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Spis treści

Introduction

Many texts jostle for attention in this collection of articles focused around literary and cultural studies. Ewa Panecka endeavours to establish the significance of the mood of "loss made good" in the poetry of two "poets of nature," namely John Clare and Edward Thomas. Małgorzata Hołda analyses two pieces of gothic fiction: Washington Irving's *The Adventure of the German Student* and Edgar Allan Poe's *The Black Cat*, both of which "execute numerous transgressions in meaning and shackle the text's seeming coherence in different ways." Małgorzata Kowalcze, in '*A Knight of Faith' Looking into the Face of the Other*, presents opinion that William Golding's *The Spire* combines two dissimilar viewpoints of Søren Kierkegaard and Jean Paul Sartre by showing a story of a man, "who undergoes an existential transformation from Kierkegaard's *'knight'* through Sartre's *'being'* arriving at Levinas's *'self'* by means of intricate relationships with other people and a process of painful himself-discovery." Marek Kucharski analyses religious motifs in artistic work of Andy Warhol with special interest in his travesty of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. Monika Mazurek focuses on Victorian period and deals with the issue of the legitimacy of the Church of England, using examples from William Sewell's *Hawkstone*, Elizabeth Missing Sewell's *Margaret Percival* and John H. Shorthouse's *John Inglesant*. Paweł Hamera examines the ways Ireland and the Irish were portrayed in *The Times* at the time of Great Irish Famine. Finally, poetry re-emerges in the essay by Przemysław Michalski's, who investigates the kenotic potential of ekphrastic poetry by investigating three poems, written by Ezra Pound, Gary Snyder and Czesław Miłosz, respectively.

The Editors

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LOSS MADE GOOD: JOHN CLARE AND EDWARD THOMAS ON POETRY AS A HEALING SUBSTANCE

Abstracs

The essay seeks to establish the significance of the mood of 'loss made good' in the poetry of John Clare and Edward Thomas, who are often labelled as 'poets of nature.' Rather than follow the reductive stereotyping, the author attempts to identify the extent of distance between the poet and the persona which reflects Clare's and Thomas's views concerning linguistic and literary representation. For both poetry functions as a healing substance, but each strives to achieve regeneration by employing a distinct creative sensibility. Thomas believes that the word can grasp and control the reality, whereas Clare refuses to ascend into symbol for fear of misreading nature.

Key words: poets of nature, creative sensibility, loss made good, literary and linguistic representation

Any form of categorization in poetry is bound to appear reductive. I will argue that it does not give justice to the author and can be misleading to a reader or student of literature when an introductory note or a handbook classifies a man of letters as 'poet of nature' or 'writer about the country.' In order to demonstrate possible pitfalls of generalizations which rely on thematic affinity I have decided to offer a close reading of two poets of nature: John Clare (1793–1864) and Edward Thomas (1878–1917), who represent different literary backgrounds, with Clare classified as a member of the 'self–taught tradition' and Thomas associated with the five Georgian anthologies edited by Edward Marsh between 1912 and 1922. However, confining the poets to their respective literary circles means committing another error of hasty judgement; although Clare is currently ascribed to the self taught tradition which embraces peasant poets of the unlettered muse, including Stephen Duck, William Cobbett, Robert Bloomfield, George Green and James Hogg, some critics, Kelsey Thornton among them, emphasize the literariness of Clare, locating his diction within a broader foundation and thus challenging reductive stereotyping. Thornton claims that Clare's descriptive and observational skills are "imbedded within more complex literary and cultural practices."[1] Similarly,

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[1] K. Thornton, "The Complexity of Clare", [in:] R. Foulkes (ed.), *John Clare, a Bicentenary Celebration* (Leicester, 1994), pp. 41–56.

though Edward Thomas is counted among the Georgian poets some readers recognize in his voice an original distinct sensibility that distinguishes him from Rupert Brooke, W. H. Davies, Walter de la Mare, D. H. Lawrence, John Masefield or Robert Graves. R. S. Thomas, a poet who acknowledged his own debt to Edward Thomas, observed: "Much of [Edward Thomas's] surface material was the same as Georgians', but his treatment of it was different. A different sensibility was at work."[2] As well as identifying a number of connections between the two 'poets of nature,' I will try to illustrate how they differ in their conceptions concerning linguistic and literary representation. Notwithstanding the differences, they both seem to share the belief in poetry as a healing substance, where loss can eventually be made good.

Both Clare and Thomas present nature with an almost metonymic attention to detail. On first reading their poems seem unromantic, appealing more to the reader's appreciation of verisimilitude than to their faculty of imagination. A closer analysis, however, will reveal that beneath the surface structure of imitating the reality the poems betray a creative sensibility akin to Wordsworth's 'inward eye,' which is well visible in one of the most popular verses by Thomas, *Tall Nettles*:

> Tall nettles cover up, as they have done
> These many springs, the rusty harrow, the plough
> Long worn out, and the roller made of stone:
> Only the elm butt tops the nettles now […]

The poem has to be appreciated for its photographic fidelity to the detail: the local scene is gradually constructed, displaying specific objects (the harrow, the plough, the roller) discarded all over the farmyard, with nature neglected and nettles gathering dust. While Thomas demonstrates a Georgian 'devotion to the concrete,' a melancholy 'forlorn' note can be heard. But the sensation is a fleeting one; eventually the reader feels cheered up and reassured that the scene will forever stay there, regularly visited: "these many springs."[3]

John Clare has a different method of arranging the scene. His *The Beans in Blossom* is a sonnet, where each couplet presents a different little scene staged as part of a 'nature's spectacle:'

> The south-west wind! how pleasant in the face
> It breaths! while, sauntering in a musing pace,
> I roam these new ploughed fields; or by the side
> Of this old wood where happy birds abide,
> And the rich blackbird, through his golden bill,
> Utters wild music when the rest are still. […]

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[2] Quoted in: S. Perry, "In Search of Something Chance Would Never Bring: the Poetry of R. S. Thomas and Edward Thomas", *The Review of English Studies*, New Series, vol. 59(24) (2007), p. 586.

[3] T. Pinkey, *D. H. Lawrence and Modernism* (Iowa City, 1990), pp. 39–44.

However, in this theatre all scenes are interrelated, happening at the same time, with the wind 'breathing pleasantly,' the blackbird singing, the cows tossing the mole hills, and the bees collecting pollen. The actions happen simultaneously but they are also consecutive; when viewed from the perspective of the poet, who is walking out in the field by the wood, delighted by the scent of beans in blossom, they seem to follow a chronological order.[4] Like in Thomas's *Tall Nettles*, in Clare's poem there is a concentration on detail, visible, for example, in the observation that the blackbird is always the last to finish singing: "utters wild music when the rest are still." However, while Thomas presents nature as a static mode, Clare's landscape is always dynamic. In order to illustrate the regularity the analysis shall contrast and compare description in another pair of poems: *Adlestrop* by Thomas and Clare's *Evening Primrose.*

Adlestrop is the most frequently anthologized piece of Thomas's poetry. All readers remember it.

> [...] The steam hissed. Someone cleared his throat.
> No one left and no one came
> On the bare platform. What I saw
> Was Adlestrop – only the name
>
> And willows, willow-herb, and grass,
> And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry,
> No whit less still and lonely fair
> Than the high cloudlets in the sky.
>
> And for that minute a blackbird sang
> Close by, and round him, mistier,
> Farther and farther, all the birds
> Of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire.

When the train draws up at Adlestrop, on a hot day in June, the scene becomes frozen: "Someone cleared his throat. / No one left and no one came / On the bare platform." The landscape looks still, like in *Tall Nettles*, but the setting is specific. The place has a name: 'Adlestrop,' further detailed by "willows, willow-herb, and grass, / And meadowsweet, and haycocks dry." The still nature comes to life with a song of the blackbird which, like in Clare's sonnet, has a leading voice among "all the birds / of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire." And yet the reader has a feeling that nature, though given a fair share of the particular and the descriptive, is not the poem's theme because the focus in *Adlestrop* falls on the speaker. Nature remains still until the speaker comes to grips with his own experience; birds start singing as soon as man assumes control and releases the world from the stupor.

John Clare's *Evening Primrose* presents a reversal of roles: nature acts as she pleases, following her own rhythm, regardless of man's gaze. In the sonnet there is

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[4] R. Lines, "Clare's 'Rough Country Sonnets'", [in:] J. Goodridge (ed.), *The Independent Spirit. John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition* (The John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994), pp. 160–161.

a detailed account of experience which comes from genuine and expert observation gathered by a naturalist:

> When once the sun sinks in the west,
> And dewdrops pearl the evening's breast;
>> Almost as pale as moonbeams are,
>> Or its companionable star,
>> The evening primrose opens anew
>> Its delicate blossoms to the dew;
>> And, hermit-like, shunning the light,
>> Wastes its fair bloom upon the night,
>> Who, blindfold to its fond caresses,
>> Knows not the beauty it possesses […]

The evening primrose is the flower of the night, a hermit who cannot stand the gaze of the day and intruding onlookers. Clare focuses on the fragility and delicacy of the primrose: "dewdrops pearl the evening's breast" when the primrose "opens anew / Its delicate blossoms to the dew." Sadly, the beauty of the primrose is lost, wasted on the night which "knows not the beauty it possesses." The poet creates an ambiguous context: one may either assume that the night, 'blindfold', caresses the flower, or that the primrose lovingly touches the night which is unaware of the flower's gratitude for hiding it so well before the day's gaze. In the poem nature is described in great detail and, unlike in Thomas's *Adlestrop*, she leads her own, independent life, outside man's controlling intrusion.

Having analyzed Thomas's and Clare's modes of description the argument shall concentrate on the ways they employ the persona. It seems that in Thomas's poetry the figure in the landscape is the emanation of the poet's mind, whereas nature reflects, in fact, the poet's nature. For Clare, however, physical landscape is not psychic landscape: his persona is an unintruding observer who distances himself from the scene. In the belief that poetry is not the same as the reality, Clare avoids the risk of misreading nature. In order to illustrate the difference it should be revealing to offer a reading of two poems which have the word 'owl' in the title, Thomas's *The Owl* and Clare's *The Fern Owls Nest*, with the aim of establishing the extent of distance of the persona to the scene.

The first poem was written in February 1915. It is a monologue of a soldier who was lucky enough to survive the battle, maybe about Thomas himself.

> […] Then at the inn I had food, fire, and rest,
> Knowing how hungry, cold, and tired was I.
> All of the night was quite barred out except
> An owl's cry, a most melancholy cry
>
> Shaken out long and clear upon the hill,
> No merry note, nor cause of merriment.
> But me telling me plain what I escaped
> And others could not, that night, as in I went.

> And salted was my food, and my repose,
> Salted and sobered, too, by the bird's voice
> Speaking for all who lay under the stars,
> Soldiers and poor, unable to rejoice.

Hungry, starved, cold and exhausted, the soldier "had food, fire and rest" at an inn, and temporarily seemed to have regained control over his life, trying to separate himself from the horrible experience: "All of the night was quite barred out." The persona's 'comfortable numbness' becomes, however, disturbed by the voice of an owl: "an owl's cry, a most melancholy cry." The cry of the owl is like projection of the subconscious, 'the uncanny' sense of guilt; he escaped while other soldiers could not. The persona loses self confidence: the voice of the bird makes his "food and repose salted and sober." Nature's voice is indeed the poet's voice, a symbolic state of the persona's mind.

Clare's poems reveal a very different relation of man and nature. The persona in *The Fern Owls Nest* is 'the weary woodman,' who is 'rocking' burdened by a bundle of wood and hears the fern owl cry. To him, the voice does not carry any symbolic connotations. The bird 'whews' and 'wizzes,' flying over the head of the woodman who seems to be unaffected by the commotion and 'tramples near' the nest, which is hidden among heather and thorn. He goes on with his own routine, letting the fern owl lead her life as she pleases.

> [...] He goes nor heeds he tramples near its nest
> That underneath the furze of squatting thorn
> Lies hidden on the ground and teasing round
> That lonely spot she wakes her jarring noise
> To the unheeding waste till mottled morn
> Fills the red East with daylight's coming sounds
> And the heath's echoes mocks the herding boys

The persona is just an element of the scene while the bird remains in focus. Rodney Lines aptly comments: "Clare's vision of nature [...] embraced the simultaneousness of what he saw and the interconnectedness of everything combined with a feeling of movement itself is a product of a poet who experienced and felt the countryside, rather than the eighteenth-century rural observers like Thomson that he had first started with."[5] Like in all Clare's poems, nature is dynamic; a lot happens 'in the crowded heath.' The reader has to appreciate how much the poet knows about fern owls, about their song that can be heard only during the night: "she wakes her jarring noise / To the unheeding waste till mottled morn / Fills the red East with daylight's coming sounds," and about their nestling routine. Fern owls do not nest on trees because their fingers are too short and too weak to embrace branches: they lay eggs on the ground.

Thomas's speaker is sure that language can represent reality; though occasionally he displays insecurity of perception, like in *Adlestrop*, the crisis of

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[5] Lines, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

subjectivity is overcome and he regains control over experience and nature ('I remember,' 'I saw'). In Thomas's poems nature is the poet's nature, the persona is the poet himself "secure in his ability to handle experience in verse."[6] For Clare, however, a landscape cannot find a literary representation in verse unless it is related to the perceiver's knowledge, or memory.[7] The difference between the poets shall be further explored through a close reading of Thomas's *Words* and Clare's *Song*.

> Out of us all
> That make rhymes,
> Will you choose
> Sometimes –
> As the winds use
> A crack in the wall
> Or a drain,
> Their joy or their pain
> To whistle through –
> Choose me,
> You English words?
>
> I know you:
> You are light as dreams,
> Tough as oak,
> Precious as gold,
> As poppies and corn,
> Or an old cloak:
> Sweet as our birds
> To the ear […]

The poet humbly addresses words, imploring that they should choose him rather than others who 'make rhymes.' The context reminds the reader of Ted Hughes's *Thought Fox*, where writing poetry is likened to capturing wild animals. In *Words* the poet is not a hunter for words; he is himself hunted while words play 'hide and seek' with him; in fact, he becomes a crack in a wall, a drain, a vehicle which words may choose to travel by, loaded with pain and joy. Words live their own life: the poet compares them to nature, to oak, poppies, birds and rose for they possess nature's attributes: they are 'sweet to the ear' and 'tough as oak,' old as hills and 'worn new,' young as streams. Words live close to man:

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[6] R. Leiter, "On Edward Thomas", *The American Poetry Review*, 12(4) (1983), p. 43.

[7] P. Chirico, "Writing Misreadings: Clare and the Real World", [in:] J. Goodridge (ed.), *The Independent Spirit. John Clare and the Self-Taught Tradition* (The John Clare Society and The Margaret Grainger Memorial Trust, 1994), p. 129.

[...] Strange and sweet,
Equally,
And familiar,
To the eye,
As the dearest faces
That a man knows [...]

Thomas has English words in mind: he places his scene in specifically English settings, surrounded with "sweetness from Wales, from Wiltshire and Kent, and Herefordshire." The poet wants to be "fixed and free in a rhyme," trusting that words can represent reality. When he announces: "I know you," it reads like his manifesto, a declaration of Thomas's poetic creed.

In order to illustrate that he "believes what he preaches[8]" the reader should turn to the poem *Digging:*

[...] Odours that rise
When the spade wounds the root of tree,
Rose, currant, raspberry, or goutweed,
Rhubarb or celery;

The smoke's smell, too,
Flowing from where a bonfire burns
The dead, the waste, the dangerous,
And all to sweetness turns. [...]

The poet 'thinks with scents,' which brings to mind T. S. Eliot's 'smell a thought' and 'think a rose' from his essay about metaphysical poets.[9] "The dead, the waste, the dangerous" are burnt out and they come back in "smoke's smell" which turns into sweetness of a new life, "the fire and the rose are one." Robert Leiter points out another literary influence, of Seamus Heaney, who also wrote a poem entitled *Digging*: "There is the same [as in Thomas] need in Heaney to possess the earth, his past, using words as a fixative.[10]" In the final stanza of his poem *I Never Saw That Land Before* Thomas declares:

[...] I should use, as the trees and birds did,
A language not to be betrayed;
And what was hid should still be hid
Excepting from those like me made
Who answer when such whispers bid.

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[8] A. Easthope, *Englishness and National Culture* (London, 1999), p. 182.

[9] *Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot on Tradition, Poetry, Faith and Culture*, ed. F. Kermode (New York, 1975).

[10] Leiter, *op. cit.*, p. 45.

The poet wants to be faithful both to the language and to the land, the whisper of nature would be betrayed if rendered in words which sounded false and inadequate.

Unlike Thomas, John Clare is sceptical about the extent of literary and linguistic representation. In *The Fern Owls Nest* the woodman was indifferent to the bird, he nearly trampled her nest. What the reader knows about the fern owl he learns from the poet himself, who demonstrates an encyclopaedic competence of a naturalist. For Clare, in order to be fully realized, a landscape or a natural scene has to be associated with some linguistic or other cognitive context, otherwise it will be ignored, meaningless to the perceiver and the reader, like the fern owl making no difference to the woodman. The same pattern can be seen in Clare's *Song* [I peeled bits of straws]:

> I peeled bits of straws and I got switches too
> From the gray peeling willow as idlers do,
> And I switched at the flies as I sat all alone
> Till my flesh, blood, and marrow was turned to dry
> bone.
> My illness was love, though I knew not the smart,
> But the beauty of love was the blood of my heart.
> Crowded places, I shunned them as noises too rude
> And fled to the silence of sweet solitude.
> Where the flower in green darkness buds, blossoms,
> and fades,
> Unseen of all shepherds and flower-loving maids –
> The hermit bees find them but once and away.
> There I'll bury alive and in silence decay.
>
> I looked on the eyes of fair woman too long,
> Till silence and shame stole the use of my tongue:
> When I tried to speak to her I'd nothing to say,
> So I turned myself round and she wandered away. […]

Song treats about pains of unreturned love. The poet employs nature to idle uses: he peels bits of straws and makes willow switches in order to chase flies. He can find solace only in the solitude of his own mind; the green flower he is talking about is not part of nature but acts as a symbolic representation of the poet's own, isolated world "unseen of all shepherds and flower-loving maids." The communication isolation is rendered in the images of darkness, silence and decay: 'flower in green darkness buds, blossoms and fades,' 'bury alive,' 'silence decay.' 'Crowded places' are contrasted with self-contained 'sweet solitude,' where the poet, mute, isolates himself from the outside world. There is alienation and failure of communication here, physical landscape is not psychic one: for Clare, life is not fully realized until it finds expression in poetry. The poet cannot cope with impossibility of linguistic and literary representation: "I looked on the eyes

of fair woman too long / Till silence and shame stole the use of my tongue: / When I tried to speak to her I'd nothing to say." The speaker could not express his love, he only 'sent sights' behind the woman and 'walked to his cell,' which aggravated his sense of isolation. The declaration from the final part of the poem: "My ballroom the pasture, my music the bees, / My drink was the fountain, my church the tall trees" recalls Thomas's *Words*, where being faithful to the language is defined as being faithful to the land. In fact in *Song* the poet faces a crisis of faith, which Paul Chirico, referring to another poem by Clare entitled *Perplexities*, calls 'the response of excessive communication isolation.[11]'

In the poetry of Edward Thomas such occasional moments of creative crisis are always overcome: his vision implies a synthesis of nature and man. When subjective perception achieves a symbolic dimension the poet regains control over his verse and the world. Thomas's vision accentuates the wholeness and not separation between the sublime beauty of creation and the ordinary, mundane reality, which is well illustrated in *As the Team's Head Brass.* The poem betrays Thomas's affinity with the style of Robert Frost, whose influence has been long debated. To me, the verses recall Frost's *Mending Wall*, a monologue of a farmer who is in conflict with his neighbour. In Thomas's poem the exchange between the poet and the farmer is written in the language of the reader, a casual chat. Their worlds meet when the ploughman returns after each round and asks a question or makes an observation while the poet either answers or comments. As always, in Thomas's poetry individual perception acquires a broader, symbolic dimension. The poet is sitting among the boughs of the fallen elm which has not been taken away because there is no one around who could do it. The ploughman's mate was killed in the war on the night of the blizzard, the same one that felled the elm. The natural (the external) and the human (the internal) come together in the painful moment. The poet says: "I should not have sat here. Everything would have been different. For it would have been another world." Why does he regret having sat there? Perhaps if he had not he would not have learnt that many people from the village had gone to the war and quite a few lost their lives. Still, the ploughman seems to believe that there is harmony in the world, even if we are unable to see it: "Ay, and a better, though / if we could see all all might seem good." After the ploughman's conclusion the poet's sense of control over the reality returns: the lovers who had disappeared into the wood in line two of the poem 'came out of the wood again,' the horses resumed their round, the poet stood there 'watching the clods crumble.' There is no distinction between the local truth, the life of the village, and the eternal truth, the life of the elm tree or rather its death which recalls man's. Although there is a momentary hesitation in the persona: ('I should not have sat here'), he concludes the poem with a sense of order regained.

The poetic vision of Clare seldom finds a reconciliation between the human and the natural, which can be observed, for example, in his poem *Vision.* The poem is full of hiatuses, contradictions, with the poet torn between dramatic, ultimate choices. The spiritual is opposed to the physical or the sensuous, but

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[11] Chirico, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

the poet enjoys neither; he lost 'the love of heaven above' while the 'lust of earth' he 'spurns.' He cannot count on heavenly or earthly love, but he finds 'heaven's flame.' As 'loveliness grows in him' the poet boldly declares himself 'the bard of immortality.' In his proud rejection of all, heaven, hell and earth, the speaker seems to have become larger than life, a prophet or spiritual leader, a bard of immortality.

> I lost the love of heaven above,
> I spurned the lust of earth below,
> I felt the sweet of fancied love,
> And hell itself my only foe.
>
> I lost earth's joys, but felt the glow
> Of heaven's flame abound in me,
> Till loveliness and I did grow
> The bard of immortality. […]

In Clare's vision the human is not the natural, to the poet the earth is 'but a name.' While Thomas insists on the wholeness of his vision, Clare seems to believe that life and art are two distinct domains. When in his other poems nature is the fixing centrality which the poet refuses to see as symbolic because tangible existence is not eternal truth, in *Vision,* enlightened by the 'eternal ray' he recalls a trumpet of prophecy, a Shelleyan 'unacknowledged legislator of the world,' speaking 'in every language upon earth / on every shore, o'er every sea.' Unlike Shelley, however, Clare does not compare himself to or identify with west wind, with nature. To him the poet is the bard of immortality, free and eternal.

"Loss made good" is the title and initial assumption of this essay. Characteristically, the poems selected for the analysis: Thomas's *Tall Nettles*, *As the Team's Head Brass*, *The Owl* or Clare's *Song and Vision*, all treat about a sense of loss. The loss means losing friends, companions, or a beloved woman. It may also involve nostalgic contemplation of the days long gone. The loss can relate to the persona's or the speaker's sense of perceptive or creative crisis, like in Thomas's *Adlestrop* or Clare's *The Fern Owls Nest.* Each of the two poets, consequently, finds solace according to his own conception of linguistic and literary representation: Thomas believes in the redemptive power of words (*Digging*, *Words*) and Clare consistently refuses to link the physical with the psychic landscape, letting nature lead her own life, undisturbed or undiscovered by the persona (*Evening Primrose*, *The Beans in Blossom*). Thomas makes loss good by asserting verbal control over experience while Clare achieves the same goal by avoiding ascent to a symbol.

Both Clare and Thomas were complex, sensitive men of delicate if neurotic personalities. Clare spent twenty seven years of his life in an asylum after his mind gave way under stress and disappointment connected with an unfavourable reception of his poems. Edward Thomas died young, killed by the blast of a shell at the Battle of Arras in 1917. John Clare's asylum was a blessing to his weary mind; though confined, the poet could wander about the countryside, was treated kindly and with respect, and encouraged to write poetry. Edward Thomas gave up reviewing poetry, the occupation which he hated and which cost him a spell of

depression. When he enlisted it turned out that the war was his 'macabre blessing in disguise.' Under the threat of death, his own and his companions', he started writing poems.[12] Loss was made good, not only in poetry, but also in the poets' lives.

