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Paraenetic Character of Modern Islamic Prose

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Abstract

Paraenetic literature encompasses didactic literature which promotes adequate and morally correct manner of action. One of the features of paraenesis is its normativism proposing models of ideal heroes, characteristic for a given social background. Paraenetic literature has its roots in Ancient Greece. In the subsequent centuries Christianity, drawing on the ancient canon of an ideal man, proposed moral values and ideal heroes hitherto unknown. At the same time, what Christianity did in the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque, was to develop new genres that aimed at conveying paraenetic content. The concept of the aesthetic role of literature as opposed to its utilitarian character was created as late as in Romanticism.

In the Arab world the utilitarian and aesthetic functions have stood hand in hand since the very beginning. In the 1980s a movement described as "Islamic literature" emerged. This genre has a didactic function and aims at forming attitudes and moral behavior patterns that go in line with the rules of Islam. This paper analyses models of heroes who are inspired by Prophet Muhammad and face modern dangers and challenges, resulting from the Western pressure.

Keywords

Islam, Islamic literature, Arab world, Arabic prose, paraenetic literature

Introduction

It is important to start deliberations on paraenetic character of modern Islamic prose (*al-adab al-islāmī*) by outlining time-frames and geographical range of this phenomenon. The origins of Arabic literature go back to the pre-Islamic times when poetry was developing amongst Bedouins of Arabian Peninsula throughout the 5th and 6th centuries. Sophisticated, long poems called kasidas – initially, transmitted through spoken tradition – have lived on till now, almost unchanged. Naturally, the continuity is not thematic, but rather a formal one, with the form being a subject to very strict metrical and linguistic rules (Walther).

A Bedouin poet as an author of panegyrics and satires enjoyed great respect and played a role not only of his tribe's spokesman, but also its shaman. A poet's high standing within his tribe resulted from the role that language – literary, poetical and mythical – played in tribal environment. Language utterances were considered to have the same driving force as deeds, and were treated as such. The performative function of language utterances was acknowledged both by speakers and by listeners (Danecki 16). Belief in a magical and causative function of language was best reflected in the form of the sacred book of Islam – the Quran. The new religion that was revealed in the 7th century to Muhammad, a descendant of Meccan Quraysh circles, helped preserving the prestige of Arabic. The Quran, a collection of divine revelations, is not only a reference text of Islam, but also – apart from the poetry – the greatest monument of Arabic language and a perfect example of literature that subsequent generations of writers are inspired by.

During next centuries the Arabs and peoples they had conquered contributed to the heritage of Arab-Islamic literature, leading to its evolution and development. Under the Abbasids (750–1258) a new type of literature emerged; it was called *adab*, meaning "upbringing, instructing". For a well-educated resident of the Abbasid caliphate, adab writings were some sort of necessary knowledge compendium, derived from various fields, such as philology, rhetoric, religion, philosophy, history, and

geography. After some time, the term acquired a broader meaning and was used to describe all literary works.

The notion that the literary work has a utilitarian function, which had resulted from convictions about the causative function of language, popular amongst Arabs, was dominant in the times of Arab renaissance in the 19th century when the pioneers of new literature who adapted Western literary forms (short story, novel, drama) decided to educate their own society in the modernist spirit, shape their national identity and inspire them to fight colonizers. Also other authors who disguised their up-to-date matters and ideological commitment with the traditional forms of classical poems were guided by similar ideas. In the latter half of the 20th century, after contemporary modern states had been established, literature was used for propaganda purposes by existing regimes or by opposition movements. Writers got involved in the problems of their era and took a stand on difficulties affecting the Arab world since the Algerian independence war through the Palestinian issue or the Persian Gulf crisis. The subsequent bloody aspects of armed conflicts, as well as struggle against ruling regimes, were reflected, in one form or another, in the new generations' writing. Authors got also involved in social issues, standing alongside socially excluded people, the poor, women and children.

After the defeat of Arab armies in the 1967 war with Israel unfolded an ideological crisis that later on resulted in the rise of fundamentalist sentiments, also in intellectual circles. Back again religion became the important part of social discourse and an ingredient of a new Arab identity. The main postulates of Islamic fundamentalism were becoming more widely heard, including the need to defend Islamic values against economic, political and ideological Western interfering. It was believed that defeats and backwardness of the Arab world were caused by modern societies abandoning traditional values and imitating the West. There was also a need to create new tools to promote new ideas.

Arab literature at this time, after a short-lived flirtation with pan-Arabism and nationalistic ideologies, engaged itself more and more visibly in the process of shaping religious or quasi-religious attitudes. The void that followed the collapse of earlier ideologies contributed to the rise of demand for paraenetic writing and to spreading an intellectual attitude that invited to seek moral sense in the outside world. The new type of Islamic literature, called *al-adab al-islāmī*, began to promote a role model that, based on the example of the Prophet Muhammad, shaped the synthesis of virtues for a perfect modern Muslim (Dziekan, Die islamische Literaturtheorie; Kubarek, Współczesna literatura muzułmańska; Kubarek, Muzułmańska perspektywa).

The spread of the term "Islamic literature", and then the popularization of literary theories and literature itself, relates to the activity of the Muslim Brotherhood (*Al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn*) and their main ideologist Sayyid Quṭb (1906–1966) and his brother Muhammad Quṭb (1919–2014) (Hafez; Hamdar and Moore). The success of this kind of literature in the Arab and Muslim world is due to International League of Islamic Literature (*Rābiṭat al-Adab al-Islāmī al-'Ālamiyya*) that considers this activity as their mission (*ad-da'wa*)[1]. On its official website International League of Islamic Literature (adabislami.org) has the following definition of Islamic literature: "Islamic literature is the objective artistic expression of man, life and universe from an Islamic perspective (al-ta'bīr al-fannī al-hādif 'an al-insān wa-l-ḥayāt wa-l-kawn wufq al-taṣawwur al-islāmī).

The term al-adab al-islāmī relates to all literary genres: lyric, epic and drama. Islamic literature, on the one hand, is rooted in its own tradition (Quran, hadith collections, mystical poetry) and is meant to build Islamic identity in contemporary world, and, on the other, uses modern, "West-borrowed" means of expression, such as short story, novel and drama. It also contributes to the modern trend of *al-shu'ūbiyyia* – a movement that aimed at encouraging Arabs to compete with Persians for political and

[1] The League publishes books and their own periodicals in different languages: Urdu, Turkish and English. Two periodicals published in Arabic are: *Al-Adab al-islāmī* and *Al-Majalla al-iliktrūniyya*. The League also awards literary prizes for prose. So far there are no prizes awarded in the categories of poetry or drama, although both forms have their recognized representatives. Poems and dramas are often published by the League in the form of a book or appear in its periodicals. There is also an award for translation from the languages of Muslim nations. The first prize was awarded to the novel Arilar ülkesi (*Mamlakat al-naḥl*, Kingdom of Bees), by Ali Nara, the secretary of the office of the Turkish League. It has been translated into Arabic by Aḥmad Khawja.

cultural supremacy in the Abbasid Caliphate in the 8th and 9th centuries (Bielawski), and that means a struggle to free itself from outside intellectual supremacy nowadays (Amīn). These demands are clearly expressed by Muḥammad Barīghish (1942–2003), a Syrian writer and Islamic literary critic, one of the founders of International League of Islamic Literature, and author of numerous works on Islamic literary theories:

> A Muslim is obliged to observe the principles of Islam in all aspects of life, ideas and art. This is what constitutes Muslim writers' call – as well as literary critics' – to create a different but remarkable route for Islamic literature; to lay its artistic foundation through experience and efforts, through activities that are really consistent with an Islamic perspective, not through imitating or borrowing [. . .]. In this way they serve literature, as they serve their religion, humanity and community.

What is exceptionally popular is prose in the form of a novel (*riwāya*) and a short story (*qiṣṣa*). Najīb al-Kaylānī (1931-1995)[2] who is considered the father of Islamic novel and pioneer of Islamic literary theory was the first to write Islamic novels and develop theoretical guidelines for a new genre. There is no doubt that his theories were taking shape under the influence of the Quṭb brothers' – Sayyid and Muḥammad – convictions. The ideas of Al-Kaylānī are present in his following dissertations: *Al-Islāmiyya wa-l-madhāhib al-adabiyya* (Islamic Character and Literary Schools), *Madkhal ilā l-adab al-islāmī* (Introduction to Islamic Literature), *Iqbal al-shā'ir al-thā'ir* (Iqbal, a Rebel Poet), *Āfāk al-adab al-islāmī* (Horizon of Islamic Literature). Apart from works on literature, he has published religious, political and social dissertations.

Najīb al-Kaylānī felt that Islamic literature is "committed" (*al-adab almultazim, al-adab al-mas'ūl*), and it means that a writer needs to take some responsibility, make a commitment which springs from the heart and convictions of a believer and is based on the Divine Book, sent down "in a clear, understandable Arabic". Al-Kaylānī enumerates the following features of Islamic literature:

– beautiful and appealing artistic expression,
– rooted in faith,
– reflecting realities of life, human being and world,
– consistent with Islamic doctrine,
– striking a chord and provoking reflections (Kubarek, Współczesna literatura muzułmańska 40).

Al-Kaylnī's ideas were creatively developed by other theoreticians and literature scholars. Imād ad-Dīn Khalīl (b. 1939), a prominent Iraqi intellectual, professor at the University of Mosul and the author of numerous works on contemporary Islamic thought, is currently one of the most distinguished theoreticians of Islamic literature. In his *Madkhal ilā naẓariyyat al-adab al-islāmī* (Introduction to the

[2] He was born in the village of Sharshāba in Western Egypt. As a first-born son, and in accordance with the rural tradition, he was sent to a kuttāb in his village at the age of four. He learnt how to read, write and count, and got to know the Quran and stories about the Prophet Muhammad's life. Then he went to a primary school in the village of Sindbad and a secondary school in Tanta (Ṭanṭā). In 1951 he entered the Medicine Department of Cairo University. After completing his studies, he started working in a Giza hospital. Later on he worked as a doctor in his home village and then in the Ministry of Transport and the Medical Department of Egyptian Railways. Already in his early youth – in 1948 – he encountered the Muslim Brotherhood's ideas. One of his uncles, involved in the activities of the organization and as a close friend of Ḥasan al-Bannā, introduced Al-Kaylānī to their convictions and took him to their meetings. After Al-Kaylānī had begun to study at the university he started attending the Muslim Brotherhood's lectures and was involved in their activities. Following a 1954 Muslim Brotherhood-led failed attempt on president Nasser's life there was a wave of arrests. Initially, Al-Kaylānī helped providing aid to prisoners but a year later he was arrested, brought to court and sentenced to ten years in prison for being a member of a secret armed organization. After three years, in 1958, he was released due to ill health. Arrested again in 1965 he spent two more years in prison. He was released following the events after the defeat of Egypt in the Six-Day War. However, all this persecution made Al-Kaylānī remain faithful to his beliefs. In 1968 he left for Kuwait to work as a doctor. Eventually he made the UAE his home. In 1992 just before his death he went back to Egypt. He died on 6 June 1995 after a serious illness (liver cancer).

Theory of Islamic Literature, 2007) he defines duties that *al-adab al-islāmī* should perform. The most important and superior is a doctrinal duty; political, social, psychological, historical, methodological and educational duties are next to follow. The basic determinant of Islamic literature is not only, according to Khalīl, an Islamic perspective and philosophy, but also Islamic aesthetics, reaching to Quranic examples and humanism. However, this criterion is a matter of argument since not all theoreticians and practitioners of this genre agree with it. One of the supporters of the view that the essence (jauhar) of an Islamic perspective can also be found in works written by non-Muslim authors is, for example, Muḥammad Quṭb (Dziekan, Die islamische Literaturtheorie; Kubarek, Współczesna literatura muzułmańska).

After almost twenty years from his death Al-Kaylānī continues to be an example for the next generations of writers and is the best known representative of Islamic literature in the Arab world (‘Abd Al-Ḥamīd; Kubarek, Muzułmańska perspektywa). He published more than thirty literary works, including *Qātil Ḥamza* (The Killer of Hamza), *Rijāl wa-dhi’āb* (Men and Wolves), *Ḥikāyat Jāda Allāh* (The Story of Jada Allah), *Mawākib al-aḥrār* (Processions of the Free) *‘Umar yaẓharu fī l-Quds* (‘Umar Appears in Jerusalem), *Layālī Turkistān* (The Nights of Turkestan) *‘Amāliqa al-šamāl* (The Giants of the North), *Al-Kābūs* (Nightmare), *‘Adhrā’ Jākartā* (The Virgin of Jakarta), *Fī l-ẓalām* (In the Darkness) and more than a dozen of short stories, such as: “‘Anda l-raḥīl” (During a Farewell), “Ḥikāyāt ṭabīb” (Stories of a Doctor), “Rijāl Allāh” (Men of God), “Maw‘iduna ghadan” (We Have Got an Appointment Tomorrow), “Amīra al-jabal” (The Princess of the Mountain), some of them are thought to be missing. Some of his books have already had ten editions which shows how popular his prose actually is. He is also an author of several poetry books and dramas. In his autobiography Al-Kaylānī mentions that he did not know Islamic literature theory while writing his first novels. What he wrote reflected a simple man’s perspective and his commitment to traditional Islamic values. Al-Kaylānī’s background had a strong impact on his writing. According to Barīghish, the writer considered countryside his homeland representing Egyptian spirit and heart. Stories depicted in the novels published before 1970 often take place in the first half of the 20th century in some Egyptian villages. The life of families living in the country helps Al-Kaylānī show three fundamental problems of Egyptian society: ignorance, poverty and diseases.

This nationalistic perspective gave way over time to an Islamic one. Al-Kaylānī ceases to be preoccupied with the problems of Egypt. His main interests are now issues concerning the Muslim community – ummah. The background of his novels from this period – which is very remarkable – is set in various Muslim countries or countries with significant Muslim communities (such as China, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Indonesia) which make his message universal. It is no wonder then that they were translated to many foreign languages, such as Turkish, Urdu, Persian, Indonesian, English, Russian and Swedish.

According to critics, the best work of Al-Kaylānī and a perfect Islamic novel is *‘Amāliqa al-shamāl*. It takes place in Nigeria in 1965–1970. However, the author does not report here any detailed historical facts but rather uses some most important events as a canvas to talk about the struggle between good – Nigerian Muslims – and evil – local Christians and strangers from the West. The main character of the novel is ‘Uthmān Amīnū, a tradesman who lives in one of the Nigerian towns in the north. He buys herds of cattle and then drives them south to Lagos and sells out. The man comes from Fulan clan, a traditional family of merchants. He is well-educated, he knows languages – Arabic and English, to say the least. His spiritual leader and moral authority is shaikh ‘Abdallāh from Qadariyya brotherhood.

‘Uthmān has a friend called Nūr who despite his best efforts is influenced by the rotten West and eventually betrays his fellow Muslims. There is also a love story in the novel which makes reading more appealing to a reader. The love story constitutes the axis of subsequent events and is what puts the depicted world in order. Jāmāka, a young woman of Ibo tribe who had been converted to Christianity by missionaries and works in a local hospital, discovers – under the influence of love to ‘Uthmān – that Islam is the true religion. She adopts a new faith and name and then changes her behavior and dress style. She stays at her beloved’s side to fight for peace in her country under the banner of Islam.

Works of Al-Kaylānī and other Islamic writers raise obvious associations with pareanetic texts. Paraenetic literature encompasses didactic literature which promotes adequate and morally correct

manner of action. One of the features of paraenesis is its normativism which proposed models of ideal heroes, characteristic for a given social background. Paraenetic literature has its roots in Ancient Greece. Already Plato specified features which embodied an exemplary notion of a human being, such as religious ardor, then bravery, moderation and fairness. Later on, Aristotle separated the meaning of virtue from religious virtues in favor of civic virtues (Dziechcińska).

Their theories were developed by – amongst others – Isocrates and Pseudo-Plutarch, but original general phrasing changed into more specific recommendations and their practical applications. The concept of a perfect man was broadened in Rome with some new culturally conditioned features – *vir bonus* was henceforth meant to be a good householder and farmer. Perfect examples embodied following virtues: noble ancestry, sometimes wealth and recognition, and then moral, religious and political virtues. The virtue of wisdom was added as well – with a special emphasis on acquiring knowledge needed to develop good morals.

In the subsequent centuries Christianity, drawing on the ancient canon of an ideal man, proposed moral values and ideal heroes hitherto unknown. At the same time, what Christianity did in the Middle Ages, Renaissance and Baroque, was to develop new genres that aimed at conveying paraenetic content, but still different from morality writings of a general nature and in favor of linking paraenetic thought with definite moral role models.

Thus, it was the beginning of two forms of paraenetic message: literary structures of example and recommendation. This differentiation leads to a double meaning of the term "paraenesis". The first meaning relates to various narrative genres that promote definite moral, ethical and civic attitudes. The second, narrower one, refers to a treaty and speculum, i.e. genres containing behavior recommendations for definite members of society.

This is due to the fact, as Dziechcińska (357) puts it, that paraenesis "started making use of language potential of narratives, relating to literary categories used in fiction, such as character, plot and action, which lead to strong development of all literary genres that could fulfill their didactic role." Narrative texts of a paraenetic nature are not only to entertain but also to educate. A reader is expected to reach proper conclusions and follow literary characters' example in an extra-aesthetic reality.

Modern Islamic novel has many features that define texts of a paraenetic character. At the same time, it reaches to its own tradition – religious works (Quran, hadith collections) and treaties and specula – and follows European examples (writings of an epic character). Following the tradition means in this respect relating to contents and values rooted in Islamic culture and religion. European inspirations are almost solely limited to a form and a way of using modern categories of fiction as carriers of paraenetic message.

Novels of Najīb al-Kaylānī, serving as examples, and works of other Islamic writers are featured above all by their normativism that is a basic factor of paraenesis (Kubarek *Modern Islamic Literature*). Al-Kaylānī and his followers create perfect moral attitudes and role models for a modern Muslim using motifs and threads. It is remarkable that these role models sometimes take certain social places. There is a perfect son, father, husband, mother, daughter, wife and a ruler, shaikh, Muslim, patriot. They are contrasted at the same time with undesirable behavior and attitudes, such as that of a traitor, coward, tyrant.

Characters are distinctly divided into good ones – those who should be followed – and bad ones. The main character of a novel is usually good. In case of Al-Kaylānī's works there is mostly a young man accompanied by a woman. In *'Amāliqa al-shamāl* the main character is the aforementioned 'Uthmān Amīnū, his partner is Jāmāka. Other couples of characters are, for example, Muṣṭafā and Najmat al-Layl in *Layālī Turkistīn*, Aḥmad and Jalīla in *Ramaḍān Ḥabībī*, Farīd and Nuhayra in *Fī l- ẓalām*, Ibrāhīm and Rūz in *Ṭalā'i' al-Fajr*, Aḥmad Shalabī and Ṣbirayn in *An-Nidā' al-Khālid,* 'Adnān Ibn al-Munadhdhir and Zumurruda in *Al-Yaum al-maw'ūd*. However, there are also novels with a young girl as the main character (*'Adhrā' Jākartā*). Each composition is structurally based on these central characters and the love story that joins them.

Similarity of characters in Al-Kaylānī's novels is also pointed out by 'Abdallāh b. Ṣāliḥ Al-'Arīnī (203-204). The critic remarks that all of them are more or less in the same age, come from the same social background and are involved in political and religious activities or liberation struggle. A plot in turn

relates to their development or spiritual change which leads to their complete self-sacrifice in order to meet their ends. The catalyst of these transformations are political events (turnover, another state's aggression) that they are all of a sudden dragged in the middle of; sometimes, these events are related to emotional involvement of one of the characters.

There is always an older person, a moral authority or spiritual leader who supports them in their change. In *'Amāliqa ash-shamāl* it is shaikh 'Abdallāh of Qadariyya Brotherhood, a teacher and spiritual master who can always find correct words to show the way, who is subjected to persecution and suffers with his disciples, becoming a role model for them. In the novel *'Umar yaẓharu fī l-Quds* it is 'Umar, the second of the Rashidun caliphs, moved in time to the present day, so as to bring back to the Arabs the times of late glory with his relentless attitude, help them shake their apathy off and show the way of action.

The construction of the three main good characters lets a reader of either sex, on the one hand, identify themselves with characters and recognize their role models, and, on the other, is a convenient carrier of didactic message. The other extreme – on the side of evil – represent both Muslims who do not show moral virtue and Western civilization's representatives (Christian missionaries, soldiers, officials) or Jews (tradesmen and profiteers living in the diaspora or Israelis occupying Palestinian lands). Their egoism, greediness, unfaithfulness and cowardice are the main features of bad characters. Out of base motives they choose to collaborate with foreign armies (English or French) or cooperate with Israeli authorities or a military regime (Al-'Arīnī 25-26).

Characters in Al-Kaylānī's novels are, to a large extent, conventional, devoid of their own features, and thus they can play a role of examples of a paraenetic nature. Good characters are to be respected and liked and a reader is expected to easily identify with them. Positive associations are inspired by physical beauty of good characters (beautiful face, wise and gentle eyes, well-groomed beard, handsome figure).

Bad characters, on the other hand, are of unpleasant appearance which makes a reader feel distaste. As Al-'Arīnī (196) puts it:

> Both bad and good characters embody these rules and values which the writer wants to show. He creates his characters in a specific way, paying attention to the fact that a definite person is to personify a definite value or rule. If he presents a bad character, a criminal, he makes special efforts to evoke as much distaste and aversion as possible. In the same way, a good character should make a good impression on a reader who identifies themselves with him and stands on his side.

It is possible to find in the works of Al-Kaylānī some references to his autobiography. The prototype of main characters is the writer himself as remembered from his youth. The author always puts him in an environment which is well-known to him, i.e. rural, academic or medical. What is also repetitive is the motif of involvement in religious and political activity, and persecution or prison as well. A moral authority may be in turn associated with people whom the writer met in his youth and who had significant impact on his life and beliefs. The first is one of his uncles (the son of his mother's uncle) Al-Ḥājj Muḥammad al-Shāfi'ī, who was the first to bring the Muslim Brotherhood's teachings to their home village. Then comes shaikh Maḥmūd Aḥmad al-Midāḥ, of Sufi brotherhood Aḥmadiyya, who the writer was very attached to. In his autobiography Al-Kaylānī describes him as follows: "He was a handsome man, clean and gentle as an angel. He looked very smart in his beautiful jubba and kaftan. His appearance made people relaxed, peaceful and full of respect" (Qumayḥa).

The next person who – according to the writer – had changed his life was shaikh Sayyid al-Wakīl, assigned by the Muslim Brotherhood to resolve a dispute which flared up when a young Al-Kaylānī was accused of an affair with a girl from his home village whom he volunteered to tutor. That event shaped the writer's beliefs on male-female relations – and these beliefs are omnipresent in his novels where his characters often make statements relating to these issues.

In the introduction to the first edition of an award-winning (Ministry of Education's prize) novel – the plot is set in the final period of the Crusades during the reign of the last Ayyubid ruler of Egypt

Tūrān Shān Kāmil al-Malik al-Ṣāliḥ Najmat al-Dīn Ayyūb (1137-1193) – the author explains that he had chosen that period of his country's history because it was then that the Egyptian nation had resisted invasion of infidels and the tyranny of a foreign ruler:

> Tūrān Shān was an example of a tyrant ruler, Zumurruda embodied the tragedy of his tyranny, and 'Adnān Al-Munadhdhir was a symbol of nation that initially suffers in silence and then rises to rescue their country, oblivious of their own distress. A Frenchman Marcel was an example of the deceived and cheated, who were dreaming about false fame, and Luiza – of a narrow-minded fanatic and blind racist. Yāqūta, in turn, was one of the symbols of feminine creativity which got apparent when a woman regained a relative freedom, threw away her shackles and was sent by fate into a battlefield . . .
>
> If I describe an event, introduce a character or a dialogue, it is because I have some aim to achieve and this is serving a big cause. (Al-Kaylānī, *Al-Yaum al-maw'ūd* 6)

There are good reasons that Al-Kaylānī favored historical novels. Although, on the one hand, he attaches great importance to historical realities and credibility of historical and social background and introduces historic figures, he is free, on the other, to create fictional characters and make them carriers of preferred features and clear examples of some attitudes and behaviors.

The didactic function is accomplished through the use of various tools. The first one is persuasion – direct or indirect. The narrator in the novels suggests what is right and gives a reader direct advice or a persuasive phrasing is expressed by characters that are presented as unambiguous moral authorities. In the novel *'Umar yaẓharu fī l-Quds* the caliph meets a young Palestinian and establishes a very clear relation with him – where he is a mentor and the Palestinian a disciple. Most of his statements are of a didactic nature and given in a form of critical commentary to the reality as he perceives it – the condition of contemporary Muslim community and political situation in Palestine – and advice or recommendations what to do to change the status quo:

> (A character) So I said with great sadness: – Everything has changed. Men are no longer men, rules are no longer rules. Strength is measured with money. Muslims are enslaved. They have lost everything except hope.
>
> ('Umar) He hit a table with his fist and with a gloomy face said: – You do not know God . . . I would never expect that something like this could ever happen. You were defeated by Jews? If someone, back in my times, said that Jews had conquered a Muslim city people would just have burst into laughter. (Al-Kaylānī, '*Umar yaẓharu fī l-Quds* 14)

Some of the caliph's statements are of a very general nature: "You know but you do not believe. Knowledge is one thing and faith is quite another. Knowledge without faith is worthless. God's might has no limits" (9). "You should know, my dear, that fear destroys every effort, wastes your time and ruins your faith" (37). "You always think everything over, you are very careful . . . Instead, you should trust in God, and victory will come" (66).

