid., 325), which could be paraphrased as not until one goes too far would one know it is too far. And for the knowledge seeker, in this case Saruman, at that point, it might be too late to realize the problem and back off with impunity.

The importance of knowing when to stop and the repercussions of going too far are illustrated by other examples in *The Lord of the Rings*; Saruman is not the only one who oversteps with serious consequences. The industriousness of the Dwarves results in the creation and expansion of the Realm of Khazad-dûm or Dwarrowdelf, as well as many subsequent centuries of prosperity. It all ends in the Third Age, when, in search of the precious mithril, they wake the Balrog who then kills their king and brings about the destruction of the beautiful kingdom that turns into the Black Pit of Moria. While the appendix A/III "Durin's Folk" gives just dry facts about this disaster without any trace of judgement (1046), the version Gandalf tells the hobbits when they enter Moria

is slightly different. The differences, moreover, are significant, and give his view of the reason why it happened: "The Dwarves tell no tale; but even as *mithril* was the foundation of their wealth, so also it was their destruction: *they delved too greedily and too deep*, and disturbed that from which they fled, Durin's Bane" (II.4, 309; emphasis added). Here too it is suggested that delving, whether actual or metaphorical (as a pursuit of knowledge), is acceptable only within certain limits and with the right motivation, which is neither greed nor pride.[3]

Greed is also suggested in a comparable situation which, however, does not happen in the past, but is part of the story of the quest and is a major tipping point. When Pippin is tempted to look into the *palantír* Gríma Wormtongue dropped from Orthanc, the narrator describes him acting "like a greedy child stooping over a bowl of food, in a corner away from others" (III.11, 578). Gandalf finds his curiosity natural but condemns his inability to stop himself when he knows it is wrong. Gandalf insists Pippin knew what he was doing was wrong and implied it was within his ability to resist: "You knew you were behaving wrongly and foolishly; and you told yourself so, though you did not listen" (III.11, 584). Both the Dwarves as a nation and Pippin as an individual, however, do not end up the same way as Saruman, and that is because they are able to recognize their mistakes and learn from them. This ability is arguably also related to the fact that they listen to others and their advice. In Pippin's case, it is Gandalf who explains the situation and makes him see the error of his ways. Saruman, on the contrary, makes sure he does not have anybody like that around him; he isolates himself and keeps his actions and mistakes hidden from everybody, and it is highly unlikely in any case that he would listen to advice and admonitions.

One of the most admirable messages of *The Lord of the Rings*, however, is that even mistakes, in a world where a divine power is present, can lead to good outcomes for those who keep faith and remain on the right path. It is clear that without Saruman's greed for power, Pippin and Merry would never have reached Fangorn and roused the Ents against him; because of the battle with the Balrog, Gandalf dies and is sent back as a more powerful Wizard. And finally, thanks to Pippin's *vana curiositas*, Gandalf, as he himself admits, is "saved […] from a grave blunder" as he was considering looking into the *palantír* himself, which would have had much more serious consequences (III.11, 581).

[3] I find it highly ironic that one of the most overused expressions by AI text generators when attempting to generate academic texts is "delve into", while AI is clearly an instance of where the danger of going too far and delving too deep seems to be our modern version of Saruman's plight.

## Seeing is (Sometimes) Deceiving

The Seven Seeing Stones or the *palantíri* add a further dimension to the discussion of the search for knowledge. The sense of sight was also very important for medieval philosophers. Thomas Aquinas, for example, believed that it "gives us more perfect knowledge than the other senses" (Pappin 2014, 327). St. Augustine, however, also sees the negative aspects of our use of sight. According to him, "the eyes are paramount among the senses in acquiring information" but we have a tendency to use it not only for good but also for "morbid curiosity" (for example looking at dead bodies or disasters) as well as for seeking out irrelevant information (Pappin 2014, 70–71). All this is expressed in Gandalf's interpretation of what happened to Saruman, when he finally puts all the pieces of the puzzle together after Pippin looks into the stone of Orthanc:

> Each *palantír* replied to each, but all those in Gondor were ever open to the view of Osgiliath. Now it appears that, as the rock of Orthanc has withstood the storms of time, so there the *palantír* of that tower has remained. But alone it could do nothing but see small images of things far off and days remote. Very useful, no doubt, that was to Saruman; yet it seems that he was not content. *Further and further* abroad he gazed, until he cast his gaze upon Barad-dur. *Then he was caught!* […] Easy it is now to guess how quickly the roving eye of Saruman was trapped and held; and how ever since he has been persuaded from afar, and daunted when persuasion would not serve.
>
> (III.11, 583; emphasis added)

Looking either from idle curiosity or to gain knowledge that would increase his power, Saruman is, yet again, seen as overstepping a boundary, going too far and falling into a trap. In this case, the *palantír* he owns works in a similar way as the One Ring he desires. Although not created with evil intentions and used for good for many years by the ones who originally designed them, Sauron rendered *palantíri* "sinister, and instruments of domination and deceit" (Tolkien 1998, 523). Thus for Saruman the *palantír* is dangerous because it offers power (in the form of knowledge) but it can also deceive him into interpreting what he sees in the wrong way. Furthermore, the *palantír* seems to "radiate" temptation the wise should know to resist. As the novel implies, it is natural for people to feel the compulsion to know and to experience even the things that are not good or healthy for them, yet it also suggests it is their duty to resist that temptation for their own good and the good of the others. Gandalf, Aragorn, Elrond, Galadriel and even Faramir refuse the temptation of the Ring and its promise of great power. But

Gandalf also has to resist the temptation of improper knowledge, *curiositas*, that he feels the moment he takes the *palantír* of Orthanc into his safekeeping:

> And how it draws one to itself! Have I not felt it? Even now my heart desires to test my will upon it, to see if I could not wrench it from him and turn it where I would – to look across the wide seas of water and of time to Tirion the Fair, and perceive the unimaginable hand and mind of Fëanor at their work, while both the White Tree and the Golden were in flower!
>
> (III.11, 584)

While what he would like to see is clearly fascinating to him, it is also absolutely useless and, as he understands, it is not a kind of knowledge he needs at that time and for his purposes. For that reason, he must suppress the desire and, unlike Saruman, he succeeds in this.

## Rhetoric and the Hunger for Power

The desire for knowledge and the power that it brings, and the degree to which these are a motivating factor in Saruman's fall, are revealed relatively early on in his speech to Gandalf when he tricks him into coming to Orthanc:

> We can bide our time, we can keep our thoughts in our hearts, deploring maybe evils done by the way, but approving the high and ultimate purpose: Knowledge, Rule, Order; all the things that we have so far striven in vain to accomplish, hindered rather than helped by our weak or idle friends.
>
> (II.2, 259)

This speech is fascinating not only because of its uncanny similarity to those of contemporary politicians (as noted by Shippey 2000, 76 and Ruud 2010, 142), but also because, as is the norm in dramatic monologues of this kind, what he hopes to convey and what he actually reveals are two very different things. Saruman not only turns to rhetoric to defend an indefensible position, but also reveals the reasons for his gradual yet, to Gandalf at least, surprising change. It was not merely his detailed study of the art of making of Rings, as noted by Elrond, nor the manipulation from Sauron via the *palantír*, as realized much later. There are other aspects that contribute to the picture. First of all, as many powerful people mistakenly believe, Saruman too thinks that the

rules for him are different to those for the "lesser" people.[4] Secondly, unlike any good teacher or priest, he turns his attention from his purpose and his students/people and starts thinking of himself only, justifying his stance by denouncing them as "weak or idle". Although the speech does not feature the usual "Is" of a self-centred man, Saruman does repeat "we" too many times and, as Gandalf correctly points out, "only one hand at a time can wield the One, and you know that well, so do not trouble to say we!" (II.2, 253) Gandalf's astute observation also exposes the last and most hidden reason why Saruman was doomed to fail. From the very beginning of the *Istari's* quest, he was jealous of Gandalf and, as Tolkien claims, this one-sided "rivalry turned at last to a hatred, the deeper for being concealed, and the more bitter in that Saruman knew in his heart that the Grey Wanderer had the greater strength, and the greater influence upon the dwellers in Middle-earth" (Tolkien 1998, 360). Saruman did not call Gandalf to Isengard to propose an alliance of a new kind, and probably not even to hinder his success in the battle against Sauron. He called him there to be a witness to his vindication and victory.

Though Saruman in his later stages, once he is revealed as the traitor and in league with Sauron, looks like a mad scientist and the representative of the abuse of science, he starts out more like a scholar in the humanities. As Aragorn describes him:

> Once he was as great as his fame made him. His knowledge was deep, his thought was subtle, and his hands marvellously skilled; and he had a power over the minds of others. The wise he could persuade, and the smaller folk he could daunt. That power he certainly still keeps. There are not many in Middle-earth that I should say were safe, if they were left alone to talk with him, even now when he has suffered a defeat. Gandalf, Elrond, and Galadriel, perhaps, now that his wickedness has been laid bare, but very few others.
>
> (III.9, 553)

This is a definition of a learned man, a great scholar who is so well educated that only those who are on the same level with him would be able to recognize potential falsehood or manipulation. The simple people are "daunted" by his knowledge and cowed by his bearing. And even though he is literally from the other world and the universe of *The Lord of the Rings* includes magic, his powers are not presented as supernatural, nor

[4] For a discussion of this phenomenon in several works of literature, including *The Lord of the Rings*, see Ellwood (1971).

even "hypnotic", which would still evoke some inexplicable abilities in most common people. Tolkien insists on him being simply "persuasive":

> Saruman's voice was not hypnotic but persuasive. Those who listened to him were not in danger of falling into a trance, but of agreeing with his arguments, while fully awake. It was always open to one to reject, *by free will and reason*, both his voice while speaking and its afterimpressions. Saruman corrupted the reasoning powers.
>
> (Carpenter 2006, 276; emphasis in original)

Eloquence, the art of speaking, seems to be one of the most essential tools of both a scholar and a priest, as they are in the habit of frequently speaking in public and being persuasive would appear to be a positive ability. It is, however, not as straightforward as that. Several scholars (Ruud 2010; Wise 2016; Chisholm 2019) have argued that Tolkien's background in the Classics is significantly reflected in *The Lord of the Rings*, especially in the representation of the ancient battle between philosophy and rhetoric, as embodied in the two wizards Gandalf and Saruman. What *The Lord of the Rings* proposes is that the truth is more important than the ability to express it well and impressively. Jay Ruud sees Saruman's speech to Gandalf in Orthanc as "Machiavellian in the worst sense of the word, in which the end justifies the means, and it is sophistry in the way only a skilled modern politician can perform it, disguising a wrong cause in fair words" (2010, 142). He also claims that great speeches are defined by the right motivation. According to him,

> Gandalf, with the power of certainty and of truth behind his words, may speak with authority in a style that inspires and moves men to virtuous action. Saruman, whose motives have come to include greed and power, intends by contrast to conceal the truth through his words, which in his case become a web of deceit glossed over by the appearance of truth.
>
> (Ruud 2010, 151)

Wise (2016) too shows the contrast between Gandalf and Saruman and their application of rhetoric: "Unlike with Saruman, the narrator barely shows Gandalf as having any effect on the many. Wisdom does not require rhetorical 'prettying up' because wisdom should speak for itself. Truth is, so it is implied, transparent and non-rhetorical" (ibid., 12). As he maintains, Saruman is not just a means "to critique modernity, indus-

trialization, or the like", he also represents the rhetor of the Classical debates, the one who is the opposite of those who "possess 'true' knowledge. They, therefore, have no desire to shape mere appearances or opinion (*doxa*) through subtle speech and cunning words". As he claims, "[t]hat path belongs only to the sophists, the rhetoricians, and the relativists. Saruman, in other words" (ibid., 2).

Chad Chisholm similarly maintains that "[f]or Gandalf, rhetoric is only a tool so that he can be the philosophic hero of Tolkien's world. This is in stark contrast to Saruman who becomes the archetypical Platonic representation of the Sophist Rhetor who places persuasion above all else, even truth" (Chisholm 2019, 91). In his view, Saruman does not use language "simply to *communicate* knowledge and ideas, but also to *construct and reconstruct his audience's* understanding of reality" (emphasis in original). Saruman as a Sophist thus "sees rhetoric as the means to power and is willing to deny or forsake truth in order to acquire it" (ibid., 98).

Tolkien's representation of Saruman thus suggests that rhetorical skill, although useful and certainly an advantage for both academics and priests, is not only of no use, but is even positively dangerous when not backed by wisdom, truth and adherence to the principles of professional integrity. This becomes obvious when Saruman, trying to deal with Théoden, Gandalf and their company under the windows of Orthanc, fails to make his speeches persuasive once his betrayal is uncovered and he cannot maintain his authority as his actions were not based on truth and genuine belief in what he was doing.

## Of Robes and Their Colours

Even Saruman's external appearance, his clothing and its colour-coding, like those of his four fellow *Istari*, are reminiscent of the rituals of both academia and the Catholic Church. *Istari* wear long robes and their colours seem to point at their place in the hierarchy of the institution/order or at their respective specialties/fields of study. In academia, the different robes indicate different universities or schools, and sometimes also the academic's position within the hierarchy of the university (the rector's robes being the most ornate). The Catholic Church not only uses colours to distinguish between different ranks within the Church hierarchy, but also between different religious orders. And indeed, the three *Istari* present in the action of the novel each have a different specialty and could be perceived as belonging to different ranks or positions: Saruman's specialty is Ringlore, and he is white because he is the head of the order. Gandalf's field of study is Hobbit-lore, and Radagast's is nature. While Saruman's (and later Gandalf's) white robes might simply symbolize purity and goodness set against the darkness and blackness of the evil Sauron, it seems unavoidable to also take into account the glaring similarity between Saruman the White and the highest representative of the Catholic Church, the Pope. Both

are, to put it in Tolkien's words, the highest of their order, both wear rings as symbols of their authority and, most importantly, both are immediately recognizable for wearing white robes. While Tolkien despised allegory and would certainly refute any intention of this kind on his side, he did not live in a vacuum and would often, whether knowingly or unconsciously, fall back on what was intimately known to him. What is more, he gave his readers leave to apply their experience of the world to his works.

With respect to Tolkien, Saruman and the Catholic Church, Bossert (2006) offers a compelling analysis of the early twentieth century movement in the Church called Modernism (not to be confused with the wider cultural and literary movement of the same name) and its many connections to *The Lord of the Rings* and the character of Saruman. The proponents of Catholic Modernism were trying to reconcile Catholic faith with modern times and offered "the scholarly approach to religious history" (Bossert 2006, 55). They were perceived as full of pride and "denouncing the supernatural in the name of history and science" (ibid., 65). They were staunchly opposed by Pope Pius X, who thoroughly condemned them especially in his encyclical *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* (1907). As Bossert states, his "witch-hunt climaxed with *Sacrorum antistitum* [1910], an oath against Modernist philosophy to be taken by all Catholic clergy and theologians" (ibid., 53). Citing many examples, Bossert demonstrates how this movement in the Church was viewed as detrimental and how "*Pascendi's* descriptions of the Modernist aptly suit the figure of Saruman" (ibid., 62).

As a young man knowledgeable about the developments in the Catholic Church, Tolkien would have been well aware of this controversy and would have agreed in many respects with Pius X. Tolkien too would not have agreed with the weakening of the faith or the supernatural as for him faith and history were "inextricably entwined […] because history, like myth or any narrative, transmits the stories of the past. Pius X's Modernists weaken[ed] that transmission by using textual studies to show how Biblical variations indicate a change in the epistemological truth in order to suit a community's contemporary needs" (Bossert 2006, 58). As Bossert maintains, Saruman is a perfect image of a Modernist, as for him "history is a means to power, of finding the Ring for his own acquisition." In opposition to him, "Gandalf uses ancient lore to protect the world from its own undoing. As already seen in *The Hobbit*, the figure of Gandalf […], evangelizes on the value of the supernatural underpinnings of the real world" (ibid., 64).

It would seem that Bossert's argument disproves the idea of Saruman being the reflection of a Pope, since it was a Pope who fought against Modernism, and Tolkien seems to have been on his side. The Pope in question, however, died in 1914, and there were another five after him in Tolkien's lifetime, as well as more than two hundred in the past, who had almost certainly not all been paragons of virtue and saintliness. How-

ever, I do not in any way propose to view Saruman as a simplistic allegory of a particular Pope, but rather as an exploration of how pride, jealousy, impatience, desire for power and *vana curiositas* can affect those in high positions where their fall has greater impact and often devastating consequences. Apart from goodness and purity, the white colour they wear also symbolizes humility and simplicity and its "breaking" by Saruman is a metaphor of both his corruption and blindness caused by pride.

> "I am Saruman the Wise, Saruman Ring-maker, Saruman of Many Colours!"
> I looked then and saw that his robes, which had seemed white, were not so, but were woven of all colours, and if he moved they shimmered and changed hue so that the eye was bewildered.
> "I liked white better," I said.
> "White!" he sneered. "It serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed. The white page can be overwritten; and the white light can be broken."
> "In which case it is no longer white," said I. "And he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom."
>
> (II.2, 252)

There are several very significant moments in Gandalf's retelling of what happened. First of all, Saruman, the rhetor could inspire us to read his colour change as symbolising his open-mindedness, his acceptance of different views and opinions, and perhaps also to different skills and competences. However, Gandalf points out that Saruman's robes *seemed* white but on closer inspection changed colour. That indicates that if Saruman wanted and when it served his purposes, he could still make people believe he had not changed and still wore white. Alternately, it could mean that only some people, those looking closely enough, literally and figuratively, could see the corruption and warn the others against it. From Gandalf's point of view, Saruman's change of colour indicates that he is unreliable, impossible to read and willing to change his appearance according to circumstances. Saruman, in simple words, betrays himself as a relativist.

This speech, as reproduced by Gandalf, however, also demonstrates that even good and uncorrupted people sometimes err in their quest for good or the truth. Gandalf's authoritative "he that breaks a thing to find out what it is has left the path of wisdom" is almost as debatable as Saruman's belief in the superiority of all colours to white. At this moment, Gandalf unwittingly gives an example of the danger of a charismatic and wise man to those who are momentarily caught in his greatness. His statement sounds like it is or should become a maxim to be quoted often and taken to heart, but is far from unequivocally true. Even setting aside science and technology, which

Tolkien was so adamantly opposed to, and which often necessitates breaking (dissecting, deconstructing) in order to understand; humanities likewise do their own, albeit metaphorical, breaking (such as close reading) without which we would not be able to learn and grow. Gandalf's maxim, when qualified further, certainly does hold some measure of truth; for example, if he added that breaking a thing without good reason or noble purpose is bad, it would align with him condemning *vana curiositas*: destroying for no other purpose than knowing. As it stands, however, his assertion is highly controversial.

## Orthanc as the Ivory Tower

Another facet of Saruman's corruption as expressed by colour symbolism – and a further reinforcement of the claim that Saruman epitomizes Tolkien's fear of the misuse of knowledge and misrepresentation of religion/faith – is connected with Saruman's chosen residence, the tower named Orthanc. The most obvious reading, that of a black tower symbolizing/reflecting negative phallic energy and ego, and the blackness of the mind and soul of its inhabitant, is one option, but neither the best nor the only one.

Orthanc is a fitting choice for many reasons: it has a strategic position guarding the Gap of Rohan, it is safe and easily protected, and it is an appropriate residence for a prideful man with a hunger for greatness. Furthermore, there are advantages related to its origins. It was not built by Saruman (hence the weakness of the symbolism of black), but the "builders of old" and their craft was such that even the eldest of the old that call Saruman young, the Ents, cannot damage or destroy its foundations: "It was fashioned by the builders of old, who smoothed the Ring of Isengard, and yet it seemed a thing not made by the craft of Men, but riven from the bones of the earth in the ancient torment of the hills." At the top of the tower, there "was a narrow space, and there upon a floor of polished stone, written with strange signs, a man might stand five hundred feet above the plain" (III.8, 541).

The foundations of Orthanc and the narrator's suggestion that the builders were aided by the elemental powers that caused Orthanc to be literally embedded in rock suggest the symbolical reading of the tower's foundations representing the pillars of knowledge or faith Tolkien would have considered strong and indestructible. The Ents' futile attempts to break the walls of Orthanc seem to resonate with biblical verse: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18). Jesus's claim suggests that the foundations of the Church are set in rock, immovable and good, and that in spite of the "building's" current inhabitants, their flaws, crooked philosophies or religious blunders. Sim-

ilarly, the tower of Orthanc will withstand Saruman and be ready for new, hopefully more worthy occupants.

Further symbolical interpretations of the connection between knowledge, faith and corruption are uncovered when the etymology of the word Orthanc is taken into consideration. According to Tolkien, the word has double etymology: one is the meaning in the "language of the Mark of old" (rendered as Old English in *The Lord of the Rings*) and the other is Tolkien's invented language of the Elves, Sindarin. In the first, *Orthanc* means "Cunning Mind", which is true of both the original builders as well as of the present inhabitant of the tower. Furthermore, the old English *orþanc* as a noun means "original, inborn thought" or "a skilful contrivance or work, artifice, device, design" and as an adjective, it means "cunning, skilful". In the Elvish, it has, rather surprisingly, the quite un-Elvishly unpoetic and pedestrian meaning of "Mount Fang" apparently simply based on its appearance (Tolkien 2005, 243; Tolkien Gateway n.d.). In *Unfinished Tales* (Tolkien 1998), Christopher Tolkien states that the Sindarin translation of *Orthanc* is "forked height" (again referring to the shape of the top of the tower) that only "happens to coincide with the Anglo-Saxon word *orþanc* 'cunning device'" (ibid., 518).

The two seemingly random and coincidental meanings of "cunning" and "fang" are, however, not isolated, but wonderfully interconnected, especially when looking into the etymology and implications of the word "fang". According to the Oxford English Dictionary's entry on "fang": the meaning of "an instrument for catching and holding", "a noose or trap" (II.3) is recorded from the 16th century. Apart from "a canine tooth; a tusk" (II.4), there is also the obsolete meaning of "a claw or talon" (II.5). As a verb, it has the now obsolete meanings of "to lay hold of, grasp, hold, seize; to clasp, embrace" (1a) as well as the Old English meanings of "to take in a snare" (1b) and "to seize upon (booty); to catch, apprehend, get into one's power (a person); to capture (a city), to seize (lands, possessions) (1c) (Oxford English Dictionary n.d.). Taking all these meanings into consideration, Orthanc emerges as an organic part of Saruman's power and downfall, not just as the setting, but also one of the reasons, or at least as an incentive for both. Saruman's cunning mind not only recognized the strategic position of the tower and the ring of Isengard, it also craved it as a fitting complement – a great residence for a great man. At the same time, however, it took him too far away from his original tasks and intentions, both literally ("five hundred feet above the plain") and metaphorically ("weak or idle friends"). He came to be too far from and above those whom he originally came to teach and rescue. Gandalf, on the contrary, remains with his feet firmly on the ground, constantly surrounded by those who are intellectually and in other ways below him. That is the only way he remains good and faithful, in spite of his inclination towards arrogance and impatience, which he shares

with Saruman. Saruman's corruption is thus caused not only by wanting to see/know too much, but also by detaching himself from the original purpose and from those who are lower in intellect and origin.

In contrast to Saruman, Gandalf is a great teacher because he recognizes that sometimes he needs to turn into a student and allow his charges to lead and inspire: "All wizards should have a hobbit or two in their care – to teach them the meaning of the world, and to correct them" (III.11, 585). While Saruman became too distant and proud to listen to and learn even from one equal to him.

That leads to another connotation of the etymology of Orthanc, or rather, of one of its meanings, Mount Fang. Fang is not only the reminder of the fact that Saruman grasped it and used it for his purposes, to catch and hold what he wanted, Gandalf included, it is also a white organic material very close in nature to the "tusks" which are made of ivory. Both fangs and tusks are of yellowish colour sometimes referred to as off-white, which again, is a link to Saruman's "not-exactly-white" robes, and the broken or corrupted white is famously connected to the greed of the colonial hunt for ivory.

With the help of this slight shift from fangs to ivory, Orthanc, in spite of its black colour (or maybe because of it too) suddenly emerges as another symbol connected to both academia and the Church, and the dangers of becoming too detached from the ordinary world and the simple life: the Tower of Ivory. To come full circle, it is linked to all three contexts of knowledge mentioned at the beginning of this paper. The first is the biblical knowledge, in the carnal sense in which it appears in the Song of Solomon: "Thy neck is as a tower of ivory; thine eyes like the fishpools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bathrabbim: thy nose is as the tower of Lebanon which looketh toward Damascus" (7:4). The second, representing the Catholic Church and the symbolism of virginity and purity embodied in the person of the Virgin Mary who is sometimes referred to as the Tower of Ivory. But lastly and most importantly, the "Ivory Tower" is the legendary symbol of the "state of sheltered and unworldly intellectual isolation" (Martin n.d.), most often connected to academia. It is sometimes believed to have been inspired by *Hawksmoor Towers* of Oxford University's All Souls' College, the University where Tolkien spent most of his professional life, but could very well apply metaphorically to the inaccessible palaces of Vatican that prevent their occupants from interacting with those whom they are supposed to serve and guide. The last meaning of the Tower of Ivory fittingly sums up Orthanc's contribution to Saruman's downfall. His pride, thirst for power and improper knowledge, jealousy and self-centredness were further aggravated by his detachment from reality and from those whom he, short-sightedly and to his own detriment, deemed unworthy and stupid.

## Conclusion

The late Kathleen Dubs used to say that there are two kinds of teachers. One kind are those who give their best to their students and do not mind or even applaud when they eventually outshine them. The other kind are those who guard their knowledge jealously and make sure they give students only so much as to prevent them from becoming smarter or more famous. While she was an example of the former, Saruman is definitely the latter case. He embraced and cultivated all the qualities that neither teachers nor priests should possess: he is jealous, impatient, resentful, and prideful. He seeks knowledge not to become better and help others, but to gain power and importance. His focus is no longer on his main role and quest and the ones he is "sent" to inspire, teach and uplift; instead, he concentrates on himself and his selfish desires, seeing his "students" as beneath him and hindering his ambitions.

By juxtaposing Gandalf and Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien on the one hand gave an example of how detrimental, almost catastrophic, the corruption of people of Saruman's position and importance can turn out to be. On the other, however, he shows that there are good teachers, priests and role models, that it is necessary and possible to resist the temptations put in one's path and, probably most importantly, that even in spite of mistakes and blunders, one can still become successful in the proper sense of the word.

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# 2.

# Tolkienesque Elements in Etelka Görgey's Mythopoetical Science Fiction

*Ildikó Limpár*

The *Csodaidők* [Miracle Times] series (2006–2010), and its accompanying *Időcsodák* [Time Miracles] series (2012–2022), written by Etelka Görgey and published under her pen name Raana Raas, is the most epic contemporary work of Hungarian science fiction,[1] which may be categorized as religious science fiction. The themes of faith and religion are not alien to science fiction (SF); and although Christian fundamentalism visibly impacted the genre in the 1980s (Mendlesohn 2003, 274), SF has traditionally had a critical perspective on religiosity since its early phase (ibid., 264). In the works that take this critical stance, "religion counterpoints not technology – although religious societies are often portrayed as anti-technology – but scientific thinking" (ibid., 265). This idea is challenged by Görgey, who is primarily interested in what an orthodox, traditional religion may be like in the future, what kind of social formations may come into existence due to the presence of fundamentalism, and the extent to which these would be tolerated by a society very similar to our global, pluralist world (Görgey, quoted in Bolla 2009).

Being a devoted Christian[2] and a Doctor of Theology, Görgey has a positive view of religion, but is not without a critical approach. Her interest lies in the moral questions that are daily posed to her by her religion and faith, largely independently of issues related to technology and science; understandably, then, it is not so much religious science fiction but religious fantasy, especially the oeuvre of the great inkling J. R. R. Tolkien, that has the most discernible influence on Görgey's fiction. The eight volumes are deeply rooted in Görgey's biblical interpretations, as indicated by her theological works, the themes of which recur frequently in her fiction. These biblical interpretations highlight her philological interest and knowledge: her study on the relationship between Psalm 22 and the crucifixion narrative (Görgey 2001a) or her analysis

[1] Based on their connection, I consider the two tetralogies as one work, but when discussing details, I differentiate between them. Due to the constraints of this study, I largely restrict my analysis to the first tetralogy.

[2] Görgey worked as a minister in the Hungarian Reformed Church while composing these novels.

on "the foolishness of God" (Görgey 2001b) rely on linguistic analysis and textual interrelations, the mechanisms of which are incorporated into the author's fiction.

The above observations may be good starting points for examining the world of Görgey's two tetralogies. The linguistic world building, which does not ignore the specifics of historical linguistics, serves as more than an atmosphere-creating component and demonstrates the Tolkienian ideal concerning an invented language, which should have "a highish level both of beauty in word-form considered abstractly, and of ingenuity in the relations of symbol and sense, not to mention its elaborate grammatical arrangements, nor its hypothetical historical background (a necessary thing as a constructor finds in the end, both for the satisfactory construction of the word-form, and for the giving of an illusion of coherence and unity to the whole)" (Tolkien 1997, 210). Looking at how Görgey constructs language in the series is beyond the scope of this paper, but I would like to emphasize that what is present on the linguistic level is only one brick of the worldbuilding and an indicator of what interests the author on the thematic level.

In Görgey's novel series, the relationship between individuals, between individuals and community, and among communities is as important a focal point as the relation among past, present, and future, including the influence of history, (religious) tradition, and myths on individuals and communities. As an SF work, it explores the possibilities of the future; however, this inquiry is tied onto looking at what – or rather what kind – the reference point is. The future and the present are dependent on the past, and in this work the question is whether the future is shaped by an unchanging, cemented tradition or by a living tradition that is capable of readjustment and transformation. Görgey is interested in exploring what kind of past, what kind of tradition would be able to sustain a community. Can we consider anything tradition if it keeps changing and seems to be losing its original form?

The above concerns are fundamental in Christianity and Judaism, and the way they are presented in this work reveals these religious-cultural roots. As early as the beginning of the first volume, we learn that the sacred text of the community at issue, the Kaven, is the so-called Bokra, which developed from the Bible. It is a rewritten version that was created on the planet Nies. It omitted many parts that were irrelevant to the new generations who did not know Earth. Then the remaining parts were thematically rearranged and completed with commentaries, whose number is ever increasing, making the Bokra grow like a tree (Görgey 2011, 70).

Heritage is thus very important to the Kaven, but it fulfils its purpose only if it can stay relevant to the community. Its content is sacred, but it needs explanation to become something to live by. It must also be practical, since the principles and values

that a text focuses on should offer practical help to people in their everyday lives. This is why parts that have grown irrelevant and impractical for a community existing in a changing environment are cut, and this is why it may grow, too. New situations may demand new solutions, and a transforming environment may require the reinterpretation of outdated guidelines. The ever-growing sacred book is discernibly based on "how the incessant interpretation of the Torah grows first into Mishnah and then the Talmud" (Görgey 2015).[3] Not surprisingly, the Kaven itself shows signs of a very closed, orthodox community, which is characterized by not only its shared set of rituals and its unique administrative system, but also a strict marriage policy and the irreversibility of exiting the community – something that one of the focalizing characters, Giin, is fighting against.

The changing of a tradition is naturally of interest to Görgey, who must have contemplated this issue as a congregational minister. One of the greatest challenges of the 21st century for Christian churches is to find a working strategy that will enable them to survive as living communities. But is the wisest strategy to rely on tradition? Or is clinging to traditions rigidly counterproductive because new generations can be engaged with only by reconsidering and ever more flexibly reinterpreting a community's heritage?

Görgey imagines a Kaven that qualifies as an ideal community in the Biblical sense; that is, a community made up of people "whose lives are shared. Whether they realize that or not, the strings of their lives are so tightly intertwined that one individual's acts may destroy or, on the contrary, save others; [in this community] *every* act has an importance from the perspective of the whole community" (Görgey 2007a, 201). While this idea comes from Görgey's 2007 study, every reader of her series is aware of it, as Giin is portrayed as a famous Bokra-commenting safir (that is, high-ranking officer), and his Bokra-interpretation and their re-interpretations and discussions are recurring elements in the novels. Interdependence within a community is ingrained into its members, and they learn as children that "people always depend on each other, and thus we are all responsible for others" (Görgey 2011, 68). This idea, however, is often experienced as an unbearable burden for a member, which is shown via another character, Yaan's example. Yaan suffers so terribly from this interdependence and responsibility that he decides to leave the community (just like many members who reach adulthood and as such are granted this opportunity); however, these principles have been so strongly ingrained in his personality that his actions are defined by them even when he lives outside the Kaven.

[3] In each case when a source published in Hungarian is quoted, it is presented in my own translation.

The community itself, of course, is not perfect, as it includes the human factor. Human fallibility cannot be automatically erased just because a community is based on principles that may ensure integrity for most of its members; what is more, a community may make a problematic decision on principle. The former is exemplified by Yaan in the first tetralogy, as he makes the decision to leave the community because he cannot cope with his own father's rigid despotism. The latter is showcased by one of the central conflicts: the Kaven is divided by the challenge that many of those who left the community would like to return. The Kaven has a zero-tolerance policy towards those who left, to keep the community pure and impervious to outside effects; however, this policy clearly has very palpable negative consequences. For instance, the number of suicides among those who left is terrifyingly high, and this phenomenon sharpens the question of the responsibility of the rejecting community.

Decisions are at the heart of each volume in this series – so much so that in the second tetralogy we read the story of the same characters spanning in the same period, except that in certain life situations they make different choices, and thus it becomes evident what consequences one decision may have even if one does not notice the weight of the choice when it is made. In addition, all three central characters – exactly because of their relation to the Kaven – are utterly aware of the importance of these decisive moments, contemplating possible outcomes in their inner monologues or in their conversations with others, so the readers' attention is consistently directed to this aspect of the narrative. The novels foreground one's attitude to one's own decisions, which invites the reconsideration of earlier choices. Rethinking the past, naturally, does not negate a bad decision, but as the series suggests, it does give a person an opportunity to ask for forgiveness and atone for what was done or to grant forgiveness and accept atonement. The parallel yet divergent trajectories in the alternate universes indicate that only when we know the bigger, more complete picture may we interpret what a certain decision may mean. This idea is confirmed at the end of *Csodaidők*, by a genuine Tolkienesque eucatastrophe, that is, "a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur" (Tolkien 2008, 77).

As Kathleen Dubs argues, the Boethian interpretation of this grace – divine providence – provides the key to understanding Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1981, 35) because "Boethius presents the philosophical issues quite apart from any link to Christian history (the Creation, the Fall, the Passion, etc.). For Tolkien, who was creating his own mythos, his own history, such an independent presentation was essential" (ibid., 35). Görgey follows Tolkien in her mythopoetic endeavors, and while she too relies on concepts that are fundamental in Christianity, she also makes sure not to present Christian propaganda even in the closures of her two tetralogies. Providence,

in Dubs's (1981) explanation of Boethius's position, is invisible to humans, who are capable of comprehending only fate. But "[a]lthough some events seem discordant or chaotic from our temporal perspective, they are not, because they remain subject to the order which proceeds from providence" (ibid., 36). Realizing this truth, Boethius' definition of "chance as an unexpected event brought about by a concurrence of causes which had other purposes in view" (Boethius 1962 quoted in Dubs 1981, 37) likewise becomes comprehensible.

Such unexpected "chance," which positively reinterprets the closures, provides the eucatastrophic turn at the end of the Görgey's two tetralogies, when all three focalizing characters learn about unforeseen, miraculously emerging facts that reinterpret both their pasts and their possible futures. This narrative strategy compels the reader to revisit the plot and especially the resolution of the first tetralogy in the light of the second, comparing the various characters' choices and the resulting consequences, which surely provokes thinking about free will, fate, and providence, as well as the connection between the individual and the community.

Creating a biblical community in a fantastic – and moreover science fictional – space is a theology-based thought experiment. As Görgey notes about the Reformed Church she served, one of its main "diseases" is that "out of its critical communities, only the family remained, but even that is a dying one" (Görgey 2007a, 202). But if we keep witnessing a gradual decline, can we imagine the revival of the biblical type of community in a techno-oriented future, which may work against interpersonal relations and strengthen the process of alienation?

Scrutinizing these issues, Görgey does have her eye on the future, but even though technological progress and alienation have become favored topics in SF, her approach, while acknowledging the interrelation of these two phenomena,[4] does not focus on it. In *Csodaidők* and *Időcsodák*, alienation is not primarily the result of scientific and technological progress but of people's thirst for power, which plays people off against people and cultures against cultures. Technological evolution, however, amplifies the effects of destruction – a notion already present in Tolkien's work[5] – from the planetary to the galactic scale.

[4] The novel *Hazatérők* [Returners], however, makes it clear that technology is a threat to interpersonal relations and may prevent immersion in the moment. The high-tech Nies society, positioned as quite a utopian one, voluntarily choose "slow" life despite possessing the technology of teleportation. They also prohibit human representation in art, which in practice means the prohibition of sending pictures showing people, arguing that allowing such a practice would lead to depersonalized communication (Görgey 2010, 188).

[5] The dangerous implications of technological progress are already addressed by Tolkien when he associates Sauron with the machines and thus "emphasizes the intersection of the desire for power with the technological impulse" (Twohig 2021).

*Csodaidők* expresses the conviction that it is the biblical, living community, if anything, that may keep humans humane in an alienating world. The three characters who serve as rotating focalizers of the various chapters show various aspects of this connection. In this respect, Yaan's trajectory is the most revealing, as at the end of the first volume of the series, he is the one who leaves his family and thus the whole community of the Kaven. His consequent decisions cause him to spiral into crisis situations, testing his conscience; yet even in the most inhuman times of war, while accepting the consequences of his separation from the Kaven, it is his tight relation to the community and the principles ingrained in him by that community that allow him to make the right calls in crises. These decisions eventually grant him the opportunity not to remain entirely separate from the community that at his core defines what kind of person he considers himself to be: Yaan Raas from the Kaven and not Paul Marty, his newly acquired identity outside the Kaven.

The living community, which assures one's integrity, functions on the model of the biblical community. It is also organized on similar principles as a Paleo-Christian community, "which considers the Scripture as the center of not only their religion but also of their life and historical thinking" (Görgey 2007a, 201). Similarly to what the Bible was to these early Christian communities, the sacred book of the Kaven is the Talmud-like, ever-growing, post-Christian version of the Bible, and its diachronic quality comes from the continuity guaranteed by the community (Görgey 2007a). As Görgey posits, coexisting and having a dialogue with the sacred text results in a community in "dialogue with the earlier generations, whose experiences and 'sacred text' help interpret the present, face its challenges, and create their own sacred text" (2007a, 201).

What is clear on the level of principles – the need to update tradition – may be very problematic in practice. The Kaven members, for instance, keep their heritage alive by upholding every part of their tradition, but this turns them into a very closed community. Görgey approaches this issue as a theologist and derives the solution from the Bible's theological commentary: the community may be broadened, as this is exactly what happened when the New Testament was created. The tree-parable of the New Testament posits that extending a community should be understood as grafting in a tree, which allows the new and wild shoot to "share in the nourishing sap from the olive root" (Rome 11,17). Keeping this biblical verse and its significance in Görgey's theological work directs our attention to the motif of the og tree in her SF series.

The og is not autochthonous on Kaven land; it comes from the planet of the historical ancestors, and people in the Kaven naturalized it together with other plants. The og represents unity, and it is able to give an instant sense of homeliness: as its red color differentiates it from the vegetation that is autochthonous outside the planet Nies, every

Kaven member immediately notices it. Wherever such a tree is planted and nurtured, people belonging to the Kaven live. The tree alone is able to embody one of the central ideas of the Bokra, the assurance that "you are not alone".

This embodiment of the sense of community is not unlike how the White Tree of Gondor functions in Tolkien's narratives. As Michael Cunningham (2006, 8) argues, the tree is a "potent symbol of fecundity and regeneration of form [and …] has long been associated with a perception of divinity and the riches lavished upon the rulers of men". The tree thus signals not only the health of the sacred king but, by extension, also the health of his community. The og tree has a function akin to this, as the blossoming of any og tree embodies the power of the metaphorical kingdom that is linked to the sacred power associated with Nies, whence the Kaven originate.

Old og trees are especially capable of communicating this sense of belonging to a community. There are trees that literally come from the Nies and were replanted in the new planet, and one of the big og trees is claimed to have originated from the grave of the famous ancestor Endeau (Görgey 2011, 310). The og bridges temporal and interplanetary distance, which suggests that the community itself should exhibit the same nature, in a ceaseless dialogue with the community separated from them by time and space.

The tree shows this connection as a physical, organic symbol: the replanted tree belongs both to Nies and the other planet where it now grows; it links planets and parts of the community, making it visible on a material level that this relation is a living one: the tree originally nourished by the ancient homeland can continue to grow in the new land. It connects death and life: the tree growing out of a grave revives on a new planet, and the live tradition defines the community's ritual heritage, according to which members of a family plant a tree to honor the memory of a deceased person. As a tree becomes more voluminous, it also reflects the community's imperative to develop and becomes the symbol of the ever-changing and growing Bokra, with which the community is in constant dialogue. The interpretation of the og as standing for eternal life (Görgey 2010, 246) is thus confirmed and enriched by the scene in which the third focalizer, Judy, finds a small stone placed in memory of Andreas the Great on his grave and is unsure how to read the old engraving on it. She cannot decide whether it should be read as "og" or "a.g.," which makes the og tree the symbol of eternal life interchangeable with the reference to the first line of the funeral prayer ("Ateenęma Gaadra," that is, "thank you, God").

At this point let me refer back to the connection noted earlier between Tolkien's and Görgey's quasi-secular use of Christian ideas to avoid reductive interpretation. While Görgey's SF centers around a community that may be labelled as religious, The Bokra-following Kaven does not exactly follow a religion similar to those of the

established Christian churches of our present-day reality. The Kaven is a society that has strong ties to God in their rituals, and many members also understand belonging to the community as following a religion, too; however, it is a community that shares a common set of moral principles but is much more secular than a(n ideally functioning) Christian community. Some of the people respected by the community are known from the Bible, and those are joined by other important figures, like the Kaven-founding Andreas the Great and his contemporaries, Mikel the Great and Endeau the Great. God (Gaadra) is present in rituals and in set phrases. Even though the Bokra is a modified version of the Bible, the reshapers of the sacred text have become venerated, prophet-like figures. What people know about these characters is partly the past, various pieces of which are proved. Some other details for a long time seem mythical and unrealistic due to their hyperbolic nature, which is explained by the great respect these characters have. This ambiguity is explored and reshaped as the story unfolds.

The enlightened (though spiritual) Kaven community is characterized by its critical attitude to its own myths. This portrayal aims to demonstrate that a technologically developed, science-oriented future is likely to result in a humanity with ways of thinking that are informed by natural sciences. This is as important an aspect of depicting the community as all the other elements that aim to challenge the mainstream SFF topos that there is an inherent contrast between religiosity and logical thinking/technology. People living in the Kaven not only use high-tech products; they are the people who develop these technologies, manufacturing various high-tech vehicles and devices (especially before the war). The Kaven families involved in these businesses are economic world powers, and studying IT is an integral part of their education. Görgey undoubtedly intends to convey her conviction that "religiousness equals neither dumbness nor weakness" (Görgey in Bolla 2009).

Myths are, nevertheless, important components of community building and futuristic worldbuilding alike, aiming to deconstruct the contradiction between "the mythical world view of churches" and "the scientific world view of the modern world" that Görgey thinks is "unsupportable" (Görgey in Bolla 2009). As she argues, one cannot change one's world view depending on context, since "such an attitude would force a harmful duality in thinking, which is absolutely unsupportable when, for instance, we face scientists or people with an interest in natural sciences;" what is more, we do so while "we give up the enormous potential symbols have, even though these could replace the mythical elements, and their relevance would be more meaningful for the outsiders as well" (Görgey in Bolla 2009).

In her SF work, Görgey validates most of the myths present in her fictive world, but by doing so, she also pulls these narratives out of the category of myth: she makes

it clear that what were thought of as myths are, in fact, based on historical facts, and she sharpens the mythical mist into history, which is capable of freshly interacting with the present. The conviction that the planet Nies must exist somewhere even though no one can locate it will be demystified by finding the planet accidentally.

Görgey also weaves an elaborate myth around the notion of longevity, reminiscent of the Tolkienian concept of longevity, which differentiates between several types of lifespans. In Tolkien's world, human's average life span is contrasted with different kinds of longevity. He has immortal characters, such as Gandalf, Saruman, or Sauron (Bassham ms., 3), while "Elves live for millennia, perhaps eons [and] thus possess remarkable 'longevity'" (ibid., 4) that Tolkien sees as "serial longevity" (ibid., 5). To these categories are added the Númenoreans, who were granted particularly long lives, spanning several centuries. In a similar fashion, while Görgey does not introduce any immortal characters, she gives Kaven people a longevity that is surprisingly long compared to the typical human lifespan. This average of one hundred and fifty years is dwarfed by the extreme longevity of several centuries attributed to certain mythical characters. Yet the possibility of extreme longevity is considered an exaggeration due to the mythical distance and the veneration of the respected figures. It is substantiated only after an encounter with the Nies people but turns out to be a rare phenomenon in the Nies community, too.

Finding the Nies demystifies some parts of a mythical past and confirms the existence of the miraculous. It also strengthens the link with the Tolkienian mythopoesis when we learn that people with extreme longevity on Nies also have what we may call the gift of the Dunédain in Tolkien's mythopoesis: the gift of choosing the time of their death, exemplified by the scene in which Aragorn decides to go beyond the world, saying "I am the last of the Númenoreans and the latest King of the Elder Days; and to me has been given not only a span thrice that of Men of Middle-earth, but also the grace to go at my will and give back the gift. Now, therefore, I will sleep" (Tolkien, "Here follows a part of the tale of Aragorn and Arwen" – Tolkien 2004, 1062).

The reception of romances with mythical characters also transforms due the discovery of the Nies. Shine Meron and Anna's romance is revealed to have been less fabulously romantic than literary heritage suggests, as it was a marriage arranged for practical, political reasons. Another love story familiar to the Kaven people evokes the past in a very specifically Tolkienian manner. In the so-called Siara-song, the female protagonist Siara falls in love with and marries a long-living man, which evokes the elven Galadriel and the Dunédain Aragorn's romance, as well as its diegetic mythical prefiguration, the romance of the elven Lúthien and the mortal Beren, which appears in several of Tolkien's works and also as a separate narrative titled *Beren and Lúthien*,

edited by Christopher Tolkien (2017). The Siara-song exhibits a less idealizing approach, though, as Siara always feels her beloved distant, and love in itself is not able to bridge the gap between extreme longevity and mortality, despite the fact that Siara survives her husband, who dies in battle. In this story, extreme longevity may not be given up, as the romance is not mixed with a magical world view, which is explicable with its function: the ballad closes with a Kaven hymn, turning the song into a story teaching about one's goals and commitment to community. Yet this gap, bridged by magic in Tolkien, will be resolved with a scientific solution at the end of *Csodaidők*.

Myths may serve even as keys to scientific breakthroughs, the series suggests. The mysterious Maareen syndrome is an incurable, genetical autoimmune disease that affects only Kaven members (Görgey 2011, 396). When the doctor Doron comes up with a hypothesis that what triggers it is linked to extreme longevity, extreme longevity still belongs to the sphere of myths, and thus the hypothesis is discarded by Judy as scientifically ridiculous and unsupportable. Yet when it turns out that extreme longevity is real (though rare), Doron's hypothesis becomes credible and is later verified. Gaining actual proof about the past turns most (but not all) mythical heritage into history, shedding light on how what survives as myth may still carry significant, life-changing knowledge and truth, and generating a new belief and understanding that knowing the past indeed contributes to building a better future.

Readers of the series may realize another significant element of the Siara-song at the end of the first tetralogy. Siara's trajectory in terms of her family history shows several analogies with Yaan's. In the war, Siara loses her partner (her husband) and both her children, similarly to Yaan, who in the war loses his wife and his child, and he also thinks that he has lost his adopted child. Görgey makes us realize the parallelism and explains the closure of the ballad, highlighting its ending stanza, then writes Yaan's story in a way that turns that hopeful stanza into reality when it is revealed that Yaan is not alone after all. The person of the future will be seen as an integrated part of the ancient myth by repeating it and confirming its promised hopeful futurity. Bridging the past and the future, Yaan is an example of how the power of a living community may be experienced.

Yaan corresponding to a diegetic mythic archetype is just one example of how Görgey uses archetypes from well-known myths and religions. Yaan's trajectory may be interpreted as one mirroring that of the prodigal son from the Bible, suggesting that here the whole community of the Kaven must act like a father, showing forgiveness and acceptance. In the second tetralogy, *Időcsodák*, Giin is given a storyline that strongly resembles Christ's narrative of suffering and self-sacrifice, keeping even the motif of resurrection from death thanks to the futuristic technology of the series. The storyline

set in the refugee camp alludes both to our present-day refugee crises and the story of the persecuted people of the Jews in the Bible.

Set in wartime, the three protagonists' stories center around loss and focus on the same motifs as the Book of Lamentations, the biblical text Görgey wrote several studies about (2005; 2006; 2007b): the relation between historical catastrophes and stories of human suffering; communal roles related to grieving; and the importance of rituals and heritage. Like the Book of Lamentations, this series may be categorized as survival literature (the best-known subcategory of which is Holocaust literature), and as such, it shows that such a story is always intertwined with the topos of the God-forsaken community (granted that the community in question is religious). Similarly to the biblical text, *Csodaidők* also focuses in its closing section on whether the separation from God is permanent or whether one may return to one's father – understood in Görgey's fiction as the community. Based on the teachings of the Scripture it is perhaps easy to decide whether anyone who has stepped off the narrow path may be received back once they have repented and desire the reunion. This is, after all, what the parable of the prodigal son teaches us. This parable may be read in various ways, of which I would like to highlight one interpretation that may be especially relevant in relation to *Csodaidők*. In Zsolt Kozma's interpretation, this parable may be interpreted in the context of Israel and the diaspora, as a result of which the biblical text is to be understood as the parable of leaving the holy nation (Kozma in Benyik 2003, 177).

In *Csodaidők*, the Kaven community has a dual role: it is the surviving diaspora of the Nies community, but it is also in the position of the holy nation in relation to those who left it. It may be considered as the holy nation because for a long time the Nies functions only as a mythological, fictive place: a place whose past existence has never been truly doubted but is considered to have been destroyed. Stories about the Nies remind us of the Atlantis myth, especially in the way the Kaven people trace back their fundamental heritage, the Bokra, to the Nies society. In the Atlantis myth – and its Tolkienian version, the myth of Númenor[6] – the sin that causes the fall of that developed civilization, oppressing others (Lynch 2018, 36), is clearly definable; the Nies, in contrast, seems a more idealized civilization, characterized by almost Edenic traits. Yet the Nies is not without sin – or at least a debatable decision – either: it purposefully isolated itself from the rest of the world, thus allowing itself to be erased from the reality of the human world. It has survived as a living community but only by cutting all ties with human civilization, which is a political decision aimed at securing peace and thus

[6] Tolkien specifically associates Númenor with Atlantis in several of his letters. See letters 131, 144, 151, 154, 156, 163, 227, 252, 257, 276, 294 (Tolkien 2023).

survival for the people on the planet (while forsaking those on other planets). However, when a small group of Kaven people meets the Nies society by chance, the issue of the holy nation and the diaspora emerges again and poses questions of conscience. Eventually, the Nies's decision to support the Kaven also has a positive influence on the Kaven's policy on how to relate to those who departed from the community.

The question of whether a new, accepting policy will be enough to reconstruct an utterly broken, disintegrated community that would be able to keep its heritage remains seemingly unanswered at the end. It is evident that the focal characters were socialized in the Kaven, and thus the opportunity to rebuild the society is invaluable to them. But the younger generations have very different connections to the community. The closure contemplates the likely fate of Emily, who by blood belongs to the Raas family of the Kaven but never received the kind of education that such members receive by tradition. She seems to be rootless, and the Raas family feels that they are losing her. This is where we leave the narrative – except that Görgey's unique mythopoetical solutions offer some confirmation that the changes depicted may effectively contribute to rebuilding the community, even among the younger generations.

With her chosen pen name and her foreword, Görgey positions her whole SF series as if it were a product from her fictive world. This mythopoesis is made more complex by a change that was generated by necessity: Animus publishing published only the first two volumes of the series, so the rest of the series appeared through self-publication, and the name of the publisher was changed to Shremeya, one of the Nies-founded planets in Görgey's imaginary universe. The front cover shows Raana Raas as author, and we soon learn that the Raas family is a central one in the narrative, so the pen name is a mythopetical tool. However, we also learn that given names in a family recur from generation to generation, so we cannot possibly know which Raana is the one writing this family history. Retrospectively, however, certain components of the foreword hint at the part of the story that was not written.