The essay will be concluded with personal confessions of Clare and Thomas, where the poets reveal bouts of melancholy, a sense of isolation, introversion and self-pity; one almost feels that perhaps they would not have wished the verses to see light and betray their author's frankness of self-exploration. Or perhaps private loss was 'made good' when painful emotions found their way to poems? Here is a fragment of *I Am* by John Clare:

> I am – yet what I am, none cares or knows;
> My friends forsake me like a memory lost:
> I am the self-consumer of my woes –
> They rise and vanish in oblivious host,
> Like shadows in love's frenzied stifled throes
> And yet I am, and live – like vapours tossed [...]

The language of the poem is direct. The poet, who is confined to an asylum, forsaken by friends, by his dearest, a 'self-consumer of his woes,' dreams of a place where he could abide with God, in a shelter which recalls sweet dreams of his childhood, with grass and the vaulted sky. It is a very personal poem, written by a very different Clare, a man who still tries to make loss good, hoping he can find relief in death, 'untroubling and untroubled':

> [...] I long for scenes where man hath never trod
> A place where woman never smiled or wept
> There to abide with my Creator, God,
> And sleep as I in childhood sweetly swept,
> Untroubling and untroubled where I lie
> The grass below – above the vaulted sky.

Edward Thomas also wrote autobiographical poems, of which particularly sincere were those about his father, whom he feared and shunned.[13]

> P. H. T.
> I may come near loving you
> When you are dead
> And there is nothing to do
> And much to be said.

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[12] M. Hollis, *Now All Roads Lead to France: The Last Years of Edward Thomas* (London, 2011).

[13] In the letter to Robert Frost Thomas complained that his father treated him cruelly. Quoted in Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 603.

> To repent that day will be
> Impossible
> For you and vain for me
> The truth to tell. [...]

It takes courage to admit hatred towards one's father, openly declaring that the feeling will not go before he passes away. Here loss is made good by the poet's uncompromising honesty, his direct confession of intimate and painful traumas.

I intended to demonstrate how Edward Thomas's and John Clare's poetry can act as a healing substance. Edward Thomas believes in the power of words which can grasp, control, and ultimately shape reality. His own career as a poet turned out to be a macabre blessing in disguise; although by writing poems he relieved his troubled mind of mundane concerns, his voice was soon silenced by the blast of a shell. John Clare believed that when the moment of the poem is over, life will go on. According to him, though art is not life, observation and appreciation of nature can heal a weary heart.

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Odzyskując to, co utracone: John Clare i Edward Thomas o poezji, która leczy

Streszczenie

Tematem eseju jest cierpienie jako impuls kreacji w poezji Johna Clare'a i Edwarda Thomasa, autorów należących do różnych tradycji literackich. Clare zaliczany jest do „poetów-samouków", a Thomas reprezentuje nurt gregoriański. Choć używają zupełnie innych środków wyrazu, często określa się ich po prostu jako „poetów natury". Celem autorki jest analiza odmiennych sposobów kreacji świata rzeczywistego (czy też naturalnego) w poezji Clare'a i Thomasa, która zakłada, że cierpienie osobiste może być inspiracją dla procesu twórczego.

Słowa kluczowe: poeci natury, wrażliwość percepcji, cierpienie jako impuls twórczy, świat naturalny a poetyckie środki wyrazu

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AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE DARK: DEATH, GUILT, RESPONSIBILITY, AND THE QUESTION OF NORMALCY IN W. IRVING'S *THE ADVENTURE OF THE GERMAN STUDENT* AND E. A. POE'S *THE BLACK CAT* – A DECONSTRUCTIVE READING

Abstract

Washington Irving's short story "The Adventure of the German Student" and Edgar Allan Poe's "The Black Cat" express psychological complexity of such categories as death, guilt, or responsibility. Both narratives are imbued with Gothic elements such as imaging of emotional and intellectual disorders, supernatural phenomena, ominous atmosphere and others. Merging real and unreal elements, what is factual and what is imagery, opens both texts on the multiplicity of meanings. The aim of this article is an analysis of the gothic schemata and the concomitant themes of death, guilt and responsibility in the two stories, in the light of deconstructive criticism.

Key words: death, guilt, normalcy, Irving, Poe, deconstructive criticism

The pervasive themes of death and guilt, responsibility and aberrations from the states of normality unite the two significant examples of gothic fiction in American literary history: Washington Irving's *The Adventure of the German Student* and E. A. Poe's *The Black Cat*. As classic instances of stories which thematically approach and also cross the threshold of the dark, the darkness of human nature, the two narratives yield interesting results in a textual analysis which deploys the post-structuralist criticism and makes use of deconstructive tools. The rich gothic imagery in Irving's and Poe's texts causes the real and the unreal to merge. What is factual seems uncertain, what is regarded as normal undergoes an immediate deprecation. Though equally involving, the two stories execute numerous transgressions in meaning and shackle the text's seeming coherence in different ways. The first focuses on blurring the boundary between morality and immorality, the second thwarts the frontier between life and death. Both, however, centre on undercutting the firmness of the demarcating lines between the acceptable/the normal and the unthinkable/abnormal, as a result of which the covert meanings surface and subvert the reader's immediate response, thus disturbing the obviousness of an interpretative process.

Whereas Poe's story shows the mind enslaved by corrupt morality, Irving's narrative evokes a vision of preponderance, which begets a humanistic aporia; the subconscious creating the apotheosis of an absolute, unconditional love entangled in a wretched reversal of the cause-and-effect logic. The former, focusing on the absurd and the immoral, delves into the unclear frontiers between life and death. In the later, vigilance becomes the core of the character's tragic downfall; the fragile barriers between the conscious and the subconscious, the human and the inhuman collapse. The deployment of threshold shown in several transgressions in motifs and the lexical texture in Poe's story not only attests to Derrida's propounding of the untrustworthiness of language. Derrida's own formal and stylistic patterning in his philosophical writings also displays a sense of edginess. Comparing Derrida's philosophical discourse and Poe's language of prose, Jodey Castricamo makes an interesting commentary on the use of the various thresholds in Derrida's philosophical writings and Poe's prose, which form a particular totality:

> The notion of threshold is important since it draws attention to the function of a border.
> But it is also significant because it gives us insight into a writing practice which produces what might be called a "borderline" subject. By staging a radical resistance to any rigorous determination of borders […] while continuing to trace along their edges, Poe and Derrida can be considered as *writing on the threshold.*[1]

Washington Irving's *The Adventure of the German Student*, being a classic example of an early horror story in the long history of gothic literature in America, generates an edgy amalgamation of idioms: allegory, and the uncanny, the unnatural and the realist. Its textual fiber, replete with gothic imagery, entreats a remonstration of the definite meaning and sharply demarcated lines of the binary opposed pairs of entities. Elements of gothic setting, rendition of the theme of fiendish enslavement of the human soul, as well as the questions of normalcy and responsibility the text poses, analyzed from the perspective of the narrative's structural and linguistic patterning, give rise to a sense of the narrative's inconsistence and susceptibility to continual rearrangement. Irving's narrative fuses the esoteric and the real, the common and the paranormal in several ways, the full discussion of which would exceed the limits of this essay. Thus, I will focus on just some selected aspects by means of which it is done: characterization, plot and the narrative voice.

Irving's story strikes with a seeming simplicity. Its protagonist Wolfgang Gottfried, a raucous young German student, can be seen as a metaphor for a despicable trial of human goodness and psychological rectitude. While the story progresses, his boisterous attitude to life is violated and finally defeated. Typically of gothic fiction, the story opens on a stormy night. It is the time of the French revolution when Wolfgang meets in Paris a dream-like female creature, a beauty, the image of whom, strangely enough, haunts his mind even before it

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[1] C.J. Castricano, *Cryptomimesis: The Gothic and Jacques Derrida's Ghost Writing* (Quebeck, 2001), p. 97.

reveals its malign signification. He finds her in the most outrageous milieu, close to a guillotine run down with blood. In no way would that produce a startling effect, had it not been for the least expected dénouement. The woman is admitted into Wolfgang's lodgings. There the plea of the everlasting love is uttered. In the morning the woman is found dead. The image of her head on the floor freezes the young lover; the figure of the woman is not a living body, but a most repugnant corpse. Most evidently Wolfgang's soul is captive to a demon.

An immediate query which comes to mind, taking into account the oddity of the story's anticlimax, concerns the state of being of the female character; is she a ghost or is she real? Ironically enough, Irving provokes us to view her as a human being only to close the storyline with a sudden volta – the female is an object of the most hideous fabrication, a phantasm. Resultantly, the text undermines the supposedly obvious oppositions of sum and substance, the tangible and the otherworldly. The etherealized love is mocked, the woman belongs both to an earthly order and to the supernatural. The solidity of the barrier between life and death is destroyed. The seeming docility of the female character, her perceptible submissiveness, are instantaneously questioned; the malicious, resistant side of the soul surfaces whence the acquiescence of the female's mental framework, the reader feels safe about, is deconstructed.

At this point, another pervasive feature of Irving's discourse emerges as significant. Characteristically for gothic fictions, Irving presents two realities: the surface reality and the reality beneath it. Wolfgang's insane excitement causes him to project his fantasy, imagining the woman to be alive, whereas he is embracing a dead body. This represents the workings of a demented mind, and the destruction of sane, reasonable conduct. The text gives us clues that Wolfgang clings to a reality which is not there. He asks the woman about the place where she lives, and on receiving the blood-freezing answer: "in the grave," he does not react in an expected way, remaining intoxicated by the woman's beauty. The paleness of her face, the oddity of her expression, the spine-chilling look of a person who was guillotined, convey no meaning to him. Likewise, the surprise on the face of the old portress who witnesses Wolfgang's malady – an act of dragging of the woman's dead body to his room does not incite him to abandon the cause of his malady. Wolfgang engages in the objectionable theories of his time. From the beginning of the story his mind is shown as impaired. Interestingly, his suffering from an obsessive indulgence in fantasizing about an ideal woman and ideal love seems to preclude the final mental dementia. A case can be made, however, for an inextricable paradox in the narrative's evocation of normalcy and aberrant psychological states. An impasse afflicts the thematically treated sanity and madness as the story draws the reader's attention to the fact that Wolfgang was sent to Paris for a change to ease his tortured mind. Ironically, the alteration of his psychical composure is contested by the very place which is expected to bring relief. This plunges us into the underside of the character's consciousness. Does the novelty of the milieu affect the insane mind or does it appropriate the past and surfaces what was hidden? An unanswerable query arises; the narrative seems to suggest a rather facile distinction between the supposed past clarity of the mind

and the present psychic imbalance, which is suggestive of a lack of the radical opposition it propounds.

A deconstructive approach to Irving's text seeks to show that apart from the internal contradictoriness in character molding, the text's explicitness and coherence are also never complete. On the level of structure and the use of the narrative voice, the story shows significant inconsistencies. For instance, while delineating the morose and awesome atmosphere of Paris in the time of the Revolution, Irving breaks up the last sentence of the first paragraph abruptly, and ends it with a sudden intrusion of the first person, unnamed narrator, to the effect of discontinuing the univocal narration: "the loud claps of thunder rattled through the lofty narrow streets – but I should first tell you something about this young German".[2] By the same token, the ending of the story posits the least expected fissure in narration; the omniscient narrative is resumed and then it is further destabilized by a somewhat artificial incorporation of an unanticipated dialogue between unnamed characters, two gentlemen of a wholly unknown provenience: "Here the old gentleman with the haunted head finished his narrative. 'And is this really a fact' said the inquisitive gentleman. 'A fact not to be doubted,' replied the other. I had it from the best authority. The student told it me himself. I saw him in a mad-house in Paris".[3] Here the narrative generates a whirlpool of the supposed credibility and incredibility of the narrated events, as the language of the passage dismantles the uniformity of significance and impedes the reliability of the narrative voice. In as much as the sheer simplicity in assessing the first person narrator as haunted astounds us, the immediacy of the implication of the believability, we take cognizance of, revolts against itself. The storyteller is the man with a haunted head and, most shockingly, the insane student is considered to be the best authority. Additionally, the supposed inquisitiveness of the listener narrows down to a question of utmost plainness, "And is this really a fact?".[4] Paradoxically, the laconic reply, "a fact not to be doubted"[5] reverberates ominously and magnifies the effect of distrust. The imminence of the seemingly differing entities, 'haunted' and 'rational,' fact and doubt, forefronts the breaching of the sane and the insane. Resultantly, the story's text unleashes other meanings and further acknowledges the deconstructive premise that language defies the translucence of its explicatory function. This evidently subscribes to Derrida's post-structuralist dictum; as Abrams notices: "[He] proposes the alternative that we deliver ourselves over to a free participation in the free-play of signification opened up by the signs of the text".[6] Suggesting meanings and immediately provoking questions about their edges, the text of Irving's story releases senses which shake the surface or

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[2] W. Irving, "The Adventure of the German Student", [in:] *Fifty Great American Short Stories* (New York, 1964), p. 1.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 6.

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] M. H. Abrams, "The Deconstructive Angel", [in:] D. Lodge and N. Wood. *Modern Criticism and Theory, A reader* (London & New York, 2000), p. 246.

univocal interpretation. Is the text then inherently deceptive? Does it open itself to misrepresentation? The multifarious production of the text's meanings puts the reader in the position of a participant of an extremely liberating reading process, which allows fabrication and fiddling, but more importantly, involves the reader in the reading/writing of senses which never seem to finalize.

There are no doubt good reasons to see Irving's and Poe's narratives, though separated in time, as not only parallel in tone, but also in their deployment of gothic elements which result in unveiling the texts' subdued meanings. The amalgamation of allegory and surrealism, the merger of the lexical and emotive uncertainty, which help uncover the flimsiness of the barriers between the normal and paranormal, the sane and the insane in Irving's story are concordant with the mixture of mystery and psychopathology in Poe's story. "The Black Cat" shows the indefiniteness of contours of the human and animalistic, the normal and the aberrant. It is a story of moral transgression and perverseness, docility and belligerence, sanity and madness. It offers a classic, psychological study of man's moral decline, vulnerability to unreasonable, brutal deeds which surmount the controllable, sane mind. Being a product of the author's rich imagination, yet constrained by the need for a disciplined organization of the images of the most ghastly inhumane drives into a cohesive discourse, the narrative yields the deconstructionist perspectives on the multifarious nature of writing and meaning, as well as the self-referentiality of narrative and its univocal character.

As Marcus Cunliffe notices in a brief presentation of the substance of Poe's short stories, he "hardly differs from the mass of sensational writers who used the trappings of the Gothic Novel"[7], and yet what distinguishes him is "the quality of intelligence and self-awareness".[8] Drawing on Baudelaire's succinct definition of the essence of Poe's gothic narratives, "Absurdity installing itself in the intellect, and governing it with a crushing logic," Cunliffe further elucidates Poe's excellence, singling out an aspect which will be of import in discerning the author's use of language patterns, both capturing a unique experience and expressing the elusiveness which is its intrinsic feature: "Though the ghastliness is occasionally overdone, it is made all the more nightmarish by the measured deliberation with which it is unfolded"[9]. Poe's use of language consists essentially in combining what is normally distinct, and making distinct what is normally commingled, the result of which is that the conventional concept of reality is questioned. Poe's narratives create a form of communication which expresses an absurd reality, the form in which commonplace distinctions are eliminated.

The opening lines of Poe's "The Black Cat" draw attention to an act of writing and the notions of meekness and violence, sanity and madness, logic and illogic, which the text deconstructs. The beginning is a scene of writing, embedding the scene of murder; the self-effacing first person narrator, the story's infamous protagonist, plunges us into a string of ghastly events, whence employing an

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[7] M. Cunliffe, *The Literature of the United States* (Harmondsworth, 1970), p. 74.

[8] *Ibid.*

[9] *Ibid.*, p. 75.

unassuming position, both construing the horror and questioning the wickedness of what the storyline unveils. Resultantly, the preordained belittling of the evil nature of the most hideous events rouses the question of the narrative's credibility since the reader faces an enfeeblement of the most expected response of disgust and uneasiness to the shocks and distastefulness the narrative offers. At the story's outset the narrator importunes a stylish reluctance, strengthening the sensational effect of the narration: "For the most wild, yet most homely narrative which I am about to pen, I neither expect nor solicit belief. Mad indeed would I be to expect it, in case where my very senses reject their own evidence. Yet, mad I am not – and very surely do I not dream. But to-morrow I die, and to-day I would unburden my soul".[10]

Not only does the narrative juxtapose words like 'wild' and 'homely,' but effectively reduces the boundary between these opposite entities. Furthermore, it diminishes the distinct character of 'mere' and 'household' in the subsequent passage, by immediately following and opposing these by 'terrified,' 'tortured' and 'destroyed.' Such a design effects a linguistic instability and a sense of quandary; is this a narrative of horror and atrocity, or is this a story of a familiar, domesticated milieu, though tinted with some bizarre, vile exceptionalities. The narrator continuously disavows extraordinariness, recants the uncommon:

> My immediate purpose is to place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events. In their consequences, these events have terrified – have tortured – have destroyed me. Yet I will not attempt to expound them. To me they presented little but horror – to many they will seem less terrible than baroques. Hereafter, perhaps, some intellect may be found which will reduce my phantasm to the common-place – some intellect more calm, more logical, and far less excitable than my own, which will perceive, in the circumstances I detail with awe, nothing more than an ordinary succession of very natural causes and effects.[11]

The scene of writing, framing the story of a murder of an innocent animal, takes on an overtly confessional note; the narrator externalizes his self-judgment, disclosing the nature of his deed:

> The fury of a demon instantly possessed me. I knew myself no longer. My original soul seemed, at one, to take its flight from my body; and a more than fiendish malevolence, gin-nurtured, thrilled every fiber of my frame. I took from my waistcoat-pocket a pen-knife, opened it, grasped the poor beast by the throat, and deliberately cut one of its eyes from the socket! I blush, I burn, I shudder, while I pen the damnable atrocity.[12]

Odd as it may seem, the verbal code for acts of murdering and writing is parallel, the two words expressing the meaning of writing and killing stem from the same root; a penknife is used in an act of bestiality and it is bestiality which is

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[10] E. A. Poe, "The Black Cat", [in:] R. DiYanni (ed.). *Literature, Reading Fiction, Poetry, Drama and the Essay* (New York, 1990), p. 77.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*

penned. The fusion of the lexical equivalence creates a peculiar effect. This will be later on echoed in yet another selection of a lexical item expressing the nastiness of the character's conduct, namely in the verb to 'bury.' Describing the scene of assassinating his wife, the narrator discloses the following: "I withdrew my arm from her grasp and buried the axe in her brain".[13] An act of burying an axe draws attention, anticipates and magnifies the horror of the subsequent perverse and vile act of burying the wife's corpse. The connections are invariably apt. Poe's use of lexical items in the scene of the horrid murder shows that the uniformity of language is destabilized as the new, suppressed senses can be uncovered. The villain wants to deprive his wife of the sane judgment of his insane deed; the brain being the site of reason and reasonable thinking.

The story's plot astounds with a minute account of man's moral degradation, a portrait of the workings of a disordered mind. Despite being a man of sensitivity and a lover of animals, in a sudden, uncontrollable furry provoked by his cat's apparent disregard of him, the villain snatches the brute and cuts out one of its eyes. Haunted by pricks of conscience, one day he hangs the unfortunate animal. Then, a horrifying mixture of regret, morbid sensitivity and perverseness incite him to make up for the loss and admit in the household another cat, resembling in every respect the former one. Had it not been enough, in a drunken stupor, while attempting to annihilate the second cat, he kills his wife, who is determined to protect the innocent creature. In order to conceal the signs of the murder he walls her corpse in the cellar. The unraveling of the enigma of the most hideous burial becomes the unveiling of the mystery of his consciousness and perverse nature.

Poe deploys here one of the typical techniques of a gothic, sensational narrative; he offers a grotesque sort of doubling; the first cat murdered is replaced by another, dramatically reminiscent of the former one. The first cat's mutilation is followed by a sign of justice – the house is mysteriously burnt, and on one of the remaining walls there appears a most bizarre phantasm – a gigantic black cat – the sign of crime. Ironically, the second black cat, being a witness of the crime, becomes walled up within the tomb, and on the discovery of the dead body it is also found, ominous and triumphant, seated on the victim's head. Metaphorically, the solid barrier between life and death is pictured as non-existent. The tomb contains a living creature, and it is not a tomb in a conventional meaning. Undoubtedly, there are good reasons to probe the poststructuralist territory of an analysis of Poe's discourse. The communally accepted clashes and separations are no more than of enigmatic value in his prose. The ties across the earthly and the unearthly mark almost all of Poe's stories: "The Oval Portrait," "Ligeia," "The Fall of the House of Usher" to mention the most important ones. As Cunliffe puts it, "Poe's deaths are of special order. It is no man's land between death and life that obsesses him, and the strange obsessive vampirism the dead with the living [...] This is the desperation of Poe's story-world: life webs away, swiftly and remorselessly, yet death does not bring peace. For him nothing is stable or sweet".[14]

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 81.

[14] Cunliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

Significantly, the cat becomes a metaphor for blameworthiness, an imprint of a guilt-ridden conscience since its ghostly apparition underlies the supernatural behind the unveiling of the sinister truth. Equally importantly, the image of a cat is an encapsulation of a deconstructive reading of the narrative. It is construed both as a living creature and a sign which inscribes opposites. In the figure of a cat docility meets anger and violence, the vile paradoxically accords with the gullible, the susceptible encounters the mischievous.

The cat is a symbol of the superstitious, the phobia of one's exposure to the perverse, as much as the externalization of the perverse, the fear of unmasking the deepest recesses of a diseased, unstable mind. Curiously, the cat's body becomes a corporeal inscription of the wretched act of assassination. Abstruse as it may seem, such an inscription, the most morose form of writing as an ingenious device conforms to the overall structural pattern of the story; the story of murders is embedded in the story of writing. The story within the story, belonging to Poe's narrative codification, attests to what Eve Kosofsky Segwick notices as phenomenal in gothic fiction: "The story within [...] represents the broadest structural application of the otherwise verbal or thematic convention of the unspeakable, it has a similar relation to the convention of the live burial. The live burial that is a favorite conventual punishment in Gothic novels derives much of its horror not from the buried person's loss of outside activities (that would be the horror of dead burial), but from the continuation of a parallel activity that is suddenly redundant".[15]

The most macabre effect of the link between two states of being is achieved by means of the image of the imprisoned cat, which is placed in the intermediary state between life and death, but also the cat plays a mediatory function; its body serves as a corporeal inscription, writing and reading in the figure of the cat collide and become inextricable. The undermining of such dualities as life and death, sanity and madness, human and animalistic, writing and reading, in Poe's story testifies to the fallibility of the language, which the deconstructive criticism proposes. Significantly, it is Poe's gothic imagery which disencumbers textual paradoxes. As it was shown previously on the example of Irving's story, the deconstructive method of analyzing Poe's text also allows one to classify it as emblematic of the concept of a decentered universe propounded by Jacques Derrida. We may follow Peter Barry's succinct explanatory remarks, which underline Derrida's proclamation that we cannot speak of texts as coherent artistic artifacts, but are rather compelled to recognize their centerlessness.[16]

Without doubt, one can say that the density of the gothic imagery in the two analyzed texts opens them to a variety of interpretative perspectives, probably the most distinguishable being the psychoanalytic stance. The selection of the deconstructive method aimed at tackling the obtrusiveness of fissures and

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[15] E. Kosofsky Segwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York, 1986), p. 20.

[16] P. Barry, *Beginning Theory. An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* (Manchester and New York, 2002), p. 68.

linguistic idiosyncrasies in them. The shifts in meaning resulting in new, as well as counter-senses, elated a pursuit of the unreliability of language in the two stories.

In conclusion, it must be highlighted that it is the very fusion of the esoteric and the real, the common and the uncanny, rational and irrational executed by means of gothic imagery in Washington Irving's "The Adventure of the German Student" and E. A. Poe's "The Black Cat" that demonstrates the instabilities of the texts' meaning and their narrative structure. An analysis of the gothic schemata and the concomitant themes of death, guilt and responsibility in the two stories, in the light of deconstructive criticism, enhanced a recognition of the narratives' other senses. The breaching of life and death, the human and animalistic, the sane and insane become impossible possibilities. The richness of gothic imagery commences the surfacing of the covert, and puzzles with the flimsy boundaries between the supposedly opposed pairs of meanings, engaging the reader into a capacious Derridean interpretative process. Impossible possibilities, unreliable realities, the forever shifting qualities of the hidden and the cruel, juxtaposed against the overt, and the tamed; the desolate, worthless, distorted and wretched versus the sublime and spiritually uplifting, the earthly and the unearthly produce textual paradoxes and rebut a univocal reading. Finally, pushing the gothic formula beyond the intermediary zones, both Irving and Poe deny the validity of such fundamental concepts as the principle of causality, continuity or non-contradiction, as the representations of the nightmarish qualities of being assert very strongly the arbitrariness of language and express the uniqueness of an individual artistic vision.