What is typical for paraenetic texts is that they are well-equipped with proverbs, maxims and quotations, readily recognized by a reader. In Islamic novels there are numerous quotations, references and paraphrases of Quranic verses and hadiths. When a pagan tribe's leader who became converted to Islam asks 'Uthmān what to do with his tribe's members who were converted to Christianity by missionary Tom, the hero relates to 256 verse of surat al-Baqarah (Al-Kaylānī, '*Amāliqa al-shamāl* 62): "No compulsion is there in religion. Rectitude has become clear from error" (2:256). Later 'Uthmān refers to a Quranic quotation to defend the tribe's member who had wanted to kill him shooting a bow while in hiding (60): "But surely he who bears patiently and is forgiving – surely that is true constancy" (42:40). During a fight in prison some prisoners attacked those who had decided to cooperate with the authorities and a new regime so to be granted freedom in return. Shaikh 'Abdallāh played the role of an arbiter mentioning the Prophet's words (93): "If two Muslims meet each other with their swords, then both the killer and the killed will be in the Hellfire" (a hadith from Al-Bukhari and Muslim collections).

When Jāmāka calls on ʻUthmān in his house he talks to her over his threshold and refuses to let her in arguing with her (18):

> – Devout Muslims – as far as I know – do not shut the door in the face...
> – That is right... But the situation is different...
> – How so?
> – Because we have one man and one woman...
> – So be it.
> – When they meet, the Satan is the third party.

The last sentence clearly refers to a famous saying: "Never is a Man alone with a woman except that Satan is the third party with them" (a hadith from Al-Tirmidhi, 3:474).

Conclusion

Every literary text seems to represent some sort of involvement or axiological focus, but in case of Islamic and paraenetic literatures, this function turns out to be dominant. Its role is emphasized by theoreticians of this literature, including Imad ad-Dīn Khalīl. The same is also proved by the structure of the text which is subordinated to the accomplishment of some aims in the extra-aesthetic space. Al-Kayānī and his followers create perfect moral attitudes and role models for a modern Muslim using motifs and threads. It is remarkable that these role models sometimes take certain social places.

Authors tending to make a paraenetic message appealing to a reader try in many ways to invite them to reading, such as introducing a surprising way of presenting a character or a thread; they show life as an image of inner struggles, as a fight between good and evil where good always prevails. All statements expressed by characters are full of very specific didacticism, with recommendations relating to definite situations. They form a type of instructions how to live one's life. Every utterance and every sentence in an Islamic novel change in a reader's mind into some sort of moral imperative or argument. This aspect of moral exhortation and utilitarian function make it possible to describe this genre as a modern Islamic paraenesis.

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Anne Sexton's Confessional Tradition and Individual Talent

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Abstract

In his influential essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot emphasizes the significance of tradition as well as the inevitability of the present talent of the artist. He argues that every artist has his own original and individual themes and techniques that separate him from and link him with his predecessors at the same time. Anne Sexton, the Confessional American woman poet, is a good example that proves this everlasting notion of the allusion to "the dead poets" of the past together with the inevitable existence of the innovative original talent of the poet. Chiefly, Sexton is labeled "Confessional" and is compared with the most remarkable Confessional poets. However, the Confessional mode is not a new movement; it has its roots in the British tradition of the Metaphysical lyrics. It is also manifest in the American tradition of Puritan Poetry. Moreover, Confessional themes and techniques can be seen in the poetry of some Modernists. Meanwhile, Anne Sexton's exceptional Confessional "individual talent" makes her a unique Confessional poet: the uncommon imperfect raw confessions, the unconventional bold sexual imagery, the fearful and astonishing religious symbols and the excessive degrees of "impersonality" are all characteristic examples of Sexton's creative Confessional art.

Keywords

confession, tradition, individual talent, impersonality, Puritans, Romantics, Modernists

This paper attempts to throw light on some of the traditional aspects and the innovative characteristics of the poetry of Anne Sexton who is numbered among the pioneers of the Confessional mode that, as some critics claim, emerged in America in the 1950s. In fact, the Confessional mode has had a long and perplexing history since the publication of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* in the fifth century and the confirmation of the mode by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions* in the eighteenth century. As traced by Laurie Duesing (1992), the tradition of confession can be noticed in so many literary works. This elongate history reminds one of the timeless critical essay entitled "Tradition and the Individual Talent" by T. S. Eliot who reassures the historical sense of the literary work and the individuation of each work of art at the same time. Anne Sexton's poetry is a good example which proves that the tradition of confession, either religious or secular, has had its roots in the past and the individuality of the poet has its strong impact on the present. Published in the America of the 1960s, Sexton's poetry has not only surprised its audience and critics but shocked them by its unusual and bold technical and thematic innovations.

To explore Sexton's conventional traits and to show her Confessional uniqueness, this paper adopts the following steps. First of all, it refers to the basic critical concepts of T. S. Eliot's most memorable article "Tradition and the Individual Talent" that supports the real existence of Confessional poetry throughout the history of literary criticism. Next, it introduces a short survey of the critics who have disapproved the Confessional mode, and those who have approved it. These critical discrepancies show that those critics have not only overlooked the basic foundations of the Confessional tradition, but they are not accustomed to the poetic subjects this group of poets have tackled as well. Then, it attempts to find out some common ground that connects the Confessional poets of the past with the Confessional pioneers of the 1950s, including Anne Sexton, the poet under investigation. After that, it attempts to apply some of the established Confessional characteristics to some past literary works by the American Puritans, the British Metaphysicals, the British Romantics, and the American Modernists. Finally, it attempts to illustrate Anne Sexton's individual talent that separates her from her predecessors.

To achieve this goal, three basic methods are employed in the paper. First, the chronological method is employed in order to help the researcher investigate the complex history of Confessional writing, starting from the *Confessions* of St. Augustine to the emergence of the Confessional mode in the America of the 1950s. Second, the comparative method is adopted to point out the similarities that relate the modern Confessional mode of the 1950s to some of the works of their predecessors. Finally, the contrastive method is applied in order to explore the distinctive qualities of Anne Sexton's poetry which illustrate her individual talent.

In his timeless essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," T. S. Eliot (1921) constructs a basic corner stone that solves the contradicting debates around the so-called Confessional mode. Eliot emphasizes the notion of viewing the present poetic production in consideration of past artistic works. Therefore, he starts with focusing on the necessity and the importance of scrutinizing and examining the works of both the past as well as the present in the process of literary criticism. He claims that "No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists" (44). To explain this communion between the past and the present, Eliot builds his argument on the concept of what he calls "the historical sense" (43). He sees that "this historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional" (44). Meanwhile, Eliot asserts the inevitability of the novelty and originality of the artist who almost always strives to convey some universal truth that manifests the public rather than the private and focuses on the impersonal rather than the personal. To use his words:

> It is not in his personal emotions, the emotions provoked by particular events in his life, that the poet is in any way remarkable or interesting. His particular emotions may be simple, or crude, or flat. The emotion in his poetry will be a very complex thing, but not with the complexity of the emotions of people who have very complex or unusual emotions in life. (51-52)

With the growth of a group of poets whose works deal with personal experiences emphasizing the anguish of familial life and the breakdown of the self in the USA in the 1950s, the term 'Confessional' has been founded and become prominent in literary criticism, and with the appearance of the second generation (as discussed by Duesing), the mode has been confirmed. In fact, the application of the term has resulted in many confusing debates: some critics have looked at the subject matter of this type as absolutely "unpoetic," while many others have praised and defended the adoption of the term. Almost all these critics have overlooked the fact that the Confessional stream has had an old literary history; the genre of Confessionalism has been established since the publication of Saint Augustine's *Confessions* in c. 397, and it has been assured in the late eighteenth century with the emergence of the *Confessions* of Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). However, the Confessional poetry of the 1950s cannot be seen as either an ultimately "unpoetic" mode or an absolutely new genre; the Confessional art has had a complex long tradition and it acquires some new characteristics in every stage of its growth throughout history.

Critics, like Michael L. Rosenthal (1959), who is responsible for applying the term 'confessional' to Robert Lowell's *Life Studies* (1959), seem to be torn between accepting and rejecting the application of the term. In his article "Poetry as Confession," he describes the term "confessional" as "both helpful and too limited." He also argues that "possibly the conception of a Confessional school has by now done a certain amount of damage" (154). In another place, he attempts to defend it claiming that a Confessional poem relies heavily on autobiographical details about the poet's real life (*The New Poets* 131-138). Also, reluctant between lauding and disparaging the mode, Mellissa Ann Cannon sees the term as inappropriate and too limited. Cannon argues that "the confessional classification has not provided a valuable approach to help us bear what the poems have to say, but has been a theory promoted at the expense of the poems it was constructed to illuminate" (172). In the same book, Cannon stresses the necessity of the use of autobiographical material that characterizes this particular group (128).

Nevertheless, other scholars, like Karl Malkoff, Ralph J. Mills and Robert Phillips, have not only praised this poetic art but they have attempted to find out some common characteristics that

distinguish this mode from its contemporaries. Karl Malkoff (1977), for example, accepts the categorization of this group due to the notion "that they are, in fact oneself consciously attempting a redefinition of the self" (99). Similarly, Ralph J. Mills sees that the Confessional poet recreates himself as a personality; he has selected a self that has been heightened in the process and could not be mistaken for someone else (7). Moreover, Robert Phillips, who agrees with Rosenthal on the idea of depending on autobiographical material, asserts the therapeutic quality of the Confessional poem. In his "The Confessional Poets," Phillips explains that "its goal is self-therapy and a certain purgation" (73-91). In the same manner, Mills supports the therapeutic act of the Confessional poem by referring to the redemptive quality in the work (6).

To explain the endowment of the past Confessional tradition and its communion with the modern Confessional mode of the 1950s, and to demonstrate Anne Sexton's individual talent, it is necessary to lay the groundwork for this discussion by scrutinizing the most common characteristics of the Confessional mode that possibly unite them all. As it will be explained in the next few paragraphs, the marks that gather the members of this school together and connect them to their predecessors can be summed up in six basic aspects: first, the heavy reliance on autobiographical material in order to relive their past tragic lives; second, the employment of some innovative memory that is subjected to shaping and creating new events out of the old ones; third, the therapeutic effect that Confessional poets often strive to attain in order to achieve reconcilement within themselves as well as with the surrounding world; fourth, the engagement of an "I" in a new elegiac form in order to gain sympathy and familiarity with the public; fifth, the utilization of the colloquial language that helps them communicate with their readers; and finally, the accomplishment of the impersonal quality that frees this type from the accusation of being too personal or too documentary.

To begin with, one of the most distinguishing features of the Confessional mode of the 1950s is the heavy reliance on autobiographical material. It is this particular mark that has made a scholar, like Rosenthal, apply the label "confessional" to Robert Lowell's *Life Studies*, where the poet deals with his private weaknesses, sufferings and transgressions. Other works that depend mainly on autobiography like John Berryman's *77 Dream Songs* (1964), and Sylvia Plath's *Arial* (1965) have helped critics deal with the application of the term as if it were a new coinage without investigating the problems that could emerge as a result of its application to literary works.

Acknowledging the positive role of autobiography in the literary field, scholars like James Olney manage to defend autobiographical poetry and put it side by side with the approved literary genres. In his criticism, Olney probes the relation of a writer's life to his or her writings. He sees little distinction between autobiography and other genres such as poetry. In fact, he sees both autobiography and other genres as acts of creation. He argues that "Man has always cast his autobiography and has done it in that form to which his private spirit impelled him, often, however, calling the product not an autobiography but a lifework . . . whether it be history or poetry, psychology or theology, political economy or natural science" (3).

Another characteristic feature, that individuates the modern Confessional mode in general and links the whole group together, is the massive reliance on some innovative memory. Most Confessional poets are strongly motivated to recall past personal events especially those painful ones. Yet, the memory they adopt is not mere recalling events; this memory is subjected to some analyses and changes. That is to say, while Confessional poets are recalling events and emotions, they shape and create new fictional narratives out of their past life struggles. Also, in the process of recalling, they may add some details or omit other ones to originate their Confessional art. Thus, in Confessional poetry, one notices some surprising unity between memory and creativity. To illustrate, events of memory can be seen clearly in Robert Lowell's "The Days of Sin," where the poet recalls his sorrowful religious experience. This poem starts with the following lines:

> Oh, mournful, mournful time!
> I prayed: but sin was there:

Sin crept upon my prayer,
And made my prayer a crime![1](23)

This stanza reveals how Lowell depends on memorial past events to convey his themes and communicate with the reader. Also, he carefully connects the past with the present suggesting the continuous spiritual struggle that evokes him to confess and pray all his lifetime.

One more peculiar mark of Confessional poetry is the vital therapeutic effect of the act of writing on both the poet and his readers. Confessional poets practice their art because they have to do so. To them, writing can heal and cure individuals from mental illnesses and spiritual struggles. Yet, this does not mean that art to them is an escape from real life. The Confessional poets are not escapists; they always ask for communion and unity. They are able to face almost all types of social and religious problems and put them down in poems without shame. Also, they often seek reconcilement with the other. In their inquiries, they carry out some inclusion rather than exclusion from society. In other words, writing, to a Confessional poet, is a means of lifting and consoling the self; it reduces mental illnesses and spiritual woes. Generally, this particular characteristic is reported by Liz Bums who sees that "literary reading, or that activity which links different levels of mental process through the medium of poetry, novels and drama, bears a striking resemblance to psychotherapy process" (xviii).

The therapeutic effect of Confessional poetry is associated with one more significant aspect: that is the attempt to redefine the self to communicate with the other. While the main concern of most writers is with man and his relation to God or his relation to the universe, as is seen in most of the poetry of the Metaphysical school, the Confessional poet's main concern is the individual self and its relation to the society. The Confessional poet is almost always preoccupied with a continuous and endless search for a new self because he is dissatisfied with the type of life he/she is leading in the middle of a huge amount of social and religious injustices. He also feels alienated and excluded from society because of some sense of guilt and disgrace. In the process of redefining the self, the Confessional poet searches for communion, too.

Formally, Confessional poetry is characterized by the exploitation of the elegiac form. The suffering speaker within the Confessional poem can better be heard in the "I" of the elegy which Confessional poets have revived. In his "Dying to Write: Reinventing the Elegiac in the Confessional Poetry of John Berryman, Anne Sexton, and Sylvia Plath," Christopher James Carney explains how Confessional poets have contributed to the elegiac form. In this thesis, it is explained how "each of the three poets focused the majority of their work on one personal, particular dimension within the elegy" (v). Besides, this reinvented Confessional elegiac form is supported with a unique crying 'I" in unusual freedom. Those poets often use an 'I' that suggests a unique individual voice full of pain and sorrow. It is an 'I' which is able to convince their listeners and readers and provide them with enough enthusiasm to sympathize with them and to participate in their painful experiences.

Finally, all the above characteristics are made to serve the most important concept of the impersonalization of the apparently so-called personal poetry. Although it seems too difficult to describe the personal as impersonal, the main goal of a Confessional poet is to achieve some reunion with society; his pains and sorrows are the pains and sorrows of the members of the society he/she is living in. Recognizing this principal quality, critics have attempted to find out some impersonal elements in Confessional poetry, e.g., Joanna Grill in "My Sweeney, Mr. Eliot": Anne Sexton and the "Impersonal Theory of Poetry". In this work, Grill compares some of Anne Sexton's poems to T. S. Eliot's most famous impersonal work, "The Waste Land," which includes the personal too.

Significantly, this quality of the impersonality of Confessional poetry has been interrogated by some critics who argue that Confessional poetry of the 1950s is not merely a private expression but it is public poetry written about public issues. For example, Cox and Jones, in "After the Tranquilized Fifties," suggest that "only a maladjusted, psychotic personality can faithfully interpret the maladjusted,

[1] Robert Lowell's poems are cited from *The Poems of Robert Lowell: Author of "The New Priest in Conception Bay."* Boston: E. P. Dutton, 1864.

psychotic personality of the age in which we live, the truth about ourselves" (108). In this comment, one sees that Confessional poets are preoccupied with inner thoughts as representatives of the whole society. Another critic, Joyce Carol Oates, explains that "poets like Sexton, Plath, and John Berryman have dealt in excruciating detail with collective (and not merely individual) pathologies of our time" (171). Certainly, Confessional poets write not only for themselves but for the public as well. They almost always strive for demonstrating their own agonies and sorrows for the sake of the mass as well as the individual.

In fact, the above mentioned thematic and technical aspects of the Confessional mode that appeared in the America of the 1950s, are not absolutely new; the idea of being confessional in literary tradition had its roots in the past. Strangely enough, one may go back to the *Book of Genesis* in the *Scriptures* where one notices how Adam and Eve have tried to justify their sins of violating God's command of not eating from "the tree of knowledge of good and evil". After breaking the command, Adam hides himself. When asked where he is (although God knows) he only says: "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself (*King James Version*, Gen. 3, 8)". Adam does not tell the whole truth. He confesses but his confession is incomplete and blames his wife for participating in committing such a sin that is seen by many Christians as the original sin which all human beings have inherited from their original parents, Adam and Eve. Surely, it is this inheritance that has taught humanity the lesson and the need for confession which has been developed from being religious into being secular in most modern societies around the world.

This long history of confession is also evident in the writings of some ancient leaders of the Christian church. One of the most well-known figures of the early Christian church is St. Augustine of Hippo whose *Confessions* are still reread and reconsidered by many recent literary critics. Moreover, the stream of Confessional poetry has its origin in the American Puritan poetry. Anne Bradstreet's work, where one notices familial struggle and spiritual agony is a good example. To add, the Metaphysical movement of the seventeenth century England is packed with personal spiritual and physical experiences as it is recognized in Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress" and John Donne's sonnet "Batter My Heart". Furthermore, the modern Confessional mode is sometimes compared to the Romantic movement specifically in the adoption of the personal 'I'. Finally, the too many critiques that emphasize the impersonal concept that characterize the Confessional mode support the idea of the great influence of the past tradition on the modern Confessional artistic cannon and Walt Whitman's "Song of My Self" deserves the analysis.

In addition to the tradition inherited in the Confessional mode of the 1950s, each Confessional poet seems to be different from the other; each has his own individuality in recalling, analyzing, and shaping his own private experience. In other words, it is true that Robert Lowell, John Berryman, Sylvia Plath and Anne Sexton, the pioneers of the Confessional mode of the 1950s, are joined together with some common characteristics, yet each of them has his own personal experiences he/she employs as the content of the Confessional work. Anne Sexton, the poet under investigation, is a typical example that demonstrates the vital function of tradition and the impact of the individual talent that she has controlled.

To begin with, the legacy of the ancient works of the past is evident in St. Augustine's *Confessions*, which is considered one of the most valuable literary works of the Western tradition. Augustine's heavy employment of autobiographical material, full reliance on some creative memory, awful search for a new self and the therapeutic effect of his *Confessions* are all parallel features that can be observed in Anne Sexton's poetry. In his *Confessions*, Augustine builds his literary work on autobiographical material. In the article "The Literary Unity of the Confessions" that examines Augustine's work as a literary achievement, Kenneth B. Steinhauser claims that in this work "one finds autobiography, philosophy, and exegesis" (15). Also, Henry Chadwick (2001) refers to the central theme of the work as "the alienation of man from his true self." In another place Chadwick states that "Augustine composed his masterpiece, the Confessions (a word carrying the double sense of praise and penitence) . . . in the form of an address to God" (68). Yet, when Chadwick sees that Augustine "adopts the extraordinary form of a prose-poem addressed to his Maker, not to human readers" (90-91), he overlooks the impersonal quality of the work; one of St. Augustine's principal goals in his *Confessions* is to reunite

himself with the public. As a preacher, Augustine's duty is to communicate with his people. This principle of communication links Anne Sexton with St. Augustine.

Like St. Augustine, Anne Sexton exploits too much autobiographical information in her art. Yet, while Augustine juxtaposes the good with the bad, the painless with the painful, Sexton emphasizes the painful and the awful rather than the joyful. When asked by an interviewer why she did not record the joyous moments, Sexton replies, "pain engraves a deeper memory" (Kevles 52). In most of her poems, Sexton probes the familial cruelties and injustices she suffered from. Throughout her life, Sexton experienced her mother's cruelty, her father's abuse, and her husband's negligence. In her poem, "The Double Image," Sexton refers to her sense of guilt and the heavy "old debt" she inherited from the family. She also seems absolutely desperate of gaining forgiveness as is suggested in the following lines:

> Ugly angels spoke to me. The blame
> I heard them say, was mine. They tattled
> like green witches in my head, letting
> doom leak like a broken faucet; as if
> doom had flooded my belly and filled
> your bassinet an old debt I must assume.[2] (28)

Also, her mother's abuse is indicated in the following lines:

> They hung my portrait in the chill
> north light, matching
> me to keep me well.
> Only my mother grew ill.
> She turned from me, as if death were catching,
> as if death transferred,
> . . . . . .
> On the first day of September she looked at me
> and said I gave her cancer.
> They carved her sweet hills out
> and still I couldn't answer. (30)

Sexton believes that reality exists in the intense awareness of the self in its most agonized moments. In other words, Sexton claims that nothing is gained easily. She also argues that the sensitive artist must open his/her mind to the pain of life in an extraordinary fashion. In one of her letters to Frederick Morgan, she describes writing as life in capsule filled with "scratches" of life (Sexton and Ames 105).

St. Augustine also relies heavily on some artificial memory that helps him recall the past agonies and anguishes of life. In *Confessions*, he asserts the notion of creating his confessional work depending on some fictional memory. He says, "this would I *do* (italics are mine) in my heart before Thee in confessions: and in my writing before many witnesses" (255). In the process of "doing" confessions, Augustine attempts to originate his work. Moreover, this work is done not only before God but before and for people as well. This creative process of memory, however, is referred to by Carl G. Vaught in his *The Journey Toward God in Augustine's Confessions* where he says:

> Augustine moves from stealing to loving, from loving to false images, from false images to philosophical dualism, and from philosophical dualism to deceiving innocent people. Finally, as the emerging philosopher struggles to find rest from his wanderings, the death of his friend causes him to see death wherever he looks, and as he flees from his birthplace, he is unable to

[2] All Anne Sexton's poems are cited from *Selected Poems of Anne Sexton*, edited with an Introduction by Diane Middlebrook and Diana George, 1988.

> find God by reflecting on the beautiful and the fitting or to frame a concept of God that is adequate to express divine transcendence. (68)

Similarly, Anne Sexton makes use of some innovative memory that helps in shaping and creating her Confessional art. Focusing on the bitterest experiences, Sexton relives her sorrows and anguishes. Her poetry illustrates the extraordinary role that memory plays in the process of creating a Confessional poem. In her deeper memory lie the shocking secret and private experiences of the lost poet who searches for a redefinition of the self as if she were an Augustine. Even in her poems of affirmation, one senses that her faith has been wrenched from out of the depth of her memory and the depth of her bitter soul. Nevertheless, because Sexton's poetry comes from the depth of her soul, the topics she often deals with are characterized by unusual frankness and sincerity. In her attempt to recall the most painful events residing in her deep memory, regardless of the problems that may emerge as a result of employing such bold recalled material, Sexton seems to be more sincere in her confessions than Augustine. Her unusual frankness and extraordinary sincerity in recalling the apparently harmful and shameful examples from her own life contribute to her being a unique talented Confessional poet.

To add, in his search for inner peace, Augustine engages the act of both oral and written confessions as psycho-therapeutic remedy. Like Anne Sexton, who was advised by her psychiatrist to continue writing poetry, one of Augustine's main goals of writing his *Confessions* is to get rid of the heavy spiritual burden of a sinful past. Another goal that links his work with Sexton's is to present it to the whole world; both Augustine and Sexton believe that most human beings share their experiences of anguish and sorrow and each one looks for one way or another to have rest and comfort. Yet, while Augustine makes use of the Christian tradition of the continuous and life-long process of confession as a means of relief and comfort, Sexton in her "Awful Journey Towards God," takes the opposite direction; she attempts to commit suicide several times. Believing that death is a passage toward relief and comfort, she dreams of it, she attempts to commit suicide several times, and finally she manages to gain it.

Importantly, because of the social and religious cruelties Sexton endured throughout her life, she tries to find out an outlet for her desperate life that has led to madness and hospitalization by writing poetry. Searching for a new Sexton, she says in "Her Kind":

> I, who was never quite sure
> about being a girl, needed another
> life, another image to remind me.
> And this was my worst guilt; you could not cure
> nor soothe it. I made you to find me. (34)

In searching for truth and striving to convey this truth to the whole world, both Augustine and Sexton provide a chance of letting the audience participate in their experiences. This participation characterizes their works with publicity and impersonality rather than privacy and personality. When Augustine describes human motives and emotions and when he analyzes the inner human nature, he does not mean only himself but the other selves too. Also, Augustine's publicity rather than privacy has been discussed fully in Jacque Derrida's argument on the question of the "I" employed by the confessant. Derrida attempts to stress the fact that Augustine's "I" is not the author's; it is the "I" of a "performative." It is similar to the "I" found in "circumfession" (4-5).