The author Raana is none other than Emilie, who learns about her family roots at the end of the tetralogy but does not feel herself connected to the Kaven community and is reluctant to listen to her Kaven name Raana. The family is convinced that she will break away from the community once she is 18 and is allowed to leave, but the foreword reveals that she does not lose ties with the Kaven. She is the family chronicler, writing her books in the literary language of the Kaven, Nitan, and uses her Kaven name as author. The foreword is written apropos of the new edition in the Lish language for an audience outside the Kaven, as a step towards cultural bridging. Raana refers to her own rootlessness in past tense and reveals her emotional connection to the Kaven, claiming that she went through a transformation while writing her book (Görgey 2011,

7). She connects this observation with a Bokra verse and its commentary, placing the emphasis on the biblical dimension of mythopoesis by recalling that each word is creation, and each act of storytelling is recreation (ibid., 8). This understanding directs attention to the speaker – that is, the narrator Raana – and completes the fictive world of *Csodaidők* and *Időcsodák* (in which Raana's name is preceded by the abbreviation *Sf.*, standing for the rank *safir*, revealing more than an emotional connection to the Kaven) and also completes the interpretation about the relationship between the sacred book and the community that holds it sacred. The two tetralogies may be seen as elaborated, community-shaping texts that illuminate the teachings of the Bokra as the Haggadah makes the teachings of the Torah easier to understand by using various tools, such as tales, myths, legends, miracle narratives, anecdotes, parables, proverbs, word-plays, similes, etc. ("Haggada"). The novel series builds the Bokra; it is a fresh branch of the symbolic og tree, whose roots, I believe, interlock with the roots of the white tree of Gondor, too.

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# 3.

# "Where It Was Not": Varieties of Mindscapes in Fantastic Fiction

*Károly Pintér*

Once upon a time – so begin traditional fairy tales in English. The appropriate turn of phrase in Hungarian is slightly different: in literal translation, it goes like "Once it was, where it was not" ("*Egyszer volt, hol nem volt*"). This simple opening statement captures the essence of all fantastic literature: the narrative gesture of setting the story in a non-existent or at least thoroughly unfamiliar and unconventional environment, a significantly different fictional universe, where the customary social and cultural norms as well as the iron laws of nature can be suspended, overcome or simply brushed aside as if they had never existed.

Critics and theorists have circumscribed this fundamental gesture of fantastic fiction in a number of ways: J.R.R. Tolkien called it "sub-creation" (Tolkien 2008, 42 ff), Darko Suvin defined it as "estrangement" (Suvin 1979, 18 ff), Robert Scholes referred to it as "fabulation" or "radical discontinuity" (Scholes 2005, 206). These and similar terms try to capture the constitutive requirement of all fantastic fiction: the verbal creation of an alternative universe that most common-sense readers would describe as non-existent, impossible, or imaginary in their empirical world. I do not wish to argue that any piece of fiction possessing some element of fantasy – or, to use Kathryn Hume's inclusive definition, "any departure from consensus reality" (Hume 1985, 21) – amounts to an alternative universe; one could easily cite famous literary texts which revolve around an isolated fantastic occurrence in an otherwise realistic fictional universe: for instance Franz Kafka's "Metamorphosis", Nikolai Gogol's "The Nose" or Robert Louis Stephenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. But the majority of fantastic fiction presents a wider natural and/or social environment which in one or more of its salient features contradicts both world-1 – that is, the empirical world surrounding the author – and world-2 – the empirical world as known by readers (Hume 1985, 9 ff). George Slusser and Eric Rabkin proposed the term "mindscape" for these fictional phenomena, because, as they write:

> fantasy and science fiction [are] the modern artistic forms most engaged in 'thought experiments', to generate landscapes, new or extrapolated, that are

> meant to be realizations of our mental forms […] Imaginary landscapes proliferate in fantasy and science fiction.
>
> (Slusser and Rabkin 1989, x)

Theorists of fantastic fiction have been struggling for more than half a century with the challenge of drawing a more or less well-defined line of distinction between the two most popular and best-known contemporary modes, fantasy and science fiction. In the following, I would mostly like to avoid this theoretical minefield by relying on the most generally accepted terms and approaches, but it seems prudent to note that 21st century literary and cultural trends point toward an ever-increasing hybridity of established modes and genres (more on that below).

Fantasy bears a discernible resemblance to folktales and ancient myths which inspired its emergence, but it is a relatively modern phenomenon: as Maria Nikolajeva writes, "fantasy literature owes its origins mostly to Romanticism with its interest in folk tradition, its rejection of the previous, rational-age view of the world, and its idealization of the child" (Nikolajeva 2003, 139). Nikolajeva also points out the eclectic character of modern fantasy, borrowing elements of romance, chivalric and picaresque tales, mysteries, gothic novels and other genres (ibid., 139). Classic fantasy has inherited the archetypal plot of fairy tales: the quest narrative described by Joseph Campbell, which inevitably involves some kind of journey on the part of the main hero, who faces trials and opponents as well as encountering helpers and a potential love interest on their way to accomplish their mission (see Campbell 2004, 227–33). But the most distinctive feature of fantasy is the presence of magic and the supernatural in the narrative in some form or another: it can manifest itself in magical characters (wizards, witches), creatures (fairies, ghosts, genies, elves, dwarves, giants, trolls, dragons, talking animals, etc.) or objects (wands, flying carpets, invisibility cloaks, magic swords, etc.) as well as other empirically inexplicable phenomena. The crucial role of magic is emphasized by one of the venerated "founding fathers" of modern fantasy, Tolkien, in his seminal essay on the evolving genre (which he still refers to as "fairy-stories"):

> Even fairy-stories as a whole have three faces: the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man. *The essential face of Faërie is the middle one, the Magical*. But the degree in which the others appear (if at all) is variable, and may be decided by the individual story-teller.
>
> (Tolkien 2008, 44, emphasis added)

At another turn, Tolkien also makes the emphatic remark that "if there is any satire present in the tale, one thing must not be made fun of, the magic itself. That must in that story be taken seriously, neither laughed at nor explained away" (Tolkien 2008, 33). The emphatic presence of magic can also be interpreted as a deliberate, even willful denial of what is commonly regarded as possible and the refusal to offer any rational explanation for this seeming impossibility: as Rosemary Jackson expresses it, fantasy "takes the real and breaks it" (quoted in Benczik 2023, 625).

While Nikolajeva foregrounds the ancestral relationship of modern fantasy to myths and folk tales, Brian Attebery points out another distinctive feature of the genre: the inspiration it draws from dreams, "daydreams, hallucination, and visionary states […] the imagery of fantasy reveals its kinship with altered states of consciousness such as hypnosis, meditation, and drug-induced vision (Attebery 1992, 7). Descriptions of these non-realistic and in some sense "unsupervised" visions open a special path to exploring the workings of the human unconscious, which makes fantasy stories particularly suitable for symbolic psychological interpretations, for instance as representations of the Jungian collective unconscious.

It is also Attebery who observes that J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* can justifiably be seen as the prototype or the "mental template" of the modern fantasy genre in three significant ways: its sharp break with reality, or a bold construction of a secondary world; the essentially positive resolution of the story that Tolkien himself referred to as "eucatastrophe" (Tolkien 2008, 75); and the sense of wonder as a liberating and inspiring emotional response to the reading experience (Attebery 1992, 14–16).

Farah Mendlesohn's widely accepted typology distinguishes four subgenres within the broader category of fantasy; out of these, two are particularly prone to inviting readers to enter their mindscapes. In portal fantasies, the Campbellian journey begins in our commonsense reality, involves a magical transportation into the secondary world of fantasy (see such classic examples as the wardrobe in C. S. Lewis's *Narnia* stories or the rabbit hole in Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*) and concludes with a return to the hero's original mundane environment (Mendlesohn 2002, 173–74). Immersive fantasies, on the other hand, dispense with this plot device altogether and simply assume that readers will find their way around an alternative imaginary world with minimal introduction and explanation. "Immersive fantasy is […] closest to science fiction, and […] it makes use of ironic mimesis. […] immersive fantasy depends for its effectiveness on an assumption of realism that denies the need for explication (Mendlesohn 2002, 175). The prototype is of course *The Lord of the Rings*, but many of the more recent classics of modern fantasy belong to, or at least make use of, immersive fantasy, from *The Wheel of Time* (1990–2013) novels of Robert Jordan to *A Song of Ice and Fire*

series (better known as the *Game of Thrones* saga after the title of its first volume, since 1996) by George R. R. Martin.

The other dominant mode of modern fantastic literature, science fiction (SF for short), also displays a predilection for devising and presenting a variety of fictional universes to readers. In fact, as Carl Malmgren has argued, the most distinctive feature of the genre or mode called science fiction is not the stories told (which are mostly variations of traditional fictional plots) but the worlds in which these stories are placed (Malmgren 1991, 7). The pioneering theoretician of science fiction, Darko Suvin, has also attempted to define science fiction based on this feature. In his opinion, SF stories are centered around one or more specific fantastic inventions (which he termed "novum", relying on an earlier idea of Ernst Bloch), on the basis of which a logical and consistent alternative to world-1 is developed by the author. This strategy is described by Suvin as "cognitive estrangement": the novum (and the imaginary world predicated upon it) functions as a defamiliarizing device, which challenges readers or viewers to make a mental effort to understand the internal logic and peculiarities of the fictional world, to contemplate differences between the fictional world and their own world-2, and – in an ideal case – to turn a fresh eye on their own familiar environment (Suvin 1979, 63–79).

Both Suvin and Malmgren emphasize that SF is also distinguished by the peculiar methodology of estrangement: it has been described by various authors as a "thought experiment" (see Slusser and Rabkin 1989, x), "extrapolation" (Scholes 2005, 214), or "speculation" (Heinlein 1977, 3, 10). All these terms are notable for their scientific-rational connotations and signal a certain underlying attitude on the part of SF narratives. Science fiction as such – contrary to some very widespread but rather simple-minded notions – is certainly not "scientific", that is, not strictly based on the existing facts, theories and knowledge of either the natural or the social sciences (moreover, it very often has little connection to any science properly understood). Nonetheless the bulk of the genre

> rests upon a scientific epistemology, one which assumes […] that the external world is both real and phenomenal. […] This world is also axiologically neutral: it is not informed by a superordinated or metaphysical system of value; […] At the same time, that world is subject to a system of discoverable and codifiable order, in the form of a set of interlocking 'natural laws'. These laws are understood to be universal.
>
> (Malmgren 1991, 4–5)

How does this "scientific epistemology" manifest itself in SF mindscapes? Classic SF narratives are characterized by a certain imaginary rigor and consistency that is less common in fantasy: contrary to popular beliefs, "anything is not possible" within an SF universe, because one of the fundamental conventions of the mode is the requirement of a logical or rational (or at least rationalizing) explanation of the fantastic events or phenomena. Magic as such is typically banished from SF universes as a mode of interpretation contrary to the laws of nature, rational logic and causality. The unfamiliar or improbable novum most be explained, or (since such "explanations" in an SF story often amount to little more than pseudo-scientific gobbledygook) at least rationalized using factual, technical, scientific language, giving readers the illusion that the events or phenomena described are potentially possible within a scientifically conceived universe. A very useful short summary of this crucial generic difference is provided by Robert M. Philmus: "naturalistic fiction does not require scientific explanation, fantasy does not allow it, and SF both requires and allows it" (quoted by Suvin 1979, 65).[1]

Perhaps the most entertaining example of how the rationalizing convention works in SF has been provided by Fredric Brown, who illustrated that the ancient legend of Midas could easily be turned into an SF story as long as the central magical element is explained away as a super-scientific ability:

> Mr Midas, who runs a Greek restaurant in the Bronx, happens to save the life of an extraterrestrial from a far planet who is living in New York anonymously as an observer for the Galactic Federation, to which Earth for obvious reasons is not yet admitted […] The extraterrestrial, who is master of sciences far beyond ours, makes a machine which alters the molecular vibrations of Mr Midas's body so his touch will have a transmuting effect upon other objects. And so on.
>
> (quoted in Parrinder 1980, 20)

[1] It should be noted, however, that such a simplified distinction is not always applicable to more recent hybrid examples of speculative fiction such as science fantasy, in which magical creatures or heroes with inexplicable supernatural skills coexist with such SF staples as spaceships, alien planets or time travel. The *Star Wars* movie saga is often considered science fantasy due to its classic fantasy plot (the quest narrative) as well as the quasi-magical Force, which enables Jedi knights and Sith Lords to foresee the future or bend other minds to their will. In other types of generic hybrids, magic is presented as a systematic body of knowledge producing its own technology, for instance in *Jonathan Strange and Mr Norrell* (2004) by Susanna Clarke, or the emergence of supernatural creatures like vampires and zombies are rationalized by quasi-scientific origin stories, e.g., in the novel *I Am Legend* (1954) by Richard Matheson (which has been adapted to film three times) or in the video game franchise *The Last of Us* (since 2013), which was also adapted for a television series by HBO in 2023. For details of these hybrid generic examples, see Benczik (2020) and Limpár (2024).

(By the way, it is worth noting that this rewriting of the Midas legend with its superhuman ET living undercover in New York City contains the core of the novum presented in the delightful SF parody movie *Men in Black* [1997].)

Another manifestation of the scientific epistemology is the future-oriented outlook of SF: since the 19th century origins of the genre coincided with the discovery of time and change as key factors in the history of the universe, earthly life and human civilization (as the development of modern geology, evolutionary biology and the concept of entropy in physics testify), SF was from its inception (especially under the formative influence of H. G. Wells) very interested in future potentials and possibilities of science, technology, social development, and similar issues.

Accordingly, some of the most conventional "nova" or devices of SF include interplanetary or interstellar space travel, the possibility of time travel, the existence of – and encounter with – extraterrestrial intelligent beings, the creation of artificial intelligence, improvements and extensions of the human body and mind, various technological breakthroughs, or substantial and often drastic changes to the ecological or social conditions of human life, such as devastating epidemics, nuclear wars, ecological catastrophes, overpopulation, etc. Each of these nova is merely the point of departure for the authorial imagination: a good science fiction story is invariably interested in the impact and consequences of such fictitious developments on humans, which means picturing an alternative version of human community – in other words, an imaginary world or a mindscape.

In the following, I wish to present my own short survey of "mindscapism" by offering a bit of subjective exploration of the fantastic worlds of science fiction, my primary field of research. While fantasy mindscapes also deserve a detailed examination, I am not familiar enough with the length and breadth of the genre to give it the proper treatment it deserves. Therefore, in the rest of the essay, while references to fantasy occasionally pop up, the focus of the discussion is restricted to SF.

## There and Back – the Significance of the Journey

Literary historians in search of the origins of fantastic genres invariably identify imaginary journeys as one of the precursors of modern fantastic fiction. This is hardly surprising, given the central significance of the journey motif in ancient myths and the history of literature in general: it is both the most common plot element and an archetypal metaphor for human life.

The popularity of the fictional accounts of all sorts of journeys is partly also explained by the fact that in premodern communities the great majority of the population rarely if ever had the opportunity to leave their dwelling place, and so were naturally

curious about foreign lands, the wider world, the "land beyond the seas", etc. Travelers were welcome guests both at peasants' homes and royal halls, and their "strange and wonderful" tales typically included unverifiable or flatly untrue stories. Reality and fantasy freely mingled in these accounts and their audience neither could nor wanted to establish their truth value. The travelogues of Marco Polo or Amerigo Vespucci were no less fantastic to contemporary audiences than the voyages of Ulysses, St. Brendan, or Sinbad the Sailor. The voyage is the most ancient and most convenient narrative strategy to transport the narrator (and the audience) to an alternative universe, as such diverse stories as Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516), Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) or Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) testify: it can be a faraway island, a distant country, or a hidden valley, where the natural surroundings can be as different from world-1 as the human inhabitants.

By the late 19th century, the seemingly endless possibilities of fictional "elsewheres" had come close to exhaustion on Earth, as the entire surface of the planet had been discovered and mapped by Western travelers and geographers. Fantasy and SF reacted to this narrative challenge in characteristically different ways: while fantasy authors invented secondary universes hidden from plain sight, accessible only with the help of magic (Mendlesohn's portal fantasies), SF invented two distinctively modern modes of transport to new mindscapes: space travel and time travel. Space travel (not as a didactic metaphorical tale of ancient and early modern authors but as a technically feasible venture) first featured in Jules Verne's famous *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865), and H. G. Wells presented the first successful landing on a celestial body in *The First Men in the Moon* (1901), but it became a widely popular means of fictional escape in the early 20th century, especially in popular American SF magazines. Following in the footsteps of H. G. Wells's enormously influential *War of the Worlds* (1898), in which imperialist Martians attack Earth and attempt to subjugate humans, Mars emerged as the favored location of extraterrestrial adventures, especially in the long series of Barsoom novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs (begun with *A Princess of Mars* [1912]), whose hero, John Carter, is transported from the American West to the planet of Mars and fights heroic battles against villains and monsters defending a beautiful princess, in an essentially fantasy-like setting (an early example of today's science fantasy subgenre). In his wake, Mars achieved such popularity in interwar pulp SF that Ray Bradbury's famous short story collection, *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), could already reflect on the history of Mars and Martian civilization not only within the bounds of its own fictional universe, but also as a reference to genre history. For post-war SF readers, Bradbury's Mars is perhaps the most memorable image of the planet: rather than a site for a romantic-melodramatic adventure story, it has been transformed into a haunted place of nostalgia and yearning,

where emigrant Earthmen are confronted with the ruins of an extinct civilization as well as by their own bittersweet memories of the culture they have left behind. Bradbury is entirely uninterested in rational extrapolation or the technological wonders of the future: he utilizes SF conventions as a transparent disguise for allegorical and poetic tales about the human condition, which made him very popular also among "mainstream" readers.

More realistic SF stories have been typically preoccupied with Mars as the first target planet for human colonization of the solar system; an outstanding example is Kim Stanley Robinson's excellent trilogy (*Red Mars*, *Green Mars* and *Blue Mars*, 1993–97) about the terraformation of Mars, that is, how Mars is turned into an ecosphere capable of supporting human habitation.

Before long, imaginary space travelers have left not only Earth but the entire solar system behind, as new and ingenious devices were invented to overcome the vast interstellar distances, such as generation starships or faster-than-light space travel. As Brian Stableford writes, "the idea of flight into space became the central myth of SF" (Clute and Nicholls 1995, 1135), and its vehicle, the spaceship, is one of the key symbols of the genre. Michel Foucault's observation about ships is equally applicable to, if not even more fitting for, spaceships: "The ship is the heterotopia *par excellence* […] a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea" (Foucault 1986, 27). Spaceships offer a number of analogical and symbolic opportunities in SF stories: they may function as the equivalent of a horse or a sailing vessel in Western or sea adventure stories (think of Han Solo as a clear equivalent of a roving gunslinger or the adventurous pirate with his battered old ship the *Millennium Falcon* in the Star Wars series); they may be frightening war machines embodying aggression and terror (such as the Imperial Star Destroyers, also from *Star Wars*); they may represent the horse-driven wagons of the early pioneers, in a mission to discover the final and infinite frontier of space, as both the title and the opening credits of the iconic *Star Trek* series expressed. It can also function as a miniature of human society like generation starship stories, in which a large group of people venture on an interstellar journey lasting for several centuries, knowing (or occasionally forgetting) that only their descendants will arrive at the destination, as in Brian Aldiss's *Non-Stop* (1958). A ship can be an ark carrying the survivors of a destroyed civilization, or a sentient being with an artificial intelligence on its own. One of the most intriguing spaceships in SF history, presented in Arthur C. Clarke's *Rendezvous with Rama* (1973), invites most of the above interpretations but offers no definitive answers: a gigantic cylindrical structure enters the solar system, and its human explorers find a perfect miniature ecosystem in it complete with land and sea, animals, even an artificially sped-up evolutionary process.

## Time after Time – Journeys into the Future and the Past

The other imaginary piece of man-made technology that achieved a similar iconic status in SF is the time machine, perhaps the most distinctly SF mode of transport, even though it manifestly contradicts the generally accepted theories of the universe. Einstein's relativity theory allows time travel into the future by means of space travel at close-to-light speed (because at such enormous velocity the time dilation causes the astronaut to age a lot more slowly than their friends and relatives left behind on a planet) but travel into the past is considered impossible by the scientific consensus. Thus, time travel and all its varieties provide yet another good example of why SF is not really about science and extrapolation but rather about rationalized wish fulfilment: once the impossible is assumed (that is, time travel IS somehow possible), all the consequences of the imaginary hypothesis can be unpacked in a neat, logical order.

The idea that a special kind of machine could enable humans to travel both forward and backward in time, which is nothing but the "fourth dimension" of space, is arguably the most significant invention of H. G. Wells in the eponymous novel published in 1895, which spawned a huge following among subsequent authors. Wells chose to send his anonymous Time Traveller into the far future, where he finds the degenerate descendants of humanity, the Eloi and the Morlocks, and even witnesses the heat death of the entire solar system millions of years from now. Wells was relatively unconcerned with both the pseudoscience of the theory and the detailed description of the machine itself: from the scattered observations provided by the narrator, the whole device reminds the reader of a lavishly decorated bicycle. He was, however, very skillful in the description of the journey through time (the visual effect of the days, months and seasons racing past the observer is captured with a remarkable imagination, as if the text was meant for a movie script) and presented a pessimistic evolutionary fable of the ultimate demise of human civilization. In George Pal's famous 1960 movie version, the machine was turned into a kind of sled with a satellite dish attached to its back, while in the much inferior 2002 remake it was probably inspired by the helicopter.

Later SF writers developed multiple theories of time travel, and imagined the experience in a number of ways: one common variety is a kind of elevator cabin which carries people back and forth across the centuries, as in Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity* (1955); or a door opening into other temporal dimensions, or just an accidental timeslip into another historical period, as in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889) – the first in a long series of stories and movies exploiting the comic potential of the confrontation between people of different historical epochs. A recurring source of excitement is the visit to certain popular historical destinations, such as the age of the dinosaurs, the height of the Roman Empire, or the crucifixion of

Jesus Christ: the past comes alive, age-old mysteries may be unraveled, and there is a strong temptation to change the course of history by for example killing a powerful source of evil like Adolf Hitler.

The mindscapes of time travel offer a different sort of thrill and pleasure from the alien planets reached by spaceships: while space metonymically stands for the mysterious unknown, stepping out of the flow of time and changing past events offers the chance of liberation from the oppression of history – even though time travel stories often come to the conclusion that such freedom is illusory, as all deeds and decisions have their consequences. The well-known time paradoxes (the theoretical opportunity of a traveler to accidentally kill his own earlier self or an ancestor, thus eliminating himself and therefore the act of murder as well) and their melodramatic potential were exploited in a number of ways by pulp SF writers from the 1920s and 30s on, and the possible impact of any modification of the past also offered a number of plot opportunities. One memorable version is for instance Ray Bradbury's "A Sound of Thunder" (1952), in which a prehistoric hunting trip goes awry, and a seemingly insignificant alteration of the past (the trampling of a small butterfly) changes the far future – the visitor's present – beyond recognition. A comic version of the potential consequences of the modification of the past was presented in the *Back to the Future* movie series (1985–90), in which the main hero, Marty McFly, first has to intervene in the 1950s to bring his own parents together (and thus save his own life), then to repair the life of his own future older self and his children. The thriller version of time travel was filmed in the *Terminator* series (1984–2019), in which the nearly unstoppable killing machine arrives from the post-apocalyptic future to prevent the birth of a future heroic leader of humanity. These two franchises had an enormous impact on popular audiences and contributed significantly to the mainstream acceptance of time travel as a plausible plot idea. Other authors developed intricate systems of parallel universes created by such alterations, often protected by a kind of time police so that the overall course of human history should be maintained.

A special subset of SF stories concerned with historical time do not utilize time machines at all: alternate history novels and stories start from the assumption that certain historical events did not take place or their outcome was different, then imagine the consequences of this modified history. This "game" was invented by professional historians in the interwar period, but gained widespread popularity in SF. Outstanding examples include Keith Roberts's *Pavane* (1968), which pictures a 20th-century Britain in which Reformation was suppressed after the assassination of Queen Elisabeth, the Catholic church remained dominant all over Europe, and consequently, both technological and social development languishes at roughly a mid-19th century level, with-

out locomotives or electricity, and a form of the feudal system remains dominant. Ward Moore's *Bring the Jubilee* (1953) describes a 20th-century USA in which the South won the Civil War; in Philip K. Dick's *The Man in the High Castle* (1962) the territory of the USA has been divided between the victorious Axis powers, Germany and Japan. Or, to cite a more recent example of a non-SF writer, Michael Chabon's *The Yiddish Policemen's Union* (2007) is a mystery story set in a Jewish district of Sitka, Alaska, where Eastern European Jews were allowed to settle after the attempt of founding Israel failed. The success of such alternate history narratives ultimately depends not on the axiomatic twist of history but the originality and creativity of the author's imagination, and whether they can bring such an improbable world to life.[2]

Another subgenre within SF which operates with a temporal dislocation and estrangement is so-called post-apocalyptic stories. The term "apocalypse" (derived of course from the common name of the final book of the New Testament, John's Revelations) refers to any kind of devastating catastrophe that has obliterated contemporary human civilization, be it nuclear war, a worldwide epidemic, or some version of natural disaster (global flood, ice age, collision with a celestial object, ecological collapse, etc.). Most of these stories describe the catastrophe and its consequences on human society with hindsight, accounting for the collapse of modern sophisticated, technological civilization and the ensuing chaos, out of which some neo-primitive form of existence gradually emerges, which often resembles the Stone Age (individuals and small bands fighting for survival and limited resources) or a version of feudal-medieval, strictly hierarchical social structures with distinct agrarian, warrior and priestly castes. The first such story in English, *The Last Man*, was written by Mary Shelley in 1826, and the subgenre enjoyed a significant vogue around the end of the 19th century (probably as a form of *fin-de-siecle* decadence) with such notable examples as Richard Jefferies' *After London* (1885) or Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895), mentioned above. But the genre's popularity peaked after Hiroshima and the realistic possibility of a global nuclear war. Even such mainstream authors as the British Aldous Huxley (*Ape and Essence*, 1948) or the French Robert Merle (*Malevil*, 1972) contributed to the subgenre's grim visions. Russian authors Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's classic novel, *Roadside Picnic* (1972), in which reckless adventurers make occasional visits to the mysterious and strictly forbidden Zone left behind by some kind of unexplained catastrophe, was turned into a haunting movie by Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky in 1979 under the title *Stalker*. An outstanding example of the subgenre is Walter M. Miller's *A Canticle*

[2] Hungarian versions of alternative history are quite rare and not particularly well-known even among Hungarian readers, but a recent essay of Áron Domokos offers a valuable survey of Hungarian authors' alternative history stories related to Nazi Germany (see Domokos 2024).

*for Leibowitz* (1960), in which human history is seen as a black comedy, suggesting that humanity will commit its fatal mistakes again and again. Mordant black humor characterizes another classic satirical apocalyptic novel, Kurt Vonnegut's *Cat's Cradle* (1963), in which a fictional artificial form of ice freezes the world's water at room temperature. A recent and extremely bleak treatment of the post-apocalyptic theme is *The Road* (2006) by Cormac McCarthy, in which a father and his son roam through the territory of the former US destroyed by some unspecified disaster, and humans have turned to cannibalism for survival.

Post-apocalyptic settings became popular in movies after the surprise success of the Australian film *Mad Max* (1979), but often as a backdrop to some barbaric-romantic adventure story with scant attention to consistency and logic. A more creative use of the post-apocalyptic setting is made by *12 Monkeys* (1995), which reconstructs the global decimation of humanity by a deadly virus from a future perspective and combines it with a time-travel plotline. The collapse of human civilization caused by a worldwide viral or bacterial epidemic, originally conceived in Shelley's *The Last Man*, remains very popular in 21st century cinema, with such examples as *28 Days Later* (2002), *I Am Legend* (2007), *Zombieland* (2009) or the TV series *Station Eleven* (2021), based on Emily St. John Mandel's 2014 novel of the same title. Such stories gained an eerie relevance from the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic that swept the globe between 2020 and 2023, but luckily did not reach catastrophic proportions. Nevertheless, it served as a stark reminder that certain SF mindscapes may resemble actual future events uncomfortably closely.

## The Familiar in the Alien – Other Planets, Other Species

So far, I have predominantly dealt with means of travel across time and space. But ultimately, both spaceships and time machines function as mere facilitating devices to transport humans into extraterrestrial or extra-temporal mindscapes where the authorial imagination may roam free. Besides the spaceships and time machines, the other most iconic images of SF are those of a foreign planet and the extraterrestrial alien. However, a surprisingly large number of SF authors have not made a huge mental effort to imagine genuinely strange and unusual environments on other planets. Many of the well-known SF mindscapes located on other planets display recognizable similarities with familiar earthly landscapes, human communities, or historical narratives. The ecology of alien planets are often convenient magnifications of a characteristic earthly ecosystem into worldwide proportions, such as the rainforest, the desert, the ocean, or the polar ice cap. The inhabitants of such planets are commonly pictured as humanoids in various stages of biological or historical evolution, which offers a fictional chance

for encounters with prehistoric hunters, warlike nomads, or some variation of ancient or medieval civilizations.

A satirical twist to this back-to-the-past-through-space plotline was added by French author Pierre Boulle in his *Planet of the Apes* (1963), in which space travelers land on a faraway planet to find the role of humans and apes reversed: apes are intelligent, while humans have degenerated into savages, and when the protagonists return to Earth, they are greeted by a gorilla in a car. The story was turned into an American movie version in 1968 (and subsequently into an entire franchise with nearly a dozen items) with an added conceptual breakthrough: rather than returning to Earth in a spaceship, the main hero is confronted with the half-sunken Statue of Liberty at the end, which makes him realize that he has never left Earth, only travelled into its future.

Another group of SF stories utilizes historical analogies on a galactic scale. Isaac Asimov's famous *Foundation* series (1942–1993) imagines a declining Galactic Empire on the clear analogy of the Roman Empire, with the splendid central planet of Trantor representing Rome, the imperial capital. His novum is the introduction of a brilliant social scientist, Hari Seldon, who is able by mathematical modelling to predict the future and establishes two Foundations to shorten the looming Dark Age. Frank Herbert's similarly renowned *Dune* cycle (1965–1985) draws heavily on the history and culture of desert-dwelling nomadic Arabs and their sudden fierce onslaught on the Middle East and North Africa after their conversion to Islam in the 7th century, when he pictures the fremen from the desert planet of Arrakis united by a messianic character for a jihad that topples the reigning galactic emperor and the traditional ruling aristocracy.

A genuinely creative alienness was imagined by Ursula K. Le Guin in *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969) and other stories that take place on the planet of Gethen. The Gethenians are generally quite similar to humans except for one crucial difference: they are bisexual, and may "go into kemmer" (become male or female) only for a few days each month. As a result, Gethenian society knows no gender distinctions, extended families are organized around matriarchs, and visiting humans from Earth are seen as pathetic monsters who are permanently in kemmer, but only in one way. Le Guin's subversion of the most fundamental dividing line of human society leads to very interesting social and cultural ramifications.

Another mysteriously memorable alien planet is pictured in Polish writer Stanislaw Lem's *Solaris* (1961), in which scientists studying a planet-sized intelligent entity from a space station find that their dreams and longings are given solid shape by the planet. The mystery of Solaris remains an enigma in the novel: the interpretative efforts of humans seem to reflect their own prejudices and desires rather than the vastly superior and inscrutable intelligence which appears genuinely divine. It was turned into

a meditative film by Andrei Tarkovsky in 1972, while an American movie version was created in 2002.

The representation of aliens in SF has been decisively shaped by the first alien-invasion story in the history of the genre, H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898). It handed down an infinitely popular plotline (the invasion of a malign extraterrestrial race) as well as an influential visualization of aliens as disgusting, blood-thirsty monsters resembling a kind of giant octopus (a gigantic head with sixteen tentacles). In his only novel about space travel, *The First Men in the Moon*, Wells presented the dystopian community of the ant-like Selenites living in a giant hive. The huge popularity of Wells's works gave rise to the so-called "bug-eyed monster" tradition in American pulp SF in the interwar period, in which dangerous and repulsive alien creatures were usually derived from similarly repellent animal species (insects, reptiles, predators), either by increasing them into human or superhuman size or combining their various features into a chimerical beast. Perhaps the best-known example is Robert Heinlein's *Starship Troopers* (1959), in which mankind faces a disgusting arachnoid alien species ominously referred to as "Bugs". Such galactic wars between the empire of humans and a rival empire of aggressive aliens display thinly disguised parallels to contemporary military confrontations, especially the Cold War. Stealthy alien-invasion stories – often featuring shape-shifting aliens imitating humans or parasites taking possession of human bodies and minds – also became very popular during the peak period of Cold War paranoia. A famous example is the movie *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers* (1956), a combination of SF and horror, just like the most recent and famous archetype of the alien monster, the murderous and parasitic creatures from the *Alien* movie franchise (1979–2024). The original Wellsian recipe of a direct and overwhelming alien invasion was recycled around the end of the 20th century by such movies as *Independence Day* (1996) or the modernized remake of *The War of the Worlds* (2005).

The interpretation of monstrous aliens is one of the popular pastimes of SF criticism: they offer convenient analogies with the horrifying Other, be it a different nation or race, the threat of military or economic imperialism, or the focus of some other disembodied anxiety. The cliché has also been the subject of occasional ironic subversion, as in Arthur C. Clarke's *Childhood's End* (1953), in which the benevolent aliens landing on Earth to bring a new period of peace and plenty refuse to reveal themselves for years, because their physical appearance closely resembles the devils of Christian mythology. The satirical parody of the alien-invasion theme is epitomized in the *Men in Black* movie series (1997–2019), which begins with the funny revelation that the aliens are among us – indeed New York is teeming with them – but a special, super-secret agency is making sure that ordinary humans do not notice them, or, if they do, they will not remember.

Benevolent aliens are much rarer in SF, and they often appear as creatures with divine powers and mysterious intentions. This mystery was perhaps most successfully conveyed in one of the best SF movies of all time, *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), which was directed by Stanley Kubrick and written by Arthur C. Clarke. The aliens never appear in the movie: all humans can see is the perfectly shaped black monoliths and other references to their existence. Other notable movies which rely on the enigma of extraterrestrial alienness, as well as the practical challenges of how to contact or communicate with an entirely different intelligent species, include *Contact* (1997), the story of which was written by eminent astronomer Carl Sagan, and *Arrival* (2016), which was based on the excellent short story "The Story of Your Life" (1998) by Ted Chiang. If non-belligerent aliens do appear, they are often presented in the tradition of the UFO hysteria of the 1950s, as slender, somewhat smallish humanoids who travel in saucer-shaped spaceships, as in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977) by Steven Spielberg.

All in all, if one surveys the length and breadth of the SF genre, the novum of space travel has rarely spawned comparable nova in terms of genuinely alien environments. On the whole, we can accept as valid the observation of Patrick Parrinder, who has written that

> it is not possible for man to imagine what is *utterly* alien to him; the utterly alien would also be meaningless. To give meaning to something is also, inescapably, to 'humanize' it or to bring it within the bounds of our anthropomorphic world view.
>
> (quoted by Malmgren 1991, 13)

## Conclusion

The incredible richness of the SF literary tradition makes even such a broad and selective survey by necessity woefully incomplete. I have not even touched upon another major strand of SF that deals with artificial intelligence in its manifold varieties, from such human-made creatures as robots, androids and cyborgs to supercomputers and their intricate networks known in the empirical world since the 1980s as the Internet, but in the SF genre more commonly as "cyberspace", a term popularized by William Gibson in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*. The mind-blowing speed of development witnessed in computer technology and wireless telecommunication in the past half-century, as well as the breakthroughs achieved in artificial manipulation of human DNA, made speculation about the "posthuman era" both current and fashionable in the early 21st century, opening up another wealth of potential mindscapes for the SF imagi-

nation (for an intriguing discussion in the context of privacy and posthumanism, see Panka 2022).

So, what to make of such a dizzying variety of mindscapes of fantastic fiction? The most conventional observation one can make is that they demonstrate an age-old desire of humanity to escape the narrow confines of the real and the possible and to overcome the limitations of space and time, as well as human biology and society. "Sub-creation", to use Tolkien's term once more, is a powerful compulsion of human imagination, and it should neither be written off as "escapist" nor dismissed as "irrelevant", since the defiant and subversive creativity displayed by the mindscapes of fantastic authors offers uniquely valuable perspectives on the human mind, its yearnings and its predicaments, as well as the challenges and pitfalls of human society and culture.

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# 4.

# Crossing Genres, Crossing Media: The Cthulhu Mythos Through the Ages

*Laura Škrobánková*

Howard Phillips Lovecraft (1890–1937), or HPL for short, was an American writer, critic and essayist who remained largely unknown to the masses during his short lifetime, living in the shadows of celebrated authors such as Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The lack of recognition was due to Lovecraft's own refusal to write anything else than weird fiction: a genre in its infancy that emerged at the end of the 19th century (VanderMeer and VanderMeer 2012). Lovecraft left to the world his short tales and a vision of a philosophy that would become essential not only to science fiction, but also to other genres and to pop culture in general. However, Lovecraft's most influential legacy is without a doubt the Cthulhu Mythos and Lovecraftian horror.

Now, what exactly do we mean when we talk about the Cthulhu Mythos? Taking its name from HPL's most famous extraterrestrial monster-God Cthulhu, the Mythos is commonly defined by scholars such as S. T. Joshi as an amalgamation of elements, characters, settings and themes found within the works of H. P. Lovecraft and his weird fiction contemporaries. Coined by August Derleth (Tierney 1972), HPL's publisher, the Cthulhu Mythos has become an ever-expanding ground for story crafting in all forms and formats, be it novels, films, comic books, or video games.

Officially coming into existence with the short story "The Call of Cthulhu" (1928), the Mythos was at that point only at the beginning of its journey towards its full cosmic potential. During its formative period, which coincided with the later part of Lovecraft's active publishing career, the Mythos became a complex web of interconnected writings with a given set of universal rules stemming from Lovecraft's nihilistic philosophy. For this very reason, the Cthulhu Mythos is often associated with Lovecraftian horror as they both share the important elements of existential dread, cosmic insignificance and the inevitable demise of the unreliable narrator (Joshi 2013, chap. 17). Nonetheless, it is important to note that due to the fact the Mythos has experienced its most substantial growth since Lovecraft's death, the two terms are not interchangeable and evoke different expectations. Lovecraftian horror is more tied to the author's own writing and is considered an expression of his cosmicism. The Cthulhu Mythos, on the

other hand, suggests the presence of Lovecraft's Pantheon, landscapes, grimoires, and characters but does not necessarily need to include cosmicism (Joshi 2013, chap. 17).

The Mythos started as an exchange of ideas between a handful of like-minded authors, with Lovecraft at the center. It gradually expanded and branched out, becoming largely independent from the original "core" as it encompassed more and more entries and works (Joshi 2015, 203–45). This is the phase where tracing the evolution of such a large, shared body of work becomes important. Renowned Lovecraftian scholars such as S. T. Joshi (*The Rise, Fall, and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos*, 2015) and Robert M. Price (*H. P. Lovecraft and the Cthulhu Mythos*, 1990) identified specific stages and marked cornerstones that clearly changed the direction in which the Mythos was heading. Next to scholarly publications on the subject matter, fan-based categorizations started appearing, especially in the last two decades, during which online domains dedicated to specific authors or mythoi have become increasingly popular.

The Cthulhu Mythos has been through various categorizations over the decades, including August Derleth's and Lin Carter's early attempts, as well as later scholarly ones such as S. T. Joshi's *The Rise, Fall, and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos* (2015). This article focuses on three distinct stages: The Cthulhu Mythos Proper as identified by R. M. Price, The Derleth Mythos coined by R. L. Tierney, and the Third Stage-Carter Mythos (Price 1985, 3–11) (see Figure 1). It intends to extensively analyze each step in the evolution of the Cthulhu Mythos using information provided by scholars and certain fandom domains. While some may oppose the latter as unsubstantiated, the author believes that the non-scholarly community of dedicated fans can sometimes offer insights a well-established scholar may have overlooked. However, the primary focus will be on scholarly material with occasional insertions from the latter. The main goal is to map the various changes that inevitably happened to the Mythos and compare their value with the core idea presented by H. P. Lovecraft.

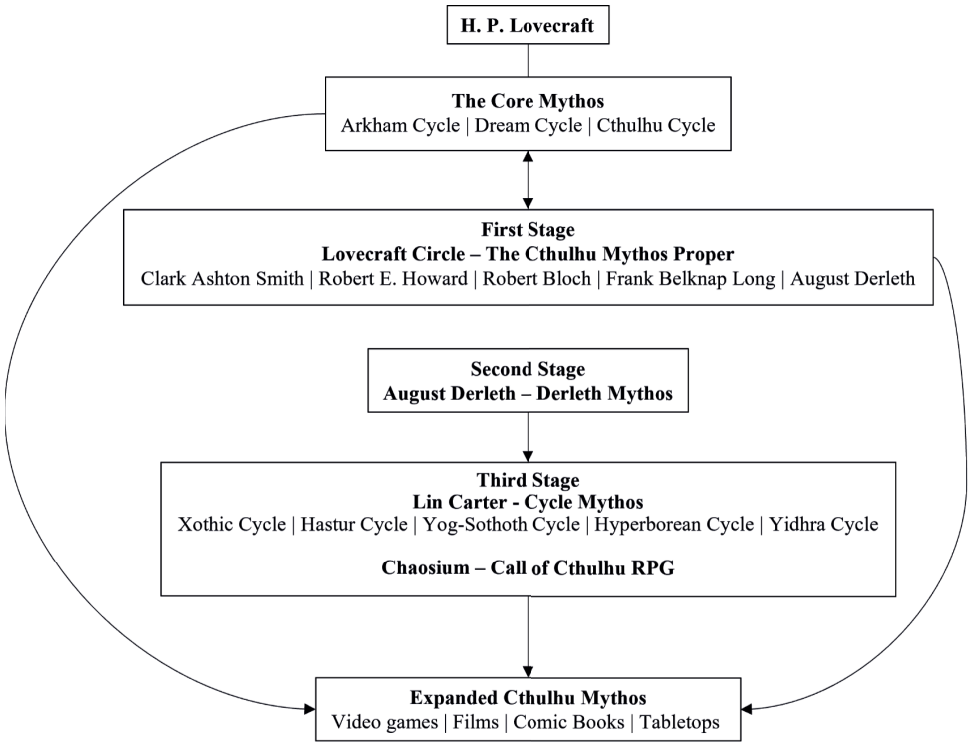


Figure 1. The evolution of the Cthulhu Mythos.

Simultaneously, the article will attempt to show that even though the origins of the Mythos began within the confines of weird fiction and pulp magazines, it has long since outgrown its intended sub-genre and managed to enter into every part of pop culture, effectively appearing in one way or another in all the available media of our contemporary world. How exactly does the Mythos present itself in fantasy? What is its legacy in science fiction? Where should the Mythos be sought in popular culture? These and perhaps some others are the questions this article intends to answer.

## 1. The Core – Origins

If one wishes to fully comprehend the magnitude of the Cthulhu Mythos's influence on contemporary culture, it is necessary to return to where it all started; to Howard Phillips Lovecraft, and to his philosophy, writing, and beliefs. This chapter therefore deals with the complexities of Lovecraft's stories – the elements, themes, landscapes, characters, and tropes and what role they play in the Mythos and its creation. Simultaneously, it is of great importance to remember that the actual name "Cthulhu Mythos" was coined

by August Derleth after H. P. Lovecraft's death; to Lovecraft himself the mythos was a series of plot devices that conveyed his philosophy (Joshi 2013, chap. 17).

The Cthulhu Mythos was born with the publication of H. P. Lovecraft's seminal short story "The Call of Cthulhu," first published in the pulp magazine *Weird Tales* in February 1928. Often considered the author's best piece of writing, it presents the greatest structural complexity of any of Lovecraft's tales written up to that point (Joshi 2013, chap. 17). "The Call of Cthulhu" not only introduced the famous dead but dreaming Cthulhu, but also truly showcased the philosophy of cosmicism through human insignificance and the inability to avoid or change one's fate. The premise of the story also indicates that no matter what the narrator intends to do, he cannot stop the inevitable. In Lovecraftian horror, there is no escape, no happy ending, only insanity and death.

Cosmic horror is a key theme of the original Mythos, and is based on the insignificance of humanity and the unknowable nature of the universe. It is an amalgamation of nihilism, fatalism and the author's own atheistic worldview. Lovecraft explained that the oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear, and the oldest and strongest fear is that of the unknown (Lovecraft 2020, 423). Cosmic horror uses this fact to its advantage and induces fear by presenting things the human mind is unable to process. Simply put, cosmic horror holds on to the idea that what humans consider reality is merely the tip of an iceberg. Below lies a truth so alien that any attempt to comprehend it causes insanity. The subgenre is also often characterized by the idea that human existence is wholly insignificant and humans are powerless when faced with entities from the deep cosmos (Richard 2023).

This opens the second main element of the Cthulhu Mythos – the Cosmic Pantheon. Although established in 1928, Lovecraft was working on the Pantheon long before August Derleth's establishment of the Cthulhu Mythos. The majority of his stories feature beings out of space that shocked readers with their grotesque, morbid appearance. Some do not have physical bodies, others are able to shapeshift, all of them are universally agender, and none of them understand the concept of good and evil. Lovecraft divided his Pantheon into Other Gods residing in deep space, Great Old Ones that once presided over the Earth as rulers but now are dead but dreaming, and Great Ones located in the Dreamlands. These alien deities present a complex ancestry that became increasingly difficult to keep track of, especially in the later stages of the mythos. Figure 2 below shows the early genealogy draft shared by Lovecraft in his letter to James F. Morton in April 27, 1933, with the addition of Dagon and Hydra, which play an important role in the novella *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936).

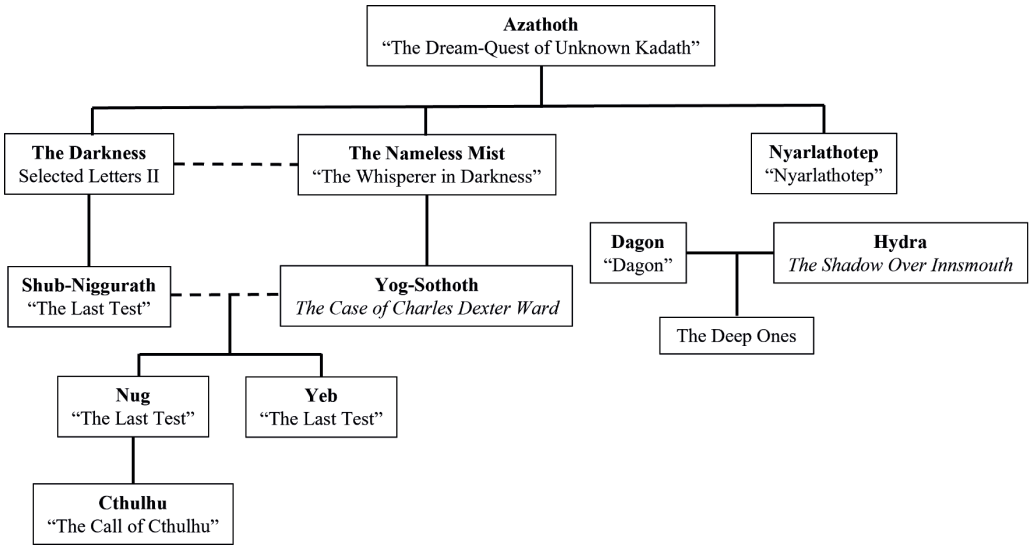


Figure 2. Genealogy chart.

It goes without saying that the Pantheon is an essential part of the Mythos, not only character-wise but also in terms of what these extraterrestrial beings represent. Ultimately, what Lovecraft created was an anti-mythology, something that resembles myths in its language and structure, but is completely devoid of any of the etiological and eschatological significance that typically characterizes them (Münchow 2017, 48). Nonetheless, HPL's artificial Pantheon still followed a genealogy similar to other pantheons known to mankind, such as the Scandinavian or Greek. Thus, Azathoth was described by Lovecraft in the short story "The Other Gods" as the primary deity of the Pantheon, similarly to Zeus, Odin or Perun.

Lovecraft's mythology, inspired by Lord Dunsany's mythos, brought another important element that quickly became associated with the Cthulhu Mythos – the cynical atheism and ethical nihilism. Though raised in a Catholic environment, Lovecraft soon abandoned these beliefs, studying other religions but ultimately settling for atheism and the power of scientific explanation. Therefore, his presentation of "gods" in all his tales is essentially a mockery of faith, because the worshipped targets are nowhere near the Christian idea of godhood, but rather extraterrestrial entities that came from the stars (Lovecraft 2006a, 145–48). Meanwhile, the ethical nihilism, defined as a rejection of the possibility of absolute moral or ethical values, is best explained by Lovecraft's letter to Farnsworth Wright from July 5, 1927:

> Now all my tales are based on the fundamental premise that common human laws and interests and emotions have no validity or significance in the vast cosmos-at-large. To me there is nothing but puerility in a tale in which the human form – and the local human passions and conditions and standards – are depicted as native to other worlds or other universes. To achieve the essence of real externality, whether of time or space or dimension, one must forget that such things as organic life, good and evil, love and hate, and all such local attributes of a negligible and temporary race called mankind, have any existence at all.
>
> (Lovecraft 1968, 149)

Ethical nihilists believe that good and evil are nebulous, and values addressing such are the product of nothing more than social and emotive pressures. The "rule" of absence of good and evil easily fit into the unwritten set of laws of the Cthulhu Mythos that were followed for as long as Lovecraft was alive.

The incorporation of other elements and themes – such as various fantastical landscapes and a fictious New England topography, the unreliable narrator, mystical occult tomes and artifacts, cults, psychological horror, and so on – into the Cthulhu Mythos came naturally as they were already used not only by HPL but likewise by his contemporary weird fiction authors. While these factors might be less significant than those previously discussed, they are still inherently Lovecraftian, and are commonly associated not only with the Mythos but with the entire sub-genre of Lovecraftian fiction/horror.

Lovecraft honed his craft for the entirety of his life, and as such it is possible to trace slight changes in his stories, especially when one compares the early works (1905–1920) with those published after 1925. Certainly, the cosmic horror elements are much more profound in the later period, formulating the basic rules present in the Cthulhu Mythos. This natural artistic evolution of worldbuilding and myth-crafting caused certain scholars (Derleth, Price) to categorize HPL's stories, labeling only those published after 1925 as "Cthulhu Mythos" tales and pushing the rest into other convenient groups (the Dunsanian cycle, the Arkham cycle, the Macabre, etc.). However, as S. T. Joshi (2013) stated, "it is purely for convenience, with a full knowledge that Lovecraft's work is not to be grouped arbitrarily, rigidly, or exclusively into discrete categories" (Joshi 2013, chap. 17). Lovecraft himself also maintained that all his tales emphasize cosmicism in some form or another, and that they are interconnected, meaning that grouping certain stories together while excluding others because they do not fit the "theme" would disturb the larger picture that is cosmicism (Lovecraft 2006b, 207–11). Even if one wanted to embrace those arbitrary categories, there would still be visible connections between the sub-divisions – for example Azathoth and Nyarlatho-

tep are featured in "The Dreams in the Witch-House" (1933) from the Arkham cycle, as well as in their native Dream/Dunsanian cycle *The Dream-Quest of Unknown Kadath* (1943) that also mentions Arkham and so on.

Weird fiction was where H. P. Lovecraft found his place as a writer, declaring that "any literary merit I have is confined to tales of dream-life, strange shadow, and cosmic 'outsideness'" (Lovecraft 2006b, 210). Lovecraft was an imaginative artist, following in the footsteps of the great writers he admired (Poe, Blake, Dunsany), while fully aware of how undervalued they were in comparison to their contemporary peers. In other words, he did not expect fame, and wrote for the sake of writing (Lovecraft 2006b, 210).

## 2. The Lovecraft Circle – The Cthulhu Mythos Proper

In his essay "H. P. Lovecraft and the Cthulhu Mythos" Robert M. Price identified the developmental stages of the Mythos. The first stage, which Price named "The Cthulhu Mythos Proper," took shape during Lovecraft's lifetime and was subject to his guidance. The second stage occurred after Lovecraft's death and was largely the work of August Derleth, who attempted to expand and categorize the Mythos (Price 1985). The term "Derleth Mythos" was later applied by Richard L. Tierney to distinguish between them, for reasons that shall be discussed later (Tierney 1972).

The Lovecraft Circle played an irreplaceable role in the further evolution of the Cthulhu Mythos. They were all weird fiction authors connected by passion for the craft (Lovecraft Fandom 2025c). Lovecraft was a prolific letter writer and corresponded with each of these writers actively, exchanging ideas for stories, borrowing story elements, and inventing grimoires, texts and extraterrestrial gods. Their stories composed the rest of the "core" of the Mythos Proper as they were written by Lovecraft's contemporaries, either co-authored with him or under his supervision and in concordance with Lovecraft's vision. A large portion of the short tales were written before HPL's death in 1937, and as such are generally regarded as "accepted" by Lovecraft. The primary Circle authors and their direct contribution, based on the correspondence between them and Lovecraft in *Selected Letters I–V*, are: Robert Bloch (12 short stories), Clark Ashton Smith (8 short stories), Robert E. Howard (7 short stories), Frank Belknap Long (2 short stories, 1 novel) and August Derleth (34 short stories, 1 novel) (Lovecraft Fandom 2025c).

Lovecraft's correspondence with other members of the Circle reveals an interesting pattern: while Lovecraft often wrote seriously, lamenting how misunderstood imaginative writers were or giving advice to his fellows, there were other instances of

playfulness in his letters that are very similar to role-playing. An example from a letter addressed to Willis Conover in 1936 might help to illustrate the role-playing aspect:

> Has Yog-Sothoth a pedigree? No. He always existed. Since he has no parents, I've never met 'em. He isn't housebroken, so I generally try to chain him outside. When he sends forth a pseudopodic tentacle (which can pass through the most solid walls) and begins to grope around inside the house, I usually call his attention to something going on in another galaxy – just to get his mind off local things. Yog doesn't always have long, ropy arms, since he assumes a variety of shapes – solid, liquid, and gaseous – at will. Possibly, though, he's fondest of the form which does have 'em. I've never encouraged him to scratch my back, since those whom Yog-Sothoth touches are never seen again.
>
> (Lovecraft 1976b, 303)

As had been shown above, letter-writing played a large role in the expansion of the Mythos. Lovecraft did not in any way monopolize his creations; on the contrary, he lent them to the other authors freely (Lovecraft Fandom 2025c). He recognized that each writer had their story-cycle and that an element from one cycle would not necessarily become an integral part of another simply because it was used in a story. Therefore, when Clark Ashton Smith mentioned "Kthulhut" (Cthulhu) or Iog-Sotôt (Yog-Sothoth) in one of his Hyperborean tales, it did not necessarily mean Cthulhu became part of the entire Hyperborean cycle (Price 1985).