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Na progu ciemności: śmierć, wina, odpowiedzialność i zagadnienie normalności w opowiadaniach *Przygoda niemieckiego studenta* W. Irvinga oraz *Czarny kot* E. A. Poe – próba dekonstrukcji

Streszczenie

Opowiadanie Washingtona Irvinga *Przygoda niemieckiego studenta* i Edgara Allana Poe *Czarny kot* wyrażają psychologiczną złożoność takich kategorii jak: śmierć, wina, czy odpowiedzialność. Obie narracje przepojone są elementami gotyckimi, takimi jak: obrazowanie zaburzeń emocjonalnych i intelektualnych, zjawiska ponadnaturalne, złowieszcza atmosfera i inne. Przemieszanie elementów surrealistycznych i realistycznych, tego, co zwyczajne i tego, co ponadnaturalne, otwiera oba teksty na wielość znaczeń. Celem artykułu jest analiza elementów prozy gotyckiej w obu tych opowiadaniach w świetle teorii dekonstruktywistycznej. Jej rezultatem jest ukazanie intertekstualnych aluzji oraz dekonstrukcji opozycyjnych znaczeń i ich nieograniczoności.

Słowa kluczowe: śmierć, wina, normalność, Irving, Poe, dekonstruktywizm

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A 'KNIGHT OF FAITH' LOOKING INTO THE FACE OF THE OTHER: EXISTENTIAL TRANSFORMATION OF DEAN JOCELIN FROM WILLIAM GOLDING'S *THE SPIRE*

Abstract

William Golding in his novel *The Spire* presents to the reader a surprisingly true to life story of a man who undergoes an existential transformation from Kierkegaard's *'knight'* through Sartre's *'being'* arriving at Levinas's *'self'* by means of intricate relationships with other people and a process of painful himself-discovery. Jocelin, the main character of the novel, is a man who follows the path of an existentialist, undergoing the process of a profound alteration of personality. He begins as a Kierkegaard's 'knight of faith,' perceiving himself as a God's Tool, and ends up as a Sartre's 'existence' aware of his abandonment and consequent responsibility. In different moments of his makeover Jocelin embodies the contrasting concepts within existential philosophy, the theistic and atheistic ones, which are woven around the themes of self-examination, free will versus determinism, humility and pride, as well as the enigmatic struggle of good and evil within a human being.

Key words: existentialism, the Other, transformation

William Golding is the author whose gloomy account of human nature, permeating spirit of doom and what seems to be a programmed lack of happy endings in his novels gained him the name of a downright pessimist, and it seems that the writer, who in his private journal calls himself 'a monster,' would not deny that. John Carey, the author of his most recent biography edited in 2009, entitled *William Golding. The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies*, claims that such a self-assessment might be a result of the war atrocities he took part in or his destructive behavior towards his son David, but it might also be a result of the fact that Golding was a profoundly introspective and 'self-blaming' man who, as he kept repeating, "saw the seeds of all evil in his own heart, and who found monstrous things, or things he accounted monstrous, in his imagination."[1]

The confidence with which William Golding struggled for literary success obscures the uneasiness which accompanied him while waiting for critics' reviews after publishing his novels. Whether it was the trauma he experienced

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[1] J. Carey, *William Golding. The Man Who Wrote Lord of the Flies* (London, 2009), Chapter 19.

with *Lord of the Flies* being rejected by numerous publishers before finally Charles Monteith, a former lawyer who had been employed in Faber and Faber as an editor for just a month, noticed the potential of a provincial schoolmaster, is extremely difficult to know for sure. His fifth novel, *The Spire*, was written at the time when Golding, having gained readers' recognition as a writer and becoming financially independent, could abandon his position of a teacher and focus on writing. That amount of free time made him even more self-examining and apprehensive about the critical reception of his works, and although the first draft of *The Spire* was written in just a fortnight, the following fine-tuning of the novel was lengthy and laborious so that it had a much more "tormented birth than any of his previous novels."[2] Mark Kinkead-Weekes and Ian Gregor, the critics whose study of Golding's novels is still regarded as the most comprehensive introduction to the author's fiction, claim that *The Spire* was a novel which revealed Golding's unparalleled artistry.[3] Golding did not provide any help for his interpreters, as his comments on his work are rather reticent and superficial. What the author used to say in the interviews is referred to by Carey as 'a gramophone record put on for an interviewer' the aim of which was to 'keep the world at bay.' This does not, however, discourage critics from facing Golding's monsters as his novels 'constitute a major achievement in contemporary English literature and deserve to be better known than they yet are.'[4] Hopefully, a closer look at one of his novels presented in the following paper will bring the reader closer to the writer who craved human contact, but at the same time feared it more than anything else.

A haggard beggar is wandering along the streets of a quaint medieval town trying to discover the whereabouts of a man named Roger Mason. Hardly anyone can recognize him to be the former dean of a local Cathedral Church of Our Lady, which recently has been in the centre of the whole community's attention due to a massive spire being built on the top. And if anybody was able to identify Dean Jocelin, the clergyman could not expect kindness and respect on the part of his congregation for it was the Dean who initiated the building of the immense edifice despite the lack of proper foundations. Now the shaky construction poses a threat to the whole cathedral. What is more, there are rumors of some pagan rituals being performed by the workers hired to build the spire; the cathedral's sacristan, who had been constantly persecuted by the workers for his impotence, finally vanished into the blue and his wife died at childbirth while giving birth to the master builder's child. Although the Dean has not left the premises of the cathedral for months, his madness has been reported to the church authorities who have decided to remove him from his function. The old man, whose tuberculosis-affected spine makes him bent double, is now literally thrown into the gutter by the angry mob. Begging other people's mercy, Jocelin is in stark contrast to the proud clergyman who used to perceive others from the height of his elevated position.

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2 *Ibid.*

3 P. Redpath, *William Golding. A Structural Reading of His Fiction* (London, 1986), p. 205.

4 H. Babb, *The Novels of William Golding* (Columbus, 1970), p. 2.

The main hero of William Golding's novel, *The Spire*, is a cathedral dean who believes that God has assigned him a mission to build a spire at the top of the cathedral's roof. The spire would supplement the temple so that it would represent 'the pattern of worship' recognizable to all believers: "The building is a diagram of prayer; and our spire will be a diagram of the highest prayer of all. God revealed it to me in a vision, his unprofitable servant."[5] The risky venture, however, not only changes the appearance of the cathedral as such, but even more importantly, it profoundly transforms the Dean in three aspects: his self-perception, his relationship with people and his notion of God.

These three spheres of man's life are subjects of multiple, often contrasting, philosophical theories, but existential philosophy deals with the issue in a particularly personal way by putting an individual in the centre of their discourse. During the process of his makeover, Jocelin embodies two extreme concepts within the existential philosophy, namely the theistic model of Søren Kierkegaard and the atheistic theory of Jean Paul Sartre. The clergyman the reader is introduced to on the initial pages of the novel appears to be a perfect exemplification of Kierkegaard's "knight of faith,"[6] a relentless servant of God, determined to fulfill his master's will. As the plot progresses, however, the main character alters so dramatically that towards the end of the book Jocelin resembles more Jean Paul Sartre's 'existence,' aware of his weakness and ontological abandonment, as well as responsibility he cannot disavow. For Kierkegaard each human being is ontologically dependent on and directed towards God, thus he must be perceived only in the context of God's existence. Similarly, every individual has a natural inclination to recognize the existence of a higher power: "[...] anyone who stands alone for any length of time soon discovers that there is a God."[7] Sartre presents the opposite view; since there is no God, a human being is alone in the universe and must be thus regarded as an unconditioned existence. The two concepts, extreme as they are, focus on certain common themes concerning human life, such as self-discovery of man and the struggle between free will and psychological determinism. These concepts at the same time constitute major themes of *The Spire*.

A Kierkegaardian Man of Faith

The existential approach of Søren Kierkegaard emerged as a reaction to the holistic philosophy of Georg Hegel's. The Danish thinker wanted to underline the meaning of an individual man, who in the universal system of Hegel's occupied a minor position of a mere element of the pervasive Zeitgeist, 'The Spirit of the Times.' What Kierkegaard wants to stress is that an abstract system encompassing the totality of reality is not applicable to dealing with the dilemma that individuals encounter throughout their existence and leaves them with no moral guidance. Kierkegaard wanted to: "find a truth which is true *for me* – the idea for which I can

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[5] W. Golding, *The Spire* (London, 1980), p. 121.

[6] S. Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Cambridge, 2006), pp. 63–70.

[7] Ch. Moore, *Provocations. Spiritual Writings of Kierkegaard* (Farmington, 2007), p. 5.

live and die [...] What I really lack is to be clear in my mind *what I am to do*, not what I am to know, except in so far as a certain understanding must precede every action. The thing is to understand myself, to see what God really wishes *me* to do."[8] Kierkegaard's philosophy would, therefore, focus on specific actions undertaken by a human being, which aim at discovering his own meaning. The word 'discover' is not accidental here because the philosopher's Christian theism entails the presumption that man, as God's creature, has a pre-established sense and purpose.

Kierkegaard defines an individual, first of all, by his freedom of choice. Man's choices determine one's life, and since every action is an act of choosing something and rejecting something else, performing evaluative acts of choosing is, in fact, what man's life consists of. Kierkegaard accentuates the fact that every single decision is the outcome of a battle between God and the world which takes place within man's soul; since the result of choosing can be either salvation or condemnation, the ability to choose is the most profound risk that man is in a position to take.[9] Since "God is the one who demands absolute love,"[10] the fundamental choice that a human being has to make is that of choosing God or rejecting Him, and it has the form of "either – or"; no compromise is possible here:

> But genuine religion has an inverse relationship to the finite. Its aim is to raise human beings up so as to transcend what is earthly. It is a matter of either/or. Either prime quality, or no quality at all; either with all your heart, all your mind, and all your strength, or not at all. Either all of God and all of you, or nothing at all! [11]

The philosopher's approach stresses the individuality of man, therefore, the central problem of his theory is the process in which man becomes a genuine self. Kierkegaard enumerates three possible stages on life's ways, or what he calls "spheres of existence:"[12] the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious; to become truly human one has to move towards the final stage, transcending the two previous ones. The aesthetic lifestyle describes individuals who aim at satisfying their desires and impulses, which refers not only to their physicality, but feelings and intellect as well; they are spectators and tasters, but not true participants. In *The Spire* that stage is represented by the workers and particularly by the master builder, Roger Mason, who, although initially profoundly rational, in the end surrenders to feelings, desires, and momentary pleasures. In the ethical stage man recognizes the importance of restraining their desires and fulfilling their moral obligations.[13] The ethical mode of living is the one represented by the members of the Chapter who define Christian conduct as strictly observing the Ten Commandments. Finally, what Kierkegaard calls the 'religious sphere of existence,' is personified by Jocelin. The religious stage requires man to transcend institutional religion;

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[8] Moore, *op. cit.*, pp. 9–10.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 10–11.

[10] Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 18.

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 45–47.

[13] Moore, *op cit.*, p. XXI.

one is independent of any pre-established laws of moral behaviour and stays in a direct relationship with God, who himself provides him with moral guidance. Not always is ethics able to deal with exceptional situations and complex dilemma which man encounters and thus, according to Kierkegaard, a true Christian is not the one who zealously adheres to ethical principles, but the one who is determined to risk transgression in order to fulfill God's will: "[...] what a prodigious paradox faith is – a paradox that is capable of making a murder into a holy act well pleasing to God, a paradox that gives Isaac back again to Abraham, which no thought can lay hold of because faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off."[14] God's request to sacrifice Isaac as a bloody offering, demanded from Abraham that he break the fifth commandment, "You shall not murder."[15] Contradictory as God's dictates appear, they point to the fact that God as a creator of moral imperatives exists above them, and is thus in power to repeal them. Abraham's individualism and exceptionality of his faith surfaced as he proved to be courageous enough to abandon the safety of ethics. Faith, according to Kierkegaard, is a paradox, in the sense that the individual as the particular is more important than the universal, is justified over against it, is superior and not subordinate precisely because the ethical may be suspended for him.[16]

Faith is therefore a kind of leap which necessitates losing the grounds of the doctrine and rationality and surrendering one's will to the will of the higher power: "Faith, therefore, requires a leap. It is not a matter of galvanizing the will to believe something there is no evidence for, but a leap of commitment. 'The leap is the category of decision' – the decision to commit one's being to a God whose existence is rationally uncertain."[17] Jocelin is the one who decides to make a "leap of faith" in response to what he perceives as God's call. The Dean jeopardizes his reputation, respect and position and follows the vision, which others regard as 'Jocelin's folly.' Since God is approachable by way of avid, undivided commitment, the Dean evades fulfilling his priestly duties such as prayer and confession, understanding that these are unimportant activities which distract him from what should be the object of his undivided attention. Nowhere in his reflections is there a shred of doubt whether any of his undertakings is in accordance with the dogma of the Church. No longer does Jocelin treat himself separately from his task; he and his mission become "a necessary marriage,"[18] and since God has assigned to him a new task, and thus has privileged him with a new status, the Dean feels that he is no longer bound by the previous obligations. Hence lack of support from the cathedral Chapter does not undermine Jocelin's conviction; on the contrary, he gains certainty that he must follow God's instructions despite all the adversities.

During the process of building the spire it turns out that not only is there no stone to constitute proper foundations, but also that the earth under the spire is

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[14] Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

[15] Exodus, 20:13.

[16] Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

[17] Moore, *op. cit.*, p. XXV.

[18] Golding, *op. cit.*, p. 93.

moving "like porridge coming to the boil in a pot."[19] For Roger Mason, the master builder, this occurrence is unambiguous and self-explanatory: "It stands to reason. Now we must stop building [...] Do more and the earth'll creep again."[20] Jocelin, however, does not let himself be distracted by rational arguments. The lack of solid foundations is perceived by him as a proof of the greatness of God who will manifest His power by a miracle of holding an enormous building up as if in the air: "You see, my son! The pillars don't sink! [...] I told you, Roger. They float!"[21] Lack of rationality is yet another element of the 'leap of faith' that the Dean takes. What can be observed here is the absurdity of faith that according to Kierkegaard is an indispensable element of a truly Christian attitude. The absurd is not a rare occurrence that certain human beings happen to experience, but the exact object of faith: "What, then, is the absurd? The absurd is that the eternal truth has come into existence in time, that God has come into existence, has been born, has grown up, has come into existence exactly as an individual human being, indistinguishable from any other human being."[22] Christianity, therefore, relies upon the absurd and as such requires a believer to trust the absurd. Jocelin's deafness to any reasonable argument and relying on the absurdity of his belief in the impossible makes him an uncompromising fanatic. To him Roger's rationality limits his spiritual sensitivity and understanding of the extraordinary events that take place around him: "[...] the master builder often looked at things without seeing them; and then again, he would look at a thing as if he could see nothing else, or hear or feel nothing else."[23] Whereas Roger Mason represents reason and cool calculation, Jocelin reflects passion and engagement, which are the only ways of coming to terms with the absurd of faith.

As it has already been mentioned, for a Christian who has stepped into the religious sphere of existence the conventional ethics does not pose a point of reference as far as solving moral problems is concerned. Since God is above ethics, He is also the one who establishes the moral value of deeds. It is therefore possible that an ethically wrong deed will be regarded as a right one simply because God has demanded it. That is why Abraham, from the ethical point of view, is a would-be murderer, although the Bible presents him as "the father of all those who believe."[24] Similarly, Jocelin is ready to bear the cost of his conviction which includes making an offering of human lives. He lets the workers persecute Pangall, the sacristan, knowing that the brutes need a scapegoat to 'keep off bad luck.' At one point in the novel he admits that the marriage of the beautiful Goody and the sexually impotent Pangall was in fact arranged by him and from the very beginning was likely to finish in misery for both. When Pangall's wife and Roger Mason become increasingly attracted to each other, Jocelin refrains from intervention, although

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. 79.

[20] *Ibid.*, p. 83.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 102.

[22] Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

[23] Golding, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

[24] Romans, 4:16.

he senses that the hazardous relationship would result in their ultimate fall since they were caught up "in some sort of tent that shut them off from all other people, and he saw how they feared the tent, both of them, but were helpless."[25] Deep down Jocelin loves Goody passionately[26] and watching idly as she gives herself to another man causes him unbelievable pain, which he considers to be his own bloodless sacrifice; he knows, however, that the presence of Goody will keep Mason on the job. The Dean cherishes a deep conviction that all the suffering resulting from his actions is indispensable to accomplish the goal; he regards it as "the cost of building material."[27] The ethical as well as the rational are suspended, and Jocelin has a feeling that he stands alone in front of God, answering to no one but Him:

> He made no sense of these things, but endured them with moanings and shudderings. Yet like a birth itself, the words came, that seemed to fit the totality of his life, his sins, and his forced cruelty, and above all the dreadful glow of his dedicated will. *This have I done for my true love.*[28]

For his 'true love,' which is God, Jocelin undergoes the torture of constant accusations of insanity and disrespect on the part of his own congregation. He lacks sleep and proper feeding; he joins the workers and works arduously day after day being aware of the fact that he is the only one who believes that building the spire is not a downright madness. He experiences acute solitude as, having looked for men of faith to be with him, he could find none. What he believes, however, is that having resigned everything infinitely, he will seize "everything again by virtue of the absurd."[29]

Although initially deeply convinced about the rightness of his undertakings, as appalling events take place and ghastly spirits haunt him, Jocelin becomes increasingly doubtful and fearful. He begins to feel the rift between what he claims and what he actually desires deep down and as he no longer feels certain about his own interpretation of reality, the clergyman begins looking for a different one. Jocelin initially interprets the spiritual presence he feels as a guardian angel that was sent to him by God in order to support him. Gradually, however, the presence of the angel becomes more and more unpleasant, more and more painful: "Often his angel stood at his back; and this exhausted him, for the angel was a great weight of glory to bear, and bent his spine. Moreover, after a visit by the angel – as if to keep him in humility – Satan was given leave to torment him, seizing him by the loins."[30] The presence of the angel is intermingled with what Jocelin experiences as the presence of a devil, and from that moment on these two characters appear always together. It is only in the tenth chapter of the novel that it becomes clear who the

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[25] Golding, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

[26] Y. Sugimura, *God and Escalation of Guilt in the Novels of William Golding* (Otaru, 1990), p. 13.

[27] Golding, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

[28] Golding, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[29] Kierkegaard, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 188.

angel really is: "Then his angel put away the two wings from the cloven hoof and struck him from arse to the head with a whitehot flail."[31] It becomes apparent to Jocelin that he has been deluded by "Satan who transformed himself into an angel of light."[32] The moment of the angel's metamorphosis seems to be the climax of the novel and the climax of Jocelin's transformation. When Jocelin recognizes the demonic nature of the whole venture, suddenly the floor in the crossways of the cathedral where he received the vision becomes "hot to his feet with all the fires of hell."[33] As the angel turns into a devil, Jocelin undergoes spiritual and existential metamorphosis as well.[34]

Although both SØren Kierkegaard and Jean-Paul Sartre are referred to as existentialists, they constitute two extremes as far as the ontological premises of their theories are concerned. Kierkegaard's theory is grounded on the concept of a fearsome God permeating man's existence, whereas the fundamental principle of Sartre's philosophy is that the universe is devoid of any kind of divine presence. Sartre's differentiation between two kinds of being, 'being-in-itself' and 'being-for-itself' introduced an irreconcilable division in the world of things. The first type of being is unaware of its existence and unable to alter itself; all the inanimate and animated objects that are deprived of consciousness exist in this mode. 'Being-for-itself' is a type of being which is aware of its existence, and establishes itself by means of existing and choosing freely; this is the way of existing of a man. In the light of Sartre's theory, God is, therefore, a contradictory concept. If he existed, God would have to be both kinds of beings at the same time. Being an established existence, he would at the same time have awareness and the property of creating himself by means of exercising his awareness. It is, according to Sartre, logically contradictory that such a being could exist.

William Golding and Jean-Paul Sartre were both in their twenties when they faced the outbreak of the Second World War and it is highly probable that the distrust towards human nature results from a similar experience of war atrocities which had not taken place to such a high extent ever before. Jocelin's actions, previously interpreted as exemplifying the attitude of Kierkegaard's 'knight of faith,' an ideal servant of God, when analyzed on the basis of Sartre's philosophy, present him as a self-deluded individual, devoured by his egotistic desires. His selfishness makes him unable to become involved in a relationship with any other being, be it God or man; he focuses on fulfilling his own will regardless of the cost and the means. Jocelin's subconscious is dominated by an overwhelming feeling of solitude and a profound belief that his existence has no pre-established purpose or sense. All his actions, therefore, serve exclusively the aim of finding or rather constructing the meaning of his life.

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[31] *Ibid.*, p. 165.

[32] 2 Cor, 11:14.

[33] Golding, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

[34] P. Ráčková, "The Angel with a Hoof: Metamorphosis in Golding's 'The Spire'", [in:] P. Drábek, J. Chovanec (eds.), *"Theory and Practice in English Studies"*, Vol. 2 (Brno, 2004), p. 162.

A Sartrean Being-for-itself

Since there is no God, no source of principles or values and no definition of a human being can be found: "Values are valid only because we have chosen them as valuable."[35] If there was a God, the author and creator of all existence, a human being would be an object made according to a pattern established in God's mind. Each individual, therefore, would be a realization of a certain conception, a concrete formula, a ready-made object which has a definite shape and purpose.[36] What Sartre emphasizes is that an attempt to find any pre-established definition of man is futile. His famous statement *existence precedes essence*[37] expresses the view that only by existing is man able to shape himself and create his own personal definition: "Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it [...] Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself."[38] The "abandonment" of man stems from the fact that there is no higher power to appeal to, since God does not exist, man has no moral directives to follow. Not only is he, therefore, absolutely free, but he *is* freedom; he is condemned to be free, because he finds himself in a state in which he cannot but choose and his choice is absolutely free.

Jocelin's life is characterized by constant and overwhelming feeling of inadequacy. He considers himself a changeling, he never experiences any union with the human community or is able to truly communicate with others. Neither particularly gifted nor well-educated, he finds himself an important figure in the Church hierarchy. The inferiority complex that he is driven by makes him search for a reason for his undeserved elevation. Eventually, he develops a conviction that he has been given a divine revelation in which God orders him to build a spire that will supplement the cathedral of which Jocelin is a dean. The belief that he is 'the chosen one' seems to enable him to come to terms with the fact that he cannot assimilate into a human community.

Although a clergyman, the Dean struggles with the idea that there is no God and consequently no objective principles to follow, which is why he clings to the delusion of God's providence that takes care of his life. Sartre would say that Jocelin finds it unbearable to exist in the full consciousness that the human condition involves existential solitude, and thus tries to underpin his unstable faith with an illusion that he has been entrusted with an extraordinary task. The idea that one is left alone with no principles to guide him in the world, that one has to create himself by means of continuous choosing and, what is more, bears the full responsibility for his deeds is indeed appalling. Jocelin believes in God's protection to the point of imagining that an angel was sent to comfort him in difficult moments. The illusion lets him avoid realizing and taking responsibility for his freedom of choice; the Dean hides in the cathedral, hides in the Church, hides

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[35] N. Greene, *Jean-Paul Sartre. The Existentialist Ethics* (Ann Arbor, 1960), p. 46.

[36] J-P. Sartre, *Existentialism Is a Humanism* (Meridian, 1989), pp. 2–3.

[37] J-P. Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York, 1992), p. 60.

[38] Greene, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

in Christianity, claiming that all his deeds aim at fulfilling God's will. The cathedral serves him as a 'coat' that he puts on himself;[39] his position of a dean, however, is just a cover for what he does, and what he does is trying to make sense of his own life. He tries to make his life meaningful by performing an extraordinary feat, and in order to accomplish that aim he needs to have some powerful defender, the one that everyone is subordinate to – God.