Another remarkable example that proves the Confessional heritage and its strong impact on the modern Confessional mode is the poetry of Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672), America's first poet and one of the early American Puritans who tries to describe their familial sorrows and spiritual hardships in the new homeland. There are some basic characteristic traits that link the modern Confessional mode with Bradstreet's art: first, the heavy reliance on autobiographical material concerning the personal painful experiences of familial life; second, the societal injustices and religious debates in the Puritan community at that time; third, the therapeutic effect of her poetry because she sees writing as one of the means of relief from the nuances she faces in the new land; fourth, the function of memory that helps

her recount some similar personal painful rather than joyful events; finally, the impersonalization of the personal as if she were an Augustine or a Sexton.

Some of Anne Bradstreet's personal poems are packed with autobiographical events and emotions which are chosen by the poet to convey her message to the new world around her. As a representative of the whole Puritan community, Bradstreet tackles the laments of her roles as a mother, wife and Puritan; awful and painful events preoccupied her mind during her settlement in the new land, where she has experienced hostile wilderness, familial frustrations, societal injustices, and religious challenges. Yet, Bradstreet's attitude toward these problems is different from Sexton's. While Bradstreet often declares her acceptance of the agonies of the new life depending on a strong belief in the Heavenly work of God, Anne Sexton seems to be less religious than her predecessor. One more difference is Bradstreet's careful control of the poetic form which is not seen in the free verse by Sexton.

Like Sexton, Bradstreet's autobiographical events are subjected to some modifications and change. Even when she employs allusions she intentionally transfers them into personal matters. Bradstreet's most private poems that depend on autobiographical events are: "The Prologue" which demonstrates the cruelty of the Puritan community, "Upon the Burning of Our House" which describes a personal crisis," "Upon a Fit of Sickness" where she speaks of her illnesses, "As Weary Pilgrim" which depicts a personal desire for immortality and other poems like "The Bird's Nest," "To My Dear Children,""To the Memory of My Dear Daughter-in-Law, Mrs. Mercy Bradstreet," "The Elegies on Her Grandchildren," and "In Reference to her children".

In "The Prologue," for example, Bradstreet expresses her sorrow over the cruel reaction of the Puritan community toward her writing:

> I am obnoxious to each carping tongue
> Who says my hand a needle better fits.
> A Poet's pen all scorn I should thus wrong;
> For such despite they cast on female wits,
> If what I do prove well, it won't advance—
> They'll say it's stolen, or else it was by chance.[3](18)

In "Upon the Burning of Our House," Bradstreet describes a wife who experiences the pain of the loss of her precious house. Her grief and sorrow over the devastated house is seen clearly in the opening couplet:

> In silent night, when rest I took,
> For sorrows near I did not look.
> I wakened was with thundering noise
> And piteous shrieks of dreadful voice.
> That fearful sound of "fire!" and "fire!"
> Let no man know, is my desire. (343)

In an autobiographical manner, the mother-daughter relationship expressed in Sexton's "The Double Image" is noticed in Bradstreet's relation with her mother in "The Four Ages of Man." Yet, while Sexton exposes her mother's abuse, Bradstreet appreciates the sacrifices her mother makes for her—sacrifices that she, as a mother, now knows intimately:

> My mother's breeding sickness I will spare,
> Her nine months' weary burthen not declare,

[3] All Anne Bradstreet's poems are cited from *The Poems of Mrs. Anne Bradstreet (1612-1672): Together with Her Prose Remains*; With an Introduction by Charles Eliot Norton, originally published in 1897. Forgotten Books 2013. www.Forgotten Books.org.

To show her bearing pains I should do wrong,
To tell those pangs which can't be told by tongue.
With tears into the world I did arrive;
My mother still did waste as I did thrive,
Who yet, with love and all alacrity,
Spending, was willing to be spent for me.
With wayward cries I did disturb her rest,
Who sought still to appease me with the breast; (62)

Moreover, to Bradstreet as well as to Sexton, writing achieves comfort and relief. The loneliness Bradstreet experienced, particularly in Ipswich where she suffered from the long absence of her beloved husband Governor Simon Bradstreet, evoked her to compose one of the most private poems that it was too difficult to read in the Puritan community at that time. In this poem, she writes:

My head, my heart, mine eyes, my life,—nay, more,
My joy, my magazine of earthly store,—
If two be one, as surely thou and I.
How stayest thou there, whilst I at Ipswich lie? (271)

Although Bradstreet was responsible for a big family while her husband was on business in Boston, she was most fruitful with personal poems. Like Sexton, Bradstreet produces poetry out of her painful life. Bradstreet was away from her friends. She experienced lack of faith in God and a delay of having children, events that cost her many prayers and tears. To sum up, pain to Bradstreet plays a positive role in man's life; it corrects his sinful behavior by reminding him of his inherent corruption as it is seen by the Puritans. In her meditations entitled, "My Dear Children" (313-330), Bradstreet stresses the role of pain in her poetic career. In repeating the word "affliction," she refers to so many painful experiences of the conflicting human body and mind. To Bradstreet, "affliction" is a necessity in Christian life; it is a way toward salvation.

Moreover, within the personal poems Bradstreet wrote in her later verse, one notices an attempt to move from the personal to the impersonal. Bradstreet, as a Puritan woman writer, who lived in a patriarchal society, was a representative of all American women at that time. As a Puritan she had to prove that she was a careful mother, a faithful wife and a good educator in a very hard environment that she had not experienced in her older community. These duties were opposed to some spiritual and psychological struggles concerning free will and feminine rights: these conflicts, in fact, are not only hers but they are all Puritan women's as well.

In the "The Four Ages of Man," where Bradstreet recounts the sacrifices made by her mother, one notices that these sacrifices are applied to all women in general, although she identifies the experiences with her personality. In the "Childhood" part of the poem, one reads:

My mother's breeding sickness I will spare,
Her nine months' weary burthen not declare;
To show her bearing pains I should do wrong,
To tell those pangs which can't be told by tongue:
With tears into the world I did arrive;
My mother still did waste as I did thrive,
Who yet, with love and all alacrity,
Spending, was willing to be spent for me.
With wayward cries I did disturb her rest,
Who sought still to appease me with the breast; (62)

Here, Bradstreet uses the personal "I" in phrases like "I will spare," "I should do wrong," "I did arrive," "I did thrive," and "I did disturb," to indicate her own awful private experiences in light of her mother's sacrificial experiences. Moreover, all these natural physical and spiritual sufferings of

pregnancy, labor, birth, recovery, and breastfeeding are common experiences of all adult married women: this painful experience of motherhood is, in fact, a universal theme which emphasizes Bradstreet's interest in revealing what is public rather than what is private. This notion of impersonality is stressed by Mary Mason who argues that "it was the merging of her private consciousness with her collective consciousness that freed her to achieve her own unique identity as a poet. Her autobiography illustrates this merging and unifying process from the inner circle of husband, family, and community to the outer circle of God's providential creation" (40).

Furthermore, Anne Sexton's Confessional poetry echoes some of the poetry of the Metaphysical school of the seventeenth century. Andrew Marvell and John Donne are good examples. In their poetry one observes the employment of some personal experiences and autobiographical material. These two poets in particular use this technique to illustrate their apparently contradictory concepts of body and soul, life and death and physical and spiritual love. The most personal poems that have clear private experiences are the sonnets and the lyrics such as Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," and Donne's "Batter My Heart Three Person'd Name". In Marvell's, one notices the most surprising hyperbole that reveals the poet's madness with an experience of a rejected love and a cruel beloved, while in Donne's, one sees the most thundering spiritual experience of a serious search for a new self. Also, the therapeutic effect of Confessional poetry is suggested in the two poems; Marvell's anguish and madness is expected to come to an end either as soon as he finishes writing the poem or with the acceptance of his love. Donne's spiritual struggle will surely come by God's heavenly work.

In Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress," the poet recognizes the limitations of time and tries to urge his beloved not to waste it. Then, flattering her, he declares his agitating lust with unusual exaggeration:

> . . . I by the tide
> Of Humber would complain. I would
> Love you ten years before the Flood:
> And you should, if you please,refuse
> Till the Conversion of the Jews;
> My vegetable Love should grow
> Vaster than Empires, and more slow;[4] (106)

Intentionally, trying to hide his personal overflowing lusty emotions, Marvell does not start the poem with "I." Yet, he cannot stand hiding for a long time. He soon packs the above lines with the confessional personal "I" which reflects his own private experience. This notion of privacy is discussed by Keith A. McDonald (2007) who argues that "we must also accept that however allusive such texts may be, notions of privacy are necessarily drawn into his verse" (85). It is true that in Marvell's poetry "one sees a biographical self-consciousness" (10).

In John Donne's "Batter My Heart Three Person'd Name," and other poems like "Hymne to God My God, in My Sickness," "A Hymne to God the Father," "A Valediction: of Weeping," and "The Good Morrow," private religious and secular experiences are the core of the poems. In "Batter My Heart," which is a representative example of devotional poetry, Donne seems to be confessing his sins to God and searching for penance and salvation. Like Confessional poets, he seeks a new life with a new identity. Addressing God in a very intimate and affectionate manner, Donne uses the most appealing demands by employing the imperatives, as in the following lines:

> Batter my heart, three person'd God; for you
> As yet but knock; breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
> That I may rise and stand; o'erthrow me, and bend
> Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.[5] (162-163)

[4] Andrew Marvell's poems are cited from *The Complete Poems of Andrew Marvell*. Vol I. edited by Rev. Alexander B. Grosart, London: Robson and Sons, 1872.

In this poem as in most of his devotional poems, Donne portrays a self vexed by contraries. At the same time, these are hymns that can be used by every Christian who confesses his sins in order to gain forgiveness and spiritual renewal. Searching for forgiveness and renewal is a significant universal theme which is applied to the public rather than the private. Due to their duties as priests, religious poets often point to the whole church: all Christian community. Also, as religious men they sometimes aim at the assurance of the salvation of all people. This is done by employing their internal elements of human religious experience. It is their inner religious experiences that one sees in the contradictory themes of Metaphysical poetry: the Metaphysical poets almost always confess their spiritual conflicts embodied in continuous struggles between soul and body, life and death, and death and immortality.

Throughout their arguments, the Metaphysical poets often aim at achieving some therapeutic effect in their literary work. Secular or divine, the Metaphysical poem often ends with the recovery of the poet as well as his listener who often participates in the experience by the effect of the dramatic elements Metaphysical poets often use. Again, in the last lines of "Batter My Heart," Donne emphasizes the notion of spiritual freedom that is gained by struggling with God: "Take me to you, imprison me, for I, / Except you 'entrall me, never shall be free; / Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me" (163).

Even in the secular poems, one notices some therapeutic element especially in poems of the rejected love. If love is rejected, healing comes from practicing writing the poem or the song; and if accepted, healing comes from the power of the lady (Fitzpatrick 141).

Built on the goal of achieving some therapeutic effect, this therapy is not meant to be related to the poet who has had the experience; it is meant to have its effect on the public, too. Most of Donne's and Marvell's poems are constructed on dialogues. These dialogues aim at evoking the listener to participate in the poet's experience in which he tries to wear a mask and hide himself as in Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress." Another example in which the Metaphysical poet strives to impersonalize his personal experience is Donne's "The Flea." In this poem, by using a small creature, Donne, wittily, juxtaposes diverse great universal themes like love, religion, life, death, and immortality. In fact, when one reads this poem, one sometimes forgets the persona behind the argument as is seen in the following lines:

> This flea is you and I, and this
> Our marriage-bed, and marriage temple is;
> Though parents grudge, and you, we are met,
> And cloistered in these living walls of jet. (249)

In addition, the Romantic poets are often preoccupied with self-interrogations and self condemnation characterized by the use of some autobiographical narrative relying heavily on their own fictional memory which is a principal characteristic feature of Confessional poetry in general and Anne Sexton's in particular. Lord Byron and William Wordsworth, whose poetry concentrate on the articulation and representation of its author's sinful and guilty self, are good examples. Attempting to find a more comprehensive definition of Confessional poetry, Alan Rawes, in "Byron's Confessional Pilgrimage," claims that Byron is a Confessional Romantic since his poetry expresses a "sense of his own sin"(121-136). Giving the example of Byron's "Childe Harold" as a representative of the Confessional Romantic work, this critic also agrees with McGann and quotes M. H. Abrams referring to "crisis autobiography," the "narrative of the private events of the individual mind," "mental or inner activity" and ending with the notion of the juxtaposition of the secular as well as the religious in Confessional poetry (121-136). Also, William Wordsworth's well-known theory of poetic creation that depends on "the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," proves that Romantic poetry in general and his own in particular is private and personal. This theory also implies that powerful feeling stored up in memory

[5] John Donne's poems are cited from *The Poetical Works of Dr. John Donne with a Memoir*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1855.

plays a central role in the Confessional mode. Poems like "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways," and "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud" are good examples. The last line from Wordsworth's "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways," suggests a sad personal experience that must have happened to the poet himself. In the poem, one reads:

> She lived unknown, and few could know
> When Lucy ceased to be;
> But she is in her Grave, and, oh,
> The difference to me![6] (96)

Here, in memory of his beloved's death, the poet mourns her, recalling the past days he spent in her company. Comparing the terrible effect of the incident on his own personality to the society around him, the poet manages to display the degree of the awfulness of the sad experience he has had. The poet's heart bleeds because of his beloved's absence and unfortunately no one consoles him. In other words, the poet's individualized anguish and sorrow is emphasized by the notion of being the only sufferer in the world. This poem echoes Jean-Jacque Rousseau's *Confessions* which is the foundation of Romantic Confessional poetry. In his *Confessions*, Rousseau says:

> I will present myself before the sovereign judge with this book in my hand, and loudly proclaim, thus I have acted; these were my thoughts; such was I. With equal freedom and veracity have I related what was laudable or wicked, I have concealed no crimes, added no virtues; and if I have sometimes introduced superfluous ornament, it was merely to occupy a void occasioned by defect of memory. (12)

Wordsworth does the same. Moments of sorrow and joy are juxtaposed in his poems. The causes of these personal experiences are also suggested in the poem. Through his company with nature which is a vital source of either happiness or sadness, Wordsworth manages to reflect his own dilemmas. Certainly, Wordsworth's experiences contribute to a remarkable transformation of his personality that often emerges in the end of the poem rather than the beginning.

Besides, in "I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud," which is included in the imagination list of poems, Wordsworth depends highly on memory which participates in the poetic creation. In the last stanza, Wordsworth writes:

> For oft, when on my couch I lie
> In vacant or in pensive mood,
> They flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude,
> And then my heart with pleasure fills,
> And dances with the Daffodils. (169)

Here, unlike the sorrowful experiences the poet has when he has separated from his beloved people or from nature, the joyous moments have been recalled. Therefore, like Rousseau, Wordsworth's confessional experiences are secular rather than religious; they are almost always based on some social background. These experiences play a significant part in developing his personality; they transfer him from a child into a man. As Eugene Stelzig puts it, "if not all Romantic writing is autobiography, much of it certainly confessional and autobiographical" (215-233).

Moreover, the Modern school of poetry, including T. S. Eliot, Walt Whitman, W. B. Yeats and others, cannot be overlooked when discussing Confessional poetry. Although it is argued by some critics that the Confessional mode of the 1950s emerged as a reaction to T. S. Eliot's theory of "impersonality,"

[6] William Wordsworth's poems are cited from *The Complete Poetical Works of William Wordsworth, Poet Laureate*, ed. Henry Reed. Philadelphia: Troutman & Hayes, 1852.

those poets themselves are often preoccupied with self-revelation and self-reconsideration in a Confessional manner. Most of these poets adopt, in one way or another, some autobiographical material that reveals their own past private experiences. Also, like Confessional poets, either religious or secular, they depend on some fictional memory, a concept that reminds one of Saint Augustine's or Rousseau's confessions. Even in their defense of the impersonalization of poetry, they come nearer to the Confessional poets.

Walt Whitman, for example, manages to celebrate his masculinity in the following lines from "Song of Myself":

> I celebrate myself,
> And what I assume you shall assume,
> For every atom belonging to me, as good belongs to
> you.
> I loafe and invite my Soul,
> I lean and loafe at my ease, observing a spear of
> summer grass.[7] (15)

Similarly, Sexton celebrates her femininity in the following lines:

> Sweet weight,
> In celebration of the woman I am
> And of the soul of the woman I am
> And of the central creature and its delight
> I sing for you. I dare to live. (125)

While in Whitman's poem, the reader notices a man full of masculine pride, in Sexton's the reader watches a woman full of feminine pride.

In another place, Whitman refers to sexual matters that were considered "taboo" in his time. In "A Woman Waits for Me" which reminds one of Sexton's bold talk about sex in her "When a Man Enters Woman," one reads the following erotic lines:

> A woman waits for me—she contains all, nothing
> is lacking,
> Yet all were lacking, if sex were lacking, or if
> the moisture of the right man were clacking. (225)

Importantly, these extracts show that both Whitman and Sexton resemble Rousseau's *Confessions* rather than St. Augustine's; in Rousseau's *Confessions*, the confessant seems to be more arrogant and more proud of his body. A confession of this type may change the confessant from a guilty person to a guiltier one. Unlike Augustine's *Confessions* which transfers the confessant from a sinner to a Saint, Sexton belongs to the former secular type; she remains till the end of her life rowing desperately for relief and recovery.

As for Anne Sexton's individual Confessional talent, it can be seen in her unusual poetic subjects, her shocking sexual images, her particular concepts of faith and her serious attempt to emphasize the popularity of her private experience. Beside the confessional traditional subjects such as mental illness, madness, and sense of guilt that have been dealt with by most conventional Confessional poets, Sexton deals with more courageous subjects that readers and critics have never seen before. Subjects of female and male organs, sexual activities, incest, and severe lack of faith are all tackled in her art. Surprisingly enough, Sexton uses shocking titles for her poems. These titles like "The Ballad of the Lonely

[7] Walt Whitman's poems are cited from *The Poems of Walt Whitman (Leaves of Grass)* with Biographical Introduction by John Burroughs. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell. Retrieved from http://books.google.com/

Masturbator," "Menstruation at Forty," "In Celebration of My Uterus," "For My Lover, Returning to His Wife," "The Abortion," and "The Breast" prove that Sexton believes that poetry can be written on any subject without shame. Even in the religious poems where one expects complete respect and surrender to the Divine and anticipates some sacred praise and worship of God, Sexton surprises her readers by exposing some hidden unspeakable religious notions that reveal some conflicts within the believers rather than the unbelievers. Titles like "Jesus Awake," "Jesus Asleep," "Jesus Cooks" are good examples. Surely, Sexton sees that most of these subjects are the production of a troubled self, like any troubled self that longs for heartfelt confession, and poetry is the most appropriate means that can reveal all these secrets and desires with grim sincerity.

To illustrate her independent vision of life, death, and religion, Sexton uses shocking images that her contemporaries have not accustomed to. Boldly, she uses the sexual human organs that control both male and female lives as images as well as symbols that very few poets can employ in their art. In her poetry, one is bewildered by the employment of the uterus, the penis, the vagina, some different sexual acts and the Jesus who cooks and plays. Most of the poems in the *Love Poems* collection, for example, affirm female sexuality and the female body. In "For My Lover, Returning to His Wife," the speaker contrasts her position with that of her lover's wife with remarkable hostility. This contrast between the two women is summarized in the last two stanzas:

> She is so naked and singular.
> She is the sum of yourself and your dream.
> Climb her like a monument, step after step.
> She is solid.
> As for me, I am a watercolor.
> I wash off. (131)

In another shocking poem, "The Ballad of the Lonely Masturbator," the speaker is masturbating in a sorrowful manner, because of a pessimistic end. The poem also shows that masturbation is a desperate sexual attempt. The lines also refer to an unwelcome sexual revelation.

As for Sexton's original concepts of faith, she seems to be a unique sincere Confessional religious poet who confesses truthfully. Sexton believes that God can be manifested in anything. She goes farther than one of the most religious poets, namely Gerard Manley Hopkins, who sees God in every beautiful natural phenomenon. Surprisingly, she sees God in sexual activities. She also sees Him in herself as an artist as well as a human being. To her God allows everything, accepts everything, knows everything, practices everything and controls everything with the participation of His human creatures. That is why she sometimes looks at herself as God: she can be perfect because God is perfect; she can be sacred because God is sacred. Here, Sexton goes behind some of the traditional religious poets who only reveal God as a creator who lives in isolation. Sexton almost always attempts to humanize and sexualize God and bring him nearer to human beings. Her God is a lover not in a traditional religious manner, but a lover who participates in every human activity.

To explain, in her three collections, *The Book of Folly* (1972), *The Death Notebooks* (1974), and *The Awful Rowing Toward God* (1975), Anne Sexton declares the invention of her own religious belief and her own image of private faith. These books can be seen as a critical confessional examination of a private Christian faith: it is the faith of the depressed and desperate feminine personality. This despair is supported by some physical images that emphasize mortality rather than immortality; misunderstanding rather than understanding; and miscommunication rather than communication. She also affirms the notion of humanizing every religious figure either male or female. In "Jesus Suckles," for example, Jesus depicts his physical relation with Mary. The poem begins with the image of Christ at his mother's breast:

> Mary, your great
> white apples make me glad.
> I feel your heart work its
> machine and I doze like a fly. (191)

The same notion is repeated in the following lines:

> No, No.
> All lies.
> I am small
> and you hold me.
> You give me milk
> and we are the same
> and I am glad. (191)

In secularized and sexualized terms, Sexton addresses Christ and tries to emphasize his mortality by referring to his body parts. In her poem, "The Jesus Papers," which reveals her special relationship with Christ, Sexton insistently humanizes and secularizes Jesus. She sometimes considers Christ's death "a personal matter." This idea is also suggested in "Consorting with Angels," where she observes: "I'm no more a woman / than Christ was a man."

Also, Sexton's "Jesus Awake" and "Jesus Asleep" are poems which reflect Sexton's own vision of Christ the man. She hardly refers to the Christian belief that Jesus is the incarnated God whose body is holly and void of all defects. In "Jesus Asleep," to emphasize the notion of lack of communication in familial life, she writes:

> and because He had not known Mary
> they were united at His death,
> the cross to the woman,
> in a final embrace,
> poised forever
> like a centerpiece. (193)

Even in her search for God, she employs the image of the terrible journey that ends with frustration rather than hope. From the title "The Awful Rowing Toward God," one expects that her journey will be unfinished or will be finished in despair. Undoubtedly, Sexton is seen as a believer who attempts to revise the Christian belief. She always strives for reconciling reason with faith. She desires a belief that matches her experience as a woman. Sometimes, she attempts to revise the patriarchal God and searches for Him but her search is often thwarted. And when she finds Him, she sees Him in the bathroom. Thus, to Sexton, God is seen in anything and in any activity. Boldly enough, in "The Fury of Cocks" she depicts a man and a woman making love:

> When they fuck they are God.
> When they break away they are God.
> . . . . . .
> All the cocks of the world are God.
> blooming, blooming, blooming
> into the sweet blood of woman. (213)

Truly, her search for God is an unusual individualized process.

In her treatment of special subjects and individualized images, Sexton attempts to narrow the gap between herself and all humanity around her, emphasizing the role of women in human life. When she uses the uterus as an image, she collects all humanity within one place; the uterus is the first place where a human being starts his/her life. Also, the image in the "The Breasts" reminds one of the first food that all human beings should have in the beginning of their lives in order to live healthfully. Even in "The Abortion" poem, which seems to be a death poem, Sexton suggests her preference to life rather than death; the image of "this baby that I bleed" (56), reflects the poet's torment of a hidden question: "Why abortion?" However, Sexton's confession in this poem is devoid of catharsis and forgiveness.

Therefore, Sexton invents images that do not help her achieve an easy forgiveness. For her, abortion is a crime of murder against all humanity.

The publicity of her poetry can be understood through most of her images that confirm her being a sinner rather than a saint: a notion that reflects the emotions of a great deal of Christian confessants who always feel that they are sinners and in need of continuous confession. This type of image is seen clearly in an early poem, "With Mercy for the Greedy": "My friend, I was born / doing reference work in sin, and born / confessing it" (58). In another place, she says, "I write very personal poems but I hope that they will become the central theme to someone else's private life" (Colburn 50). Yet, Sexton's use of female rather than male images emphasizes her awareness of the fact that a woman has both sexes: male and female. Prejudicially, she concludes that women's private experiences must be manifested without shame because women seem to be more effective and more powerful in the process of reproduction and regeneration.