Some cases were just borrowings of names or places that did not mean the story was a part of the Mythos, whereas in other situations, deities and characters of other Circle authors had been connected to the Mythos through several stories and other means of explanations (genealogy, for example). This was the case with Tsathoggua, an entity created by Smith that Lovecraft mentioned in no less than ten stories, starting with *The Whisperer in Darkness* (1931). In his revision of Zealia Bishop's *The Mound* (1940), Lovecraft tied Smith's creation to his own story-cycle by placing Tsathoggua alongside entities such as Yig, Shub-Niggurath and Nug and Yeb in subterranean K'n-yan, a realm located under the state of Oklahoma (Price 1985). Depicted as a vast underground nation under a "sky" of glowing blue clouds similar to the Aurora Borealis, it is occupied by a hidden race of prehistoric humanoids (Lovecraft 1940, chapters IV–V). Lovecraft mentioned this realm in other stories such as *The Whisperer in Darkness* (1931) and "Out of the Aeons" (1935).

The primary authors of the Circle not only crossed their story cycles and deities, they also deliberately created elements to be included in the Mythos, the most notable

example being the various arcane grimoires of forbidden lore. This worked in a similar way as with the inclusion of other deities into the Pantheon. Robert E. Howard used *Necronomicon* in "The Children of the Night" (1930) and Lovecraft in turn mentioned Howard's *Unaussprechlichen Kulten* in both "Out of the Aeons" and *The Shadow Out of Time* (1936). Interestingly enough, Howard's original, unedited Conan the Barbarian stories are part of the Cthulhu Mythos, for he frequently corresponded with Lovecraft and the two would sometimes insert references or elements of each other's settings in their works. Later editors reworked many of the original Conan stories, diluting this connection.

To conclude this chapter, the primary figures in the Lovecraft Circle contributed to the Mythos in the same way Lovecraft had, following Lovecraft's vision but presenting it in their own unique style. However, it is still important to remember that the authors perceived the Mythos as an elaborate inside joke between colleagues, especially as Lovecraft was getting closer to his death (Lovecraft 1965; 1968; 1971; 1976a-b). Once again, returning to S. T. Joshi's analysis, Lovecraft most likely did not see the Mythos as the centerpiece but as a background element, similarly to his pseudo-mythology (Joshi 2013, chap. 17).

## 3. The Derleth Mythos

August Derleth (1909–1971), H. P. Lovecraft's publisher, founder of Arkham House Publishing and member of the Lovecraft Circle, was the central figure in the second stage of the Mythos development. Richard L. Tierney was the first to call the second stage of the Mythos the "Derleth Mythos" in his essay "The Derleth Mythos" (1972). Criticizing Derleth's attempt to systematize Lovecraft's "core" and concepts, he believed Lovecraft's outlook on the supernatural and the cosmos had been dynamic – constantly changing and developing throughout his life. Meanwhile, Derleth's attitude was largely static; he appreciated his mentor's concepts but cared less for developing them (Tierney 1972).

> I grant Derleth the right to his view of the cosmos, but the sad thing is that he has made all too many believe that his view is that of Lovecraft also. This is simply not true. Lovecraft's picture of the universe and Derleth's are completely dissimilar.
>
> (Tierney 1972)

After Lovecraft lost his battle with cancer in 1937, Derleth took it upon himself to "maintain" the Mythos. Derleth changed the Cthulhu Mythos from a mere background

element into a cohesive and organized system to a far greater extent than Lovecraft or any other author had done before. That in itself could not be considered a bad decision – Derleth wanted to keep the weird cosmic fiction alive, after all. It is chiefly the path he chose for this ambitious expansion of the Mythos, and the subsequent changes he made, that are currently accepted only by some and despised by others, foremost among them S. T. Joshi, as can be gauged from *The Rise, Fall, and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos*. Nonetheless, it happened as part of the natural evolution of the Mythos and as such should not be forgotten or omitted.

Before we dive into the confusion that must have been the second stage, let us briefly outline who August Derleth was. Derleth was a writer for *Weird Tales* whom Lovecraft mentored and inspired. When Lovecraft passed away, Derleth worked with R. H. Barlow, Lovecraft's literary executive, and gained permission from Lovecraft's aunt to republish Lovecraft's work. After the aunt also passed away, Derleth froze Barlow out and monopolized all the Lovecraft rights. Derleth also wrote "collaborations," which meant he used Lovecraft's name for his own stories (Phipps 2024).

Derleth intended to change the entire perception of the Mythos at the time: instead of a background element, he turned it into the focal point. He started rigorously cross-referencing Lovecraft's tales in an attempt to create a large, singular story-cycle that would be the central pillar for the Cthulhu Mythos. It was an interesting decision considering it was also Derleth who first suggested the categorization of Lovecraft's fiction into "Cthulhu Mythos tales," "Dunsanian tales," and "New England tales" (Joshi 2013, chap. 17).

Furthermore, he ignored the individuality Lovecraft recognized in the stories of his fellow writers (or even his predecessors): if Lovecraft referenced a name from another author, that justified including the other author's story-cycle into the Cthulhu Mythos. Using the same example as in the previous chapter, Derleth would assume that, because Clark Ashton Smith used a slightly different spelling of "Cthulhu", it was only rational to consider his Hyperborean cycle part of the Mythos.

Derleth's decision to bring the good and evil dichotomy into the Mythos, and in the process to Christianize it, clashed with the elements and philosophy of HPL's stories. Derleth was a Catholic, and as such he did not exactly follow the nihilistic philosophy of Lovecraft and the immediate Circle, nor the atheistic, science-driven settings and the idea of non-anthropocentric universe (Tierney 1972). Derleth created the Elder Gods, good entities that were supposed to help humanity fight against the evil Old Ones, a parallel of the "Christian Mythos," with the bad against good, and humanity the focal point of it all (Tierney 1972). Because Elder Gods in the Mythos were Derleth's invention, he also created new entities himself, or assigned to this role characters with no

previous association to the cosmic Pantheon, such as Nodens from Lovecraft's Dream Cycle. On the other hand, the Old Ones were an amalgamation of the Great Old Ones such as Cthulhu, the Old Ones from *The Dunwich Horror* (1929) and the Other Gods from the Dreamlands. In this case, Derleth simply assumed they were all the same, which Lovecraft never claimed.

Alongside Derleth's firm decision to adjust the Cthulhu Mythos to the Christian and Medieval tradition, he also created an elemental system, borrowed from the ancient theory that all things known to us are compounded of four elements: fire, water, earth, and air (Tierney 1972). Even here, Derleth contradicted himself; he made Cthulhu and his minions water beings, yet "The Call of Cthulhu" has them coming from space and building their cities on a landmass – most likely the legendary Atlantis – that is later submerged by a geological upheaval, trapping Cthulhu in R'yleh (Lovecraft 2014). Yog-Sothoth (*The Case of Charles Dexter Ward*, "The Dunwich Horror") and Nyarlathotep ("Nyarlathotep," "The Rats in the Walls") were associated with Earth, even though both existed outside the solar system. Hastur and Ithaqua were placed under Air, although Hastur supposedly lives at the bottom of the lake of Hali. The elemental association made sense perhaps only with Ithaqua, Derleth's own creation, as suggested by the title of their "debut" short story "The Thing That Walked on the Wind."

Aside from creating good deities and turning those who were impassive into something truly evil, Derleth also added certain beings into the Pantheon, once again on the basis of a simple reference. Hastur became a Great Old One represented as an avatar by the *King in Yellow* of Robert W. Chambers, because of a passing reference that linked Hastur and the Yellow Sign in *The Whisperer in Darkness*. Derleth also gave more meaning to the servitor races and codified them as an important aspect of the artificial mythology and hence the Mythos itself. Servitor races were present in the earlier works, primarily used by Lovecraft and Frank Belknap Long who, however, did not think them a major aspect of the shared universe, as stated in their letters.

What August Derleth achieved was indeed an immense growth of the Mythos – every passing reference, any story that mentioned a Mythos element, Lovecraft's numerous passing or friendly mentions of other Circle members' creations became part of the Cthulhu Mythos. What it gained in volume it lost in conciseness and core values. It was still weird fiction at its core, with all the stories Derleth was adding, but it stopped being the fiction people now associate with the Cthulhu Mythos. To be fair to August Derleth, he built a somewhat coherent mythology from disparate sources and shared the works of a writer he genuinely admired. As such, he inspired other younger authors just as Lovecraft had wanted to. Fans of Derleth often also argue that without Derleth, Lovecraft would have been completely forgotten.

## 4. Third Stage - The Lin-Cycle Mythos and RPG

The third stage of the Cthulhu Mythos followed what had been set in motion by Derleth. The most influential authors of this period that greatly contributed to the expansion were Lin Carter, Colin Wilson, and Brian Lumley, while scholars like Richard L. Tierney, David E. Schultz and Robert M. Price focused on literary criticism and academic aspects concerning the Mythos. It was also at this stage the Cthulhu Mythos began more actively branching out into film and tabletop games.

Lin Carter (1930–1988) was another influential figure who, like Derleth, not only contributed to but also rearranged the Cthulhu Mythos. A writer himself, Carter combined fantasy, science fiction and weird fiction simultaneously, producing various stories about Conan. His most influential works were studies of the modern literary fantasy genre *Tolkien: A Look Behind "The Lord of the Rings"* (1969), *Lovecraft: A Look Behind the "Cthulhu Mythos"* (1972), and *Imaginary Worlds: the Art of Fantasy* (1973). Being an editor of the *Ballantine Adult Fantasy* series alongside his publications established Carter as an authority of the fantasy genre.

Carter's goal regarding the Cthulhu Mythos was ambitious to say the least, as he intended to codify it as much as possible, something essentially unachievable given the amount of lore that had already been added by Derleth. On top of that, Carter's own attempts introduced more gods, books, and places that were interlinked. However, he was influential in setting out detailed lists of gods, their ancestry, and their servitor races through his Mythos tales, simultaneously reworking Derleth's elemental system.

Understanding that the size of the Mythos had reached a point where individual authors could not possibly familiarize themselves with all elements, Carter solidified the idea of cycles; something that had already been present within the Mythos but left unfinished. The primary idea was that the cycles, like real legends and myths, would be elaborated upon and rewritten with varying details. This would explain the Mythos as a series of interconnecting cycles that sometimes conflict with one another. Therefore, Carter's Xothic cycle, a series of short stories based on "The Call of Cthulhu" and "Out of the Aeons," can be viewed as another version or retelling of those stories. On the other hand, the Hyperborean cycle consists of Clark Ashton Smith's stories that can be interpreted as an extension of the Cthulhu Mythos. Carter's cycles offered a loophole for future authors in the sense they do not have to familiarize themselves with the entirety of the Mythos but can choose a myth-cycle instead.

Brian Lumley (1937–2024), a British contributor to the Cthulhu Mythos, invented a large number of new Great Old Ones and Elder Gods, following Derleth's Mythos and abiding by his good versus evil dichotomy. He also added new locations and fictional grimoires that could be shared within the universe. Lumley's first entry to the

Mythos happened after he had corresponded with Derleth, who selected "Cement Surroundings" and "The Sister City" for the anthology *Tales of the Cthulhu Mythos* (1969). Lumley contributed to the Mythos with a multitude of stories, notably about his detective character Titus Crow, who was featured in numerous tales and several novels, such as *The Burrowers Beneath* (1974), *The Transition of Titus Crow* (1975), and *The Compleat Crow* (1987). Crow was portrayed as a persistent nemesis to the Xothic (or Cthulhu) Cycle deities, particularly to Ithaqua. Another significant cycle of Lumley's takes place in Lovecraft's Dreamland, for example "Dylath-Leen" (1970) and *Hero of Dreams* (1986). The last notable cycle happens in the Primal Lands known as Theem'hdra and includes several series of short tales that were later published in a volume called *The House of Cthulhu: Tales of the Primal Land* (1984).

Another British author, Colin Wilson (1931–2013), was not as infatuated with H. P. Lovecraft as Carter, Derleth or Lumley. He dedicated two chapters to Lovecraft in his *The Strength to Dream: Literature and the Imagination* (1962) and neither of them were exactly flattering, while offering little literary criticism or any objective remarks. If anything, his chapters on Lovecraft seemed like a personal vendetta towards a man long dead.

> In some ways, Lovecraft is a horrifying figure. In his 'war with rationality', he brings to mind W. B. Yeats. But, unlike Yeats, he is sick, and his closest relation is with Peter Kürten, the Düsseldorf murderer, who admitted that his days in solitary confinement were spent conjuring up sexual-sadistic fantasies. Lovecraft is totally withdrawn; he has rejected 'reality'; he seems to have lost all sense of health that would make a normal man turn back halfway.
>
> (Wilson 1962, 25)

In the wake of such harsh criticism, Wilson was challenged by August Derleth to show whether he could write better than Lovecraft. As a response, Wilson produced *The Mind Parasites* (1967), in which humanity is bedeviled by creatures called Tsathogguans. Later, he turned Derleth's Lloigor into an alien species of psychic vampires whose depiction influenced subsequent writers, including graphic artists Alan Moore and Grant Morrison (Lovecraft Fandom 2025a). In comparison to previous Mythos writers, Wilson's stories were more overtly sexual and explicitly violent.

A perhaps surprising influence – but of great significance for 21st-century developments – was the roleplaying tabletop game *Call of Cthulhu*, chiefly created by Sandy Petersen and published in 1981 by Chaosium. Petersen merged heroic fantasy with weird fiction and cosmic horror by combining a fantasy RPG where the player decides their character's fate via rolling a specifically modified dice with Lovecraft's unique

– and versatile – Mythos. The horrors presented in all the stages of the Mythos are obscure enough to pass, at least at first glance, for science fiction and fantasy. Dragons are a common occurrence, so why not an entity made of mist, or a dead but dreaming God at the bottom of the ocean? That is how Petersen felt when he designed and wrote the rules for *Call of Cthulhu*.

However, Petersen's influence did not stop there. Most tabletop games come with roleplaying manuals that guide the players through the story. These additions can be combined or added to the "core" manual depending on what the dungeon master has in mind for the next adventure session. *Sandy Petersen, therefore, wrote Sandy Petersen's Cthulhu Mythos: The Ultimate Guide to the Cthulhu Mythos in Roleplaying* (2017), which can be used for the tabletop RPGs *Pathfinder*, *Dark Eye* and *Dungeons & Dragons*. This massive, beautifully illustrated volume brings in playable character sheets, rules for Insanity and Dreams, new spells and rituals, mythos items and artifacts, cults, and four player races from Lovecraft's universe: Dreamlands Cats, Ghouls, Gnorri, and Zoogs.

> The fact is that Lovecraft's monsters aren't just monsters. They have *personalities*. And as such, you can use them for much more than just bags of hit points. Most obviously, they need not always be treated as enemies. Yes, these monsters can be malign, cannibalistic horrors, but they are most often intelligent horrors who are able to understand and sometimes communicate with humans. They have purposes.
>
> (Petersen 2017, 4)

As can be gauged from the paragraph above, Petersen used more of a Derlethian approach for his gaming manual. Lovecraft most likely did not think so deeply about his deities, although his playful mentions of the Pantheon in his letters may suggest otherwise. Petersen's material was written in a more terse, clinical way so it would fit the needs of the game. It mostly included descriptions and functions of the monsters, deities, characters and other gaming assets.

The influence of the tabletop game was immense, as it ultimately opened the door to video gaming, arguably the main driving force that keeps the Cthulhu Mythos alive today and effectively spreads it across genres like a cosmic plague.

## 5. Legacy of the Mythos, Genre Crossing and Cultural Impact

The development of the Mythos as such ended with the previous chapter. S. T. Joshi published *The Rise and Fall of the Cthulhu Mythos* (2008), in which he discussed the

spreading phenomenon at length. He later edited, extended and re-published the volume under the title *The Rise, Fall, and Rise of the Cthulhu Mythos* (2015). Joshi's understanding of the evolution of the Mythos is straightforward: it emerged, it expanded under Lovecraft's peers and scions, then it was ruined by Derleth, followed by a chaotic stage until the Mythos settled at last (Joshi 2015, 203–45).

The status of the Cthulhu Mythos – what is considered "canon" and what not – is perilous at best. There is a large disagreement about the Derleth Mythos and even the third stage. What everyone seems to agree upon is that Lovecraft's stories are the core of the Mythos and that Derleth's involvement and vigorous publishing efforts helped establish Lovecraft as an influential figure in contemporary horror and literary fiction. A casual consumer of popular entertainment might not even realize the cosmic horror that surrounds them. The Cthulhu Mythos began spreading into other genres at some point during the second stage, invading science fiction, fantasy, horror and so forth. As has been previously established, some artistic creations utilized Lovecraftian horror over the actual Mythos, choosing Lovecraft's ideology rather than his creations. Those pieces of work do not necessarily fall into the Cthulhu Mythos.

Science fiction, to no one's surprise, easily absorbed the Mythos, having no problems integrating extraterrestrial beings and nihilistic philosophy into the genre. Pieces such as *Area X: The Southern Reach* trilogy by Jeff VanderMeer, Stephen King's *The Mist* (1980), and John W. Campbell's *Who Goes There?/Frozen Hell* (1938, 2019) are great examples in literature, among many others. In film (and the subsequent novels and novelizations by various authors) one may note, for instance, that Ridley Scott's *Alien* franchise adapted humanity's insignificance and fragility into its lore. The Xenomorphs do not distinguish between good and evil, but are controlled by their instincts, despite showing a capacity to learn and a certain level of intelligence. Furthermore, the aliens' design was made by H. R. Giger, who was heavily inspired by Lovecraft, as can be also seen in his compendium *Giger's Necronomicon* (1977). John Carpenter's style brought Lovecraft's philosophy to the screen through pieces such as *The Thing* (1982), *In the Mouth of Madness* (1994), and *The Fog* (1980). Clive Baker's stories and films, especially his *Hellraiser* (1987) are, too, considered an extended part of the Mythos, while simultaneously working with Lovecraftian horror.

The genre of fantasy has begun integrating elements of the Cthulhu Mythos much more slowly than science fiction and horror. Although both fantasy and weird fiction belong to speculative fiction, they present different elements and settings. Fantasy is defined as a genre of literature that features magical and supernatural elements absent from the real world (Encyclopaedia Britannica 2025). Many fantasy authors such as J. R. R. Tolkien and G. R. R. Martin created entirely imaginary universes with their

own physical laws, logic, races and creatures. In comparison, weird fiction usually juxtaposes fantastical elements with the real world. To simplify, while both genres have many features in common, one does not expect to find an elf in a weird tale, or a cosmic being in any of the fantasy sub-genres. The best examples of fantasy narratives influenced by cosmic horror can be found in video games, as well as their novelizations and lore. *World of Warcraft* (2005–) and the *Elder Scrolls* series (1994–) both feature a plethora of references to the Cthulhu Mythos; they furthermore incorporated cosmic deities into their fantasy lore, while basing large portions of lore around their influence on the various races present within their respective universes.

Sandy Petersen's guidebooks for the tabletop games are mainly in the fantasy genre, as has been established in the previous chapter. Guillermo del Torro worked with the Cthulhu Mythos when creating his *Hellboy* films: the first movie starts with a quote from De Vermis Mysteriis, a fictional grimoire created by Robert Bloch that debuted in "The Secret in the Tomb." The Golden Army mentions Bethmoora and features a pair of Elder Things in a brief background appearance. Similarly, the short television series *Guillermo del Torro's Cabinet of Curiosities* featured three adaptations directly related to the Cthulhu Mythos.

Stephen King once said, "I think it is beyond doubt that H. P. Lovecraft has yet to be surpassed as the twentieth century's greatest practitioner of the classic horror tale" (Wohleber 1995). Lovecraft's stories and philosophy, his "core," and even the Mythos itself undoubtedly shaped the evolution of horror in the 20th and 21st centuries. It is obvious humans enjoy feeling fear in a controlled environment; Lovecraft's understanding of fear and its usage in his tales gave further generations of horror writers and creators something versatile to work with. An entirely separate article would be needed to truly dissect the impact Lovecraft has had on horror, so for now, let us focus on how it affected popular culture, primarily comics and video games.

Lovecraftian horror and the Cthulhu Mythos were also impactful in the narratives and worldbuilding of comics. Characters and deities appeared in the works of other artists as homages to Lovecraft or for their horror aspect. Places and the infamous *Necronomicon* were used in many issues of comic books. Adaptations of the works of the Mythos are constantly being published, with individual artists using their vivid imaginations as they set Lovecraft's universe to paper. The best introduction to the Mythos in comics is via Alberto Breccia's *Los Mitos de Cthulhu* (1973). The Uruguayan-born Argentinian artist created a volume of incomparable artistic prowess. Showing deep understanding of Lovecraft's horror, he used mechanical weaving, collages, optical effects and other techniques previously unthinkable in a comic book to properly portray the horror that characterizes Lovecraft's tales.

> "I realized that the traditional language of comics could not satisfactorily represent Lovecraft's universe, so I experimented with new techniques such as monotype or collage."
>
> – Alberto Breccia about *Los Mitos de Cthulhu* (Jiménez 2011)

Breccia created some of the most disturbing and intriguing pages ever seen in comics, and as such raised the artistic category of the genre to a new level. According to Jiménez, even forty years after its publication, *Los Mitos de Cthulhu* remains a graphically revolutionary work and one of the best adaptations of literature to comics (Jiménez 2011).

Marvel Comics, arguably one of the most widely recognized comic publishers with a vast lore of its own, seamlessly incorporated the Cthulhu Mythos into the "Multiverse." To no one's surprise, Stan Lee and other creators repurposed the Mythos, claiming it as their own in the unique style of Marvel Comics. Even Lovecraft himself has become a character, writing about the Old Ones otherwise known as the True Faeries. DC Comics's *Batman* features the Arkham Asylum located on the outskirts of Gotham City. *Batman: The Doom that Came to Gotham* by Mike Mignola combines the character Batman with various elements of the Cthulhu Mythos, taking its name from "The Doom that Came to Sarnath" (Lovecraft Fandom 2025b). Joe Hill's *Locke & Key* references many aspects of the Mythos and features a town named Lovecraft and demonic spirits called the Children of Leng.

Based on the annual number of titles released just on *Steam* (a digital distribution service and storefront developed by Valve), video games are currently considered the main representatives of Lovecraftian horror and the Cthulhu Mythos. Video games are unique in how they convey emotions and utilize narratives. When watching a film or reading a book, even those with the wildest imaginations are largely observers of the story. Video games are capable of pulling the audience directly into the story, turning them into the protagonist. This is why the horror genre in video games is thriving: because players experience fear viscerally, especially when the title is consumed in virtual reality.

*Amnesia: The Dark Descent* (Frictional Games, 2010) was among the first games that used Lovecraft's lack of anthropocentrism and fear of the unknown to its advantage, introducing mechanics such as the management of sanity. Since then, "sanity" has been actively used as a tool in horror video games. To simplify it: the character/player is subjected to fear which in turn reduces sanity; the lower the sanity, the more probable the encounter with cosmic horror and monsters. Lovecraft's influence on the gaming industry has been so immense that it developed its own "tag", "Lovecraftian", when searching for games on digital distribution platforms such as

Steam or the PlayStation and Nintendo Store. No other author has managed to be influential to the point where their visions, ideas, and creations would effectively create a sub-genre of video games.

There are many groundbreaking titles featuring the Cthulhu Mythos. Since it would be impossible to list them all, only the most influential (based on player responses, sales and general success) shall be mentioned. The Cthulhu Mythos video games, or those that are directly inspired by the stories or incorporate a vast portion of the Mythos' elements, can be represented by survival/psychological horror titles such as *Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth* (Headfirst Productions, 2005), *The Sinking City* (Frogwares, 2019), *Call of Cthulhu* (Cyanide, 2018), and *Alone in the Dark* (original: Infogames, 1992; remake: Pieces Interactive, 2023). *Dark Corners of the Earth* deals with Dagon and his servitor race of fish-like people, and is loosely based on the short story "Dagon" (1919). *The Sinking City* is a combination of *The Shadow Over Innsmouth* (1936) and "Dagon." It is a detective open-world action game that features worshippers of Dagon, Shub-Niggurath, and Cthulhu. It further uses Lovecraft's fictional New England and other elements of the Mythos. *Alone in the Dark* focuses chiefly on the occult rituals meant for the twisted fertility deity Shub-Niggurath. Set in the deep American South, the protagonist soon encounters monsters, cult conspiracies and mysterious eldritch figure called The Dark Man – a reference and embodiment of Nyarlathotep.

Fantasy video games such as *Elder Scrolls: Skyrim* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2011) or *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard Entertainment, 2005) incorporated large portions of the Mythos into their own lore. For example, *World of Warcraft* created a servitor race based on Lovecraft tales and paid homage to the most famous deities by including in-game counterparts. The servitor race furthermore utilizes language like the one Lovecraft attributed to the Cthulhu worshippers. The *Dead Space* series, a science-fiction game with a narrative reminiscent of Lovecraft, utilizes both the Cthulhu Mythos and Lovecraftian horror. All three main titles (*Dead Space*, *Dead Space 2*, and *Dead Space 3*) work with the Mythos's elements not by name but by function. The protagonist is stranded on a spaceship where he must face Unitologists, a fanatical cult that worships the Marker, an ancient artifact from deep space. *Dead Space* also features alien races, such as a semi-aquatic alien race similar to HPL's Deep Ones and Necromorphs. While the Unitologists worship Necromorphs, the protagonist is trying to stop the arrival of the Brethren Moon – the last evolutionary stage of Necromorphs whose goal is the eventual killing and total consumption of every living being in the Universe. Brethren Moon's agenda is no different from any Lovecraftian alien creature present in the Mythos.

> "You can kill the prophet, but you can't kill the god! Your chance to warn the Earth has come and gone. We are coming. We are hungry. We are here."
>
> – The Brethren Moons to Isaac Clarke and John Carver in *Dead Space 3: Awakened* (Visceral Games 2013)

## Conclusion

This article focused on the development of the Cthulhu Mythos, from its early stages with H. P. Lovecraft and the Lovecraft Circle, through August Derleth's involvement and Lin Carter's adjustments to the contemporary version of the Cthulhu Mythos. It has become clear that the Mythos did not experience the same evolution as other well-known mythoi, such as Tolkien's, Lewis's or Blake's, mostly due to the fact it was a "group project" that has been consistently rewritten and re-made over decades. While Lovecraft's writing has been the primary inspiration, the Mythos has been influenced by other authors throughout the decades since its establishment. Scholars and fans have tried to track the Mythos's history and have been successful to a certain extent. Nonetheless, it is obvious that at a certain point it becomes almost impossible to tell who has influenced whom and what should and should not be considered part of the Mythos. Richard L. Tierney felt most writers that continued the Cthulhu Mythos in fiction or scholarly articles were merely perpetuating the misconceptions that had been begun by Derleth. Ultimately, he believed no one had really taken up where Lovecraft left off as far as the Mythos was concerned (Tierney 1972).

Regarding the questions stated at the beginning, it is safe to say that The Mythos has indeed influenced other genres to varying degrees. Science fiction and horror are the definite carriers of elements and ideologies alongside the Mythos itself. The cultural impact in pop culture is likewise tangible, presenting itself in comics, music and films that pay homage to the late master of horror.

In conclusion, the cultural impact of the Cthulhu Mythos and H. P. Lovecraft's writing has been immense and immeasurable. It successfully developed its own sub-division that is easily recognized and has become a trademark in media and popular culture. Cthulhu as a character is one of the most popular antagonists of all time. Lovecraft's philosophy of cosmicism, his Pantheon, invocations and obscure grimoires had such strong appeal religious organizations such as the Church of Satan or the occult society Ordo Templi Orientis were founded on its basis or borrowed some of the elements. Respected and influential authors of the 21st century have credited Lovecraft over and over when discussing their own work. The Cthulhu Mythos did not have the same background evolution as other famous mythoi, and its beginning was small and insignificant, yet one rarely encounters someone who has not heard the name Cthulhu at least once.

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# Across Genres and Ages

# 5.

# From Gentle Wit to Venomous Bites: Benjamin Franklin's "Industry" of Marketing Ideas

*Beatrix Balogh*

Perhaps unconventionally for an academic essay, but fitting the overall spirit of this publication, I must begin by stating that this writing was not only inspired by Kathleen Dubs's endeavors or academic interests in general, but was born in "conversation" with a specific paper she published in *Faces of English*. Her essay (Dubs 2011) primarily calls attention to some lesser-discussed satires of the Franklin oeuvre at a time when these were being collected and edited by Yale University and were not yet widely accessible online.[1] Her aim seems to have been not only to show how dark and sinister Franklin's satire became later in his life, but also to debunk a myth about Franklin – that his writing was a means to an end, and never merely an artistic endeavor, or a self-serving outburst of frustration. She explored the "dark face of Franklin that legend-admiring audiences would rather not see," and argued that especially the post-Revolution satires of the 1780s lacked a specific audience and their darkness "blackened out" any effectiveness (2011, 193). She implies that these "biting" texts impress the reader as outlets for Franklin's gout, or imprints of a tormented soul, rather than carrying lessons for public benefit.

I would, however, suggest that Benjamin Franklin did not lose sight of utility. Instead, as much as in his earlier years, he adjusted the style to the subject matter, and his target audience, and exercised what modern political or marketing communication would call *strategic placement*. This means that specific images or narratives are published in media consumed by the target audience or known to be influential in specific circles of society. Humor is certainly one way to combine reason with emotive effects that can best sell the brand – the more absurd, the higher the shock value. What strikes the reader as sinister, or so dark that it unreflectively obscures utility, was a very seri-

[1] Franklin's published papers are now arranged by Yale University and the American Philosophical Society into 37 edited volumes publicly available (for study purposes only) online at https://franklinpapers.org/ with 9 further chronologically organized folders of unpublished papers, along with his *Autobiography* similarly accessible for this digital collection. However, unless indicated otherwise, I will cite and reference the U.S. National Archives *Founders Online* collection exhibiting both Franklin's original and annotations adopted from the print volumes of *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin* (Franklin 1751; 1773a; 1773b; 1774; 1782).

ous endeavor, or a serious Franklinian hoax presenting fabricated news through deftly devised authenticity proxies.

Franklin had a sound understanding of both his audience and the power of media, and used his accumulated insights to further the causes he took up. His transitioning from *Silence Dogood* to *Americanus* not only coincided with the transformation of the colonists from British subjects to citizens of a new Republic, but also illustrates how his satirical writings shaped the agenda and moved the political conversation from the congregation to the national assembly and onto the international stage. In this paper, I wish to demonstrate how Franklin's notion of *industry* always embodied multiple meanings: not only combating idleness and applying ingenuity to public service, but also – more in line with the modern sense – the industry of promoting ideas, from self-improvement to the advancement of national policy. While his best-known satires suggest an evolution of style from "gentle wit" to "the outrageous" (Dubs 2011), he applied these various styles simultaneously, fitting the occasion and his target audience rather than moving from good-natured humor to malicious venom.

To make my case, I will first expand on Franklin's very own newspaper business to showcase his media-savviness through his tenure as printer and owner of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, his main propaganda enterprise, which he also used to market his *Almanack*. In fact, Franklin was a media mogul and propagandist long before he became famous for his political pamphlets and signature hoaxes. It is through his experience as newspaper owner, printer, practical journalist, and agenda-setter that he developed an acute sense of his audience and the multiple ways he could manipulate public opinion.

## Franklin the Pennsylvania Media Mogul and Agenda-Setter

We are fascinated with his humorous or sensationalist fillers, as well as his literary flair in adapting Swiftian and other satire strategies to American contexts. However, little attention is generally paid to the multiple ways Franklin commanded colonial communication platforms, allowing him to wield significant influence over public discourse. He owned not just *a* news business but *the* news business.

While Franklin's writings influenced colonial sentiments before he assumed ownership of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1728, it was certainly his tenure as printer-publisher that sharpened his understanding of the emerging power of the media. He recorded colonial sentiments as much as he shaped public discourse, first out of necessity, on account of his trade, and later through the monopoly this trade accorded to him over news and agenda. The *Gazette* was, of course, a business venture. He undoubtedly wanted to fill it with content that would yield the highest possible circulation and thus revenue. The examination of the newspaper industry in its infancy would suggest that

Franklin's writing the paper "from beginning to end" was less an outlet for his creative genius than a necessity, and that his mastering of all print media was inherent in his trade. Yet, the comparison with other printers of his age also demonstrates how consciously he cultivated these skills to put his industry to public service.

Looking back at the early decades of the *Gazette*, we must recognize that printing was a "preindustrial, hand-pressed, horse-carried" trade, the printer was an artisan engaged in dirty physical work, and the newspaper itself was a one-man show (Parkinson 2015). Typically, there was only one regular paper in town, and only in the larger cities of Boston, New York, and Philadelphia (Adelman 2019). The printer was not an investigative journalist but rather a seeker of news, relying on public officials walking into the printshop "bearing information of public import" or volunteering a private letter "anonymously extracted for public consumption," as well as his correspondence with other colonial printers and European newspapers, or private acquaintances (Parkinson 2015, Adelman 2019). The four-page weeklies printed "occurrences" and "exchanges," local news and announcements, and reports picked up from other papers (Breig 2003, Parkinson 2015). Later these exchanges became the vehicle for sharing ideas across the colonies through what Adelman (2019) calls *Revolutionary Networks*.[2] While colonial printers held significant influence over public discourse by curating, editing, and publishing materials (Adelman 2019), Franklin demonstrated exceptional ingenuity in his technical skills – that also advertised his trade – and leveraged this system for audience engagement.

Preparing the pages for the press was time-consuming and required careful planning. To maximize efficiency, printers first assembled the front and back covers filled with ads and announcements that could run for several weeks. They compiled colonial and European news lifted from other papers for page two, leaving the local coverage to be finalized just before press run (Adelman 2019, 2–3). This was the standard and a near-uniform practice across the colonies as well as on the other side of the Atlantic (Clark and Wetherell 1989, 283, 295), where we will revisit Franklin to see how the then diplomat-printer manipulates the British news industry with his strategic hoaxes.

One often overlooked aspect of newspaper reading at the time was its communal and oral nature. Rather than being a solitary affair, printed news and pamphlets were read out loud in taverns and other public spaces; papers were loaned, passed on, and saved for special occasions (Parkinson 2015; Thompson 2011, 453). This means that the readership, or rather audience, was vastly larger than the number of subscribers, and

[2] Exploring all aspects of the news industry in its infancy, Adelman (2019) investigates how colonial printers facilitated discourse and influenced ideology before and during the Revolution.

that layout, typeset, and "authorship" played a crucial role in shaping how information was consumed. Franklin consciously cultivated these aspects of orality by capitalizing words for emphasis, strategically placing items within standard newspaper sections to authenticate the sources, and manipulating layout for the purpose of guiding readers.

Newspaper columns looked much like today but there were no catchy headlines, and pseudonyms were the norm to protect both author and the printer. One must remember that freedom of the press is an eighteenth-century development. America's first newspaper (Boston's *Publick Occurrences Both Forreign and Domestick*) did not survive to see a second issue in 1690 for reporting on British troops allying themselves with "miserable" savages, and that Franklin's brother[3] not only lost his newspaper license but was also imprisoned on charges of libel (Breig 2003). Printing and running a newspaper were not without hazards. Franklin's ingenuity with pen names and sustained fictitious personae not only efficiently navigated this system but also leveraged it through satirizing the real and plausible colonial characters and to establish "authentic" sources for the issues he wrote about.

Whereas the tedious labor of laying out the weekly issue required craft and artisanship, it was the editing of the paper that gave printers immense power to shape public discourse or the political agenda. The printshop controlled information, and the printer was the curator of news. Printers had to cultivate extensive networks to obtain the news – not just from local sources but also from other colonies, European correspondents, government officials, private inquiries, and even ship captains or debarking passengers (Aldridge 1962, 77). Colonial printers wanted to outpace rivals by obtaining news faster[4] and having access to sources that other printers did not. They sifted through these items and decided what to print and in what format – never a politically neutral exercise – to best inform their readers and to best sell the paper.

Not only did they control the flow of news and ideas through the newspaper but produced other print materials from commercial and legal forms to custom-ordered broadsides, or pamphlets, and operated their own distribution networks. Adelman's research also confirms that nearly every printer published an almanac – a "sure steady seller" that supplemented revenues and stood as the most popular print medium at

[3] James Franklin published the *New-England Courant* where Benjamin was apprenticed, and where he published his fourteen Silence Dogood essays anonymously, allegedly sneaking them in under the door of the shop. The paper antagonized the clergy and political establishment. James's license was suspended in 1722 and he was banned from publishing the paper, which was henceforward published under Benjamin Franklin's name until 1727 even after he moved to Philadelphia.

[4] The *Gazette* could boast a good selection of Pennsylvania news "since our last," meaning the previous edition and thus less than a week old, but the majority of news and reports were more than three-month old when they hit the page in Philadelphia (Clark and Wetherell 1989, 295).

the time (2019, 4). This granted printers virtual monopoly over print communication at a time when print was the primary medium. Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanack* – affectionately dubbed "Poor Dicks" by his wife – sold more than ten thousand copies a year hand in hand with the *Gazette*, which he developed into a leading colonial newspaper and a commercial success[5] (Clark and Wetherell 1989, Lepore 2008). One sold the other.

It is important to note, however, that throughout the 1730s and 40s, Franklin shaped public discourse primarily through his *Gazette*. Adelman's survey of colonial printers found that newspapers still accounted for 80% of all print media "even going mid-century" (2019, 6), granting printers firm control over content, from sourcing to editing. Like other colonial publishers, Franklin relied on the British papers for the news from Europe, and edited it for local consumption when it was plentiful. He was the primary interface between the colonists and the wider world. It was during the dead of winter, with the port of Philadelphia iced over, when – abandoning the widespread practice of republishing encyclopedia entries – he filled the *Gazette* with his own writings (Aldridge 1962, 77). The "Darth of News" proved lucrative in the long run. Franklin's ability to integrate humor and moral reflections in ways that resonated deeply with his readers earned him money and influence over the agenda.

Other than running sensationalist pieces in the 1730s to "oblige the Subscriber," he acted as his own columnist, writing about local affairs and science, providing legal and medical advice, and ridiculing dubious practices through vitriolic verse in the *Almanack* and through hoaxes in the *Gazette* (Aldridge 1962, Detweiler 1973). He dipped his pen in biting acid early on, "spewing jibes" at itinerary lawyers who compensated for their lack of training or competence[6] with absurdly ornate but meaningless legalese. One such example – reprinted almost in full by historian Robert Detweiler to illustrate his point – is a purported legal petition from 1736.[7] Its sheer length was enough to

[5] By systematically analyzing the *Gazette's* financial records and contents between 1728 and 1765, Clark and Wetherell (1989) found that not only did the paper make comfortable profits, but also that more than 20% of the revenue came directly from paid advertising. The diagrams on page 290 of their study indicate that the number and space taken up by these ads grew steadily from the early 1740s and peaked in the early 50s, showing that popularity firmly established by Franklin's editing and writings turned the paper into the ultimate platform for advertising in Philadelphia.

[6] Detweiler notes that this attitude was undoubtedly shaped by the prevalence of poorly trained lawyers, often referred to as "Dirty Pettifoggers." At the time, most households owned legal manuals that gave them the language and information needed to present themselves at court. Franklin also often acted as his own lawyer.

[7] Indeed, the full appreciation of Franklinian absurdities often requires engaging with them in their entirety. While shorter excerpts may highlight clever puns or literary devices, they fail to capture the overarching brilliance grounded in structure, or sustained voice. Dubs (2011) also quotes the Franklin texts profusely, including longer passages. Since, however, the present paper focuses on printing strategies rather than style or composition, citing the original texts is limited to hallmark soundbites, or very characteristic wording.

physically cover the tract of land it sought to secure (Detweiler 1973, 1165), albeit with neither its subject nor its argument transpiring from the string of words. The counterfeit document "sourced by the Printer" is a Franklinian absurd so characteristic of his late satires, not only presenting the case from the very fictitious person he is ridiculing but so doing in the diction and rhetorical formulae particular to the practice he is exposing. Wordsmithing exaggerated legalese without substance is different only in language – not in strategy – from the logical historical reasoning or the inventory style tallies of the late pamphlets.

What Detweiler does not discuss is how Franklin used typeset, notably, the strategically inserted capitalized common nouns[8] to amplify irony and ridicule. Capitalizing, and thus stressing otherwise mundane words like "Part" or "Money" within a sea of lower-case formulaic nonsense – such as, "therefore to will, and to shall be, now and then, and there, and at this time, and at the time past, and heretofore, and formerly, and at the present, and forever" – create a dizzying, almost nauseating rhythm when read aloud. With a view to orality, Franklin composed these pieces to enhance the performative aspects of satire. We will see other subliminal codes in his later hoaxes when print types and fonts become more varied, but the earlier works generally directed both gaze and intonation through marked words.

Similar writings under all sorts of pen names appeared on the pages of the *Gazette*, together with factual "occurrences" and "exchanges" lifted from other papers, or "communicating instructions," as Franklin writes in his *Autobiography*, by reprinting "extracts from the 'Spectator,' and other moral writers" (Lemay and Zall 1986, 114). Eventually the printer Franklin became one of these moral writers himself. In parallel with the down-to-earth folk wisdom of *Poor Richard*, Franklin used these fillers to "cajole" his readers into do-gooding, or to deliver critical attacks assuming fictional personae but reflecting the very real characters of colonial America (Thompson 2011). Ultimately, as Franklin himself confessed, everything he wrote was political (Lepore 2008).[9] He did not necessarily invent new journalistic features or columns, but masterfully leveraged the existing types, most often the "Letter to the Editor," to further political causes in much the same way as is done today.

[8] This is also seen in Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), but capitalizing most common nouns was an extensive practice in eighteenth-century America. The *Declaration of Independence* would also follow this custom. Wendorf (2022) suggests that while Jefferson penned it in a style that became fashionable around the 1760s, the document was eventually printed following the older rules for typeset, as per Franklin's specific instructions. It is also evident though from many of his satirical pieces that he used this selectively for the words he intended to be stressed in speech.

[9] In a *New Yorker* article for the 250th anniversary of *Way to Wealth*, Harvard historian Jill Lepore cites a letter from Franklin's sister asking him for a copy of "all the Political pieces" he had ever written, to which Franklin answered that "I could as easily make a Collection for you of all the past Parings of my Nails" (Lepore 2008).

As the Gazette became self-sufficient by the mid 1730s – thanks in no small part to Poor Richard, who evolved into an archetypical American[10] (Lepore 2008; Ross 1940, 786–88) – Franklin could turn his attention to other formats and to broader colonial matters. In 1741, he launched a literary magazine, *The General Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, as an auxiliary to the *Gazette*, publishing his *Essay on Paper-Currency* the same year (parts of which resurfaced in his 1766 pamphlet against the Stamp Act). He likely contributed other material that he repurposed later for new contexts (Aldridge 1962, 81).[11] Going into the 1750s, his writings increasingly addressed British imperial conduct or insufficient coordination among the colonies.

By the time pamphleteering emerged as the dominant platform for generating public debates, Franklin had become *Americanus*, a distinct species of colonial subject. An early specimen representing colonies-wide discontent, and Franklin's violently accusatory language, is his famous "Felons and Rattlesnakes" satire – the first of the Dubs-sampled writings. Written as a letter to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1751 and signed *Americanus*, Franklin proposes *modest* means by which the parental care of the English government, "emptying their *Jails* into our Settlements" can be returned, or should be answered in kind. In this, Franklin argues that Britain sending shiploads of convicts to the colonies, to help them grow – though the colonial papers reported a series of heinous crimes as their contributions – should be recompensed with shiploads of rattlesnakes, which Franklin defines as "felons-convict from the beginning of the world," and most "suitable returns for the human serpents sent us by the mother country" (Franklin 1751).

Less biting, but curiously repeating the serpent imagery, is a Franklin-designed editorial cartoon, a novel format that Franklin introduced to colonial newspapering. Starting in the 1740s, he began adorning his pamphlets with engravings and woodcut illustrations, recognizing the interplay "between imageries and text in a way that others did not" (Canva 2015). This had less to do with being a gifted graphic artist – for although he did some of the creative work himself, he employed engravers and woodcutters. It was, however, his intuitive sense of how readers decoded the drawing that elevated Franklin to "America's first genius of the viral political image" (Canva 2015). The

[10] Franklin originally based his Richard Sounders character, the fictious persona and author of *Poor Richard's Almanac*, on Swift's Isaac Bickerstaff, a pseudonym for a 1728 hoax that predicted the death of the then-famous almanac-maker John Partridge. Franklin's attack targeted Titan Leeds, the Philadelphia-based publisher of *The American Almanack*. John D. Ross showcases multiple parallels between the two, but argues that Poor Richard eventually evolved into an American archetype. Also remarking on the origins of the fictious character, Jill Lepore discusses how *Poor Richard* eventually "cost" Franklin to be credited with the American Creed despite Franklin's intentions to offer practical guideline for the times.

[11] Since most of these essays did not bear Franklin's name, it was often only the recurrence of these themes and their styles, or exact passages in Franklin's later works that helped Aldridge establish authorship.

best example of this is his iconic "Join, or Die," which first appeared in the May 9, 1754 issue of the *Gazette* (Franklin 1754). Occasioned by the impending war with France, it depicts a dismembered snake representing America severed into distinct provinces that were not likely to withstand any attack from the north without uniting their governments. Franklin himself devised the image to promote what would become known as the Albany Plan. In his *Autobiography*, he recounts: "I projected and drew a plan for the union of all the colonies under one government, so far as might be necessary for defense and other important general purposes" (Lemay and Zall 1986, 109). Evaluating the plan with the benefit of hindsight, Franklin muses that this would have made the stationing of "English troops, and the Pretense of subsequent Taxing" unnecessary, avoiding "[t]he Bloody Contest it occasioned" (ibid., 110). With little immediate efficacy, the image ultimately became one of the most powerful banners of the Revolution twenty years later, with the motto "Don't Tread On Me." This non-elaborate woodcut masterfully captures both the causes and the aspirations of the Revolutionary War.

With already keen understanding of his colonial audience, Franklin gained further insights from the pamphlet wars of 1764. The pamphlet was originally not a genre but a print form, custom-ordered leaflet, or booklet, flexible in size and cheap to produce. Essays could be serialized in the weekly paper or could be printed as pamphlets (Parkinson 2015). However, as a "medium of rapid response that allowed for greater elaboration than the newspaper" (Richter 2020), pamphlets became the primary means of disseminating critical views in the 1750s, with the printer controlling both the medium and its distribution. The pamphlet wars were viral outbursts, with people trading "barbs and fiery accusations" on cheap paper – hastily typeset and distributed by the city's printing house (Richter 2020).

One of these, with Franklin as pen-party, broke out in Pennsylvania over frontier defense and Indian raids. This *print* conflict, involving Franklin and the Paxton Boys (a mob of frontier settlers attacking indigenous encampments), is documented in the "Digital Paxton" collection, encompassing 69 pamphlets, broadsides, political cartoons, and newspapers. The Paxtons' savage attack on defenseless Native women and children, "all scalped and otherwise horribly mangled," is reenacted in Franklin's 1764 pamphlet *A Narrative of the Late Massacres*. In the sequel, he evoked sympathy in his Christian audience by tallying victims according to their English names and their virtues (Richter 2020). The Paxton Boys countered with pamphlets blaming the colony's assembly for inadequate defense. There were other massacres, some bloodier, but none generated more debate than the ones *in print*. The "business of protest," remarks the curator of the collection, also proved lucrative for the printer – one print material sold the other. The "ink-drenched battle" that followed the Paxton incidents accounted

for nearly one-fifth of all the publications printed in Pennsylvania in 1764 (Richter 2020), with the printer presiding over the agenda.

Franklin also witnessed another pamphlet war over British colonial policies, originating in Boston and raging in London during his visit. The pamphlets he could read in the British press at the time inverted popular arguments, mimicked the style of authorities, made the case for self-government by appealing to early British colonial practice in Ireland, and included "credible" letters to the King (Green 2024).[12] Historical accounts tell us that Franklin was witness to it while testifying in Parliament about the prospective effects of the Stamp Act (Lepore 2008). While these pamphlets likely laid the groundwork for strategies he later refined for his hoaxes, he could also enhance his understanding of British audiences, and how best to manipulate them. At the time though, it was not his pamphlet that stood out, but rather a memorable quip. During debates on the repeal of the Stamp Act, Franklin was asked how soldiers sent to enforce the new taxes would be received, to which he answered, "They will not find rebellion; they may indeed make one" (Lepore 2008).

## Strategic Placements and Authenticity Proxies Targeting Policy Makers

We have seen how Franklin leveraged his media enterprise for both profit and for marketing ideas. The Stamp Act ultimately transformed not only attitudes towards British imperial governance but also the colonial newspapers that went from "provincial mirrors" to "active combatants" (Clark and Wetherell 1989, 301). By the 1770s, Franklin had expanded the discourse beyond the *Revolutionary Network*, bringing it onto the transatlantic stage. Instead of simply airing his growing bitterness in obscure publications (Dubs 2011, 188–91), Franklin exploited the "Letters to the Editor" to shape public opinion. The conventions of the genre made it possible to hide behind a pseudonym, which Franklin devised to best *authenticate* the content by attributing the work to an author whose trade or position validated the report. He further enhanced credibility through the author's geographical proximity to the original source of information, while his neutral bystander role positioned him as an effective authenticity proxy for the cause.

The writings from this period that Kathleen Dubs scrutinizes are indeed darker in tone but nonetheless very much signature Franklin, mostly combining the Americanized varieties of the Swiftian hoax and the strategies from the Pamphlet Wars. What makes these late satires intriguing is not the novelties of style, but the conspicuous circumstances of publication. The legal-political logic and timely puns make them historians' favorites, and the best of Franklin (Lepore 2008). They also demonstrate his

[12] The Digital Collection (Green 2024) from the Liberty Fund offers a quick survey of titles and synopses.

mastery of strategic placement and authenticity proxies for manipulating British audiences in the lead-up to the Revolution in the early 1770s, and to sway public opinion during his diplomatic tenure in the early 1780s. Interestingly, Dubs finds these masterpieces "some of his most uncharacteristic" for their "biting" language, lacking specific audience or apparent benefit.

One example in Dubs's sampling, jumping from 1754 to 1773, is "Rules by Which a Great Empire May Be reduced to a Small One" published in the *Public Advertiser* in London (Franklin 1773a). The piece is an "absurd inversion," writes Dubs, in which Franklin "enumerates" existing legal practices to achieve the proposed end (Dubs 2011, 188). The author assumes the position of the imperial government and earnestly suggests that, because "the cake is mostly diminished at the edges," the provinces are not to be incorporated but merely kept as outposts, and it is better not to "quarter troops among them at their own expense" lest they revolt. The last of the coolly logical list of twenty rules would accord the leader of the British troops in the "Provinces with great and unconstitutional Powers, and free him from the Controul of even your own Civil Governor" (Franklin 1773a). Franklin very clearly presents his London high society readers with an inventory of all the ill-advised policies directly leading to the Revolution. The publication date, September 11, may trick us into thinking that this was just a light jab before the second attack, the more famous "An Edict of the King of Prussia," published eleven days later in the same paper. In reality, they were two components of the same design. What makes them a pair – and reveals an even cannier Franklin than might be evident from reading them separately – is the adoption of inverse perspectives: one forces the British readers to see their policy through "colonial eyes," while the other "jolted them with the fiction that they were colonists themselves" (Franklin 1773a). As the digital annotations for the National Archives exhibit point out, "the two essays had a single purpose, to induce the public to take a fresh look at the American problem" (Franklin 1773a).

Franklin had made these arguments in more sober formats many times before, but with the "Rules," he adopted the fictitious signature Q.E.D. (*quod erat demonstrandum*), as if presenting the most self-evident proof of a mathematical theorem. For the "Edict," he assumed the voice of a Prussian privy council secretary, the piece appearing in the paper as though the editor had sourced it directly from Danzig – lending it an air of legitimacy. Both were shrewd authenticity proxies designed to reinforce the arguments he was making and to resonate with the salon audiences of *The Public Advertiser*. Franklin did not have the benefit of focus groups and detailed statistics on cohorts; instead, he relied on the acute sense of audiences he had developed as a printer. One should also note how Franklin's designs leveraged the standard practices of newspaper

editing at the time. The items made good gossip and sure "exchange" material, or good copy. In fact, *The Public Advertiser* was a publication that reached the highest circles of society, serving as a platform for challenging British government policies. This political and literary journal – similarly to its colonial counterparts – was the vehicle of not only news *in print* but also for generating public debate at society events.

As a political piece of reasoned argument, "An Edict by the King of Prussia" makes pretensions at validity by citing historical facts to expose the absurdity of the British claim over the colonies on the grounds of English discovery and settlement. The past Germanic invasion of the British Isles would allow Germany to impose similar mandates over Britain. Evoking the German concept of nationhood, the Edict demands that the British Isles be returned to Prussia, an alarming prospect for the genteel audiences the satire targeted. As an eighteenth-century form of social media post, the hoax went viral circulating salons and being "lifted" and reprinted by multiple newspapers. We also learn from Franklin's letter to his son that only a few of his English friends suspected the writing to be "some of your American jokes upon us" (Franklin 1773b).