'It's senseless, you think. It frightens us, and it's unreasonable. But then – since when did God ask the chosen ones to be reasonable? [...] The net isn't mine, Roger, and the folly isn't mine. It's God's folly."[40] Jocelin is deeply convinced that by choosing him, God has also given him the right to go beyond the conventional values in order to accomplish the task. In that way Jocelin avoids what is crucial in Sartre's philosophy and inextricably joined with the freedom of choice – responsibility. It is significant in Sartre's philosophy that man, free as he is, is at the same time responsible for all the choices he makes. Since man possesses himself, the accountability for his deeds, for his existence as such, is placed solely upon his own shoulders: "If, however, it is true that existence is prior to essence, man is responsible for what he is."[41] Not only, like God, does Jocelin want to exceed ethics, but also like God he wants to be free from the need to explain the reasons for his choices. Jocelin involves masses of people in the process of fulfilling 'his mission,' bringing their lives to a ruin, and then refuses to take responsibility for the outcome of his actions, claiming that the whole venture was in fact 'God's work.' Jocelin lends to building the spire a divine authority that cannot be questioned and excuses himself by maintaining that his own role is that of a mere tool fulfilling the will of the Divine.[42] According to Sartre, man tends to justify his decisions by claiming that they are indispensable consequences of his social role or that exceptional circumstances left him no other choice. This 'false consciousness,' however, cannot free man from the burden with which his whole existence is marked, the burden of finding his own values, making the world meaningful and bearing full responsibility for the results of his actions.

Physicality and the experience of spirituality are inseparable faculties of an individual, free and conscious self. Downgrading any of these two aspects of human condition results in the state of a distorted existence. Jocelin's peculiar attitude towards his own body is the aspect of his personality that strongly influences his manner of perceiving the external world.

> The earth is a huddle of noseless men grinning upward, there are gallows everywhere, the blood of childbirth never ceases to flow, nor sweat in the furrow, the brothels are down there and drunk men lie in the gutter. There is no good thing in all this circle but

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[39] Golding, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

[40] *Ibid*.

[41] Sartre (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

[42] J. Costin, "The Spire: A Construction of Desire", [online:] http://openpdf.com/viewer?url=http://www.william-golding.co.uk/F_costin.pdf.

the great house, the ark, the refuge, a ship to contain all these people and now fitted with a mast.[43]

The Dean seems afraid of humanness, his own in particular, and regards everything related to human condition as defiled and sinful, low and contemptible. Since physicality is despicable, the Dean struggles desperately to elevate himself to what he perceives as a more spiritual realm. Jocelin compares himself to Noah, considering himself to be the only one who is free from the earthly defilement, and as such the only one able to contact with the Absolute. Hardly ever does he leave the premises of the cathedral, and he observes the life of ordinary people only from the height of the spire, which makes him separated from the experience of everyday life of his congregation. The statement saying that the cathedral is 'like a coat' to Jocelin, seems then to have yet another meaning. A coat covers the body and conceals the physical appearance of man; Jocelin wants to be physically invisible to the external world and his newly assumed personality of a 'holy man' lets him treat himself as no longer a physical being.

Although the Dean finds himself unable to accept what is human and secular, his life is influenced by the secular to a large extent. His position is only due to a sinful relationship since Jocelin becomes a cathedral Dean thanks to his aunt, Alison, who as the king's mistress, managed to persuade the monarch to do her nephew a favor. What is more, it is Jocelin's promiscuous aunt who finances building the spire, hoping that in return she will be buried in the cathedral among the saints and nobility. The Dean abhors the idea of being associated with his aunt's misdeeds so he evades her, dismisses her letters and treats her in a condescending manner. And yet he accepts the money.[44] Jocelin lives in a delusional world that he has himself created. Never is he open to any rational argument and seems to reject the rational world in a similar way in which the rational world rejects him as 'God's chosen one.'

One of the pivotal moments in Jocelin's transformation comes when working in the spire he actually sees his mirror image in a metal sheet; that very moment the Dean is confronted with the reflection of his physical self:

> Yet before the sun had gone, he found he was not alone with his angel. Someone else was facing him. This creature was framed by the metal sheet that stood against the sky opposite him. For a moment he thought of exorcism, but when he lifted his hand, the figure raised one too. So he crawled across the boards on hands and knees and the figure crawled towards him. He knelt and peered in at the wild halo of hair, the skinny arms and legs that stuck out of a girt and dirty robe. He peered in closer and closer until his breath dimmed his own image […] He examined his eyes, deep in sockets over which the skin was dragged […] the nose like a beak and now nearly as sharp, the deep grooves in the face, the gleam of teeth […] Well Jocelin, he said soundlessly to the kneeling image; Well Jocelin, this is where we have come.[45]

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[43] Golding, *op. cit.*, pp. 106–107.

[44] Babb, *op. cit.*, p. 140.

[45] Golding, *op. cit.*, pp. 154–155.

Jocelin's transformation into a responsible self-aware existence begins when he faces his own physicality. His inability to recognize himself in a mirror reflection suggests the extent to which he has drifted away from what is human. On seeing his physical appearance, Jocelin realizes that although he has always avoided the secular, he has always participated in it by the sheer fact that he is a physical creature. It is not until several people lose their lives and Jocelin himself balances on the verge of lunacy that the Dean is finally able to exceed his previous narrow perspective, and limited understanding. He has striven for illumination from the very beginning of his work in the cathedral, but the knowledge he hopes to possess is different from the one he comes to finally. It is not spiritualization that the Dean attains, but the truth about the weakness of his human condition. Jocelin learns that: "it is not by turning back upon himself, but always by seeking, beyond himself, an aim which is one of liberation or of some particular realization, that man can realize himself as truly human."[46]

As Jocelin's awareness of his physicality grows, his affinity with other human beings becomes apparent to him as well. Jocelin soon realizes that other people are indispensable to him so that he could reconcile himself to the truth about himself. According to Sartre's philosophy, apart from being a *being-for-himself*, man is at the same time a *being-for-others*: "[...] finally, in my essential being, I depend on the essential being of the Other [...] I find that being-for-others appears as a necessary condition for my being-for-myself."[47] Not only is therefore man responsible for himself, but since he is a constituent of humanity and his actions are causally linked with the actions of other human beings, he is also responsible for the existences of others: "And, when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men."[48] Initially, Jocelin fails to recognize the fact that 'no man is an island' and behaves as if he was spiritually and mentally separated from his community. He also seems convinced that his elevated position of a God's servant has granted him a mandate to coerce people into performing certain acts without taking into consideration their own individual rights, plans and desires. Jocelin exploits people by treating them as his tools; he perceives them as elements of himself in the way that his pride preys on other people's fragility and imperfection. Only after having experienced the state of an absolute solitude does the Dean gradually realize other people's worth and importance. Not until the end of the novel does Jocelin appear to adopt the attitude of an existentialist proper: he realizes that no divine power can ever excuse him for his decisions; not only is he then himself responsible for his own deeds, but also for the other people whose lives are affected by his actions.

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[46] Sartre (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 15.

[47] Sartre (1992), *op. cit.*, p. 322.

[48] Sartre (1989), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

Levinasian Self

A prominent representative of philosophy of dialogue, Emmanuel Levinas, studied relationships between individuals in great detail, regarding them as the central issue of philosophy. For him the *Me-You* relationship is of ontological and metaphysical nature and since the encounter with another man always refers to the ethical sphere of our existence, ethics, which regulates human relations, is the heart of philosophical thinking. It is the encounter with the Other that teaches us how to live ethically, how to exist in the manner appropriate for a human being. What influences one's existence in particular is an encounter with the *face* of the Other. The word 'face,' however, in the sense Levinas uses it, means more than just one's physical appearance; in French, which Levinas spoke, the word *visage* refers to "seeing and being seen."[49] One's face is their self-presence, which is performed by the gaze or appeal directed towards us. The philosopher claims that one's subjectivity is formed through his subjected-ness to the Other, who perceives him in a specific way. The Other's face questions him and demands that he answers the questions which are crucial to his existence; answering these questions shapes his existence: "The face I welcome makes me pass from phenomenon to being in another sense: in discourse I expose myself to the questioning of the Other, and this urgency of the response – acuteness of the present – engenders me for responsibility; as responsible I am brought to my final reality."[50] It is the presence of the Other that makes one's life meaningful, that reveals to man the truth about himself. What Levinas stresses in his writings is that one's responsibility for the Other is not a matter of a subjective decision nor does it depend on their commitment or lack of it, but is deeply rooted within one's human constitution: "The unlimited responsibility in which I find myself comes from the hither side of my freedom, from a 'prior to every memory' an 'ulterior to every accomplishment' from the non-present par excellence [...] prior to or beyond essence."[51]

The face of the Other calls one to responsibility which lets him understand the meaning of his existence and the existence of other entities; at the same time man is not free to reject this responsibility itself: "[...] it is not free to ignore this meaningful world into which the face of the Other has introduced it. *In the welcoming of the face the will opens to reason*."[52] The phenomenon is particularly well presented towards the end of *The Spire* in the scene in which Jocelin, who is lying on his deathbed, suddenly recognizes Father Adam, whom he previously depersonalized calling him 'Father Anonymous,' to be a distinctive person:

> Father Adam raised his head. He smiled. Jocelin saw at once how mistaken they were who thought of him as faceless. It was just that what was written there, had been written small in a delicate calligraphy that might easily be overlooked unless one

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[49] B. Waldenfels, "Levinas and the face of the other", [in:] *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* (Cambridge, 2002), p. 64.

[50] E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Dordrecht, 1991a), p. 178.

[51] E. Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* (Dordrecht, 1991b), p. 10.

[52] Levinas (1991a), *op. cit.*, p. 219.

engaged oneself to it deliberately, or looked perforce, as a sick man must look from his bed.[53]

The Other escapes the understanding of one's self, speaks to it 'from above,' he demands that one go beyond his limited perspective and open oneself to the dialogue with the Other, because only in that way can one gain knowledge about oneself; only in that way does he exercise his human nature. On seeing the face of the Other, Jocelin suddenly feels the existential bond connecting him with other humans, which is not something established by man, but it is an element of his human condition. As his folly gives way to reason so that he is able to see his own life in the right light, the Dean realizes the ontological responsibility that he has been oblivious to through nearly all his life.

Levinas suggests that it is through the encounter with the other that man has access to transcendence; it is therefore impossible to enter into a relationship with God if one is alienated from human community: "The other is not the incarnation of God, but precisely by his face, in which he is disincarnate, is the manifestation of the height in which God is revealed."[54] Jocelin's awareness of the fact that only through other men can he get to know God, arises not only from recognizing Father Adam's face, but also from the painful realization that it is impossible to separate the sacred from the secular, which he was zealously trying to achieve, because these two spheres merge together in the form of man. It is not to God's messenger, but to the human face of the Other that he cries out for help as the 'dark angel' approaches to torment him. The Dean recognizes that it is the secular that he must come back to since the spiritual world is no longer safe, no longer predictable and no longer available to him.

Although a perfect parallel between philosophy and literature is impossible because of different written forms and language styles that they adopt, it is often the case that certain figures and events not only symbolize, but in fact personify ideas to the point that "image becomes concept and concept image."[55] Such an embodiment of a philosophical idea can be found in *The Spire*. Having recognized his physical self, Jocelin becomes aware of his existential union with other people and the responsibility for others, which is a part of his human condition. He realizes that as the cathedral lacks proper connection with the earth, he lacks connection with the physical world. His image of other people had been occluded by his mono-perspective 'vision' and 'enlightenment' which turned out to be blindness and ignorance. Saying that: "I was a protected man. I never came up against beldame" Jocelin admits that his post of a dean prevented him from meeting the face of the Other and thus facing the truth about himself; his 'protection' made him ignorant of the complexity of human nature.[56]

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[53] Golding, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

[54] Levinas (1991a), *op. cit.*, p. 79.

[55] R. Wellek and A. Warren, "Literature and Ideas", [in:] *Theory of Literature* (London, 1966), p. 123.

[56] Costin, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

Having collapsed after being persecuted by the crowd, Dean Jocelin regains consciousness back in his room in the cathedral. He no longer feels presence of either angel or devil, it is Father Adam who takes care of him now and who offers to "help him into heaven." Jocelin, however, understands that he will have no entry to paradise unless he enters it together with the people he has ruined. Balancing between sanity and madness, the Dean has visions in which pictures from his past and supernatural images mingle into an irrational amalgamate; sacred and secular are no longer distinguishable to him as God seems to permeate the physical world on the one hand and humanity reveals its spiritual dimension on the other. Jocelin's last words are "God! God! God!" and although it is unclear whether he addresses God or Father Adam, it seems that when the young priest lays the Host on the dead Jocelin's tongue, the Dean is for the first time worthy of accepting it.

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„Rycerz wiary" patrzący w oblicze Innego: egzystencjalna metamorfoza Jocelina w powieści Williama Goldinga *Wieża*

Streszczenie

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest interpretacja historii głównego bohatera *Wieży* Williama Goldinga jako procesu egzystencjalnej przemiany z "rycerza wiary" Kierkegaarda w "byt-dla-siebie" Sartre'a. Jocelin przeobraża się ostatecznie w "Ja" Levinasa, istotę świadomą faktu, że człowiek odnajduje siebie w twarzy Innego. Ów proces przemiany głównego bohatera przebiega w drodze zawiłych relacji międzyludzkich, zmagania się z własną wiarą i pragnieniami oraz bolesnej autorefleksji. W rezultacie dogłębnej przemiany osobowości i postawy światopoglądowej, Jocelin przestaje postrzegać siebie jako narzędzie Bożej woli i uzmysławia sobie swoją egzystencjalną samotność. Uświadamia sobie także fakt, że stanowi część społeczności ludzkiej, za którą z racji samego tylko bycia człowiekiem jest odpowiedzialny. Na różnych etapach swojej przemiany Jocelin ucieleśnia dwie skrajne koncepcje istniejące w ramach egzystencjalizmu: teistyczną i ateistyczną, które dotykają takich zagadnień istnienia ludzkiego, jak samowiedza, wolna wola i determinizm, pokora i pycha, a także problem walki dobra i zła w człowieku.

Słowa kluczowe: egzystencjalizm, Inny, bycie, przemiana, wiara

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RELIGIOUS MOTIFS IN ANDY WARHOL'S SELECTED VISUAL REALIZATIONS

Abstract

Commonly associated with pop art and consumerism, Andy Warhol's artistic output is a complex phenomenon, full of ambiguity and binary oppositions. The same could be said about his life in which religion, though not explicitly, played a domineering role. Warhol's ethnic origins, as well as his family background, exerted a profound influence on his art and can be easily seen in his various realizations, with particular intensity in the last decade of his artistic activity.

Key words: ambiguity, dichotomy, icon, pop art, transcendence

The aim of my paper is to analyze the selected religious motifs which permeate Andy Warhol's artistic output. I will put special emphasis on the motif of icon, the concept of which was completely redefined in his serigraphic realizations. I will also focus on the idiosyncratic character of religious references which, always present in Warhol's artistic production, started to dominate in his work towards the end of his life.

The complexity of Warhol's approach towards pop art can be proved by the dualism which consistently manifested itself in the binary oppositions that can be observed in his artistic oeuvre: highbrow culture – lowbrow culture, artistic individualism – mass-production, anonymity – fame, the private – the public, the East – the West, the sacred – the profane. Similar dichotomies characterize his religious paintings.

Warhol's involvement in applying religious motifs into his production was a gradual process which actually spanned the whole period of his artistic activity. When analyzing his visual realizations in religious context, one could distinguish four periods during which his works displayed religious or quasi-religious properties: the earliest was the 1950s – the beginnings of Warhol's activity as a graphic designer in New York. It was then that besides the projects of chiefly commercial character, he also produced a series of religious designs, which is best exemplified by the Christmas cards for Tiffany & Co. The next period was the 1960s – the time dominated by creating iconic representations of objects of everyday use

and portraits of American representatives of the world of politics and pop culture. It was also the period that witnessed making the series focusing on such issues as race riots, car crashes, suicides, H-bomb explosions, images of electric chairs, as well as photographs of thirteen most wanted men. The 1970s was the continuation of the above trend with the tendency towards painting artistically sophisticated portraits and producing the series of *Skulls* and self-portraits with skulls, as well as abstract *Shadows*. And finally the 1980s – the decade during which Warhol continued painting portraits and embarked on creating travesties of the classic Renaissance paintings with special regard to Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. It was also around that time that Warhol produced the series of *Crosses* and *Eggs*.

Provocatively dubbed the Pope of Pop, Andy Warhol (1928–1987) became famous as a graphic designer whose artistic output is commonly associated with the serigraphic renditions of Campbell's soup cans and the garish silkscreen portraits of Marilyn Monroe. It goes without saying, however, that his artistic legacy is a very complex phenomenon in which the motif of icon, understood literally and figuratively, constantly recurs. Warhol's artistic oeuvre during his whole life underwent a constant dynamic evolution, which can also be referred to the religious motifs constantly present in his realizations. Looking at the artistic development of the most famous representative of pop-art, one could venture saying that by creating silkscreen icons of pop-culture, in the second period of his artistic activity, he created himself as an iconic character and in doing so effaced the borderline between the truth and fiction.

Although born in Pittsburgh, USA, Andy Warhol remained throughout his whole life under a strong influence of the ethnic culture of his parents: Andrej and Julia Warhola.[1] They were both Carpatho-Rysyn poor immigrants of Lemko origins, who arrived in USA from the village of Miková, which is situated in the present-day Slovakia. Both Andrej and Julia were ardent followers of Greek Catholic religion, regularly attending services in the local orthodox church of St John Chrysostom. Their house was full of devotional items mixed with the products of American mass culture. On the kitchen wall hung a cheap copy of the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci, the esthetic counterpoint of which were the cartons of Kellog's cornflakes, Campbell's soup cans or Coca-Cola bottles. This peculiar iconospheric[2] mélange together with the regular visits at the local church became specific fuel for the artist whose life and artistic output was always characterized by strong dualism, which manifested itself by the aforementioned binary oppositions.

A similar dichotomy can be applied to Warhol's understanding of the concept of icon as a form of religious painting. From his early childhood both at home and

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[1] By sheer coincidence rather than as a result of an intentional denial of his ethnic origins, Warhol dropped the final *a* in his surname, which took place as early as 1942 when he had signed in this way one of his New York drawings (J. D. Dillenberger, *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol* (New York, 1998), p. 21).

[2] By the term 'iconosphere' I understand a set of visual, auditory and olfactory stimuli and phenomena which through constant exposition to shape one's psyche and consciousness, the concept postulated by Mieczysław Porębski in his book *Ikonosfera* (M. Porębski, *Ikonosfera* (Warszawa, 1972), pp. 18, 271).

at the local church, Warhol was exposed to the iconic images of saints and religious scenes. Although developed in the times of triumph and hegemony of Abstract Expressionism, which dominated the American artistic scene in the 1950s and was represented by such painters as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Willem de Kooning, Warhol's art remained predominantly figurative. The scope of his artistic realizations comprised silkscreen renditions of the American historic heroes, such as general George Custer, two presidents: Theodore Roosevelt and J. F. Kennedy and the Indian chief Geronimo, the icons of American pop culture, such as, among many others, Marilyn Monroe, Elvis Presley and John Wayne, as well as the international celebrities of the world of politics, science and literature, which was incarnated in the portraits of Vladimir Lenin, Albert Einstein, Mick Jagger and Gertrude Stein. Objects and products of everyday use were treated in a similar iconic way, which can be exemplified by Warhol's graphic renditions of Campbell's soup cans, cartons of Brillo soap pads and Coca-Cola bottles, to mention just a few. Towards the end of his life Warhol became an icon of pop-art himself, undergoing the evolutionary transition from an artist-producer towards the high priest of contemporary art.

In the process of creating his silkscreen realizations, Warhol drew on the rich tradition of East European religious art. His inspiration derived from the Greek Catholic and Orthodox sacred pictures, popularly referred to as icons, which during his childhood spent in industrial Pittsburgh considerably influenced his iconosphere.

An icon is a cult picture formed in the Eastern Christian art, depicting saints, as well as biblical and liturgical scenes. Its prototypical origins can be traced back to the Fayum mummy portraits from the Coptic period,[3] as well as the Early Christian Catacomb paintings.[4] The main types of icons and the manner of painting or rather writing them were established during the period of Iconoclasm and the period of the Byzantine art influence which it was directly followed by. The idiom of writing icons was defined during the Second Council of Nicea in 787 AD. According to the rules which were established then, the composition of icons could not be based on the artist's invention, but was subject to the strict principles set by the Church and tradition. The icons were, therefore, painted according to the specific canon and the painters were expected to display mystic and ascetic approach towards the rendered subject. Execution of the richly adorned pictures was not performed by a single painter, but resulted from the collective endeavor of two or several artists. The mystic character of the realizations was emphasized by the fact that they were not painted but written, which was meant to only highlight the direct relationship between the artist and the Creator. Painting of icons, having its roots

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[3] The best example of the influence which the Fayum coffin portraits exerted on Andy Warhol is his 1973 portrait of Katie Jones, a member of the multi-millionaire Schlumberger family, who *stares forth with something of the mute appeal seen in the eyes of the ancient portraits from Fayum, Egypt* (J. D. Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 28). The Fayum portraits were done before the death of the subjects, thus they bear strong resemblance to the deceased. The poignant portraits depict the characters whose conspicuous eyes *are riveting, claiming the moment but focused beyond time* (*ibid.*, p. 28).

[4] K. Onasch, A. Schnieper, *Ikony. Fakty i legendy* (Warszawa, 2013), pp. 14–17.

in the Hellenistic East, developed in the area of the Byzantine culture influence, particularly in the territory of Greece, the Balkans region and Ruthenia. Its heyday fell on the period between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries. From the beginning of the seventeenth century its popularity started to wane. The decline of the genre was caused by the growing influence of the Western culture.[5]

When discussing the iconic character of Andy Warhol's artistic output, one should be aware of the distinction between the concepts of the icon and iconicity. The prototypical meaning of the word icon as a religious picture still remains the same. However, the very concept of an icon has undergone a semantic evolution, particularly in recent years. Derived from the Byzantine civilization, a contemporary icon is still a figurative image, often assuming the form of a symbol, which can be best exemplified by the easily recognized icons that appear on computer screens. Iconicity, defined in functional-cognitive linguistics, as well as semiotics, as the conceived similarity or analogy between the form of a sign and its meaning, can also be referred to a set of characteristics attributed to a particular person or object.[6] Consequently, there appear iconic sportsmen, artists or even politicians. The contemporary iconostases are also decorated with the commonly worshipped trademarks, names of companies or simply objects of everyday use (Smorąg-Różycka, p. 65).[7] In the case of the realizations of Andy Warhol, who was the flagship icon of pop art himself, the distinction in question is blurred. His serigraphic renditions do not depict saints, or religious scenes, which was the original purpose of the Byzantine icons, but the characters associated with the household names, instantly identified in the world of mass culture. The same refers to the objects of everyday use, which in the epoch of mass consumerism are also endowed with the cultic attributes. The artist is no longer a mystic high priest, resembling the Orthodox Church painter, Andrei Rublev, but becomes a producer chiefly interested in his own income and fame. The difference between the sacred and the profane ceases to exist. The fake replaces the original. All these properties can be found in Warhol's artistic output. By redefining the concept of an artist and his work, Warhol becomes somehow the precursor of Postmodernism in which the notion of artistic religiousness assumes a new, previously unknown form, the definition of which is full of ambiguities and contradictions.

Despite instigating and being involved himself in numerous social and artistic scandals and excesses, Andy Warhol remained a devout Catholic and towards the end of his life became an exceedingly and deeply religious person. It was emphasized in the funerary speech delivered by the art critic, John Richardson during the mass celebrated after Warhol's death at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City on April 1st, 1987. The beginning of Richardson's eulogy goes as follows:

> Besides celebrating Andy Warhol as the quintessential artist of his time and place –
> the artist who held the most revealing mirror up to his generation – I'd like to recall

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[5] *Słownik Terminologiczny Sztuk Pięknych* (Warszawa, 2002), s.v. „Ikona", pp. 156, 157.

[6] A. Burzyńska, P. M. Markowski, *Teorie literatury XX wieku* (Kraków, 2007), p. 252.