To conclude, Anne Sexton's poetry is a good example that supports T. S. Eliot's theory of tradition and the individual talent. Sexton's Confessional poems which include some unusual subjects relate her to the ancient Confessional works of the past and demonstrate her original poetic talent. As it has been explained in the discussion of this paper, Sexton is compared with St. Augustine of Hippo and Jean-Jacques Rousseau who are pioneers in the history of Confessional literature. Also, like the American Puritan woman poet, Anne Bradstreet, Sexton proves that she can face the social and religious cruelties and hardships of her community in bold Confessional poems without fear or shame. Besides, the paper has illustrated how Sexton is as secular and religious as Andrew Marvel and John Donne: two of the most famous British Metaphysical poets. Moreover, in her Confessional attempts, Sexton has been linked with some Romantic poets like William Wordsworth. Furthermore, in her celebration of the body, she reminds her readers and listeners of one of the most remarkable Modernists, Walt Whitman, who is often described as the poet of the body. On the other hand, Sexton's individual talent has been demonstrated in her unusual and unconventional use of shocking sexual and religious imagery in order to convey her spiritual and physical anguish with grim sincerity.

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The Discreet Horror of the Holocaust in Ida Fink's Stories

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Abstract

The topic of the article is writings by Ida Fink. It analyses stories of the author of *Wiosna 1941* (*The Spring 1941*) which refer to the Holocaust. The analysis also draws attention to the poetics of "discreet horror" in which Ida Fink's stories are embedded. In her records the author does not underline the cruelty, but shows the terror of the situation by subtle narrative and compositional manoeuvres. The picture of death is de-emphasised by the psychology of characters, and the main focus are complicated human relationships in which the author with a great delicacy presents various emotional states of people who, despite being sentenced to death, still try to survive the war.

Ida Fink's stories are different from the majority of Holocaust literature which exposes the severity and brutality of mass death. These stories stand out as an exceptional phenomenon among works by such authors as Tadeusz Borowski, Zofia Nałkowska, Leon Buczkowski, Henryk Grynberg or Bogdan Wojdowski.

Keywords

the Holocaust, war, literature, Ida Fink

Introduction

What makes Ida Fink's work different from the Holocaust literature is mainly the way she presents Jewish extermination. Her short prose works have recently been compared to the works of Irit Amiel, Miriam Akavia, Michał Głowiński or Henryk Grynberg (Ubertowska 168; Krupa 171). In her stories published in *The Garden that Floated Away* (since this aspect of her work is going to be discussed) lives of main characters are presented by means of seemingly trivial, inconspicuous scenes which lack dynamics or brutality (Maliszewska 119) – a distinguishing feature of the prose of Tadeusz Borowski, Zofia Nałkowska, Leon Buczkowski, Bogdan Wojdowski, Henryk Grynberg or Tadeusz Różewicz's poetry. Ida Fink does not shock the reader with cruelty but she rather reveals a pervasive sense of dread through narration and composition. There are no disturbing scenes of unloading and selection of the Jews crowded in railway wagons, which is the case with Borowski's stories. There are no piles of human bodies like in *Medallions* by Nałkowska. There is no typically striking horror of war. Depicted events, or to be more precise "micro-events" (Ubertowska 168) described by Fink, occur somewhere "in the suburbs of the absolute Jewish extermination" (Adamiec 62), "on the edge of the main stage" (Śliwiński 21; Szczęsna and Sobolewski). The episodes, which frequently go beyond traditional themes of the Holocaust, (Buryła) take place in personal and sheltered circumstances (Szczęsna and Sobolewski) in "small and steamy surroundings" (Maliszewska 119). Ida Fink's style can be characterized by discretion, calmness, minimalism, as if she was describing her stories "in whisper" (Sokołowska 347; Szczęsna and Sobolewski). These stories are fully credible, and this is either due to the consistently used euphemism and litotes or some kind of lyricism, which softens and blurs the contours of the picture. What is more, her writings sneak out of a poetry of crude and "inquisitive" realism (Tokarska-Bakir 138). The author of *A Scrap of Time* diverts attention from images of death to psychology and focuses on complex relations between the characters. With a lot of delicacy, it also records tragedies of people who try really hard to survive the war despite being doomed for extermination.

Understatements, euphemisms, periphrases...

Ida Fink is usually cautious and reserved when it comes to providing information about characters of her stories. Sometimes she does not even reveal names of heroes, not to mention their surnames. Very often characters appear only for a moment or one event, one conversation or one small scene and then they disappear as quickly as they emerged. This is what happens in her best short stories – "A Conversation", "Aryan Papers", "The Key Game", "Zygmunt", "The Pig", "Jean-Christophe", "Crazy", "In Front of the Mirror" and many others. Portrayed people do not always have names, as Nisia and Adela in the last of the above mentioned stories. It happens quite often that the narrator uses the most general categories – she only identifies sex, age, sometimes provides the reader with some family background.

In this way we get to know that: the main characters of "The Key Game" are "a man", "a woman" and "a child"; in "Jean-Christophe" she only mentions "girls" who work on the railways; in "Aryan Papers" a sixteen-year-old girl meets a mature man; the main character of "Crazy" is a dustman who is considered to be a lunatic. The main character of "The Pig" is simply "a person" while in "Nocturnal Variations on a Theme" it is somebody whom we get to know only from his obsessive dreams about being released from the concentration camp. This, however, appears to be only a deceptive temptation, an illusion which always finishes with inevitable, fatalistic return to the camp.

Understatements, concealments and periphrases include also other elements of the world depicted, e.g. a basic fact of Jewish affiliation of the characters as well as social and historical factors of the Holocaust. Fink talks to the readers from her own world, from the depths of her Jewish identity and she does not consider it appropriate to explain in her stories the most basic context of this fight for survival. That is why she is also not going to comment on different behaviors or events, which makes her stories completely different comparing to other texts connected with the Holocaust, for instance *The Black Seasons* by Michał Głowiński (Grynberg 274; Waligóra 159).

Therefore, it is important for the reader to know basic historical and cultural facts before reading Ida Fink's stories. The author does not hide her message in any way. Some literary allusions or elision enable the reader to create a friendly and deep relationship. However, sensitivity and at least basic historical background about the Holocaust is absolutely crucial. This kind of knowledge will enable the reader to understand why in "A Scrap of Time" a student of architecture lied, contrary to his neighbours, when asked about his profession. He said that he was a carpenter and this lie "saved his life or rather postponed his death sentence for the next two years"[1] (Fink, *Odpływający ogród* 16)[2] [*uratowało mu życie, ściślej mówiąc odroczyło wyrok śmierci o dwa lata*].

In this context it is also important to notice various ways of talking indirectly about Jewish identity, both historical and the one which has grown up during the war so much that it led to radical alienation and separation. This happened as a result of "the Final Solution of the Jewish Question". In "A Scrap of Time" the author uses a periphrasis to describe Jewish stigma by saying: "we the different ones, always different" [*my inni, zawsze inni*] and because of that fact "condemned to death again" (10) [*znów skazani*]. The author uses more vivid pseudonyms describing Jews and Germans in her story "A Closed Circle". Here the reader can find one particularly euphemistic description which presents the Nazis while entering Jewish flats in order to – as we may presume – rob them, move to a ghetto or a camp or simply kill them. These brutal invasions are ironically called "paying a visit":

> During one of such visits, which the uniformed in helmets used to pay to those wearing white armbands with a star of David, into Józef's room came a man in the uniform, brought by an attentive caretaker, and it turned out that he was a great admirer of art. (41)

[1] All the translations of quotes used in the article (as literal translations for language analysis) by Monika Banach. Their Polish equivalents can be found in square brackets.

[2] All the quotes come from the works of Ida Fink from the following edition (unless stated otherwise): Fink, I. (2002). *Odpływający ogród*. Warsaw: Publisher: W.A.B. Numbers of the pages are given in brackets.

> [*Podczas jednej z wizyt, jakie umundurowani w hełmach składali białym opaskom z sześcioramienną gwiazdą, zjawił się w pokoju Józefa – sprowadzony przez usłużną dozorcową – osobnik w mundurze i hełmie, który – jak się okazało – był miłośnikiem sztuki*].

Greed of a German soldier excited about tacky products made of porcelain and bronze made it possible for Józef to remain unscathed. Fink is very consistent in not using words such as "German" or "Germans" and avoids them not only in this particular description but also throughout the whole story as well as in her other works. She is sometimes forced to use various verbal balancing acts which – along with impersonal structures – end up with grotesque effects. A helmet and a uniform become a synecdoche (*pars pro toto*) of a German soldier: "a green wall of uniforms and helmets" [*zielony mur mundurów i hełmów*], "hunters in helmets" [*myśliwi w hełmach*], "the uniformed in helmets" [*umundurowani w hełmach*], "he nodded with his helmeted head" [*skinął uhełmioną głową*], "a person in a uniform" [*postać w mundurze*], "it barked from under the helmet" [*warknęło spod hełmu*]. In "A Scrap of Time" impersonal structures were used to dehumanize the enemy in a different way. The enemy is not an animal, as the last phrase depicted, but they represent ruthless, anonymous machine of oppression and terror: "we were ordered to line up" [*kazano nam ustawić się w szeregi*], "only men were ordered to stay" [*kazano zostać samym mężczyznom*], "the streets were surrounded" [*obstawiono ulice*], "it was allowed to send food parcels" [*zezwolono również na wysyłkę paczek żywnościowych*].

In the story "In Front of the Mirror" euphemisms and periphrasis shape the image of reality in a very ostentatious way. Likewise, the words "Germans" or "action" do not appear in the text although the meeting of Adela and Nisia takes place during a slow liquidation of the ghetto. Incidentally, the word "ghetto" does not appear either. Empty beds were a sign of the death of the relatives: "There were four beds, three of which were useless. The first bed got vacant in summer, the next one – early autumn, and then the third one. Nisia used the fourth one" (159) [*W pokoju stały cztery łóżka, trzy z nich nieużyteczne, najpierw, latem, zwolniło się jedno, potem, wczesną jesienią, drugie, a później trzecie. Czwarte służyło Nisi*]. Then, as if incidentally the author mentions the Nisia's father – it is when we get to know that Adela sat on his stool.

The story is set in December, probably in 1942, since in that year after the January conference in Wannsee Germans started to liquidate ghettos and the extermination of the Jews. Being aware of the context makes it possible to understand some statements which at the first sight seem to be illogical: "She was tiny {Nisia – JW} and still pretty although three beds were already vacant and one could expect the fourth bed to become vacant soon" (159) [*Była drobna {Nisia – JW} i wciąż jeszcze ładna, mimo że po kolei zwolniły się trzy łóżka i tylko patrzeć było, jak zwolni się czwarte*].

Interestingly enough, it is not only the narrator but also the heroines who use the phrase about vacant beds:

> – I know everything, you silly thing... – Adela continued – beds are v a c a n t in my place, too... I know everything. Though I want to know nothing. (160)
>
> [– *Wszystko wiem, głupia… – mówiła dalej Adela – u mnie też z w o l n i ł y się łóżka… Wszystko, wszystko wiem. I nic wiedzieć nie chcę*].

It means that previous narration served as free indirect speech and it exactly reflected Nisia's fears expressed in fatalistic euphemism: "and one could expect the fourth bed to become vacant soon".

What is also surprising is how the narrator diverts attention of the reader from an issue of mass extermination to a very individual, private and intimate thread connected with Adela's falling in love. The contrast between background (the reality and people condemned to death) and foreground (a girl who is dressing up in front of the mirror for her beloved one) has electrifying effects. A burst of joy, Adela's happiness, her sparkling eyes along with her radiant face seem to be deeply offensive for Nisia. However, such "inappropriate" behaviour appears to be absolutely justifiable – all in all, it is the first and the only time she is in love. That is the reason why the young seamstress reacts not only with a terror but also with humbleness. She meekly accepts this inexplicable eruption of life force which seems to stand in opposition to overwhelming atmosphere of omnipresent death in the ghetto. Therefore,

sobbing Nisia is not only a sign of jealousy and condemnation but also a proof of being helpless in this absurd and inexplicable reality.

In "Jean-Christophe" Ida Fink also presents a whole wide range of experiences of the characters. Once more, she does not explain anything about the world depicted and avoids naming the facts in a straightforward way. The reader must guess who the girls "working in Ostbahn" are and who a woman-controller called *aufseher* is; and what the relation between "an action in the city" and waiting for "a rumbling train" is; why "they shoot and shout and cry over there" and why a girl reading a book is afraid that she will not finish it. Naturally, it is not difficult to guess the right answer so understanding this reality will not be a challenge. However, it is more important to understand the way Fink sticks together the ideas of "here" and "there" by using nervous anticipation, and how successfully she uses discord between idyllic scenery and a "slaughterhouse" still which leaves a beauty of the day unblemished (Kotarska 297).

The dialogue between *aufseher* and a reader of a monumental novel "Jean-Christophe" seems to be crucial here. Once again the conversation about the book and its love threads seems inappropriate in the gravity of this situation. Maybe in a minute the girls working on the railways will see their families transported to extermination camps in Bełżec or Sobibór so they listen closely and wait in nervous anticipation. Meanwhile "the thin and black one" is only worried if she manages to finish her book whilst *aufseher*, described by the narrator as "gentle", tries to comfort her.

This act of consolation seems to be very light-hearted and it closes a trivial dialogue about reading and borrowing books in a grotesque way. Such a dialogue would be much more appropriate in the times of peace: "But you will definitely manage to finish it, after all it's not that thick" (65) [*Ale zdążysz, na pewno, taka gruba znowu nie jest*]. In the words of *aufseher* the reader can notice inevitability of the girl's death as well as consent for that to happen. Despite its best intentions, this doubtful consolation only means that the girl will live long enough to at least finish the book.

As the reader can observe, euphemisms, periphrases, ellipses and understatements play an important role in Ida Fink's stories. It can be visible on different literary levels – in language, the mentality of characters, the world depicted, the plot. This style is not supposed to camouflage, distort or erase the Holocaust as it happens in the case of all euphemisms typical for the Nazi totalitarian language, described by Katarzyna Kuczyńska-Koschany (29-47).

In that latter totalitarian usage, euphemisms hide and weaken dread and terror of reality. They are not only a way of introducing propaganda taboo but they also signify indifference to the Holocaust and contempt for its victims. Sometimes they are used to twist the meanings of some words in an impudent and cynical way. Kuczyńska-Koschany presents some convincing examples (based on *Shoah* by Claude Lanzmann):

> . . . not to tone down the meaning but to hide it, to confuse readers and listeners; gas chambers were called "bath houses", gassing was called "disinfection", cattle wagons – "special trains", murderer – "a sanitary officer". The prisoners who were taking bodies out of gas chambers and were preparing corpses to be cremated were called "The Blue Sky Unit" {*Himmelskomando* . . . , cf. *Himmelfahrt* – Ascension, Assumption}, a place of execution – "field hospital", shooting into the neck – "treatment with a pill". (32)
>
> [*... nie tyle by złagodzić znaczenie, co by je ukryć, by zdezorientować odbiorców komunikatu językowego, komory gazowe nazywano „łaźniami", zagazowanie – „dezynfekcją", bydlęce wagony – „pociągami specjalnymi", mordercę – „oficerem sanitarnym", tych więźniów, którzy wyciągali ciała zabitych z komór gazowych i przygotowywali zwłoki do spalenia w krematorium – „komandem niebiańskim" (Himmelskomando {...}, por. pokrewne: Himmelfahrt – wniebowstąpienie, wniebowzięcie), miejsce egzekucji – „lazaretem", zabijanie strzałem w kark określano zwrotem „leczyć pigułką"*].

In Ida Fink's artistic vision the reader deals with something completely different. It gives an impression of a transparent curtain made of fabric full of subtle periphrases and euphemisms surrounded by a veil of understatements and skilfully erased contours. The tragedy of the Holocaust

remains in the shadow, between speculations, guesses and images triggered by a subtle and evocative structure of the story. Combining all those aspects together is what makes the author's style so unique while her vision is full of discreet horror.

On the one hand it is possible to notice in here the character of the author herself who is not fond of brutality and abruptness. On the other hand, it is a kind of a sanctifying and protective gesture (cf. Kuczyńska-Koschany 45) as if naming things straightforwardly would pose a threat to the honour of the murdered, depriving them of dignity, reducing psyche and emotions to the level of numbing fear, pain and instincts forced by the Nazis.

Lyrical metonymies

Toning down the Holocaust narration in Ida Fink's stories takes also a form of unobtrusive, subtle and figurative character of her works. Her prose describes the world depicted through the senses and affectionate self-restraint. In dramatic moments it looks as if the words were stuck in her throat, so similar to Różewicz's poetry (Maciejewski). It is skilfully depicted in a scene from "A Spring Morning" where Aron and Mela's five-year-old daughter is shot: "On the edge of the pavement a small bloody shred was lying. Thin smoke of a shot was hanging in the air fading in the blowing wind" (112) [*Na skraju chodnika leżał mały skrwawiony strzępek. W powietrzu wisiał niknący na wietrze cienki dymek wystrzału*]. Periphrastic metonymy ("a small bloody shred") presents through diminutive forms and affectionate objectification a dead child, which triggers feeling of compassion and pain. All hopes of the parents were in vain and disappeared like a "thin smoke of a shot".

What catches the reader's attention in "The Garden that Floated Away" is an unrealistic, poetic image of a garden which moves away:

> Wojciech's garden, who was a friend from our childhood, shuddered suddenly, moved and swayed and started to float away like a huge, green ship. It was moving away slowly but steadily, the distance between us was rapidly growing. It started to shrink and fade away. It was vanishing into unreachable distance, impossible to overcome. (55)
>
> [*Ogród Wojciecha, przyjaciela naszego dzieciństwa, drgnął nagle, poruszył się, zakołysał i zaczął wolno odpływać jak wielki, zielony okręt. Oddalał się powoli, lecz nieustannie, odległość pomiędzy nim a nami zwiększała się gwałtownie, malał, nikł. Odpływał w dal niedosiężną, nie do pokonania*].

The garden which floats away signifies that the subject became immobilized and isolated from its nearest area, becoming its subjective centre, while the outside world is set into motion. It can remind the reader of a poem by Cyprian Norwid "To citizen John Brown" where the laws of physics are equally controversial and this, in turn, intensifies the feeling of loneliness of the main character. At the same time, it presents contempt to the unjust reality in which a man fights for the rights of African-Americans. In this poem Brown "kicks away the debased planet" [*odkopuje planetę spodloną*] while in "The Garden that Floated Away" – Wojciech's garden moves away from the heroine. Contempt is replaced by sadness and disappointment.

The whole story is based on the idea which, in a poetic and surrealistic way, expresses the end of a harmonious and neighbourly coexistence. However, the meaning of the metaphor goes beyond local perspective – the heroine (and also the narrator) realizes that Jews and Poles have ultimately drifted apart. The metaphor sets and presents a symbolic moment of this inevitable, melancholic separation. This metaphorical force runs through the whole story about gardens – an avenue of currants "sews them up with a neat stitch" [*zszywa je równym ściegiem*], neighbours are just starting "the dance of fruit gathering" [*taniec owocobrania*] while the sun "lights bonfires on trees' masts" [*rozpala na masztach drzew ogniska*]. At the same time this oneiric image is interrupted by a sobering counter argument put forward by the sister and the father. The sister disciplines and reminds: "Don't squint your eyes. When you do that, it is obvious that you are a Jew" (55). [*Nie mruż tak oczu. Jak mrużysz oczy, zaraz poznać, że jesteś Żydówką*]. The father worries about survival: "if only we could save ourselves, if only they wouldn't kill us" (56) [*żebyśmy mogły się ratować, żeby nas nie zabili*]. Those rather rare moments of

being direct and frank can be easily justified in "The Garden that Floated Away". By confronting melancholic lyricism with the prosaic aspects of life Fink produces expressive and successful effect.

The story "The Threshold" is based on a similar contrast. Here, the reader deals with a heroine who wants to mentally run away from the horror of ongoing events. It occurs in July, 1941 after Germans entered the town and after the first massacre took place. There is no information about the victims so the massacre's aftermath is expressed by the condition of the house:

> The gate, usually carefully closed, was now hanging on one hinge like a body of a man who fainted. The windows were closed tightly despite beautiful summertime. (19)
>
> [*Furtka, zwykle starannie zamknięta, zwisała bezwładnie na jednym zawiasie, jak ciało mdlejącego człowieka, okna zaś były szczelnie pozamykane, mimo pięknej, letniej pory*].

The author uses trivial elements of the reality which are transformed into a symbol (Kuryłek 235). One of such symbols is a gate anthropomorphized in a martyr way, another one can be the threshold which the main heroine does not want to cross. She prefers to stay on the side of life, love and wonders of summertime than to take part in never-ending laments of aunts and uncles. The ultimate crossing of the threshold by the girl is also a metaphor. Forced by Germans to witness the death of a young Russian soldier and being tainted and hurt by the conflict, she can no longer ignore the war. She sits among her relatives and listens how "Goldman and his little son were killed" [*zabili Goldmana i jego małego synka*]. This psychological and ethical choice drags her into this condemned to death community. It is an entrance to the dark side, a way of reconciling with the fact that the sentence has already been passed.

Photographs and portraits

Portraits of the protagonists of the two longer stories – Eugenia and Julia are also of a poetic character, (stories: "Eugenia", "Julia"). Although, we get to know many things about them, this knowledge is still insufficient, and the narrator shares information in a way she considers to be appropriate. As a matter of fact, details and images recorded in a form of photography or memories seem to be the most important. They can be revived thanks to evocative and vivid descriptions, as in the first parts of "Eugenia". Syntax, especially the length of phrases, lack of verbs and gradual capture of stagnant landscape features – these elements emphasize stability in a photographic presentation of the bygone reality. Similes ("alley flat like a table", "nest-like hat") and metaphors ("a green cloud of branches", "sleepy river", "frozen in the heat") seem to be unsophisticated, close to everyday speech. That manoeuvre does not weaken their precision and power, though. Their accumulation and commonness stimulate imagination, create very appreciable images:

> The alley on top of the Castle Hill, flat like a table. A green cloud of branches hangs over the alley, empty benches stand under the trees in the scorching sun and there are only the two of us in this, adored by all residents, alley – Eugenia and me. The parents have already disappeared behind the park's gate, it's only us and houses, gardens, a sleepy river and a stagnant grey pond at our feet. All frozen in the heat of the July sun. (193)
>
> [*Aleja na szczycie Zamkowego Wzgórza, płaska jak stół. Nad aleją zielona chmura gałęzi drzew zamkowego parku, pod drzewami ławki puste o porze gorącego słońca i tylko my dwie w tej alei, ulubionej promenadzie mieszkańców miasteczka – Eugenia i ja, rodzice już znikli za bramą parku, tylko my dwie, a u naszych stóp domy i ogrody, senna rzeka i szary, nieruchomy staw. Wszystko zastygłe w upale lipcowego słońca*].

Photography initiates the work of memory, but memory likes surprising associations, shifts in time and space as well as digressions. That is why images change and overlap. Eugenia's dress (which was later given to the narrator) becomes a catalyst of such a swift transition. In fact, she was wearing her aunt's dress when she was taken to the labour camp, and this situation puts the images in motion:

> I barely finished writing (or maybe it just wrote itself) when the Castle Hill disappeared for a few seconds. It was replaced by potato fields in grey, autumn mist and Ukrainian overseers who started to shout... but only for a few seconds because a minute later both of us emerged from the fog: Eugenia speeds up and doesn't look at me whatsoever; she stares at the stagnant pond in the distance. She wears her nest-like hat coquettishly askew. (195)
>
> [*Ledwo to napisałam (samo się napisało), aleja Zamkowego Wzgórza znikła sprzed oczu na kilka sekund, a na jej miejscu pojawiło się kartoflane pole w szarej, jesiennej mgle i odezwał się krzyk ukraińskich nadzorców… na kilka sekund tylko, bo oto już obie wyłaniamy się z mgły: Eugenia przyspiesza kroku i wcale na mnie nie patrzy, tylko na staw daleki, nieruchomy, a na jej głowie siedzi ukosem, zalotnie, czapeczka przypominające ptasie gniazdo*].

Julia is portrayed with similar selection of details and similar calmness which also describe a pre-war portrayal and pre-war, summer atmosphere:

> I remember Julia from the last days of August: she flows across a dusty market with her black, straw hat which she seems to use as a helm. She is still slim, wearing a sandy skirt and elbow-length gloves, full of chic and big-city style, walking with light step and shapely leg. (292)
>
> [*Pamiętam Julię z ostatnich dni sierpnia: płynie przez zakurzony rynek, sterując szeroką kresą czarnego, słomkowego kapelusza, jeszcze szczupła, w piaskowej spódnicy, w piaskowych po łokcie rękawiczkach, szykowna, wielkomiejska. Chód ma lekki, zgrabną nogę*].

While organizing and looking for some coherence, the narrator's memory tries to fill in the gaps and coordinate events in time and space. These are the moments when the narrator seems to experience some flashes of inspiration and enlightenment, such as the following parenthetic remark where a person at whose place Julia stays, says: "Or: she heats up groats in the kitchen while Agafia stares at her with this forbidding look in her eyes since she doesn't like having intruders in her kingdom (so the crumbles must be from the first weeks because Agafia is still ruling in the kitchen, she hasn't been banned from reigning at Jews' yet)" (304). [*Albo: kaszę odgrzewa w kuchni, a Agafia patrzy na nią złym okiem, nie lubi intruzów w swoim królestwie (a więc to okruchy z pierwszych tygodni, bo Agafia króluje w kuchni, jeszcze nie zakazali jej królować u Żydów)*].