Franklin was fully aware of his audience and the language it demanded. He notes in this letter to his son that he had written these two pieces "designed to expose the conduct of this country […] in out-of-the-way forms, as most likely to take the general attention" (Franklin 1773b). Franklin's deliberate use of typesetting for desired effects is revealed in the same letter where he also complained about the removal of his "capitalling and italicking" in the *Chronicle*[13] reprint of "Edict". His frustration underscores not only his belief that print style was integral to the message but also, as Thompson points out, his awareness of the "confluence of print and oral communication" (2011, 454). Franklin was of the opinion that lower-case print strips the text of elements that "intimate the allusions and emphasis […] to bring them as near as possible to those spoken." He clearly designed the text for oratory and public performance, and likens the reprint "all in one even small character," to a Whitfield sermon "in the monotony of a school-boy" (Franklin 1773b). As in his *Gazette* pieces, he used typography to mark the words that should be stressed when orally delivered, a visual design functioning multimodally to enhance the desired effects.

The following year, Franklin wrote a letter to the same paper proposing a "method of Humbling American Vassals" signed *A Freeholder of Old Sarum*. Not only is this a reference to the most notorious rotten borough of England,[14] a pun also noticed

[13] The *London Chronicle* reprinted the purported "Edict" on September 23, 1773, a day after it was published in the *Public Advertiser*.

[14] With a seat in the Commons representing a barn and hundreds of sheep, this was the old constituency of William Pitt. As Prime Minster, Pitt oversaw policies that ultimately led to the Stamp Act's imposition on the colonies.

by Dubs (2011, 189), it is (not) coincidentally the constituency of William Pitt the Younger, a major opponent of Lord North's oppressive policies. In this letter, Franklin mockingly suggests that to prevent any possibility of the American colonies growing in strength, the population should be controlled, and "on the blowing of the horn all the males be assembled in the market Place to be castrated" (Franklin 1774). Exporting them as eunuchs, Franklin adds, would even yield extra revenue. This is yet another *modest* American *proposal* to help the British solve their imperial problem. For Dubs, it is a "literally cutting one" (2011, 189), but hardly darker than what the historical circumstances might conceivably occasion. Notably, Franklin's letter appeared on May 21, 1774, the day after the crown passed "An act for the better regulating the government of the province of the Massachusetts Bay, in New England," now regarded as one of the staple primary sources for students of the Revolution.[15] Franklin's *cutting proposal* is either rapid-fire journalism or a prophetic warning. We are a few weeks into the Intolerable Acts, with the port of Boston placed under martial law, and "If all this does not yield to the Humbling of the American Vassals" – and it did not, as by this time the calls for a continental congress were already being sounded – castrating them would be the logical next step.

However, not all of Franklin's satire from the same year cuts body parts; he employs multiple styles simultaneously. He published his well-known piece of Revolution Lore just six weeks earlier, presenting himself as a friend of the military government at a time when it was just being introduced in Boston. What is interesting about the "Open Letter to Lord North" for our purposes is its pretense of aligning with the liberal traditions of coffee house circles – dated *Smyrna Coffee-House*,[16] *April 5* – while ironically proposing that Lord North should not stop at coercive acts but take the next step and exert total control over the unruly colonies (Franklin 1774). As with the "Edict", Franklin used the very media outlet of British high society to advertise his criticism, knowing that his hoax would be read, shared, and gossiped about. It was not an open letter from the colonists but one coming from an authenticity proxy, a seemingly curious but neutral onlooker who argued from a "disinterested" perspective.

These strategies are evident in the last two satires analyzed in the Dubs survey: the *Gerrish Letter* and the *Jones Letter*. These two hoaxes – what might now be termed "fake news" masquerading as legitimate reports – were printed on the front and back

His son later opposed Lord North's draconian measures. The constituency was dissolved only with the Reform Act of 1832.

15 Known as *The Massachusetts Government Act*, it was one of the final straws leading to full-scale rebellion.

16 Existing London coffee house in Pall Mall Street. It was a popular meeting place of writers and intellectuals in the early eighteenth century.

of the same broadsheet – faking a *Supplement to the Boston Chronicle* – designed and printed in Franklin's very own private printshop, which he operated from Passy as an adjunct[17] to his diplomatic endeavors (Mulford 2008, 491–3). Surprisingly, Dubs finds these writings the most "uncharacteristic" of Franklin, not only due to their "biting" nature (2011, 191), but also because their immediate benefit seems unclear. Treating them as distinct works, she remarks, "As it appeared in a New England paper, it is hard to see how the British audience would have been affected in any positive way" – a conclusion that I find perplexing.

True, at face value, these letters, dated 1781 and 1782, appear to originate from New England. The first, the Gerrish Letter, describes brutal Indian raids, while the second, the Jones Letter, attacks the king by mocking British naval failures. Kathleen Dubs notes that these writings "are almost savage," and indeed they are. The first is an inventory of yields from the Indian campaign, titled "Extract of a Letter from Captain Gerrish, of the New England Militia, Albany" and reports on the parcels seized on the St. Lawrence River expedition. Captain Gerrish meticulously tallies the findings, neatly labelled, "No5 Containing 88 Scalps of women; hair long, braided [..] to shew they were mothers […] Of the scalps in No. 8, a mixture of varieties 20 were little Infant scalps […] Ript out of their Mothers' Bellies." The letter further instructs that "[s]amples be sent to museums, the Rest to be distributed among the Houses of Parliament; a double Quantity to the Bishops" (Franklin 1782).

Even if they had appeared in a real supplement of the *Boston Chronicle*, these pieces would have made good copy, eventually circulating among the political elite. Had they surfaced in New England as a report by a local military officer, they would have lent the kind of credibility to the account that Franklin so masterfully cultivated through carefully selected aliases. The fact that these were published in a Franklin-produced fake paper – a hoax from cover to cover – mimicking all the conventions of authentic reporting, proves how the printer-turned-diplomat effectively operated a full-fledged propaganda machine.

Contrary to the appearance that "in a shotgun blast it strikes at Indians, the British, and the Canadians (Dubs 2011, 191), the target was clearly British public opinion. As the American Minister to France, Franklin's official duty was now to generate goodwill for the independent colonies, and to conclude the eventual peace treaty on favorable terms, including reparations (Adams 1956, 135; Mulford 2008, 497, 501). He launched

[17] He also used the printshop to design and issue passports, government forms, and loan certificates, and to design forgery-proof official documents (Mulford 2008, 493–95). The growing scholarship on Passy attests that Franklin's printshop was an elaborate operation, and not just an experiment with a "boyhood craft".

the *Supplement* – as if it had been a special issue of the real *Boston Chronicle*[18] – into the news market on April 22, the day before the final Peace terms were submitted. The Gerrish accounts, or "scalping letter," were meant to dominate the public agenda as a reminder of the British war campaigns of the past, enlisting and mimicking the Indian tactics (Mulford 2008, 501–7). To appear authentic, the Franklin-designed *Supplement* was a "tour de force" of fonts that would accommodate italics and headlines (ibid., 497).[19] The trial run, or first edition, featured neatly designed commercial ads – also hoaxes – on one side, with the Gerrish Letter on the other (ibid., 494). However, there is no evidence that this version was distributed (ibid., 492). The two-sided *Supplement* made waves on both sides of the Atlantic: it was circulated, copied, reprinted, and debated in both Europe and America. Franklin intended for this to happen. He even sent copies to John Adams, who was then negotiating in Amsterdam, and John Jay in Madrid (ibid., 502).

Although his health did decline and contemporaries became increasingly critical of his abilities to serve effectively, these biting pamphlets were not mere outlets for Franklin's gout. By strategically placing his satirical pieces in the right publications, timing their release, using multiple platforms, adopting various personas, and incorporating visual elements, Franklin effectively used satire to enlist public opinion behind a cause and thus indirectly influence decision makers. Franklin was fully aware of the media's power and his ability to harness it. Writing from his Passy residence, he observed, "[b]y the press we can speak to nations" (Parkinson 2015). And now, as America's representative, he sought to do exactly that.

## Conclusions

Franklin's writings not only bring early American society up close and personal, providing insights into provincial concerns and local events, they also capture the revolutionary transformation from the 1720s to the drafting of the Constitution in 1787 and beyond. For a social historian, another dimension of Franklin's multifaceted industries is equally fascinating – his role as not only recorder of social and political trends but also as agenda-setter. From his early essays advocating both Christian values and criticizing church practices through gentle humor to the vitriolic attacks on colonial politics, Franklin's writings embody the transformation from provincial subject to public

[18] Franklin's broadside perfectly imitated the size and style of Boston's actual *Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, numbering it No. 705 as if it were an addendum to the paper's March 12 issue, which reached Europe in late April (Mulford 2008, 496).

[19] Whereas previous annotations highlighted only the Cicero font for its italic capability, Mulford's inventory (2008, 497) identifies six fonts – a broader selection than most printers could afford, including French-made custom designs for Franklin.

servant. He was efficiently using humor to advance his causes, but never in a self-serving way or as a manifestation of mere creative idleness. The record suggests that Franklin applied industry all through his writing career, consistently striving for utility and public good – a "more perfect edition"[20] of self, community, and nation.

This essay argued that Franklin's main industry was marketing ideas, which he pursued with ingenuity and purpose. He adjusted the style for the occasion. Thus, the gentle wit and spewing jibes do not necessarily mark the evolution of his satirical style – the full spectrum ran simultaneously. He was not only crafty with words, but also a conscious user of the print media in disseminating his views, believing that his efforts would serve the public good. For want of a better word, to borrow from our twenty-first-century vocabulary, Franklin was running a propaganda machine. In fact, he was in the industry of marketing ideas and ideals. He employed a wide repertoire within the satirical genre, a rich political communication toolkit that included authenticity proxies and strategic placement, all tailored to the specific cause and the audience he targeted.

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[20] In the epitaph he composed for himself at the age of 22, Franklin defines himself as a printer, likens his body to a worn book, his life's work to its contents, and envisions "a new & more perfect edition" (Franklin 1728).

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# 6.

# From Chaucer to Atwood: Robes, Roles, and Repression in Gilead

*Katarína Labudová*

## Introduction

Fashion, often overlooked in literary analysis, can offer a powerful optic that deepens our understanding of characters and their words. While Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* reflects a time when fashion provided a channel for self-representation and self-construction, *The Handmaid's Tale* shows how clothes can be used to erase identity and individual expression. This paper explores how fashion can be manipulated by repressive regimes and can be employed to enforce conformity and control. The role of fashion in literature is frequently neglected in traditional literary analysis. However, depictions of clothing, styled bodies, material culture, and changing fashions are integral to the evolution of fiction. With the development of fashion studies, literary critics have been able to "argue for the consideration of clothing and its implications as a generative critical lens, inviting new and exciting venues of investigation" (Kuhn and Carlson 2007, 2). And because style and fashion can apply equally to linguistic expression and text, studying fashion, garments and accessories can enrich and deepen the literary analysis of characters' psychological state, gender identification, race and ethnicity markers, social and political status, and occupation.

Clothes, dresses, and costumes have undeniable symbolic value in fiction. In fairy tales, the destinies of fairy tale heroes and heroines depend on glass slippers, golden hair, invisible cloaks, and wedding dresses that spring out of a nutshell. In medieval poetry, items such as the magic girdle in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* have vital significance. Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* "takes a great deal of care in describing the pilgrims' garments enabling readers to understand and visualize these items, as opposed to the spiritual world in which these characters operate" (Mahawatte 2022, 293).[1] Furthermore, as seen in "The General Prologue" to *The Canterbury Tales*, where the Wife of Bath is described as wearing "coverchiefs ful fyne of ground" that

[1] For more studies on the intersection of fashion and literature and culture, see Benstock and Ferriss (1994); Bruzzi (1997); Flügel (1930). For more recent studies, see Seys (2018). Paulicelli et al. (2022) offers a section on fashion and literature.

"weyeden ten pound" (Chaucer 2011, 15), it is not merely the literal weight of the head coverings that matters. Rather, Chaucer's use of exaggeration, meticulous attention to luxurious detail, and references to rich fabrics such as silk, velvet, and muslin serve to construct vivid character portraits. These descriptions reveal not only personal vanity or wealth but also embed the characters in a broader cultural and social context, as seen throughout "The General Prologue" as well, where apparel and ornamentation signify authority, sexuality, and personal narrative.

With these frames, the article traces the dialogic tensions between outer appearance and inner identity, performance, conformity, and resistance in Chaucer's and Atwood's narratives. Clothes do more than just protect the body from cold or unwanted attention. In *The Face of Fashion*, Jennifer Craik argues that "codes of dress are technical devices which articulate the relationship between a particular body and its lived milieu, the space occupied by bodies and constituted by bodily actions. In other words, clothes construct a personal habitus" (1993, 4). Moreover, the intertextuality of Atwood's and Chaucer's writing draws our attention to the fabricated and interwoven nature of their texts, using changes in fabrics, clothes, and fashion to connect to both social change and the lineage of writing. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, clothes and style support the idea of the text as a palimpsest,[2] drawing on the previous texts and styles: "I could smell […] the pungent scent of sweat, shot through with the sweet taint of chewing gum and perfume from the watching girls, felt-skirted as I knew from pictures, later in mini-skirts, then pants, then in one earing, spiky green-streaked hair. Dances would have been held there; the music lingered, a palimpsest of unheard sound, style upon style" (Atwood 1996, 13).

The pairing of Chaucer with Atwood is both deliberate and generative. Kathleen E. Dubs has argued persuasively for the continuing relevance of Chaucer's narrative strategies and ethical frameworks in literary contexts. She underscores Chaucer's engagement with power and narrative performativity – concerns that resonate strongly with Atwood's strategies of writing. By aligning a medieval text with a contemporary novel, this article follows Dubs's insistence of Chaucer's and his narrators' afterlife and invites an intertextual dialogue on the politics of dress and identity.

Through the examples of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, I explore how fashion can serve both as a medium of individuality and identity in one text, and as a tool of uniformity and control in the other. While

[2] In its original meaning palimpsest is "a writing surface, whether of vellum, papyrus, or other material, that has been used twice or more for manuscript purposes. […] The vellum surfaces were often scraped or rubbed or the papyrus surfaces washed. With a material so used a second time it frequently happened that the earlier script either was not completely erased or that, with age, it showed through the new" (Holman and Harmon 1986, 354–55).

*The Handmaid's Tale* portrays clothing as a mechanism of ideological repression, *The Canterbury Tales* presents a more varied picture. Although not every pilgrim's attire is overtly individual – such as the Knight's plain tunic or the Monk's fur-lined cloak – Chaucer often seeks out distinctive details that hint at character, values, or status. Whether through exaggeration, symbolic colour, fabric, or accessories, these sartorial details offer narrative cues that enliven the characters beyond mere costume. I suggest that the study of fashion in literature can deepen literary analysis by revealing psychological, social, political, and cultural insights about the roles and the status of characters. I argue that clothing and fashion are symbolic, contributing to the understanding of a character's identity and situation and the narrative's context.

## Red Habits

The title of Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* echoes *The Canterbury Tales*, as we learn from its in-story editor, Prof. Pieixoto, who has given this title, "partly in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer" (Atwood 1996, 313), to the anonymous tape he has found. However, it is not only this note that relates Atwood's dystopia to Chaucer's work. In "Margaret Atwood and Chaucer: Truth and Lies," Pamela Clements discusses medieval elements in Atwood's work, textual links and similar textual history of *The Canterbury Tales* and *The Handmaid's Tale*: "Offred's story has been found recorded on several ancient rock-and-roll cassette tapes that have been ordered in much the same way as the 'fragments' of *The Canterbury Tales*" (2011, 56). Clements emphasises that each book is as much "about storytelling as about its own subject matter" (2011, 56). Moreover, even if the story is fragmentary and full of silences when it becomes too painful, Atwood's tale follows the rules of the dystopian genre, that the story is meant to be a warning to readers who might end up in a dystopian setting. The storytellers in *The Canterbury Tales* include a moral lesson in their narratives too, which is typical for medieval narratives. As Marta Dvorak suggests, *The Handmaid's Tale* is "a cautionary tale, it has a central question and a central message, a sententia, sense or moral expected by listeners/readers of Chaucer's time, and inscribed into the novel, as signalled by the intertextual title and ribald references to the author of *The Canterbury Tales* in the Historical notes" (2018, par. 27).

However, I argue that there is at least one more important link that connects Atwood's and Chaucer's texts, and that is the importance of clothes and fashion in both works.[3] The texts' fragmentation and intertextuality call attention to the "fabricated,

[3] For a detailed discussion of clothes and fashion in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, see Hodges (2005) and Ramsey (1977). For fashion in Margaret Atwood's texts, see York (1990); Kuhn (2001); Kuhn (2005).

fictional nature of the texts" (Dvorak 2018, par. 4).[4] The word "fabrics," again, underlines the link between clothes and textuality. Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* and *The Testaments* (2019), which is a sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, are rich, interwoven narratives that draw from a complex textual palimpsest of citations, newspaper clippings, literary works, and historical events. This textual patchwork is not just a stylistic choice but Atwood's effort to challenge conventional modes of storytelling, creating what Roland Barthes describes as a woven text – an open fabric of meaning, where the "text means Tissue; but whereas hitherto we have always taken this tissue as a product, a ready-made veil, behind which lies, more or less hidden, meaning (truth), we are now emphasizing, in the tissue, the generative idea that the text is made, is worked out in a perpetual interweaving […]" (1975, 64). Through intricate narrative design of interweaving, Atwood reflects the ways in which oppressed identities and dystopian societies are constructed, offering a commentary on both the literal and metaphorical significance of clothing.

## Red Stockings

From *The Canterbury Tales*, Offred's tale has links with "The Wife of Bath's Tale," Griselda in "The Clerk's Tale," and "The Second Nun's Tale". The female characters represent models of femininity that Atwood creatively reconstructs and parodies following Chaucer's own example, as his texts are intertextually linked to older sources.[5] Chaucer's detailed descriptions of the pilgrims' clothing and accessories function as signifiers of their "condition" and guide the reader in understanding and imagining the pilgrims (2011, 2). It becomes obvious that the pilgrims' clothes, although they most certainly reflect their social and economic status, also reflect their personal character. In *The Canterbury Tales*, Offred's story in *The Handmaid's Tale* resonates particularly with the Wife of Bath and Griselda. While Offred's narrative engages with these tales thematically, Chaucer's "General Prologue" offers further insight into gender and identity through the visual and material portrayal of his pilgrims. His detailed descriptions of clothing and accessories function as signifiers of the characters' "condition" (Chaucer 2011, 2), they guide the reader's imagination and interpretation. Although these garments often reflect social and economic status, they also reveal personal traits. For instance, the Prioress, though not directly linked to Offred's tale, is described with particular attention to elegance and refinement: "That no droppe ne fell upon her brest"

[4] Apart from Chaucer, *The Handmaid's Tale* refers to fairy tales (Little Red Riding Hood), myths (Eurydice), the Bible, and a number of utopias (More and Campanella) and dystopias (Zamyatin, Orwell, Bradbury).

[5] According to Scarano D'Antonio (2021), Chaucer draws on *Roman de la Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris and by Jean de Meun. "The Clerk's Tale" can be traced back to Petrarch's story and to Boccaccio's version.

and "ful fetis was hir cloke" (Chaucer 2011, 5) suggest meticulous self-presentation. The brooch she wears – "a brooch of gold ful sheene" – inscribed with "Amor vincit omnia" (2011, 6), which translates to 'Love conqueres all,' and carries also a secular connotation, potentially suggesting romantic or courtly love. This dual meaning highlights that her delicacy and refined manners may extend beyond the simplicity and humility typically associated with a nun's lifestyle.

Another important female character is from Bath and is linked to Offred by her red stockings. She goes on many pilgrimages, and we learn that she has had five husbands. Chaucer describes her "hosen" that are "of fine scarlet red" and her "shoes full moist" (2011, 15).[6] What is more important, we learn that her "coverchiefs" are "full fine" and Chaucer swears they "weighede ten pound" (2011, 15). Her clothes thus communicate to readers not only her economic situation – namely that she could buy expensive red stockings and new shoes – but also that she did not mind attention, since she wore a hat "as broad as is a buckler" (Chaucer 2011, 15) and the colour of her stockings can be associated with frivolity and erotic experience. Moreover, her expensive and elaborate clothes, far from ideals of modesty and chastity, suggest that she is more interested in travelling and adventures than in religious devotion. It is obvious that even though the Prioress's fine clothes and Alison's clothes indicate their gender and their economic and social situation, we cannot overlook that they still have a way to exert their personal choices in self-fashioning. With their bold outfits and accessories, the Prioress and Alison challenge religious edicts and gender expectations, showing their ability to shape their own identities. Unlike Offred's red robe, which is imposed on her, the Wife of Bath's costume and the accessories worn by the Prioress are chosen by them to reflect their personal style, even within the restrictions of the patriarchal society. In *The Culture of Fashion*, Breward argues that personal appearance is not just a passive reflection of status, it is a means of self-fashioning: "[i]n a society arranged around rigid strata, duties and expectations, dictated by such considerations as gender, wealth, age, land and ancestry, personal appearance carried immense importance as an indicator of social position and role" (1995, 23). In *The Canterbury Tales*, the Prioress and the Wife of Bath can exercise some agency in how they fashion themselves unlike Offred who cannot accessorise, who cannot pick her clothes, not even buy them or wash them herself.[7]

[6] In "The Two Alisouns: The Miller's Use of Costume and His Seduction of the Wife of Bath," John Slefinger comments on the Wife of Bath's expensive clothes: "the Wife's hosen are specifically marked as expensive in that they are made of scarlet, an expensive fabric often used by royalty, and are dyed red, a particularly costly colour" (2014, 156).

[7] Offred mentions the store, Lilies of the Field, where Handmaids order their robes. As many names of products, places, and events in Gilead, this name refers to the Bible. Colette Tennant argues that Gilead uses this allusion

In "*The Handmaid's Tale*: An Intertextual Transformation through Storytelling," Carla Scarano D'Antonio argues that "the female character that mainly interweaves with Offred is Griselda, the faithful, meek wife and the poor peasant girl who marries the rich and powerful Walter, or Gualtieri, marquis of Saluzzo" (2021, 605). Just like Griselda, who did not even bring her own clothes into her husband's house, Offred is given her red robe. Griselda is given "broches and ringes" (Chaucer 2011, 252) to match her husband's status: "Walter has had clothing made, secretly, to Griselda's measure" (Kuhn and Carlson 2007, 37). Griselda does not own her clothes and, likewise, Offred wears the uniform provided by the state. Interestingly, even though clothing plays a significant role in *The Canterbury Tales*, the readers do not get a full detailed description of Griselda's attire. As Ramsey (1977) observes, in this tale, changes in her clothing symbolise shifts in her social status: "when Griselda is wedded to Walter […], she is clothed in finery; when she is sent away, the fine clothes are stripped from her; after her restoration, she is again clothed in regal garments" (106–7).

Griselda's old smock, "olde gear," (Chaucer 2011, 256) or "rude array" (Chaucer 2011, 281) is in such condition that the ladies did not want to "handle before dressing her in the new and noble garments and jewels that Walter provides. Chaucer's depiction of these ladies' attitudes illustrates the disdain felt for old garments" (Hodges 2014, 101). She is not appreciated for who she is, until her new clothes make her visible. Walter's act of dressing Griselda in fine clothes and jewels follows the tradition of "marital gifts: that function as public displays of possession and status" (Hodges 2014, 102). This gesture not only reinforces his patriarchal authority over her but also, ironically, obscures his initial attraction to her – Griselda's innate virtues, or "her bounte" (Chaucer 2011, 252).

When Walter sees Griselda's sartorial metamorphosis, he comments on it, "For though that eve virtuous was she, / She was increased in such excellence" (Chaucer 2011, 257). The way the red robe transforms the women in Gilead is equally remarkable. However, while Griselda's new clothes and status are admired and approved by others, her crown and clothes enhancing her individuality, Offred's identity is erased by her robe and its red colour provokes feelings of hatred and disapproval, especially from other women. In *The Testaments*, Agnes feels shame when she is told that her biological mother is a Handmaid: "They get passed around until they have a baby. They're all sluts anyway, they don't need real names" (Atwood 2019, 81). Gileadean propaganda says that handmaids are precious but only as well-disciplined bodies, a sort

manipulatively: "By calling the store that sells the prescribed Handmaids' uniform 'Lilies of the Field', the orchestrators of Gilead's society suggest that the Handmaids are 'arrayed' or dressed in a glorious or fitting and appropriate way for their role, and that their role is a providential one instead of a prison" (2019, 22).

of reproductive army. Griselda's removal of her old smock in "The Clerk's Tale" is echoed at the beginning of *The Handmaid's Tale*, where Offred recalls how the Handmaids in training "neatly folded their clother" and wrapped themselves in "army-issue blankets" (Atwood 1996, 13). While the contexts differ, both scenes function as rituals of erasure: acts in which women are stripped of their former identities and prepared for submission to a new social class. In this sense, Griselda becomes an antetype not through direct narrative resemblance but as a symbolic embodiment of female disrobement within patriarchal systems. The scene is a symptom of a society that has stripped these women of their individual rights, names, and personality. Moreover, to connect Offred and Griselda more tightly, Offred's daughter is forcibly removed from her and her (future) babies will be taken from her too by the state; Griselda too must give up her own children: "This child I am commanded for to take" (Chaucer 2011, 261). Both women are forced to surrender their children which demonstrates the central theme of control over women's lives and their roles, even their roles of mothers, in an oppressive environment.

## Self-fashioning and Storytelling

The silencing of their roles as mothers mirrors another silencing: the control over their voices and stories. Griselda and Offred are created by male narrators: Griselda by the clerk in "The Clerk's Tale" and Offred by Professor Pieixoto, a male academic in the future. He reconstructs Offred's narrative, analyses it and comments on it in an ironic way, further reducing her to an object for scholarly dissection, much in the same way that Griselda was fashioned and exposed to the male gaze. Pieixoto's irony reveals that he approaches Offred's account with academic detachment, objectifies her, and talks over her, thus silencing her voice. He academically criticises the gaps in her story because he ignores her trauma and emotional urgency. Similarly, Griselda's story is shaped by the Clerk, who fashions her as an ideal and retells her obedience as a moral and didactic exercise. In both tales, the act of narration becomes a form of silencing.

We do not hear their tales directly from them, but rather styled and edited by the male narrator. Chaucer's narrators similarly disrupt the pilgrims' tales. As Kathleen Dubs notes: "The Clerk's Tale" – the story of patient Griselda – triggers the first of Harry's overtly personal reactions. "[…] Harry completely misinterprets the story's message about reason, compassion, and mercy. Instead, he fixates on the theme of unruly wives, and specifically on his own" (Dubs 2011, 43). In doing so, Harry reveals his anxiety over women defying male-imposed norms, which enhances the connection between Griselda's symbolic derobement and oppressive regime of Gilead. Clements argues that "Gilead's patriarchal social system echoes medieval ideas about

women, ideas that make up much of the debate embedded in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*," (2011, 56) suggesting that Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* deliberately evokes these medieval notions to critique contemporary gender dynamics. The sequel, *The Testaments*, goes further by not only continuing this medieval echo but also drawing on additional medieval texts, especially the Middle English poem *Pearl*. Through these intertextual references, Atwood deepens her exploration of the power structures of patriarchal ideologies. As Mary Dockray-Miller suggests, *Pearl*, is "constructed as a dream-vision dialogue between a grieving man and the character commonly referred to as the 'Pearl Maiden,' who instructs him about Heaven, the afterlife, and Christian doctrine" (2024, 12). She compares the Pearl Girls to the medieval Pearl Maiden, who wears a crown of pearls, not only a pearl necklace, and whose dress is shiny. Visually alike, the Pearl Girls recall the Pearl Maiden. Although they may appear similar at first glance, the Pearl Girls – unlike the Pearl Maiden – pervert the authenticity of Christian moral values and spiritual insight: "the Pearl Girls offer only a false, socially sanctioned version of purity and moral rectitude; the converts agree to enter not an immaculate feminine paradise but a false, misogynistic Hell" (Dockray-Miller 2024, 13). Atwood layers many historical, religious, and literary sources to stitch together a postmodern tapestry. Her text resonates with patriarchal voices from the past and mirrors past wardrobes. Madelaine C. Seys argues that "sartorial description also functions as a self-conscious literary technique. Authors use their heroines' sartorial refashioning as a metaphor for their own negotiation of contemporary politics and fashions of literature, representation, and genre" (2018, 14).

Madelaine C. Seys's argument suggests that the deliberate choice of clothing in literature can symbolise a deeper negotiation of identity. What is more, it supports the idea that the novel is a "patchwork of texts" (Edwards 2005, 100), stitched together from various pieces, reflecting how *The Handmaid's Tale* is a tapestry of interwoven literary and historical references. This "patchwork" structure is emblematic of the postmodern novel, where the imagery of textiles symbolises how different texts are sewn together to form a new yet perverted design, which shows Gilead's control over the lives of its citizens.

In this context, the concept of palimpsest not only serves as a literary device but also functions as a metaphor for Offred's experiences and her evolving resistance. Just as Gilead recycles old clothes, Offred's identity is layered and constantly restyled – reflecting the layering of multiple influences. Atwood challenges the notion of pure genres and the existence of a single, fixed identity by using palimpsest to illustrate how Gilead's power structures erase and overwrite the past and the Bible. Her reimagining of historical events unfolds like a palimpsest – rewritten texts, where references and

quotations are transformed, reinterpreted and restyled to reflect the fragmented nature of identity and narrative in Gilead.

Clothing becomes a powerful instrument of control in the dystopian regime of Gilead. The government exerts control over every aspect of life, including how people dress. The protagonist, Offred, describes how theocracy forces rigid dress codes on women and uses uniforms to erase individuality and reinforce the power hierarchy. The theocratic regime dictates what citizens wear, leaving them with no agency or freedom of expression. This loss of control over clothing reflects broader themes of submission and restriction in theocratic Gilead, where personal autonomy is denied, and even fashion becomes politicised. This control over dress is not unique to theocratic Gilead but reflects real-world patterns of societal regulation in the past and present. As Susan B. Kaiser argues, religious groups like Gábor Adventists or orthodox Mennonites exert "control over their members' bodies" (2012, 91).[8] In these religious groups, women's clothes and head coverings are supposed to show submission and modesty. There are numerous examples from history and fiction where clothes are used to erase or suppress individuality: the plain habits of monastic orders signify submission to the order over personal identity; Victorian workhouses imposed standardised dress to instill discipline and suppress rebellion among the poor. Military uniforms, Nazi concentration camp uniforms, and Socialist school outfits alike emphasise conformity and loyalty to collective ideals, often at the expense of personal expression. Even in fictional constructs like Thomas More's *Utopia*, uniformity in dress reflects a deeper ideological commitment to social harmony achieved through the erasure of self. Thus, Atwood's narrative strategies – her interweaving of historical, religious and genre discourses, along with metaphorical use of clothing – create a powerful critique of theocratic authoritarian regimes that aim to control both the mind and the body.

The sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale, The Testaments* (2019), was published 34 years after the popular dystopia. The events of *The Testaments* take place approximately fifteen or sixteen years after the events of *The Handmaid's Tale*. It focuses on the lives of two young women: Daisy, raised in Canada, and Agnes, a privileged Gileadean daughter. The narrative shifts to their experiences as they navigate Gilead's oppressive

[8] The Gábor are a subgroup of Roma people, primarily found in Romania. Traditionally, the Gábor are known for their strict internal rules, distinctive clothing, and patriarchal social structure. According to Péter Berta, "women [are] wearing ankle-length skirts and headscarves, choosing a spouse from their own Roma ethnic population" (2019, 48). Orthodox Mennonites are part of the Anabaptist Christi. They are committed to pacifism and plain dress (often including head coverings for women and beads for men), live separated from modern society, and avoid using electricity, cars, and modern technology. Jana Hawley analyses the significance of their dress code that has changed very little over the years: "Dress for Old Order women consists of a white prayer cap made of organza, a black bonnet, a shawl, cape, apron, black stocking, and a dress. The long dress, apron, and shawl are intended to conceal the body, and the bonnet to follow the biblical notion of 'shamefacedness'" (2008, 93).

society. Through their perspectives, we learn about the private lives of citizens, where clothing, much like food, is dictated by the regime.

In Gilead, the prescribed dress codes, uniforms, and the symbolism embedded in clothing are central to the regime's control and structure. These uniforms, which clearly define an individual's role in the theocratic state, play a crucial part in maintaining social order. The Handmaids, Aunts, and other members of the hierarchy are not just identified by their positions and roles within the regime, but by the uniforms they wear. Except for the Handmaids, high-status women (Wives and Aunts), women in Gilead are classified either as Econowives or Marthas and personify the ideal of the housekeeping and domesticity. Econowives, wearing red, blue, and green striped uniforms that "mark the women of the poorer men" must perform all roles (Atwood 1996, 34), while Marthas are domestic servants and cooks in the Commanders' households. Offred describes their uniforms as dull green, "like a surgeon's gown of the time before" (Atwood 1996, 19).[9]

Wearing uniforms according to a rank or role reinforces the idea that Gilead is a military state at war with enemies. This is supported by propaganda broadcast on TV, which is the only source of information for the citizens. The idea of being surrounded by enemies creates a false sense of belonging to Gilead. As Roveri argues, "[u]niforms enforce social discipline, strengthen a sense of belonging and amplify national sentiments. They also provide a 'costume' where to hide and adopt a socially acceptable appearance, which emphasizes the utility of bodies (over the value of individuals)" (Roveri 2022, 195). Uniforms emphasise a sense of hierarchy: from the cheap, colourless robes of Unwomen to the better fitting and flattering uniforms of wives in blue, or very precious brides in tailored white wedding dresses.

Likewise, in the time of Chaucer and his pilgrims, the clothes and their colours reflected not only practical functions but also social and economic status:

> [i]n the Middle Ages in Europe, society was organized in a very hierarchical manner – again, in a pyramid-like feudal structure. The elite's wealth and power at the top resulted from their ownership of land. Below the elite was a class

[9] The women who resist any classification in Gilead are declared "Unwomen" and are sent to the Colonies where they remove toxic waste or are executed. Unwomen are assigned the colour grey. The women at Jezebels, who escape being assigned a colour, are nevertheless required to wear garish costumes that declare their role as sex objects – "government issue," as Moira describes a Playboy bunny outfit (Atwood 1996, 315). The colour symbolism of uniforms in *The Handmaid's Tale* has been analysed by a number of critics. In *Brutal Choreographies*, J. Brooks Bouson comments on the colour of Offred's uniform: "The sexual object for male consumption and the marginalized woman who is shunned and despised by other women, the Handmaid is the good/bad woman, the saintly prostitute. Her red, nun-like uniform symbolizes her imprisonment in the Handmaid's role" (1993, 140).

> of merchants, clerics, and artisans. […] Because lower class individuals had to perform manual labor, it was difficult to keep their clothing clean. The color of clothing – dark colors to hide dirt versus lighter colors for those who did not need to worry about manual labor – also became a key indicator of social status.
>
> (Kaiser 2012, 110)

The strict dress code in Gilead is a reminder of medieval and Renaissance efforts to prevent people transgressing class boundaries. However, while medieval rules regulated appearance based on class, they still allowed for some personal variation – unlike Gilead, where clothing functions as a totalising system of control that erases any individuality.

The uniforms, particularly the Handmaids' red robes, are designed as a visual expression of Gilead's oppressive theocratic ideology. The robes are not only practically but also symbolically restrictive, echoing Puritan ideals of femininity and submission. Offred reminiscences about her past and the clothes she used to wear. "I think about laundromats. What I wore to them: shorts, jeans, jogging pants. What I put into them: *my own* clothes, *my own* soap, *my own* money, money I had earned *myself*. I think about having such *control*" (Atwood 1996, 34). Gilead strips her of her own clothes, her name and identity. This process of stripping away autonomy and individuality is further emphasised by Aunt Lydia's reflection on the creation of a new societal order: "Week by week we invented: laws, uniforms, slogans, hymns, names" (Atwood 2019, 177). This invention of dress codes is not merely administrative but a tool for indoctrination, teaching women their assigned roles.[10] The uniforms serve as constant visual reminders: a woman's dress is a direct reflection of her value to the regime and a memento of their specific function.[11] As Laflen argues: "In fact, each of the roles available to women in Gilead reinforces this belief. Although each role carries with it different privileges and burdens, each is signalled visibly by an assigned costume and colour" (2007, 92). The powerful costume imagery of Gilead is as a tool for both identification and isolation of citizens. At its core, the regime enforces a radical division of traditionally gendered functions (shopping, cooking, childbirth, intimacy) by assigning each to a separate class of women. This fragmentation not only condines women to reductive roles, but also prevents them from empathising with one another. By defining, delimiting, and separating women's roles, Gilead creates rigid boundaries and frictions

[10] Mary Dockray-Miller describes the process as follows: "[S]omewhat analogous to kapos in the Nazi concentration camps, Lydia and the other founders thus become complicit in the oppression of women in Gilead: training the Handmaids as sex slaves for breeding; 'educating' the young, elite women to be submissive Wives; designing the codes and rituals that will enforce the categories of female exploitation under the regime" (2024, 10).

[11] Even the second-hand, shabby old costumes at the Jezebel's are a satirical comment on the costume imagery of Gilead.

between the classes of women, leaving women with little empathy and no trust in each other, as they are denied shared experiences.

In Gilead, the prescribed dress is part of the larger project of controlling the bodies of women. Colour-coded uniforms, fear, and brain-washing propaganda make it easier to (visually) screen and control the groups of citizens. Women willingly take part in self-surveillance, not to gain any kind of advantage, but out of fear of being taken to the Colonies: the Handmaids keep each other in line, Marthas and Wives spy on the Handmaids too and vice-versa. Apart from representing oppression and the power hierarchy, Atwood's obsessive description of clothes, shoes, and headpieces in *The Handmaid's Tale* also serves to ironise and ultimately subvert the twisted ideology of the dystopian state. On the other hand, clothes can be an occasion for communicating empathy and care. Calling to mind Gilead's stipulation that Marthas not befriend Handmaids, the reader still witnesses how Rita offers Offred an ice cube, after seeing her in a warm red habit on a hot day. An act of sympathy is a gesture of rebellion, and not only against the strict dress-code. Similarly, in *The Testaments*, the wedding dress becomes a symbol of women's empathy, collaboration, and resistance. The fitting of wedding dress is not only an act of participation in the regime's rituals but also a moment to save Agnes from her traumatic union with the well-known but untouchable abuser, Commander Judd.

The red robes remind Offred of habits, a term that evokes monasteries, order, discipline, and strict habits that "are hard to break" (Atwood 1996, 34). The association of Handmaids' red robes with nuns' habits is manipulative: "The red gloves are lying on the bed. I pick them up, pull them onto my hands, finger by finger. Everything except the wings around my face is red: the colour of blood, which defines us. The skirt is ankle-length full, gathered to a flat yoke that extends over the breasts, the sleeves are full. The white wings too are prescribed issue. They are to keep us from seeing, but also from being seen" (Atwood 1996, 18). In contrast, Chaucer's Wife of Bath is also marked by excessive redness – her bold red stockings and flushed complexion – yet this signals not repression but her unapologetic embrace of sensuality. She challenges the norms of female modesty. In Gilead, the Handmaids in red look like nuns, walk in twos like nuns, and pose their hands and heads like nuns. However, this similarity is entirely superficial. As Colette Tennant suggests, "instead of being married to Christ, as celibate orthodox nuns are expected to be, these Handmaids are flesh-and-blood examples of religion gone awry. Instead of the voluntary celibacy practiced by nuns, they are raped every time they endure a Ceremony" (2019, 62). Gilead abuses fashion and aesthetics to serve their political goal of increasing the population in the state. In *The Testaments*, the colour of their dresses reflects the girls' fertility and marriageability: pink

for a pre-pubescent girl (purple in winter), bright spring green for post-pubescent but still not married: "The pink, the white, and the plum dresses were the rule for special girls like us. Ordinary girls from Econofamilies wore the same thing all the time – those ugly multicoloured stripes and grey cloaks" (Atwood 2019, 11). Gilead forces girls into marriage as soon as they get their first period: Agnes is only thirteen when they start arranging her wedding. But first, they bring in a wardrobe team led by Aunt Gabbana.[12]

## Indoctrination

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred's perception of the women around her is heavily shaped by Gilead's indoctrination. She becomes accustomed to her robe and to what it means. First, out of fear of severe punishment, but later out of habit: "the handmaids' habits are deep full-yoked gowns, white slips and petticoats, stockings, and low shoes, veils, cloaks and headpieces. The complexity of the habits preserves the excessive modesty demanded by patriarchal societies" (Kaler 1989, 52). The extent to which Offred has absorbed the viewpoint symbolised by her robes is surprisingly revealed when she sees a group of Japanese tourists dressed in short skirts, high heels, and wearing lipstick. Although Offred recalls a time when she wore revealing clothes, she thinks, "[t]hey seem undressed. It has taken so little time to change our minds, about things like this" (Atwood 1996, 38). She remembers how she used to dress in feminine and stylish clothes and shoes, but she has become used to new (red) habits.

The regime's pervasive control extends to the manipulation of how bodies are viewed: "The regime encourages people to look at the bodies on the Wall" (Laflen 2007, 107). This reflects the wider use of visual culture to instil fear and obedience. The mass production of statues, paintings, and other representations of Gilead's authority reinforces an environment of surveillance. Lydia herself becomes part of this: Aunts wear a khaki brown uniform which include a cattle prod, and they are not shy about using it. The constant presence of these images fosters an atmosphere where resistance seems not just dangerous but futile. Yet small acts of rebellion – whether a gesture of kindness or a covert mission like the wedding dress fitting – suggest that even in a society where the regime controls every aspect of visual appearance, acts of resistance and women's sympathy can still emerge.

[12] Aunt Gabbana's name echoes the name of a famous Italian luxury fashion house, Dolce&Gabbana. She is a matchmaker and wedding planner, who consults on wedding dresses and the premarital wardrobe. The outfits are "themed in green: spring green with white accents – pocket trims, collars – for spring and summer, and spring green with dark green accents for fall and winter. […] spring green was for fresh leaves, so the girl was ready for marriage. Econofamilies were not allowed such extravagances, however" (Atwood 2019, 159–60). Nobody can pick the colour of their outfit; Gilead picks it for you.

The aesthetic of Gilead's uniforms is a weapon of political control. The Aunts, as the enforcers of the regime's ideology, discipline clothing to suppress individuality and enforce uniformity. Clothes are designed to mark the wearer's place in a rigid system, where personal expression and resistance are forbidden. The aesthetic serves to make Gilead's ideology visible and palpable. As Sartwell writes, "aesthetics represents the 'ideological' aspect of political systems," and in Gilead, this aesthetic, including fashion, is employed to maintain the oppressive power structure (2010, 50). However, the carefully selected and designed uniforms function as misleading disguises as well. Offred compares the Commander to a series of harmless "male figures: to a museum guard, a midwestern bank president, a man in a vodka ad, and the shoemaker character in a fairy tale" (Bouson 1993, 145), thus diminishing his identity as an important figure in Gilead. In a mirror passage, the Commander talks to Offred about women in the past buying new clothes to become some other woman; in Gilead, by contrast, many women look the same because they wear the same clothes, the identical red robe, which hypocritically covers the true nature of Gileadean sexual polygamy.

The Aunts' manipulation of aesthetics, clothing, and appearance extends beyond uniforms. They also shape the ideological narratives of Gilead through fairy tales and stories designed to instil fear and obedience. These tales, often filled with cautionary imagery of innocent girls abused or killed by men, reinforce Gilead's message about women's roles. "One for murder, Two for kissing […] And Seven we caught you, Red Red Red!" (Atwood 2019, 107). These songs, nursery rhymes, and games transform even childhood into an indoctrination tool, where everything, from play to clothing, is politicised. Young girls like Agnes understand how women in Gilead should dress: "arms covered, hair covered, skirts down to the knee" (Atwood 2019, 9).

Despite Gilead's powerful use of clothing and aesthetics to maintain control, the uniformity is not an entirely unbreakable system. Foucault argues that "where there is power, there is resistance," and in Gilead, resistance manifests in subtle, almost invisible ways (Foucault 1978, 95–6). The uniform, though a powerful symbol of repression, also provides the means for covert resistance. In this way, the uniforms and the political aesthetics of Gilead can be potential tools for rebellion. Moira's escape from the Red Centre is emblematic of this strategy: she can get through the guard posts because she is wearing an Aunt's uniform and is presumed to be unquestionable. By creating a society that works like a machine, Gilead becomes vulnerable in situations where more critical thinking is needed. For example, to leave Gilead and smuggle the important piece of evidence against the regime, the two sisters (Daisy and Agnes), disguise themselves as Pearl Girls, missionaries proselytising and recruiting for Gilead in neighbouring countries. They are "young women in long silvery dresses and white hats who called

themselves Pearl Girls and said they were missionaries doing God's work for Gilead" (Atwood 2019, 44). They "had white pearl necklaces and smiled a lot, but not real smiling" (Atwood 2019, 45). However, Gileadean Pearl Girls have no understanding of the Bible and Christianity, their mission is to go to Canada and recruit young fertile women to Gilead. Their mission is fake, their "pearls" are fake, "[f]ake…everything about them is fake" (Atwood 2019, 46).[13] Many of the Pearl Girls are opportunistic, serving this mission only to escape their (future) roles as Wives. Daisy, when infiltrating Gilead, is also wearing the uniform of Pearl Girls as it hides her true Canadian identity. On the other hand, when Daisy leaves Gilead and changes back to jeans and T-shirt, she feels like her true self again.[14] Daisy's shift back to casual clothing symbolises a reclaiming of her personal autonomy and true self. In Gilead, the prescribed dress codes and uniforms serve as a pervasive tool of ideological control. They strip individuals of their personal identity, reinforcing a strict social order, yet they also present opportunities for resistance, as characters like Daisy and Agnes demonstrate. Ultimately, the aesthetics of Gilead are a reflection of the regime's power, and the uniformity this imposes is both a means of suppressing resistance and, paradoxically, a means of facilitating it.

## Conclusion

Clothing in *The Handmaid's Tale* and in *The Canterbury Tales* serves not only as a symbol of the strict social, economic, and gender roles within patriarchal system, whether in dystopian Gilead or medieval society. In Gilead, the uniforms imposed on women enforce conformity and erase individuality, mirroring a hierarchical and militarised society, where any attempt at personal expression is suppressed and severely punished. On the other hand, the same uniforms can trigger subtle gestures of empathy and subvert the system.

By intertextually linking *The Handmaid's Tale* to *The Canterbury Tales*, Atwood highlights the complex relationship between clothing, power, and textuality. In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer uses detailed descriptions of the pilgrims' clothing to reflect their social status as well as personal identities. Clothes and personal style illustrate how fashion functions as a form of self-expression and social signalling. In contrast to the uniforms enforced in Gilead, including rigid colour schemes, the female characters in *The Canterbury Tales* such as the Prioress, the Wife of Bath and Griselda use their

[13] Daisy's fake-pearl necklace breaks in her fight with hypocritical Aunt Vidala (Atwood 2019, 358).

[14] "The clothes were jeans and long T-shirts and wool socks and hiking boots. Plaid jackets, fleece pull-on hats, waterproof jackets. I had a little trouble with the left T-shirt sleeve – something caught on the O. I said, 'Fucking shit' and then, 'Sorry.' 'I don't think I've ever changed clothes so fast in my life, but once I got the silver dress off and those clothes on I began to feel more like myself'" (Atwood 2019, 364).

clothing to communicate their personal style and oppose expectations. While the Wife of Bath's red stockings and lavish garments and the Prioress's refined, accessorised attire suggest a degree of independence and self-stylisation tied to social and economic standing, Griselda's outward grace and composure must be read differently. Rather than signalling autonomy, her appearance reflects the ideals of obedience and virtue projected onto her by patriarchal authority, which both invests her with and strips her of symbolic value.

This contrasts sharply with prescribed robes in Gilead, where uniforms strip away rights and identity, and force people into conformity and docility. While medieval society also prescribed clothing based on class, women in that era still retained more personal freedom for self-expression that the women of Gilead, whose uniforms leave no space for resistance or self-definition.

Moreover, the comparison between Offred and Griselda is striking. Both women endure torture, are defined by the patriarchal control over their bodies, and are robbed of their children. Griselda's humble old smock and Offred's red robe signify their subordination. Atwood uses intertextual references to critique how clothing functions to control women's autonomy.

Through the intricate layers of robes, veils, and stockings, Atwood shows that clothes can be a tool of oppression, but also a means for resistance and rebellion. Just as the characters in *The Canterbury Tales* express their roles and identities through fashion and personal style, Gileadean women find ways to empathy and resistance through subversive uses of clothes and uniforms. Human desire for freedom cannot be suffocated by heavy veils.

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# 7.

# "No Love like a Mother's Hate": Navigating Internalized Misogyny and Inter-Generational Trauma in Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*

*Nora Júlia Levická*

Motherhood represented one of the pinnacles of female existence throughout the distinct periods of ancient Greece. The socio-cultural importance of women lay in their innate ability to produce citizens for the city state, or *polis*, thereby linking their status to their nature as perpetuators of society. However, a mother's bond with her children was deemed essentially immaterial in the phallocentric democracy of ancient Athens. This was paralleled by laws demonstrating disinterest in women as mothers and the bonds between mothers and their children (Pepe 2018, 154). Therefore, my interest will lie mainly in exploring how Margaret Atwood manages to portray these relationships through both a feminist and female perspective in her novella *The Penelopiad* (2005). By providing both Penelope and the Maids with narrative voices of their own, Atwood's retelling of the *Odyssey* offers an angle on the story that was inaccessible and often unrelatable to ancient Greek audiences due to societal norms at the time. The writers, narrators and heroes of these tragedies were men, and the female perspective was not the focus of the stories they told. By foregrounding her female characters, Atwood not only balances the focus, she also challenges the sanctity of the most vital role women fulfilled at the time – motherhood – unveiling the depressing reality of the consequences of the internalization of sexism and patriarchal notions of gendered violence and misogyny. *The Penelopiad* will be approached as a case study of these issues, employing both the contemporary feminist theory and trauma theory, as well as providing the cultural and historical context necessary for the understanding of the roots of the issues Atwood addresses in her novella, namely Homer's *Odyssey*, and ancient Greek myth-inspired tragedies from the Classical period.

Since *The Penelopiad* is a feminist retelling of one of the most renowned myth-based ancient Greek literary works, which in turn shaped the social and cultural expectations of the time due to its ubiquitous status in the ancient world, we must explore these very same norms and expectations first. As Northrop Frye remarked, "[t]he word myth is used in such a bewildering variety of contexts that anyone talking about it has

to say first of all what his chosen context is" (1990, 3). Thus, the objective of this paper is to explore the wide spectrum of distinct flavours of traumatic events that happen to and are perpetuated by the protagonists of Atwood's *The Penelopiad*. It aims to find links from her own suffering, internalized misogyny, and the (passively) violent acts she commits, to the binary notions of gender perpetuated by mythological narratives and ancient Greek drama, and the role motherhood plays in all of them. Myth will, therefore, serve as a dominant narrative against which Atwood writes her novella, as well as a cultural background reflecting the ideas perceived as real by the people whose lived experienced was shaped by it. Homer's works represent a mirror of Greek society (Cantarella 1987, 25) and since they often leave the female characters with limited to "no scope for effective action" (Farron 1979, 26), a rewriting of the *Odyssey* gives us an opportunity to observe how much from the ancient tradition we can still notice in the mirror's reflection today.

When Aristotle contemplated the elements of great art in 335 BCE, he wrote on the crucial elements defining good tragedy in his highly esteemed *Poetics*. Throughout his text, Aristotle does not forget to mention Homer as the pioneer of this artform, mentioning the importance of the genius of the epic poet numerous times: 21, to be precise. The heavy focus on Homer reflects his importance and the reverence with which later generations treated his works as the most respected source (Finley 1954, 4). Homer's works serve as objects of study for current feminist critics, Atwood's work being an example of this. According to Aristotle, a great tragedy should tell a story that is either terrible or pitiable (Aristotle 2013, 68). As he states, "[w]hat should be looked for are cases where the sufferings occur within relationships, as between brother and brother, son and father, mother and son, son and mother – where one kills, or is on the point of killing, the other, or is doing something else horrible" (2013, 71). Despite the complexity of the relationship family dynamics mentioned by Aristotle, one in particular seems to be missing – the mother–daughter bond. A good tragedy, a story that would move the reader and/or the audience member, should not concern itself – at least according to Aristotle – with relationships between women. Instead, he repeatedly reinforces the importance of the ties between a son and his female progenitor, mentioning it twice, as seen above. The decision not to include parental relationships with daughters might be interpreted as an oversight, but only if one does not look at the societal norms of ancient Athens and the societal expectations of women from the time.

The proof of the deeply and firmly embedded nature of these can be found precisely where Aristotle directs us: in the often myth-inspired ancient Greek tragedy. It is crucial to emphasize that the Athenian tragedy presented a rather conflicting portrayal of women, allowing the female characters much more agency and freedom of trans-

gression of the rigid societal norms than the Athenians would grant to flesh-and-blood women. Many scholars, such as Nancy Rabinowitz, Victoria Wohl, and Kirk Ormand, use multiple literary models to discuss the role of women in Ancient Greek tragedy, employing women as symbols to uphold the coetaneous system of gender norms, and emphasizing that these women should be treated as such. "Greek tragic women seem to form a sort of paradox: they must be based in reality, and yet they do not seem to represent their real-life counterparts very well at all" (Hoyt 2013, 2). Their portrayal in these tragic narratives was in turn inspired in their depictions in myths like the epics of *Illiad* and *Odyssey*, the same myths against which Atwood writes her own story. The purpose of this paper is not to explore the level of correspondence between the real lived experience of ancient Athenian women and their versions portrayed in tragedies, so for the purpose of this analysis, the treatment of the female characters in tragedy will be employed for the purpose of demonstrating the art being retold by the contemporary authors.