[7] M. Smorąg-Różycka, „Andy Warhol tworzy ikony", [in:] Warhol Konteksty (Kraków, 2012), p. 65.

a side of his character that he hid from all but his closest friends: his spiritual side. Those of you who knew him in circumstances that were the antithesis of spiritual may be surprised that such a side existed. But exist it did, and it's the key to the artist's psyche.[8]

Warhol himself hardly ever admitted to his religious side as it stood in contradiction to the image of an emancipated artist he was very willing to be compared with. In the interview he gave to Lee Radziwiłł for the *Interview* magazine in March 1975, he explicitly, but slightly ironically, mentioned his visits to the church of Saint Vincent Ferrer on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, where he regularly participated in the liturgical observances. Here are a few excerpts from this interview:

"Lee Radziwiłł: Did you go to Church today Andy?
Andy Warhol: Yes, but I only stayed a minute.
Lee Radziwiłł: Why?
Andy Warhol: Because I thought I was going to be late. I got there right before it started and left right as it was starting. […]
Lee Radziwiłł: This is pretty personal, but do you ever take Communion?
Andy Warhol: Well – I never feel that I do anything bad. But I do take"[9]

There were also revealed some facts concerning Warhol's charitable activities. It was possible to meet him in New York's poorhouses and kitchens for the homeless, particularly in the shelter run by the Church of the Heavenly Rest. Waiting on the poor and needy, it was in these places that Warhol cast off the mask of a celebrity.[10] The religious side of Andy Warhol is best revealed by the motifs which started to weave their way with particular intensity in his late realizations, one of the last of which was his serigraphic travesty series of the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci. It is worth mentioning that a photograph copy of the Renaissance masterpiece was used by Julia Warhola as a bookmark in her prayer book. The above facts only confirm the complexity of Warhol's psyche, remaining in opposition to the commonly known iconic, though sometimes outrageous even by today's standards, image of the artist who was popularly dubbed Drella. He was a man full of moral ambivalence, bearing at the same time the traits of Dracula and Cinderella.

Jane Daggett Dillenberger postulates that there were several reasons which may account for Warhol's involvement in religious issues. Apart from the family background, which was of crucial importance, they may be traced back to the early days of his childhood. As a child, Warhol suffered from three attacks of St. Vitus Dance, also known as Sydenham's chorea, a nervous disorder, marked by spasmodic movements of the limbs and facial muscles and by lack of coordination. The illness resulted in his long confinement to bed, which finally contributed to his

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[8] Quoted after Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[9] L. Radziwiłł, "Communion sometimes", *Interview*, 3 (1975).

[10] V. Bockris, *Andy Warhol. Życie i śmierć* (Warszawa, 2012), p. 556.

social isolation, subsequently augmented by the speech disorder he tried to conceal by being silent or reducing his answers or comments only to laconic utterances. It was during those long periods of idleness that the strong bond between the eight-year-old Andy and his mother developed. A devout Rusyn Byzantine Catholic, Julia nursed her youngest son with great affection. She also became his first artistic collaborator, which is best exemplified by the whimsically illustrated books on cats.[11] The intimate relationship was embodied in Warhol's portrait of Julia in which her face bears a strong resemblance to her son's features.[12]

Warhol's preoccupation with religious issues is often linked with the motif of death. The recurrent death themes are also deeply rooted in his infancy.[13] At the age of fourteen, having undergone a long period of convalescence, he was exposed to yet another traumatic experience. His father had tuberculosis as a result of which he was housebound from 1939 until his death in 1942. Drawing on Warhol's elder brother Paul's recollection, Dillenberger gives the following account: "[...] when his father's body was brought back from the hospital, Andy, terrified, hid under his bed and refused to look at the body, which was laid out, as was the custom of the Rusyn Byzantine Catholics in the Warhola home."[14] Warhol's obsessive interest in death motifs intensified in his adulthood, particularly after June 3rd, 1968, which is the date of the attempt on his life perpetrated by Valerie Solanas, a deranged feminist and script writer. Although declared dead at one point, Warhol survived and, according to his collaborator, Bob Colacello: "promised God to go to church every Sunday if he lived and he kept to the letter of that promise."[15]

It is worth mentioning that even before the aforementioned nearly fatal accident, Warhol displayed excessive interest in the concept of death. When working on the quintessentially Pop series *Campbell's Soup Cans*, he embarked on a new chapter in his artistic output by "launching a new era in the history of art."[16] The event which became the catalyst for adopting this approach was the photograph that he saw in the copy of *New York Mirror* on June 4th, 1962. It depicted the wreck of the plane which crashed, killing 129 passengers. It was from that moment on that Warhol began to be preoccupied with morbid subjects and, according to Klaus Honnef, became "a true artist"[17] by reconciling his commercial activity with producing pictures rendered in a serious vein.

The series of *Death and Disaster* marks the beginning of the period in which Warhol reached maturity as an artist. Simultaneously produced, his Pop works remained in dramatic contrast with the macabre renditions of the pictures of violent death. The series was based on the photographs culled from the tabloids, *Life* magazine and the popular press. They presented the wrecks of the car bodies

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[11] Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 19–22.

[12] Bockris, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

[13] Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

[14] *Ibid.*, p. 20.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 31.

[16] K. Honnef, *Warhol* (Köln, 2007), p. 45.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 45.

together with the distorted corpses of the casualties. The pictures were jolting in their immediacy and the effect they produced had a wrenching impact on the viewer.[18] The same refers to the silkscreened paintings of suicides, the atomic bomb explosions, the electric chairs and race riots. Dillenberger compares the *Death and Disaster* series to a contemporary dance of death, reminiscent of similar realizations rendered by the sixteenth century German painter Hans Holbein.[19] According to Honnef, the *Thirteen Most Wanted Men* portraits, the pictures that come from the FBI's criminal records, represent the same category as the *Death and Disaster* series. What is more, Honnef links them to the serigraphic series of Marilyn Monroe's posthumous portraits.[20] The same reference is made by Warhol's biographer, Victor Bockris.[21] The pictures in the series *Suicide* (Fallen Body) are meditative and elegiac in their tone. When it comes to *Electric Chairs*, the series based on the photograph of the execution chamber in Sing Sing state penitentiary in New York, Dillenberger asserts that the somber monochromatic images of the death-dealing instrument evoke religious associations. In her opinion "the chair is transformed from a grotesque instrument of death into a numinous object, suggesting transcendence, much as the cross, which was used for a particular cruel kind of execution, is seen in Christian art as a symbol pointing to salvation."[22]

The motif of the skull as a *memento mori* heralds yet another series which testifies to Warhol's obsessive interest in the concept of death. Drawing on the long tradition of similar representations in the history of art, in the seventies Warhol made a series of self-portraits with a skull. The rendition of the topic in its form resembles Frans Hals's *Young Man Holding a Skull*, the portrait made in the seventeenth century. By doing so, Warhol inscribed his work in the series of depictions called *vanitas*, the paintings which were reminders of the transience of life and inevitability of death, the issues that Warhol was fully aware of at the time.[23] In 1976 he produced a series of paintings entitled *Skulls.* Dillenberger asserts that the very topic echoes contemporary concerns, such as the rampant spread of AIDS and the increasing threats of nuclear and ecological disasters.[24] She also points to the relationship between the skulls and the fetal-shaped black shadows that they cast. The striking juxtaposition seems to remain in accord with the recurring theme of the transience of life. The resurgence of the motif of death is

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[18] Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[20] Honnef, *op. cit.*, pp. 62, 63.

[21] Bockris, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

[22] Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, pp. 70, 71.

[23] The execution of the paintings took place nearly eight years after the assassination attempt by Valerie Solanas. The two bullets fired at close range penetrated Warhol's stomach, spleen, oesophagus, and both lungs. As a result of it, till the end of his life, he had to wear the surgical corset. In Richard Avedonow's picture taken after Warhol's convalescence, he stands, in the pose resembling Christ, exposing his wounds, the corset having been pulled down (Bockris, *op. cit.*, p. 376).

[24] Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

also exemplified in a group of Warhol's last works depicting four skeletons stitched together. The black and white pictures were commissioned by the Swiss art journal *Parkett* and were originally meant to symbolize the spirit of Switzerland. The scope of works produced during the decade also comprises Warhol's most enigmatic abstract paintings titled *Shadows*. The realizations were executed in the manner of abstract expressionists, such as Mark Rothko and Barnett Newman, both of whom addressed religious issues by trying to express the idea of the Sublime in their paintings. Dillenberger claims that meditation on the series "evokes the eschatological question of mortality and the end of time."[25]

The religious character of the aforementioned works of art is clearly apparent. Being a direct reference to the hill of Golgotha, the place of Christ's crucifixion, the motif of the skull is deeply rooted in the history of European iconography. In Warhol's case, seen in the context of the assassination attempt that he miraculously survived, it is also a reminder of the fragility of human existence. The *Death and Disaster* series focuses on the meaning of life as contrasted with sudden death. The *Electric Chair* paintings through the juxtaposition of death and salvation symbolized by the electric chair compared to the cross imply transcendence. The *Shadows* touch upon eschatology.

In the 1980s, which is the last decade of Warhol's activity, he embarked on producing a series of travesties of the selected works of European Renaissance, such as Piero della Francesca's *Saint George and the Dragon* and *Saint Apollonia*, Raphael Santi's *Sistine Madonna*, Paulo Uccello's *Madonna del Duca da Montefeltro*, as well as Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation* and *Last Supper.* The series, which was titled *Details of Renaissance Paintings*, echoed Warhol's early Pittsburgh years, when by attending art classes in the Carnegie Institute of Technology, he developed his interest in traditional European painting, particularly the Old Masters. Towards the end of Warhol's life, his concern with religious issues considerably deepened. Dillenberger claims that "it was during those last five years that most of his religious works were done."[26] Apart from the aforementioned figurative travesties, in 1982 he also made a series of paintings of the cross, as well as a series of graphics, using eggs as a motif.

The element of the cross appears in one of Warhol's juvenile paintings, which is titled *The Warhola Livingroom*. In the picture, the interior is deprived of the icons which originally hung on the walls. What strikes the viewer is the cross put on the mantelpiece. It is the cross used during his father's funeral, which only confirms that for Warhol "art and religion were linked from an early age."[27] The conspicuous carved New Mexican crucifix also appears in the photograph of the bedroom of his New York residence at 57 East 66th Street into which he moved in 1974. Set against a velvety background, the 1982 Warhol's image of the scarlet single cross levitates before the viewer. Its insubstantial character seems to deny any links with the cross of crucifixion. In another realization, commissioned for the exhibition in

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 63.

[26] Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 19.

Madrid, entitled "Guns, Knives, and Crosses," two-dimensional crucifixes are randomly put in rows. They are reminiscent of the crosses seen in the military cemeteries of the Spanish Civil War.[28] The egg as a symbol stands for immortality or resurrection. The tradition of painting Easter eggs, so called *pysanky*,[29] is practiced by Catholics, including the followers of the Rusyn Byzantine Church. The practice was instilled into the young Warhol by his mother, and, during his boyhood years, he would often give egg designs as presents to friends and customers at Eastertime. The paintings of 1982 introduce the eggs which balance freely against the black background, and in the context of religious imagery can be perceived as a kind doxology.[30]

The travesties of the Renaissance paintings focus on the selected details of the original pictures. They were made in 1984 and 1985, that is a few years before Warhol's death. In the case of Leonardo's *Annunciation*, it is the upper part of the masterpiece that attracted Warhol's interest. In his rendition of the painting he eliminated the figures of the Virgin and the Archangel Gabriel. Instead, the viewer can see only their hands set against the landscape dominated by a violet mountain and the red sky. Their hands may convey the idea of communication between the heavenly messenger and the earthly recipient of the divine message.[31] The same ploy was applied in the travesty of Piero della Francesca's *Madonna del Duca da Montefeltro.* The viewer sees neither the Madonna nor her entourage. Warhol's attention is riveted on a Renaissance niche from the top of which an ovoid object, resembling an egg, hangs. The surrealist element implying an egg in a womb can be associated with the serigraphic images of Easter eggs. It is also a cropped detail that interests Warhol in his translation of Paolo Uccello's *St. George and the Dragon*. This time it is a marginal element which was cut out from the original painting. The dragon's wing and its spiky tail together with the head of the princess bear a strong resemblance to a comic strip, implying that heroic saints were replaced by pop culture characters in the contemporary iconography.[32] Warhol's playful interpretation of the *Sistine Madonna* by Raphael is another Renaissance painting that he turned to. It is noteworthy that the image was used as a cover for the Warhol Memorial Mass at St. Patrick's Cathedral in 1987. The rendition looks forward to Warhol's serigraphic series based on Leonardo's *Last Supper*. The contours of the characters and the obtrusive price tag herald the ideas developed extensively in the last of his realizations. Warhol manipulates the elements of the original by placing them freely within the frames of his design. The final result is jolting. The motif of the Virgin with Infant Jesus recalls similar realizations, such as *Modern Madonna* and *Mother and Child*, which are reminiscent of similar topics addressed in Byzantine icons.

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[28] *Ibid*., p. 45.

[29] Probably thanks to Ukrainian immigrants, the word *pysanka* is commonly used in the American and Canadian dialects of English.

[30] Dillenberger, *op. cit*., p. 48.

[31] *Ibid*., p. 48.

[32] *Ibid*., p. 50.

To prove how deeply set in the religious context Andy Warhol's selected works are, let me carry out a brief analysis of one of his last renditions, that is his travesty of the aforementioned the *Last Supper* by Leonardo da Vinci. The Passover meal that Jesus had with his disciples has always been a popular motif in art. Its earliest images date from the fifth century. As a result of referring to the subject, Warhol produced his own interpretation of the Renaissance masterpiece fresco. It resulted from the commission the idea of which was hatched by the Paris gallerist, Alexandre Iolas, who also arranged for the Milan bank Credito-Valtellines to sponsor the enterprise in 1984. A suite of paintings based on the theme was meant to be exhibited in the Palazzo Stelline in Milan, which is situated in the close vicinity of the church Santa Maria delle Grazie, where the dilapidated original is kept. Devoting a year to its realization, Warhol considerably exceeded the scope of the order by creating over a hundred painterly interpretations of the *Last Supper*. Through his involvement he revealed his nearly obsessive interest in the theme. He mediated da Vinci's ideas by working on a cheap, popular, black and white photography of the engraving of the original, which was popular in the nineteenth century. He also applied a schematic outline drawing, which he found in the 1913 *Encyclopedia of Painters and Painting*. The photograph was used as a model for screenplays and the picture was applied as a medium of tracing the contours of the selected details of the original painting.

By drawing on the pop-cultural iconosphere, Warhol covered da Vinci's painting with the trademarks of some distinctive products of everyday use, occasionally labeling them with their price tags. In doing so he seems to have endowed them with religious properties. Dillenberger affirms that the Wise Potato Chips logo, which resembles an owl and rotates before the viewer, obscuring the Apostles on Christ's right hand, that is John, Judas and Peter, symbolizes divine wisdom.[33] In the canvas entitled *Las Supper (The Big C)* the imagery is even more explicitly religious. "The Big C" stands for the slogan "Can the Mind Act as a Cancer Cure?" It appears that for Warhol, who, due to his childhood, as well as adulthood experience, was very much anxious about his health, "The Big C" is synonymous with Christ.[34] In the *Last Supper (Dove)* Warhol used the religious imagery even more extensively. In his translation of the original he put the figure of Christ between the following two logos: Dove from soap packages and GE from packaged light bulbs. His intention seems to be obvious. The dove symbolizes cleanliness, whereas electric light is associated with power. GE is the symbol for the creator, the dove epitomizes the Holy Spirit. Together with the sketchy figure of Christ they constitute the concept of the Holy Trinity.[35]

In the decomposed and transformed original Warhol outlined the contours of the details which he subsequently exposed in the multiplied series of images. Although the dominant colors are bright, the figures are black, evoking the connotations of death, especially that of Jesus. As it was typical of his idiom, in

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[33] Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 92.

[35] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

another version, Warhol shocked the audience with several punching bags adorned with the outlined images of Jesus Christ and the inscriptions attributed to Jean-Michel Basquiat, which had the word *Judge* as their focus. Finally, he overlaid one of the versions of the figurative original with an abstract camouflage. This was a direct reference to the series of his abstract realizations which he produced towards the end of his life, drawing on the ideas postulated by the representatives of Abstract Expressionism. In his own specific way, Warhol presented da Vinci's work in a new context by treating it as a product which can be multiplied or rather mass-produced and sold in large numbers in the form of tacky copies. By incorporating the pattern of camouflage and shrouding the *Last Supper* with it, Warhol might have intended to make an attempt at defining himself as a man full of contradictions, always appearing in disguise and masking his real self. He might have as well recalled the camouflages that appeared on the uniforms of American marines which, fascinated with the modern electronic mass-media, he could see on the TV screen. Another interpretation of using this specific cover-up might have been his ambiguous stance on religious issues.[36]

In a specific and laconic way Warhol renounced such interpretations, which can be best exemplified by the fragment of the last interview he gave to Paul Taylor in April of 1987:

> P.T.: "In America, you could be almost as famous as Charles Manson. Is there any similarity between you at the Factory and Jesus at the *Last Supper*?"
> A.W.: "That's negative, to me it's negative. I don't want to talk about negative things"
> […]
> P.T.: "Does the *Last Supper* theme mean anything in particular to you?"
> A.W.: "No, it's a good picture"[37]

It seems that the spiritual tone of Warhol's last realization is in contradiction with his words. Although it is hard to acknowledge Andy Warhol's interpretation of the *Last Supper* as his artistic credo, it needs to be admitted that it constitutes the quintessence of the complexity of his style by referring directly to his religious beliefs. There had always been a serious or even tragic streak in Warhol's realizations, be it a series of electric chairs, plane and car crashes, burning cars and street riots or portraits of the most wanted men. Even the serigraphic images of Jacqueline Kennedy and Marilyn Monroe bear the stamp of death. The former was rendered right after J. F. Kennedy's assassination, the latter the day after Monroe's death. The idiosyncratic idiom of Warhol's various realizations and constant presence of binary oppositions of which his artistic oeuvre was always full emphasize the intriguing ambiguity of his works. The same refers to his renditions of religious themes, which his travesty of Leonardo's masterpiece is the most prominent example of. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that Warhol is

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[36] Dillenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 112.

[37] K. Goldsmith (ed.), *I'll Be Your Mirror: The Selected Andy Warhol Interviews 1962–1987* (New York, 2004), pp. 384–385.

referred to as a "prolific, enigmatic, and complex artist, whose importance defies the test of time."[38]

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Motywy religijne w wybranych projektach wizualnych Andy'ego Warhola

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu jest analiza wybranych motywów religijnych w twórczości Andy Warhola (1928–1987), ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem ostatniego dzieła artysty, którym była serigraficzna trawestacja *Ostatniej Wieczerzy* Leonarda da Vinci. Prowokacyjnie mianowany przez media papieżem pop-artu, Warhol zasłynął jako grafik reklamowy, którego twórczość powszechnie kojarzona jest z seryjnymi obrazami puszek zupy Campbell i przejaskrawionymi sitodrukowymi portretami Marilyn Monroe. Artystyczna spuścizna Warhola to jednak zjawisko bardzo złożone, w którym symbolika religijna, w tym motyw ikony, rozumiany w sensie dosłownym i przenośnym, jest stale przewijającym się wątkiem. Twórczość artysty w ciągu całego jego życia podlegała dynamicznej ewolucji. Dotyczy to również wątków religijnych stale obecnych w jego realizacjach, zwłaszcza w drugiej fazie życia artysty. Patrząc na życiową i artystyczną drogę najbardziej znanego przedstawiciela pop-artu, można by zaryzykować stwierdzenie, że tworząc serigraficzne ikony popkultury, w drugim okresie swojej działalności artystycznej sam wykreował się na postać ikoniczną, zacierając tym samym granice między prawdą i fikcją. Życie i twórczość artystyczną Andy Warhola charakteryzował zawsze silny dualizm przejawiający się w binarnych opozycjach: Wschód – Zachód, kultura wysoka – kultura masowa, sfera prywatna – sfera publiczna, introwertyczność – ekstrawertyczność, twórczość – produkcja. Podobna dychotomia cechowała Warhola w jego rozumieniu koncepcji sacrum – profanum, czego artystyczna trawestacja wybranych motywów religijnych w jego twórczości jest najlepszym potwierdzeniem.

Słowa kluczowe: dwuznaczność, dychotomia, ikona, pop art, transcendencja

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[38] Dillenberger,The Religious Art of Andy Warhol, p. 120.

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UNDER WHICH LORD?
THE CONFLICT BETWEEN OBEDIENCE AND FREEDOM
OF CONSCIENCE IN THE VICTORIAN RELIGIOUS NOVEL

Abstract

One of the issues regularly cropping up in Protestant polemic writings was the issue of the legitimacy of the Church of England. Attacked both by Dissenters and Roman Catholics as an "Act-of-Parliament" church, it defended its position as the institution authorized to exercise pastoral care over the souls of Englishmen and Englishwomen. Often the novelists used the story of a family conflict in order to depict such issues in a miniature form, with parents standing for the state and / or church authorities, while children were their rebellious subjects. The conflict between obedience and freedom, or, to be more precise, obedience to authority and the freedom to decide to which authority one should submit, was the lynchpin around which the discussion revolved. Anglican writers, while proud of the traditional British liberty, were afraid that exercising it too freely could lead many susceptible souls astray, that is, into the Roman fold. The paper will attempt to explain the implications of this argument, using examples from selected Victorian novels.

Key words: Victorian literature, Catholicism, Tractarianism, obedience, legitimacy

Throughout its history, the Anglican church had to contend with two conflicting forces in its midst, of those who preferred their national church to be Protestant and of those who insisted on its essential character being Catholic, or respectively of the Low Church and High Church party, as they were dubbed. One of the divisive issues was the question of the obedience to clerical authority versus freedom of private judgement. In the Victorian era, under the influence of Tractarianism, the concept of the Church of England as a Catholic church, with a resulting emphasis on the reliance on the authority of ecclesiastical institutions in the matters of conscience, experienced a marked revival. The purpose of this article is to discuss how the conflict between obedience and freedom was presented in the Victorian Anglo-Catholic novel.

The link between Roman Catholicism and despotism was a staple of the Protestant polemic writing since the Reformation. The reliance of the Roman Catholic Church on the magisterium of the Church, as well as its use of sometimes forceful means to ensure the fidelity of its subjects, easily explains this association. A number of political writers, including such key figures as Locke and Milton,

argued that while Protestantism had a natural affinity with personal and political liberty, Catholicism was inextricably connected with oppression and absolutism. This association was epitomized in the title of Andrew Marvell's political pamphlet of 1678 *Account of the Growth of Popery, and Arbitrary Government in England*, which made clear that the relationship between these two things was an organic one.[1] It seemed quite obvious that Protestantism with its emphasis on the individual conscience was naturally conducive to building political systems respecting individual liberty, while Catholicism was by its very nature authoritarian, as the examples of absolutist France and Spain illustrated. This observation was quite widespread and it did not take a thinker of Locke's stature to make it; Frances Brooke in her popular novel *The History of Emily Montague* (1769) makes one of her protagonists remarks: "the Romish religion is best adapted to a despotic government, the Presbyterian to a republican, and that of the church of England to a limited monarchy like ours."[2] In this way, the opposition between British Protestant liberty and foreign Catholic slavery was constructed: "[a]rbitrary government, superstition, ignorance, corruption, exorbitance, foreign domination, and other ideas tied to Catholicism found their direct counterparts in the rule of law, knowledge, education, virtue, simplicity, free government, and other ideas that came to be associated with liberty."[3]

Taking into account the grave political danger posed by Catholicism, 17th and 18th-century writers accepted as natural that the liberty they set out to defend could not be granted to the enemies of this liberty. Milton in his *Areopagitica* (1644), today hailed as the landmark in the history of the freedom of speech, while arguing powerfully for intellectual liberty, had no intention of including Roman Catholics in it. He wrote: "I mean not tolerated Popery, and open superstition, which as it extirpats all religions and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpat," adding benevolently "provided first that all charitable and compassionat means be us'd to win and regain the weak and the misled."[4] For Milton there was no question that since Rome itself worked hard at inhibiting the freedom of speech through its policy of imprimaturs, Roman Catholics were not entitled to the freedom of speech or conscience their spiritual superiors destroyed.