In the case of both characters "a draft of life history", as the author adds in the subtitles of "Eugenia" and "Julia", includes a longer time perspective, but naturally the Holocaust is the main event of both biographies. Tragic events reach the reader only in fragments through single scenes and images. That is why we can see a sudden glimmer of happiness and love in Eugenia's life during the darkest period of the Holocaust. Next, we can follow her with our eyes when she walks – supported by a loving man – with other people condemned to death after the final liquidation of the ghetto. The reader needs to guess the rest – what she felt, what she was thinking about, how she dealt with that time.

In the case of Julia the readers are also left with guesses and suppositions prepared by the narrator, who also witnessed these events, with a huge dose of intuition and empathy. Sometimes it is a laconic and masterfully reduced but at the same time evocative description of the heroine – such as Julia's reaction to Tulek's death: "In the evening she was lying numb in her bed, covered with a grey blanket. A lump of dirt" (305). [*Wieczorem leżała w łóżku bezwładna, okryta szarym kocem. Bryła ziemi*]. The character is compared to a lump of dirt not only for visual reasons (shape, color) but also psychological ones – it represents numbing, excruciating pain after losing the son. The narrator's suggestions also trigger our emotional sensitivity when she tries to describe Julia, who has lost all her relatives, while she is looking at the photo hanging on the wall. In a heartbreaking but reserved way, this scene expresses, or even creates, a wide range of emotions – from pain and feeling of loneliness to becoming completely engrossed in memories of the lost family and times of happiness:

> But what is she like behind the closed door in the evening? Szymon is looking at her from her bedroom walls; she is haunted by a lighthearted laugh of the boys who are standing on the bridge

in Z. Dawid is holding a book and Tulek – a ball. Under the bridge foaming water is swooshing merrily. (309)

[*Ale jaka jest wtedy, gdy wieczorem zamyka za sobą drzwi mieszkania? Ze ścian pokoju biegną za nią spojrzenia zwalistego Szymona i beztroski śmiech chłopców, którzy stoją na mostku w Z. Dawid trzyma w ręku książkę, Tulek piłkę. Pod mostkiem wesoło bełkoce spieniona woda*].

It is necessary for the reader to pay close attention to this scene – filled with meaningful brevity and detail. Through short and simple utterances (especially the two last sentences) containing only the most important elements, Fink managed to place some characteristic features of each person. She also portrayed the atmosphere in the picture – so dramatically different from Julia's current state of mind. She precisely described an idyllic location of the photographed group (a small bridge, down there "foaming water is swooshing merrily") and attributes associated with the times of safety, all of which gain symbolic meanings (a book, a ball). She froze that happy moment of a family – the time before the breakdown and destruction.

From behavioral perspective (Sokołowska 354) both Julia and Eugenia do not lose their psychological depth despite the fact that they are presented in a fragmentary way and based on memories deprived of any thorough examination.

Moving towards drama

The prose of Ida Fink contains not only poetic inclinations, though. Some stories, especially those full of dialogues or some kind of games or pretending, are close to dramas (Kiec 208). At the same time, they leave many issues unresolved and evocatively encourage the reader to guess and speculate. This is also characteristic for Ida Fink's actual dramas and radio dramas such as *Description of a Morning* or *Traces*. They show the characters in the state of tension and anxiety. This is what happens for instance in "A Conversation". In a single marital dialogue the author presented a heart of the problem and accumulated emotions experienced by the characters. This dynamic discussion is divided by descriptions of Anna's and Michał's appearance and reactions. Fink emphasizes the moments of their fiercest anger by capturing easy to overlook physiological reactions. The author focuses on very subtle gestures and body language of her characters. Describing these specific aspects of their behaviour turns out to be a main feature of her delicate prose, and which in turn would be difficult for actors to perform on stage. Fink wants to present moments in which her heroes happen to be in the most extreme states of anger. In Anna's case it is „silent, barely visible shivering" (86) [*ciche, ledwie dostrzegalne drżenie*], in Michał's case –„a rush of blood brought to the man's face has left it one tone paler" [*fala czerwieni, jaka przeszła przez twarz mężczyzny i pozostawiła ją o odcień bledszą*] as well as „heavy breath" (87) [*głośny oddech*].

In this way both techniques – prose and drama – complement each other functionally. By reducing the story to the most important issues, the author presented in "A Conversation" the complexity of a situation and its psychological consequences resulting from ambiguous relations between Anna, Michał and Emilia who is hiding them. Anna's oblique consent for an affair between her husband and a Polish woman means that the conflict between the need of closeness and exclusiveness and the will to survive has been resolved, although we do not know for how long. Both of them feel dispirited and ashamed. In her case it is not only caused by the fear and resignation from Michał but also by the feeling of her own pride and dignity. He, in turn, feels downhearted because of the fact that he was treated as an object in this conflict between the women, where Emilia holds all the cards.

Jews and Poles

"A Conversation" is one of those stories which confirms that Poles play many different roles in the works of Ida Fink – very often morally ambiguous, but their behavior never involves this immorality which we know from the latest historical studies (Gross, *Sąsiedzi*; *Strach*; *Złote żniwa*; Engelking; Skibińska; Grabowski). On the contrary – they are often helpful, they hide Jews and help them to survive. At least this applies to some individuals such as Emilia from "A Conversation". In her case all doubts of ethical nature derive from a complex emotional situation. However, it looks differently in

"Aryan Papers". Here, 'sexual services' are already included in a price which a mature, Polish man expects from a sixteen-year-old Jewish girl.[3] Is he kinder than a group of blackmailers who threaten her family? Taking into consideration all realities of the war, it is possible to judge him quite positively which even the heroine does as a form of self-consolation: „He is quite nice after all, and was always good to me while working. And he could turn me in..." (73) [*On jest nawet miły, zawsze był dobry dla mnie przy pracy, a mógł donieść...*]. Eventually it appears that the man kept his side of the bargain. Nevertheless, the whole situation must be extremely stressful and embarrassing since, as we may suppose, the girl has never experienced any physical love before. It is only the closing dialogue between the man and his business partner that reveals moral depravity and male brutality in this situation, right after the girl was sexually abused:

> – So, who was that girl? – he asked entering the room.
> – Well, just some whore.
> – I thought she's a virgin – he looked surprised. – All pale, crying, shaky...
> – And who says whores cannot be virgins?
> – Look what a philosopher you are – the other one said and they both laughed. (74)
> [– *A co to za dziewczyna? – spytał, wchodząc do pokoju.*
> – *A, taka kurwa.*
> – *Myślałem, że dziewica – zdziwił się. – Blada, popłakana, chwiejna…*
> – *Albo to dziewice nie mogą być kurwami?*
> – *Filozof z ciebie – rzekł tamten i obaj się roześmieli*].

Polish people also act as a group observing the Jewish tragedy which according to Hilberg classifies them as bystanders (Hilberg).[4] Emotions of the crowd are not completely clear. Fink does not have any insight into its mood or consolidated psyche (if it exists whatsoever). However, she points out to some reactions, most of which refer to the lack of understanding of ongoing events and unappreciation of how significant those events are. Fink proves her point through Aron's last words in a conversation between a few men in a station restaurant ("A Spring Morning"). As Anna Kuryłek rightly noticed: "Polish people are commenting on the events and putting them into some logical frames which are clear only for them; they are looking for explanations for an overheard paradox while they are still keeping out of discussion the fact of Jews actually leaving the city. Two worlds – Polish and Jewish – become alienated" (Kuryłek 225) [*Polacy komentują je, umieszczają w logicznych dla siebie kontekstach; szukają wyjaśnień zasłyszanego paradoksu i pozostawiają poza dyskusją sam fakt wyjścia Żydów z miasta. Dwa światy – polski i żydowski – wyalienowują się*]. In the story "The Pig" Fink describes a scene where Germans send Jews to death in packed lorries, but the observing crowd reacts with a fierce outrage only when a pig is run over by a car.

Conclusion – between suffering and form

It needs to be noted that Ida Fink has found an optimal way of combining categories which frequently stand in an opposition (not only with reference to the Holocaust): history and literature (Lang; White)[5], ethics and aesthetics (Barańczak), suffering and form (Przybylski). She is aware of the necessity to join the truth with words, experience and art – this awareness can be noticed for instance

[3] Aleksandra Ubertowska mentions *Aryan Papers* as one of the examples where "the issue of sexual abuse was transfered to fictional literature" (Ubertowska 31).

[4] In the context of Hilberg's book and referring to Polish society during the times of war, Elżbieta Janicka and Tomasz Żukowski claim that it is necessary to change a safe status of "being a witness" of the Holocaust into the category of "being an inside participant observer". According to them, "the Holocaust left no place for being uninvolved". The authors point out to all, even the smallest, reactions which could expose Jews: whispers, looks, comments... (Janicka, Żukowski).

[5] The stands of both researchers were presented and commented on by i.a. Katarzyna Chmielewska (21-32) and Bartłomiej Krupa (29-40). Jacek Leociak, in turn, referring to one of Bogdan Wojdowski's stories, argues that the author managed to create a form which is "a literary and historical discourse at the same time" (Leociak 459).

in the story "Zygmunt". Here Fink compares two interpretations of the same piece of music, the third concert of Beethoven, played by a diligent student "from the provinces". His first performance seems to prove the narrator's observation about Zygmunt's personality – the boy is hardworking but cold in nature and pedantic while his play, so technically correct, lacks "the heart". It is a different type of church – one which lacks the God, as Mickiewicz allegedly described the works of Słowacki.

His second performance occurs in different circumstances, and it can be compared with the first one in the same way one can compare two sermons of father Paneloux in *The Plague*. This time his music sounds dramatic and reminds a scream: "There was no coldness in his play, nothing artificial – that was a pure, spine-tingling music" (35) [*Nic oschłego nie było w tej grze, nic sztucznego – to była czysta, przejmująca do głębi serca muzyka*]. Two sides of boy's personality may remind two mythological artists from Herbert's poem, who take part in a musical duel: Marsyas and Apollo.[6] Marsyas, lost and flayed, screams while Apollo –"the god with nerves of artificial fibers" [*bóg o nerwach z tworzyw sztucznych*], walks away along a beautiful alley after diligent tortures. Marsyas' wailing in pain turns a nightingale into stone and makes a tree turn grey-haired. Likewise, Zygmunt's suffering, who was cruelly and regularly battered by Germans (or maybe Ukrainian guards), makes him a trustworthy artist who expresses his torment, pain and fear through playing Beethoven – a German master of music.[7] The range of emotions is so vast that the narrator's reaction is almost physiological: "I flinched and started to feel cold" (35) [*Wzdrygnęłam się, zrobiło mi się zimno*]. This is what happened to a nightingale and a tree from Herbert's poem and what appears to be the basis for Ida Fink's story.

However, there is a significant difference between the style of "Apollo and Marsyas" and aesthetics of Ida Fink's story. As we can imagine, she could have described the boy's body, extremely battered, full of bruises and wounds – Apollo in Herbert's poem spares no sight of Marsyas' entrails. But Fink draws a merciful curtain through which not much can be seen. Similarly to Herbert, she is aware that she will not be able to capture the human's pain through neither a scream nor cold and sophisticated aesthetics (Przybylski 98). This gesture presents the essence of her artistic approach and style – compassion, simplicity, calmness and discreet distance. She proves that ethics and aesthetics, suffering and form, experience and metaphor can intertwine into one moving and undying message. As a matter of fact: "authenticity cannot exist without literary quality since it is the only thing which sets conditions for authenticity, creates shattered narration and imposes at least a minimal form on shapeless experiences" (Czapliński 369) [*autentyzm nie może obyć się bez literackości, ponieważ tylko ona pozwala ustanowić warunki autentyczności, wytworzyć pogruchotaną narrację i nałożyć minimalną choćby formę na bezforemność doświadczenia*].

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[6] In Herbert's poem Stanisław Burkot noticed a poetic manifestation of a dispute flared up by Julian Przyboś and Tadeusz Różewicz (Burkot).

[7] With reference to Ryszard Przybylski's thoughts, Zygmunt's "scream" is not "an enemy of art"; it does not destroy "pure art" (Przybylski, 1998, p. 91, 95) because this boy somehow "performed" his scream with a necessity of emotional, individual complementation. His second performance prevails over the first one although the price that he paid is horrible. It is similar to Marsyas's case who truly defeated Apollo since the latter could not play on his lyre the same music as Silenus: "A sound which is made by tortured people before they die. A sound which makes the art of our century [that is the twentieth century – JW] impossible to exist" (Przybylski 96) [*Tonu wydawanego przez torturowanych tuż przed skonaniem. Tonu, bez którego nie może istnieć sztuka naszego stulecia {XX w. – JW}*].

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Manifestations of Slovak and Rusyn Identity in Vasil Stefan Koban´s *The Sorrows of Marienka* and *Excerpt from Michal*

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Abstract

Vasil Stefan Koban (1918-2007) was an American writer of Slovak origin. His cultural identity is, however, somewhere between Rusyn and Slovak, but all his writings were published in Slovak journals such as *Slovakia,* or *Almanac* run by National Slovak Society. The Slovak translation of his only novel, *The Sorrows of Marienka*, was published in 2006 with the subtitle *Púť Slovákov za lepším životom do Ameriky*. The book is about the life of his mother Marienka who after marriage to Ivan Kinda emigrates from Jarabina to Conemaugh, an American coal mine town. *Excerpt from Michal: Biography of a Galician Coal Miner, 1906-1933* is a revised version of the story in which Michal, Koban's father and Marienka's second husband, loses his leg in an accident and he must stay in a hospital for a year. In both stories Koban uses lots of Slovak words, but on the other hand, he mentions that Michal helped to build the Russian Orthodox Church of St. John the Baptist in Conemaugh with other Galicians, his natives, since he was born in Habowa. Although he considered himself to be of Slovak origin, Koban is enlisted under Carpatho-Rusyn Literature in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature*. The article focuses on manifestations of Slovak and Rusyn identity in Koban´s two most notable literary works.

Keywords

autobiographical novel, Slovak identity, Rusyn identity, ethnicity, minorities.

Vasil Stefan Koban

Vasil Stefan Koban was an American writer of Slovak origin born in Conemaugh, Pennsylvania in 1918.[1] His parents came from Austro-Hungarian Empire. Mother Mária Jedinák was from a little Slovak village Kamienka in Prešov region, situated near Polish borders and his father Ivan Kindja was born in Jarabina, just across the hill from Kamienka. According to Koban´s daughter, Marienka travelled to America alone and later she was accompanied by Ivan and their children. She started to run a boarding house in the Johnstown borough Franklin, so she could save some money and buy a farm on the Singer Hill Street. After a mine accident that killed her first husband Ivan, Marienka married Michal Koban, a Galician from a Polish village Habowa, who was killed in a car accident.[2] Marienka gave birth to thirteen children; however, this number Koban sees as fatal in their family fate. In his article "Heavenly Father" (1991), he reminiscences how his siblings either too young or too unexpectedly left this world. Marienka´s children gradually died in various other accidents and under different circumstances. Interestingly, as Koban writes, Marienka re-named her children, so for instance there were three boys who were named Stefan – when the first Stefan died, Marienka gave this name to another newly born boy and when he died again she gave the boy the same name. Nevertheless, this was against her Orthodox religion and Koban believes that this could be the reason for so many deaths in his family (44). In addition, it was also against their religion to make marriage vows for sisters as well, which again happened in Marienka´s case because of poverty (48).

[1] In America, Vasil usually changed to „Charles". The following information is written in the note about a writer in his novel: "Vasil S. (Charles S.) Koban was born in Conemaugh, Pennsylvania, in 1918."

[2] In his novella *„Excerpt from Michal: Biography of a Galician Coal Miner, 1906-1933"*, Koban writes that Michal Koban was born in Habowa. Presumably it is Hałbow, now Desznica (Poland).

The life at the turn of the centuries was very hard for them. For example, Koban notes that after Ivan´s death, the oldest son Michael started to work in the mines when he was only twelve (44). Vasil attended no more than four grades at school as he had to work on the family farm. His daughter remembers that he wore clothes of his sisters due to their bad economic situation. He worked in a steel mill, in the taxicab business and occasionally got a small acting role in a TV series, such as Colombo. He married three times and had two daughters. Two of his wives were descendants of Slovak immigrants coming from Kamienka, Marienka´s native village. As it is observed, the bonds of Slovaks in their new land were very strong even after several years. They enclosed themselves in their diaspora that gave them the sense of belonging and kept them together. Slovaks tried to maintain their culture and customs, to have something common in the hostile country, as this is how America was experienced by the newcomers.

For Koban it was a challenge to find a sense of life, since his marital relationships always failed. Still, he found some happiness in "my religion, my foreign spoken language and my foreign cooked food" ("Heavenly Father" 46). He started to work for the Greek Orthodox church community, building a church in Miami, Florida, in 1950: "All my church really needed was youth. I was 35 and could speak the Slovak language. So I helped out as an errand boy, and they came to confide in me like their own son" ("Over-the-Hill" 49). He describes these five years as the most beautiful of his lifetime ("Heavenly Father" 46). He died in Hollywood, Florida, in 2007.

Interestingly, Koban´s cousin and childhood playmate was Michael Strank, a soldier and a member of the U.S Marines during World War II, who appeared in Joe Rosenthal´s famous photograph "Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima", where he was eventually shot and died. Despite Strank was born in Jarabina, the same village Ivan came from, he was raised in Conemaugh Township and even achieved high school education.

The Sorrows of Marienka

Koban under Michael Novak´s guidance, his lifelong friend, advisor, and Johnstown native, enjoyed being a part of a Slovak community. Through the years he informed National Slovak Society about his life and literary activities. He published several articles in journals *Slovakia* and *Kalendár – Almanac*, such as "Heavenly Father" (1991), "'Over-The-Hill' Gang Meet in Argument Park" (1988), and "They Were Not Strangers" (1985), reminiscing his personal and family life struggles.

It took him twenty-six years to get his only novel *The Sorrows of Marienka* (1979) published. The novel came out with the help of Michael Novak under the project EMPAC![3] and it was his dream to see the book translated into Slovak language too. Just a year before his death Vydavateľstvo Spolku slovenských spisovateľov published it in 2006 as *Marienkine žiale* with the subtitle *Púť Slovákov za lepším životom do Ameriky*.

Uncommonly for a writer born in the USA, half of the book takes place in the present-day Slovakia. This autobiographical novel depicts the life of the seventeen years old Marienka who gets married to Ivan Kinda, an officer in his best years, whom she sees at the wedding for the first time. Marienka is a strong and spirited woman which helps her to overcome wrongdoings of her jealous mother-in-law. Marienka and Ivan build a small house but soon an unpleasant event occurs and she seeks a way out of the hostile village. She accidently sets fire on the local tavern when she wants to teach Ivan lesson because of his excessive alcoholism. People start to avoid her and gossip: "I tell you that woman is a witch. She should be run out of town" (*Sorrows* 78). So they travel with their two children from the Slovak village Jarabina to the American coal mine town near Johnstown in Pennsylvania.

Koban shows their simple manners and peasant ignorance of the world when they see a black man on the ship: "A black man! Who ever heard of such a thing?" (88). Moreover, a gypsy man tricks all the passengers that America is a dangerous country populated with fierce Indians so they buy knives from him for protection: "Haven´t you heard of Indians? Don´t you know what America´s like at all? It´s a wild

[3] EMPAC! (The Ethnic Millions Public Affairs Council) was a national civil rights committee, dedicated to politics of family and neighborhood, to equality and fairness, to a new America. It was founded in 1975.

land full of savages that attack men alone in their fields and helpless women. They grab them by their hair and skin off their scalps" (92).

The Slovak community in Conemaugh is presented from the point of view of only one generation - the newcomers. The author focuses on the life of Marienka and her family. From the very beginning she is very enthusiastic about America and because she can neither write nor read she goes to her compatriot Katarina Borsuk and pays her twenty-five cents for writing and sending a letter to her father. She starts her letter as follows: "America isn't like home. No, not at all. America is wonderful" (102). But too soon she realizes that this is far from the reality. As the conditions are hard in the New World, Marienka takes twelve boarders to care for. She prepares all their meals, does the washing for them, besides raising her own sons. The boarders are all Slovaks and they have a very nice relationship. This, however, cannot be said about the Slovaks who are sent from the coal mine company. When Ivan stays one day at home because he is sick, the men come and want a one week pay for his absence. This unfair act strikes Marienka hard and she actually understands that their previous friendly manners were just a falsehood: "Swindle. The word was a new one to Marienka. And it seemed especially cruel that it would be their own countrymen who would introduce them to this ugly practice" (108).

Obviously, more people try to establish themselves by swindle. Igor Cigan, a deacon and a treasurer of the church, persuades Slovaks to raise money and build a new church. Although the old one was not even ten years old, people believe his good intentions. So it happens that Igor keeps seven thousand dollars with him. Jacka, Marienka's younger sister, falls in love with him. It seems suspicious to Marienka that Jacka gives preference to Igor over Michal. In fact, Michal meets Marienka on the board of a ship on the way to America. Jacka, being the most beautiful girl for him, is the main goal why he wants to be Marienka's boarder. Michal is very shy hiding his feelings, but Marienka tries to push Jacka toward him. Jacka, however, is not interested in Michal as Igor seems to be a successful man. Marienka and Ivan start to be nervous about Jacka being still single. Ivan wants Igor for her, while Marienka prefers Michal: "One of these days she's going to wake up to the fact that the only man worth having is Michal." Ivan replies: "That young nobody?" For Ivan, Igor is "the one with a future" and "There's nothing about Michal" (161). Jacka can hardly wait for Igor to propose to her, but all Slovaks soon learn that Igor Cigan is a swindler. People see him to get on a train to New York and later on there are gossips that he lives in Bratislava and has been attacked and tortured by some men who want to know where he keeps all that stolen money. In fact, his name means a gypsy, a member of ethnic group; however, "cigániť" signifies a liar, swindler, or an untrustworthy person in Slovak language.

Marienka often sends letters to her father, but replies from him are rather rare. If she receives a letter, the message is usually unpleasant. In one of these letters her father writes that her mother had died and that he is going to marry Marienka's coeval and best friend Zuska. Because Zuska comes from a very poor family, no one wants to marry her. She must endure the fact that Štefan Haluška, the man she loves, marries a girl from a rich family. So Zuska in order to have something on her own does not to hesitate to marry a sixty-year-old man. Koban on this example shows how hard the life in Slovakia was and what compromises people had to make. A girl in the era of mass emigration could only hope that she will find a husband in America, otherwise her prospects were very poor.

The work in the mines is dangerous and deadly accidents are an everyday threat to the workers: "There was always danger in the mines, but the men didn't want to talk about the danger unless they could laugh or sing about it. And even the sad words of the songs were not meant to be sung like a dirge. They were just happy songs with sad words" (157). Eventually, Ivan makes a song about Ivan Yuháš who is killed in the mines and whose place is given to him:

Ivan Yuháš was a miner
From over Johnstown way,
A brawling, dirty miner
Was what they used to say.
He dug for coal like the rest of us
But one way he was the best of us,
In playing a guitar.

It's not a guitar
That's made of wood,
Nor strung with gut
As you think it should;
The sounding box is the pit o' the mine
With strings called props that number nine
For playing this guitar.

From roof to floor
And the guitar's pitch
Is a deep bass roar;
Oh, any of us can tune the thing,
But only the brave can cut the strings
In playing this guitar.

Ivan Yuháš played
With bated breath
There in the gloom
A song called 'Death',
A lonely tune we all must play
Who work in the mines from day to day
In playing our guitar. (158)

The song is rich in imagery. It metaphorically connects the sound that miners make while they are digging with the sound of a guitar: "The sounding box is the pit o' the mine". They create a song called "Death" that is present "from day to day". The working place here shares both positive and negative pictures in their minds. On the one hand, the working surrounding brings unpredictable consequences for the miners with the notion that if the roof or the props cave in after the explosion, they will lose their lives. On the other hand, to give some meaning to everyday struggles in the pits, they feel that during their long shifts there is some way to escape the misery through the work of art and imagination.

One night, Ivan brings a drunken Slovak to their house and in a while he starts singing a sad song:

There are three kinds of roses,
There are three kinds of roses.
A husband, I had a husband,
I had a husband who was a drunk.
He didn't work, he only drank,
When he came home, when he came home,
When he came home, he beat me up.
Don't beat me up, don't torture me.
Don't beat me up, don't torture me.
I will leave you and the children,
I will go beyond the Danube.

From atop the ship she was waving a white handkerchief
From atop the ship she was waving a white handkerchief
Come home, dear wife, your children are crying.
Your children are - (124-125)

This song is in its original meaning called "Červená ruža trojaká" and according to some sources it is supposed to be a song of Rusyn people. Slovaks are portrayed as people who love music and singing.

Koban translates many Slovak folk songs in the novel and thus they become a strong indicator of their national pride and identity. Furthermore, these songs also point out their common life experiences in their mother land. In this case the song is about a woman whose husband is a drunk and beats her. She has no other option than to intimidate him that she will leave him and the children and travel beyond the river Danube. The last stanza of the song gives us a hint that she might travel to America and never come back. The following song is in Slovak "Ej, javor, javor, javor zelený". The maple tree is in the Slovak verbal art associated with love and happiness of newlyweds. The same song Ivan sang after he and Marienka got married.