One of the best examples of the edifying practice of minimizing the importance of female involvement in the process of procreation is Aeschylus's trilogy of tragedies known as the *Oresteia* (458 BCE). In the trilogy, Orestes is confronted by an impossible choice: either to bear the burden of avenging his father's murder at the cost of becoming a matricidal criminal, or to turn his back on the tradition dictating the need to spill his own mother's blood to cleanse that of his father. He chooses the former over the later. When the deed is done, Orestes is faced with the wrath of the immortals for the matricide he committed, despite the fact that he was urged to murder his own mother by Apollo himself. Having killed Clytemnestra for the murder of his father Agamemnon, he is put on trial in Athens in front of the most ancient court in the polis, the Areopagus. The defence of his crime of matricide is performed by the same deity who initially incited Orestes to commit the crime through the oracle: Apollo, son of the great Zeus himself. In his speech, the sun god attempts to convince the jury that in killing his own mother, Orestes had not committed a deed against the social order:

> The *mother* of what's called her offspring's *no parent* but only the nurse to the seed that's implanted. The mounter, *the male's the only true parent*. She harbours the bloodshot, unless some god blasts it. The womb of the woman's a convenient transit.
>
> (Aeschylus 1989, 658–61, emphasis mine)

To reinforce his notion of the elimination of the parental status of mothers, Apollo provides the goddess Athena as a prime example of a purely masculine birth since the protector of the city of Athens sprung directly from her father's forehead. In oth-

er words, she was not born out of a woman but a man, thus completely disregarding the maternal power of women. However, not even Zeus is truly able to perform such a feat since Apollo is lying – Zeus is only able to "give birth" to Athena due to him swallowing her mother Metis while pregnant with Athena, thus proving that not even he was able to create life without a woman. In a similar act of castration induced by a male deity, Orestes both has his revenge and satisfies the patriarchal need to punish his mother's transgression of the societal norm: "Orestes kills his mother because the rule of the God – Father and his appropriation of the archaic powers of mother-earth require it. He kills his mother and goes mad as a result" (Irigaray 1999, 37). The fact that Clytemnestra murdered her husband in revenge for her daughter Iphigenia's sacrifice by Agamemnon's own hand is never mentioned in defense of her crime, emphasizing the discrepancies in the importance of the gendered relationships between parents and their children.

Nonetheless, at the end of the play, Orestes is acquitted of his crimes, which, according to Pepe, "confirms that the god (Apollo) is expressing a widespread view" (2012, 268). In her article "Pregnancy and Childbirth, or the Right of the Father" from 2012, Pepe draws a link between the notions represented in the theatrical pieces and scientific explanations that have been created to confirm the subordinate role of women in the process of procreation. She mentions Aristotle's complex theory developed in order to prove the marginal function of women in childbirth itself. He describes women as passive and cold recipients, while men are portrayed as their perfect counterparts, bearers of warmth and providers of life (Pepe 2012, 269). Thus, he relegates women to a passive position in the life-creating process, since even the birth they give has to be initiated by the foetus.

It is especially important to reiterate the importance of motherhood in the whole equation here. Despite the continuous and repeated attempts to limit access to abortion and contraceptive methods, an approach that seems to be on the rise in the last few years, the crucial role women play in the process of procreation, birth and parenting remains unquestioned in the countries of the global West. However, the same cannot be said regarding the approach towards pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood in Ancient Athens. Thus, as Pepe emphasizes, according to Aristotle, the same philosopher who did not deem the relationship between mothers and daughters as worthy of such a genre as tragedy, women are "'strangers', 'guests' to their children" (2012, 269). The philosopher thus stripped Athenian women of their life-giving power and diminished them to the position of mere carriers of their husbands' progeny, reduced to vessels of future generations without any rights to decide whether to carry the foetus to term or to

rear the child: the right to make both of these decisions was reserved for Athenian men (Pepe 2013, 42; Pepe 2012, 256).

The inferior position of women in art is, therefore, a reflection of the societal approaches towards them in general. As Nancy Demands claims in her book *Birth, Death and Motherhood in Classical Greece*, at the time, "the problems inherent in being female were believed to begin with conception" (1994, 4). Women were therefore placed below their male counterparts at the very moment of being conceived. This rather patriarchal and misogynistic outlook can, yet again, be confirmed by pieces of art enjoyed by a segment of the population – overwhelmingly men – who lived in the era. As Fox-Genovese remarks, "it is now at least acknowledged that while men were […] busying themselves with those activities we are wont to call history, women were invariably doing something – if only bearing more men to make more history and more women to permit them to do so" (1982, 6). This misogyny, as Pomeroy adds, "taints much ancient literature" (1975, 10). This is where we should link the ancient Greek – or, more precisely, Athenian – notions of femininity and their portrayal in the myths, epic narratives and tragedies with the contemporary rewritings produced as both a reaction to and a continuation of the tradition of these stories today. The failure to represent intimate relationships between women thus stems not only from sexist notions about the female sex, but also simply from a lack of knowledge regarding the female existence behind closed doors.

The fear of *miasma*, a spiritual soiling of the individual due to their exposure to the realities of life, such as death, blood, menstruating women or childbirth (Pepe 2012, 246–50) was one of the main reasons for a divide between the male and female spheres in the Archaic and, in this case, Classical period. Therefore, the lacuna of mother–daughter relationships may be explained by the male ignorance of the real dynamics in relationships between mothers and their daughters, since, as Strong remarks, "from antiquity to the present day, Western literature and historical texts […] tend to be male authored" and these texts, due to the nature of their authorship, "tend to depict dialogues between mothers and daughters as both hostile to males and focused on the female manipulation of male relatives and lovers" (2012, 121). If these authors were not acquainted with the nature of these relationships, lacking any kind of experience with them due to the partly gender-segregated society they inhabited, they compensated for their own lack of knowledge with assumptions which, nonetheless, still invariably centre men.

Nonetheless, it is necessary to emphasize that the issues regarding mother–daughter relationships were not completely ignored. Some of the works focusing on this issue include, for instance, the Classical period tragedy *Iphigenia at Aulis* from 405 BCE by Euripides, where the touching relationship between Clytemnestra and

Iphigenia is explored, and the focus on the two women presents a stark contrast to the aforementioned *Oresteia*. Furthermore, Homer's much older *Hymn to Demeter* dating to the Archaic period, also narrates the loss of a daughter due to an unjust decision made by Kore's father at the expense of both mother and daughter. However, it needs to be emphasized that both of these writings, separated by centuries, are tragedies resulting in the rupture of the maternal bond through death, and most dialogues between the women revolve around men. Both Iphigenia and Kore (later named Persephone) are removed from the safety of their home due to their fathers' decision to satisfy the greed and lust of their male relatives, since it was not within the parental right of the mother to question decisions made by the father. The maternal bond is therefore cut by the patriarch, with the mother and daughter remaining separated, excluded, removed; the bodily encounter with the mother forbidden by the father (Irigaray 1999, 39). Thus, the absence of the mother–daughter dynamic and the lack of its inclusion in Aristotle's concept of a good tragedy should be viewed as yet another symptom of the general approach towards women rather than a mere oversight: it is an intentional choice, made time and time again.

From what has been stated above, the conclusion is that being a woman in ancient Athens was not an empowering experience. Women were expected to adhere to the expectations connected with their gender and rewarded for their compliance with a semblance of power due to the biologically imposed need for their existence: after all, the sole parents of the children could not have carried the foetuses themselves. Not that they did not dream of a world without women. It is in Euripides' *Medea*, the first version of the myth of the Golden fleece in which it is Medea who kills her sons (in the other versions of the story, the young boys are murdered by a mob of furious Corinthians), where Jason expresses the wish for a world completely devoid of women: "Mortals ought, you know, to beget children from some other source, and there should be no female sex. Then mankind would have no trouble" (573–75, in Pepe 2012, 264). Jason is not the only Euripidean hero who echoes the desire to be rid of women altogether. Hippolytus says, "If you [i.e., Zeus] wished to propagate the human race, it was not from women that you should have given us this. Rather, men should have put down in the temples either bronze or iron or a mass of gold and have bought offspring, each man for a price corresponding to his means, and then dwelt in houses free from the female sex" (Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 618–24, in Pepe 2012, 265). He criticizes Zeus for cursing humanity with the gift of women represented by the very first one, Pandora. Since this dream remains unfulfilled, motherhood remains in the hands and loins of women.

This, however, does not mean that misogynistic ideas did not take root and were not propagated through the upbringing provided by the very same mythological women

who were being subjugated by the patriarchy. In the aforementioned tragedies, Euripides portrayed motherhood as both an empowering and threatening act, emphasizing the power it holds and the potential danger it poses to the established social hierarchy. Therefore, the issue of motherhood and its role in perpetuating the status quo which women were (and often still are) expected to follow the cultural diktats of the patriarchy will be further explored in *The Penelopiad*.

What Atwood examines is not only how the narrative changes with the shift in perspective from which it is being told but also how the original notions are preserved and challenged. The mere act of handing over the metaphorical lens from one gender to another does not entail a change in and on itself: the story was written and the biases it helped create are still standing strong. As Gubar argues, "[a]s a genre, feminist expository prose inevitably embeds itself in the misogynist tradition it seeks to address and redress" (1994, 462). In other words, it is impossible to tear internalized notions regarding female gender away from the general subconscious simply by narrating the story from a woman's point of view. As Larrington emphasizes in the introduction of her work *The Feminist Companion to Mythology*: "For Westerners, our interpretation of our mythological heritage conditions the way in which we think about ourselves. Myth has been appropriated by politicians, psychiatrists and artists, among others, to tell us what we are and where we have come from" (1992, 9). As Korkmaz emphasizes in her work *Rewriting Myths*, the mythological narratives as well as the tragedies they inspired, and which were, in turn, in a dialogue with the society at the time, "are not simple, innocent stories about old gods and goddesses, but symbols and images, which bear political, social, historical and cultural meanings and codes" (2011, 1). Ancient Greek mythology occupies a crucially significant position in this self-identificatory process of Western culture, including the process of formation of gender identity and the biases connected with it.

Thus, that it became an object of scrutiny for contemporary female authors and feminist critics can hardly be viewed as surprising. However, what needs to be emphasized is the approach Atwood has opted for in her retelling of the *Odyssey*. She employs her protagonists – Penelope and the Maids –, as well as the other female characters in her novella as tools to explore how these deeply entrenched gendered biases seep through the consciousness of the characters and present themselves in the narrative. In other words, the fact the story is narrated by women does not imply that they are void of rampant acts of gendered violence fuelled by generational trauma and internalized misogyny. The patriarchal trap cannot be evaded completely simply due to the fact these works are being written under its rule, since "we cannot escape how culture makes us know ourselves, we need to understand that even as our own theorizing engages with

the social relations of femininity and masculinity, it is fashioned by them" (Gubar 1994, 469). The notions perpetuated by the mythological narratives are hard to escape due to their omnipresent nature in our socio-cultural awareness, both conscious and not, and women are no exception. As Luce Irigaray emphasizes, "we are all imbued with many Greek […] traditions, particularly through art, philosophy, and myths without our realizing […] they remain bound to a patriarchal mythology which hardly ever questions itself as such" (1993, 23). In this sense, women are not immune to the bombardment of patriarchal messages, and their gender identity does not serve as protection. On the contrary, they inevitably learn to accept these notions as a part of their lived experience and reality. Thus, the act of writing back is, in its essence, empowering and therapeutic, since it allows women to revisit their own suffering on their own terms.

This exploration will be analysed through a theory of trauma which will draw from the issue of internalization and Webster's concept of mother wound (Webster 2021), drawing on the works of Adriene Rich, Luce Irigaray, Jacques Lacan, and Carl Jung, among others. Internalization, as defined by Ryan and Connell, "is the process in which social norms and values established by the society are adopted as one's own" (1989, 73). Thus, as a result of the influence of the ideas of womanhood created by patriarchal notions and transmitted – albeit not exclusively – via mythologies, women internalize these notions, (sub)consciously accept them, and perpetuate them. Millet focuses on the issue of the internalized patriarchal and sexist ideas in her work *Sexual Politics*. One of her main concerns is the issue of rivalry between women caused precisely by the aforementioned process of internalizing the patriarchal hierarchy of the society they inhabit. As she remarks, "one of the chief effects of class within patriarchy is to set one woman against another, in the past creating a lively antagonism between whore and matron, and in the present between career woman and housewife" (1970, 38). This establishment provides men with the privilege of a superior social and economic status in the patriarchal systems, therefore giving women the shorter end of the stick, leading to "play(ing) the estranged women against each other as rivals" (ibid.). Millet identifies myths as one of these kinds of devices used to achieve the disruption of female relations. In her opinion, "the female did not herself develop the symbols by which she is described. The image of women as we know it, is an image created by men and fashioned to suit their needs" (1970, 46). Thus, she is confirming the idea of womanhood as a creation of the patriarchy, transmitted from one generation to another via the symbolical language of the *mythos*: "The two leading myths of Western culture are the classical tale of Pandora's Box and the Biblical story of the fall. In both cases […] concepts of feminine evil have passed through a final literary phase to become highly influential ethical justifications of things as they are" (Millet 1970, 51).

It is no coincidence that both of these myths narrate the origin story of the woman who later becomes the first ever mother.

Adriene Rich reflects on this issue through the scope of her own lived experience, struggling against the tightness of the mould she felt pushed to fit, especially in relation with the issue of motherhood: "I had no idea what *I* wanted, what *I* could or could not choose. I only knew that to have a child was to assume adult womanhood to the full, to prove myself, to 'be like other women'" (1995, 25). She reflects on her desire to belong, to fulfil the societal expectations she felt, paying little to no attention to her own true desires, not even able to formulate them, to name them, to give them any form. This uncertainty regarding one's femininity and identity is not lost on Cixous, who explores the need to discover one's body thorough writing and self-expression, the things previously impeded by the system of patriarchy employing myths, among others, as weaponized tools. As a result of the constant influence of the expectations established in and transmitted by mythology, the woman is "kept in the dark about herself, led into self-disdain by the great arm of parental-conjugal phallocentrism" (1991, 335). Since the phallus represents "the privileged signifier" (Lacan 2001, 581), women are defined in the terms of the phallocentric discourse present in the myth-inspired narratives. The concept of their subordination due to their portrayal in the Greek mythology could be viewed, as Jung emphasizes, as a "projection of the collective unconscious" (1969, 152). The myths and the culture formed and shaped by it influence each other, maintaining the phallocentric binary dichotomy of the weak feminine and dominant masculine (Levická 2022, 34). As Korkmaz points out, "Western metaphysics is built on the idea that the phallus, or people who have the phallus, are more rational, stronger and worthier" (2011, 15). The mother as a being of power of her own does not fit the codependent dynamic of myth and Athenian society, but serves merely as a means to an end: she earns respect as a producer of new citizens, but has to keep her power behind closed doors. Her importance as one of the cornerstones on which patriarchy is built is the reason for her presence and the need for her subjugation.

In the ancient texts, the idea of a perfect loving mother is represented by Demeter, whose tragic relationship with her daughter and the lengths to which she was willing to go to protect her is one of the key representations of divine motherhood in Greek mythology. The importance of the mother goddess is not lost on Adriene Rich, who marvels at the power of a mother's love and the daughter's desire to be protected by a strength so fierce that it could "undo rape and bring her back from death. And *every mother*," she adds, "*must* have longed for the power of Demeter, the efficacy of her anger, the reconciliation with her lost self" (1995, 240, emphasis mine). The notion of all mothers' de-

siring the liberation of their daughters from patriarchal shackles does not always match reality: as the following analysis will demonstrate, the exact opposite is often true.

*The Penelopiad* by Atwood offers complex portrayals of mother–daughter dynamics influenced by the issue of societal pressure and internalized sexism. We will first delve into how Penelope experiences this injustice first as a daughter, being doubly victimized by patriarchal notions, and her own mothers' indifference at best, vindictiveness at worst. Afterwards, these will be contrasted with her role as a mother, demonstrating the lasting influence of the internalization of misogyny.

One of the recent comprehensive definitions of the mental wounds suffered in childhood caused by the emotional unavailability of mothers was put forward by psychologist and writer Bethany Webster in her successful work *Healing the Inner Mother* (2021). There, the author identifies four kinds of mother wound: personal, cultural, spiritual and planetary, of which the first two, personal and cultural, are employed in the analysis of the mother–daughter relationships tainted by internalized sexism present in *The Penelopiad*. In her own writing, the *personal* mother wound refers to a "set of internalized limiting beliefs and patterns that originate from the early dynamics with our mothers that causes problems in many areas of our adult lives, impacting how we see ourselves, one another, and our potential" (Webster 2021, 24). On the other hand, the *cultural* mother wound delineates "[t]he systemic devaluation of women in most aspects of patriarchal cultures, rooted in colonization, that has come to dominate much of the world, and the dysfunctional imbalance in the world as a result" (ibid). In her article on a popular and popularizing platform *Psychology Today*, American psychologist Sherry Gaba outlines the concept of the mother wound as "a deficit in the mother–daughter or mother–son relationships that is passed down through generations, and is a reflection on how we have experienced parenting and how we parent" (Gaba 2019). Among other issues, she identifies the general emotional aloofness and diminished attentiveness towards their offspring in mothers as one of the root causes of their children's struggle with mother wound. She asserts that adults who are dealing with a "mother wound" often look back on their childhood and can identify issues such as concerns about not being loved by their mother, difficulties in relating emotionally to the mother, and attempts to gain the mother' attention, acceptance and approval (Gaba 2019). The way in which these tendencies tend to manifest in the novella will be explored in the following.

In *The Penelopiad*, a novella taking place in Asphodel millennia after the end of the Trojan war, Atwood gives the central character of her story, Penelope, a voice to offer her own perspective on the events happening throughout Homer's *Odyssey*. Thus, Penelope, the proverbial angel of the house whose fierce loyalty to her long-absent

husband Odysseus earned her a highly esteemed position in the mythical narratives of Homer, takes the centre stage of the narrative, shifting the focus from the adventures experienced by her husband outside of the home to her very own struggles taking place inside it. Atwood paints a picture of a woman who possesses a deep resentment towards such a portrayal, since, as Penelope herself sees it, her very real and emotionally exhausting experience has simply been reduced and turned into "[a]n edifying legend. A stick used to beat other women with" (Atwood 2005, 2). However much she seems to protest this portrayal, she admits to her own failures, since every time she opens her mouth, she "sounds like an owl" (Atwood 2005, 3). Atwood's subversion of the *Odyssey* emphasizes the multifaceted aspect of any story, and "stresses the importance of myths as a medium which organizes individuals' behaviours and roles around it" (Korkmaz 2011, 31). The role ancient Greek mythology played in both shaping the coetaneous and the contemporary notions of gender has been proven to be significant, and its influence has taken root in the consciousness of both women and men, and resulted in ideals which, for a very long time, have been seen as the truth. Penelope's relations with multiple women in *The Penelopiad* serve as a starting point for the exploration of how the constant reminders of one's inferiority can result in the internalization of these notions, and how they can lead to her alienation from the other women, resulting in the absence of community.

Atwood's Penelope does not suffer from a lack of mother figures: varying from her own dryad mother, through Odysseus' mother Anticleia and his nurse Eurycleia, we discover a plethora of distinct women who played a directing role in her life; nonetheless, none of them can be described as maternal. Penelope's mother, who remains intentionally nameless throughout the novella, is a naiad, a being who in Greek mythology is a lesser goddess tied to a body of water. Penelope blames her mother's divine nature for her emotional unavailability and lack of empathy for her own very mortal struggles. Penelope had never experienced a warm maternal embrace, either literal or emotional. As she herself states: "My mother, like all Naiads, was beautiful, but *chilly at heart*. She had waving hair and dimples, and rippling laughter. *She was elusive*. When I was little I often tried to throw my arms around her, but she had a *habit of sliding away*. … she preferred swimming in the river to the care of small children, and *I often slipped her mind*" (Atwood 2005, 10–11, emphasis mine). The above perspective of the now adult – and long dead – Penelope provides us with a window into the soul of her own hurt inner child; painting a picture of a young girl whose emotional needs were not met, a girl-child who never knew her mother's love and kindness.

The two women do not seem to be able to connect on any level, they are separated both by the mortality of the daughter and the eternality of the mother, unable to connect

due to Penelope's mother's failure to fulfil the mother role and meet the societal expectations. One of the principal skills any respectable woman at the time had to acquire was weaving, since it represented a proof of her virtue. Penelope has been long deemed a prime example of the ingenuity and skill necessary to stall the suitors' attempts to marry her in Odysseus's absence: she tricked them into waiting until she had woven the shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes. What she deftly wove during the day she undid during the night. The importance of weaving is proven by the frequency of its depiction on objects from the era. By far the most recurrent image is of a mother and daughter weaving together, with the mother being responsible for teaching her daughters the intricacies of the skill (Reboreda Morillo 2018, 144), transmitting the ability to weave from one generation to the next. The notion is supported by written records as well: Reboreda Morillo mentions Xenophon's proclamation that learning about wool was the most meaningful task in the upbringing of young women (2018, 145). The fact that Penelope did not share this experience with her mother who, being a Naiad, could not herself have provided the necessary knowledge, emphasizes the depth of the personal tragedy she experienced. Not only has her mother failed to teach her the craft, she expressed her disdain for it: "she had no use at all for weaving and spinning. 'Too many knots. A spider's work. Leave it to Arachne,' she'd say" (Atwood 2005, 86). By comparing her work of passion to the woman transformed into a spider for her crime of besting the goddess Athena, she proclaims her contempt for the activity that is so important for her daughter's self-fulfilment. As a result, the two women never found common ground, and Penelope had to learn self-reliance from early on since she "could hardly count on family support" (Atwood 2005, 11). Thus, the "mother wound" she experiences as a result of her mother's emotional unavailability and disregard for her child's needs and interests, which were too aligned with stereotypical femininity, came to be.

Unfortunately, the cycle of disregard for Penelope's emotions and her need of self-actualization from her mother figures does not end after her departure from Sparta. After Odysseus wins Penelope's hand – and more importantly, her dowry – he takes both back to Ithaca. There, Penelope meets two women who could be described as mother-figures: her mother-in-law Anticleia, and Odysseus' nurse, a slave woman named Eurycleia. Both of them antagonize Penelope due to unresolved issues fuelled by internalized sexism. "My mother-in-law was circumspect. She was a prune-mouthed woman, and though she gave me a formal welcome I could tell she didn't approve of me. She kept saying that I was certainly very young" (Atwood 2005, 60). On top of the antagonism seemingly caused by the age difference between the two women, Anticleia refuses to provide the new queen with guidance regarding local customs, rendering Penelope's position at court vulnerable; instead, she "was content

to sit silently and say nothing while I made a fool of myself, a tight little smile on her face. She was happy that her adored son Odysseus pulled off such a coup … but I think she would have been better pleased if I'd died of seasickness on the way to Ithaca and Odysseus had arrived home with the bridal presents but no bride" (Atwood 2005, 62). Anticleia's cold approach to Penelope could be explained as jealousy. In her case, she seems to envy Penelope's youth and the spousal relationship she had with her son. The role of the mother, as was previously discussed, was the most highly valued female role in ancient Greek society – the loss of such a position by being 'replaced' by a younger woman who still possesses the ability to give life might have been the cause of Anticleia's feelings of antagonism.

In contrast to Penelope's absent birth mother, Anticleia and Eurycleia both seem to embody the archetype of the "dark mother," described by Jung as "anything secret, hidden, dark; the abyss, the world of the dead, anything that devours, seduces, and poisons, that is terrifying and inescapable like fate" (Jung 1969, 82). Traits of possessiveness, manipulation and control over their children (Mahmood 2024, 140) are typical of this behaviour, and Anticleia's fear of loss of control over her son leads her to openly antagonize the embodiment of the threat – Penelope herself. The wetnurse Eurycleia is another example of this possessive nature. At first, she attempts to take Penelope under her wing, acquainting her with the local customs, thus serving as a stand-in for Anticleia in a process that seems innocuous at first. However, her tendency to assume most of Penelope's responsibilities proves traumatizing and alienating to Penelope: "Nobody but she must give him his baths, oil his shoulders, prepare his breakfast, lock up his valuables, lay out his robes for him, and so forth. She left me with nothing to do, no little office I might perform for my husband, for if I tried to carry out any small wifely task she would be right there to tell me that wasn't how Odysseus liked things done" (Atwood 2005, 62–63). Eurycleia's care proves to be a thinly veiled attempt to maintain any semblance of control over her master, smothering Penelope's own attempts to find her place, resulting in further feelings of inadequacy. Eurycleia goes even so far as to scrutinize Penelope's weaving, a skill which had already alienated her from her own mother: "too light, too heavy, too sturdy, too flimsy. 'It will do well enough for a steward,' she would say, 'but surely not for Odysseus'" (Atwood 2005, 63). The quality of her weaving serves as a metaphor for Penelope herself: she is never deemed a good enough match for the idealized king of Ithaca. Even when she is to become a mother herself, Eurycleia feels bound to remark that "'We will have to fatten you up,' she would say, 'so you can have a nice big son for Odysseus! That's your job, just leave everything else to me.'" (Atwood 2005, 63). This way, she strips Penelope of any form of agency in her own motherhood, apart from the pregnancy and childbirth themselves.

This "kindness" results in Penelope's isolation and inability to fulfil her role as a wife and mother, thus rendering her worthless according to the societal standards of the day. Anytime she attempts to gain agency and fulfil her role, Eurycleia impedes her: "'You are barely more than a child yourself,' she would say, snatching my baby out of my arms. 'Here, I will tend the little darling for a while. You run along and enjoy yourself.' But I did not know how to do that" (Atwood 2005, 72). The little authority she could have in the household as a mother of the heir to the throne was barred by Eurycleia's good intentions. In fact, with the two women – Anticleia and Eurycleia – "running all domestic matters and making household decisions" (Atwood 2005, 71) Penelope is left without purpose and aim. Only through her mother-in-law's passing, and Eurycleia's failure to attend to all the needs at the court after Odysseus's departure, does Penelope emerges as the matriarch of her own house.

Ultimately, Penelope discovers a way to gain some semblance of power: by choosing to rear and raise a dozen female slave children. As demonstrated earlier, the protagonist did not have any positive maternal figure in any part of her formative years, and this lack, along with the social difference between the queen and the slaves, paved way for the ultimately destructive end of her so-called daughters. The Twelve Maids represent the other focal point of the novella, and it is through them that we are allowed to explore Penelope in the role of a mother to daughters. Unlike Penelope, they do not present their own version individualistically, but as a group, "nameless and faceless", creating a "collective linguistic effect, bearing the words of others and their story endlessly circulated" (Dimock 2015, 323). Despite the fact that the Maids occupy a significant portion of the novella, they continue to be pushed to the margins, their remarks reduced to oppositions to and comments on both the original narrative of the *Odyssey* and the story woven by the protagonist of *The Penelopiad*. Their inferior position is reinforced by the attitude of their mother figure, Penelope herself. As Visel puts it, "[a]lthough she too is oppressed by white men and patriarchal structures, she shares in the power and guilt" (1988, 39) of those who have been silencing women. According to Suzuki, Atwood's choice to provide both sides of the mother/daughter coin with a narrative voice "foregrounds hierarchies of class as well as gender" (2007, 275). While Penelope's status allows her a certain level of agency due to her privilege as a member of the aristocracy, despite being a woman, the cards are stacked against the Maids on both fronts.

Penelope's possessive and haughty attitude towards her slave wards serves as a reflection of her very own internalized sexist and classist patriarchal views, as well as a perpetuation of her own suffering. From the very beginning, she regards the Maids as mere property: "The male slaves were not supposed to sleep with the female ones, not without permission. This could be a tricky issue. They sometimes fell in love … But

if a pretty child was born of these couplings, I would often keep it and rear it myself, teaching it to be a refined and pleasant servant" (Atwood 2005, 87–88). With her typical tongue-in-cheek humour, Atwood makes the Maids address the issue themselves, claiming: "You don't have to think of us as real girls, real flesh and blood, real pain, real injustice. That might be too upsetting. Just discard the sordid part. Consider us pure symbol" (2005, 168). If viewed as mere objects or tools employed to accomplish her goals, Penelope's attitude towards women about whom she claims to feel as if they were her own daughters (Atwood 2005, 180) seems to stem from her own feeling of inadequacy and powerlessness. In order to feel empowered, she employs her "daughters" as pawns; she describes her Maids as women with "lovely voices, all of them, and they had been taught well how to use them. They were my most trusted eyes and ears in the palace" (Atwood 2005, 113–14). In her attempt to protect Odysseus's household from the cohort of suitors, Penelope orders her "twelve young maids – the loveliest, the most beguiling – to hang around the suitors and spy on them, using whatever enticing arts they could invent" (Atwood 2005, 115). Despite the fact that the queen is aware of the young women's vulnerability due to their social status, and contrary to her claims regarding the realness of her affection for them, she employs them as tools for her own protection. It comes as no surprise that, as a result of their forced closeness with the greedy suitors, "several of the girls were unfortunately raped, others were seduced, or were hard pressed and decided that it was better to give in than resist" (Atwood 2005, 116). Their social status makes the Maids much more vulnerable to the violence which Penelope never attempts to stop, sacrificing their own well-being in order to protect herself. Atwood is thus representing the Maids as sacrificial victims and surrogates for her protagonist (Suzuki 2007, 274).

Penelope accepts this reality matter-of-factly, as the (ab)use of the host's servants was deemed a normalized practice, though not without the permission of the master of the house: "They were like daughters that I never had (*Starts to weep*.) I felt so sorry for them! But most maids got raped, sooner or later; a deplorable but common feature of palace life. It wasn't the fact of their being raped that told against them, in the mind of Odysseus. It's that they were raped without permission" (Atwood 2005, 181). More than a great transgression of the bodily autonomy of her "daughters", she views the rape of the Maids as an affront to her husband, and, by proxy, to herself. Since she is well aware of the source of her power, borrowed for the duration of her husband's absence, she is unable to empathize with the Maids, going as far as to purposefully put them in the harm's way in order to protect herself, thus perpetuating abuse and the cycle of emotional unavailability from mother to daughter(s). Chute argues that trauma

can be viewed as repetition (2010, 182), a vicious circle of unhealed wounds and cycles of abuse: in the case of Penelope, hurt simply switched sides.

The ultimate display of her disregard for the Maids' wellbeing is the absence of any reaction to their brutal murder at the hands of her own son, Telemachos. Once Odysseus returns, slays the suitors and learns about their rape of the slave women, he orders them to be hanged, since their crime of being abused was viewed as an affront to the patriarch of the house. Penelope does not defend her so-called daughters: "What could I do? Lamentation wouldn't bring my lovely girls back to life. I bit my tongue. It's a wonder I had any tongue left, so frequently had I bitten it over the years. Dead is dead, I told myself" (Atwood 2005, 160). Once the usefulness of the twelve slaves runs its course, she discards them, protecting herself at the expense of other, more vulnerable and less privileged, women. As she herself claims, "happy endings are best achieved by keeping the right doors locked and going to sleep during rampages" (Atwood 2005, 3). Which is what she did, thanks to a sleeping potion administered by her own mother figure, Eurycleia, who harboured a deep resentment towards the twelve young maids, slandering them as "notorious whores" and, in the end, helping to facilitate their murder in order to "retain her inside position with Odysseus" (Atwood 2005, 169). Thus, the queen of Ithaca is not the only maternal figure willing to sacrifice the wellbeing of her "daughters" to secure her own position in the hierarchical system of patriarchy whose values she has internalized. Penelope seems to be acting from pain caused by her own mother wound, this time both cultural and personal. Drawing on Webster's (2021) theory, Penelope is exhibiting a disdain for her self-proclaimed daughters due to both the internalized sexism of society as a whole, and because of her disillusionment with her own mother figures.

Atwood manages to portray female antagonism in a multi-layered prism, skilfully employing the archetypal notions of femininity to lift the curtain covering the ideology hiding behind the mythical narrative (Levická 2022, 72). *The Penelopiad* serves as a quite critical representation of motherhood, driven by internalized sexism and misogyny. These feelings of vindictiveness towards the younger and more vulnerable daughter figures result in the perpetuation of the patriarchal and hierarchical notions of womanhood, of which Penelope is the best example: a child formerly neglected by her own mother, who is later denied her role of mother by another woman and, as a result, fails to protect other women from the patriarchal norms she herself internalized in the process. In the arduous journey towards self-actualization and empowerment, the previously unheard and unseen daughter who felt like she was never good enough seeks any semblance of power through further subjugation of other women whom she labels as her own daughters. In her failure to acknowledge her own complicity in perpetuating the cycle of abuse from mother to daughter under patriarchy, Atwood echoes the words

of Germaine Greer: "our mothers blackmailed us with self-sacrifice" (1971, 175). Except, in the case of Atwood's Penelope, the sacrifice is of her daughters' lives as a representation of her own innocence, youth and fertility she herself places on the altar of patriarchy. Her inability to understand her own shortcomings and blame in regards to her daughter figures, whom she blames for chasing Odysseus away from Hades, paints a picture of a woman who would rather keep the victims silent than acknowledge her own share of blame. In doing so, she represses not only her guilt, but also her role as a mother and a woman.

At the same time, the interplay between Penelope and the slave girls transforms their original subjugation to forms of resistance (Keck 2024, 7). Atwood forces the readership to confront internalized issues, making us sensitive to the proliferation of sexual ideologies, to the significance of who is deploying them – and to what political effect – even as it breeds a healthy self-scepticism born of an awareness of our own inexorable embeddedness in history (Gubar 1994, 469). Atwood's protagonist presents two of Webster's (2021) four mother wounds: the personal and the cultural, where the first one causes her deeply-insecure self-image, while the other leaves her unable to relate to the suffering of other women due to the cultural and social notions deeply imbedded in her own psyche. The fact that the raising of daughters was a little explored topic for Homer created space to delve deep into it in contemporary mythical rewritings. And Atwood's trip into the depths of the wounded psyches of both daughters and destructive mothers challenges the chances of female community, shedding light on the deeply ingrained issue of internalizing patriarchal notions. Alternatively, the reason for the examination of the mother wound is due to the impossibility of suturing it, for "there is no indifference or cruelty we can tolerate less than the indifference or cruelty of our mothers" (Rich 1995, 231). And there are no daughters less forgiving than "the ones you killed" (Atwood 2005, 5).

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# 8.

# How We (Can) Remember Medieval Women in Biofiction: The Case of Victoria MacKenzie's *For Thy Great Pain Have Mercy on My Little Pain*

*Nóra Séllei*

"The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there."
(L.P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*)

"'The Victorians,' Mrs. Swithin mused. 'I don't believe,' she said with her odd little smile, 'that there ever were such people. Only you and me and William dressed differently'."
(Virginia Woolf, *Between the Acts*)

A tribute volume, like the current one, is inevitably a gesture of remembering, of re-membering (re-integrating into the community), of evoking the memory of the painfully deceased, in this case Kathleen E. Dubs, who was my professional predecessor. Professional-academic remembering means creating a meaningful bridge between the remembered one and the one doing the remembering. Knowing Kathleen E. Dubs's research areas and professional interests – the Middle Ages, Tolkien and fantasy literature, early American literature, and teaching writing – at first sight does not seem to provide ample grounds for establishing a solid basis for a bridge between us, with me focusing professionally on the literature by women writers from the late 18th century to the present. How can I, thus, do my part in remembering Kathleen, how can I reach out to her academically? In spite of these disciplinary distances, perhaps I can still remember her by asking the very same question: how we remember, and how we can remember – both Kathleen E. Dubs, her perhaps primary literary period, the Middle Ages, and the people in the Middle Ages. Or more specifically, incorporating myself and my own research areas into this act of remembering, I can ask the question: how we remember – or how we *can* remember – medieval women of whose lives so little is known, and whose world seems to have cultural codes so difficult to decipher for us, 20th–21st-century scholars – or lay readers, so our engagement with the medieval past

may equal the experience of visiting a foreign country, like in the opening sentence to L.P. Hartley's novel *The Go-Between* in one of the epigraphs (Hartley 1954, 1).

But how "foreign" is that country? What is "foreign" about it, and to what extent? Can we inhabit it? Can we make it homely and familiar or does it resist appropriation? Or shall we identify with Virginia Woolf's character in the other epigraph, Mrs. Swithin, who can only see the clothes as the distinguishing marks between herself and the Victorians (Woolf 1992b, 104)? Mrs. Swithin, however, looks back on the Victorians from the distance of about half a century, or at the most one century (*Between the Acts* supposedly takes place in June 1939). Can we extend Mrs. Swithin's position to the Middle Ages? Can we replace the "Victorians" with people from any past age? Are they as accessible as the Victorians? Or are they culturally as indecipherable as a foreign country? And is time – the past as time – the only difficulty? Do these spaces – and the people living in them – unproblematically offer themselves for revisitation, remembering, re-membering and evocation?

In *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf's speaker famously reminds her fictitious woman writer, Mary Carmichael, of another problem: the lack of clarity of the life stories of women, yet she posits an almost ethical imperative that "[a]ll these infinitely obscure lives remain to be recorded" (Woolf 1992a, 116), and further elaborates that she

> went on in thought through the streets of London feeling in imagination the pressure of dumbness, *the accumulation of unrecorded life*, whether from the women at the street corners with their arms akimbo, and the rings embedded in their fat swollen fingers, talking with a gesticulation like the swing of Shakespeare's words; or from the violet-sellers and match-sellers and old crones stationed under doorways; or from drifting girls whose faces, like waves in sun and cloud, signal the coming of men and women and the flickering lights of shop windows. *All that you will have to explore*, [she] said to Mary Carmichael, holding your torch firm in your hand.
>
> (Woolf 1992a, 117 – emphases added)

Woolf's speaker here calls on Mary Carmichael to record the lives of the mostly even unnamed, average women, whose lives are utterly subsumed in the routine of the everyday, and, as such, go unnoticed and unremembered: "[f]or all the dinners are cooked; the plates and cups washed; the children sent to school and gone out into the world. Nothing remains of it all. All has vanished. No biography or history has a word to say about it. And the novels, without meaning to, inevitably lie" (Woolf 1992a, 116).

In Woolf's writings, however, the issue of the obscurity of lives appears at another level too: in the case of creative and scientific women whose life and works are close to sinking into oblivion. In a shorter essay, "The Lives of the Obscure", she asks the imaginary librarian to help her dust the books – and thus also lives – of intellectual women like the Taylor sisters (writers of children's poetry), Maria Edgeworth (novelist), Laetitia Pilkington (poet and memoir writer) and Eleanor Anne Ormerod (19th-century entomologist), who in 1925 (at the time when the volume of essays *The Common Reader* appeared) were as good as forgotten. Because of their achievements, they are obviously different from the average woman, yet, as the essay puts it metaphorically, to be able to say anything about them, they – and their books – must be as good as unearthed from their graves: "Their backs are flaking off; their titles often vanished. Why disturb their sleep? Why re-open those peaceful graves, the librarian seems to ask, peering over his spectacles, and resenting the duty, which indeed has become laborious, of retrieving from among those nameless tombstones Nos. 1763, 1080, and 606" (Woolf 1953, 109). The metaphors of the sentence: books with flaking backs, the library as a peaceful grave – at another point as a "faded, out-of-date, obsolete library" (Woolf 1953, 109) – and, for an assistant in the labour of digging, an unwilling, resentful, bespectacled librarian, all suggest the close-to-impossible effort of resuscitating the lives of even the less obscure from past ages, particularly, in the case of women, due to the lack of sufficient sources and almost complete oblivion.

This laborious effort of evoking the past, of re-membering dissembled, fragmentary, obscure lives and of reimagining ages gone by is a major tendency in contemporary fiction, massively tangible from the late 1960s on, perhaps triggered by John Fowles' postmodern Victorian pastiche, *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (1987), and since then the imaginative re-creation of various past ages has been in vogue. Perhaps not by chance (proving that Mrs. Swithin is right?), the trend – and not only in Fowles' novel – started off with the Victorian period, creating terms like Neo-Victorian fiction and Neo-Victorianism, and perhaps even now going back to the Victorian period is the most productive and most widely read, most popular form of engagement with the past, taking various forms and attributes. Some Neo-Victorian novels, partly through their postmodern, self-reflexive narrative technique, create a consciously critical sense of historicity while maintaining a persistent connection to the present, implying that the Victorians are us, or, paraphrasing Jan Kott's classic, making the Victorians our contemporaries (Kott 1974). The Victorians, in this sense, differ from us only in their clothes: the Victorian age can be seen as the period when several forms of modernity, including our modern lifestyle, most directly emerged (and this is not disregarding all the historical processes that started off in the Early Modern period).

While the prevalence of Neo-Victorian fiction has never declined, novels reaching back to the past started to embrace other periods in fiction: the Edwardian period, World War I, World War II, the interwar period, and also previous ages, such as the 18th and 17th centuries, and even the Renaissance, producing a great variety of "neo-novels" or neo-historical novels (just to mention two recent biographical novels from the Renaissance period by Maggie O'Farrell, *Hamnet* on Anne Hathaway (O'Farrell 2020), Shakespeare's wife, and *The Marriage Portrait* on Lucrezia de' Medici, Duchess of Ferrara (O'Farrell 2022)). Seeing this process, it was only a question of time before fiction also reached back to evoke the Middle Ages – Kathleen E. Dubs's research area – from a contemporary perspective (incidentally providing me, partly a scholar of contemporary fiction, with a bridge to reach out to the medieval). All these novels – while usually focusing on fictitious characters – creatively combine the factual and the fictitious by presenting a well-researched "pastness of the past", while at the same time creating an imaginative fictitious narrative that frames the past from a contemporary perspective, and as such, can be seen as self-conscious (re-)discoveries, (re-)interpretations and (re-)visions of the past.

Particularly from the 2000s on, a new sub-trend emerged in reinterpreting the past: biographical fiction or biofiction, which focuses on a historical figure for a protagonist as a factual element, but following Lytton Strachey's re-readings of famous historical figures from the Victorian and Elizabethan age (like Florence Nightingale, Cardinal Manning, Thomas Arnold, General Gordon or Queen Elizabeth and the Earl of Essex – Strachey 1985; 1990), contemporary biofiction usually has a stake of reinventing these lives. While doing so, biofiction, by definition, perfectly and consciously subscribes to the postmodern uncertainty considering the ever less clear boundaries between fact and fiction. In David Lodge's definition, biofiction "takes a real person and their real history as the subject matter for imaginative exploration, using the novel's techniques for representing subjectivity rather than the objective, evidence-based discourse of biography" (cited by Lackey 2016, 3). Thus, biofiction, similarly to general neo-historical novels, provides a space for combining the factual and the fictitious, the objective and the subjective, the truthful and the imaginary. This seems a perfect combination for (re-)creating the lives of the Woolfian "obscure", in whose case even the minimally factual may be absent, or difficult to access: the genre not only allows and justifies the function of imagination, but even makes it the dominant element. As Michael Lackey argues, novelists of biofiction "do not pretend to give readers unadulterated historical or biographical truth". Instead, "novelistic biographies, what we refer to as biographical novels, are irredeemable aesthetic forms, because the authors misrepresent biography and therewith history" (Lackey 2019, 7, 6).

Lackey, a major scholar of biofiction, consistently argues for the nonfactual aspect of biofiction, claiming that "[b]iographical novelists use rather than do history" (Lackey 2019, 15) – and, let us add, historical figures as well. In contrast, Maggie Gee, herself a writer of biofiction (like *Virginia Woolf in Manhattan* – Gee 2014) articulates her unease (as summarised by Bethany Layne) at "the tensions between biofiction's reinventions and the impenetrable aspects of the subject's unique life" (Layne 2020, 3), which indicates that authors are aware of the inevitable fictitiousness of biographical novels. Biofiction, no matter how apparently truthful and well-researched, does feature a large degree of invention and the imaginary, which, in turn, may cause some discomfort for the authors of biofiction, even if they subscribe to the genre consciously. This unease and discomfort may be also caused by how readers relate to biofiction: they are more likely to take biofiction as true of – to go back to Layne's words – the impenetrable aspects of the subject's life. Put differently, readers may be more likely to read biofiction as a truthful representation of a subject's life, which, in turn, imposes an ethical responsibility on the author of biofiction, even in cases when a biographical novel is so obviously fictitious that it imaginatively takes Virginia Woolf into 21st-century New York and Istanbul, as Maggie Gee's text does. But as the author's comment implies, even a novel like this can be expected to reflect some in-depth truth of the subject.

The biographical novel – or biofiction – thus balances between verifiable facts and the imaginative reinvention of the past, and struggles with the issue of how to recreate the past. In this respect, however, autobiographical theories may give some relief for biofiction authors. Whereas autobiography is usually seen as the most taken-for-granted discourse of truth production for one's self, and as such the most truthful genre possible, theorists of autobiography argue for the inevitable fictionality of any autobiography. The reasons are multiple, but to focus on the most significant ones: in any autobiography one can distinguish three autobiographical "I"s: the author, the narrating I, and the narrated I (in various stages of their life); in addition, autobiography is greatly impacted by what is remembered, and also by the reasons for which an autobiography is written. Furthermore, considering how an autobiography is structured from the perspective of the narrative (what is the starting point of the narrative, how are the "plot" elements arranged, how is time treated, how is causality created, etc.) it is clear that depending on the narrative structure, an infinite number of plots can be created from "the same" material (Séllei 2001, 13–27). One can argue that the same applies to writers of biographies too: it is not only the discovery of new biographical materials that inspire a new biography of the same biographical subject but also a new, different "take" on a life story.

The awareness of this volatility of autobiographies and biographies can be a liberating idea for writers of biofiction as well, all the more so as – to go back to Woolf and the obscure lives – in many cases there are not enough accessible sources to rely on, but despite that (or perhaps because of it), figures from the past can appeal to writers' imaginations, and can inspire them to re-invent – or in some cases simply invent – most of their lives. Undeniably, as a central element, biofiction assumes the existence of a historical figure in the past, and in this sense there are always some elements of truth in biofiction. Just as inevitably, however, even in the case of well-documented biofictional subjects, invention and fictitiousness deriving from narrativity are integral parts of biofiction, just as much as historical factuality. In this way, biofiction combines scholarly research with both entertainment and education – and perhaps also blurs the boundaries between high and popular culture. Accordingly, readers turn to biofiction both to gain some "truth" about its subject and for the enjoyment of an imaginative narrative.

A further question concerns why writers turn to a figure of the past, what relevance they may bear for the contemporary readers, and what stakes are at play in re-locating them in the current discourse on history and subjectivity. Apart from the claims above that biofiction combines historicity and fictionality in the process of re-creating the subject, if a biographical novel aims to appeal to a contemporary audience, it seems a feasible strategy to approach the subject from perspectives that are relevant to contemporary readers. A such, while focusing on figures even from several centuries ago and exploring why they were significant in their own cultures, these texts may address issues that concern us contemporary readers just as much as (or perhaps even more than) the age when these biofictional characters actually lived. In this sense, biofictional texts do not only balance between the factual and the imaginative, but also between recreating the past and exploring it with contemporary stakes. The result is a vision of the past as re-created, re-invented, and re-imagined by the author with their own contemporary stakes, concerns, perspectives and approaches.

In the case of female biofictional subjects, how their gender functioned and was constructed in that particular historical age is a key question. Biofiction – due to the features analysed above – can have alternative takes on life narratives, and can freely explore how a female figure was not only constrained, but how she also challenged or played with her own contemporary gender norms in a historical context to create her agency, which does not mean disregarding the socio-cultural specificities of the age concerned. As succinctly summed up by the editors of a volume on early modern European women, "modern creators of biography and biofiction about women face cultural challenges in exploding stereotypes, while celebrating early modern women creators

who forged their own opportunities for materialising authorship, performing gender, and authoring identity" (Fitzmaurice et al. 2021, 19).

The relative lack or inaccessibility of biographical-factual materials about women's obscure lives, paradoxically, may even be an advantage: the fewer facts, the greater the space for imagination, for contemporary interventions, for new ways of seeing, and for interrogating history from a gendered contemporary perspective. This accords with Lackey's argument: "[t]he contemporary ethos always inflects the representation of a particular life" (Lackey 2020, 274). As a result, the impact of biofiction is always necessarily about the past and the contemporary age alike. To paraphrase and turn Lackey's rhetorical questions into statements, the value of biofiction is that it can be used "to advance knowledge and understanding of history, women, humans and life", and, specifically, "fictional texts about the lives of early modern women contribute to the scholarly record and knowledge about contemporary culture" (Lackey 2020, 272).

The issues, ambivalences, (im)balances and complexities of biofiction outlined above are multiply present in the case of medieval women, like Julian of Norwich, also known as Dame of St. Julian of Norwich (1343–after 1416), and Margery Kempe (c. 1373–after 1438), the two protagonists of Victoria MacKenzie's novel *For Thy Great Pain Have Mercy on My Little Pain*. As stated in her accounts about the making of the novel, MacKenzie felt enticed to write Julian of Norwich's story primarily because of her several-year long fascination with "the anchoress experience". She wanted to explore what it meant to restrict one's life to a single room, which she saw as a counterpoint to the contemporary liberated lifestyle. In 2020, however, when she started writing her novel, it turned into an experience that resonated with the COVID restrictions: "[l]ockdown seemed the perfect time to write about a woman who lived in a single room for over thirty years," and while doing research on the anchoress, she came across Margery Kempe (MacKenzie 2023b, 11.26–15.30, MacKenzie 2023c).

Both Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe were religious mystics, but neither of them made it to sainthood, though a dominant way of accessing their lives historically is through their religious convictions and mysticism, including how they are present in their own contemporary religious discourse and that of their posterity. This framing of their lives and visions causes problems, because – as Catherine M. Mooney argues – the difference between "female self-representations and male representations of sanctity" is crucial because one must "distinguish the voices and points of view of saints […] from those of their interpreters" (Mooney 1999, 1). She also raises the issue as "to what extent portrayals of sanctity are influenced not so much by gender as by genre" (Mooney 1999, 2), referring to the generic conventions – and thus constraints – and, more importantly, religious-conceptual interpretations of the hagiographic tradition

within which a certain relatively set rhetoric and a masculine perspective prevail. As she argues, "male-authored depictions of holy women, however sincerely intentioned, are likely to reveal far more about men's idealized notions of female sanctity and its embodiment in women's lives than they reveal about the female saints themselves" (Mooney 1999, 3), even if, as Tamás Karáth points out, within each specific religious genre, there is a surprisingly wide variety (Karáth 2020, 183), and even if for women in the Middle Ages religious visions were a form of self-expression.

Although Mooney's arguments above pertain to female saints, and neither Julian of Norwich nor Margery Kempe is canonised as a saint, as major mystics in medieval England they were also framed within the rhetorical tradition that reflects a religious disciplinary attitude the moment there were doubts about their non-compliance with religious orthodoxy. Margery Kempe's mysticism, for example, was often seen as heresy, and in some cases she was publicly exposed and chastised by preachers (Karáth 2020, 189). These two medieval mystics, however, also have their own voice and agency, as both of them are authors. Julian of Norwich was literate (rather rare among women in the 14th and early 15th century), and is the author of the first book in English written by a woman: *Revelations of Divine Love*, or as also known, *The Shewings of Divine Love*, and this is the only surviving text written by an anchoress. Julian of Norwich was a woman whose name is unknown: the name we know her by is given to her based on where she lived several decades of her life: walled into a small cell attached to St. Julian Church of Norwich, where she moved as an anchoress after a serious illness during which she had mystical visions: sixteen revelations. Her text, as explained by Karáth, is one of the very few mystical-spiritual diaries from the Middle Ages. It has two versions: the shorter one was most probably noted down after her illness of 1373, while the longer one is supposed to be the result of her contemplations on those "shewings" (meaning showings, visions, revelations) as an anchoress. The shorter version survived in a single manuscript, while the longer version, although its original was lost, survived in three 17th-century copies and in two further fragments (Karáth 2020, 202–203), and the longer version was first published in 1670.

Margery Kempe, in turn, is the first female autobiographer, even though she was illiterate: in her sixties, she dictated her autobiography first to her son, John, then to a priest, who also corrected the parts dictated to John because John lived for a long time abroad, and his writing skills in English were less developed (MacKenzie 2023a, 159). From the perspective of the narration, an interesting point is that the two scribes, as Karáth points out, present the autobiographical subject in the third-person singular, from their perspective. It is only at a later point in the text that, perhaps due to an oversight by the scribe-editor, there is an exceptional, and probably accidental switch to the

first-person singular (Karáth 2020, 203), i.e., to what we see today as "proper" autobiographical narration. In addition, the Kempe scholarship abounds in wide-ranging and contradictory theories as to the identity of the original and the later scribes (the ones who copied the original manuscript) and also as to their formative contribution to the final shape and wording of the text of the *Book* as it has been passed down to posterity (Bale 2017, 175–76). This, of course, raises questions concerning the extent to which we can really read Margery Kempe's text in her *Book of Margery Kempe*, yet, undeniably, this is a text considered her own autobiography, which was found in a single copy in 1934. As Victoria MacKenzie recalls, it was discovered in a country house, as when someone was looking for ping-pong balls it fell out of a cupboard (MacKenzie 2023a, 160), and was first published in 1940.