The staunch Protestantism of Milton and other political writers of the 17th and 18th centuries made the right of private judgement one of its key tenets. Roman Catholicism, with its reliance on the authority of the Church, was open to the charges, often made by Protestant polemicists, that Catholics put their consciences entirely in the hands of their confessors, effectively becoming their string-puppets. Catholic morality was an externalised one, without any basis in the spiritual experience of the individual, but wholly dependent on the decisions of the Church, personified by its priests. In contrast, Protestants would enjoy the true freedom

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[1] C. Fatovic, "The Anti-Catholic Roots of Liberal and Republican Conceptions of Freedom in English Political Thought", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 66(1) (2005), p. 45.

[2] F. Brooke, *The History of Emily Montague* (London, 1777), vol. 2, p. 207.

[3] C. Fatovic, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

[4] J. Milton, *Areopagitica*, ed. John W. Hales (Oxford, 1894), p. 54.

of conscience, because they had to confront their ethical and religious dilemmas on their own and maintain their relationship with God without any intermediaries. Freedom became to be perceived as one of the defining features of British political and social life, which could not have been achieved if Britain had not been a Protestant country.

In view of the above, the 19th century could be said to bring about a kind of conservative backlash against the Whig vision of Britain, where Protestantism and liberty were mutually dependent. While the argument about the inextricable link between Britishness, Protestantism and liberty was still current and in use, some authors, many of whom were connected more or less closely with the Oxford Movement and its heir, Anglo-Catholicism, came to view the idolization of liberty as a virtue under all circumstances with a certain degree of distrust. Matthew Arnold in his *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) wrote with irony about "Englishman's impulse to do as he likes […] always regarded […] as something primary or sacred,"[5] seeing its embodiment in "that crowned Philistine, Henry the Eighth."[6] Arnold used the example of Murphy Riots, incited in the 1860s by an anti-Catholic lecturer of this name in various industrial cities of central and northern England; the authorities refrained from stopping Murphy in the name of the freedom of speech, which was, in Arnold's view, an inadequate response, paving the way to anarchy. He argued:

> if we let this excess of the sturdy English middle-class, this conscientious Protestant Dissenter, so strong, so self-reliant, so fully persuaded in his own mind, have his way, he would be capable, with his want of light – or, to use the language of the religious world, with his zeal without knowledge – of stirring up strife which neither he nor any one else could easily compose.[7]

Arnold's distrust of the unbridled liberty of expression, granted indiscriminately to everyone, carries with it the echoes of the dispute about liberty which was started in Arnold's university days by the authors associated with the Oxford Movement. The authors who are of particular relevance to this paper are those who remained in the Church of England, trying to navigate between the Scylla of Low-Church, or Dissenting Protestantism on the one hand, and the Charybdis of Roman Catholicism on the other hand. An example of such an author is William Sewell, who left the Oxford Movement after the publication of *Tract 90*, but still remained of the opinion that the Church of England was essentially Catholic in its nature. This is exemplified in his novel *Hawkstone* (1846), where all the positive characters insist on using the term "Roman" or "Papist" instead of "Catholic" when referring to the Roman Catholic Church, emphasizing that it is actually the Church of England which continues the true apostolic tradition of the primitive Church, and, even more importantly, continues the apostolic succession through its bishops. The question of the apostolic succession provided the fodder for much

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[5] M. Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy* (London, 1869), p. 60.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 224.

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 82.

of Catholic/Protestant polemic through the centuries and became very important in the 19th century for the Tractarian movement, with as many as six of *Tracts for the Times* devoted to this issue.[8] The reason why apostolic succession was so important to some High Church Anglicans was the fact that it gave them the aura of legitimacy. The continuous line of ordination from one generation of bishops to another, stretching back, at least in theory, all the way to St Peter and Jesus himself, proved to Anglicans that their church was not a human construct, or "the Act of Parliament Church," as Catholics used to call it dismissively; on the contrary, they were still the heirs of the first apostles and as such, still retained their authority, even if it had been sullied in the period before the Reformation by the excesses of the Romish Church. The ideal Catholic Church of England, as Sewell paints it, would be "Catholicism without Popery," as he ascribes all that is "noble and good" to the former, while "the spirit of rule, of ambition, of self-will"[9] to the latter.

The protagonist of *Hawkstone*, a young aristocrat named Ernest Villiers, arrives in the eponymous town, which is stricken by all the 19th-century plagues of industrialization, Chartism, the growth of Dissenting churches, infidelity and soon mass bankruptcies caused by speculations; the root causes of all these evils are "self-will and lawlessness"[10] and the fate of Hawkstone, as one of the characters predicts, foreshadows the fate of the whole England if it does not mend its ways. The ideal mode of the spiritual rebirth envisaged by Sewell is portrayed through Ernest's actions: he, together with some of his trusted clergymen friends from Oxford, restores the local priory and sets up there a kind of Anglican monastic community, reinvigorates the life of the parish and encourages the local agriculture and commerce even when it means a financial disadvantage to him. He also sets up an ideal hamlet for his farm labourers, which is essentially a kind of Robert Herrick fantasy land:

> [i]n the centre of the hamlet he [...] marked out the village green, with its tall elm trees grouped about it, its cricket-ground, its maypole [...] He had encouraged the villagers to form a little band of music which played in the summer evenings on the green, while the old women sat with their spinning-wheels at the doors of their houses, and the younger men practised all kinds of athletic games.[11]

Sewell's paternalist utopia rules out the presence of other denominations than Anglicanism of High Church variety: at the beginning of the novel, when Hawkstone is still in its unreformed and impenitent state, he depicts the meetings of interdenominational charity societies as ridiculous, not sparing their Anglican members, who are described as misguided or as equivocators whose unwillingness to castigate all opposing religious views as schismatic is tantamount to denying one's own faith. Thanks to the activity of Villiers and his collaborators, in Hawkstone two new churches were built, the old one was renovated and

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[8] D. Fisher, *Roman Catholic Saints and Early Victorian Literature* (Farnham, 2012), p. 13.

[9] W. Sewell, *Hawkstone* (New York, 1855), vol. 2, p. 41.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 255.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 286.

enlarged, while "one after another the schismatic chapels became empty"[12] and the recently arrived Romish priest fails in his mission. This is achieved, among others, by the new rector visiting local "schismatics" and threatening them with excommunication, which is described in glowing terms as asserting the God-given privilege of the Church of England over the citizens of this country, while in the same book the use of excommunication by the Roman Church is condemned as a proof of its intolerance.[13]

Thus, the remedy to all social and economic ills troubling England is rooting out disobedience in all its forms; following the dictates of benevolent aristocrats and wise priests is the key to prosperity in this world and salvation in the next. The terrible consequences of disobedience in political life are illustrated by the equally grave consequences of disobedience in Ernest's personal life. Villiers's son was kidnapped as a child by a scheming Jesuit Pearce working undercover and brought up by him deliberately to be a drunkard and a rebel who in the final riot scene attempts to kill his own father whom he does not know. He is sentenced to the gallows by the testimony of his own father, who also at that time does not recognize him. Fortunately, the execution is deferred because of his fatal sickness which gives his father, who in the meantime learns the truth about the young man's identity, the time to get him out of prison and nurse him in the final stages of his illness, during which the young man realizes the error of his ways and dies a penitent man.

Sewell's story is largely the story about re-establishing the paternal authority, a narrative about fathers and sons, both on the individual and societal level.[14] Ernest Villiers interprets much of the misfortunes that struck him as a divine punishment for his filial disobedience towards his father, despite the fact that the old General Villiers is portrayed as an aged libertine unworthy of any respect. But, as Sewell argued in his *Christian Politics* (1844), both father's and state's authority should be preserved, since both family and the state are divine institutions; he quotes Oedipus, of all people, as an example of the sad results of disobedience, "a picture of the deepest horror and suffering which ever befel mankind."[15] Thus, Ernest's activities in restoring the paternal authority of the Church of England, motivated by the guilt about his unfilial behaviour, in a way are reminiscent of the mechanism of establishing patriarchal religion and culture as portrayed by Freud in *Totem and Taboo* (1912–1913) and *Moses and Monotheism* (1937), where sons, motivated by the guilt over the murder of their father, elevate him to the figure of totem worship. Ernest does a similar thing, transferring his feeling of

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[12] *Ibid.*, p. 297.

[13] *Ibid.*, vol. 1, pp. 274–275.

[14] S. Griffin, *Anti-Catholicism and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 71. The whole argument about the psychoanalytic reading of *Hawkstone* is indebted to Susan Griffin's insightful discussion of this book, pp. 62–78, even though my reading leads in a slightly different direction.

[15] W. Sewell, *Christian Politics* (London, 1844), p. 74.

self-reproach from his deceased father to the Church of his father, emphasizing in his work its divinely-granted authority over the people of England.

Indeed, in keeping with other Tractarians Sewell places such a high value on obedience that it sometimes seems to be the only virtue in his catechism. The key argument through which an Anglican clergyman converts Lady Eleanor, who comes from an Old Catholic family, to Anglicanism is that living in England, her "first duty [...] is to place [herself] under [her] lawful rulers," going even so far as to claim that if she lived in Rome, her duty would be to submit to the Roman church, refusing "obedience only where our conscience, not leaning on itself, but supported by the external testimony of the primitive and other churches, denounced the act as criminal."[16] The main crime of Popery is that, as Villiers puts it in the last sentence of the novel, it "[rends] asunder, in this country, ties which God has joined, and [tears] the children of this empire from their Father in the State and in the Church, as my child was torn from me!"[17]

The parallels between *Hawkstone* and the story of Oedipus are striking and, as the allusion to the myth in Sewell's *Christian Politics* shows, at least to some degree intentional on Sewell's part, even though, being unaware of the significance that Freud was going to give to the myth, he interpreted the story of Oedipus as a cautionary tale against filial disobedience. In *Hawkstone* there are two acts of patricide: one symbolic, by Ernest the elder, who "kills" his father with ingratitude and disobedience, and the other attempted real one, during the riots. Hawkstone is Thebes and Colonus rolled in one; it is the place visited by the plague of modernity, from which Ernest, like Oedipus, sets it free; it is also, like Colonus, the place of purification and penitence for Ernest's son.

William Sewell lays a particular emphasis on the need for clerical guidance in women: one of Ernest's manifold acts of charity is the reinstitution of beguinage, where spinsters and widows can live together and devote themselves to various acts of charity, under the protection and direction of the Church of England. Obedience of women plays a similarly important role in *Margaret Percival* (1847) by William Sewell's sister, Elizabeth Missing Sewell. The eponymous heroine, who is wavering between the Church of England and the Church of Rome, is reminded by her clergyman uncle that she is unable to make a rational decision without practically doing a full course of studies in Latin and Greek, as well as Protestant and Catholic theology; failing that, converting to Romanism while ignoring her uncle's warnings, would be an act of sinful wilfulness. "Keep a careful watch over a criticising, discontented spirit, and you will never become a Romanist,"[18] her uncle tells her sternly, implying – as many Catholic divines did – that human reason, and especially that of a young girl, is too feeble to vanquish doubt and must rely on the authority of the Church. Elizabeth Sewell portrays the vaunted Protestant freedom of conscience as a burden, writing:

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[16] Sewell (1855), *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 312.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 350.

[18] E. Sewell, *Margaret Percival* (London, 1858), p. 480.

> The right of private judgement is much spoken of, and supposed to be a great privilege; but there are not many, especially among women, who find it so. Their very physical weakness makes them willing to be governed, especially in questions of religion; and it is in this way that a power which comes before them, speaking authoritatively and requiring unreserved submission, seizes upon their imagination, and easily triumphs over their reason.[19]

The conflict between obedience and freedom is also the key issue in John Henry Shorthouse's *John Inglesant* (1881). The title character, a 17th-century younger son of an aristocratic family with secret Catholic sympathies, receives an atypical Jesuit education: his tutor brought him up as an Anglican in order to make him an intermediary between the Church of England and the Church of Rome. Consequently, Inglesant spends most of his life moving both in Anglican and Catholic circles, until, like Shorthouse, he finds peace of soul as a High Anglican. Towards the end of his life, Inglesant sums up the conflict between Protestantism and Catholicism in these words: "'This is the supreme quarrel of all,' he said. 'This is not a dispute between sects and kingdoms; it is a conflict within a man's own nature – nay, between the noblest parts of man's nature arrayed against each other. On the one side obedience and faith, on the other, freedom and the reason. What can come of such a conflict as this but throes and agony?'"[20] While practising obedience to the commands of his spiritual director put Inglesant many times in danger, and while in the end he rejects the unquestioning obedience that the Church of Rome demands, he still considers it one of "ideal virtues."[21]

The elevation of obedience to the rank of one of "ideal virtues" by High Anglican writers may be mystifying for contemporary minds, raised in the democratic culture where "critical thinking" and "questioning authority" are hailed as indispensable for the development of individuals and societies. However, for many Victorians observing the rapid transformation, or, from their point of view, disintegration of the world surrounding them, familial, religious and civic disobedience seemed to be the root cause of all evil. The Roman Church, traditionally criticized by Protestants for its practice of turning its followers into unthinking slaves by requiring unquestioning obedience to the institution, started to be perceived as somewhat enviable in its ability to retain believers and attract new ones, as the growing number of high-profile converts testified. In view of that, High Church writers chose to turn their backs on the traditional Protestant virtues of private judgement and freedom of conscience, emphasizing instead the need of submission to the institution of the Church, respect for authority and obedience to one's social and religious superiors.

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[19] *Ibid.*, p. 236.

[20] J. H. Shorthouse, *John Inglesant* (New York, 1882), p. 441.

[21] *Ibid.*

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Któremu Panu służyć? Konflikt między posłuszeństwem i wolnością sumienia w religijnej powieści epoki wiktoriańskiej

Streszczenie

Jednym z tematów regularnie przewijających się w protestanckiej literaturze polemicznej była kwestia legalności kościoła anglikańskiego, który był atakowany zarówno przez dysydentów, jak i katolików jako kościół "ustawy parlamentarnej", a zatem nie pochodzący od Boga. W XIX w., gdy liczba katolików w Anglii szybko rosła, a ich najwyżsi przedstawiciele otwarcie wyrażali nadzieję na szybkie nawrócenie całego kraju, protestanccy powieściopisarze próbowali bronić swojej przynależności religijnej. Niektórzy pisarze wiktoriańscy zajmowali się w swoich powieściach kwestią posłuszeństwa władzy religijnej oraz sposobem ustalenia legalności takiej władzy. Nierzadko powieściopisarze posługiwali się historią konfliktu rodzinnego, aby ukazać takie zagadnienia w miniaturze, z rodzicami jako odpowiednikami władzy kościelnej i/lub państwowej, a dziećmi jako ich zbuntowanymi poddanymi. Konflikt pomiędzy posłuszeństwem i wolnością, lub, ściślej rzecz ujmując, posłuszeństwem władzy i wolnością wyboru, której władzy należy podlegać, był centralnym zagadnieniem tej dyskusji. Pisarze anglikańscy, chociaż byli dumni ze swojej wolności, uważanej za tradycyjną cnotę brytyjską, obawiali się, że jej zbyt duża doza może zwieść zanadto podatne na wpływy dusze na manowce, czyli do kościoła rzymskiego. Niniejszy artykuł jest próbą przeanalizowania wniosków wypływających z tej argumentacji na podstawie powieści *Hawkstone* Williama Sewella, *Margaret Percival* Elizabeth Missing Sewell i *John Inglesant* Johna Henry'ego Shorthouse'a.

Słowa kluczowe: literatura wiktoriańska, traktarianizm, katolicyzm, posłuszeństwo, prawowita władza

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'ALAS! THE IRISH PEASANT HAD TASTED OF FAMINE AND FOUND THAT IT WAS GOOD':[1] *THE TIMES* AND THE GREAT IRISH FAMINE

Abstract

The Great Irish Famine (1845–1852) played a pivotal role in the history of Ireland and Great Britain. It was a serious blot on the achievements of the British Empire, which exacerbated the strained relationship between the two islands. The failure of Britain, especially of the English, to help the sister island and its inhabitants has reverberated among the Irish to this day. Many historians point out that the catastrophe was brought about by British politicians, who rigidly adhered to the ideology of *laissez-faire* and, as a result, left the Irish to fend for themselves. Nonetheless, the role of the English press at the time cannot be overlooked. The nineteenth century was a period of rapid development of the press and the growth of its influence. The most influential of newspapers at the time – *The Times*, examines the portrayal of Ireland and the Irish at the time of the Great Irish Famine. A closer look at how the Emerald Isle was depicted in this daily newspaper, which undoubtedly had an enormous influence on British public opinion and British politicians, helps to understand why this tragedy took place despite the fact that Ireland belonged to the mighty and affluent United Kingdom.

Key words: the Irish Famine, *The Times*, the English press, the public opinion, Anglo-Irish relations

The Great Irish Famine, which played a pivotal role in turbulent Anglo-Irish relations, was extensively covered in *The Times.* The journal was published daily and very often the Irish question was discussed in its editorials, as well as letters to the editor. In addition, there was a separate column which was devoted to the news from the Emerald Isle. *The Times* without any doubt had an enormous influence on British public opinion and British politicians. Looking at how Ireland and its inhabitants were presented in the journal helps one to understand why such an enormous tragedy as the Famine of the 1840s was allowed to take place despite the fact that Ireland was an integral part of 'the empire on which the sun never sets.' The aim of this paper is to prove that *The Times* should be viewed as one of the main culprits responsible for the Irish Potato Famine.

In order to better understand the articles published in *The Times* referring to Ireland, it is vital to show how the Irish were perceived in Britain over the

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[1] *The Times*, 22.09.1846, p. 4.

ages. The Anglo-Irish relations have been tense since the Norman invasion in the twelfth century. At that time the famous Welsh chronicler Gerald of Wales started the tradition of looking down at the Irish and perceiving them through derogatory stereotypes.[2] In general, the inhabitants of the Emerald Isle were perceived by Englishmen as inferior and as savages. The British glossed over the fact that before the Viking raids Ireland was well known for her educated scholars and that Irish monks such as St. Columba spread Christianity in Britain. Since Henry II conquered Ireland and established the Lordship of Ireland, which he granted to his son John, the neighboring island virtually became the colony of the English crown. Over time the influence of the English and the subjugation of the Irish increased. As argued by Michael Hechter, Ireland was an example of internal colonialism and a country where England could try her colonial policy that was later used in oversees colonies. Hence, the relationship of England and Ireland was that of a metropolis and a periphery. In order to keep peace and stability in Ireland the English had to employ a number of stereotypes vilifying the Irish.[3] The most desirable goal of England was to 'anglicize' the sister island and her inhabitants through instilling desirable, that is, English traits as well as introducing Anglo-Saxon institutions.[4]

In the nineteenth century stereotypical image of Ireland and her inhabitants was well established and accepted. Richard Ned Lebow suggests that "it had become a perceptual prison, a closed image by which information about Ireland was organized and given meaning and in terms of which policy was frequently formulated."[5] For instance, a nineteenth-century radical periodical *Figaro in London* states in one of its texts that "no sooner is an assassination committed in Ireland, than the whole peasantry is denounced as a gang of murderers."[6] Generally, the Irish were deemed as indolent, dirty, violent, childish, feminine and thus incapable

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[2] See W. R. Jones, "Giraldus Redivivus" – English Historians, Irish Apologists, and the Works of Gerald of Wales, *Éire-Ireland*, 9(3) (1974), pp. 3–20; R. N. Lebow, "British Historians and Irish History", *Éire-Ireland*, 8(4) (1973), pp. 4–7; J. Th. Leerssen, *Mere-Irish & Fíor-Ghael: Studies in the Idea of Irish Nationality, its Development and Literary Expressions Prior to the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1986), pp. 35–38.

[3] M. Hechter, *Internal Colonialism: The Celtic Fringe in British National Development 1536–1966* (London, 1975), pp. 30, 73; see also C. Hall, "The Nation Within and Without", [in:] C. Hall, K. McClelland, J. Rendall (eds.), *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 182–183, 206–208; J. H. Ohlmeyer, "A Laboratory for Empire? Early Modern Ireland and English Imperialism", [in:] K. Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 26–60; T. Bartlett, "Ireland, Empire, and Union 1690–1801", [in:] K. Kenny (ed.), *Ireland and the British Empire* (Oxford, 2004), p. 70.

[4] N. Canny, *Kingdom and Colony: Ireland in the Atlantic World 1560–1800* (Baltimore, 1988), p. 31; M. de Nie, *The Eternal Paddy: Irish Identity and the British Press, 1798–1882* (Madison, 2004), p. 3.

[5] R. N. Lebow, *White Britain and Black Ireland: The Influence of Stereotypes on Colonial Policy* (Philadelphia, 1976), pp. 81–82; see also L. P. Curtis Jr., *Anglo-Saxons and Celts* (Bridgeport, 1968), p. 14; R. Romani, "British Views on Irish National Character, 1800–1846. An Intellectual History", *History of European Ideas*, 23(5–6) (1997), pp. 193–219.

[6] "Summary Convictions", *Figaro in London*, 28.01.1839, 373, p. 27.

of self-governance as opposed to the masculine Anglo-Saxons. Moreover, Michael de Nie points out that an Irishman "was forever a Celt, a Catholic, and a peasant."[7]

In 1845 Europe was struck by a potato blight that had particularly disastrous effects in Ireland, as the potato was the staple diet of the inhabitants of the Emerald Isle. This led to a famine that lasted almost to 1852 and became known in the Irish language as *An Gorta Mór* (the Great Hunger). During this period about one million of the Irish died and one and a half million left Ireland. The event aggravated the relationship between England and Ireland and fueled hatred of the Irish towards the English for a long time. It has reverberated among the Irish to this day. The Great Famine has also been a very thorny subject among historians with some of them blaming the British government and others whitewashing British politicians and underlining the economic situation of Ireland.[8] In 1997 during the 150th anniversary of the Irish Famine, Tony Blair, who was the Prime Minister at that time, apologized for the ineptitude of the British government, saying that "those who governed in London at the time failed the people through standing while a crop failure turned into a massive human tragedy."[9] While many historians have focused on British measures implemented at that time or economic factors, the influence of the English press at the time should not be overlooked.

To better understand why the Irish Famine was allowed to happen while Ireland was an integral part of the mighty British Empire, it is necessary to examine the attitude of English newspapers, especially of the most influential one, *The Times*. It was published for the first time in 1785 by John Walter I and at first the title of the journal was *The Daily Universal Register*. At the beginning it did not stand out from other newspapers in Britain. After three years, however, Walter changed the title to *The Times* and the journal quickly became the most successful and powerful newspaper in Great Britain, if not in the world. The success of *The Times* stemmed from its willingness to implement new technological novelties such as the telegraph or steam-powered presses. It also was a pioneer in developing a system of correspondents around the world.[10] Its major rival, *The Edinburgh Review*, states in one of the articles that *The Times* was "'the Leading Journal of Europe,' and is perhaps the greatest engine of temporary opinion in

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[7] M. de Nie, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[8] See G. Davis, "The Historiography of the Irish Famine", [in:], P. O'Sullivan (ed.) *The Meaning of the Famine* (London, 2000), pp. 15–39; M. Daly, "Revisionism and Irish History: The Great Famine", [in:] G. D. Boyce, A. O'Day (eds.), *The Making of Irish History: Revisionism and the Revisionist Controversy* (London, 1996), pp. 71–89; M. Fegan, "Faction: The Historiography of the Great Famine", [in:] M. Fegan, *Literature and the Irish Famine 1845–1919* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 10–34.

[9] Cited in J. O'Keefe, *Famine Ghost: Genocide of the Irish* (Bloomington, 2011), pp. 207–208.