> Eh, maple, maple. Green maple!
> Under our window you were planted! (126)

Koban uses in the novel Slovak names, such as Štefan Haluška, Igor Cigan, Petro Hrobák, Ignác Kohutik, Adam Drotár, Mrs. Česlák, Katarina Borsuk, Zuska, Jacka and names of Marienka´s sons: Michal, Jánik, Mikuláš, Jozef, Jurko. The geographic names are frequent too: Jarabina, Kamienka, Spišská Magura, Košice. He makes use of many Slovak phrases to highlight their national and cultural heritage (see table 1):

Slovak phrase	**English translation**
čepec	Bonnet
slivovica	plum brandy
šatka	Headscarf
grajciars	Cents
čardáš	Czardas
starosta	Mayor
borovička	juniper brandy
koláč	Cake
žandárs	police officers
krčma	Saloon

Table 1 Slovak phrases in *The Sorrows of Marienka*

Religion plays a significant role in the novel. Marienka and Ivan are married in the church in Jarabina and all their children are christened. Jánik, their son, plays with the fire in the kitchen and subsequently gets deadly burnt, while Marienka is helping Ivan in the mines. In this situation Slovaks hold close to each other and help with necessary doings: "The Slovaks of the town gathered to sing the slow, sad dirges of their country. Someone brought food. Others brought drinks" (117). Jánik is buried in the cemetery "of the new Greek Catholic church which the miners from Slovakia had built in Conemaugh" (122). His grave is the first child's grave to be placed in the cemetery.

Here Igor Cigan explains to Michal why it is important to build a new church. If we leave his selfish intentions out of consideration, it seems that having a church means a lot for Slovaks because it reinforces their national identity towards other ethnic groups living in Conemaugh:

> You're a newcomer to Conemaugh. You don't know how our family of Slovaks here has grown. Why, when that church was built there was only a handful of our countrymen in this town. Building a church was one of the first things they did, for God is always close in our hearts. We showed the town. We showed the Irish and the Italians and the Americans that we Slovaks amounted to something. And now there are thousands of us. And we're going to keep on showing them. (165)

As in other American towns, Slovaks keep enclosed against other ethnic groups. The exceptions are usually nations such as Magyars and Poles with whom they have closer contacts in Austro-Hungarian

Empire. Nevertheless, Slovaks work with Irish in the mines and even though they do not understand each other due to ignorance of English language, the relationships between them are more antagonistic than friendly. Michal talks about his Irish fellow worker: "It makes two weeks he's been in the mines with me … he still don't know how to take out the coal, but I know more about that girl than I did about my own mother." Ivan adds: "All those Irish are alike" (169).

Excerpt from Michal: Biography of a Galician Coal Miner, 1906-1933

Excerpt from Michal: Biography of a Galician Coal Miner, 1906-1933 is a sequel to *The Sorrows of Marienka* seen from the perspective of Michal Koban's father and Marienka's second husband. The excerpt is in the form of a novella, but Koban had the manuscript finished and wanted to get it published, but he could not find a publisher for it. The novella is divided into five chapters, each one is dated. It starts on Thursday, May 24, 1906 and ends on Tuesday, December 7, 1909.

The narrative begins with Michal Koban working as a mule skinner in the mine in Conemaugh. An Irish boy Kelly, whom he works with, should get three sprags on the three cars, but he refuses to do so and says that two are enough. As a result, Michal's leg is badly injured and after a few months in a hospital, his right leg has to be amputated. He stays in the hospital for a year and uses this time to learn English.

Koban's novella was published only one year after his novel, but he changes Michal's national identity significantly. If Michal is portrayed as a Slovak and speaks only Slovak language in the novel, here he becomes a Rusyn. From the very beginning of the story, Michal speaks Rusyn language: "´You got three sprags on the three cars, Kelly?´ he asked in Rusin" (*Excerpt* 105). Moreover, Koban repeatedly reinforces the fact that Michal really is Rusyn: "A pert little nurse in a peaked cap came in to take his pulse and speak to him reassuringly in his native Rusin" (106). Nevertheless, when Marienka comes to see him with Ivan, she speaks Slovak: "´How are you, Michal?´ she asked with concern in Slovak, her only language" (106). When he wants to learn more about the condition of his leg, a nurse must interpret what doctor says, because Michal does not understand English and the doctor does not speak his language: "They did not have Slovak or Rusin doctors to talk to the immigrants in their own language" (107). In addition, as Michal is lying in the bed, a little boy runs in his room: "´Where is daddy?´ he said in English. ´*Otec* is down futher´, she [mother] said in Slovak. … The mother hastily pulled the child away with abject Slovak humiliation, and said in English..." (108).

Manifestations of Rusyn and Slovak Identity

When considering both works, *The Sorrows of Marienka* is seen from Marienka's perspective, while *Excerpt from Michal* sees Michal through his own eyes. In the novel, Michal never says that he is Rusyn, or that he speaks Rusyn language, and we do not learn much about his family background. Furthermore, all characters in the Slovak community in the novel are Slovak. Even boarders read a Slovak newspaper (*Sorrows* 163). As Koban uses real places in his work, the villages Marienka and Ivan come from – Kamienka and Jarabina – signify that Rusyn identity could be presented, but is not.[4] In the novella Koban informs us that Michal "was born in Habowa, a little village in the Galician area of Austria, one of four children – two boys and two girls. At 12 he was put out as a servant on a farm, to work from sunup to sundown" (110). To add more confusion in this matter, Koban writes that: "In 1905 he [Michal] and other Galicians put up some money and proudly helped build the Russian Orthodox Church, St. John the Baptist, in Conemaugh. He was beginning to feel a real part of the community" (110). It was already noted that Jánik was buried in the Greek Catholic cemetery that was built by Slovaks in Conemaugh. Koban wants to highlight that most Slovaks portrayed in the novel were Greek Catholics and that most Rusyns profess the Orthodox Church. All in all, Michal's Rusyn national consciousness is completely new in the novella.

To understand why Michal's identity in *The Sorrows of Marienka* is suppressed, we must connect it with the revival of ethnics in the 1970´s and with Michael Novak. It seems that Vasil Stefan Koban tries

[4] According to Paul Robert Magocsi in *Our People: Carpatho-Rusyns and Their Descendants in North America* (Ontario, 2004, Fourth revised edition), Kamienka (144) and Jarabina (142) are Rusyn villages.

to underscore in Marienka her Slovak identity and in Michal his Rusyn identity. Why did not he implement Rusyn traits in the novel? It was already mentioned that it took him twenty-six years to get his novel published. In the 1970´s Michael Novak immensely contributed to the revival of Eastern European ethnics. He was responsible for the project EMPAC! that pushed Slavic writers to publish their works. As Novak made use of his Slovak background in his lectures and books, Koban could not mix two nationalities in his book then when everyone knew if he was a Slovak or a Rusyn. If Koban put Rusyn traits in his novel, it is suggested that he would not get it published at all. As a result, the date of publication between both works is only one year. If we take into account that the *Excerpt from Michal* is longer than the version published in *Slovakia*, Koban could have changed all Rusyn marks in *The Sorrows of Marienka*, but did not want to do the same in his second novel.

Koban's national identity is somewhere between Rusyn and Slovak, but all his writings were published in the Slovak journals, such as *Slovakia*, or *Kalendár – Almanac*, besides, he regularly kept Slovak Studies Association up to date with his writings and TV roles.

Remarkably enough, Rusinko enlists Koban under "Carpatho-Rusyn Literature" in *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Multiethnic American Literature, Vol. I*: "The first Rusyn American writer to seek an audience outside the Rusyn community was Vasil S. Koban, with his novel The Sorrows of Marienka (1979), written in the style of sociological realism" (395).

It must be recognized that Koban is not the only writer whose ethnic belonging is a problematic one. Liza A. Alzo writes in the "Introduction" to her autobiographical novel *Three Slovak Women* how she coped with her ambiguous ethnic background:

> While the author is cognizant that her heritage may be identified as Carpatho-Rusyn and/or possibly Ukrainian, her grandparents chose to identify themselves as 'Slovak'. All family documents and recourses list Verona Straka and Jánoš Figlyar as 'Slovak' with regard to ethnic identity. The book is written as a family testimonial and is not intended as a tool for political causes related to any particular group whether Czech, Rusyn, Slovak, Ukrainian or any others. (xiv)

Alzo shows that the concept of identity is an active process in which people can choose who they want to be. To return back to the novella, while Michal is recovering in the hospital, his boss comes and reassures him that when he is fit he will get another job in the mines, but he must improve his English. A nurse tries to cheer him up:

> "´You see, Michal, things aren't as bad as you thought´, she said. ´You'll have a job, and you can get better jobs as you learn more English and learn how to get along in America – the land of real opportunity.´
> Michal looked up at her. ´You really believe America is the land of opportunity, no matter what happens to you?´
> ´Of course or I wouldn't be here. I'd still be slopping hogs in Galicia.´" (*Excerpt* 109)

He soon meets Tressa Hruska, a Rusyn teacher of English language and attends her classes: "There were children from every possible group in Central, Western, and Eastern Europe – Slovaks, Irish, Rusins, Poles, Germans – all learning to be Americans and take advantage of the glorious American opportunity to better themselves" (114). After few months Michal gets his English Diploma and is happy to become a part of American society. The story ends with Ivan Kinda's death and funeral. Marienka is a widow and her five sons can imagine Michal to be their father.

Although Michal is presented as being Rusyn, Koban uses only Slovak words and phrases: *Prekliaty blbec!* (You goddamn bastard!), *otec* (father), *priatel'* (friend), *veru* (really), *slivovica* (plum brandy), *matka* (mother). He writes that *slivovica* is the Slovak national drink (115).

Conclusion

Vasil Stefan Koban's works showed how Slovaks lived in Conemaugh, Pennsylvania. Although the works are not very known in America, Paul Wilkes in his review appreciates that through literature about our compatriots Slovaks will not forget how they once came and sought better life for themselves and their families. Wilkes warns the next generations that they should keep in mind their roots in the future:

> As second, third, and fourth-generation Slovaks pursue the American dream, buying their four-bedroom houses, gaining their college degrees, wearing shirts and ties, and learning which fork to use, I would caution them to pause for a moment and look back. Look back, if they can, to see if they know anything about what their forebears experienced. … We have pushed aside the Marienkas of our families, we have not taken the time both to listen to them and to record what they have to say. (158)

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Food as the Representation of Idyllic Landscape of Victorian World in the Novels by Thomas Hardy

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Abstract
The aim of the paper is to analyse the idea of cooking/eating in two novels by Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess d'Urbervilles*. Both works present the idea of food as one of the major points of reference in human relationships. One of the aspects worth analysing is eating as one of the most crucial primary needs. Another one is family eating. The meetings are preceded by careful preparation of meals (e.g. Sunday preparations in Arabella's house or cooking in the house of the Crick family). The food often becomes the major topic during these meetings, showing in this way the idyllic character of family eating: the looks of dining rooms and kitchens are essential as well as the possibility of talking to each other while eating. This idyllic space of collective eating (according to M. Bakhtin) can be frequently destroyed by social conventions; when Tess was rejected by society, she used to eat alone and did not take care of what she eats. Both novels explore the idea of food making it important for the creation of an idyll.

Keywords
Victorian England, idyll, space, family eating

Introduction

Eating and cooking has always constituted a very crucial part of human relationships. Before the twentieth century which can be perceived as the age of mass consumption, the rituals and habits connected with eating used to have significance as a distinguishing mark of a particular status (Gottwald and Kolmer 7). In Victorian England the role of preparing and eating was essential in shaping human relationships. Cooking was regarded as a female domain and it was not only connected with preparing meals, as Draznin claims, "the job included menu planning, marketing, and preserving food for future consumption, tasks which the advice manuals assured her were her responsibility whether she did the cooking or not" (59). In this way, women became preoccupied with their duties and not interested in the activities perceived as male. Due to the importance of preparing food and eating, the families used to have "lavish expenditures on food and entertainment for the guests" (Pool 85). The cookbooks became very popular in the nineteenth century; they were published for people of all classes (Mitchell 123) and were dominated by French authors of the recipes (Mennell 135). Eating found its representation in the majority of Victorian novels, among them, in the works by Thomas Hardy: *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*. The role of food in the novels can be analysed according to the following division: 1. the role of food as a primary need, 2. preparation of food and its importance, 3. the idea of eating with family and friends.

The role of food as a primary need

Thomas Hardy in his prose makes an attempt to present food and eating habits in order to emphasize different relationships among people; they serve as the examples showing social and cultural background of the epoch. The author frequently points out at the importance of eating as a primary need. In *Jude the Obscure* it functions as a factor defining life conditions. When Jude desired to move to a city in order to gain education, he was thinking of the best way to survive there: "But how live in that

city? . . . What was most required by citizens? Food, clothing, and shelter" (*Jude the Obscure* 35).

This very obvious conclusion shows the importance of food as a primary need. Jude was aware that it was also crucial both for people and animals, that is why he used to feed the birds that came to the farmer Troutham's field, instead of keeping them away from the seeds. Jude perceived the birds as similar to himself; there was some kind of brotherhood between them; their life was wretched and miserable as Jude's life, that is why the boy understood their greediness well: "'Poor little dears!' said Jude, aloud. 'You shall have some dinner—you shall. There is enough for us all. Farmer Troutham can afford to let you have some. Eat, then my dear little birdies, and make a good meal!'" (*Jude the Obscure* 15).

The presence of birds as representatives of nature constitutes an indispensable feature of Hardy's novels; it shows their idyllic character and concentration on human coexistence with rural life. One of the most symbolic representations of food in the novel is bread. Jude was brought up in his aunt's bakery, and, as a grown-up he thinks of going back to baking bread. Sue advises him to take up work connected with railway stations, bridges, hotels etc., which is, according to her, far from any morality. But Jude thinks of producing bread, as he has some experience in it and would like to be useful for society.

Jude is very much aware of the importance of food, and even when he separates with Arabella, he knows that every person should have this basic need fulfilled. That is why Jude offers Arabella the amount of money sufficient for something to eat and to live.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, food also plays an important role of a primary need. The lack of victuals and the prospects of losing a house influence Tess's decision to agree for Alec's proposal and live with him. But before that, Alec decided to give up his preaching and visit Tess at Flintcomb-Ash farm. After hard work, Tess looked bad and Marian, one of her friends, tried to help her:

> "You ought to het a quart o' drink into 'ee, as I've done," said Marian. "You wouldn't look so white then. Why, souls above us, your face is as if you'd been hagrode!"
>
> It occurred to the good-natured Marian that, as Tess was so tired, her discovery of her visitor's presence might have the bad effect of taking away her appetite (*Tess of the d'Urbervilles* 287).

Alec's appearance in Tess's life is always connected with her problem to survive. It is Alec who offers her and her family food and shelter, that is why she decides to be with him and in this way, provide her relatives with basic living standards.

Preparation of food and its importance

Victorian home was a place of a careful preparation of meals, as it was definitely a female duty expected from a woman by society. It was not only a typical action concerning cooking, but it also frequently had a form of a home celebration, involving all its inhabitants. In *Jude the Obscure* Hardy presents a special occasion for preparing meals at Arabella's house, underlining the importance of this idyllic meeting: **"**On Sunday morning the interior of Arabella's home was, as usual, the scene of a grand weekly cooking, the preparation of the special Sunday dinner. Her father was shaving before a little glass hung on the mullion of the window, and her mother and Arabella herself were shelling beans hard by" (53).

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* the author presents collective eating of a meal in the Cricks' dairy. There was always a clear indication that the time for a meal is approaching, which made the workers be well-organized: "The milking progressed, till towards the end Tess and Clare, in common with the rest, could hear the heavy breakfast table dragged out from the wall in the kitchen by Mrs Crick, this being the invariable preliminary to each meal; the same horrible scrape accompanying its return journey when the table had been cleared" (116).

Careful preparation of meals played a crucial role in Victorian society, and it was the prelude to collective eating that contained characteristic habits and rituals.

The idea of eating with family and friends

Dining together with family or friends, presented in prose is an indication of idyllic elements in novels. According to Mikhail Bakhtin, food is a major motif of an idyll, especially when it refers to the presence of children (450-451).[1] The members of families discuss their problems and enjoy their successes sitting by the table. In *Jude the Obscure* the conversations while eating concentrate mainly on discussing relationships. When Jude and Sue spent some time after her engagement, they decided to eat a meal and talk about their relationship. A walk to the railway station, and during their next meeting – to the castle, was accompanied by dining together and by analysing their lives:

> "Oh yes, we will," he said quickly. "Your being engaged can make no difference to me whatever. I have a perfect right to see you when I want to; and I shall!"
>
> (…)she cried. "Only you don't know how bad I am, from your point of view, or you wouldn't think so much of me, or care whether I was engaged or not (130-131).

This kind of conversations is very frequent in the novel, and it has traits of the so-called destruction of an idyll. According to Bakhtin, it is a typical feature in the nineteenth-century novels to present the destruction of family life, which can be caused by numerous factors, among others, by degeneration and failure of idealism. (456-457, 459).

In *Jude the Obscure* the destruction of family life very often takes place while having breakfast. When Philloston, married to Sue, felt that she might not be quite happy with him and far from Jude, he decided to free her from their marriage. During having breakfast, he said she could leave with anyone she desires. The couple also used to have breakfast either separately or in total silence. Earlier, just before Sue's wedding with Philloston, both Jude and Sue regret having eaten breakfast together. The conversation about Sue's wedding and the relationship between her and Jude constituted the background for the meal. Jude wanted to turn back time and make Sue resign from her marriage, but her decision was irrevocable. That is why the idyllic atmosphere became destroyed.

In *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* having meals together is also connected with the idea of an idyll. The narrator pays attention to the idyllic picture of Tess and Angel, eating their first meal after their wedding: "They went into the ancient parlour to tea, and here they shared their first common meal alone. Such was their childishness, or rather his, that he found it interesting to use the same bread-and-butter plate as herself, and to brush crumbs from her lips with his own. He wondered a little that she did not enter into these frivolities with his own zest" (191).

Although the atmosphere of the above-mentioned meal looks innocent and pleasant, for Tess it is definitely difficult. Her behaviour presented at the end of the description indicates a situation she faces: Angel seems not to be aware of her past and that is why she cannot be fully happy and enjoy the moment. This is the beginning of the destruction of Tess and Angel's marital idyll. Later on, after having learned about Tess's previous life, Angel goes back to the Wellbridge farmhouse, when he spent some time with Tess as his wife, and recalls their first meal and conversation here. He regrets not having been informed earlier about his wife's past and leaves for Brazil (234).

Apart from presenting a family idyll and its destruction, Hardy also describes longing for love accompanied by dining. It is mainly connected with a presentation of a stormy relationship between Jude and Sue. Their meetings by the table are marked by constant changes in their liaison; they either dine together or, eating separately, long for their own company. At the very beginning of their acquaintance, Jude desired to have Sue closer, so he decided to ask his aunt for Sue's photograph. He put the photograph by the fireplace and kissed it. Sue's image accompanied him during meals and made him feel settled in Christminster, a new place in which he decided to start a new life. Although Sue married Philloston, she still had a weak spot for Jude; she tried to forget about him and forbade him to visit her.

[1] The analysis of an idyll in the Victorian novel is also presented in the article: Buda, A. "Food as the Representation of Social Conventions in Victorian Female Novel." *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, 2 (3). 2014: 225-232. Print.

Nevertheless, regretting this decision, she decided to write a letter to Jude, inviting him for dinner. Unfortunately, the letter arrived too late and Jude was furious that he could not dine together with his beloved woman. Just before a great disaster (the death of Jude's children) Jude asks Sue to accompany him during breakfast. They are discussing the possibilities of changing house by Sue and the children. While Jude was preparing breakfast for them, Sue found her children dead. This situation completely destroys the idyllic character of the relationship between Jude and Sue. What strikes the reader most in this part of the novel, is a great contrast between the events: on one hand - a preparation of family breakfast, on the other hand - a disaster that happens in the children's bedroom. By combining these events together, the story seems to be similar to a drama; the characters are unaware of danger and the atmosphere appears to be full of dramatic irony.

While in *Jude the Obscure* dining together is mainly connected with a destruction of an idyll, in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* it is frequently presented as a ritual. While working on a farm, Tess participated with other workers in eating lunch: "As the hour of eleven drew near . . . the harvesters ceased working, took their provisions, and sat down against one of the shocks. Here they fell to, the men plying a stone jar freely, and passing round a cup" (79).

This rural atmosphere attracted Angel Clare, who, tired with modern city life, decided to live on a farm and dine together with its workers: "At first he lived up above entirely, reading a good deal . . . But he soon preferred to read human nature by taking his meals downstairs in the general dining-kitchen, with the dairyman and his wife, and the maids and men, who all together formed a lively assembly; for though but few milking hands slept in the house, several joined the family at meals" (103-104).

Angel's attitude towards living in the countryside and working in the dairy constitutes a praise of rural life and its simplicity. It is at the same time criticism of modern, technologically advanced city and artificiality of those who live there. Eating together in the countryside is a great opportunity for Tess to observe her husband and discuss their lives. Noticing him from a distance, she is always ready to serve meals and create family atmosphere. In his novel Hardy pays also attention to the perception of rural, idyllic landscape by upper classes of society. When Angel visits his parents and brothers, he is struck by their attitude towards countryside. He notices that his family does not know real life; they are only familiar with the trends that they follow and real life has deeper meaning; "what the inner world said in their clerical and academic hearing was quite a different thing from what the outer world was thinking" (140). This attitude also contains the perception of food and eating; Angel's parents do not accept the way of eating popular among milkmen and country people; they do not want to try Mrs. Crick's black-puddings or drink mead, as it is not a typical sort of food they are used to eating (141). Such an attitude has a wider meaning: upper classes do not feel obliged to be interested in poor people's lives.

A weak quality of food or poor conditions of dining also appear in the novels by Hardy, mainly in the context of presenting the characters as lonely or rejected by the society. In *Jude the Obscure*, Sue is punished for not going back to school on time, by staying in her room alone for a week and having meals by her own. Tess, as well, being forced to find a job, after an affair with Alec, travelled to the farm and "did not stop at Weatherbury after this long drive, further than to make a slight nondescript mea lat noon" (89-90). These situations seem to be some kind of punishment for the heroines for not following social rules or not fulfilling social expectations.

Conclusion

The role of food and its preparation plays a significant role in the novels by Thomas Hardy. It not only refers to the importance of eating as fulfilling a primary need, but it also has a social status. The preparation of meals belongs to a female domain and it is a part of an idyll that is described in both *Jude the Obscure* and *Tess of the d'Urbervilles.* Dining together accompanies discussions about life, relationships and family matters, while eating alone refers to being condemned by society. Finally, showing family eating constitutes a picture of cultural and social England of the nineteenth century.

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Changing Role of Indian Woman: A Glimpse into Two Bollywood Movies English – Vinglish and Queen

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Abstract

Bollywood, being one of the biggest film industries of India, is an interesting area of research to understand the socio-cultural perspectives of today's India. My paper will focus on the changing role of Indian woman. It will argue if the change is merely superficial or the Indian woman has been successful to negotiate with and challenge the patriarchal social structure. These multiple issues will be discussed with special reference to two of the latest Bollywood movies, namely, *English-Vinglish* and *Queen*.

The focus on these two movies is because both concentrate on emancipation of woman. Sashi, the central character of English-Vinglish, despite facing all kinds of humiliation in her own family and finally learning English (her inability to speak in English being one of the primary reasons for her being ridiculed in her family) comes back to her family at the end. Queen showcases a different kind of emancipation where Rani, the leading lady of the movie, being dumped by her fiancé, decides to go for her honeymoon trip all by herself and recognises herself anew.

These two movies are examples of the changing role of woman who does not need a male to rescue her from danger or to console her in her tears. She is a self-sufficient woman who does not forget her roots. Both the movies generate thought-provoking questions about the status of woman in present India and can be employed as lenses to see through the multiple layers of the gendered Indian society.

Keywords

India, Bollywood, woman, patriarchy, emancipation

Introduction

A recent ban on a documentary titled *India's Daughter*, based on the heinous and petrifying 2012 gang rape in New Delhi, prompted director Leslee Udwin to comment: "My documentary is a drop of water on a stone and we should all globally hang our heads in shame (if) we don't stop war on women" (Thacker). She further stated: "Society's way of shame is to marginalize the women like they are rotten apples in a barrel, but in fact it is the barrel that is rotten and rots the apple" (Thacker). When the entire country is caught in this issue of gender-violence and the controversial banning of this documentary, one of the India's leading women journalists, Barkha Dutt, discussed the issue of this ban with Udwin at the Women in the World Summit, 2015 and made certain pertinent remarks regarding the position of women in the post-colonial Indian socio-cultural context. She remarked, with her unconventional approach and positivity that the repercussions of the gang rape could be viewed as a "moment of hope for women" (Thacker). She further stressed: "The incidence of sexual violence is higher in the United States and the United Kingdom than India" and asserted that India had its own Prime Minister four decades back and had the provision of maternity leave before it was implemented in a First World Country like America. Dutt further pointed out that "gender is more complex than that, it cannot be put in a box" (Thacker).