Comparing the two women's texts, one can discover a crucial difference from the perspective of biofiction and the issue of facts: while Julian of Norwich's *Revelations* (both the shorter and the longer versions) focus on her "shewings", i.e., her mystical visions, Margery Kempe's *Book*, in addition to her own visions, includes more personal details that can be used as a source for biography, including, obviously, biofiction. No matter how personal the origins of Julian of Norwich's *Revelations* are – she had her "shewings" in her severe illness, when she thought she would die – her text includes her mystical visions only, even if, as Karáth notes, presented sometimes in surprising images while alternating various attitudes, like devotion, ecstasy, direct response to the visionary experience and meditations (Karáth 2020, 202–203). In contrast, from Margery Kempe's *Book*, one can get a rather broad picture of contemporary society, including details on the specificities of women's lives both in their families and in the wider social and religious-devotional context, which provided a relatively stable basis of "facts" for the Kempe line in MacKenzie's double biofiction.

The question is what Victoria MacKenzie makes of these two women's lives, whether she treats them as if from a "foreign country" or as "our contemporaries", what her take is on this more than 700-year-old joint narrative, how MacKenzie can make these two women's life stories speak to us, 21st-century readers, what the stakes are of re-telling, re-imagining and to a great extent – due to the lack of data of Julian of Norwich's personal life – inventing this story, and, finally, how these two stories are narrated to make them appeal to contemporary readers.

MacKenzie chooses a moment that can be seen as the culmination of the joint story of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe: the narrative is placed in 1413, when Margery Kempe went to visit Julian of Norwich, by then already an anchoress and famous spiritual adviser, a meeting documented in Chapter 18 of Kempe's *Book*, describing it in terms of edifying, spiritual conversation, and sisterly communion that

"they enjoyed for 'many days'" (Bale 2017, 183). The text uses a double, alternating first-person narration, providing both female characters with an – at least fictive – agency: they have a voice of their own in this biographical novel. The text has a structure that resonates with some medieval modes of discourse: while the prologue goes back to ancient Greek drama, it was also an integral part of medieval mystery and miracle plays, thus creating an implied link to contemporary stage traditions, and also giving the impression that these two lives are staged, like two alternating monodramas which, however, are closely interlinked, and not only because of their historic meeting. The novel rhetorically concludes similarly: it has an epilogue, which is culturally an effective solution because it was customary in the 15th century to conclude texts with an epilogue. MacKenzie's closure sums up the lives of these two women after their meeting (which in Julian of Norwich's case was just a few years, and in Margery Kempe's case about two and a half decades), and also the history of their books, in this way framing the text in the factual data of the lives of these two women and their writings, while the body of the narrative is the fictive re-imagination of their interlocking, sometimes parallel, sometimes deviating stories.

The "Prologue" is presented in Margery Kempe's voice, on her arrival at Norwich. This short, less than one-page-long text has a rhetorical frame of its own, expressing Kempe's fundamental fears and her spiritual doubts, and opens with the words "I fear that my neighbours are right, that it is the devil inside me, making me think that I see Christ" (MacKenzie 2023a, n. p.), and concluding with "[b]ut this is my last hope. The devil won't have my soul. The anchoress will surely help me" (MacKenzie 2023a, n. p.). As the reader will later know (and is also known from her *Book*), Kempe was several times accused of heresy, and her visions – partly due to the fact that she accompanied them with what was seen as improper body movements – were considered as the devil's making, so instead of considering her highly spiritual, in direct connection with Christ, she was seen as possessed by the devil. The rhetorical framing of the "Prologue" articulates this deepest fear of hers, and her own spiritual doubts that her accusers may be right, while it closes on notes on hope – the last hope – that the anchoress, i.e., Julian of Norwich, will help her. This rhetorical framework enacts the scenario of redemption: it is as if Kempe expected Julian of Norwich to be her redeemer, granting her salvation from her own personal, earthly purgatory, and as such, the "Prologue" reflects on the title of the novel, taken from Julian of Norwich's *Revelations*, which is also about the possibility of redemption by Christ's crucifixion (*For Thy Great Pain Have Mercy on My Little Pain*). The opening and closing sentences of the "Prologue" outline a potential earthly redemption narrative but frame a series of ultra-secular scenes of blasphemy. A man is described in the street of Norwich as putting a live mouse in his mouth as

if taking – and parodying – the holy communion, symbolically Christ's body – while Margery undergoes experiences of humiliation – being called a strumpet in the street of Norwich – of discomfort – a filthy bed in the inn – and of a lack of homeliness: "[f]irst time in many years I wish I was home with my children" (MacKenzie 2023a, n. p.). All these details can be read as elements of the contemporary social context, in which and against which Margery Kempe, a lay woman, lays claim to having direct connections to Christ, and has to prove her true devotionality and the truth of her visions, almost against all odds. In this sense, the "Prologue" can be interpreted as the *mise-en-abyme* of the whole novel, and not only in terms of the Kempe line, but also that of Julian of Norwich, whose acceptance by the church authorities could not be taken for granted either due to her unorthodox theological ideas.

The novel is further structured into three parts: "The Shewings", "The Meetings" (Day I and Day II), and "The Books", of which the first part is the longest, presenting how these two women made it to this very time and space, in 1413 in Norwich, outlining both their personal lives and their mystical visions, and in their cases these two are fundamentally indivisible: their visions derive from their personal lives, and their personal lives are subsumed in these visions. The double, alternating narratives of the two women are formally separated and the actual speaker is always indicated: their names (Julian, Margery) appear at the opening of each new section. An intriguing aspect of the narrative arrangement is that the two narratives neither run in parallel with each other, nor do they have the same narrative sequence. They have different points of origin: while in the case of Julian of Norwich the narration starts off with her childhood and family, the Margery Kempe line opens with her giving birth to her first child, which is, at the same time, her first experience of Christ visiting her, and in this sense it can be seen as her own birth as a spiritual woman, as a mystic. This narrative opening may suggest a difference between their personalities: Julian of Norwich is presented as a more serene, contemplative woman who is more resigned to her fate, and handles her mystical visions in a more contained way. Margery Kempe, by contrast, is presented – in her own *Book* as well – as someone who falls into ecstatic states very easily, and is best known for her unstoppable and rather loud weeping and sobbing in her moments of spirituality, even disturbing the audiences at churches, at public preachings or on pilgrimages: in her case the spiritual and the bodily are utterly inseparable.

The opening of Julian of Norwich's section, in spite of her apparently comfortable, well-to-do childhood, is also related to her visions, even if only indirectly, because it starts off by noting that when she was seven "the great pestilence came to [their] city", i.e., the Black Death, the bubonic plague that devastated Europe between 1346 and 1353 (thus, considering her year of birth, her narrative starts off in 1350). The con-

trast between their lifestyle and the devastating Black Death is imagined succinctly: "We were rich, this had always been clear to me. We ate well and our house had many rooms. My clothes were made from Flanders linen, and my mother had a garden just for flowers. Just for beauty. Imagine. But we still died": her father, brother, sister and nurse fell victim to the epidemic (MacKenzie 2023a, 3–4) – an experience echoed by the COVID pandemic that raged while MacKenzie was writing the novel. This opening, apart from being an instance of *memento mori*, a common reflection in the medieval times, creates a connection to *her* spiritual rebirth as well, because she has her revelations while very ill, almost dying. At this point, the connection is not made, because illness, physical suffering, and death or almost death seem to be present in the opening of both narrative lines. What is more, the spiritual birth of both women is inscribed in the narrative of bodily suffering: illness and excessive labour pains.

In Julian's case, not having data about her life (as indicated above: not even her real name is known), MacKenzie invented – had to invent – a complete life story that both converges with and diverges from that of Margery Kempe. The common point is that – according to this partly fictive narrative – both come from relatively well-to-do families, which is a known fact in the case of Margery, who came from a family of the local elite (Karáth 2020, 203), but to create this background for Julian of Norwich was also inevitable, otherwise her literacy would be close to impossible to explain. According to the imagined life story, after the death of her family members in the pestilence, she lives with her mother, then as a teenager she falls in love with her future husband, who teaches her to write. Their marriage is presented – perhaps as a counterpoint to Margery Kempe's marriage – as a loving, harmonious relationship, but her husband, too, passes away in the epidemic, as does their child, and she goes on to live with her mother in shared widowhood. At the age of thirty she falls ill, she has a serious "sweating", and is even given the last unction, but – while having her visions – she comes back to life. Even before becoming an anchoress in the walled-up cell attached to St Julian Church of Norwich (a possible, but not the only possible reason why she is called Julian), her mind is intensively engaged with these fifteen plus one, altogether sixteen "shewings".

Living as an anchoress in the cell, not having any connection to the outside world except a maid taking care of her physical needs, and only talking to visitors (without seeing them) who come to ask for advice, obviously does not provide much plot for a narrative. Victoria MacKenzie, however, makes up ingenuous and moving parts focusing on her internal life: not only on her meditations on her revelations, but also how she experiences the decades of being confined to a very small cell. The transition from the world to the cell, though entirely her own wish and decision, is far from being

a smooth and tranquil process. Originally, she chooses this new life so that she can devote herself to spirituality and to interpreting her visions, whereas (understandably), for a long time this is impossible: "[i]nstead of thinking about my *shewings*, my mind kept running back to the past, like water flowing downhill" (MacKenzie 2023a, 76). She recalls memories of her family, her husband touching her, kissing her, and also abject memories of bodies rotting during the pestilence, and related to her traumatic losses, she asks "heretic" questions: "If God could resurrect his own son, why not my daughter? What harm would that do?" (MacKenzie 2023a, 82). She obviously has to work through her own life traumas, while also struggling with the size of the space:

> The walls of my cell seemed very close. I walked around it, my sleeve brushing bed, desk, cupboard. I could take ten paces in one direction, turn and take six paces, turn and take eight paces, turn and take six paces.
> Ten, six, eight, six.
> Ten, six, eight, six.
> Ten, six, eight, six.
> Ten, six, eight, six.
> Ten, six, eight, six.
> Ten, six, eight, six.
>
> (MacKenzie 2023a, 82)

The obsessive repetition indicates the struggle with the confinement, and also a mind compulsively revolving around the same traumas, going around the same life events, trying to come to terms with them. Not only is the space against her, so is time:

> Time has not been a steady friend to me.
> In the early years in my cell, the minutes between the bells ringing out for prayer were so long I used to wonder if the bell was broken or if the bell-ringer was distracted. But now the hours are minutes, the days are just hours, and winter approaches before I have even noticed the scent of freshly scythed hay.
>
> (MacKenzie 2023a, 114)

Gradually, as seen in her changing attitude to time, she reconciles to her space and time and can gain the focus necessary to write up her meditations on her visions. This process of calming down, however, is intertwined with her vision of her approaching death, which is increased by the fact that she is walled up – as if in a tomb – for several

decades, which may also contribute to her bodily decline: "I look at my brown-spotted hands, their swollen knuckles, and see that there is not much longer left to me on earth. *My body is stiff, as if already preparing for the grave*. My knees creak, and my fingers struggle with my beads. Indeed, Sara gives me broth and mashed turnips, but no meat because my teeth are crumbling" (MacKenzie 2023a, 123 – emphasis added). The stiffness of her body can be understood as a symbol of her self-incarceration, for the lack of life that being an anchoress implies, for a gradual loss of movement, space and time.

Her only connection with the outside world is that after a time she functions as a spiritual adviser: people come up to her cell, which has an opening, even if curtained, and she gives them counsel. Among these visitors, Margery Kempe also comes, which is a historically proven fact. Margery needs advice – as could be seen in the "Prologue" – because her status is questioned in her community. Her narrative line – or rather fragments of her life story, intertwined with that of Julian of Norwich – is based on her *Book*, but as MacKenzie claims, "[t]his work is a creative engagement with both texts [*Revelations* and *Book*] as well as a work of imagination" (MacKenzie 2023a, Author's note, n. p.). This creative engagement with the *Book*, in my interpretation, means a careful selection of details from Margery Kempe's private life that make sense for the 21st-century reader, while preserving Kempe's religious enthusiasm, devoutness, and all the conflicts that arise from her specific display of being touched by preachings or visions. Her private life is, unsurprisingly, controlled by the dominant male figures in her family: her father, and then her husband. Unlike Julian's invented marriage, hers is very far from being a marriage for love: a lot closer to an arranged marriage that facilitates the businesses of both the father and the husband. The control she is under is symbolically expressed in the opening of her narrative: she recalls that during her pregnancy, while wishing to eat weird things, her husband threatened her to imprison and shackle her, at which, as Margery recalls in the text, "I quite lost my reason. I ranted and screamed and tore my clothes and hair. And I was indeed restrained as my husband had threatened, and he took away my keys. Then my labour pains began and they were shackles themselves, pinning me down and causing me to roar" (MacKenzie 2023a, 5). The parallel between the husband literally incarcerating her and experiencing the labour pain as shackles is symbolic of her relation to her body, sexuality, heteronormativity and maternity: although she gives birth to fourteen children, she hardly ever feels emotionally attached to her children, admits to not being a devoted mother – or wife, for that matter – and on giving birth to her first child, "[w]hen the child emerged, [she] thought he was the devil come to split [her] into two and toss [her] entrails to the dogs" (MacKenzie 2023a, 5). While childbirth is indeed painful, the imagery of the devil born out of her labour pains and being tossed to the dogs expresses a disturbed relation to

female biology and sexuality, which Margery Kempe keeps struggling with, although – or precisely because – she has fourteen children. All through these consecutive births, however, she keeps yearning for a chaste marriage, which the husband is not willing to agree to: he lays claim to his own right to have access to her body.

Margery Kempe, no matter how much the husband wants to control her, cannot be confined to the domestic: she becomes what we would call these days a small entrepreneur as an "alewife" (MacKenzie 2023a, 37) to help her husband financially, and a public person, known by many. Although having spiritual visions, as a woman she is aware that she can never be a preacher or religious teacher ("As a woman I was not allowed to preach, as was declared by St Paul" – MacKenzie 2023a, 36). Yet, she manoeuvres in the space granted, she not only responds to preaching and teaching by her famous weepings, she is also aware that "[i]t was not the Lord's intentions that [she] be quiet about [her] visions" (MacKenzie 2023a, 37), which are undeniably unique because she claims that she was present both at Jesus's birth and his crucifixion, and though not authorised, she ultimately stands up in the street and tells of her visions. While her copious and loud weeping is "only" disturbing, her visionary claims go beyond the uncomfortable, meaning that her position in her community becomes more fraught, on a number of levels. Her family members become estranged from her, considering her dangerous both spiritually and economically, and feeling that she jeopardises the family businesses and family fortunes with her close to sacrilegious visions. Her husband, for instance, claims that it is due to Margery that he will not be elected an alderman (MacKenzie 2023a, 73). She becomes tainted and tainting: an element of potential contamination because she cannot be clearly placed in the relatively strict order of the Middle Ages because she is a woman with visions that not even the anointed priests have, and a woman expressing her devotion in bodily-visceral ways is a figure of suspicion for both her own community and the Church. She is questioned for heresy in York, a seat of one of the archbishops, the outcome of which can be the most frightening punishment in the medieval times: excommunication, and ultimately death. She is almost impossibly saved from prison and from further investigations by secular people, and she is released, but in spite of these lay people's faith in her, she is constantly beset by doubts. While in Norwich, her self-doubts are presented in this way, including the eponymous quotation from her *Book*: "I am constantly shriven but I can find no release, and I am nearly in despair. It cannot be written what pain I feel and what sorrow I have. And I say, 'Lord, for thy great pain have mercy on my little pain. Alas, Lord, you have said before that you would never forsake me. Where now is the truthfulness of your word?'" (MacKenzie 2023a, 127).

This is the state of mind she is in, and this is how the novel starts in the "Prologue": with her arrival in Norwich to seek Julian of Norwich's counsel and relief from her despair. The historical-psychological-narrative culmination of the novel is the meeting of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe. Its uniqueness is indicated by the fact that although on principle Julian of Norwich never allows anyone to come for counsel more than once, in Kempe's case she makes an exception, and she can come twice (in Kempe's *Book*: on "many days", as quoted before). During their meeting, the narrative changes: the interlocking but fragmentary narratives change into a dialogue between the two women, significantly the only dialogue sequence in the text, as if indicating that they could only communicate with each other. Julian of Norwich is not judgemental at all, believes that Kempe has holy visions, and supports her against archbishops and doctors of divinity, saying "[y]ou are a woman of great grace and courage" (MacKenzie 2023a, 137). Their dialogue is characterised by mutual empathy, recognitions, and new perspectives, on which both of them reflect as getting and giving comfort, and Kempe even feels the city of Norwich more welcoming after the meeting (MacKenzie 2023a, 143–44).

On the second day, before Kempe comes again, Julian is visited by priests who warn her not to receive heretics, plainly referring by this term to Kempe, even though she has never been officially declared a heretic. The rumours and suspicion surrounding her, however, are sufficient for the Church authorities to try to keep her away from Julian, who is more properly integrated into the system of the Church (thus, their narratives also demonstrate the haphazardness of whether someone will be condemned or – even if only on the fringes – incorporated, of which Julian of Norwich's cell attached to the church is a spatial equivalent). Yet the two women meet a second time, going against not only Julian of Norwich's own habits, but also against the prohibitions of authority. The exchange that takes place in the novel between them is a direct resistance to these authoritative voices, and even breaks some taboos. This time, it is not Margery Kempe who asks for Julian of Norwich's help, but the other way round. Namely, the novel plays with the historical possibility that Julian of Norwich's *Revelations* survived because she gave her manuscript to Margery Kempe on her visit. Passing over the manuscript is framed within terms of a dangerous gift that can be read as heresy, so taking it needs courage (MacKenzie 2023a, 146–49), which is justifiable in the contemporary religious context because Julian of Norwich's theological ideas on universal redemption (to which the title of the novel refers as well, even if taken from Kempe's *Book*, which is another link made by the text between the two women) was not an orthodox, canonical religious position at the time. The notions of heresy and danger up until this point in the text are primarily associated with Margery Kempe, not Julian of Norwich,

but now she characterises herself and particularly her book in these terms, creating fundamental parallels between their in many ways diverging life narratives.

At the moment of passing the manuscript over, they literally touch each other, which is an ultimate taboo for Julian of Norwich as an anchoress. The women's responses to this apparently accidental yet in the context of the whole text symbolical touch show the significance of the act. Julian describes it in this way: "I slid the papers, tied up with silk threads, under the curtain. Margery Kempe reached out to take the bundle but, as she did so, her fingers touched mine. It took all my wits not to cry out – no other person's flesh had touched mine for twenty-three years" and even after confessing this sin to Master Thomas, who disregards it as an accident, Julian of Norwich says: "[b]ut I cannot forget. My flesh feels seared, as if those hot fingers are on my skin still. It has unsettled me, and now I yearn more than ever to be embraced" (MacKenzie 2023a, 149, 151). Their spiritual meeting turns into an intensive emotional, and beyond that, bodily experience that results in a long-repressed desire for other bodies – for another woman's body – to embrace and to be embraced by. In this religious-cultural context this is the ultimate taboo, and not for nothing did the Bishop warn her that "the devil worked through that woman" (MacKenzie 2023a, 145).

Going against authoritative prohibitions, the two women courageously reach out to each other spiritually, emotionally and physically, and find solace, support, comfort, inspiration and genuine sisterhood in each other. "With [her] book in the world, [Julian of Norwich] is free to die" (MacKenzie 2023a, 151), while Margery Kempe cherishes Julian of Norwich's manuscript: even if illiterate, she takes it every day in her hand, wonders what it is like to write – and is inspired to write her own book. Raising the issue to her husband, his response is that "there would be no interest in such a thing. A woman knows little of life", and adds that "[w]omen cannot read […]. Their brains are too soft" (MacKenzie 2023a, 157). Margery, however, does not agree, and insists: '"Other women may be interested', I said. 'After all, I am well travelled and not everyone has had the good fortune to speak with Dame Julian", and she adds that "if there are words, there is no death. And I *will* write a book of my own. My words will live also" (MacKenzie 2023a, 157 – emphasis in the original). These two extraordinary medieval women's interlocking narratives can thus be read as the beginning of women's writing in English, and their persistence in the truth of their visions (in several meanings of the word) gave rise to a cultural matrilineage based on a supportive sisterhood. Their touching each other, meanwhile, can be interpreted as symbolical of a subversive cultural undercurrent going against the exclusion of women from culture, history and memory. So they not only *can* but *must* be remembered.

*Epilogue*: This text, in turn, is my humble scholarly attempt at trying to reach out to, touch and remember Kathleen E. Dubs in a scholarly field where she was an expert – while I am not even a laywoman.

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# 9.

# Liminal Aspects of the Hero's Journey in the Major Works of Neil Gaiman

*Ianina Volkova*

## Introduction

Neil Gaiman is known as a hugely popular bestselling English writer. Some readers know him as the author who turned a relatively unpopular graphic novel into *The Sandman* (1988–1996), which everybody knows as a bestseller and worldwide streaming Netflix series. Others first discovered Gaiman's works on the stage of London's National Theatre or while reading his collaborative works, such as *Good Omens* (1990), written in co-authorship with Terry Pratchett. Gaiman's works are diverse in many respects and cover several genres, from fantasy to children's literature. However, the most prominent works are predominantly defined as the Weird. Gaiman himself has confirmed this in many interviews, including, for instance, his conversation with Weird Fiction Review in 2011, in which he speaks of the influence H.P. Lovecraft had on his early works.

The Weird Literature genre is a complex and at times ambiguous phenomenon as it incorporates various elements. The very definition of the Weird provided by H.P. Lovecraft in *Supernatural Horror in Literature* (1927) allows for many possible interpretations, but with one unalterable quality: "The one test of the really weird is simply this – whether or not there be excited in the reader a profound sense of dread, and of contact with unknown spheres and powers" (Lovecraft 2012, 28). The sense of encountering unknown places and realms can be explored through the lens of liminality – a space of transition, uncertainty, and the breakdown of conventional boundaries. This in-betweenness manifests itself both thematically and structurally: characters often find themselves trapped between realities, exploring realms in which natural laws dissolve, or confronting entities that exist beyond human comprehension. The setting may embody this instability as well, whether through dreamlike landscapes, shifting geographies, or environments where time and space collapse and it becomes difficult to interpret the events, actions and even words or thoughts of the hero.

The ambiguity of the Weird manifests itself at many levels – linguistic, thematical, and even structural. Following the steps William Empson proposes in the introduction to his *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1961), it becomes clear that the reader can easily

get lost between meanings and possible interpretations. From a linguistic perspective, the issue can be resolved by identifying how a single detail can simultaneously be effective in multiple ways or create a synergy between two seemingly unrelated meanings (Empson 1961). In the context of the Weird, linguistic ambiguity often remains unsolved, as words and phrases carry a multiplicity of meanings that refuse to settle into a single, stable interpretation. The Weird frequently employs paradox and contradiction, forcing the reader to confront language as something fluid and unreliable, so that language itself becomes a site of tension.

From a thematic standpoint, however, ambiguity in the Weird becomes more elusive, as it is not merely a byproduct of language but an integral feature of the narrative itself. For a better comprehension of an unconventional narration, it is necessary to define the purpose of such an authorial choice. This in-betweenness extends beyond setting and atmosphere – it also shifts the very structure of the narrative, extending the comprehension challenge beyond linguistic ambiguity and blurring the lines between reality and illusion, making it difficult to preserve a clear perception of space and time. Contemporary authors such as, for instance, Neil Gaiman, create a space for their characters to get lost and wander without any obvious direction or even cause. Such moves provoke not only ambiguity but make the reader wonder about the nature of the character's journey. Due to the diverse backgrounds and experiences of readers, characters and events can be interpreted in multiple ways. This can affect the reader's perception of the very nature of the character's journey, and whether the understanding will be reached depends on both the writer's craft and the reader's skill.

This paper explores the ambiguity and the eerie tension inherent in the in-betweenness, the space between worlds and meanings in the selected works of Neil Gaiman, through the lens of structuralist analysis. By examining the hero's journey as a fundamental structural element, the study focuses on the liminal aspects that disrupt conventional narrative trajectories. Rather than adhering to clear, linear progressions, these liminal spaces introduce fractured realities, unresolved tensions, and disruptions in the expected flow of storytelling. Such narrative shifts challenge traditional understandings of plot coherence and reader expectations, as well as broadening the scope of storytelling by highlighting the transformative power of ambiguity.

Additionally, the work suggests that embracing these structural ambiguities can foster a more open and fluid literary framework, allowing for fresh interpretations and engagement with previously underexplored themes. By challenging conventional narrative closure, the Weird creates new pathways for comprehension, encouraging a shift in the reader's interpretative approach. In doing so, the text emerges as an intermediary space, bridging the reader's perception with the other space – an unsettling, unfamiliar

realm that resists easy categorization. This approach may contribute to the overall quality of comprehension, inviting a shift in interpretation and understanding of the role of text as an intermediary between the reader and the other space.

## The role of liminality in the monomyth structure

When it comes to a character's journey, to achieve a comprehensive understanding it is essential to seek assistance in structural analysis. Knowledge and understanding of the structure and its meaning is a useful framework given by the structuralist approach, and in the context of fantasy and Weird literature can be encapsulated in the famous "there and back again". The cycle is also known as the hero's journey or monomyth, described in detail by Joseph Campbell in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949/2008), where Campbell divides the adventure of the hero into the stages, carefully examining each of them and their significance for the understanding of the narrative. The heroes of the selected novels happened to all be men, whose experience with the world is drastically different compared to women's experience, simply because for thousands of years women did not have such basic personality-shaping liberties as autonomy, sovereignty, parity, or equality. Nevertheless, the common ground of liminal spaces can be beneficial for both the hero and the heroine, and are of interest for the latter, though the notion of the heroine's journey is still under discussion in academic discourse. Even when such ideas were presented by researchers, such as Maureen Murdock, the authoritative scholars, Joseph Campbell in particular, omitted the idea as fallacious. Campbell reminded his student that a woman does not have a journey, and in all the possible aspects is a goal of the hero's journey, a subject to it as she is a subject to a husband or to a culture, but certainly not a sovereign human being who can undertake a journey of her own. Murdock quotes Campbell's interview from 1981 in her The *Heroine's Journey* (1990):

> In the whole mythological tradition the woman is *there*. All she has to do is to realize that she's the place that people are trying to get to. When a woman realizes what her wonderful character is, she's not going to get messed up with the notion of being pseudo-male.
>
> (Murdock 1990, 2)

This one-sided view, however, can be challenged first of all by referring to certain shared aspects that can be revealed while exploring liminality in the hero's journey. Campbell describes myth as a secret opening through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into the human cultural manifestation (Campbell 1949/2008, 1) and the

hero as a man of self-achieved submission. Paraphrasing this, the hero is the one on the mission to explore the world so as to continue living and avoid oblivion by answering the call, crossing the threshold into the unknown, and surviving the space between two worlds, so he can reach the point which Campbell calls "recurrence of rebirth" (Campbell 1949/2008, 12) and return to the world he left, carrying gifts of knowledge and other assets. Campbell also emphasizes that the adventure starts after the threshold is crossed and the hero enters the space of in-betweenness. This liminal space is where the most crucial moments of the journey unfold, as the hero is tested and reshaped by the unfamiliar forces at play. Expanding on this idea, Tzvetan Todorov in his *The Fantastic, a Structural Approach to the Literary Genre* (1970) underlines the role of threshold in myth-cycle structure and as it signifies movement to the world where laws are totally different from what they were in the world previously known. The importance of the threshold had been previously given special attention by Campbell, who calls it "the entrance to the zone of magnified power" (Campbell 1949/2008, 71). This "zone of magnified power" is also known as liminal space, where the most important moments of the journey become possible due to the nature of that space in between two stages of the adventure. In this way, each threshold is pivotal for the myth-cycle structure, based on the premise that the progress of the narrative is built on the hero's attitude to the passage, whether they do or do not intend to cross it and set out on the adventure.

Consequently, the structure of the journey comprises three stages: crossing the threshold for a journey, crossing the threshold back, and dwelling in the space between the two. According to Campbell, this short formula can be applied to both micro- and macrocosm. For instance, he represents the cosmogonic cycle as a circulation of consciousness through the three planes of being:

> The first plane is that of waking experience: cognitive of the hard, gross facts of an outer universe, illuminated by the light of the sun, and common to all. The second plane is that of dream experience: cognitive of the fluid, subtle forms of a private interior world, self-luminous and of one substance with the dreamer. The third plane is that of deep sleep: dreamless, profoundly blissful. In the first are encountered the instructive experiences of life; in the second these are digested, assimilated to the inner forces of the dreamer; while in the third all is enjoyed and known unconsciously, in "the space within the heart," the room of the inner controller, the source and end of all.
>
> (Campbell 1949/2008, 227)

A journey of such kind may resemble what Kathleen E. Dubs in her *Harry Bailly: Chaucer's Critic* (2011) defines as "pilgrimage": the concept of pilgrimage – for the Middle Ages – was a journey to a holy shrine, but at the same time represented the journey of the soul to God. Like life itself, the pilgrimage was a one-way journey, not a return trip (Dubs 2011, 37). The hero sets out on a journey with no prior knowledge or guarantee of return, unfamiliar with the place they are going to enter, a place that serves more as a passage than a destination. Spending extended time in these spaces can feel unsettling because they are designed for transition, not permanence.

In scientific discourse, this theme is commonly referred to as the concept of liminality and liminal space, thirdspace, or heterotopia. The most comprehensive exploration of liminality was offered by Victor Turner in *Liminal to Liminoid in Play, Flow, and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology* (1974), where he defines liminality as a space of transformation and transition (Turner 1982, 24). Turner's ideas echo those of Arnold van Gennep, who, in *The Rites of Passage* (1960), discusses liminality within the framework of rites of passage, describing it as an intermediate space between two states, where a decision must be made (van Gennep 1960, 28). Consequently, those who cross the threshold enter a liminal space of uncertainty, where established concepts can shift, ultimately influencing and reshaping the traveller's perception.

Turner further develops this concept in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* (1969) by introducing *communitas*, a sense of deep social connection and equality that emerges among individuals undergoing liminal experiences together (Turner 1969, 96). Within this framework, liminality is often temporary, a transitional phase that leads to reintegration into a structured reality, albeit in a transformed state. However, in Gaiman's works, liminality frequently becomes a permanent condition rather than a fleeting stage in a rite of passage. Many of his protagonists do not fully reintegrate into their original worlds or establish a new, stable identity within a structured community. Instead, they remain liminal *personae* ("threshold people") wanderers in the liminal realm (Turner 1969, 95), existing between worlds rather than fully belonging to any one of them. For instance, in the novel *Neverwhere*, Richard Mayhew crosses the threshold into the world of London Below, where he undergoes trials that should culminate in his transformation and reintegration into his former life. However, when he attempts to return to London Above, he finds himself unable to fully reconnect with his past existence. Instead of reintegrating into the mundane world, he chooses to embrace permanent liminality, re-entering the space of London Below.

Apart from liminal spaces, there are two more concepts dealing with space and time that are of interest for this article: the concept of thirdspace, introduced by Edward W. Soja, and the concept of heterotopia, introduced by Michel Foucault. Edward W.

Soja in his *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996) defines thirdspace as a space that transcends the physical (firstspace) and the mental or perceived (secondspace), integrating both to form a simultaneously real and imagined, physical and metaphysical space. This concept aligns closely with the narrative structures in Gaiman's works, where characters frequently navigate liminal spaces that blur the boundaries between reality and imagination. For instance, in the graphic novel *The Sandman*, Dream's realm, The Dreaming, operates as a thirdspace – both a literal place and a manifestation of collective unconsciousness, shaping and being shaped by the dreams of mortals. Similarly, in *Neverwhere*, London Below exists as a thirdspace where forgotten and discarded aspects of London's history and mythology merge into a surreal, lived reality.

The term heterotopia was introduced by Michel Foucault and developed in his text *Of Other Spaces* (1984), a rather brief summary of a lecture he originally delivered to a group of architectural students in 1967:

> Places of this kind are outside of all places, even though it may be possible to indicate their location in reality. Because these places are absolutely different from all the sites that they reflect and speak about, I shall call them, by way of contrast to utopias, heterotopias. I believe that between utopias and these quite other sites, these heterotopias, there might be a sort of mixed, joint experience, which would be the mirror.
>
> (Foucault 1984)

In this lecture, Foucault challenges conventional ways of thinking about universal constructs such as time and space by exploring the opportunities heterotopia can offer: "In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface; I am over there, there where I am not, a sort of shadow that gives my own visibility to myself, that enables me to see myself there where I am absent" (Foucault 1984). According to Peter Johnson's arguments in *The Geographies of Heterotopia* (2013), liminal spaces are linked to the "notion of 'alternative ordering' in suggesting that these spaces allow 'the other' to flourish" (Johnson 2013, 794), enabling life to be experienced differently by establishing a complex relationship between time and space. These spaces manifest in real, tangible locations within society but remain distinct due to their layered meanings and functions. Examples include hallways, waiting rooms, stairwells, and rest stops – ordinary places that nonetheless evoke a sense of separation from everyday life. Johnson defines liminal spaces as sites embedded within different aspects and stages of human life, which "somehow mirror

and at the same time distort, unsettle, or invert other spaces" (Johnson 2013, 790–91) and "dissolves binary oppositions, uniting dualities whilst simultaneously cherishing unlikeness" (Johnson 2013, 800). This aligns with Michel Foucault's original concept presented in *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias* (1984), where he argues that heterotopias reach their full potential when individuals experience a significant break from their traditional perception of time, marking a break from the familiar and structured rhythms of existence (Foucault 1984). Both theorists emphasize how these spaces, through their fluid and transformative nature, allow for the flourishing of "the other" by disrupting traditional perceptions of time and space. Johnson's view that liminal spaces function as sites of alternative ordering aligns seamlessly with Foucault's notion of heterotopias, highlighting how these spaces offer opportunities for reflection, redefinition, and even escape from the previously learned rhythms of life. Together, their ideas reveal the power of liminality to alter perceptions, provoke introspection, and foster new forms of understanding in a world defined by the interplay of time, space, and even identity.

Expanding on the latter, it is important to mention that the alteration of time and space is not the sole characteristic of liminality. As Peter Messent discusses in his article "American Gothic: Liminality and the Gothic in Thomas Harris's Hannibal Lecter Novels" (2004), the concept of the threshold – the space between two spaces – captures liminality's association with provisionality, instability, and intermediate forms; it exists between the known and the unknown or the other (Messent 2004).

The difference between the three notions may seem vague at first glance, but there are specific aspects to be emphasized. Liminality and liminal spaces focus on transitional states and thresholds, emphasizing moments of transformation and uncertainty within a structured process. Liminality, as theorized by Victor Turner, is an in-between phase in rites of passage, where individuals exist outside of their previous identity but have not yet assumed a new one. Liminal spaces, such as doorways, crossroads, or dreamscapes, serve as physical or metaphorical zones where these transitions occur. In contrast, thirdspace (Edward Soja) and heterotopia (Michel Foucault) describe spaces that are not simply transitional but function as layered, hybrid realities. Thirdspace merges real and imagined dimensions, creating spaces where multiple meanings coexist, as seen in mythological realms or fantastical cities. Heterotopias, on the other hand, are spaces of otherness – cemeteries, museums, or prisons – that exist within the real world but operate by their own distinct rules, challenging conventional spatial and societal structures. While liminality is a phase and liminal spaces are temporary, thirdspace and heterotopia endure as complex, alternative realities that resist fixed interpretation.

## Liminal Thresholds in Weird Fiction: From Lovecraft to Gaiman

Applying the notion of liminality to the Weird, it is important to define the genre, as the term "Weird literature" can be applied to a broad range of works. H. P. Lovecraft has simplified this task by providing the aforementioned definition in his "Supernatural Horror in Literature" (1927). The definition served H.P. Lovecraft himself and his readers as a guiding principle in presenting, understanding, and interpreting Weird fiction. In a series of novels known under the name *The Dream Cycle* (1918–1932), Lovecraft even exceeded mere contact, letting the hero decide if he wants to cross the threshold of a journey or not. The first attempt us unsuccessful, as using Rudolf Steiner's terminology proposed in his work *Through the Gates of Knowledge* (1912), Lovecraft's hero is stopped by the Guardian of the Threshold and for some time no further steps are taken. However, shortly after Randolph Carter sets out on the journey and after a while returns, keeping his mind clear and enriched by the adventure. Unexpectedly, *The Dream Cycle* takes an unpredictable turn at the very end; the last threshold, that of "unknown spheres and powers" (The H.P. Lovecraft Archive 2009), is reached and crossed with no possibility of return. The story is told in "Through the Gates of the Silver Key" (1932–1933), written by H. P. Lovecraft together with E. Hoffmann Price. At least then, "a gate had been unlocked – not indeed the Ultimate Gate, but one leading from earth and time to that extension of earth which is outside time" (The H.P. Lovecraft Archive 2009). Unfortunately, there is no information on the hero's further life and adventures.

Providing a more contemporary perspective on Weird fiction, Gaiman explores the fluidity of time and space through his multilevel narratives and complex characters. His works, such as *Neverwhere* (1996/2021), exemplify the essence of his approach to the Weird, in which the boundaries of reality are bent and broken, and the journey of the hero is triggered by encounters with the unknown. In the novel *Neverwhere*, the hero's adventure "starts with doors" (Gaiman 1996/2021, 3) – not just a literal passage but a symbolic threshold that leads the protagonist into a world previously unknown. This theme of entering new realms appears in Gaiman's earlier graphic novel *Sandman* (1988–1996), as well as in his collaboration with Terry Pratchett in *Good Omens* (1990), and finally in his later novel *American Gods* (2001). Despite the varied settings of these works, they share a common trope: the hero is introduced to a pivotal threshold, either through a transformative event or a guide, setting them on their journey. While Gaiman's writing is deeply rooted in mythical motifs, his exploration of altered dimensions of space and time offers a fresh take on the genre of Weird fiction.

Gaiman's works stand at the crossroads of mythology, fantasy, and the uncanny, weaving narratives that challenge conventional storytelling structures. Gaiman embraces ambiguity and nonlinear storytelling, often structuring his stories in a way that re-

sists linear progression, reflecting the fluid and unstable nature of liminal spaces. In the graphic novel *The Sandman*, for example, the narrative spans vast stretches of time and space, interweaving myth, history, and personal transformation without adhering to a single, cohesive storyline. Rather than a traditional arc, the series operates as a tapestry of interconnected tales, reinforcing the idea that stories themselves are ever-evolving and never truly complete. Gaiman does not simply retell myths – he actively reshapes them, merging folklore, literature, and modern sensibilities to create something new. The novel *American Gods* dismantles traditional mythic structures by presenting gods as entities that survive only through human belief, forcing them to adapt or fade away. This fluidity challenges the idea that myths are fixed narratives, instead portraying them as dynamic and responsive to cultural shifts. The stories often leave readers in a state of uncertainty. His protagonists may not achieve closure, and their journeys frequently end in open-ended ambiguity. In the novel *Neverwhere*, Richard Mayhew chooses a path that does not lead to a clear resolution – he neither fully returns to his old life nor settles permanently in his new world. This subversion of finality challenges the expectation that stories must provide a definitive ending, instead embracing the idea that transformation is ongoing and unresolved. As a result, Gaiman's exploration of liminality – spaces between the known and the unknown – reshapes the traditional hero's journey, offering a more fluid and dynamic approach to Weird fiction. By embracing continuous transition rather than rigid progression, Gaiman creates stories that defy strict categorization, making his works both unsettling and deeply immersive. Compared to Lovecraft, whose characters often approach the threshold of the unknown only to retreat or vanish from the narrative after crossing it, Gaiman's protagonists remain active and aware beyond the boundary. Rather than being passive observers or losing themselves to the mercy of the unknown, they navigate and interact with the unfamiliar realms where human presence is neither expected nor welcomed. In Gaiman's stories, the crossing of the threshold is not the climax but the true beginning of the adventure – his characters engage with the strange, shape their own fates, and influence the worlds beyond. At the same time, Gaiman implements the concept of liminality to go beyond the traditional mythical structure of the hero's journey and push the existing boundaries of Weird fiction. The distinctive feature of the selected works can be defined as the continuous journey, in which liminality creates the environment where a more open structure is possible. Four major works have been chosen for this article, the graphic novel *Sandman* (1988–1996), the novel *Good Omens* (1990), written in collaboration with Terry Pratchett, and the novels *Neverwhere* (1996/2021) and *American Gods* (2001).

Sandman, or Dream of the Endless, as Neil Gaiman describes him in an interview with *Entertainment Weekly*, is not merely a protagonist but rather a host and a guide

for others, facilitating their journeys through his realm (Gaiman and Sturridge 2022). He is both an entity and a space – his existence is inextricably linked to the Dreaming, a realm that he is said to have created and over which he holds dominion. This space is not static, it embodies the collective unconscious and is in a constant state of flux, shaped by the dreams, fears, and desires of all who enter. Because of this, Sandman himself can be interpreted as an archetype of liminality – simultaneously a gatekeeper, a threshold, and the very liminal space through which others pass. It is he who grants access to the realm of dreams while also personifying its fluid and ever-changing nature.

Géza Róheim in his *The Eternal Ones of the Dream* (1945), calls dream a personalized myth and myth a depersonalized dream (quoted in Campbell 1949/2008, 18). He further suggests that mythology and dreams are deeply interconnected, with mythological symbols emerging as spontaneous productions of the psyche. This aligns with Gaiman's portrayal of Dream as a force beyond individual consciousness – both an autonomous being and a manifestation of the collective human experience. According to the interview given by Tom Sturridge to Popverse in 2023, Gaiman himself calls Dream "a voice in your head" (Sturridge 2023) emphasizing his intangible yet omnipresent role in shaping stories, myths, and inner realities.

Beyond Sandman, the graphic novel introduces the Endless, a family of timeless beings who embody fundamental aspects of existence: Dream, Death, Destiny, Destruction, Desire, Despair, Delirium (formerly Delight), and two mysterious others. Neither gods nor mortals, they are eternal forces shaped by and shaping human consciousness. Though immensely powerful, they are not static – their identities evolve with humanity, reflecting their liminal nature. Rather than merely ruling over their domains, their existence is inextricably linked to those who experience them.

The opposing force to the Endless in *The Sandman* is Lucifer, the fallen angel who abdicated his angelic nature for the throne of Hell. Lucifer's defiance of the predetermined role imposed upon him adds another layer to the theme of transformation, choice, and liminality. By rejecting his initial position and becoming the ruler of Hell, he challenges the notion of an immutable identity, reinforcing the idea that even the most powerful entities are not bound by a singular path. This dynamic interplay between change, identity, and perception draws an intriguing parallel to Géza Róheim's concept of dreams as personalized myths and myths as depersonalized dreams. The Endless, much like Róheim's mythological constructs, exist in a space that is neither fully tangible nor entirely abstract – their own realms where transformation occurs as a result of their interactions with human consciousness. This mutual influence suggests that the properties of liminality allow for a two-way exchange: while the Endless shape the experiences of mortals, they too are shaped by the evolution of human thought, culture,

and belief. It is within this ever-shifting, fluid space that the true essence of the Endless emerges – not as fixed entities, but as evolving manifestations of the human experience itself. This phenomenon aligns with John Mapham's argument in *The Structuralist Sciences and Philosophy* (1973), in which he discusses the necessity of re-evaluating both the relationships between entities and the very nature of the entities themselves:

> Not only may relations between entities need to be re-evaluated in the light of theory but it can also happen that the entities themselves need to be identified differently. The interest of this lies in the fact that there is often something so compelling about the way in which our experience of the world is organized that this can actually constitute an important epistemological obstacle to the development of theories or to their acceptance. Distinctions or identities may be so deeply embedded in our discourse and thought about the world, whether this be because of their role in our practical lives, or because they are cognitively powerful and are an important aspect of the way in which we appear to make sense of our experience, that the theoretical challenge to them can be quite startling.
>
> (Mapham 1973, 115)

Therefore, the kingdom of Sandman, the Dreaming, which is also Sandman himself, can be considered an intermediary space between the Endless Family and humanity, allowing for communication between the two. As this communication takes place within the dream, or personalized myth as it was suggested earlier, this intermediary space can become a source for new myths to appear. Claude Lévi-Strauss, in *Structural Anthropology* (1963), puts together the most prominent ideas on the nature of myth, including interpreting myths as collective dreams, as the outcome of a kind of aesthetic play, or as the basis of ritual, while mythological figures are considered as personified abstractions, divinized heroes, or fallen gods (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 207). This connection between the two realms provides an opportunity to observe the change of the Endless Family that was initiated by humanity. For instance, Delight becomes Delirium, and Despair and Dream are killed in a struggle for humanity's attention. Dream, however, is reborn, which may signify his indispensable nature as an intermediary and in-between space, that has a double structure and, while being a part of present events, remains Endless (timeless), shaping this way the third structure, or the thirdspace.

The novel *Good Omens* (1990) resembles the Bible as "it begins where time begins, with the creation of the world; it ends where time ends, with the Apocalypse" (Frye 1990, xiii). In other words, the novel expands on the well-known narrative of the Bible or, in the words of Terry Eagleton in his *Literary Theory* (1983), passes from

myth to irony and then reverts to myth. Such resemblance makes it possible to trace the hero's quest within the traditional, predetermined myth-cycle structure and identify when it goes outside of it.

One particularly striking departure from the conventional mythic structure lies in the novel's handling of its protagonists. In the early drafts, the two central figures – Aziraphale, the angel, and Crowley, the demon – were created as a single character. However, in the final version, they were split into two distinct entities, a decision that fundamentally reshaped the story's exploration of free will and predestination. By existing as separate beings, Aziraphale and Crowley are able to embody opposing yet complementary perspectives on good and evil, revealing the intricate and often blurred boundaries between divine order and human agency. Moreover, their dual existence allows us to go backstage[1] and have a look at the cosmic machinery that governs the world, exposing the interactions between the realm of archetypal forces and the realm of human action. This interplay highlights how these two dimensions are not only interconnected but also constantly influencing one another.

What makes *Good Omens* particularly radical is that it does not conclude in the way one might expect from a myth-based narrative. Instead of a neatly resolved, predestined ending – where prophecy is fulfilled and history follows a predetermined course – the novel crosses the threshold of predetermination. The expected conclusion, where the world meets its end, is no longer there. By rejecting the finality of the apocalypse, the narrative resists closure, instead embracing an open-ended structure that denies the reader the certainty of an ultimate resolution. This effectively transforms the story into an ongoing one – one that expands beyond the novel itself.

In this way, *Good Omens* becomes both synchronic and diachronic. Synchronic in that it exists as a self-contained narrative drawing from established mythic structures, and diachronic in that it extends beyond its own limits, continuing to unfold in the mind of the reader. The novel's refusal to provide a definitive ending invites the audience to carry its themes and unresolved tensions into their own lives. The boundaries between fiction and reality blur as the reader, having engaged with the world of *Good Omens*, returns to their own, now subtly altered by the journey. The narrative does not simply end, but rather lingers, suggesting that stories – like myths, dreams, and reality itself – are never truly concluded, only perpetually reimagined. This way, the reader is brought back to a life where they now exist within two realms, their life and the realm of the novel, which then continues into the reader's reality, blending the borders between the two.

[1] Backstage, a term proposed by Neil Gaiman in his book *American Gods* to refer to the realm of archetypes.

The journey unfolds in a similar way in the novel *Neverwhere* (1996/2021), which initially represents the hero's journey as it is usually seen – departure, initiation and return – within the previously unknown realm. After this threshold is crossed, the hero finds himself in the so-called "London Below", which possesses certain traits of the well-known world, or "London Above". From this moment, he belongs to neither of the two Londons, but travels the space in between. In other words, the hero is confronting liminal space, where nothing can be predetermined and the space is reacting to the hero's actions in an unpredictable or seemingly chaotic way. The new space interacts with the hero, reacting to his choices as if it had a consciousness of its own.

> And then they set foot on Night's Bridge, and Richard began to understand darkness: darkness as something solid and real, so much more than a simple absence of light. He felt it touch his skin, questing, moving, exploring: gliding through his mind. It slipped into his lungs, behind his eyes, into his mouth …
>
> (Gaiman 1996/2021, 102)

Whenever it is not possible to omit personification, there appear a number of characters impersonating the space and also interacting with the hero, leading him to the final goal of his quest. As soon as the thirdspace is not defined by anything and can become anything, it serves the creative purposes of the writer, which in Gaiman's case is to create a volatile space filled with nothing but what the character brings with them. This idea resembles a labyrinth, or at least one of its interpretations, a space where nothing hunts the traveller but the demons they had brought with them. It is a place where the hero meets with the part of their own self which used to be hidden and, surprisingly enough, it did not exist in a vacuum. The thirdspace allows the hero to embrace their personality in its wholeness and let it interact with the space in all its manifestations, whether that is a character or a circumstance. In comparison to the familiar stories, in the thirdspace we do not simply observe the adventure while waiting for the hero to return to "normal", we are put in circumstances where no return is actually guaranteed. Gaiman innovates within the Weird tradition by extending beyond traditional cosmic horror or dreamlike ambiguity to create a space where reality itself is actively rewritten by the characters who traverse it. Rather than simply exposing protagonists to the unknown, as in Lovecraftian horror, Gaiman's Weird landscapes are almost interactive and participation-requiring – they do not merely challenge the hero but respond to them, shaping and reshaping according to their actions, fears, and self-discovery.

One more journey of a weird nature is taken by Shadow Moon in the novel *American Gods* (2001). In the novel, the space of ordinary and the space of sacred, where

gods can usually be encountered, are put together as if there is no difference between daily life and the sacred space. As those spaces are normally separated from each other, the novel can be considered the thirdspace. While one may note the resemblance to the double structure of *The Sandman*, the journey of Shadow Moon goes even further and introduces the thirdspace as a setting for the whole narration, allowing for occurrences impossible in other circumstances and making the novel myth-like, eventually suggesting a paradigm shift, just like *Good Omens*. The narrative as the thirdspace is also said to stretch the known reality and reveal its white spots: "For the most part it is uninspected, unimagined, unthought, a representation of the thing, and not the thing itself" (Gaiman 2001, 100). The journey of the protagonist, who is known to be "not dead <…> not alive either" (Gaiman 2001, 472), refers to rituals of becoming, in which a person is neither one nor the other and this way is moving through the liminal hallway, where the transition between mind and matter has been demolished (Todorov 1970, 113). The hero is communicating with the archetypal impersonations as if they were a part of his ordinary world. The space allows a new interpretation of the known archetypes, not least because they are no longer static but acting on their own and interacting with the hero, who himself is acting without knowing but with a certain sense of direction, the nature of which represents interest in terms of the hero's journey myth interpretation.

## Conclusion

Examining the underlying mechanisms of personal transformation – both psychological and mythological – it becomes evident that the ability to embark on a journey is not inherently gendered. It is possible to say that when it comes to higher mental functions, certain aspects are shared. For instance, consciousness as a state of awareness of self and the environment produces cognition and declarative memory as one of its forms. Cognition also allows for an executive or higher-order cognition, with abstract thinking and construction abilities as its manifestations, such as, for instance, imagination. These functions shape the ability to perform a journey in the space where no other body can serve for further motion.

Rudolf Steiner, in *The Gates of Knowledge* (1912), names four types of knowledge: material, imaginative, inspirational or "knowledge of the nature of Will", and intuitive knowledge. Imagination deals with ego, in which, according to Steiner, the union of images and ideas is accomplished (Steiner 1912, 6). Together they generate what is called individual memories and "It is obvious that the life of the soul would be impossible if we could retain the image of a thing only so long as the thing itself stood before us" (Steiner 1912, 7). Assuming the liminal space is a space where collective

unconsciousness is stored and where individual unconsciousness can at times find itself, an individual unconsciousness needs individual memories that are carried by an individual consciousness to individualize itself and later personalize into an individual soul or, in the context of narration, the hero.

The thirdspace, or liminal space, of the selected Gaiman novels allows the hero to travel beyond generally acknowledged space and time, where they are confronted by the necessity of adjusting their reality to the common one, to the space where the archetypes of personal and collective myths are impersonated by the characters who interact with the hero, helping him to apply his personal experience to the collective, producing new ways for the character themselves and, consequently, for humanity. Therefore, the aforementioned "certain sense of direction" is an application of the personal to the collective experience, or in relation to the liminal space, an application of an individual case of consciousness aligning unconsciousness while the hero still retains an ability to create individual memories and, therefore, take the result back to their ordinary life.

In the selected novels, Neil Gaiman makes these usually invisible phenomena manifest, and lets the reader trace their actions. For instance, the transformation and subsequent rebirth are lived through by the hero as if they were happening with his physical body and not his soul as it was experienced by Shadow Moon when he was hanged on the tree above his father's body:

> His feet were five feet above the ground. The tree was leafless and huge, its branches black against the grey sky: its bark a smooth silvery grey.
> They took the ladders away. There was a moment of panic as all his weight was taken by the ropes, and he dropped a few inches. Still, he made no sound.
> The women moved Wednesday's body, wrapped in its morel-sheet shroud, to the foot of the tree, and they left him there.
> They left him there alone.
>
> (Gaiman 2001, 488)

Later in the text, his dead wife, who should be able to recognise death, offers to cut him down, arguing that he is dying: "You're dying up there. Or you'll be crippled, if you aren't already" (Gaiman 2001, 499). This scene and the following resurrection of the hero show particular resemblance to the realm of dream, as dreamers usually believe that they partake in the events that affect them physically and interfere with their lives. In other words, they do not differentiate between what exists as a thing and what exists as an image, travelling in the realm of dream, they lose the inner sense allowing for

recognition of an image as such (Sartre 1972, 3). In the novel *American Gods*, such a transition goes unnoticed and again creates the thirdspace.