[10] S. V. Makover, *Some Notes Upon the History of The Times 1785–1904* (Edinburgh, 1904), pp. 3–12; J. Grant, *The Newspaper Press: Its Origin – Progress – and Present Position*, vol. 1 (London, 1871), pp. 418–440; G. A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society: "From Caxton to Northcliffe"* (London, 1978), p. 152.

the world.”[11] Around the world *The Times* was perceived as the mouthpiece of the British establishment.[12] Ralph Waldo Emerson also underlines the influence of the journal: “No power in England is more felt, more feared, or more obeyed. What you read in the morning in that journal, you shall hear in the evening in all society.”[13]

Before the potato blight struck Ireland in 1845, the articles in *The Times* were very critical of the Irish and their lifestyle and commonly portrayed them as inferior or even as barbarians. The journal vilified Irishmen for relying too heavily on the potato, which was supposed to indicate their proclivity for slothfulness. In one of the articles, for instance, *The Times* states that the Irish “cannot live without potatoes […] and every acre is an *el dorado* to the imagination of an unreflecting Irishman.”[14] The fact that the Irish ate almost only potatoes was commonly viewed by the English as a sign of their degradation. L. M. Cullen points out, however, that “the adoption of the potato was a perfectly rational and justifiable response to economic circumstances.”[15] As a matter of fact, Irish peasants feeding on potatoes, which they often washed down with buttermilk, provided themselves with a very nutritious diet and were taller and healthier than British peasants.[16]

The Times was well known for its vicious attacks on Daniel O’Connell, who was the most famous Irishman in the first half of the nineteenth century and the most revered person in Ireland.[17] For instance, *The Times* described O’Connell’s actions as “blackguardly coarse, and sneakingly cowardly.”[18] O’Connell, on the other hand, called the journal, “that miscreant organ of the Tory party in England”[19] or “the leading organ of bigotry and tyranny.”[20] The acrimonious feud between the Irish politician and the English newspaper was so well-known that *Figaro in London* devoted some of its first-page engravings to it. One of them, “A Sign of the ‘Times,’” (fig. 1) depicts the office of the journal Printing House Square, in whose window

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[11] *The Edinburgh Review*, 38(76) (1823), p. 363.

[12] K. A. Miller, “‘Revenge for Skibbereen’: Irish Emigration and the Meaning of the Great Famine”, [in:] A. Gribben, *The Great Famine and the Irish Diaspora in America* (Amherst, 1999), p. 186.

[13] R. W. Emerson, *English Traits* (Boston, 1860), p. 262.

[14] *The Times*, 18.03.1830, p. 2.

[15] L. M. Cullen, “Irish History without the Potato”, *Past and Present*, 40 (1968), p. 81; see also L. M. Cullen, *The Emergence of Modern Ireland 1600–1900* (London, 1981), p. 147.

[16] K. H. Connell, *The Population of Ireland 1750–1845* (Westport, 1975), p. 156; C. Ó Gráda, *Ireland: A New Economic History 1780–1939* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 19, 21–22.

[17] Daniel O’Connell (1775–1847) was the most prominent Irish political leader in the first half of the nineteenth century. He played a crucial role in the campaign for Catholic Emancipation, which earned him the bynames: The Liberator and The Emancipator. In 1840 he founded the Repeal Association, whose purpose was to dissolve the legislative union between Ireland and Great Britain.

[18] “Ireland: The Precursor Association”, *The Times*, 14.01.1839, p. 6.

[19] “Ireland: Meeting at the Adelphi Theatre”, *The Times*, 27.12.1839, p. 6.

[20] “Ireland: Meeting of the Trade Unions”, *The Times*, 28.12.1839, p. 6.

the editor Thomas Barnes and the vice-editor Francis Bacon spray O'Connell with 'lies,' 'slander' and 'malice.'[21]

In August 1845, on the eve of the Famine, *The Times* sent a correspondent to Ireland, Thomas Campbell Foster. His task was to investigate abject poverty in Ireland and provide a portrayal of lifestyle in Ireland in a series of letters that were published in *The Times* between 21 August 1845 and 20 January 1846. The purpose of the letters was to provide a new source of information on Ireland, which was supposed to be objective and different from other publications of this period.[22] In one of the editorials the journal even claims that Foster's letters are "the most weighty and the most telling things that have ever been published on the great Irish question."[23] On the whole, the letters are full of stereotypes about the Irish and provide a very negative image of the island. Some scholars even doubt whether Foster visited Ireland at all.[24]

When the potato blight struck, many scientists, as well as farmers in Ireland and Great Britain, provided various methods of rescuing diseased potatoes. In general, the proposed solutions were useless because nobody knew that the blight was caused by the fungus *Phytophora Infestants*, and a successful remedy was discovered as late as 1882. Also Foster in one of his letters proposes a system of ventilating potatoes that was supposed to save them. At the same time, he underlines that trying to help the Irish is pointless because they are "ignorant and apathetic – so stupidly obstinate in their old ways."[25] In addition, Foster points out that despite the fact that the Irish live in the vicinity of waters which are full of fish, they are too lazy to tap into this source of food. In this way he suggested that Irishmen had themselves to blame for their plight.[26] Foster did not take into account the fact that the Irish did not have the necessary equipment or boats to fish on a large scale. On top of that, rivers belonged to landlords and catching fish in them was illegal.[27] The fact that the fishing industry in Ireland was inadequate to provide a great number of people with fish was underlined by an inspector of fisheries W. J. Tennell, who states in a letter that "[t]here is not one fishing boat in operation here, nothing but those wretched "Curraghs" [a typical Irish boat – P. H.] which cannot attempt to stir in the slightest breeze."[28]

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[21] See also "Baiting the Hedge-Hog", *Figaro in London*, 4(211), 19.12.1835, p. 207; "The Irish Artist", *Figaro in London*, 4(202), 17.10.1835, p. 172.

[22] *The Times*, 21.08.1845, p. 4.

[23] *The Times*, 02.10.1845, p. 5.

[24] L. Williams, "Bad Press: Thomas Campbell Foster and British Reportage on the Irish Famine 1845–1849", [in:] L. Brake, B. Bell, D. Finkelstein (eds.), *Nineteenth-Century Media and the Construction of Identities* (Houndsmill, 2000), p. 298.

[25] T. C. Foster, "The Condition of the People of Ireland", *The Times*, 28.11.1845, p. 5.

[26] *Ibid.*

[27] C. Ó Gráda, *Famine: A Short History* (New Jersey, 2009), p. 76; C. Kinealy, *A Death-Dealing Famine: The Great Hunger in Ireland* (London, 1997), pp. 81–82.

[28] "Extract from a Letter from MP. W. J. Tennell Inspector of Fisheries, dated Belmullet, 13th February 1847", National Library of Ireland, MS. 13, 361/1–2, Monteagle Papers.

In one of the letters Foster described O'Connell's estate, stating that "amongst the most neglectful landlords who are curse to Ireland Daniel O'Connell ranks first – that on the estate of Daniel O'Connell are to be found the most wretched tenants that are to be seen in all Ireland."[29] The letter resulted in a verbal altercation between Foster and O'Connell, which was published in *The Times* and widely discussed in Britain. Even the two illustrated magazines, *The Illustrated London News*, as well as *The Pictorial Times*, sent their artists to provide illustrations of O'Connell's property. This shows how popular Foster's letters were. After the series of illustrations were published, *The Times* commented on them right away. *The Times* underlines that the illustrations are not realistic and do not depict the squalor in which O'Connell's tenants live. According to *The Times*, the illustrations do not portray the reality of their plight because "it is an amiable fault of artists to flatter."[30] Furthermore, *The Times* comments on one engraving that appeared in *The Illustrated London News* (fig. 2) as follows:

> The defined outline of the roof in this sketch, with its accurately placed timbers, is what "ought to be" rather than "what is" […] The interior, too, shows the luxury of space, which the originals boast not. No cottage is twice the length of the cow inside in breadth. There, however are the cow, and the pig, and the lazy men – quite natural. Only the artist's English imagination has placed a broom inside – an article a Kerry peasant in all probability never saw, and most certainly never uses.[31]

This shows how deep-rooted the prejudice against the Irish was at the time. The fact that the leading English journal propagated such views of the neighbors only strengthened the stereotypical image of Ireland. A Quaker, William Edward Forster, after visiting O'Connell's lands, points out in a letter that Foster's letters are malicious and dishonest, and that O'Connell is one of the more magnanimous landlords in Ireland.[32] What is more, Kinealy says that, in fact, the reports provided by Quakers not only gave firsthand accounts of the Famine in Ireland, but also counterbalanced the callous narration of *The Times*, as well as that of other English periodicals.[33]

Foster's letters with additional comments were published as a book in 1846.[34] Foster sent his book to Robert Peel, who was the Prime Minister at the time and the person responsible for the relief policy in Ireland. Peel, in a letter to Foster, says that despite the workload he had to deal with, he read almost every letter written

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[29] T. C. Foster, "The Condition of People of Ireland", *The Times*, 18.11.1845, p. 8.

[30] "Darrynane Beg and Cahirciveen 'Illustrated'", *The Times*, 12.01.1846, p. 5.

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] T. Wemyss Reid, *Life of the Right Honourable William Edward Forster* (London, 1889), pp. 100, 102; see also M. MacDonagh, *Daniel O'Connell and the Story of Catholic Emancipation* (Dublin, 1929), p. 340; M. R. O'Connell, "O'Connell: Lawyer and Landlord", [in:] K. B. Nowlan, M. R. O'Connell (eds.), *Daniel O'Connell: Portrait of Radical* (Belfast, 1984), pp. 116–119.

[33] C. Kinealy, "Potato, Providence and Philanthropy: The Role of Private Charity during the Irish Famine", [in:] P. O'Sullivan (ed.), *The Meaning of the Famine* (London, 2000), p. 153.

[34] T. C. Foster, *Letters on the Condition of the People of Ireland* (London, 1846).

by Foster about Ireland that was published in *The Times*.[35] As a result, he might have been influenced by Foster's letters in forming his relief policy in Ireland. *The Times* also supported Lord Clarendon, who became the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in 1847, probably because he was on good terms with John Delane, the editor of *The Times*.[36] Clarendon was in favor of coercive methods and was unpopular among the Irish. Clarendon's affinity with *The Times* is attested in a letter to Henry Reeve, the correspondent of *The Times* and Clarendon's friend, in which Clarendon says:

> I am really obliged for the two articles in the 'Times' which are admirable, and have had a stunning effect here [Ireland – P. H.], where it is as well known as on the Continent that the 'Times' forms, or guides, or reflects no matter which the public opinion of England.[37]

Many scholars highlight that during the Famine British society succumbed to the so-called "compassion fatigue," which means that people constantly exposed to reports on a plight of a particular country or a group of people are "left exhausted and tired by those reports" and cease to "think that anything at all can be done to help."[38] Looking at the articles that were published in *The Times* before the Famine of the 1840s, it is clear that compassion fatigue appeared even earlier. During the famine of the 1820s, *The Times* was still compassionate towards its neighbors:

> There are topics on which the heart shrinks from dwelling, and the present state of the south of Ireland is one. Famine has there succeeded at length to the calamities endured in ordinary seasons by a wretched and despairing race of men: tens of thousands of families are exposed to its worst horrors: and while men in office are thinking about arrangements by which that which ought to have been foreseen and prepared against six months ago may be tardily checked in the latter stages of its course, the miserable tenant of the bog or mountain district throughout the wider portion of the south of Ireland, expires amidst the screams and agonies of his little ones, perishing of the same hunger which destroys him. [...] Details have reached us which we forbear to force upon our readers; but in the bare outline of such a picture there lies an appeal to the humanity of the English people, which is not in their nature to disregard.[39]

Already in the 1830s, when Ireland was again in the grips of a famine, *The Times* wrote:

> Our advice is, let Irish property relieve Irish no-property. Till something of this kind is done, till some permanent provision is legally made for the houseless poor, by the endowed rich, the possessors of house and lands, the squiralty and nobility, we shall

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[35] T. C. Foster to R. Peel, 21.03.1846; R. Peel to T. C. Foster, 24.03.1846, The British Library ADD MS 40588, Peel Papers, p. 1–3.

[36] J. Prest, *Lord John Russell* (London, 1972), p. 252–253.

[37] Clarendon to H. Reeve, 14.10.1849, [in:] J. K. Laughton, *Memoirs of the Life and Correspondence of Henry Reeve*, vol. 1 (London, 1898), p. 215.

[38] K. Tester, *Compassion, Morality and the Media* (Buckingham, 2001), p. 13.

[39] *The Times*, 01.05.1822, p. 4.

not oppose the exercise of English benevolence, but we shall not again endeavor to rouse and excite it.[40]

In the same editorial the journal underscores that it does not devote too much space to the misery in Ireland, as "we are tired of the periodic fits of distress to which Ireland is subject."[41] The claim that "Irish property must pay for Irish poverty" became actually a mantra during the Great Famine of the 1840s, which hampered bringing proper help to the Emerald Isle.[42]

Ruth Wodak distinguishes a number of topoi that are used in order to propagate social exclusion, discrimination, racism, ethnicism or nationalism.[43] Three topoi, namely, the topos of responsibility, the topos of history and the topos of abuse were employed by *The Times* during the famine. The topos of abuse means that if someone or a group abuses offers of help, the help should be withdrawn or something should be done to curb the abuse.[44] Accordingly, right at the beginning of the Famine, while pondering how to help Ireland, *The Times* concludes that "[i]t is impossible to hit on a remedy which shall not run into abuse."[45] In general, the newspaper was against any direct help, as it could have been abused, and in addition the Irish could have become too dependent on the help from the outside. It was oftentimes underlined in *The Times* that jobbing was rife in Ireland. This perfectly dovetailed with the common perception of the Irish as lazy. Moreover, *The Times* constantly underlined the ingratitude of their neighbors for the efforts of the British by pointing out that the Irish subscribe to the motto: 'England's weakness is Ireland's opportunity.'

Already when the potato blight started wreaking havoc, the journal told its readers that:

> Even to this dark hour, when those fell sisters, famine and plague, are beginning their ravages, the people maintain a vast and expensive organization and a "quasi" Government, which, under the pretence of seeking national dismemberment, is daily employed in inventing calumnies against every English man and every English thing.[46]

When it turned out that Ireland was not able to pay off loans granted by the British government, *The Times* wrote that Ireland:

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[40] *The Times*, 13.07.1831, p. 5.

[41] *Ibid.*

[42] See J. S. Donnelly, "'Irish Property Must Pay for Irish Poverty': British Public Opinion and the Great Irish Famine", [in:] C. Morash and R. Hayes (eds.), *'Fearful Realities': New Perspectives on the Famine* (Dublin, 1996), pp. 60–76.

[43] R. Wodak, "The Discourse-Historical Approach", [in:] R. Wodak, M. Meyer (eds.), *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London, 2001), pp. 75–77.

[44] R. Wodak, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

[45] *The Times*, 07.02.1846, p. 4.

[46] *The Times*, 14.03.1846, p. 4.

after sucking the very blood of England for these months, returns much the same thanks to the people who have suffered, and are suffering, for her sake, that a wolf would return to the man who should be simple enough to draw it out of a pit.[47]

The Times also used the topos of history. According to it, as history shows that specific actions have specific results, one should either do or shun a specific action in a specific situation based on the similar historical example.[48] As a result, the journal highlighted in its editorials the fact that famine was a perennial problem of Ireland and spending money for the relief of the Irish only meant squandering the earnings of hard-working Englishmen.[49]

The last topos used by *The Times* was the topos of responsibility, which means that "because a state or a group of persons is responsible for the emergence of specific problems, it or they should act in order to find solutions to these problems."[50] According to this topos, it was common to view Irish landlords as the culprits responsible for the situation in Ireland. In one of the articles, the newspaper asks Irish landed classes:

> How can you, whose properties depend on Irish labour – whose rents proceed from Irish produce – whose first social duties are owing to Ireland and Irishmen – how can you with any face come to beg a farthing out of the English Exchequer, until you have done all in your power – all you are expected to do – to meet a great and pressing exigency?[51]

The Times called Irish landlords asking money from the government "aristocratic mendicants."[52] Irish gentry was also portrayed as a group that took advantage of the Famine and their emaciated tenants, as put by *The Times* the Irish landlord "makes the same use of his peasantry as the gipsy does of her stolen child. She pinches the poor creature, and extorts our alms on the strength of its sufferings."[53] Consequently, the journal wanted to place the financial burden for helping the Irish poor solely on the shoulders of Irish landlords.

The Times tried to convince its readers that Irish landlords should be made responsible by showing hardships imposed on English workers. Hence, in one of the editorials the newspaper says: "Thus the tiny fingers of a pale little operative snatched from her cradle to the factory, and from the factory to the grave, will maintain Irish lords in the saloons and halls of Paris, and Cork peasants at the cabin door."[54] *The Times* very often underlined the burden that English workers had to bear to help their Irish neighbors. In one of the articles the journal asks "whether

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[47] *The Times*, 08.09.1847, p. 4.

[48] R. Wodak, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

[49] *The Times*, 19.02.1846, p. 4; *The Times*, 27.02.1846, p. 5.

[50] R. Wodak, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

[51] *The Times*, 12.02.1846, p. 4.

[52] *The Times*, 18.09.1846, p. 4.

[53] *The Times*, 27.08.1846, p. 4.

[54] *The Times*, 11.02.1847, p. 5.

every English working man is always to carry an Irish family on his shoulders, as he is at the moment."[55] *The Times* must have been successful in convincing some of its English readers that they were being exploited by the Irish as in a letter to the editor one of the readers states: "People are beginning to see the unreasonableness of the bees on one side of the Channel supporting drones on the other."[56]

Reports about the suffering of the Irish brought about commiseration around the world and many people decided to donate money for the famished families in Ireland. Nonetheless, when it was announced in Britain that money was to be collected to help Ireland, *The Times* was against it. The journal stressed that "the charity, the energy, the intelligence, the public spirit of the nation should be applied to improve the old Poor Law" and urged its readers not to "waste your hearts, your souls, your thoughts, and your purses on any self-constituted junta."[57] Charitable work was encouraged especially by Queen Victoria's letter (13 January 1847) addressed to the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Archbishop of York, calling for the subscription of money for Ireland and some parts of Scotland.[58] The Queen's call was answered – £171,533 was collected and given to the British Association.[59] Additionally, Queen Victoria announced that on 24 March 1847, a general national fast should be observed. Around this time *The Times* did not spur its readers to give succor to the Irish. On the contrary, the journal underlined idleness of the inhabitants of the Emerald Isle, concluding that Irishmen:

> have tasted of public money, and they find it pleasanter to live on alms than on labour. […] Deep, indeed, has the canker eaten. Not into the core of a precarious and suspected root, but into the very hearts of the people, corrupting them with a fatal lethargy, and debasing them by a fatuous dependence![60]

In October 1847 the Queen issued another letter asking for a collection of money for Ireland, as well as for some districts of Scotland. The leading newspaper was of course against such a measure which is made clear in one of the leaders:

> So there is to be another collection for Ireland. […] We are treated like those rich Italian pastures where, Virgil tells us, more grass grows in the night than the cattle can eat in the day. […] The poor of this country [England – P. H.] received much less alms and hospitality last winter in consequence of the drain for Ireland; and many

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[55] *The Times*, 11.02.1847, p. 5.

[56] *The Times*, 19.03.1847, p. 6.

[57] *The Times*, 28.12.1846, p. 4; The Irish Poor Law was passed in 1838. It established a system of workhouses and divided Ireland into 130 unions. The purpose of the workhouses was to help impoverished Irish families, however, this system of relief proved ineffectual during the Famine. See more in G. O'Brien, "The Establishment of Poor-Law Unions in Ireland, 1838–1843", *Irish Historical Studies*, 13(90) (1982), pp. 97–120; T. G. Conway, "The Approach to an Irish Poor Law, 1828–1833", *Éire-Ireland*, 6(1) (1971), pp. 65–81; P. Gray, *The Making of the Irish Poor Law, 1815–1843* (Manchester, 2009).

[58] "The Queen's Letter", *The Times*, 22.01.1847, p. 6.

[59] C. E. Trevelyan, *The Irish Crisis* (London, 1848), pp. 117, 121.

[60] *The Times*, 26.03.1847, p. 4.

a man supporting a family on 8s. a week *missed* the relief which fell into rapacious grasp of comfortable Irish farmers. [...] The evil of dependence is one which is sure to increase. The Irish appear to have much the same notion of England that village children have of the metropolis. They must imagine its roads to be covered with gold dust, while at every door stand heaps of wheat and all sorts of eatables.[61]

The Times published in the same month two letters: one by Charles Trevelyan, Assistant Secretary to the Treasury, who is also blamed by some historians as the man responsible for the Irish Famine, and the other one by John Burgoyne, the chairman of the Relief Commission. Beseeching the readers of the newspaper to take part in collecting money for Ireland, both civil servants underlined the suffering of the western parts of Ireland and the need for charity towards Ireland in the letters. Despite this plea, in the editorial of the same issue, *The Times* extolled the virtues of English benevolence, pointing out that "[w]e do not, therefore, fear the imputation of inhumanity when we say that public opinion is adverse to this repeated 'begging' for Ireland."[62] The denunciation of another subscription for Ireland by *The Times* must have struck a chord with its English readers as the Queen's second letter was unsuccessful and only £27,000 was collected.[63] This was foretold in one of the letters to the editor, whose author states: "Sir, I for one fear to find that empty churches, frigid discourses, and a still-born birth of the national gratitude, will be the almost reasonable effect of an attempt so ill-advised as again to fatten the lazy Celt on the daily bread of the industrious Saxon."[64]

Apart from the effects of the chartist movement and the insurrection in Ireland, the United Kingdom went through the tumultuous period of the 1848 uprisings unscathed. The rebellion in Ireland led by William Smith O'Brien was an ignominious fiasco, as a group of famished Irishmen were dispersed by a group of constables. The unrest in Ireland only further emphasized the ingratitude of the Irish. Even before the insurrection *The Times* described Ireland as "the sore and gangrened limb of the Empire" and added that "[w]e are sick of Irish wants and Irish grumblings – sick of Irish factions and Irish violence – sick and disgusted at the virulence of Irish sedition, and the magnitude of Irish wickedness."[65] When the rebellion was over *The Times* ridiculed O'Brien for allegedly fleeing the scene of the scuffle by hiding in a cabbage patch, writing that "[h]e escaped the shots fired at him by the two policemen when he was crawling on all fours out of Mrs. Cormack's cabbage garden."[66] When O'Brien was captured, *The Times* wrote that

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[61] *The Times*, 09.10.1847, p. 4; in the same issue *The Times* published two letters by Anglican clergymen against the Queen's letter, see "Collections on the Thanksgiving-Day", *The Times*, 09.10.1847, p. 5.

[62] *The Times*, 12.10.1847, p. 4.

[63] *British Association Minute Book: Finance Sub-Committee*, 24.02.1848, National Library of Ireland MS. 5218, p. 124.

[64] "The Collection for the Irish", *The Times*, 15.10.1847, p. 5.

[65] *The Times*, 13.04.1848, p. 4.

[66] "The Irish Rebellion", *The Times*, 03.08.1848, p. 4.

he "has allowed himself to be picked up like a 500l. note in the gutter."[67] O'Brien was hurt by being the butt of jokes of the English press.[68] What is more, later on he even challenged Robert Peel's son to a duel when the latter mocked the Irish rebels of 1848.[69] Most importantly, the Irish rebellion was the straw that broke the camel's back and was perceived as the ultimate symbol of Irish ingratitude for the alleged hardships that Englishmen had to go through for their sake.

In 1851 the first returns of the official census of Ireland were published, showing the extent of the effects of the Famine. It demonstrated how the mass starvation, pestilential diseases, mass emigration depopulated the Emerald Island, as the number of its inhabitants dropped from 8,175,124 in 1841 to 6,515,794 in 1851. Massive emigration and the census were widely discussed by the press, however, the depopulation was not perceived as a failure of the relief policy toward the neighboring island. While leaving their home country in droves was an anguish for many Irish families, for *The Times* "[t]he Irish problem has solved itself, or rather is in course of rapid solution, in a manner which is strikingly illustrative of the vanity of human foresight"[70] and "the abstraction of the Celtic race at the rate of a quarter of a million a-year is a surer remedy for the inveterate Irish disease than any human wit could have imagined."[71] *The Times* explained the disappearance of masses of Irishmen to its readers in racial terms as inevitable because "in the middle of the nineteenth century there still survives on the westernmost shores of Europe a rugged mass of Celtic aborigines."[72] The journal described Irish peasants as mere savages and "a class incompatible with civilization."[73] In addition, *The Times* exonerated the British government from the responsibility of the tragedy in Ireland and passed the buck to extravagant Irish landlords and inveterate peasantry.[74]

Such callousness towards Ireland was well remembered by the Irish and fuelled hatred towards the English for years to come. John Devoy, an Irish nationalist, wrote in his diary that "the London 'Times,' which always voices the prevailing opinion in England, printed an article rejoicing over the disaster."[75] Very often maligned in *The Times* and famous for his opprobrium of the British government, John Mitchel wrote that "[t]here began to be an eager desire in England to get rid of

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[67] *The Times*, 08.08.1848, p. 4.