This article would like to address these complex and multi-layered dimensions regarding the position of women in post-colonial India through an analysis of Bollywood movies. Bollywood, being one of the biggest film industries of India, is an immensely interesting area of research for delving deep

not only into the trends and changes in the art of film-making but also to understand the socio-cultural perspectives and newer dimensions of thought process of today's new India. However, in order to probe deep into it, in order to understand whether the role of Indian woman has changed at all or not, whether the change, if any, is merely superficial, whether today's Indian woman has achieved a position where she can challenge and negotiate with the patriarchal social structure, it becomes imperative to trace the journey of woman in Indian society from the colonial to the post-colonial times.

Some steps back to the ancient times can give us a vivid picture of the position of woman in Indian socio-cultural context. *Manusmriti*, one of the seminal texts of Hinduism, states that "Day and night woman must be kept in dependence by the males (of) their (families), and, if they attach themselves to sensual enjoyments, they must be kept under one's control. Her father protects (her) in childhood, her husband protects (her) in youth, and her sons protect (her) in old age; a woman is never fit for independence."

Manu's portrayal of woman is in accordance with the depiction of women characters in our epics where women are supposed to be obedient to their male counterparts, be dutiful and chaste, and be always at their mark to prove their purity if the society demands them to do so. Jasbir Jain points out: "Gender construction in India has its roots in Sita's agnipariksha, Draupadi's chirharan and Damayanti's adherence to the pativrata code" (*Indigenous Roots of Feminism* 29). Draupadi is forced to maintain marital relationship with five husbands while Sita and Ahalya, without any active role in the violation of social codes, are commanded purification through symbolic deaths (one by being transformed into stone and another by being asked to pass through fire). This kind of portrayal of women might prompt us to think about the marginalization of women who were subjected to utmost negligence and humiliation as depicted in the epics. But the story is not that simple. Rather it has multiple layers involved in it. While, on the one hand, women are subjected to atrocities and humiliation, denied self-respect and dignity by the essentially male-dominated society, on the other hand, there are the deities of Durga and Kali worshipped in the society, the deities considered being supremely powerful and symbolizing creation and destruction respectively. The concept of Swayamvara, the right of a woman to choose her husband, is another feature which marks woman power in the earlier social construct. Moreover, the women in the epics are not always essentially passive. While Sita opts to return to mother earth instead of going back to her husband, Draupadi demands war for justice in order to take vengeance against the Kauravas for her Vastraharan. Thus there is an interesting duality in the position of woman in Indian socio-cultural context. Though her potential is tried to be curbed by the patriarchy, her spirit, dignity and self-respect have often come to the forefront despite all hurdles laid down on her way.

In colonial India women were ignorant of their basic rights mostly because of illiteracy and economic subordination and were denied access to social equality. Tarabhai Shinde, in "Stree-Purush Tulna" (A Comparison between Women and Men) points out the injustice involved in the models of womanhood made by men and criticizes the restrictive patriarchal impositions, which attempt to deprive women of their basic freedoms (Jain, *Feminizing Political Discourse* 125-129). The social rites like Sati, infanticide, child marriage, polygamy are few instances to prove the deplorable condition of women in the then contemporary society. The role of social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar and Christian missionaries towards the upliftment of women by establishing schools and by imposition of certain phenomenal acts like Sati-Abolition Act (1829) and Widow Remarriage Act (1856) are worth-mentioning here. Ban on Female Infanticide, Abolition of Devdasi System and Purdah system, provision of educational opportunities for women and equal share for women in political life of the country were other significant measures to boost up the confidence of women in pre-independent India. The Indian Freedom Struggle provided women a much-needed opportunity to break the male hegemony in the political sphere. However, writers like Geraldine Forbes observes that the so-called emancipation of woman in nineteenth century India was not prompted by what the woman wanted; rather it was the modernization of woman as per the requisite of patriarchy. Moreover, colonial racist views about an inferior Indian civilization had largely inspired social reforms and thus the ideology which tried to redefine gender relations was a blend of both foreign and indigenous concepts (Forbes & Forbes 14). The emergence of the "New Woman" created by the nationalist agenda was essentially

different from the westernized woman in terms of her social emancipation, cultural refinement and national identity. She was expected to write in Sanskritized vernacular and possess feminine virtues. Thus she had to be the epitome of national culture while suiting the modern world and this combination was again dictated by the male-dominated nationalist ideology. The nationalist resolution was pretty clear about the prescription of different degrees of westernization for men and women and thus both the masculine-feminine and home-world dichotomies were prevalent in the society (Chatterjee 237). The role of Indian woman was always that of "sati-savitri-sita" (Chatterjee 248) and she was always perceived as a part of the "home," the domestic space and her role was to improve the society through her dharma (Chakrabarty 129). Meenakshi Mukherjee focuses on the way women were "used/ perceived/ deployed/ represented in this predominantly masculine project" of the construction of nationhood (118). However, writers like Tanika Sarkar, through the reference to biographies of women, bring to limelight the desires of women for much more than fulfilling the roles of "chaste wives, good mothers or good daughters" (47).

In the post-colonial scenario when Indian Constitution assures equality of the sexes and when woman empowerment is the latest in-thing, an attempt to delve deep into the position of today's Indian woman becomes quite interesting. Within the framework of democratic polity, Indian laws, development policies, plans and programmes aim at the advancement of women in different spheres. India has also ratified several international conventions to ensure rights of women. After Independence the Central Social Welfare Board was established in 1953 which promoted welfare and development services for women and children. "The planning commission's Plans and Prospects for Social Welfare in India, 1951-61 spells out social welfare services as intending to cater for the special needs of persons and groups who by reason of some handicap - social, economic, physical or mental - are unable to avail of or are traditionally denied the amenities and services provided by the community. Thus women were considered to be handicapped by social customs and values and social welfare services were thought of to rehabilitate them" (Chaudhuri 350). It was during the drafting of the Sixth Five-Year Plan (1980-85) that a group of women's organizations demanded that the strategies recommended by these groups needed to be included in the Five-Year Plan. Then the Planning Commission included a chapter on "Women and Development" in the document. After that the government set up a Department of Women and Child Development in 1985 and the UGC began extending support to Women Studies Centres in several universities. India has quite a glorious list of woman president, woman prime minister, women writers, women scientists, women entrepreneurs, so on and so forth. Ironically, despite all these names in different social spheres, women consistently lag behind men in terms of access to education, health care and jobs. Another horrible reality of post-colonial India is the gruesome truth of femicide which is rationalized as and co-opted into the rhetoric of population control. The horror of femicide is not only restricted to the brutal killing of female foetuses but also gets extended to the murder of girl child through callousness and indifference by adopting discriminatory treatment in terms of unequal allocation of food, uneven access to medical facilities, family resources and minimum survival needs. Apart from economic and social inequality, women are the worst victims of crimes such as rape, molestation, domestic violence, dowry deaths and trafficking. The point may be brought home in a clearer way by looking at the different NGOs striving for the upliftment of women in post-colonial Indian social scenario. The necessity for the formation of Indian Women and Child Welfare Trust clarifies my point further.

Hence the question which immediately crops up is what is the social reality regarding women. Has she been emancipated or is she tied down by the age-old norms laid down by patriarchy; is she enjoying equal social status with men or she continues to be a victim of male control and social dictates? At this crucial juncture when the woman question has so many layers and perspectives involved in it, this paper would be an attempt to look into the position of Indian women through an analysis of Bollywood movies.

Cinema being one of the most powerful media for mass communication possesses the potential to combine entertainment with ideas. Because of its appeal to the masses it can portray the aspirations, frustrations and contradictions present in any given social order and can also exercise palpable

influence on the mind of the people and thus generate social awareness and formulate public opinion. In India, Bollywood being the largest and most popular film industry has enormous possibility and responsibility towards social development and upliftment. Apart from the so-called 'masala' movies meant only for entertainment (though scope for seeking social messages is always there), there are movies in which the directors take up the responsibility to deal with pertinent social issues and interrogate certain norms and customs of the society. Directors like Aparna Sen, Kalpana Lajmi and Deepa Mehta (to name a few) are the film directors who deal with social issues, particularly related to women, with immense sensitivity and care.

'Sacrifice' is integrally linked with the role model of Indian woman as far as the patriarchal social context is concerned. All the memorable women characters of literature in the vernaculars are submissive and completely at home with the load of virtue and suffering imposed on them by the patriarchal tradition. Indian woman has understood and "internalized patriarchy so well that she never complains - is further merged with the 'woman in the house' of post-enlightenment bourgeois society. Popular Indian Cinema has consistently used the resultant 'ideal Indian woman'- productive, uncomplaining, kind, pragmatic, equally at home with Indian tradition and colonial (and postcolonial) modernity - as the ultimate backup, representative of a cultural state of equilibrium that at times could serve as a signifier for either family, society, or the nation" (Mehta 10 - 11).

This paper deals with two latest Bollywood movies, *English-Vinglish* and *Queen*, directed by two upcoming directors Gauri Shinde and Vikas Bahl released in 2012 and 2014 respectively and tries to locate the position of women in contemporary Bollywood cinema. Both the movies concentrate on emancipation of women, but the way in which this issue is handled in both is different. *English-Vinglish* delineates the story of a home-maker Sashi (enacted by Bollywood diva Sridevi) who is not only a responsible wife and mother but also possesses great culinary skill. She is an expert in making laddoos (an Indian sweet) and has her own small home-based business of delivering laddoos to different households. However, all her potentials remain unnoticed by her family members who suffer from the typical colonial mindset judging people on the basis of their fluency in English. Sashi, lacking proficiency in English, is a source of fun and ridicule for her husband Satish (enacted by Adil Hussain) who is complicit in ridiculing her weakness. Sashi's daughter is ashamed to take her to school because of Sashi's linguistic incompetency but, despite this ill-treatment from her daughter, Sashi wants to ensure that her daughter is not subjected to the same humiliation as her. That is why Sashi asks the teacher about her performance in English. (It is interesting to note that the teacher was stressing the need of Sashi's daughter to improve in another subject but Sashi's focus was on English). Sashi, being raised in the patriarchal social set up, accepts all her humiliation unquestioningly. She knows that it is her duty to make breakfast ready for her husband in the morning and become his partner in bed at night. Every morning she wakes up early, does her regular chores like cleaning and cooking (different meals for different members of her family) uncomplainingly. Apparently it seems she has adjusted with the lack of appreciation that she confronts at every moment in her life. But this typical non-complaining housewife emerges as somewhat confident and satisfied while delivering laddoos and being appreciated for her potential by her customers. The feeling of contentment for not being taken for granted by people outside her home is reflected in her smile and despite her husband's insistence on leaving her job of laddoo-making, she continues with it saying that it is the only thing that she is fond of doing for herself. Satish does not miss a single chance to criticize Sashi regarding her cooking and particularly her skill in making laddoos, saying that she was born to make laddoos. This remark is added with a sarcastic smile which hovers over his face. Sashi once explains with her broken English: "Men cooking art lady cooking daily job duty" (When a man cooks it is called the art of cooking but when a woman cooks that is considered her daily job, her duty).

A twist comes in Sashi's hackneyed life when she has to travel to America alone to assist her sister to make necessary arrangements for her daughter's wedding. Here also Sashi's journey is prompted by her responsibility towards her sister. Once in America, she comes across an advertisement claiming to make candidates fluent in English in four weeks. What is striking here is the fact that Sashi gets enrolled for the class, not by asking for financial assistance from anyone, but with her own money that she had saved from her business. Moreover, she manages to go to the class all alone and is thoroughly satisfied

to find the venue of the class all by herself. The smile on her face is the sign of that feeling of contentment and achievement. She joins the class not for proving anything to her family, but as a personal goal to prove to herself. This is evident from her final emotional speech when she asserts that in moments of depression it is self-help which is needed the most. In her English learning class she gets acquainted with people belonging to diverse ethnicities and nationalities all of whom are struggling to learn English. Thus an immediate bond is created amongst all the classmates because of a commonality of linguistic incapacity in them. One of Sashi's classmates, a French chef, Laurent, begins to feel romantically inclined towards her. But Sashi, being true to her Indian values of purity and chastity, refuses to indulge in any kind of emotional commitment towards him, despite her liking for Laurent and explains that she wants respect, not love. But the way she interacts with Laurent, the way she stumbles and tries to control herself after meeting Laurent at the rooftop are obvious signs of her unuttered liking for him. That is why when Laurent appreciates her beauty in front of the entire class and the Indian classmate (representative of patriarchy) takes immediate offence saying that he should show respect towards an Indian woman, Sashi is not offended. Rather she remarks that she had not been appreciated like this for years. However, her wifely responsibilities and motherly instincts prove stronger than her identity as a woman. Hence, she values her commitment much more than her own desires. At the end of the movie Sashi delivers a speech in English reminding the newly-married couple of the value of marriage, the importance of family and the need to support each other without being "judgemental". At the end of the speech, her husband and daughter apologize to her for all their rudeness and impolite behaviour towards her for all these years. Sashi turns to be a confident woman, starts appreciating her own identity and worth.

Thus it can be viewed as a kind of emancipation where Sashi, the timid, docile wife turns to be a woman respected both by herself and her family after acquiring fluency in English. However, this story of apparent liberalization of a woman has certain deep-rooted questions embedded in it. There is a subtle suggestion that though motherhood is the most fulfilling aspect of a woman's life, only being a mother does not earn enough social recognition. Thus Sashi, with all her love and dedication, fails to gain respect in her family and has to learn a foreign language in order to be at par with the social standard of her family.

Linguistic hierarchy prevalent in India, with English being the trump card to climb up the social ladder, is an undeniable truth and this truth is reinforced through this movie. Though Sashi had always been a business woman, her learning the English word 'entrepreneur' gives her a strange confidence about herself which she never possessed earlier. Thus the hegemony of English, even in the post-colonial era, is rampant in Indian society. Moreover, though Sashi's character has potentials of development, there is no radical transformation of the social role of woman suggested through this movie. Sashi remains a dedicated Indian wife with her saree and mangal sutra (signifying her marital status) and while returning from America speaks in English to ask for a Hindi newspaper.

While pondering about the character of Sashi which arises so many questions in mind about the reality and role of present day Indian woman, there is another character called Rani (enacted by leading Bollywood actor Kangana Ranaut) who is the protagonist of a very unconventional Bollywood movie entitled *Queen*. Initially Rani is a young girl, busy, along with her entire family, making preparations for her wedding. Her happiness at this wedding arrangement makes it quite obvious that it is the meaning of her very existence. When her fiancé Vijay (enacted by Rajkummar Rao) meets her in order to call the wedding off, we find her in tears, sobbing, stammering, literally begging Vijay to get married to her and promises to change herself as per his wish or requirement. This is a typical Indian girl for whom life centres around getting married and leading a life completely dependent on her male counterpart. She is like thousands of other girls, trying to be happy in the happiness of her husband and his family and altering, rather forgetting her own individuality and sacrificing her own desires to remain a "good" woman as per the patriarchal social standards. After being rejected by her fiancé Rani goes back home and locks herself in the room. At this point one might expect that she would be a devastated woman or even might commit suicide in her grief of being dumped by her prince charming. However, to the utter astonishment of the Indian audience, she emerges out of the room and declares to her family that she would continue with her honeymoon plan and would be travelling to Paris and Amsterdam alone.

In Paris, Rani instantly connects with Vijaylakshmi (played by Lisa Haydon) who is an aggressively independent young single mother. She has no inhibitions about her drinking habit and her multiple relationships. She speaks a little Hindi and Rani does not know French at all. But language does not become a barrier in the friendship of these two women. They enjoy thoroughly and laugh their hearts out. Rani is delighted to burp (it is considered indecent for girls to burp in India). She is excited to drive at unknown places by looking at the map and gets reminded of being ridiculed by Vijay, her fiancé earlier during her initial driving lessons. She is ecstatic to dance at a pub and continues dancing on the road along with Vijaylakshmi. Interestingly, these two women are poles apart from each other - one a simple Punjabi girl with her innocent charm and very limited knowledge about the world while the other one is a gorgeous promiscuous woman who has gained much experience in her attempt of survival. The beauty of this friendship is that nowhere the director has been judgemental about who is right and who is wrong. Rather it is a kind of sisterhood where the two women complement each other. But the movie does not end in Rani's attainment of this new friendship. She has to fight the battle of her own life and this has been suggested in the movie when she puts in all her strength to hold on to her bag and make the snatcher's effort futile in Paris rather than losing it and crying for help. She succeeds to overcome her own fears whether it is crossing the road or being haunted by the sight of the Eiffel Tower in Paris. It is the beauty of the same Tower that she enjoys later on. She has to mature as an independent woman gaining in experiences of life. Hence she sets off for Amsterdam alone where she meets new people. There, in a hostel, she has to share a room with three men. Quite obviously, with her upbringing as per Indian social codes of conduct, she is desperate to leave that room. Finding no other choice, she prefers to sleep in the hallway. Her roommates (who have not been portrayed as stereotyped rapists) show her respect and leave the entire room to her preferring to sleep in the hallway. Soon Rani becomes their friend and then sharing the room becomes quite natural for her. It is a relation of pure friendship between a woman and three men which has been brilliantly depicted in the movie. Rani's priorities of life change and thus when her ex-fiancé wants to talk to her in Amsterdam, she pays for her own juice and valuing her friendship more chooses to spend time with her room-mates at a Rock Show rather than carrying on the conversation with her fiancé. The audience remains awe-struck that it is the same Rani who was pleading with Vijay earlier to get married to her.

In Amsterdam she gets acquainted with an altogether new world when she goes to a brothel to meet Ruksar (a friend of Vijaylakshmi). Rani learns from her talk with Ruksar that she plays the role of a "man" (conventionally the bread earner as per the patriarchal social code) for her family and earns enough to get her two sisters educated and to arrange for the marriage of another one. The sexuality of Vijaylakshmi and Ruksar are new revelations for Rani (she being brought up with the values of patriarchal society where any kind of expression of sexuality is considered vulgar and a woman's chastity is something to be zealously guarded before marriage). Here Rani finds two women for whom sexuality is a symbol of economic independence and an agency for fulfilling their responsibilities as mother (in case of Vijaylakshmi) and as daughter (in case of Ruksar). Later on Rani gets rid of her own inhibitions and makes the move to kiss Marcello, an Italian chef, whom she finds attractive. The kiss is also prompted by a challenge that Indians are best at everything. She takes up the challenge sportingly and kisses Morcello to prove it. This daring nature of Rani might come as a shock to the Indian viewers. In this context Ratna Kapur's observation regarding sexuality of Indian women seems pertinent: "In India, motherhood, wifehood, domesticity, marriage, chastity, purity, and self-sacrifice constitute the primary features of normative sexuality" (56). Brinda Bose elaborates Kapur's argument that gradually a spirit of challenging normative sexuality is developing and "contemporary controversies around sex/sexuality are proof that sex is no longer seen solely as a negative, contaminating force that needs to be contained, while the re-conceptualization of sexual speech and expression as a right has simultaneously posed a cultural challenge as well" ("When the towel drops"). But in the very same year in which Kapur's article was published, Tamil film actor Khusboo landed herself in the midst of huge controversy for her comment at an AIDS awareness programme that there was nothing wrong with premarital sex provided that it was safe. Ultimately the actor was compelled to apologize for offending the sentiment of Indians. Thus locating the position of women in Indian society is marked by duality. On

the one hand, there are instances of women's liberation; on the other hand, there are the shackles of patriarchal domination.

Coming back to *Queen*, gaining in experiences, Rani turns to be a confident girl aware of her own worth and dignity. Thus after returning to Delhi she musters courage, goes to meet Vijay in his house, gives back the engagement ring to him and puts an end to their relationship. To the utter dismay and shock of Vijay, Rani smiles while telling Vijay about her decision. There is no grudge, no repentance, and no tears in her eyes. It is the smile of a confident woman who has realized her own potential and would never lose her self-respect. It is the smile of liberation; the smile of an emancipated independent woman. *Queen* is the story of a woman who does not need a hero to save her in crisis or console her in her tears. She has the courage to fight alone and be a winner by discovering her strength and potential.

Thus these two movies are brilliant examples of the changing role of woman in the post-colonial Indian socio-cultural scenario. However, there are significant differences in the portrayal of these two women characters. While Rani is confident enough to shirk off the marriage proposal, Sashi being a wife and mother, cannot do so though she earns self-respect and becomes much confident and recognizes self-worth. "Women are not necessarily willing to break away...from institutional frameworks, such as marriage and family . . . the necessary freedom for them is at times not possible" (Jain, *Indigenous Roots of Feminism* 272-4). This becomes starkly evident when Sashi's son gets hurt and she fails to attend him immediately because of her English class. She cries frantically as if she has committed a crime, feels guilty that how she can neglect her family and think about herself. She declares that her priority in life is her responsibility towards her family and not her own happiness. Whether Sashi's coming back is a sign of her ultimate giving in to the patriarchal system or her reverence to Indian values is an issue to ponder over. Whether through Sashi's speech the issue of liberalization is intentionally toned down to cater to the sentiment of the Indian audience which is probably still not prepared for complete emancipation of woman is debatable. We might question - is it so important to learn English to gain in recognition and prove one's worth? Sashi's choice of coming back with her husband can evoke multiple interpretations. We might wonder whether this decision is prompted by her respect towards Indian values and roots or it is the patriarchal ideology that she has internalized all through her life which makes her compromise with her own desires and priorities. "The degree of socialisation of traditional values, the level to which they have been internalised and accepted . . . lack of exposure - all go to dull evaluation of oppressive situations or reaction to them, and many are accepted as normal" (Jain, *Indigenous Roots of Feminism* 280). *Queen*, on the other hand, offers a kind of liberation from this societal trap, where Rani prefers to remain a single woman not requiring a man in her life to make her feel important and provide her with a sense of social security. Both the movies generate thought-provoking questions about the status and role of women in the present Indian society. To quote veteran film director Mrinal Sen " . . . films . . . provoke discussions, cause dissension and agreement, build controversy. This is the area where the discriminating public becomes articulate - airing divergent views and giving various interpretations to life and art. This is where two opinions or more stand sharply divided . . . What is important . . . is not to seek unanimity but to provoke discussion and, in the process, to raise controversy . . ." (48) and thus generate social awareness. Keeping this observation in mind the two movies can be employed as brilliant lenses to see through the multiple layers of the essentially gendered society of present India and the role of woman in it.

Conclusion

To conclude this article, reference to the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition) Bill, 1986 might evoke certain pertinent questions and help us ponder further into the woman question of India. According to this law "depiction in any manner of the figure of a woman, her form or body or any part thereof in such a way as to have the effect of being indecent or of being derogatory or denigrating women or is likely to deprave, corrupt or injure public morality or morals" (Bose 101) is a punishable offence. Flavia Agnes' argument in regard to this bill questions the definitions of "obscenity", "morality" and "indecency" and asserts that "upholding the dignity of women" means turning them to asexual beings (Agnes 138-143). To find a concrete place for women in the Indian society thus seems to be a stupendously difficult task since the position is in flux. There are so many issues entangled and

criticalities involved in identifying a position for women in the present Indian socio-cultural context. The two Bollywood movies chosen in this article showcase the differences in the socio-cultural positions that women find themselves in and evoke several questions in our minds: Does a woman have the right to be happy on her own terms and lead her own life? Can the society stop being judgemental on what she wears or how she moves? Can she be happy in her own achievements? Can she choose to lead a life without the "protection" provided by the patriarchy? Will the exploitation of women, both sexual and emotional, come to an end with women being educated? Can she be really emancipated? The answers to these questions are not easy to be found since they are entangled with multi-layered social issues and gender dynamics.

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They were never wrong…
Masters of Word and Picture about Suffering

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Abstract

To handle physical, mental or existential pain, man resorts to medicine, psychology, religion, philosophy . . . This issue has also been discussed by writers and painters of all epochs. Artists have the advantage though – using the language of art, they can reach the truth about human life which cannot be accessed in a different way.

The departure point for the deliberations about suffering and the sense of debating about it by means of words and pictures is a poem by W. H. Auden "Musée des Beaux-Arts", from which the title quotation is derived. Auden refers to P. Bruegel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus,* which applies to Ovid. In this paper, besides the aforementioned works (Auden, Bruegel; *Metamorphoses*), other paintings by Bruegel as well as the prose by Z. Herbert *The Passion of our Lord Painted by an Anonymous Hand from the Circle of Rhenish Masters* are used, allowing one to reflect on suffering, on the language of art, on making sense of the work in the reception process, and also on the morality of art and the morality of art understanding.

Keywords

literature, painting, word and picture, language of art, reception of art, morality of art, suffering

Introduction

The British philosopher Bertrand Russell once came to the following conclusion: "people suffer so terribly that as many of them as it is possible should be killed to reduce the weight of the suffering to the maximum" (Kołakowski 205). Indeed, if one accepted these provocative words as a solution, suffering – the eternal problem of human beings - would be solved in a radical way. There is a problem though - all would have to be killed. However, for some reasons people do not do that and we know or feel why it happens. Life wants to live, it is certain. But to live means also to suffer.