> There was nothing to see. The place was deserted. It was an empty battlefield.
> No. Not deserted. Not exactly.
> <…>
> And the Shadow knew where the battle must be taking place.
> <…>
> It was like pushing through a membrane, like plunging up from deep water into air. With one step he had moved from the tourist path on the mountain to …
> To something real. He was Backstage.
>
> (Gaiman 2001, 571–72)

The events of the gods' gathering scene take place in a space which one can reach by consciously restoring one's memory of it, and imagination allows for commuting between two realms. Imagination is a space where things exist as a mental image (Sartre 1972, 3), put together with individual experiences, or memories, and applied consciously. Imagination allows for a unique journey beyond the scope of shared human experience. However, visualisation is not enough for a passage between the realms, as perception only occurs when a sensory apparatus comes across the properties of a visualised object, which reminds us again that an image is not a thing (Sartre 1972, 5). Therefore, the space Shadow Moon calls "Backstage" is something other than the physical realm and the realm of imagination, as the hero also names it "something real". The thirdspace appears as a liminal hall connecting individual and collective experiences, or memories, in a similar way to how an image was presented by Spinoza: as a thought of a man, who is a finite mode, and as an idea, a fragment of the infinite world which is the totality of ideas. Another analogy can be found in the effort of Leibniz to establish the connection between knowledge, image and thought (Sartre 1972, 9–10) or in reference to the sublime in terms it was described by Cassius Longinus in *On the Sublime*.

In the examined works of Neil Gaiman, the liminal space – the thirdspace – emerges as a crucial structural element and conceptual framework, allowing the hero to cross the boundaries between personal experience and collective unconsciousness. That can result in the discovery of new properties, which can only be revealed if personal experience is applied to collective experience and individual unconsciousness to collective unconsciousness. Additionally, it may be possible to identify a new archetype or discover new traits of the old ones as well as the effect they have on humanity and

separated individuals. The novels demonstrate that mythic structures are not static but rather fluid, capable of transformation through individual journeys that integrate memory, imagination, and cognition. By engaging with archetypal forces, Gaiman's protagonists redefine their existence and the nature of storytelling itself. Their journeys challenge traditional mythological conventions, moving beyond linear progressions to cyclical and open-ended narratives that continue beyond the narrative, extending into the reader's reality. By making the invisible processes of transformation visible, Gaiman's Weird fiction underscores the power of storytelling and the text as its instrument and as a liminal hallway – one that bridges the personal and the universal, the temporal and the timeless, ultimately reshaping the reader's understanding of self and narrative. Gaiman reshapes Weird fiction by shifting its focus from existential horror and terrifying otherness to an interactive, mythopoeic experience where the unknown is not just encountered but negotiated and transformed. Traditional Weird fiction, particularly in the Lovecraftian vein, presents characters as powerless in the face of vast, indifferent cosmic forces. Gaiman, however, reinvents the Weird by making it deeply personal and mutable – his protagonists do not merely witness the strange, they engage with it, shape it, and in many cases, find a way to exist within it.

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# Language in Transition and Transfer

# 10.

# *Now You See It, Now You Don't*: *h*-dropping in the Early History of English[1]

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## 1. Introduction

The paper investigates how the intermediate, diachronic stages as well as the present-day dialectal variation of consonant /h/ in English can be modelled through the representations of linguistic structure, that is, in autosegmental phonology. Revealed is a complex diachronic path toward segmental effacement, where crucially there are intermediate stages of deletion, leading to latent, 'phantom consonants': sounds exhibiting contradictory phonological behaviour whereby now you see them, now you don't.

The chart in (1) depicts the complex interactions of two such latent segments: the etymological underlying /n/ of the indefinite article on the one hand, and the /h/ English varieties inherited from Old English (OE) at the beginning of a lexical set. The indefinite article's /n/ appeared in all phonological contexts when it emerged as a development of OE's numeral *ān* 'one' (see (1a) below). However, in present-day Standard Southern British English (SSBE) and General American (GA) as well as a number of other varieties, we witness that the /n/ is only found in a subset of phonological environments, specifically in contexts where the morpheme juncture is prevocalic (1b–c). In pre-consonantal contexts the /n/ does not appear, and this includes before the lexical set of words that start with /h/, which is treated like any other consonant.[2] Since a rule of /n/ insertion/deletion cannot be generalised, traditionally one has to assume two competing variants of the indefinite article: *a* and *an*.

[1] The paper reports part of the results of an ongoing project pertaining to the historical development and present-day patterning of English (i) indefinite article (*a/an*) and its final /n/; (ii) word-initial /h/, focussing on the diachronic enigma that surrounds the latter. We are grateful to the audience of the *Nyelvelmélet és diakrónia 5* [Language theory and diachrony 5] workshop at PPCU in Budapest in 2022 and the *Crossing borders between countries, scholars, and genres* conference at the Catholic University in Ružomberok in 2024 for commenting on the first drafts of this study, as well as to our reviewers. BBK's contribution to this project was in part supported by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Pázmány Péter Catholic University in the frame of project no. PPKE-BTK-KUT-23-2.

[2] This despite some speakers using *an* with certain *h*-initial words, which we discuss in Balogné Bérces and Ulfsbjorninn (in prep.).

As can be seen in (1d), in a number of English English varieties including, most famously, Cockney English, there is no phonemic or phonetic /h/ anywhere in the phonological system. No synchronic rule of *h*-dropping can be realistically posited, and thus the conclusion is that Cockney has no underlying /h/ at all. Consequently, it is straightforward that the *h*-initial lexical set has fully merged with the vowel-initial set, and both uniformly take the *an* variant of the indefinite article.

In addition to the systems in (1a–d), there was a form of Cockney prior to the 'classic' variety in (1d), described by Hurford (1971; 1972), who referred to it as 'an archaic pronunciation found mainly in older speakers' (1971, 144). In this variety, though there was also no /h/ and no reasonable synchronic rule of *h*-dropping, the lexical set of *h*-initial words used the same variant as the consonant-initial set. Meanwhile, the *an* variant was obligatory before all other vowel-initial words. This is shown in (1e).

(1) Indefinite article shape by phonological context over time

| | **_ + C**<br>*cat* | **_ + V**<br>*apple* | **_ + h**<br>*heart* |
|---|---|---|---|
| a. Early Middle English[3]<br>(cf. Old English *ān* 'one') | an-kat | an-apːəl | an-hɛrt(ə) |
| b. Older Standard Southern British English | ə-kæt | ən-æpl̩ | ə-hɑːt |
| c. Modern Standard Southern British English | ə-kaʔ | ən-apu | ə-hɑːʔ |
| d. Cockney English | ə-kæʔ | ən-æpu | ən-ɑːʔ |
| e. Older Cockney | ə-kæʔ | ən-æpu | ə-ɑːʔ |
| f. MLE | ə-kaʔ | ə-ʔapu | ə-h/ħɑːʔ |

Lastly, and quite interestingly, Modern London English (referred to in the literature as 'Multicultural London English' – henceforth MLE) uses the variant /ə/ in all contexts,

[3] The exact timing of when the present-day use of the article was first fully developed is a secondary issue in this paper. As Crisma and Pintzuk (2016) show, this was a gradual process of syntactico-semantic change going hand-in-hand with the elision of the /n/, which eventually led to the allomorphy. The first forms of *a~an* alternation are already attested in late Old English, but the system remains variable well into the Middle English period. Therefore, what we depict in (1a) characterises a relatively long time span from late(r) Old English till early Middle English. Consequently, the forms of the example words, too, are only meant as approximate representatives of Old English *catt*, *æppel*, *heorte*, and Middle English *cat*/*catte*, *appel*, *herte*, respectively, and their dialectal variants.

thereby having no allomorphy, like OE, but this time having lost /n/ entirely (see 1f). Interestingly, however, MLE has restored the *h*-initial lexical set, presumably having recovered its pattern from Modern Standard Southern British (1c), with which it is contemporaneous, and/or the orthography.

Of this intricate case of synchronic and diachronic variation, our paper focusses on *h*-initial words and their historical development, structured as follows. The next section, section 2, discusses the riddle of Middle English <h> – a sound whose controversial development suggests that for centuries, it was both present and absent at the same time. Section 3 then explains how autosegmental phonological theory actually *predicts* such cases of latent sounds, while section 4 brings further evidence of these 'phantoms' from older forms of today's varieties of English. Finally, section 5 briefly introduces the preliminary results of a study on latent /h/ in the speech of present-day 'standard' accents, and section 6 concludes the paper.

## 2. The riddle of Middle English <h>

Word-initial /h/ started undergoing gradual lenition most probably in OE already, and this process was accelerated by contact with Romance in Middle English (ME). Quite puzzlingly, however, most of these /h/'s (with just a few lexical exceptions like *hour*, *honest*, *heir*) were later fully recovered into most varieties including the current standard (see (1b-c)). The most convincing evidence of this full recovery between ME and Early Modern English is the oft-cited argument that the dialectal feature of *h*-dropping is virtually non-existent in American varieties – i.e., it was not transported overseas by British settlers at the time when the transatlantic forms of English were founded, and consequently, its prevalence in modern (traditional) dialects of English English must be the result of a later, separate (albeit not necessarily unrelated) internal development. This diachronic rehabilitation of /h/ seems to have happened in a period when literacy was not yet widespread enough to provide orthographic support, and, as we will see presently, there is controversial diachronic data from alliterative verse and other manuscript evidence on whether word-initial /h/ was pronounced or dropped.

Parallel to this development, an indefinite article was also emerging from OE's numeral for 'one', with the syntactico-semantic process accompanied by the phonological destabilisation of its final consonant. Since the ensuing allomorphy is conditioned by the class of the following phoneme, the form selected with a lexical item is indicative of speakers' assessment of the initial sound of that lexical item. The fact that late OE and early ME witness non-alternating *an*(*e*) with all three lexical sets represented by 'cat', 'apple' and 'heart' underpins the initial stability of the /n/ – and shows that the

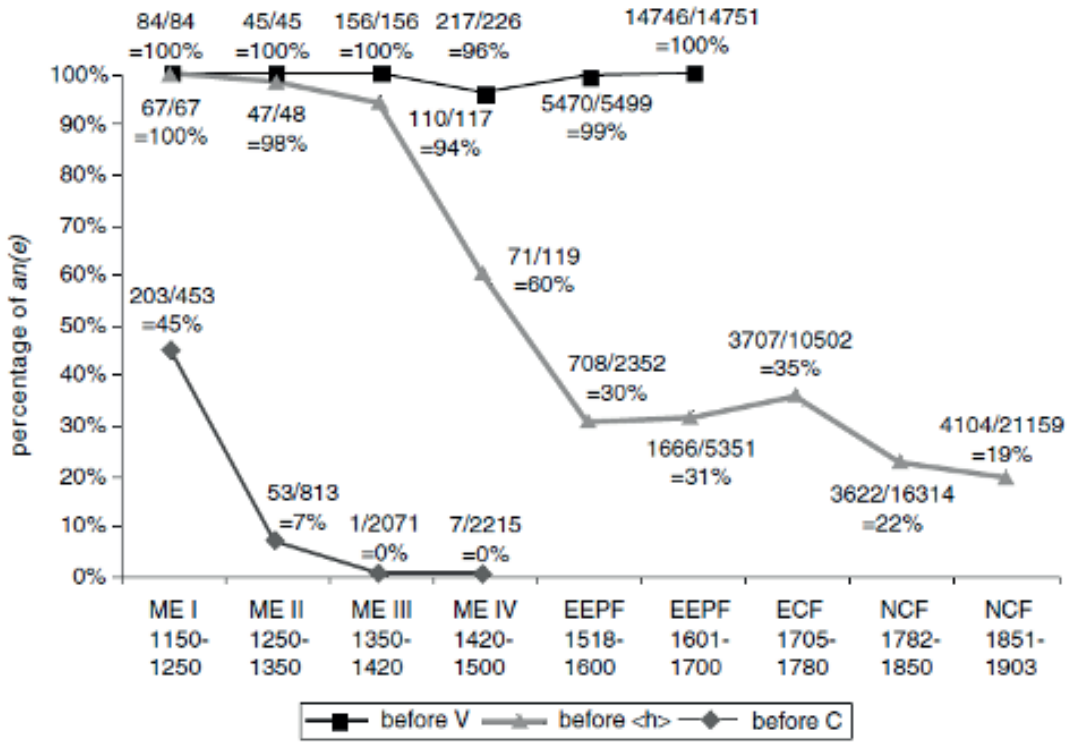
indefinite article cannot yet be used as a test to detect the pronunciation of *h*-initial words for this period.

Nor, for that matter, does it provide evidence whether the forms corresponding to 'an apple' are truly different from the other combinations, with consonant-initial following words, in this period. As a side issue, we note here that Minkova (2000; 2003) has some arguments, based on data from vowel alliteration, (the absence of) vowel elision in apparent hiatus contexts, and orthography, that there were no vowel-initial words in OE yet. This would mean that the language had systematic hard attack (*harter Einsatz*) as present-day German, Dutch and Czech – much the same way as, allegedly, MLE as well as contemporary, progressive forms of SSBE and Cockney English. Since the issue is only tangentially relevant to the present discussion (regarding the chronology of the emergence of article allomorphy), we plainly add this comment here, referring the reader to Minkova (2000; 2003) for the claim and Okazaki (2006) for a few counterarguments.

The diagram in (2) below (from Schlüter 2010, 173) shows the later development of both *an* and the treatment of *h*-initial words, between early ME and Modern English. Before vowel-initial words, *an*(*e*) has been stably at 100%, and in the first historical phase it is also used, at a cca. 50% variability, before consonant-initial words. This, then, drastically and rather swiftly drops to (near) zero. Before <h>, however, it only starts its decrease in the final ME phase, when it has already become extinct before other consonants, and it only plunges to no more than around 20% in the nineteenth century, and never disappears fully (at least before a close set of lexical items – see section 5). That is, in ME texts, words beginning with <h> are predominantly treated as words beginning with a vowel.[4]

[4] Similarly to *a*/*an*, the loss of the final nasal in the possessive determiners *mine* and *thine* was also a gradual process that went through an intermediate stage where the choice between *my*/*mine* and *thy*/*thine* was phonologically determined. Intriguingly, this final consonant erosion before *h*-initial words lagged behind other pre-consonantal contexts, making the pattern of the change mirror that of *an*(*e*). The *my*/*thy* forms appeared well before the 1400s and the whole process was fully completed by 1680, but corpus data from between 1410 and 1460 still records only around 50% occurrence of *my*/*thy* with *h*-words, which does not reach 100% before a hundred years later (see Nevalainen and Raumolin-Brunberg 2016, Nevalainen 2018).

(2) The distribution of *a* and *an*(*e*) in a series of corpora from ME to nineteenth-century English according to the initial letter of the following lexeme (Schlüter 2010, 173)




What is not clear, however, is how this selection of *an* is to be interpreted: whether the initial <h> is not pronounced, or it is not *felt* as a consonant. The historical data is unfortunately inconsistent and contradictory, providing no conclusive evidence. For instance, there even are cases when *a* is chosen with a word-initial <h> but at the same time, that <h> alliterates with vowels (see Crisma 2010). Schlüter (2010) assumes an internal change, unrelated to but accelerated by the Norman French influence, whereby the /h/-sound undergoes progressive (phonetic) weakening and disappearance (or at least achieving minimum phonetic salience) in early ME, which is later reversed through its gradual strengthening, leading to its re-introduction. Crucially to the present discussion, both Crisma (2010) and Schlüter (2010) make the claim that throughout, some kind of continued representation of /h/ has to be posited. Schlüter (2010) even mentions that early ME weak initial /h/ can be conceived of as (part of) a vowel. Based on a close investigation of the relevant data, she concludes that '[…] the phonetic realization of these lexemes may well have preserved traces of the earlier [h]-onset, even though language users were not aware of this, and these traces may have been the

germs of the renewed strengthening of the sound from later Middle English onwards' (Schlüter 2010, 188).

Scholars, therefore, seem to conclude that /h/ has to be assigned some kind of representation throughout: one that may correlate with its 'minimum phonetic salience' and its ambiguous patterning as (part of) a vowel, one that involves its 'traces' that may later serve as the basis for its reconstruction. This takes us to the issue of phonological representations and their potential to express such controversial and contradictory linguistic objects.

## 3. How can a sound be present and absent at the same time?

The theory of phonological representations, autosegmental phonology, is in fact able to handle such enigmatic situations with ease: since its fundamental claim is that phonological objects are multidimensional constructs, with the different dimensions (levels or tiers) functioning autonomously and being connected by associations only, it does not only have the ability to conceive of but it potentially *predicts* structural configurations in which there is some incongruency on two separate levels attached to the same segment. It is indeed possible for a sound to be present and absent at the same time if it comprises some phonological substance on some tier(s) but not on others.

We contend, therefore, that the intermediate diachronic stages in the development of /h/ (and, incidentally, of the /n/ of *an*, too) emerge from the various levels of phonological representation, and the fact that representations can lack an underlying association line at any of these levels. In this way, underlying representations differ from pattern to pattern, and overall we observe the full gamut of representational possibilities given by the theory: (3a) fixed (diachronically/synchronically stably associated) segments; (3b) empty skeletal slots; (3c) skeletal slots associated only to an empty root node (for the reason why we use the label '*h* aspiré', see later); and unlinked/unfixed/floating segments (with a root node) (3d), or segmental material (features) without a root node (3e) (see below).[5] Empty skeletal slots (3b) are generally accepted in autosegmental representations (more traditionally depicted as an empty 'x' dominated by an Onset node), and there has been some prior research that argues for the distinction between (3b) and (3c) (Charette 1991). Floating segments and floating features (3d–e) also belong to the established vocabulary of autosegmental models. In what follows, the configurations in (3c–d) are in the focus of our attention since they represent structures including a root node (shown by the dot), i.e., they are *segments*; however, they

[5] In (3), 'C' stands for a consonantal skeletal slot, the dots are root nodes, and 'α' represents some phonetic/melodic material. For a remark on the root node, see below.

are *empty* on the tier either below or above. Consequently, their constructions predict ambiguous, ambivalent phonological behaviour: they derive surface/phonetic latent consonants.

(3)

| a. fixed | b. empty | c. *h* aspiré | d. floating segment | e. floating segmental material/feature |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| C | C | C | | |
| \| | | \| | | |
| • | | • | • | |
| \| | | | \| | |
| α | | | α | α |

On the prosodic tier, the assumption that the syllable rhyme always comes with a preceding onset (i.e., syllables are onset–rhyme pairs) adds the prediction that syllable-initial latent consonants will typically be of type (3c) (followed by full nuclei), whereas syllable-final instances thereof will typically be of type (3d). Syllable-initial ones will be hiatus enforcers, 'phantom consonants': invisible prosodic demarcators exhibiting similar effects to those of certain empty categories observed in syntax (e.g., *wh*-traces – denoted by **Ø** in (4) – blocking *wanna*-contraction).

(4) *wanna*-contraction (Radford 1988, 475–76)

a) I *want to* win
b) I *wanna* win
c) You *want to* beat who(m)?
d) Who do you *wanna* beat **Ø**?
e) I *want* Jim *to* win
f) You *want* who *to* win?
g) Who do you *want* **Ø** *to* win?
h) *Who do you *wanna* win?

In (4), (a) and (b) show that *want* and *to*, when juxtaposed, can be contracted in spoken/colloquial English. When the sentence structure also involves *wh*-movement, however, the contraction is only possible when the *wh*-trace (indicated by **Ø**) does not intervene between the two words (4d) – otherwise it is blocked (4h). This syntactic example is similar in effect to hard attack (see the previous section) in languages like German (and, arguably, in OE, too), blocking the emergence of cross-word linking, including *r*-linking, cf. English *summe*/r/*evening* versus German *Sommer*[ʔ]*abend*. The difference is that, unlike the zero in (4), the glottal stop does have a phonetic manifestation. Below

we will see that French *h* aspiré serves as a more perfect phonological counterpart, as the intervening empty category does not appear in any phonetic form in that case.

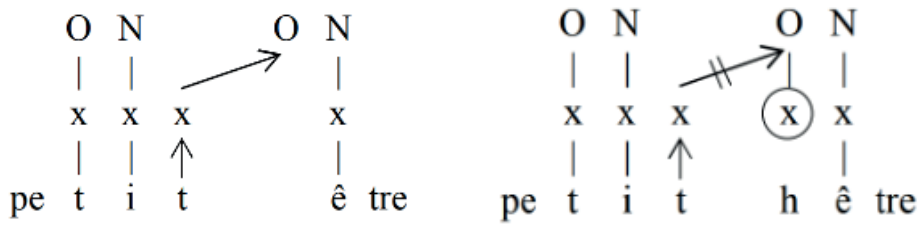
Syllable-final (in this case, morpheme-final) latent consonants will typically be of type (3d) and will therefore be the opposite: potential (aspiring?) hiatus fillers (or mechanisms to avoid OCP violations, as claimed in Scheer 2022). The most well-known such case in English is 'Intrusive *r*' in certain non-rhotic varieties, which turns up as a cross-morpheme linking consonant after a set of lexically marked roots, such as *law* in *law* /r/ *and order* (unless we accept the proposal that such /r/'s are not underlyingly present latent consonants but phonetic interpretations of vocalic material spreading from the root-final vowel – see Broadbent 1991).

Both types of latent consonant discussed above are straightforwardly exemplified by French: the former is a possible representation of what is called *h* aspiré, while the latter is showcased by what is called liaison (see below for illustration). However, we claim that these phonological configurations are more widely attested: in addition to French, it is possible to identify further cases of similar 'phantom consonants', even of the *h* aspiré type, in other languages, e.g., Ik (Ulfsbjorninn 2021); John (2014) provides a further list of Aranese Gascon, Onandaga, Seri, Turkish, Maltese Arabic and Tiwi (see references therein) as languages that seem to also exhibit the phenomenon. Even more relevantly to our present topic, we may also assume that both emerge diachronically as a stage in consonant lenition, i.e., a process pointing towards deletion: in this way, they are conserved/fossilised incomplete elisions, potentially triggering ambiguous phonological behaviours such as the one documented for ME /h/.

Of course, the most well-known such case is that of *h* aspiré in French, illustrated in (5) (from Scheer et al. 2015).[6] The final, floating consonant of words like *petit*, a /t/ this time, is normally 'resyllabified' into a following vowel-initial word (e.g., *être* /ɛtʁ/ 'being') and liaison happens (in *petit être* in (5a)); however, a set of lexically specified words which begin with an orthographic but phonetically unrealised *h* (e.g., *hêtre* /ɛtʁ/ 'beech') will systematically block cross-word linking (5b). Such *h*'s are called *h* aspiré 'aspirated *h*', and such words can be referred to as *h* aspiré words. The orthographic <h> is shown in the diagram in (5) but its actual representation is the x-slot itself.

[6] Note that this diagram is a bit misleading because the *h* is actually written under the initial onset slot for *hêtre* although the claim is that it is never pronounced anymore.

(5) a. *petit être* 'little being' b. *petit hêtre* 'small beech'




(5) shows the basic idea behind Charette (1991)'s analysis: *h* aspiré words start with an empty onset having a timing slot, whereas 'true' vowel-initial syllables (like *être*) lack any structure below the Onset node.

The French example, then, provides illustration of *h* aspiré (3c) as well as floating segments (3d), repeated below for convenience as (6a–b), respectively. We claim that both are exemplified by English, in the diachronic evolution of *an* and word-initial /h/. Drawing on support from the historical surveys, we contend that, on the one hand, the English *a*/*an* allomorphy is analysable as *n*-liaison (lexically unlinked floating melody), developing in the ME period and still present in certain varieties including older and modern Standard Southern British English (1b–c); on the other hand, conceiving of the intermediate stage of *h*-dropping as *h* aspiré (empty skeletal slot/root node) accounts for all the observed individual patterns in the diachrony.

In particular, conceiving '*h*-dropping' in the early history of English as a case of *h* aspiré (rather than one of dropping proper) solves the long riddle: /h/ was neither deleted nor pronounced – hence the controversial data from poetry, and its mysterious easy, quick, full reconstruction. Besides, we cannot exclude the possibility of a scenario in which speakers' grammar got so unstable during this transitional period that a kind of random vacillation was brought about between *h* aspiré (6a) and floating *h* (6b), with speakers varying in terms of the URs stored for different items, leading to both inter- and intraspeaker variation. This would explain even more of the observed discrepancy in the diachronic data and the almost perfect rehabilitation of *h* in later ME.

(6) a. *h* aspiré b. floating


The careful reader may have noticed that there is a systematic theoretical difference between the representations in (5) and ours in (6): the prosodic tier (the 'O–x' pair in (5) and 'C' in (6)) and phonetic structure (abbreviated to phonetic symbols) are mediated in our model by root nodes (the dots). This issue is beyond the scope of the present discussion – suffice it to say that the investigation of the two latent consonants in the history of English contributes valuable arguments to yet another aspect of phonological representations, namely, the role of skeletal positions versus that of root nodes. For Charette (1991) (and the research that follows in that vein), the formal difference between *h* aspiré words and vowel-initial words lies in the presence of a timing slot in the initial empty onset in the former, and the absence thereof in the latter. We, however, argue in Balogné Bérces and Ulfsbjorninn (in prep.), together with others like John (2014), that the skeletal slot is present in either case, and what they differ in is the availability of a root node.[7]

You may also notice that the French data above do not require the presence of the melody of /h/ in the UR (see our footnote 6), whereas here we suppose the potential historical reconstruction of initial /h/ due to its phonetic trace being retained in the exponents (lexical forms) – hence the /h/ in (6a).

Intriguingly, an additional option for a possible diachronic explanation reveals itself if we assume that the phonetic form of word-initial /h/ was [ɦ] at the time. In her study of (older) Cockney, Häcker (2005) finds that that pronunciation was firmly established in 19th-century English, and due to its phonetic properties, it may have given the auditory impression of a dropped /h/. If it was among the pronunciation variants in earlier periods, too, that could have contributed to the contradictory nature of the phenomenon.

[7] Our representations are closest in theoretical taste to those of Strict CV (or CVCV) phonology (Lowenstamm 1996; Scheer 2004). Although Strict CV does not usually show the root node, they are understood to be there often implicitly (Kula 2008) and explicitly (Ulfsbjorninn 2021; Scheer 2022; Lahrouchi and Ulfsbjorninn 2024; Faust 2025; etc.). The root node layer introduces other possible configurations, just a floating root node, or features and just a root node but no association line between them. These possibilities have not been analytically used so they are not listed in (3). There has also been the use of an underlying association line (Ziková and Faltýnková 2021; Fortuna 2022) – these are not relevant to our work here so we do not include them.

Nevertheless, we maintain that the autosegmental solution in (6) provides a better insight through its special tier associations. Its structural configuration integrates the continued representation of /h/ proposed by the diachronic studies, and explains its almost complete rehabilitation between 1400 and 1600, witnessed by many varieties of the language. Certain non-standard accents, however, end up as fully *h*-less, which is even apparent in the interaction of *h* (or more precisely, its absence) with the /n/ of *an* (e.g., Cockney – see (1d)). The following section turns to these varieties and a possible reconstruction of their development.

## 4. Further evidence: The 'phantom *h*' in older forms of today's *h*-less varieties

Many present-day varieties of English English have historically eliminated their *h*-initial words. Most probably, this gradual process started with the simplification of /hw/ sequences in words like *which*, *whine* (homophonous with words like *witch*, *wine* in varieties that have introduced this change: most of England, but not, notoriously, in Scotland and parts of Ireland, and North American varieties are divided still today whether they merge or split the two lexical sets), and spread afterwards to all other instances of initial /h/, too (only really happening in forms of English in England, becoming a forceful local identity marker as well as perhaps the most heavily stigmatised non-standard pronunciation feature there, but remaining unable to affect varieties beyond). These are the so-called *h*-dropping, or *h*-less accents of English, the most well-known of which being Cockney in London.

Such *h*-dropping accents of English typically only drop *h*'s word-initially, hence the most frequently used keyword in dialectal studies, *house*. Investigations of native intuitions about the word-internal site (in words like *ahead*, *behave*, *mahogany* or *Sahara*) are sparse, probably because of the low frequency of most such words and their scarcity in corpora. Baranowski and Turton (2015, 298) report *h*-dropping in Manchester English in, e.g., *behind*, and state that the process feeds 'Linking *r*' (e.g., *Harpurhey* may be pronounced /ˌɑːpəˈɹeɪ/). Informal, introspective reflections either suggest no medial deletion, or some interaction with the preceding vowel's quality (see, e.g., the comments below Smith 2012). This may indicate some diversity in the precise structural description of the diachronic rule of *h*-dropping in different varieties, but because we are primarily concerned with the representation of the outcome (irrespective of word position), and because the word-initial site is shared by all *h*-less subsystems, we will continue to focus on the more frequent, better-documented case of the beginning of the word.

We therefore turn our attention to the gradual diachronic development of these *h*-less varieties. There is evidence from their older forms (e.g., Older Cockney in the

south of England, or Older Hartlepool in the north) of an intermediate stage with no *n*-liaison with dropped /h/ (1e). For instance, Hurford (1971; 1972), talking about phrases like *a half* in Cockney, explains: 'I have the impression that [əɑːf] is an archaic pronunciation found mainly in older speakers and that [ənɑːf] is now predominant, especially in speakers of middle age or younger' (Hurford 1971, 144), and 'we find, for example, *a half* [əɑːf], and *a heart* [əɑːʔ], but never (in adult speech) **a apple* *[əæpʰʊ], or **a office* *[əɔfɪs]' (Hurford 1972, 294).

Dialect writing provides further proof of the pattern. Reg Smythe's Andy Capp cartoons, for example, produced for the *Daily Mirror* and the *Sunday Mirror* since 1957 and depicting then-middle-aged characters from Hartlepool, Durham, put into the characters' mouths phrases written as *a 'ook* 'a hook', *a 'elluva* … 'a hell of a …', *a 'and* 'a hand', *in a 'urry* 'in a hurry', alongside *an*+V- sequences such as *an idiot*, *an ash-tray*, *an early night*, etc. This seems to suggest dropped *h*'s word initially (indicated by the apostrophes) but consonant-initial allomorph selection for the indefinite article with those same words, while the allomorph triggered by vowel-initial stems is also part of the system. Sporadic instances of *an* + *h*-less item (e.g., *an 'alf-back*, *an 'usband*) indicate that the system is on the way towards the Cockney type (1d), and, since the same apostrophe is applied, that all these pronunciations uniformly involve the plain absence of /h/ rather than, e.g., hard attack. The fact that the present-day form of this dialect is indeed (1d) with no (systematic) hard attack also suggests that the apostrophe in *a 'ook* and the like denotes an unfilled hiatus and not a glottal stop – it is difficult to believe that speakers would have abandoned the strategy of glottal stop insertion later if it had been part of their phonological system.

The examples above identify a transitional, hybrid phase in the historical evolution of the elision of /h/ in these accents, in which the consonant acts like a 'phantom': it is present in some way (blocking the appearance of the /n/ of *an*) and (felt) absent in another (phonetically) at the same time. We claim that this kind of behaviour is due to its patterning as *h* aspiré, stemming from its structure which we show in (6a). It may well be the case that ME /h/ underwent the same intermediate phase in the course of its change but, unlike the later wave of *h*-dropping that eventually produced today's *h*-less varieties, this earlier diachronic process did not reach its terminal stage and got reversed from a melody-preserving *h* aspiré before it could lead to complete deletion.

## 5. The special case of certain *h*-words in present-day English

A final issue pertaining to the Janus-faced /h/ of English concerns present-day varieties of the 'standard' type (1b–c), i.e., in which the well-known *a*/*an* allomorphy is accompanied by stable /h/ in words like *heart* that – normally – grants consonant-initial

behaviour to its lexical set. A closed set of words, however, e.g., *historic*, have both an *h*-initial and an *h*-less pronunciation that alternate: both *a* /h/*istoric* (*moment*) and *a*/n/*istoric* (*moment*) occur. Furthermore, certain speakers systematically (albeit variably) use pronunciations composed of the *an* variant combined with the *h*-ful form: *a*/n h/*istoric*. Balogné Bérces and Ulfsbjorninn (in prep.) reports the results of a small-scale survey whose goal is to discover the details of the phenomenon, which we briefly summarise here.

First, native speakers' reflections on such pronunciations point out that most of those who use *an* with words like *historic* do not drop the *h* but pronounce /-nh-/ (Smith 2012). The process is item-specific, and the *h*-words involved are both phonologically and etymologically constrained. The most frequent such words include *habítual*, *históric*(*al*), *hotél* and *heróic* – they all are French/Latinate words with second-syllable stress (marked with the accents). Hypothetical **an hístory*, i.e., the *an* form combined with an *h*-ful pronunciation of an initial-stressed word, is deemed downright ungrammatical by native speakers, which indicates that stress is indeed a factor.

Second, an acoustic analysis of a corpus containing actual instances of such sequences in spontaneous speech reveals a number of different phonetic strategies that the speakers resort to: most frequently, the /nh/ sequence is pronounced with a smooth transition, but some speakers hold a very brief pause inbetween, and some fully merge the two consonants into a devoiced nasal [n̥]. It is very important to bear in mind that these options are available only after *an* and only with these specific *h*-words, and these speakers are otherwise non-*h*-dropping speakers; therefore, it is obvious that this variation arises as a result of the combination of two lexically marked items.

Our interpretation is that these speakers seem to be aware of two variants for both words (the two allomorphs of *an* and the *h*-ful and *h*-less forms of the *h*-words) as they store both with URs with latent consonants. The juxtaposition of two latent segments creates a phonological conflict that can be resolved in a variety of ways depending on how the floating melodies are associated to the prosody. As a result, with the exclusion of *a 'istoric* (which would not surface either of the floating consonants and thus would create cross-word hiatus in this accent), all the available structural configurations enter into a competition, leading to a huge amount of interspeaker (and perhaps also intraspeaker) variation. The representations and the derivations are explicated in Balogné Bérces and Ulfsbjorninn (in prep.) in detail.

The true relevance of this case to our present discussion is that it unveils an array of configurational alternatives that speakers have access to at a synchronic stage in the flow of diachronic development. This way, it opens up the possibility that a similar (or the same) kind of vacillation characterised the treatment of *h*-initial words in Mid-

dle English, with an ensuing complex situation of inter- and intraspeaker variation very much like what we witness about the phenomenon of clashing latent consonants above.

## 6. Conclusion

We hope to have shown that representational phonology offers well-supported solutions to the riddle of '*h*-dropping' in the early history of English: it may not have been complete deletion at any of the stages of its development, but instead, a process producing intermediate forms of the *h* aspiré type. These latent, 'phantom', or 'ghost' consonants may have resembled their counterparts identifiable in older forms of present-day *h*-less varieties (like Cockney, or Hartlepool English), or they may have produced phonetic patterns similar to the ones that still exist for *historic* and a few other words in accents that are 'standard' otherwise. Or there may have been a mixture of both.

In any event, we are led to conclude that /h/ was neither deleted nor pronounced, in a phonological setting which brought with it a great deal of inter- and intraspeaker variation, but which also guaranteed a simple, quick, and full reconstruction for the destabilised consonant. This approach to this issue is in line with the results of diachronic studies, quoted above, that suggest 'some kind of continued representation of /h/ during its obscurity in late Old and early Middle English' (Schlüter 2010, 188). Without doubt, the toolkit of representational phonology is available to account for such puzzling observations.

In addition, we propose that the current sociolinguistic variation found in extant Southern British English with regard to indefinite article allomorphy and initial /h/ can be entirely modelled phonologically by different speakers having established different underlying forms for these items. In modern SSBE, *n*-liaison stays maintained with no *h*-dropping or *h* aspiré. In MLE, another prominent southern variety, *a*/*an*-allomorphy cannot survive (a well-known feature of urban language contact – see Britain and Fox 2009), the /n/ having been finally and completely extirpated from the UR of the indefinite article, and neither can *h*-dropping/*h* aspiré as *h*'s are restored.

Nevertheless, still today, in present-day 'standard' varieties, /h/ continues to work in mysterious ways, even if in a limited set of words (like *historic*) only, as shown in our last section above. It keeps puzzling us, as it did in Middle English and later periods. It remains the most whimsical sound: now you see it, now you don't.

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# 11.

# Personal Names in the Irish Gaelic Translation of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*

*Dóra Pődör*

## 1. Introduction

This article discusses the most common personal names in the Irish Gaelic[1] translation of J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, which appeared in 2012, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the first publication of Tolkien's classic work. The translator, Nicholas Williams is a linguist. He is an Englishman who has published widely on the Irish and Cornish languages, and, apart from *The Hobbit*, he also translated *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass* into Irish Gaelic. As Irish is a minority language in Ireland and has more non-native speakers than native ones, it is not unusual for a non-native speaker to translate into Irish. Williams translated *The Hobbit* not only into Irish, but also into Cornish. With the appearance of the Scottish Gaelic translation of this book on the occasion of the Tolkien Reading Day on 25 March 2025, *The Hobbit* is now available in five of the six Celtic languages: Welsh, Cornish, Breton, Irish Gaelic and Scottish Gaelic. The only one missing yet is the Manx version. All these translations were published by Evertype, a publishing company run by the American-Irish linguist Michael Everson, which specialises in publishing books in various minority languages – especially the works of J. R. R. Tolkien and Lewis Carroll (Ó Coimín 2025).

The Preface to *An Hobad* states that the Irish translation is based on the third edition of *The Hobbit*, which appeared in 1966, but the corrections in *The Annotated Hobbit* (ed. Douglas A. Anderson 2002) were also taken into consideration (Tolkien 2012, v). In the original foreword written by Tolkien, which explains how English is used to represent the languages of long ago that feature in *The Hobbit*, some things were changed in order to provide an Irish-language context. So, for example, instead of "English is used to represent the languages" (Tolkien 1998, 9), in *An Hobad* one can find "Irish is used to represent the languages" (Tolkien 2012, x). It is also stated that

[1] The Celtic language spoken in Ireland is known as 'Irish' or 'Gaelic' on the island of Ireland, but is mostly referred to as 'Irish Gaelic' in the rest of the world, so as to distinguish it from its close relative, Scottish Gaelic, which is spoken in Scotland. In this article, both 'Irish' and 'Irish Gaelic' are used.

"[n]ames like *Elrond* and *Gondolin* which are in the Elvish language Sindarin are not translated" (ibid.). Note that this is the only section of the book that appears both in Irish and in English.

The translation was reviewed by several people after it appeared, and it was generally well received, although some reviewers had mixed opinions as to the quality of the Irish text and the Gaelicisations (e.g., *An Sionnach Fionn* 2012; Ó Coileáin 2012; Sims 2013; or *Cork Irish* 2014). The present author is not aware of any publication that has discussed the personal names in this translation.

In 1975, the 'Guide to the Names in *The Lord of the Rings*', also known as the 'Nomenclature of *The Lord of the Rings*', written by J. R. R. Tolkien and edited by his son, Christopher Tolkien, was published for the first time in Lobdell (1975). This text begins with the following introduction by the editor: "These Notes on Nomenclature were made by J. R. R. Tolkien to assist translators of the book into other languages. They were composed when only the Swedish and Dutch translations had appeared" (Tolkien 1975, 153). In this guide, the first section is 'Names of Persons and Peoples', but no names that could be considered first names can be found here. The only name that is relevant for this paper is Baggins, about which Tolkien says the following: "Baggins. Intended to recall 'bag' – compare Bilbo's conversation with Smaug in *The Hobbit* – and meant to be associated (by hobbits) with Bag End (that is, the end of a 'bag' or 'pudding bag' = cul-de-sac), the local name for Bilbo's house. […] The translation should contain an element meaning 'sack, bag'" (Tolkien 1975, 160).

In the next section, let us examine the forms of the most frequently used personal names in the Irish translation of *The Hobbit*. The English names were taken from Tolkien (1998).

## 2. Some basic rules of Irish spelling and pronunciation

Native Irish does not have an organically developed standard version of pronunciation but is spoken in the form of three major and some minor dialects; however, the editors of the *Foclóir Póca* dictionary (Ó Liatháin et al. 1986) designed an artificial standard in order to be able to provide an abstract representation of the phonemic contrasts that exist in Irish. As the editors state in the 'Phonetic Preface', "The system of pronunciation proposed here contains all the essential contrasts found in the three main dialects. It does not correspond in every detail to any one dialect but contains a core common to them all" (Ó Liatháin et al. 1986, xii). This system is applied here when giving the postulated Irish pronunciation of the most important personal names in *The Hobbit*. The vowel symbols in the transcription are identical with those of the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet), while the consonants are represented by slightly modified symbols. The *Foclóir Póca*

lists 37 consonant phonemes (i.e., sounds that are able to distinguish between meanings) for Irish Gaelic, 34 of which represent 'broad' and 'slender' consonant pairs. The term 'broad' refers to velarised or non-palatal consonants: here, during articulation, the tongue moves close to the velum, that is, the back of the roof of the mouth. 'Slender' denotes palatalised or palatal consonants: here, during articulation, the tongue moves near the hard palate, towards the front of the roof of the mouth.[2] In general, it could be said that the broad consonants are 'harder', while the slender consonants are 'softer' in pronunciation. The slender consonants are marked with a superscript ´ symbol in the transcription. For example, /n/ is broad, corresponding roughly to the 'n' sound in English **now** or Hungarian **nap** 'day; sun', while /n´/ is slender, corresponding roughly to how the <n>[3] is pronounced in English **venue** or Hungarian **nyúl** 'rabbit, hare; reach out'. Similarly, /s/ is broad and should be pronounced as the <s> in **see**, while /s´/ is slender, and it should be sounded as <sh> in **shoe**. (This latter sound is normally represented by the symbol /ʃ/ in the IPA.) Thus, there are altogether 17 broad–slender consonant phoneme pairs in Irish. Consonant phonemes that do not come in broad–slender pairs are /h/, /w/ and /d´z´/ (which equals /dʒ/ in the IPA) (Ó Liatháin et al. 1986, xiv–xv).

The broad versus slender consonant distinction is so important in Irish that it is consistently represented in spelling. The vowel letters <a>, <á>, <o>, <ó>, <u>, and <ú> appear beside broad consonants, while the vowel letters <e>, <é>, <i>, and <í> appear beside slender consonants. A consonant inside a word will be normally flanked by vowel letters belonging to the same category. One consequence of these spelling rules is that many vowel letters in Irish words will not be pronounced, as their role is simply to indicate whether the adjacent consonant letter represents a broad or a slender consonant. So, for example, in the name **Seán** /s´a:n/ the <e> is not pronounced as it simply indicates that the preceding <s> is slender so it should be pronounced /s´/ as the <sh> in **shoe** and not as the <s> in **see**. Similarly, in the Irish Gaelic version of Bilbo's name, **Biolbó**, the <o> is silent, as its role is to indicate that the following 'l' and 'b' are broad; or in the Irish version of Dori's name, **Dóirí**, the <i> again is silent as it only indicates that the following 'r' is slender[4].

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[2] The terms 'broad' and 'slender' are going to be used in this article. Although 'velarised' and 'non-palatal' do not quite refer to the same phenomenon, as neither do 'palatalised' and 'palatal', these differences are not relevant for the topic of this article; and neither are the dialectal differences in the degree of palatalisation.

[3] As usual in papers in linguistics, spelling is indicated throughout between pointed brackets, while pronunciation is given between slashes, indicating abstract phonemic notation.

[4] A slender 'r' is 'softer' than a broad one, almost as if there was a /j/ sound (like the first sound in **you**) pronounced with it. Many sound files in the *New English–Irish Dictionary* (focloir.ie) illustrate the difference. For example, the word **mór** (in the entry 'big') ends in a broad 'r', while the word **cóir** (in the entry 'justice') ends in a slender one. These words can be listened to in the three major dialects of Irish Gaelic by clicking on the letters C, M and U beside the speaker icon.

## 3. The spelling and the pronunciation of first names in the nominative

*An Hobad* has a short appendix which contains a pronunciation guide. The pronunciation is given in the IPA for fourteen common nouns and proper names: **Bladorthin**, **cram**, **Dorwinion**, **Eldamar**, **Elrond**, **Esgaroth**, **Galion**, **Girion**, **Glamdring**, **Gondolin**, **Gundabad**, **mithril**, **Moria**, **Orcrist** (Tolkien 2012, 267). Of these words, only the personal names **Elrond** and **Girion** are discussed in this study. The transcription given for these names is respectively ['ɛlrɔnd] and ['giriɔn][5], and so this is what is going to be given here as well. However, for all the other names, as they do not appear in the pronunciation guide, only a postulated pronunciation will be given based on the letter-to-sound rules of Irish Gaelic, as laid out in the *Foclóir Póca* dictionary referred to above.

In Table 1, the spelling and pronunciation of first names in the nominative are presented in alphabetical order. In two of the three major dialects, the stress falls on the first syllable of a word, and this pattern is given here, with the stress indicated by the ' symbol before the stressed syllable. The colon after a vowel indicates that it is long, e.g., /o:/.

Note that in *The Hobbit*, the names do not have accents, while in *The Lord of the Rings* such diacritics appear in the names of **Dáin**, **Glóin**, **Óin**, **Thráin**, and **Thrór**, indicating the Old Norse spelling (Tolkien 2007). The first four names among these are supposed to be disyllabic. It is not clear if their Irish versions are supposed to be disyllabic as well.

| Original form of the name in *The Hobbit* | Irish form of the name | Postulated Irish pronunciation |
|---|---|---|
| Balin | Báilín | /'ba:l´i:n´/ |
| Bard | Bard | /ba:rd/ |
| Beorn | Béorn | /'b´e:ərn/ |
| Bifur | Bíofúr | /'b´i:fu:r/ |
| Bilbo | Biolbó | /'b´ilbo:/ |
| Bofur | Bófúr | /'bo:fu:r/ |
| Bombur | Bombúr | /'bombu:r/ |
| Dain | Dáin | /da:n´/ |

[5] The translator uses square brackets, which traditionally indicate phonetic rather than phonemic notation. (For the difference between phonetic and phonemic transcription, see 'Phonetics: An Interactive Introduction' at australianlinguistics.com/speech-sounds/phonemic-vs-phonetic – Reid n.d.). Also note that the possible slender quality of consonants is not indicated.

| Original form of the name in *The Hobbit* | Irish form of the name | Postulated Irish pronunciation |
|---|---|---|
| Dori | Dóirí | /'do:r´i:/ |
| Durin | Dúirín | /'du:r´i:n´/ |
| Dwalin | Dváilín | /'dva:l´i:n´/ |
| Elrond | Elrond | /'ɛlrɔnd/[6] |
| Fili | Fílí | /'f´i:l´i:/ |
| Gandalf | Gandalf | /'gandəlf/ |
| Girion | Girion | /'giriɔn/[7] |
| Gloin | Glóin | /glo:n´/ |
| Gollum | Golam | /'goləm/ |
| Kili | Kílí | /'k´i:l´i:/ |
| Nori | Nóirí | /'no:r´i:/ |
| Oin | Óin | /o:n´/ |
| Ori | Óirí | /'o:r´i:/ |
| Smaug | Smóg | /smo:g/ |
| Thorin | Tóirín | /'to:r´i:n´/ |
| Thrain | Tráin | /tra:n´/ |
| Thror | Trór | /tro:r/ |

Table 1. The nominative form of non-English personal names in the Irish Gaelic translation of *The Hobbit*.

An attempt is made here to explain some of the translator's choices.

a) The letter <w> is only used in Irish in some loanwords (e.g., **wigwam**), so **Dwalin's** name appears as **Dváilín**.
b) The letter <k> is only used in proper names of foreign origin, for which **Kílí** is a good example here (Ó hAnluain 1960/1999, 1).

[6] This is the pronunciation provided by the translator. The postulated pronunciation based on letter-to-sound rules would be /'elrənd/.

[7] This is the pronunciation provided by the translator. The postulated pronunciation based on letter-to-sound rules would be /'g´ir´iən/.

c) Modern Irish does not have interdental fricatives, so the initial consonant of **Thorin**, **Thrain** and **Thror** /θ/ is rendered as a /t/: **Tóirín**, **Tráin**, **Trór**. This sound needs to be spelt with a <t>, as <th> in Irish is pronounced as /h/.
d) One may ask what guided the translator's choices as to the consonant quality (broad or slender) in the names in the Irish translation, i.e., why it is that the translator chose the form **Biolbó** /'bʲilbo:/ and not **Bilbeo** /'bʲilʲbʲo:/, or **Dóirí** /'do:rʲi:/ and not **Dóraí** /'do:ri:/. In the first case it could be argued that the pronunciation of **Biolbó** is closer to the pronunciation intended by Tolkien, while in the second case the final /i:/ may have influenced the translator as to the choice of the quality of the preceding consonant. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to try and account for the quality of each consonant in these names.
e) **-ín** is a productive diminutive suffix in Irish which sometimes appears at the end of names: **Máire – Máirín** (anglicised as **Maureen**), **Séamas – Séamaisín**. Thus the **-ín** at the end of **Tóirín**, **Báilín**, **Dváilín** and **Dúirín** does not sound un-Irish. This suffix is also productive in Irish English in its anglicised form, **-een**; e.g., **dropeen** 'a small drop' ('dropeen', McMahon and O'Donoghue 2011) and **girleen** 'little girl' ('girleen', oed.com).
f) In **Bíofúr**, **Bofúr** and **Bombúr** the vowel in the second syllable is long before the /r/. This reflects the sound pattern of Irish, as in *A Reverse Dictionary of Modern Irish* there is only one disyllabic word that ends in -<ur> /ər/, while forty-nine that end in -<úr> /u:r/ (Doyle and Gussmann 2004, 315).
g) Some of the dwarves' names end in a long /i:/ in the Irish version: **Dóirí**, **Fílí**, **Kílí**, **Nóirí**, **Óirí**. Note that the vowels in the stressed syllables are also lengthened, becoming /o:/ and /i:/, respectively. According to *A Reverse Dictionary of Modern Irish*, almost all disyllabic words end in /i:/ rather than /ə/ (spelt as <i>) (Doyle and Gussmann 2004, 199 and 200–44). This means that here again, the pronunciation of these names is adjusted to Irish phonological patterns.
h) The <ó> in **Smóg** approximates the English pronunciation of <au> in words such as **caught**, **haunt**, **sauce** /ɔ:/; however, in **Smaug** the vowel is /aʊ/ ('Smaug', wikipedia.org).
i) Thorin's name is often accompanied by his epithet, Oakenshield. This was translated into Irish as **Tóirín na Scéithe Darach**, literally 'Thorin of the Shield of Oak'.

In the next table, the names of the trolls are presented. They represent a separate category as they are English names in the original text.

| Original form of the name | Irish form of the name | Irish pronunciation |
|---|---|---|
| Bert | Beartla | /'b´artlə/ |
| Tom | Teaim | /t´am´/ |
| William | Liam | /l´iəm/ |

Table 2. English names in *The Hobbit* and their equivalents in the Irish Gaelic translation.

**Beartla** is an Irish male name, which derives from Bartholomew (Nielsen 1986, 30). The Irish version of **Thomas** is **Tomás**, and **Teaim** is probably the Irish transliteration of English **Tom**. Finally, **William** and **Liam** are both borrowings from Norman French, where the stress fell on the last syllable, and in Irish the unstressed syllable was lost. **Liam** is a very common name in Ireland. In the original English text, **William** is sometimes addressed with the hypocoristic form of his name, **Bill**. As there is no such form corresponding to **Liam**, **Liam** is what is used in these cases as well.

## 4. The spelling and the pronunciation of family names in the nominative

In *The Hobbit*, some hobbit family names can also be found, for example **Baggins** and **Took**. **Baggins** is rendered as **Baigín** /'bag´i:n´/ in the Irish translation. The English word **bag** was borrowed into Irish as **baig**, a verb meaning 'to bag, to heap' ('baig', v, Ó Dónaill 1977/2005), while **-ín** is a very productive diminutive suffix in Irish, as mentioned earlier – however, diminutive suffixes cannot be attached to verbs, only to nouns. But in the *National Corpus of Irish* (Bhreathnach et al. 2024; henceforth *NCI*), there is a single example of the noun **baigín** from an Irish-language TV programme in the sentence *Níos fearr ná baigín sweets is dócha* ('Better than a small bag of sweets, probably')[8] ('baigín', *NCI*). Thus, this form seems to be the English noun **bag** with the Irish diminutive suffix, so the surname **Baigín** fulfils Tolkien's earlier cited wish that "[t]he translation should contain an element meaning 'sack, bag'" (Tolkien 1975, 160).

**Took** appears **Túc** as in **Beileadona Túc** (Tolkien 2012, 2) 'Belladonna Took' (Tolkien 1998, 13)[9]. The surname of one of the trolls, **William**, occurs once in the text as **Huggins** (Tolkien 1998, 54). **Huggins** is the diminutive form of **Hugh** (Hanks, Coates and McClure 2016, 1351). The Irish translation has **'Uiginn** /'ig´in´/ here (Tolkien 2012, 33), a shortened form of **Ó hUiginn** /o: 'hig´in´/ 'descendant of a viking'

[8] My translation.
[9] The English equivalents were taken from the 1998 edition of *The Hobbit* (Tolkien 1998).

(Irish **Uiginn** < Old Norse **víkingr**). This name is often anglicised as **Higgins** or **O'Higgins** (Hanks, Coates and McClure 2016, 1281 and 1992).