Human beings have always been trying to handle this most painful aspect of existence called suffering. One of the greatest pessimists among philosophers, Arthur Schopenhauer, does not offer any illusions:

> Constant efforts aiming at eliminating suffering give nothing but just an alteration of its shape. Originally it is lack, poverty, concern about keeping one's life. If someone managed to remove this type of pain, which is very difficult, then automatically the pain would come back in thousands of different forms, depending on age and circumstances: as sexual drive, passionate love, jealousy, envy, hatred, fear, ambition, greed, disease etc., etc. If it cannot appear in any of these shapes, eventually it comes wearing a sad, grey outfit of surfeit and boredom." (Schopenhauer 479)

Asking about the meaning of suffering, similarly to the suffering itself, is a part of our nature, makes our species unique, even though we would probably prefer to avoid this type of uniqueness. Even if Schopenhauer convinced us, we would not stop asking: Does suffering make sense? Can suffering be understood? Is it possible to understand the suffering of another human? Is it possible to help a person who suffers? If suffering is inevitable, what attitude should we have towards it? Rebellion? Resignation? Acceptance?

We look for the answer in religion, science, psychology, philosophy. Also art originates from suffering. Some people rightly claim that art lets us see such aspects of life which usually remain unnoticed. It gives us a chance to obtain knowledge about human beings and the world, which would never be possible to reach in a different way. Art has its own unique language as well, the most capacious language in the world (Łotman). There is a reason for art existing since the moment human beings appeared, even though it does not seem to be indispensable for man to survive, which is the case with food or shelter.

It could be said that the act of art is not finished at the point when an artist puts away a pen or a paintbrush. Literature or paintings, created in a particular epoch, are somehow intentionally addressed to a certain group of people, and usually these works live longer than the historical contexts which released them. Especially when those works relate to universal problems. They function in anthologies of texts, albums or on museum walls, existing in totally new contexts, getting into new interactions, being looked at or read by new recipients. In every such act of reception the work is to some extent co-created by the recipient. However, a painting or a poem tells the recipient only the things which he/she is able to hear because the recipient exists in a particular reality, has a particular inner context, has particular competences, particular experiences.

Let us try to take a look at the question of suffering through the prism of art, through the prism of a few works of literature and painting which interact with each other sometimes more and sometimes less intentionally. It will be only one of the possible perspectives on this issue, resulting from the proposed set of texts. To create a contextual set of works, that is to locate them in a particular context, it means to simultaneously co-decide about the way of their understanding, about the meanings which will be created as a consequence of this combination.

The Old Masters

When the sixteenth century Dutch painter Pieter Bruegel the Elder was painting his famous *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, he was obviously referring to *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. Ovid, as we know, set himself a goal to show changes in the world in a chronological order. He created a literary version of ancient mythology, giving stories about the beginnings and the history of the world, among them a myth about Daedalus and Icarus, a specific character. *Metamorphoses* left a great mark on the whole European culture. What is more, the one referring to Bruegel's painting and also indirectly to Ovid was Wystan Hugh Auden while writing a poem "Musée des Beaux Arts" in 1938. The poet appreciated unusual skills of "The Old Masters" who were trying to present the essence of suffering, and as an example of a perfect work relating to this topic, he pointed to the aforementioned *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus.*

All these works evidently merge together, which means that the artists were intentionally making use of the myth about Daedalus and Icarus in a variety of ways. In this context, however, there is one more work which seems to be worth mentioning, and it interacts with the aforementioned works even more intensively. Its author does not refer to Greek mythology, but also relates to the phenomenon of suffering. To reach his goal the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert, who is the subject of current discussion, in his short prose *The Passion of Our Lord Painted by an Anonymous Hand from the Circle of Rhenish Masters* similarly to Auden reaches out to painting. He analyses a technique of "The Old Master" who depicts Christ's sacrifice, but constructs his text in such a way as to provoke the recipient to reflect on it much more profoundly. Besides the issue of suffering, he is also interested in an artist as someone who tries to express the secrets of human existence, as a recipient who stands in front of a painting and looks at suffering. In other words, Herbert asks about the morality of art, and to be more precise, he asks about the morality of its creation process and the morality of its understanding (Łukasiewicz 61).

Auden and Bruegel

The inspiration and the departure point for the considerations taken up in this paper is the thesis formulated by Auden in the introduction of the poem "Musée des Beaux Arts". The poet claims: "About suffering they were never wrong, / the old Masters: how well they understood / its human position . . ." Firstly, let us make it clear that by saying "The Old Masters" Auden means great painters of the past. According to the Oxford English Dictionary *old master* is "a pre-eminent artist of the period before the

modern; a pre-eminent western European painter of the 13th to 18th centuries". The poet formulates a thought of a general character - "The Old Masters" found a way to depict human suffering by means of painters' expression techniques. To see how Auden justifies his thesis, one can refer to the whole composition:

Musée des Beaux Arts
About suffering they were never wrong,
The old Masters: how well they understood
Its human position: how it takes place
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting
For the miraculous birth, there always must be
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating
On a pond at the edge of the wood:
They never forgot
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse
Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

What is puzzling from the very beginning is the title of the poem: *Musée des Beaux Arts,* that is a museum of fine arts. Museum, a place where various works of art are collected, scientifically analysed and displayed for public viewing. Paintings can be exhibited in many different ways – in a chronological, biographical, geographical, thematic set etc. In Auden's poem we can certainly identify one work because the poet makes reference to a particular name of "The Old Master" and an abbreviated version of the title: *Icarus.* There are two paintings by Pieter Bruegel the Elder which are traditionally considered to take up this mythological topic: *The Fall of Icarus,* which is located in Museum David and Alice van Buuren and *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* which can be seen in Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.[1] At first glance the paintings are alike, but there is one fundamental difference: in the latter one there is no figure of Daedalus who, lying on the ground, turns back and with despair observes the tragedy of his son. We know which painting Auden refers to mostly due to the title of the poem, because in the text itself there is no word about Daedalus.

[1] The newest research indicates that these are not the original works painted by Bruegel (Allart and Currie, 2013).

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, oil on canvas, 73.5 cm × 112 cm, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels (probably copy by an unknown artist of Bruegel's original, perhaps painted in the 1560s).

Auden went to Musée des Beaux Arts in Brussels in 1938 and looked at many works by "The Old Masters", especially the Dutch ones. In the discussed poem, Auden relates to at least two more paintings by Bruegel: *The Massacre of the Innocents* and *The Census at Bethlehem.* The paradox is that such strange combinations, that is the fall of Icarus and miraculous birth next to the pictures of martyrdom can appear only in a museum: "paintings put together not because they successively tell anything like a coherent story but because they all come from the same hand" (Heffernan 138). One can imagine that a poet is standing right now in front of a red museum wall and seeing Bruegels' paintings hanging on the wall, he or she admits with appreciation: yes, about suffering they were never wrong, the old masters . . .

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Massacre of the Innocents*, (copy) 4th quarter of the sixteenth century, 116 cm × 160 cm, Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

The scenes depicted in the works discussed by Auden – the death of a drowning boy, children murdered with cruelty, Mary feeling cold in a crowd of indifferent people – they make us feel that the neutral title of the poem, "Musée des Beaux Arts", sounds a little bit surprising, maybe even provocative and ironic. It is easy to talk about the beauty of a work of art, but it is difficult to see beauty in a drastic death of a child. Aesthetics faces the morality. The juxtaposition of the paintings described by Auden can certainly inspire one to come to general conclusions about painting or suffering, but the poet does not let us forget either: this is only a museum, this is not a real life. Art is artificial. What we see are only visual representations of suffering. Suffering seen through scenes which paradoxically have never taken place in the real world, and if they did happen – they must have looked in a totally different way. Icarus was drowning, but only in an ancient myth. If it is true that Mary came to the census with Joseph, and Herod's army did perform the massacre of the innocents, then neither the first situation nor the other one could have happened in a typical, snow-covered Flemish village. Does it mean then that Bruegel lies? No, this is certainly not what Auden wants to say. On the contrary, the phenomenon of art is, among others, about the artists reaching sometimes the deepest truth about the human being by means of made-up worlds. What is more, sometimes this is the only possible way. Then, the ones who reach the truth are "The Old Masters" of painting. Also, the one who reaches this truth is "The Old Master" Auden. His poem could actually be titled "About Suffering" . . . (Caws 327).

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Census at Bethlehem* (also known as *The Numbering at Bethlehem*), 1566, oil on panel, 116 cm × 164.5 cm, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium in Brussels.

What is then the key to the genius of "The Old Masters of Painting" that "The Old Master of the Word" writes about? They very well understood the position of suffering in human life. The incidents of real life are exactly like the ones from the painting *The Census at Bethlehem* - a miracle happens, and no one

notices it. Someone is opening the window, someone is eating, someone is just walking dully along, someone is skating and playing on a frozen pond, someone is preparing to slaughter a hog . . . Also, it is exactly like from the painting *The Massacre of the Innocents*, a terrible crime does not take place in a great field of glory but in an ordinary village, at the backyard. But, as the poet says, "even the dreadful martydom must run its course anyhow in a corner . . ." Nature is indifferent to human life and is absolutely innocent: torturer's horse scratches its behind on a tree, the dogs go on with their doggy life. The real life is also exactly like in the other painting by Bruegel – *The Procession to Calvary.* One has to take a really close look to notice a figure among a crowd of ordinary people. People busy with their own matters or just looking for cheap emotions. It is the figure that is falling down somewhere under the cross.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Procession to Calvary*, 1564, 124 cm × 170 cm, oil on panel, Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.

Auden's strategy is clear and sophisticated, actually consistent with the rules of rhetorical art. The poet begins with a totally neutral name of a museum in the title of the poem. Such institution is, for example, visited by a person looking for some contact with art, or somebody who is aesthetically shaped or just curious. It can also be someone vain, who thinks that going to museum is in good taste, it gives evidence that one belongs to an elite. Sometimes we go to museum when we are forced, when somebody, for example a teacher, tells us to go there due to educational purposes.

Right after the title, the poet formulates a thesis about "The Old Masters" who paint suffering, and then gradually presents arguments and explains what their artistic craft is all about and simultaneously explains the nature of human suffering. Regardless of the motivation of someone visiting a museum, Auden uses a technique of "The Old Masters" aimed at this visitor. Reading a poem, we "watch" particular pictures, but the poet is the one who decides what we "see". Auden composes the plot, constructs a

coherent vision like a painter, points to details, tells the recipient to look at the various ordinary activities of ordinary citizens engaged in their private matters, thanks to which the indifference of people and the indifference of nature towards human suffering become clear. The poet does not confine himself to the description of one work, but reaches out to components from the whole collection of paintings so that his existential generalization sounds plausible. Just at the end of his deliberations, Auden focuses on a single case of a particular person, known very well from the ancient myth. It is a visual exemplification of the "study". We can see this scene very clearly. The poet performs a brilliant ecphrasis of one of the most famous works by Bruegel. The viewer becomes an unintended witness of not some kind of abstract tragedy but a very particular tragedy, regardless of the reason why he happened to come to this poetic museum.

The key to Auden's genius is that a reader of the poem and a viewer of the work "painted" by the artist is in exactly the same situation as the witnesses of the events in Bruegel's painting. Like the ploughman, who "may have heard the splash and the forsaken cry, but for him it was not an important failure". Is Icarus's drama for those who look at the paintings of "The Old Masters" or those who read Auden's poem a "not important failure" as well? Does art have any kind of power of persuasion? And in a real life? Does the suffering of another man mean also nothing?

Let's leave these questions unanswered for now. We need to stop at *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* for a short moment. As we mentioned, the work relates to *Metamorphoses* by Ovid. This is where ploughman, angler and shepherd come from to enter Bruegel's painting. In the 8th book of the poem we encounter the following scene: "Some angler catching fish with a quivering rod, or a shepherd leaning on his crook, or a ploughman resting on the handles of his plough, saw them, perhaps, and stood there amazed, believing them to be gods able to travel the sky." It is funny that but for the title of the painting, the majority of people would have problems to explain what the artist really depicted. How could we recognize who the legs coming out of the water belong to? "Could we do so without any sign of Daedalus in the picture to guide us, with a setting sun scarcely high enough to melt the wax of high-flying wings, and with flagrantly non-Ovidian ship to lead us off the scent?" (Heffernan 148).

As we see, Bruegel does not paint a simple illustration of Ovid's poem, and he does it intentionally. He interprets the work like painters do, or rather we should call it a reinterpretation of the mythological story. Adam Dziadek rightly claims that the Dutch artist, creating his work "fundamentally changed the paradigm of myth literature" (Dziadek 118), which means he changed the reception of the story about Daedalus and Icarus. He put emphasis on the existential reflection, on the issue of suffering and the indifference towards the death of another person.

The one who also follows this idea is Auden, who expands Bruegel's "narration" and makes it complete. Eventually, he does not give us any illusions: while suffering, man is always lonely, and in reality it is impossible to understand the suffering of another person. Sometimes it is even difficult to notice it. In consequence, one cannot sympathize with somebody who suffers. Unfortunately, human life is subjected to different laws. What we can only do is to be aware of the state of affairs.

What is even worse is that the tragedy of our existence takes place against the backdrop of a beautiful but also morally indifferent nature, which since forever has been functioning in the constant rhythm: "the sun shone as it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green water . . ." (Auden). Between the sun on the horizon and the recipient a real tragedy takes place. One could say: between one indifference and the other one. It is hard to blame the sun, though. What is more terrifying is the human indifference. Or the "expensive delicate ship" which broke the fundamental law of the sea (Heffernan 148; Riffaterre 8). The ship "must have seen something amazing" but despite that, so indifferent it sailed somewhere further, "had somewhere go get to . . ." (Auden). But could it have happened in a different way? The poet knows that this is exactly what the world order is like. And he talks about it in a restrained way, factually, without emotions, which even intensifies the expressiveness of his work.

Between one man and another man there is a precipice which lonely Icarus falls down into. In Ovid's work the one who heard his scream was at least his father. Daedalus in despair cursed his art, found and buried the body of his poor son. Bruegel mercilessly magnifies the intensity of human tragedy, the father is not there, no one will cry at his grave. "The ploughman may have heard the splash, the forsaken cry, but

for him it was not an important failure . . ." (Auden). James A. W. Heffernan rightly notices that the situation of dying Icarus "calls to mind what another dying son famously cried to his father: My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Mark 15:34) (Heffernan 151).

Auden, describing the ship as "expensive" and "delicate", and before that describing the horse as "innocent", exposes his attitude. He gives the recipient a clear sign – I am aware of the fact that it should be different. But the poet is not naive. The sun needs to rise and set, the ship needs to sail – regardless of "miraculous birth", regardless of "something amazing", but also regardless of disaster, despair, regardless of dreadful martyrdom, regardless of death. "No plough stops because a man dies" the folk proverb says, well-known in Bruegel's times[2]. However, we should not forget that both the painter and the poet were the ones who noticed Icarus's tragedy and the ones who talk about it in a very suggestive way. Maybe art does make sense then. Especially when all else fails. The questions still remain open.

Herbert and "Anonymous from the Circle of Rhenish Masters"

Looking for the answers, let us try to approach the problem from another perspective. Let another poet take part in this discussion. The poet who deals with similar issues and, similarly to Auden, makes use of the word – painting relation in a skillful way. I mean Zbigniew Herbert and the poetic prose mentioned in the introduction titled *The Passion of our Lord Painted by an Anonymous Hand from the Circle of Rhenish Masters*. Almost all of the previously discussed works by Pieter Bruegel (*Landscape*, *Census at Bethlehem*, *The Procession to Calvary)* had one characteristic in common, which Auden noticed in his poem. He noticed that the most important individuals (Icarus, Mary, Jesus) were never exposed in those paintings but were always somehow hidden among the hustle and bustle of everyday life. In this context Zbigniew Herbert's proposition looks very interesting. And very tricky. Firstly, let us consider the text:

> *The Passion of our Lord Painted by an Anonymous Hand from the Circle of Rhenish Masters*
>
> They have coarse features, their hands are deft and accustomed to a hammer and nails, to wood and irons. Just now they are nailing to the cross Jesus Christ Our Lord. There's lots to be done, they must hurry to get things ready by noon.
>
> Knights on horseback – they are the props of this drama. Impassive faces. Long lances imitate trees without branches on this hillock without trees.
>
> As we said, the fine craftsmen are nailing Our Lord to the cross. Ropes, nails and a stone for sharpening the tool, are ranged neatly on the sand. There's a hum of activity, but without undue excitement.
>
> The sand is warm, each grain painstakingly depicted. Here and there a tuft of stiffly erect grass and a marguerite innocently white cheering the eye. (Czerniawski 121; translated by Adam Czerniawski)

Herbert describes a painting by an anonymous master, probably created in the 15th century in Northern Europe. The anonymity of the author results from the medieval tradition - an artist as a tool of God. This custom was something very natural at that time and because of this anonymity, we currently witness so many endless discussions on the attribution of origin as far as works of art are concerned. In those days also, an artist was actually not perceived as somebody very different from a craftsman yet – painters worked in guilds. The title of master and a right to open one's own guild was given after a few years of the student's practice. Nowadays, art historians very often call these anonymous authors using a word "master", which is due to the fact that their identity is impossible to establish.

''The Circle of Rhenish Masters" from Herbert's poem is just one of the painters' groups expanding on German lands where art in the 15th and the 16th century was flourishing (the so called *Sondergotik).* The

[2] Another proverb which Bruegel relates to says: "Blade and money need careful hands". On the rock slightly above a farmer we see a pouch and a sword. It could be considered as a reference to Icarus's attitude, his sense of responsibility and an ability to assess the situation in an objective way. However, these aspects of the Greek myth and Bruegel's work are not the subject of this discussion.

dominating topic was religion, and the works were characterised by an unusual precision as far as the details' depiction was concerned – shape, colour, texture etc. This precision was a fundamental rule of the craft, a sign of competence and solidity of the maker (Rzepińska).

Herbert then, being as detail-focused and precise as "The Old Master", painstakingly describes the picture of the Rhenish Master. We are not even sure if the presented work actually exists. It does not matter, though. What draws one´s attention is the fact that in the description (not in the painting!) the most important part is missing - "Jesus Christ Our Lord" being nailed to the cross. In his own way, the poet acts similarly to Bruegel who actually did depict this part but almost completely hid it by covering it with other elements of the show. What then can we see for sure in Herbert's poem?

The poem was divided into four sections and in each of them the work of the Rhenish Master is presented in a slightly different way. We can clearly "hear" at least two kinds of voices. In the first and the third paragraph the narrator speaks about a professional job of "the fine craftsmen" who nail Jesus. In the second and the fourth paragraph the narrator speaks about a professional job of an anonymous painter. The first narrator is like somebody who comes from the times when the painting was created. Deducing from the style of his speech, it is somebody simple and naive (". . . they are nailing to the cross Jesus Christ Our Lord"). It is somebody who understands that the craftsmen from the painting work hard but precisely, they know their profession. Their professionalism evokes acclaim ("There's a hum of activity, but without undue excitement"). The viewer is probably a craftsman himself. He knows these tools; he knows well how to use them. Obviously he probably does not nail people to a cross on an everyday basis, but he definitely understands what hard physical work is. This work requires a specific precision, no matter how difficult conditions and pressure are. He also knows what the effectiveness of this work depends on.

The narrator from the second and the fourth paragraph, however, is somebody more modern. He looks at the painting as carefully as the previous medieval craftsman does, but he sees something totally different. Most of all, he sees a work of art painted in a professional way. In his description he uses a totally different language ("Long lances imitate trees without branches on this hillock without trees"). He notices typical characteristics of Late Gothic art from Northern Europe (". . . each grain painstakingly depicted").

In Herbert's text then, we have two perspectives on time-related reception of the work and two different points of view. When we take a closer look at the particular paragraphs though, just like a person who thoroughly examines every detail of a painting, we will notice that there are even four faces of the narrator. The "old" narrator from the first paragraph says: a lot of things to do, not much time, let's get to work! The "old" narrator from the third paragraph says, though: they are professionals, they know their craft, they will handle it. The "modern" narrator from the second paragraph, however, is somebody who is an expert on art, a person who carries out an emotionless, professional iconographic analysis of the work. Finally, the "modern" narrator from the last paragraph does not act like a critic. A good example is the moment when he is so surprised by the precision of the artist who even reconstructs the individual grains of sand. And he says with irony ("a tuft of stiffly erect grass"; "a marguerite innocently white").

Herbert's tricky idea to look at the painting which might not exist, and examining it from a few perspectives and time frames provokes us to ask many questions. One of the commentators of that piece of writing, Jacek Łukasiewicz, formulated a whole list of questions:

> "How to look at a painting, how to translate it to verbal description? Whose point of view to take? A modern, ordinary viewer, an art historian, or that painting artist or a viewer from that distant epoch? And if it is going to be the viewer from the distant epoch – which one, then? A simple man who looks at a painting in a church or a well-educated, knowing his profession connoisseur? The one who prays in front of the sacred canvas, or the one who only looks at it? And nowadays what can a painting tell us about the then philosophy of life and what that philosophy of life, which we reconstruct based on different sources, will tell us about this painting?" (Łukasiewicz 61)

Most of all, we need to underline that a painting can tell us only things which it can tell us in a particular situation of reception, a particular external context (e.g. other paintings, other writings, knowledge about an epoch, etc.) and also in a particular internal, more personal context (experiences, competences or books a recipient read, etc.). When we look at the painting for the second time and after some time – everything is different. Certainly, however, one can never look at it from the perspective of a simple, medieval man if one is not a simple, medieval man. One cannot look at the painting from the perspective of a religious person if one is an atheist. One cannot also look at the painting from the perspective of connoisseur, being a layman on art. What we can do, however, is to conduct some kind of intellectual and aesthetic experiment. In other words, we can do what Zbigniew Herbert proposed in his prose, that is to take a look at the art work from the perspective of different people. Or, we can just try to formulate conclusions based on our own interpretation of his text. Literature and art in general context, "as we said" (Herbert), gives us made-up worlds from which we can try to reach the truth.

What is more, beyond everything what has been said, it seems appropriate to underline that when one looks at the painting by an anonymous artist "from the Circle of Rhenish Masters", even when one takes a really close look at it, one still does not see, as it is the case with Bruegel's works, the most essential element: the suffering of another man (and simultaneously the suffering of God). All in all, crucified Jesus must have been placed in a central part of this painting! He is not seen by a medieval craftsman, he is not seen by an art historian, he is not seen by a modern man, even though everyone notices the smallest details. We are also the ones who do not see. Herbert, similarly to Auden, tells us to realise this fact, using ecphrasis to achieve his aim. For some reason we look at the work through the prism of aesthetics, not noticing the ethics, through the prism of the profanum, not noticing the sacrum, through the prism of the physical world, not noticing the metaphysical sphere, through the prism of pragmatism, not noticing the aspect of idealism.

Between a reader of Herbert's poem, who is designed to be a viewer of the work by Master Anonym, and a scene depicted in the picture a similar interaction takes place as in the case of *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* by Bruegel. One dimension is the background, "the props": "long lances imitate trees without branches on this hillock without trees" (in Bruegel's vision, as we remember, there was the setting sun). The second dimension is a reader who "stands in front of the painting". In the space between these two dimensions a real tragedy takes place. The tragedy of suffering, human hardship, injustice. In the space between one indifference and the other one. What a paradox: we can clearly see the foreground of the painting (grains of sand, marguerite), we can clearly see the background (knights' lances), in the centre we can even see the torturers, but we cannot see the main element of the whole situation – a suffering victim. The victim, as always, suffering in loneliness. ''My God, my God, why have you forsaken me". . .

Conclusion

Man can see in the picture only the things which he or she can see. Man can understand only the things which he or she can understand. The problem is not suffering, because it is an inseparable component of human nature, and this state of affairs cannot be changed. The problem is a human being who looks at something, but does not see it. And even if that human being sees it, he or she does not understand it. Both in art and in a real life.

Sometimes artists manage to reach the core. This is why, as Jurij Łotman claims, "a man busy with producing, fighting for keeping his or her life, almost always deprived of the most basic things, constantly finds time for an artistic activity, which he or she needs so much" (5). General and universal explorations made by artists of various epochs – painters such as Bruegel, or writers such as Auden or Herbert - are not in contradiction with those of more narrowed nature. All in all, the language of art, as mentioned above, is the most capacious language in the world, and sense always depends on context. If we look at the aforementioned works through the prism of history, in which particular artists lived, these works will gain more different meanings. Bruegel, painting *The Massacre of the Innocents* or *The Procession to Calvary,* tried to say something about a "dreadful martyrdom" of the then inhabitants of the Low Countries in times of Spanish "torturers" occupation. Let us underline the fact that Auden wrote his poem on suffering and indifference right before the outbreak of World War II, when so many people were too blind

to see the oncoming danger and tried to pretend that the problem was not their concern. Herbert, in turn, "painted" his *The Passion* (1969) after Auschwitz. After something like that, as Stanisław Barańczak stated, there is no coming back to heritage. We are "disinherited" forever.

About suffering they were never wrong, the old Masters. How well they understood its human position. . . Certainly not only The Masters of Painting. The Masters of Word as well.

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