It should be noted here that most Irish surnames are made up of two elements, where the first element means son or daughter (**mac** or **nic/ní**) or grandson/descendant (**ó**), followed by a patronymic, as shown in the first column of Table 3. In the anglicised forms, only the first elements denoting males (**Mc** and **O'**) appear. However, there is another way of using family names in Irish Gaelic: "[t]he usual way of referring to somebody by surname is to make an ordinary noun of the name by adding **ach**" (Ó Sé 2010, 226). In such cases, the surname has to be preceded by the definite article **an**. Some examples from Irish can be seen in the table below:

| Surname | Pronunciation | Surname with *-ach* | Pronunciation | Anglicised form |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Mac Mathúna | /mak 'mahu:nə/ | an Mathúnach | /ən 'mahu:nəx/ | McMahon |
| Ó Briain | /o: 'b´r´iən´/ | an Brianach | /ən 'b´r´iənəx/ | O'Brien |
| Ó Conaill | /o: 'konəl´/ | an Conallach | /ən 'konələx/ | O'Connell |

Table 3. Different forms of some Irish surnames.

The suffix **-ach** /əx/ is also used in *An Hobad*, as both **Baigín** and **Túc** appear with the **-ach** suffix as well: **an Baigíneach** (Tolkien 2012, 263) 'Mr Baggins' (Tolkien 1998, 362), plural **na Baigínigh** (ibid., 1) '[T]he Bagginses' (ibid., 12) and **na Túcaigh** (ibid., 2) 'the Tooks' (ibid., 13). (There is no singular **an Túcach** in the book.)

## 5. Initial mutations and their effects on the personal names in *An Hobad*

Irish Gaelic, just like the other Celtic languages (e.g., Scottish Gaelic, Welsh and Breton), often expresses grammatical relations with the help of initial mutations. This means that the first sound of a word may change depending on what precedes it. These rules also apply to proper nouns, although it is not compulsory to apply initial mutations to foreign names. An examination of the personal names in *An Hobad* reveals that the personal names used in the Irish translation of the novel behave like Irish names, as they can undergo aspiration (also known as lenition) (see 5.1), nasalisation (also known as eclipsis) (see 5.2), and can also acquire an **h-** when they begin with a vowel. The examples below show these initial changes on the personal names. Note that words that begin with **h**, **l**, **n** and **r** are not affected by any initial mutation.

### *5.1 Aspiration (lenition)*

Although both 'aspiration' and 'lenition' are used for the phenomenon that is described in this paragraph, lenition would be the more accurate term for it. Lenition is a change in consonants whereby they become 'weaker' from the phonetic point of view (Hyman 1975, 165). In Irish Gaelic, the general rule is that the oral stops <p> /p/ - /p´/, <t> /t/ - /t´/, <c> /k/ - /k´/, <b> /b/ - /b´/, <d> /d/ - /d´/, <g> /g/ - /g´/, and the nasal stops <m> /m/ - /m´/ become fricatives or the semivowel /j/ (indicated as /ɣ´/ in the system used by the *Foclóir Póca*), the fricatives <s> /s/ - /s´/ turn into the 'weaker' fricative /h/, and <f> /f/ - /f´/disappear completely. When /s/ - /s´/ are followed by /k/ - /k´/, /m/ - /m´/, /p/ - /p´/, /t/ or /t´/, the initial consonant is not lenited. Thus, the name **Smóg** is not affected. Examples can be seen in Tables 4, 6 and 7 below. The term 'aspiration' is used ambiguously in phonological descriptions of different languages, sometimes referring to the /s/ > /h/ change (as in this case), sometimes denoting a puff of air which follows a consonant, which is indicated in phonetic transcription with a superscript 'h', as in English **put** [pʰʊt]. Note that the term 'aspiration' in the Irish context refers exclusively to the phenomenon of lenition described above; however, in spelling it is indicated by putting the letter <h> after the consonant affected. So, a lenited /b/, /b´/ will be spelt as <bh> in Irish Gaelic.

The table below contains examples of aspiration after certain prepositions that require it with the names given in alphabetical order and the postulated pronunciation provided in IPA. The symbol /ɣ/ denotes the voiced velar fricative – this is produced at the back of the mouth and can be compared to a kind of gargling sound. Its voiceless counterpart is /x/, which can also be found in some words used in Scottish English, e.g., **loch** 'lake' (a borrowing from Scottish Gaelic) or in the German words **Buch** 'book' and **machen** 'make' (the IPA symbol is also /x/). Slender /x´/ sounds like the consonant in German **ich** 'I' (the IPA symbol is /ç/).

The corresponding English text is provided for reference; note that the prepositions and the structures in the two languages often differ.

| **Name with aspiration** (in Tolkien 2012) | **Pronunciation** | **English version** (in Tolkien 1998) |
|---|---|---|
| *a) Names of non-English origin in Tolkien's text* | | |
| ar Bháilín (p. 82) | /er´ 'va:l´i:n´/ | (Gandalf called) to Balin (p. 120) |
| do Bhard (p. 219) | /də 'va:rd/ | (but not) of Bard (p. 301) |
| do Bhéorn (p. 113) | /də 'v´e:ərn/ | for Béorn (p. 160) |

| **Name with aspiration** (in Tolkien 2012) | **Pronunciation** | **English version** (in Tolkien 1998) |
|---|---|---|
| ó Bhéorn (p. 133) | /o: 'v´e:ərn/ | of Béorn (p. 187) |
| ó Bhiolbó beag (p. 145) | /o: 'v´ilbo:/ | from little Bilbo (p. 205) |
| de Bhombúr (p. 185) | /d´ə 'vombu:r/ | except Bombur (p. 255) |
| ó Bhombúr (p. 132) | /o: 'vombu:r/ | from Bombur (p. 186) |
| do Dháin (p. 242) | /də 'ɣa:n´/ | telling Dain (p. 333) |
| ó Dháin (p. 242) | /o: 'ɣa:n´/ | of Dain (p. 332) |
| ar Dhóirí (p. 96) | /er´ 'ɣo:r´i:/ | (seized) Dori (p. 139) |
| ó Dhváilín (p. 27) | /o: 'ɣva:l´i:n´/ | from Dwalin (p. 46) |
| ar Fhílí (p. 187) | /er´ 'i:li:/ | Fili (and Kili looked uncomfortable) (p. 258) |
| d'Fhílí (p. 142) | /'d´i:li:/ | of Fili (p. 200) |
| ar Ghandalf (p. 7) | /er´ 'ɣandəlf/ | about Gandalf (p. 18) |
| do Ghandalf (p. 43) | /də 'ɣandəlf/ | to Gandalf (p. 68) |
| ó Ghlóin (p. 53) | /o: 'ɣlo:n´/ | Glóin (wanted to) (p. 79) |
| do Gholam (p. 67) | /də 'ɣoləm/ | for Gollum (p. 99) |
| ó Gholam (p. 72) | /o: 'ɣoləm/ | Gollam wanted (p. 107) |
| ar Khílí (p. 187) | /er´ 'x´i:l´i:/ | Fili and Kili (looked uncomfortable) (p. 258) |
| de Khílí (p. 233) | /d´ə 'x´i:l´i:/ | except (…) Kili (p. 320) |
| ar Thóirín (p. 248) | /er´ 'ho:r´i:n´/ | (They had forgotten) Thorin! (p. 340) |
| do Thóirín (p. 43) | /də 'ho:r´i:n´/ | to Thorin (p. 68) |
| don Bhaigíneach (p. 137) | /dən 'vag´i:n´əx/ | to Mr. Baggins (p. 193) |
| sa Bhaigíneach Uasal (p. 83) | /sə 'vag´i:n´əx 'uəsəl/ | Mr. Baggins (has more about him) (p. 121) |
| *b) Names of English origin in Tolkien's text* | | |
| do Bheartla (p. 37) | /də 'v´artlə/ | to Bert (p. 59) |

Table 4. Aspiration (lenition) of first names and the surname Baggins (**an Baigíneach**) in *An Hobad*.

As the examples above show, these names behave like Irish names. The following should be noted here:

a) The <o> /ə/ of the preposition **do** is dropped when it is followed by a word beginning with a vowel. When a word beginning with an /f/ + a vowel is lenited, then the consonant completely disappears, thus the lenited form of the word begins with a vowel. This is why we have **d'Fhílí** /'d´i:li:/ instead of ***do Fhílí** /də 'i:li:/.
b) As stated above, the letter <k> is very rarely used in Irish. In the *NCI*, the <K> /k/ is usually not lenited: e.g., **ó Kitty** 'from Kitty' (two examples) but no **ó Khitty**; **ó Kevin** 'from Kevin' (36 examples) but no **ó Khevin**; **ó Katherine** 'from Katherine' (three examples) but no **ó Khatherine**. These data are all the more remarkable as the name **Kevin** comes from the Irish name **Caoimhín**. In *An Hobad*, the initial consonant of **Kílí** is consistently lenited when this is required by the grammatical rules of Irish Gaelic.
c) As far as the names of the trolls are concerned, **Beartla**, as expected, is affected by aspiration; however, **Teaim** is not: **do Teaim** (Tolkien 2012, 37) /də 't´am´/ 'to […] Tom' (Tolkien 1998, 59) (the expected form would be **do Theaim** /də 'ham´/.

### *5.2 Nasalisation (eclipsis)*

In the case of nasalisation, all the vowels and the consonants <b> /b/ - /b´/, <c> /k/ - /k´/, <d> /d/ - /d´/, <f> /f/ - /f´/, <g> /g/ - /g´/, <p> /p/ - /p´/, <t> /t/ - /t´/ are affected. The term 'nasalisation' is somewhat misleading, as only the voiced stops (/b/ - /b´/, /d/ - /d´/, /g/ - /g´/) turn into nasal sounds, while the other consonants that are affected – and which are voiceless – will become voiced. In orthography, the consonant letter(s) indicating the new initial sound in the word will be placed before the original word-form, thus in spelling it will be obvious what the word stem is. In the case of words beginning with a vowel, an <n> will be prefixed to them. In proper nouns the nasalisation is indicated with a lowercase letter followed by the original capital letter. Examples of both types of change that are described as 'nasalisation' (that is, nasalisation and voicing) can be found in the table below.

First names are less prone to nasalisation than common nouns, as mostly it is a preposition followed by the definite article that triggers this type of initial mutation, and personal names are not normally used with an article in Irish. However, as mentioned earlier, the **-ach** suffix can be attached to family names and then they will be preceded by the definite article; when certain prepositions are placed before them, nasalisation occurs. As can be seen in Table 5 below, the family names in *An Hobad* follow the rules of Irish Gaelic in this respect.

| **Name with nasalisation** (in Tolkien 2012) | **Pronunciation** | **English version** (in Tolkien 1998) |
|---|---|---|
| ag an mBaigíneach (p. 74) | /eg´ ən 'mag´i:n´əx/ | The Baggins has got it … (p. 109) |
| faoin[10] mBaigíneach (p. 145) | /fi:n´ 'mag´i:n´əx/ | of Mr Baggins (p. 204) |
| duine de shinsir na dTúcach (p. 2) | /nə 'du:kəx/ | one of the Took ancestors (p. 13) |

Table 5. Nasalisation of family names in *An Hobad*.

### *5.3 <h> /h/ attached to a word beginning with a vowel*

This initial mutation is not as frequent as the previous ones, as fewer words cause this type of alternation. One of the most common ones is the preposition **le** 'with; to, for; by, against'. Names beginning with a vowel do get an <h> attached to them in *An Hobad*: **le hÓin** (Tolkien 2012, 29) /l´ə 'ho:n´/ 'not even Óin' (Tolkien 1998, 49), **le hElrond** (ibid., 259) /l´ə 'hɛlrənd/ 'to Elrond' (ibid., 357). Just like in the case of nasalisation, the initial mutation is indicated with a lowercase letter before the capitalised one.

## 6. The vocative and genitive cases

Irish personal names have a vocative and a genitive case, which are identical in form. The vocative has to be used when addressing somebody, when calling to somebody. The rules for the formation of the vocative case of male names are the following:

a) the name has to be preceded by the vocative particle **a** /ə/, which lenites the following name; AND
b) in names for males in most cases (that is, in those that belong to the first noun declension), if the name ends in a broad consonant, the final consonant is made slender, that is, it is palatalised.[11] This is indicated in orthography with the insertion of the letter <i> before the last consonant or consonant cluster. Thus, the vocative of **Tomás** /'toma:s/ is **a Thomáis** /ə 'homa:s´/, and the vocative of **Séamas** /'s´e:məs/ is **a Shéamais** /ə 'he:məs´/. (The name **Hamish** used in English originates from the vocative form of **Séamas** 'James'.)

[10] Note that **faoin** is the preposition **faoi** 'about' + the definite article **an**.
[11] When a broad consonant is made slender, it is palatalised; the name of the process is palatalisation.

The genitive forms are the same as the vocative ones, but of course the vocative particle is not used before them.

Note, however, that it is not compulsory to apply the above rules to foreign names or names that are used in their non-Irish form. For example, the name **Benjamin** is not lenited in the vocative in three examples found in the *NCI* (**a Benjamin**), while it is in six examples (**a Bhenjamin**). **Peter**, the Irish form of which is **Peadar**, is not lenited in seven examples (**a Peter**), while it is in eighteen (**a Pheter**).

There are plenty of examples of both the vocative and the genitive of personal names in *An Hobad*. A very nice example can be seen on p. 136, where Bilbo is lost in Mirkwood and calls out the names of all the dwarves: "A Dhóirí, a Nóirí, a Óirí, a Óin, a Ghlóin, a Fhílí, a Khílí, a Bhombúir, a Bhíofúir, a Bhófúir, a Dhváilín, a Bháilín, a Thóirín na Scéithe Darach" (Tolkien 2012, 136).

As the final consonants of only names ending in a broad consonant can be affected in the vocative and the genitive, the names are presented in two different categories. Table 6 below shows examples of the vocative and genitive of male names ending in a vowel or a slender consonant in the nominative case in the Irish Gaelic translation, where only lenition is expected, while in Table 7 the same cases for the names ending in a broad consonant can be seen – here both lenition and palatalisation of the final consonant would be expected. (Names that are not supposed to change in the vocative and the genitive – e.g., **Nóirí**, **Óin**, **Óirí** are not listed here.) If no vocative or genitive form is given here, then it means that it does not appear in *An Hobad*. (Separate searches were made for such forms in the *NCI* in order to make sure that none were overlooked.)

| **Vocative/Genitive** (in Tolkien 2012) | **Pronunciation** | **English version** (in Tolkien 1998) |
|---|---|---|
| *a) Names of non-English origin in Tolkien's text* | | |
| a Bháilín (p. 136) | /ə 'va:l´i:n´/ | Balin (p. 191) |
| de dhoras Bháilín (p. 157) | /'va:l´i:n´/ | (First he unlocked) Balin's door (p. 219) |
| a Bhiolbó (p. 136) | /ə 'v´ilbo:/ | Bilbo (p. 219) |
| i lámh Bhiolbó (p. 70) | /'v´ilbo:/ | in Bilbo's hand (p. 104) |
| a Dháin (p. 245) | /ə 'ɣa:n´/ | O Dain! (p. 336) |

| **Vocative/Genitive** (in Tolkien 2012) | **Pronunciation** | **English version** (in Tolkien 1998) |
|---|---|---|
| ar shála Dháin (p. 245) | /ɣa:n´/ | on the heels of Dain (p. 337) |
| a Dhóirí (p. 136) | /ə 'ɣo:r´i:/ | Dori (p. 191) |
| rúitíní Dhóirí (p. 95) | /'ɣo:r´i:/ | Dori's ankles (p. 138) |
| Lá Dhúirín (p. 48) | /'ɣu:r´i:n´/ | Durin's Day (p. 73) |
| de chine Dhúirín (p. 169) | /'ɣu:r´i:n´/ | of the race of Durin (p. 235) |
| BUT: de sliocht Dúirín (p. 173) | /'du:r´i:n´/ | of the race of Durin (p. 238) |
| a Dhváilín (p. 136) | /ə 'ɣva:l´i:n´/ | Dwalin (p. 191) |
| BUT: cochall uaine Dváilín (p. 7) | /'dva:l´i:n´/ | Dwalin's green hood (p. 19) |
| a Fhílí (p. 136) | /ə 'i:l´i:/ | Fili (p. 191) |
| le cúnamh fonnmhar Fhílí agus Khílí (p. 172) | /'i:l´i:/ | With the willing help of Fili and Kili (p. 237) |
| BUT: bail Filí (p. 142) | /'f´i:l´i:/ | (than) Fili (p. 200) |
| a Ghlóin (p. 136) | /ə 'ɣlo:n´/ | Glóin (p. 191) |
| a Khílí (p. 136) | /ə 'x´i:l´i:/ | Kili (p. 191) |
| le cúnamh fonnmhar Fhílí agus Khílí (p. 172) | /'x´i:l´i:/ | With the willing help of Fili and Kili (p. 237) |
| a Thóirín (p. 136) | /ə 'ho:r´i:n´/ | Thorin (p. 191) |
| féasóg Thóirín (p. 86) | /'ho:r´i:n´/ | Thorin's beard (p. 126) |
| *b) Names of English origin in Tolkien's text* | | |
| a Bheartla (p. 32) | /ə 'v´artlə/ | Bert (p. 53) |
| i lapa mór Bheartla (p. 33) | /'v´artlə/ | in Bert's big paw (p. 55) |

Table 6. The vocative and genitive forms of male names that end in a vowel or a slender consonant in the nominative case in *An Hobad.*

In almost all the cases, we get the expected lenition. The exceptions are:

a) In **bail Filí**, one would expect **Fílí** to be lenited in the genitive case. Also, there is a typographical error here, as in all the other cases **Fílí** is spelt with two long <í>-s, and here the first <i> does not have the lengthmark.
b) One would expect the genitive of **Dváilín** to be **Dhváilín** based on the two examples of the vocative in the book (**a Dhváilín**), but the only genitive form to be found is not lenited: **cochall uaine Dváilín** (Tolkien 2012, 7) 'Dwalin's green hood' (Tolkien 1998, 19).
c) **Teaim** is not lenited in the vocative (it has been shown in section 5.1 that it is not lenited either after prepositions that would require it): **a Teaim** (Tolkien 2012, 33) (/ə 't´am´/) 'Tom' (Tolkien 1998, 55).
d) In the case of **sliocht Dúirín** (Tolkien 2012, 173), according to one of the subrules of aspiration, the /d/ is not lenited after a word ending in a /t/ (Ó hAnluain 1960/1999, 25).

| **Vocative/Genitive** (in Tolkien 2012) | **Pronunciation** | **English version** (in Tolkien 1998) |
|---|---|---|
| *a) With lenition + palatalisation* | | |
| a Bhíofúir (p. 136) | /ə 'v´i:fu:r´/ | Bifur (p. 191) |
| a Bhófúir (p. 136) | /ə 'v´o:fu:r´/ | Bofur (p. 191) |
| a Bhombúir (p. 136) | /ə 'vombu:r´/ | Bombur (p. 191) |
| ar dhroim Bhombúir (p. 59) | / 'vombu:r´/ | on Bombur's back (p. 88) |
| a Ghandailf (p. 47) | /ə 'ɣandəl´f´/ | Gandalf (p. 71) |
| BUT: a Ghandalf (p. 109) | /ə 'ɣandəlf/ | Gandalf (p. 154) |
| capall Ghandailf (p. 42) | /'ɣandəl´f´/ | Gandalf's horse (p. 66) |
| BUT: tuairim Ghandalf (p. 81) | /'ɣandəlf/ | and Gandalf was saying (p. 118) |
| BUT: focail Gandailf (p. 239) | /'gandəl´f´/ | - [Gandalf's word] (p. 328) |
| Lómharchloch Thráin (p. 240) | /hra:n´/ | the Arkenstone of Thrain (p. 330) |

| **Vocative/Genitive** (in Tolkien 2012) | **Pronunciation** | **English version** (in Tolkien 1998) |
|---|---|---|
| BUT túslitreacha (Tróir agus) Tráin (p. ix) | /traːn´/ | the initials of (Thror and) Thrain (p. 10) |
| halla mór Thróir (p. 212) | /hroːr´/ | the great chamber of Thror (p. 291) |
| BUT túslitreacha Tróir (p. ix) | /troːr/ | the initials of Thror (p. 10) |
| *b) With lenition where possible, but no palatalisation* | | |
| A Bhard a chroí! (p. 237) | /ə 'vaːrd/ | My dear Bard! (p. 326) |
| teachtairí Bhard (p. 223) | /'vaːrd/ | Bard's messengers (p. 306) |
| i ngairdín Bhéorn (p. 110) | /v´eːərn/ | in Beorn's garden (p. 156) |
| BUT: Halla Béorn (p. 107) | /b´eːərn/ | - [Beorn's hall] |
| comhairle Elrond (p. 49) | /'ɛlrənd/ | (by the wise) advice of Elrond (p. 75) |
| de shliocht Ghirion (p. 220) | /'ɣ´iriən/[12] | of the line of Girion (p. 302) |
| scéal Gholam (p. 145) | /'ɣoləm/ | the Gollum story (p. 204) |
| a Smóg (p. 196) | /smoːg/ | O Smaug (p. 269) |
| de shúil chlé Smóg (p. 195) | /smoːg/ | of Smaug's left eye (p. 269) |

Table 7. The vocative and genitive forms of male names that end in a broad consonant in the nominative case in *An Hobad.*

The examples show that there is some inconsistency in the vocative and genitive forms of the names that belong to this category:

a) The vocative and genitive forms of **Gandalf** are not consistent. The vocative appears in two versions: **a Ghandailf** (Tolkien 2012, 47) (with lenition and pala-

[12] Palatal /ɣ´/ is like the initial sound in **you**, which is normally represented by /j/.

talisation) and **a Ghandalf** (ibid., 109) (with lenition and without palatalisation). A search for these two forms in the *NCI* will give two examples of the former and four examples of the latter. The genitive of this name appears in three different forms: as **Ghandailf** (ibid., 42), as **Ghandalf** (ibid., 81) and as **Gandailf** (ibid., 239). There are altogether three examples of the first form, seven of the second and two of the last one in *An Hobad*. It seems that this is the name which is the least consistent as far as its various forms are concerned, and this was already noted by Ó Coileáin (2012, 26).

b) The genitive of **Tráin** and **Trór** sometimes appear with lenition, and sometimes without it. Some examples can be seen in the table above, while some more are presented below (Tolkien 2012):

> "Cinnte, a Thóirín mic Thráin mhic Thróir!" (p. 177) 'Certainly, O Thorin Thrain's son Thror's son!' (p. 244)
> "Tóirín mac Tráin mac Tróir Rí faoin Sliabh!" (p. 173) 'Thorin son of Thrain son of Thror King under the Mountain!' (p. 238)
> "Is mise Tóirín mac Tráin mhic Tróir Rí faoin Sliabh!" (p. 174) 'I am Thorin son of Thrain son of Thror King under the Mountain!' (p. 239)
>
> In the inscription on the map, the form of the genitive is **Thróir**: **Léarscáil Thróir** (p. xii) 'Thror's Map' (p. 6).

c) **Halla Béorn** is the title of the illustration on p. 107, and this is the only example where the genitive form of this name appears without lenition.

Furthermore, it can be seen that the final consonants in the vocative and genitive forms of the names **Bard**, **Béorn**, **Elrond**, **Girion**, **Golam** and **Smóg** are not palatalised. It should be noted here that **bard** exists as a common noun in Irish, meaning 'poet, bard', and also as a surname **Mac an Bhaird**, 'son of the bard' (anglicised as McWard, MacEward or Ward). So, the genitive and vocative forms are **bhaird** /va:r´d´/, and not **Bhard** /va:rd/, as in the translation. With this different genitive and vocative form the translator may have intended to indicate that the name **Bard** in *The Hobbit* is not the same as the Irish word **bard**.

Finally, the surname **an Baigíneach** follows the rules of Irish noun declensions. Nouns in **-ach** belong to the first group, thus both in the vocative and in the genitive the initial consonant is lenited, where possible, and the final consonant is made

slender. Thus, we have vocative **a Bhaigínigh** (Tolkien 2012, 225) 'Baggins' (Tolkien 1998, 309) and genitive **(i mbróga) an Bhaigínigh** (ibid., 62) '(in) Mr Baggins' (place) (ibid., 92).

## 7. Influence of the translation and conclusion

It is fascinating to see how a translation of a text into a language that it has not yet existed in can open the door to new ways of thinking and speaking about a certain topic. The Irish-language version of Wikipedia, *An Vicipéid*, has a page with the title *An Hobad, nó Anonn agus Ar Ais Arís* ('The Hobbit, or There and Back Again'), which uses the names that appear in Williams' translation. The page history reveals that the page was created on 5 January 2011 by the publisher (*An Vicipéid* 2025) – some time before the publication of the book. Thus, these names have acquired a new lease of life on the internet.

The translation has been digitised and is included in the *National Corpus of Irish*. One cannot access the full, continuous text, but all of the words can be searched for, the hits appear in context, and concordances can be created for them. The availability of this text in this corpus was very useful for this research.

As far as the actual forms of the names are concerned, the analysis of most of the personal names in the Irish Gaelic translation of *The Hobbit* has shown that the non-English names are aligned with the phonology of the Irish language, and apart from a few inconsistencies, are treated as Irish names from the morpho-phonological point of view (i.e., with regard to initial mutations). The inconsistencies are almost exclusively found in the genitive and vocative forms of the personal names, as some of them appear both with and without lenition; moreover, the final consonant in the genitive and vocative of the name Gandalf is not always palatalised. Although the final consonant of not all Irish male names has to be palatalised in these cases, it would still be interesting to know why the translator decided to apply palatalisation in certain names in the genitive and vocative, but decided not to do this in the case of some other names. In spite of these inconsistencies, it is hoped that it has been convincingly shown that the names represent a successful attempt at nativisation.

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# 12.

# Developing L2 English Essay Writing Skills at the C1 Level: A Focus on the Process

*Csilla Sárdi*

## 1. Introduction

It is a general understanding in the EFL teaching profession that, of the four language skills (i.e., speaking, listening, reading and writing), the acquisition of writing seems to be the most challenging for L2 English learners, especially in the case of formal genres such as different types of essays (see, e.g., Godwin-Jones 2022; Hyland 2003; Matsuda and Silva 2020). Indeed, this is the skill which, even in the learners' L1, requires much effort and perseverance to develop, and can become effective in both L1 and L2 educational contexts with the active support of professional instruction (Leki 2000; Matsuda and Silva 2020).

This applies to the Hungarian higher education context as well, where one of the main objectives of the BA in English Studies programme is to further develop B2 English language proficiency (as described in Council of Europe 2001) so that students are able to reach a minimum C1 level before graduation. This achievement is usually demonstrated by the successful completion of an English language proficiency examination, where the proficient use of language, including writing, is measured following the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe 2001). This is the procedure at the university where I conducted a case study focusing on students' L2 English writing skills enhancement preceding the examination. In the case of this particular BA programme, the writing component of the C1 proficiency examination is an argumentative essay on a general issue, and one of the aims of the English Language Practice courses preceding the examination is to help students improve their essay writing skills focusing on different types of essays (i.e., expository, comparative and argumentative).

The starting point of the research was that my teaching experience at the course was mixed. Since the Language Practice courses have a number of language skills-related aims other than writing, and the students are also required to attend two essay writing courses (one general, one academic), only a limited amount of time was devot-

ed to writing during my course. I found that the quality of the essays produced in my seminars often fell short of what was expected.

This problem may be explained by a number of reasons. Firstly, some students found it difficult to directly apply the knowledge and skills they had focused on during the essay writing courses because of the differences in expectations regarding the topic, focus, aims, text length and evaluation criteria. Secondly, the students' motivation for completing the task was mainly instrumental: work was required in order to achieve a seminar grade and credit points as well as to successfully complete the C1 proficiency examination. While these requirements served as a sufficient incentive to carry out the writing assignments, they were not powerful enough to motivate all students to strive for the best possible results. Thirdly, the structure and efficiency of the essay writing tasks in my seminars did not appear to be adequate. Because of time constraints, the assignment was largely product-oriented: relatively little time was devoted to relevant classroom discussions before, during and after task completion; students produced their texts as individual work outside class; and revision work based on the teacher's comments and evaluations was only a recommendation on my part, which students often did not follow.

Recently, the situation has been further complicated by the widespread accessibility of chatbots (e.g., ChatGPT), which use generative artificial intelligence systems to maintain conversations and create natural language texts online. The use of chatbots enable students to create texts in line with the essay writing task description without having to go through the process of written text creation: the chatbot does the work for them in a matter of seconds. In line with the principle of least effort (Zipf 1949), which states that people usually choose the least effortful way, among possible options, to achieve a given goal, the amount of attention and time students spent on the task has been significantly reduced, thus the chances of developing effective essay writing skills have decreased. As a consequence, the number of failed proficiency examinations, due to a failure in passing the requirements of the essay writing component, has increased.

In the light of the above experiences, I decided to carry out a small-scale case study where my aim was to develop and evaluate the perceived usefulness of an experimental essay writing task within the framework of my language practice course. During the design and implementation of the writing task, special focus was given to the process of writing. To fulfil this aim, I asked the following research questions.

1. To what extent did a focus on the writing process contribute to successful task completion according to the students?

2. To what extent was teacher guidance during the different phases of the process perceived as effective by the students?
3. To what extent did the experimental task enhance essay writing skills according to the students?

Given the already inescapable presence of chatbots in education (Folmeg, Fekete and Kóris 2024), one possible direction of research could have been to investigate the applicability of ChatGPT in this context. However, since this direction would not reflect the writing process expected in the C1 proficiency examination, I decided to design a task that would help students further develop their existing knowledge and skills in a targeted way, which they could then utilise in exam situations where the possibilities provided by artificial intelligence are not available.

The theoretical framework for the empirical research is discussed below. This is followed by a description of the research design, and a presentation and discussion of the results.

## 2. Textuality, writing skills and the writing process

According to de Beaugrande and Dressler (2000, 23–36), a piece of language can be defined as text if it satisfies the conditions of textuality: (1) coherence and cohesion; (2) intentionality on the part of the author and acceptability on the part of the audience, thus allowing cooperation between the two parties; (3) newsworthiness and relevance; and (4) realisation of genre requirements. Widdowson (2007) adds that meeting the textuality criteria also ensures that the text is communicative. A text is regarded as communicative if it is created in a way that enables writers and readers to participate in the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning conveyed in it (Savignon 2017, 3).

Kellogg (2008) maintains that students' improvement of writing skills is closely linked to a development in their rhetorical literacy, by which he means the broadening of learner's knowledge of the world together with an enhancement of problem-solving skills, creativity and emotional intelligence. If we look at written text production as a rhetorical problem-solving task, it follows that the creation of the text can be regarded as an integrated process, where the production and the comprehension of the text are interrelated, and where the development of L2 English writing skills may be enhanced by using relevant techniques and subtasks not only in writing but in speech as well (Candlin and Hyland 2014).

Text production, understood as an integrated process, may be supported by a form of writing instruction that emphasises the process of writing alongside its end-product (Hyland 2003, 10–13). Process-oriented writing, as defined by Zamel (1983, 165), is

a 'non-linear, exploratory, generative process whereby writers discover and reformulate their ideas as they attempt to approximate meaning'. Thus, a process approach to writing instruction builds on the consideration that writing is a recursive process, and that conditions for becoming a good writer include writing extensively and in a reflecting way, because this is how learners may gain experience in going through the steps that are essential for the creation of an effective, communicative text (Matsuda and Silva 2020). Steps of the process include data collection, planning, drafting, multiple revisions of the text in preparation, editing the final version of the text, and dissemination (see, e.g., Gilliland 2016; Graham and Sandmel 2011).

Taking the above theoretical considerations into account, my language pedagogical principles for the experimental writing task were as follows:

1. The purpose, audience, genre and style of the essay should be well-defined and realistically imaginable by the students.
2. In parallel with the end-product, the process of writing should also receive focused attention during the design and implementation of the task.
3. Teacher guidance, both individually and in groups, should support successful task completion throughout the writing process.
4. Reading comprehension and oral discussion should also support the writing process.
5. The emphasis should be on the ability to create own text rather than the skilful use of artificial intelligence. To this end, time should be made available for the individual completion of some of the subtasks in class.

## 3. Research design

My case study aimed to investigate the perceived effectiveness of an experimental essay writing task with a particular focus on the process of writing. Effectiveness was evaluated with a focus on the student perceptions. To achieve this aim, I designed a writing task in line with the pedagogical principles described in Section 2 above. (See Appendix 1 for the task description.)

Within the framework of the experimental task, I asked students to write a 350-word comparative essay in English about one of the general English topics we covered during the semester (i.e., arts, entertainment, health, lifestyles). The target audience of the essay was defined as Hungarian and international students in the English Studies programmes (BA, MA, Teaching English as a Foreign Language) at the university, and I asked students to select a topic and decide on the focus, elements to be compared and criteria for comparison in a way that their essay might attract the attention of this audi-

ence. The ultimate goal was to write an essay for publication in the university's online student magazine.

My participants were second-year BA students, aged between 20 and 22 years, in three parallel English language practice courses. The number of students in each course was 14. The language proficiency of the participants was at a B2+ level or above. All in all, 37 students participated in the research: they submitted their essay and completed the questionnaire. Out of the 37 participants, 13 were male (35.1%) and 24 were female (64.9%).

The process leading to the completion of the writing task consisted of five phases. Students were required to complete one subtask in each phase supported by teacher guidance before and after the completion of the subtask (for a summary see Table 1). Phase 1 (giving an in-class presentation about the topic selected by the students) consisted of an oral subtask, while the subtasks in Phases 2–5 required writing. Only in Phases 1 and 5 were students asked to spend time on the task outside the classroom; Phases 2–4 required individual work in class. Class time spent on individual subtasks was flexible: students could use the amount of time necessary within the 90-minute seminar, while the remaining time was devoted to other language practice tasks in the form of individual and group work activities. Subtasks in Phases 1–4 were compulsory, while the final subtask (preparing the essay for publication) was optional.

Teacher guidance preceding the subtasks was provided in groups, while guidance proceeding task completion focused on individual students in speech and/or writing. The experimental task was divided into phases in order to facilitate the process of writing, and teacher guidance focused on both the process and the product. Phase 1 (giving an in-class presentation) formed an integral part of the writing task, because this was the stage where students were encouraged to work on their selected topic content-wise while collecting, analysing and interpreting background information. Also, this subtask gave students the opportunity to think about and experiment with the structure of comparison. My pedagogical aim here was to facilitate subsequent writing-related work during Phases 2–5. The above decisions are in line with my pedagogical principles as described in Section 2.

| Phases of the writing process: Subtasks | Teacher guidance in preparation for the subtask (group focus) | Teacher guidance proceeding subtask completion (individual focus) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Developing and giving a presentation on the selected topic (individual work at home and in class) ↓ | Discussing the general characteristics and requirements of the comparative essay incl. purpose, audience, style, structure, content | Providing feedback on the aims, structure, content, and style |
| 2. Developing the outline of the essay (individual work in class) ↓ | Discussing the process of writing and relevant writing strategies | Providing feedback on the outline (title, structure, content elements, comparability) |
| 3. Creating the first draft (individual work in class) ↓ | Analysing sample essays focusing on structure and style | Providing feedback on structure, style and language use in the first draft |
| 4. Revision and creating the final version of the essay (individual work in class) ↓ | Analysing sample essays focusing on coherence and cohesion | Providing feedback on task achievement |
| 5. Optional: Preparing the essay for publication (individual work at home) | Revising the characteristics and requirements of comparative essay | Providing feedback on overall task accomplishment |

Table 1. Phases and characteristics of the process-oriented essay-writing task.

To answer the research questions, I asked students to provide feedback, with the help of a questionnaire, on the perceived usefulness of the writing task upon completion (see Appendix 2). The working language of the questionnaire was English. To avoid misinterpretation, I allocated time for a brief discussion on technical vocabulary in the questions (e.g., audience, cohesion, coherence, punctuation, purpose). The students' participation was voluntary and anonymous. To ensure this, I asked for their written consent. The data in the questionnaires were coded and analysed using the Excel 2013 program with the help of descriptive statistical indicators.

## 4. Research results

Below, the findings of the questionnaire are described first. Section 4.1 looks at individual time spent on task and the perceived usefulness of each writing phase. Section 4.2 discusses participants' opinion regarding the usefulness of teacher guidance in the phases. Section 4.3 gives an account of the relationship between the experimental task and perceived improvement of essay writing skills according to the respondents. This is followed by a discussion of the findings in Section 4.4.

I decided not to include responses related to the optional work phase (Phase 5: preparing the essay for publication) in the data analysis, because only five participants indicated that they would take advantage of this option, and the majority (n=30) of the respondents did not answer the relevant questions in the survey.

### *4.1 Phases of writing: time spent on subtasks and perceived usefulness*

In Questions 1 and 2 of the questionnaire, students were asked to estimate how much time they spent on completing each subtasks individually from '0–15 minutes' to 'longer than 60 minutes', and to evaluate the usefulness of each phase from 'not at all' to 'very much'. Looking at mode values, results in Table 2 show that both in terms of time spent on task and perceived usefulness, developing an outline is at the bottom of the rank order. Most students spent 0–15 minutes on this subtask (mode 1), and ranked its usefulness the lowest (mode 2). In the case of the other three subtasks, the majority of the students spent 46–60 minutes on each (mode 4). Mean comparison indicates that most students spent the longest time on developing the presentation (3.73) This is closely followed by writing up the final essay (3.48) and the first draft (3.43). These figures indicate that, on average, students needed approximately 1 hour's individual work to complete each of these subtasks.

| Subtasks | Time spent on task individually | | Perceived usefulness | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | mean | mode | mean | mode |
| Presentation | 3.73 | 4 | 2.8 | 3 |
| Outline | 1.68 | 1 | 2.7 | 2 |
| First draft | 3.43 | 4 | 2.94 | 3 |
| Final essay | 3.48 | 4 | 3.27 | 4 |

Table 2. Student's evaluation of the phases of the writing task.

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The perception of usefulness is in line with the time spent on the subtasks. Developing the final version of the essay was ranked as 'very useful' by most respondents (mode 4), becoming the most highly rated of the four compulsory phases, while giving a presentation and developing the first draft were rated as 'to a large extent useful' by most respondents (mode 3). By looking at these results, it can be concluded that the majority of students spent a minimum of 195 minutes on the complete assignment in the form of individual work.

### *4.2 Teacher guidance during the essay writing task*

The successful fulfilment of each subtask was facilitated by different types of teacher guidance. Question 3 of the questionnaire inquired about the extent to which students found the focus and form of the guidance useful from 'not at all' to 'very much'. The results are summarised in Table 3.

| | Focus of teacher guidance | mean | mode |
|---|---|---|---|
| Group work | Characteristics of comparative essay (discussion) | 3.5 | 4 |
| | Structure (sample text analysis) | 3.1 | 3 |
| | Coherence and cohesion (sample text analysis) | 2.88 | 3 |
| | Writing process and writing strategies (discussion) | 2.72 | 3 |
| | Social context: purpose, audience, style (discussion) | 2.57 | 3 |
| Individual attention | Content | 3.62 | 4 |
| | Structure | 3.62 | 4 |
| | Use of English | 3.56 | 4 |
| | Coherence and cohesion | 3.51 | 4 |

Table 3. Usefulness of teacher guidance as perceived by the students.

The results show that, regardless of the focus of guidance, there is a noticeable difference in the students' evaluation in relation to group instruction preceding and individual attention following the completion of a subtask. On the one hand, guidance types in the 'group work' category were rated as useful 'to a large extent' by most respondents (mode 3). The only exception is the focus on the 'characteristics of comparative essay' (mode 4). However, while the latter was regarded as 'very useful' by most participants, its mean value (3.5) is not higher than the lowest mean value in the 'individual atten-

tion' category (3.51). On the other hand, all guidance types requiring individual attention were rated as 'very useful' by most respondents (mode 4).

Looking at the results in terms of the mean, individual attention directed to the content and the structure of the essay were rated as the two most useful foci of guidance (3.62), closely followed by a focus given to use of English (3.56) and coherence and cohesion (3.51). Every focus in the 'group work' category ranked lower than those in the 'individual attention' category. In the former, the discussions on the characteristics and structure of the comparative essay were regarded as the two top-rated foci (3.5 and 3.1 respectively). Students evaluated the usefulness of group discussion on the writing process as relatively low (2.72), making this focus the second least useful category. Discussions focusing on the purpose, audience and style of the essay were found the least useful (2.57), and the relatively low mean value indicates that this focus proved only partially useful from the students' point of view.

### *4.3 Impact of task on essay writing skills enhancement*

In the survey, I also wanted to know how satisfied the students were with the enhancement of their essay writing skills in the light of their task experience. First, I asked about the subskills that we explicitly focused on in each phase. Second, I inquired about students' perceived level of overall improvement in essay writing. In both cases, answers could be given ranging from 'not at all' to 'very much'.

The results in Table 4 show that most students felt they were satisfied 'to a large extent' (mode 3) in terms of the impact each subtask had on their subskills development as well as on overall essay writing skills development. However, a comparison of mean values reveals a rank order, indicating that the experimental task was regarded as the most beneficial in the case of the subskill 'developing the structure of a comparative essay' (3.35). This is followed by 'achieving coherence within and between paragraphs' (3.18) and 'formulating a relevant and informative thesis statement' (3.16). Two subskills (creating and maintaining the content focus in the text, and using English accurately) scored 3 in terms of the mean, while respondents felt that the experimental task helped them increase their abilities to go through the phases of writing using relevant writing strategies slightly more (3.05) than in the previously mentioned cases. The subskill 'using English appropriately' is at the bottom of the ranking (2.91). At the same time, students' satisfaction with the task in terms of their overall essay writing skills enhancement scored somewhat higher (2.97) indicating that, all in all, they felt the task was helpful to a large extent.

| Essay writing subskills | mean | mode |
|---|---|---|
| Developing the structure of a comparative essay | 3.35 | 3 |
| Achieving coherence within and in between paragraphs | 3.18 | 3 |
| Forming a relevant and informative thesis statement | 3.16 | 3 |
| Going through the phases of writing using relevant strategies | 3.05 | 3 |
| Creating and maintaining the content focus throughout the text | 3.00 | 3 |
| Using English accurately (grammar, vocabulary, punctuation) | 3.00 | 3 |
| Using English appropriately (purpose, audience, style) | 2.91 | 3 |
| Overall satisfaction with own essay writing skills development | 2.97 | 3 |

Table 4. Impact of task on essay writing skills enhancement as perceived by the students.

Students were also asked to elaborate, in an open-ended question, on their experiences and opinions in relation to the essay writing task. Responses (n=8) show that students tended to link the extent of writing skills improvement to their existing level of abilities. Also, they appreciated individualised spoken comments from the teacher. At the same time, individualised feedback provided in writing did not always prove perfectly clear, and they felt not enough time was spent on the clarification of teacher suggestions in this type of feedback. Responses also indicate that students found the inclusion of a subtask which required oral performance (i.e., giving a presentation) useful, because it provided the opportunity for background research in terms of content, and for trying their hand at developing the structure of the comparative essay.

## 5. Discussion

Below, I will discuss the findings with the help of my research questions. First, I investigated the extent to which a focus on the writing process contributed to successful task completion according to the students (Research Question 1). I sought answers to this question by looking at the time spent on task and the perceived usefulness of each subtask. Results show a link between the amount of time participants individually spent on a subtask and the perceived usefulness of any given writing phase. This may suggest that students regarded the subtasks on which they spent relatively more time as more

useful from the point of view of successful task accomplishment. Thus, all phases, with the notable exception of 'developing an outline', were ranked as 'very useful' according to most respondents. At first glance, this may suggest that students see the outline as the least crucial part of the process. These results, however, may also be explained by the fact that students had already spent considerable time on the structure of the essay by the time we reached the outline phase. In order to develop and give a presentation on the selected topic, creating an outline is essential. This suggests that students could use their previous work while creating the essay outline, which may, at least partly, explain the low ranking of the outline.

Individual time spent on overall task completion was relatively high, an average of 195 minutes (3 hours 15 minutes). While this time length is not available during the proficiency examination since students are given only 75 minutes there, spending an extended period of time on task provides practice opportunities for writing extensively and in a recursive way. This may serve the purposes of becoming a more experienced and skilful writer, increasing the students' chances for success in the C1 proficiency examination.

Effectiveness is also supported by the finding that the phases focusing on the first draft and the final text were ranked as the most useful by the participants. This view is in line with the consideration that experienced writers treat text production as a recursive process rather than a linear one. Furthermore, the relatively high rating of the phase 'giving a presentation' indicates that the participants also found the oral subtask valuable, because it created an opportunity to focus on the content and the possible structure of their future essay, to do background research, talk about ideas in front of their peers and receive relevant feedback.

In my research, I also examined the extent to which different forms of teacher guidance were regarded as effective during task phases (Research Question 2). Findings clearly indicate that students need professional instruction and help in every phase of the writing process. Results show that individualised feedback following subtask completion proved the most useful according to the respondents. A reason for this may be that students could more successfully link this type of guidance to particular aspects of their work in which they had already made progress and gained direct experience. This assumption also seems to be supported by the finding that students found teacher guidance in relation to the final text the most useful. This may be because by the time they arrived at the writing up phase of the final version, they had already gained considerable experience during the process.

At the same time, relevant findings also point to the perceived usefulness of teacher guidance preceding subtasks. Indeed, group-focused instruction prior to individual

subtask completion was also regarded as beneficial to a large extent by the students. The difference between the two types of guidance lies in the degree of their perceived usefulness.

Responses to the open-ended question point to a difference in the perceived helpfulness of teacher guidance between oral and written feedback. Students found oral feedback more beneficial, because of its clarity and the possibility to discuss and clarify comments and suggestions immediately. While it would be highly desirable for the teacher to provide individualised oral feedback on each subtask, this is not a realistic option due to time constraints. Nonetheless, this is an important finding that needs to be taken into consideration within the framework of similar future tasks.

Research Question 3 inquired about the relationship between the experimental writing task and students' essay writing skills enhancement according to the participants. More specifically, questions focused on the subskills which received focused attention during the task on the one hand, and on overall essay writing skills improvement on the other. Focus on most subskills had a direct link to product (i.e., the context, content, structure, formal features of the essay), while the process of writing also received explicit attention.

During the experimental task, a focus on the process was ensured in two ways: partly by the design of the task itself (i.e., the requirement of going through four plus one phases leading to task completion), and partly by the explicit focus on the writing process in the form of teacher guidance. According to the participants, both the process-oriented task design and explicit focus contributed to a heightened awareness and capability of going through the various phases of the writing process. The results clearly indicate that students could benefit from the process focus of the experimental task.

At the same time, findings also show that respondents needed more than a sole focus on the process for their writing skills improvement. They found an explicit focus on product-related features such as text structure, coherence, use of English, content and social context beneficial, and also experienced a considerable improvement in their abilities to write an essay in terms of dealing with product-oriented text features more effectively, accurately and appropriately. Students' overall positive responses in terms of usefulness regarding an explicit focus on product-related features suggest that they were willing to make a noticeable effort to improve the quality of their texts. This finding also supports the perceived effectiveness of the experimental writing task in general.

It also needs to be mentioned, however, that the social context (i.e., purpose, target audience and relevant stylistic features) ranked the lowest in the experimental task both in terms of usefulness of teacher guidance and perceived helpfulness in writing

skills development. There seems to be a link between this finding and the fact that 32 of the 37 participants completed the obligatory phases of the task only, making the decision not to take advantage of the possibility to submit a revised and edited version of the essay for publication in the university's online student magazine. Thus, it is likely that, for most students, the realistic aim of writing the essay remained to complete the assignment for the language practice course, in which case the purpose of writing was to fulfil the requirements laid down in the course description, and the sole audience of the comparative essay remained the teacher. While my initial assumption was that a wider audience and a tangible publishing platform may increase students' motivation and help the writing process, these results may also indicate that students find it challenging to imagine a communicative function for their essays beyond the immediate classroom context[1]. Despite the fact that my findings do not justify this assumption, students went through the phases, completed the task and reportedly benefited from the experience. This is an issue which I will take up below in relation to the pedagogical implications of the results.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper reported on the findings of a case study looking at the impact of a C1 level experimental writing task on the improvement of L2 English students' essay writing skills at a Hungarian university. The task was designed and implemented in a way to give a strong focus on the process of writing while also providing explicit attention to aspects of product, the text itself, including content, structure, language and social context.

All in all, results suggest that focusing on the process could effectively contribute to successful writing task completion. At the same time, the study also found that a focus on the product cannot be overlooked, since explicit instruction, guidance and feedback on structural, formal and content- and context-related text features are regarded as indispensable to improvement according to the students. The findings carry a number of pedagogical implications. These are summarised below.

1. Both the process and the product of writing need focused attention during the design and implementation of the writing task. The degree of attention depends on the actual language needs and learning needs of the students.
2. Teacher guidance is crucial, because it is strongly required by the students. There is a place for group-focused and individual guidance both before and after the writing task. The relative proportion depends on the needs of the students.

[1] I am grateful to Andrea Reményi for drawing my attention to this aspect of the results.

3. Written feedback on individual work needs to be provided in a way that is clear for the students. To ensure this, students could benefit from training in decoding and making sense of relevant terminology in language pedagogy. Also, time could be allocated to consultation outside class to clarify unclear points.
4. Careful task design is needed to provide enough time for each phase, the individual completion of subtasks, and feedback.
5. Purpose and audience need to be more realistic so that students become motivated enough to pursue the task to the final phase of publication. This may further increase students' interest in the assignment, while also helping them to meet the expectations of the social context. For example, the Teams group of the Language Practice course could be a realistic place of publication, where the uploaded essays could also be used in follow-up tasks.

A limitation of the study is that it looked at the experimental task from the students' perspective only. Thus, as a possible direction for further research, it would be informative to evaluate a revised version of the writing task from the teachers' and a neutral observer's perspective. Also, text analysis of the different versions of the essays (i.e., first draft, final essay, publication) would be instrumental in gaining a deeper insight into the extent to which improvement takes place across the phases of the writing process.

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## Appendix 1: Description of the essay writing task

Write a comparative essay in English about one of the general English topics we are dealing with in this semester: arts, entertainment, health, lifestyles. Select a particular focus within your topic and compare two (or more) items that are relevant in this context.

The final aim of the task is to write up a text to be published in the online magazine EDZine, the English Department blogroll of students (https://btk.ppke.hu/anglisztika-edzine). EDZine publishes shorter papers written by students, and the readers include students and faculty members at the university and elsewhere.

I divided the essay writing task into subtasks, and you are required to submit your work in each phase. Deadline for the submission of each subtask can be found in the Course Description. The word limit of the final text is 350 words. Completing the essay is a requirement for this course, and your work will be graded.

## Appendix 2: Questionnaire about the perceived effectiveness of the writing task according to students

*1. The comparative essay writing assignment consisted of five tasks. How much time did you spend working on each task individually? Please write the appropriate number next to each task below.*

**1** = 0-15 ms **2** = 16-30 ms **3** = 31-45 ms **4** = 46-60 ms **5** = more than 60 ms

Task 1 Presentation: …….. Task 2 Essay outline: ……..
Task 3 First draft: …….. Task 4 Final text: ……..
Task 5 Preparing essay for publication: ……..

*2. To what extent did the five tasks contribute to the development of your essay writing skills? Please write the appropriate number next to each task below.*

**1** = not at all **2** = to some extent **3** = to a large extent **4** = very much
Task 1 Presentation: …….. Task 2 Essay outline: ……..
Task 3 First draft: …….. Task 4 Final text: ……..
Task 5 Preparing essay for publication: ……..

*3. While working on your essay, to what extent did you find the teacher's guidance useful in relation to the following? Please write the appropriate number next to each category below.*

**1** = not at all **2** = to some extent **3** = to a large extent **4** = very much

(1) characteristics of comparative essay (group discussion): ……..
(2) social context: purpose, audience, style (group discussion): ……..
(3) process of writing and writing skills (group discussion): ……..
(4) structure of essay (sample text analysis): ……..
(5) coherence and cohesions (sample text analysis): ……..
(6) essay content (individual focus): ……
(7) essay structure (individual focus): ……..
(8) use of English: grammar, vocabulary, punctuation (individual focus): ……..
(9) coherence and cohesion (individual focus): ……..
(10) other (*please specify*): ……..

*4. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? Please write the appropriate number next to each statement below.*

**1** = not at all **2** = to some extent **3** = to a large extent **4** = very much

The comparative essay writing task helped me to
(1) find and maintain the content focus in a 350 word comparative essay: ……..
(2) form a relevant thesis statement: ……..
(3) develop a logical text structure: …….
(4) create coherence within and in between paragraphs: ……..
(5) use English correctly: ……..
(6) use a style appropriate to the aims and audience of the essay: ……..
(7) other (*please specify*): ……

*5. Overall, to what extent are you satisfied with the development of your essay-writing skills in light of your experience during the comparative essay writing task? Please underline the answer you agree with the most.*

**1** = not at all **2** = to some extent **3** = to a large extent **4** = very much

*Please explain your choice.*

*6. If you have any other comments about the essay writing assignment, please write them below.*

Thank you for your help.

Kathleen E. Dubs (1944–2011) was a university professor, mediaevalist and literary historian. She was born an American, but after the first half of her academic career she moved to Eger, Hungary, and worked at Pázmány Péter Catholic University in Hungary and Catholic University in Ružomberok, Slovakia, until her death in 2011. The year 2024 marked her 80th birthday anniversary. This book, compiled from papers produced over 2024–2025, written by her former colleagues and other scholars in honour of her memory and on themes close to her fields of academic interest, aims to pay tribute to Kathleen's achievements and exceptional personality. It is a posthumous festschrift, brought to life as a cooperation of scholars from Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic, that seeks to promote her figure as one whose academic activity crossed borders in several senses of the word.