[68] W. S. O'Brien, *Correspondence between John Martin and William Smith O'Brien Relative to a French Invasion* (Dublin, 1861), pp. 30–31; see also B. M. Touhill, "'The Times' versus William Smith O'Brien", *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 15(2) (1982), pp. 52–63.

[69] R. Davis, *The Young Ireland Movement* (Dublin, 1987), p. 163; R. Sloan, *William Smith O'Brien and the Young Ireland Rebellion of 1848* (Dublin, 2000), p. 222.

[70] *The Times*, 09.01.1852, p. 4.

[71] *The Times*, 14.01.1851, p. 4.

[72] *The Times*, 02.01.1852, p. 4.

[73] *Ibid.*

[74] *The Times*, 04.07.1851, p. 4.

[75] J. Devoy, *Recollections of an Irish Rebel* (New York, 1929), p. 4.

the Celts by emigration; for though they were perishing fast of hunger and typhus, they were not perishing fast enough."[76] The propagation of a negative image of Ireland in *The Times* did not end with the Famine and continued throughout the nineteenth century. In 1871 *The Examiner* expounded on the Irish policy of *The Times* stating that

> How often have dispassionate witnesses borne testimony to the fearful exasperation that awoke among the tortured people when, in the melancholy time the great Irish exodus, the *Times* raised its song of triumph over the flight of the famishing myriads, exclaiming, with thoroughly un-English exultation over calamity, that the Celts were going 'with a vengeance'.[77]

According to *The Examiner*, the result of such a policy was that:

> It is useless to assure large classes of Irishmen that, when the leading English journal writes thus, the majority of Englishmen are not of the same opinion; and perpetuation of Celtic hatred is part of the price paid for the reputation of the *Times* a representative journal.[78]

The Great Irish Famine claimed many victims, one could say too many, especially when taking into account the fact that Ireland was an integral part of the 'workshop of the world,' which showboated its might in 1851 during the Great Exhibition, while on the neighboring island people were still dying. Scholars have usually tried to explain that the Famine was the result of the misguided policy of the British government or that it stemmed from the social and economic condition of Ireland. Nevertheless, it is vital to examine the contents of the leading English newspaper at the time, as it sheds light on the milieu in which decisions about the relief policy were made and helps one to understand why this tragedy was allowed to happen. The excerpt from *The Times* in the title of this article "Alas! The Irish peasant had tasted of famine and found that it was good" encapsulates the attitude of the leading English journal towards Ireland at the time of the Famine. It is small wonder that the calamity happened when the English public opinion and the elites were fed with such contents. As a result, *The Times* can be viewed as the main culprit that hampered bringing sufficient help to the Irish in the time of need.

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[76] J. Mitchel, *The Last Conquest of Ireland (Perhaps)* (Glasgow, 1876), p. 139.

[77] "The Decline of 'The Times'", *The Examiner*, 15.04.1871 (3298), p. 384.

[78] *Ibid.*

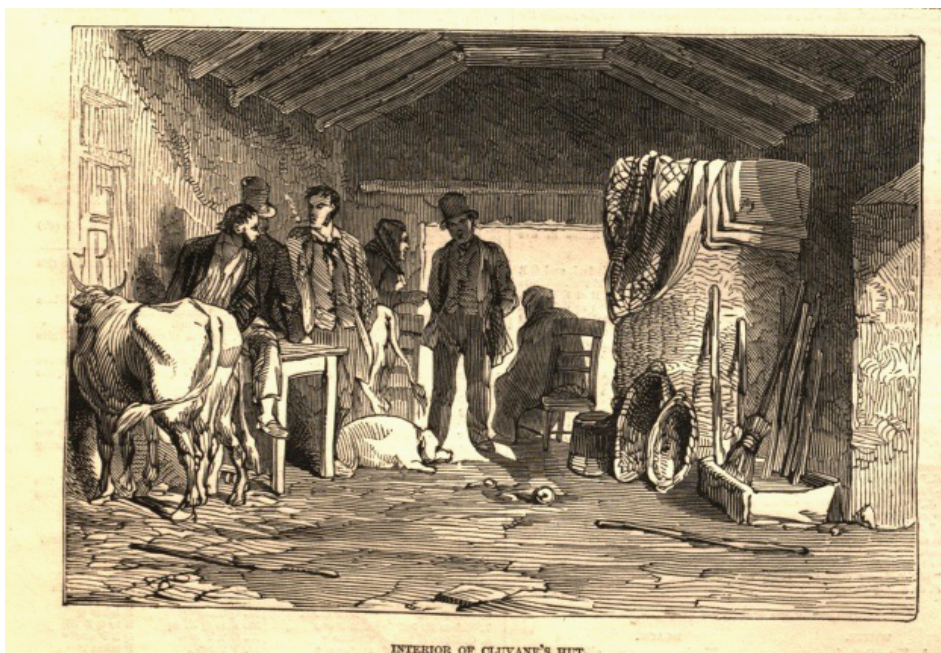Fig. 1. "Sign of 'The Times'", *Figaro in London*, 01.10.1936, 5 (252), p. 161

Fig. 2. "Interior of Cluvane's Hut", *The Illustrated London News*, 10.01.1846, 8 (193), p. 24

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„Niestety! Irlandzki chłop poczuł smak głodu i polubił go": obraz Wielkiego Głodu w Irlandii w relacjach dziennika *The Times*

Streszczenie

Wielki Głód Irlandzki (1845–1852) odegrał niezmiernie istotną rolę w historii stosunków angielsko-irlandzkich. Głód, który znacznie pogorszył już i tak napięte relacje pomiędzy dwoma wyspami, stał się blamażem dla Imperium Brytyjskiego. Irlandczycy do dnia dzisiejszego pamiętają, że Wielka Brytania, a w szczególności Anglicy, nie pomogli sąsiedniej wyspie i jej mieszkańcom. Historycy często wskazują, że do katastrofy doprowadzili brytyjscy politycy, którzy podejmując decyzje kierowali się ideologią leseferyzmu, co doprowadziło do tego, że Irlandczycy zostali pozostawieni na pastwę losu. Często jednak zapomina się o roli jaką odegrała w tym czasie angielska prasa. Dziewiętnasty wiek był okresem, kiedy nastąpił znaczny rozwój prasy oraz wzrost jej wpływu na opinię publiczną. Najbardziej wpływową gazetą w tym czasie był dziennik „The Times". Niniejszy artykuł ukazuje jak wizerunek Irlandii był kształtowany na łamach „The Times" w okresie Wielkiego Głodu Irlandzkiego. Bliższe spojrzenia na to, jak Zielona Wyspa była przedstawiana na łamach tego dziennika, który bez wątpienia był najbardziej opiniotwórczy, pozwala zrozumieć, dlaczego pozwolono, aby tak wielka tragedia miała miejsce, pomimo tego, że Irlandia była częścią potężnego i bogatego Zjednoczonego Królestwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Głód Irlandzki, The Times, prasa angielska, opinia publiczna, stosunki angielsko-irlandzkie

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ON FURTIVE PERSISTENCE OF SELFHOOD
IN THREE EKPHRASTIC POEMS

Abstract

The aim of this article is to investigate whether ekphrastic poetry, which by its very nature tends to focus solely on the element of pure description, allows one to compose verse entirely purged of any traces of authorial subjectivity, often manifesting itself in the shape of a consciousness trying to impose human categories on what is essentially non-human. Through analyses of three different poems, by Ezra Pound, Gary Snyder and Czesław Miłosz, respectively, the article tries to demonstrate that the ambition of writing poetry completely free from any intrusions of human subjectivity is bound to remain an impossible project. At the same time, however, it is likely to yield poems whose philosophical and artistic scope sets them apart from a more openly self-involved kind of verse.

Key words: poetry, ekphrasis, description, subjectivity, consciousness

Introduction

The study of pictorial representations of texts, narrative potential of paintings, textual characteristics of images, mutual interdependence of visual arts and the written word, etc., is a rapidly expanding field of study and one cannot hope to do justice to its fascinating complexity in a single article except by enumerating the most important recent contributions to the debate. Apart from the long-admired classical works on the subject, the most stimulating recent studies must include W. J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory. Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (1994) and *What Do Pictures Want?: The Lives and Loves of Images* (2005), where Professor Mitchell discusses the "pictorial turn" in contemporary culture, which he compares to the „linguistic turn" that took place in the 1960s. Another important study is Murray Krieger's *Ekphrasis: The Illusion of the Natural Sign* (1992), which assumes a more historical approach to investigate the capacity of words in poetry to create images. The author explores the potential of visual representation inherent in language and the theoretical background behind various forms of verbal recreation of images from Plato to post-modern thinkers. James A. W. Heffernan's study of ekphrastic poetry *Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (1993) also takes a historical approach and examines the

art of descriptive representations of objects through the medium of language from Homer and Virgil to Ashbery and Williams. The museum of words signalled in the title refers to the treasure trove of ekphrastic poems which have accumulated over the centuries. Another study of the history of ekphrasis is Ruth Webb's *Ekphrasis, Imagination and Persuasion in Ancient Rhetorical Theory and Practice* (2009), which is focused primarily on how the term was originally used and points out significant differences between its application in antiquity and today.

The aim of this essay is to examine three ekphrastic poems, written by Ezra Pound, Gary Snyder and Czesław Miłosz, respectively. While the last poem to be discussed clearly falls into the category of ekphrasis, the previous two can also be called ekphrastic texts only upon accepting a generously inclusive definition of the term, which will be provided below.

There are dozens of angles from which one can approach ekphrastic poetry, but the problem I would like to engage with here is the question whether some traces of the author's controlling consciousness must necessarily remain in such poems, since texts of purely descriptive character seem most conducive to total, or near-total, self-effacement.[1] This is not to claim that the above-mentioned poets deliberately set out to write poems which would be to the largest possible degree free from their more or less intrusive presence as progenitors of the text; Pound, for example, never really claimed that he wanted to efface subjectivity, rather his ambition was to replace the excessively sentimental subjectivity of the romantic type for subjectivity which may be translated into images but not necessarily erased altogether. Snyder's approach is different in that his interest in Buddhism logically leads to the greatest possible diminishment of selfhood to the point of complete self-effacement, which is the desired terminus of the spiritual path of every Buddhist, and many of Snyder's descriptive poems, including the one which will be discussed in this article, express this wish. Miłosz seems more like Wordsworth in that even in broadly understood ekphrastic poems which unfold naturally along the lines of pure description, and may accommodate the shadowy presence of the poet himself only at the peril of disrupting the unity of the poem, the speaker re-emerges from the margins of the text in ways that may often seem superfluous or intrusive. Consequently, the aim of this article is not to chastise authors for having failed to take every precaution to evacuate the aura of human agency from the text, but rather to gauge the kenotic potential of poetry which focuses on pure description, to investigate whether it is at all possible to write verse which would be completely free from any traces of subjectivity.[2]

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[1] Of course, there are dozens of other issues one could address, e.g. "How does description contain or convey meaning? What do we do when we describe something? Reproduce, account for, picture, portray, trace, parcel out? How does one take the measure of the external world? How neutral or objective a form can such an effort take? [...] Can language hope for a scientific rendering?" – W. Spiegelman, *How Poets See the World. The Art of Description in Contemporary Poetry* (New York, 2005), p. 5.

[2] The term "kenotic" is here understood in its existential rather than religious or Bloomian sense, i.e. as leading to genuine self-effacement, rather than as a craftly circumlocutory detour of the belated text furtively asserting its authority on the precursor text.

As will have become clear by now, the definition of ekphrasis adopted here is comprehensive enough to cover descriptions of both works of art and natural landscapes since both may serve as powerful stimuli urging the poet to describe them in all their induplicable individuality. Taking a leaf out of the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, one might define ekphrasis as rendering the inscape of the visible, which is not necessarily restricted to works of visual arts, through verbal representation. Thus, it goes beyond Heffernan's understanding of ekphrasis as "verbal representation of visual representation"[3] and is closer to Krieger's position, which holds that "the ekphrastic dimension of literature reveals itself wherever the poem takes on the 'still' elements of plastic form which we normally attribute to the spatial arts."[4]

At the risk of proleptically revealing the conclusions of these investigations, this essay will try to demonstrate that even poems which seem purely descriptive do nevertheless retain certain traces of their authors' subjectivity, and that it is well nigh impossible to entirely evacuate the aura of human agency from the text. Even in poems which seem to make every effort to limit themselves to pure representation, the selfhood of the author is bound to re-emerge at some point like a half repressed pentimento, even when one has taken every care to observe the stringent exigencies of descriptive discipline. If, at least for some authors, pure reportage is the holy grail of ekphrastic poetry, they soon learn that the defining quality of this object is its tantalizing elusiveness. The seemingly banished subjective component may implicitly reappear in the form of human agency (as in descriptions of cityscapes), outwardly incorporeal meditation or perception, in the nature of selection of elements which are gathered into description, in the intensity and nature of introspection which the contact with an object has called forth in the author, and in a number of other ways.

I am not making here a banal claim that by following such clues one can trace back the authorship to a specific person, but that the limits of referentiality set up by the text itself are "sullied" by the agency which set up those limits in the first place. My claim is that even in the texts which seem perfect vehicles for offering the transparency of egoless scrutiny, such desired translucence, or selfless fusion of that who looks with the object of his or her gaze, must remain an utopian project. This is not necessarily a criticism, even though the way in which the author intrudes upon the text may sometimes be seen as excessive (which is for every sensitive reader to judge).

Before analyzing the three poems, it might be worthwhile to speculate why writers reach for the form of ekphrasis in the first place. In some poems, the work of art may be a springboard for philosophical deliberations or an appealingly concise representation of some philosophical problem. Such is the case with the widely anthologized "Musée des Beaux Arts" by W. H. Auden, which contains a brief

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[3] J. A. W. Heffernan, *Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ekphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago, 1993), p. 3.

[4] M. Krieger, "The Ekphrastic Principle and the Still Movement of Poetry, or Laokoön Revisited", [in:] F. Lentricchia and A. Dubois (eds.), *Close Reading. The Reader* (Durham, 2003), p. 90.

description of Breughel's famous painting about the fall of Icarus. Auden's poem starts with an idea, and then goes on to revisit Breughel's painting in an attempt to offer an "ocular proof" that the poet's disillusioned view of human nature is not only firmly rooted in empirical reality, but also mirrored by other works of art. For some, the impulse behind writing an ekphrastic poem is the sensation of purely aesthetic delight which the author wants to share with the reader. In that case the poem merely registers the pleasures of aesthetic response, and the text itself is often merely a five-finger exercise in poetic technique to see how well one medium can represent another. For others, the sight of a painting, a vase, or a sculpture provides a powerful stimulus which nudges the poem into existence, while the poet immediately departs from pure description in order to explore other ideas and wrestle with other problems. As a result, the features of the work of art which generated the text are less important than the questions they provoke. John Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn" belongs to this category.[5]

Even if we accept the Derridean view that our engagement with reality is inescapably of textual nature, it would be impossible to maintain that there are no differences between works of art and written texts. The best way to outline briefly those differences is by returning to the classic distinction made by Lessing. His most important point is that while literature and music are linear and unfolding through time, works of visual art are spatial and therefore instantaneously available to the eye.[6] A visual work of art gives itself to the viewer at once, in the complexity of its synchronic simultaneity, almost like the *langue* of Saussurian semiotics. Consequently, the device of ekphrasis involves the skill of selection, since a poem cannot take the form of passive enumeration of objects and figures visible in the painting. As Jean H. Hagstrum has noticed about the celebrated description of Achilles' shield in Book xviii of Homer's *Iliad*: "The passage remains faithful to the demands of verbal art and is by no means only an enumerative description."[7] At the same time, by describing a painting, the poet certainly does not mean to insinuate that left to its own devices, the originary work of art would be somehow deficient. On the contrary, as Spiegelman notices, "[t]he act of describing, especially in poetry, both reproduces (in words) a visible external provocation and adds a new item to the totality of available reality."[8]

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[5] Cf. Haffernan's analysis of the poems by Keats and Auden in the before-mentioned *Museum of Words*.

[6] "The object of imitation, as spatial work, becomes the metaphor for the temporal work which seeks to capture it in that temporality. The spatial work freezes the temporal work even as the latter seeks to free it from space" – Krieger (2003), *op. cit.*, p. 90. Krieger's own words his approach is "anti-Lessing" – *Ibid*, p. 90.

[7] J. H. Hagstrum, *The Sister Arts. The Tradition of Literary Pictorialism and English Poetry from Dryden to Gray* (Chicago, 1987).

[8] Spiegelman, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

On the illusive transparency of egoless observation in Ezra Pound's "In a Station of Metro"

It might be argued that by the very nature of their technical ambitions and theoretical tenets, certain literary movements are more likely to employ the technique of ekphrasis, especially those which deliberately strive to blur the distinction between poetry and visual arts. In other words, those authors who lay a greater emphasis on the auditory or visual aspect of the work of art, often to the detriment of its philosophical content, are naturally predisposed to employ ekphrasis more frequently.

Imagism was definitely a literary current in which poets could take full advantage of the self-denuding possibilities offered by ekphrastic poetry. Although imagists did not at all frown upon subjective treatment of the thing, as long as it was direct and exact, the most highly cherished tenets of the movement urged the poet to focus on a faithful representation of the object through language, while trying to keep at arm's length the intrusive pressures of philosophical commentary, romanticized embellishments, authorial digressions, etc. Ezra Pound's famous poem "In a Station of the Metro," which also happens to be the text most readily evocative of Imagism, may at first seem to be a triumphant incarnation of the ideal of perfectly egoless observation: "The apparition of these faces in the crowd; / Petals on a wet, black bough."

At first glance, it appears that the art of disembodied description cannot go further than that. After all, the text features no personal pronouns, it is devoid of verbs, and, consequently, like a painting it offers itself to the reader almost at once in the totality of its simultaneity. There is no ostensible speaker, no plot, no context, just a purely metonymic equivalence of the situation and its verbal-visual representation. On closer scrutiny, however, it turns out that this egoless transparency of pure observation is an illusion, since the subjective re-enters the text in the shape of a transforming intelligence, which is not content with mere description, but instantaneously captures the scene in a network of diverse relations. The sight of a group of passengers at the station activates in the mind of the speaker certain associations, which remain quite tangible despite the poet's best efforts to make them appear incorporeal and impersonal. In other words, pure description would have to be pure metonymy, but here metonymy is transcended by the introduction of implied metaphoricity in the second line (and the second part) of the poem; the faces in the crowd and the petals on a wet, black bough are not merely positioned next to each other, but one is depicted in terms of the other. In this way, human agency becomes subtly tangible in the form of a transformative action of interpreting perception, and the scene appears to us not in its alleged preverbal innocence, but filtered through an idiosyncratic intelligence. Paradoxically, the ostensible absence of the verb "to be" or the preposition "like" only serve to enhance the relationship between the scene and the viewer's subjective rendition of it. Willard Spiegelman makes the following comment:

"Apparition," in addition to its ghostly mythological overtones (the crowd in the Underground is Virgil's or Dante's shades in the Underworld) is a verbal noun: the faces must have appeared from somewhere. And no verb could be clearer than the absent "is" or "is like" or "resembles" that separates the two lines. Mere identity vigorously asserts itself. Finally, there is no "thing itself" that can be directly treated; the poem can observe only indirectly through metaphor.[9]

Moreover, in his commentary on the poem, Pound speaks about "splotches of colour," and even though the metaphor itself cannot be attributed to any specific work of art, most readers tend to visualize the underground scene along the lines of Impressionist painting.[10] While the artist behind those lines may wish to appear invisible, paring his fingernails in a Joycean fashion, the traces of his presence in the text remain detectable in the form of small hermeneutical gestures and subtly implied suggestions.[11] Also the initial impression of the poem's atemporality does not survive a closer scrutiny.[12] Spiegelman's commentary is once again helpful:

Even its odd punctuation moves us away from atemporality, inaction, and objectivity. We might expect a colon at the end of the first line, which would signify a pseudo-mathematical equivalency between X and Y, faces and petals. Instead, the semicolon implies clauses rather than phrases, action rather than still life, time rather than eternity, and also a human observer rather than an instant photo or an English haiku. The punctuation suggests (if not means) something like: "First I see the apparition of

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[9] Spiegelman, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[10] The aesthetic impulse which urged the poem into being is well known but will certainly bear repetition: "For well over a year I have been trying to make a poem of a very beautiful thing that befell me in the Paris Underground. I got out of a train at, I think, La Concorde and in the jostle I saw a beautiful face, and then, turning suddenly, another and another, and then a beautiful child's face, and then another beautiful face. All that day I tried to find words for what this made me feel. That night as I went home along the rue Raynouard I was still trying. I could get nothing but spots of colour. I remember thinking that if I had been a painter I might have started a wholly new school of painting. I tried to write the poem weeks afterwards in Italy, but found it useless. Then only the other night, wondering how I should tell the adventure, it struck me that in Japan, where a work of art is not estimated by its acreage and where sixteen syllables are counted enough for a poem if you arrange and punctuate them properly, one might make a very little poem which would be translated about as follows [quotes the poem]. And there, or in some other very old, very quiet civilisation, someone else might understand the significance" – E. Pound, "How I Began", *T. P.'s Weekly*, 6 June 1913, p. 707.

[11] David Herman compares Pound with Milton, and observes "That the reader is being asked here to see an image, and not to hear a song, demonstrates that very different conceptual metaphors shape Milton's and Pound's poetic representations. Both of these metaphors are special cases of the more general metaphor THE MIND IS A BODY MOVING IN SPACE. In each, a mental activity – composing a poem – is conceptualized as a physical experience (looking) or action (singing)" – D. Herman, *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English* (Lincoln, 2011), p. 138.

[12] William Harmon calls the poem Pound's "tactic for escaping the sequential presentation inherent in the verbal medium" – W. Harmon, *Time in Ezra Pound's Work* (Chapel Hill, 1977), p. 48.

these faces in the crowd; then they remind me of petals on a wet black bough." *Post hoc*, in poetry, bears the strong implication of *propter hoc*.[13]

The two become combined in the binary mechanism of the tenor and the vehicle, which thrusts the adjacent phrases into the realm of metaphor. In this way, the hermeneutics of (subtle) suspicion debunks the myth of selfless observation. When Ludwig Wittgenstein famously said: "Don't think but look,"[14] he knew very well that man was forever banished from the paradise of pure perception.

On an incomplete subjugation of selfhood in Gary Snyder's "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout"

An interesting example of a poem which tries to remove not so much the presence of human consciousness altogether, but conceal its position of epistemic hegemony from which it imposes its categories on the world, is Gary Snyder's "Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout." The poem was "inspired by [Snyder's] summer job as a lookout ranger in the mountains of Washington."[15] It is also worth mentioning that Czesław Miłosz included his own translation of the poem in an anthology of descriptive poetry called *A Book of Luminous Things.* The poem also shows that despite the writer's desire to retreat to the very margins of the scene, his presence reasserts itself in ways over which he can exercise little control. Here is the text of the poem in its entirety:

> Down valley a smoke haze
> Three days heat, after five days rain
> Pitch glows on the fir-cones
> Across rocks and meadows
> Swarms of new flies.
> I cannot remember things I once read
> A few friends, but they are in cities.
> Drinking cold snow-water from a tin cup
> Looking down for miles
> Through high still air.

The first stanza unquestionably comes close to the ideal of egoless observation. It is consistently founded on the device of metonymy, which is characteristic of descriptive passages both in prose and poetry. The subjective "I" has been deliberately dissolved into an "eye," which does not try to dominate the landscape

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[13] Spiegelman, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

[14] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, eds. and trans. P. M. S. Hacker. J. Schulte (Oxford, 2009), p. 66.

[15] J. Parini, B. Millier (eds.), *The Columbia History of American Poetry* (New York, 1993), p. 600.

in any way. Neither does the landscape – a stimulus for the sublime experience of unity with the natural world – dominate over the subject.[16]

While the description of natural phenomena in the first stanza embraces the ideal of self-diminishment, in the second stanza, Snyder endeavours to diminish the weight of his presence through the sheer negativity of the actions he mentions. Both the temporal remoteness of his barely remembered act of reading and his physical separation from friends create the impression that they had long paled into insignificance. The negatively invoked ways of engagement with the outside world create an elusiveness in which his otherwise rigid ego structures may dissolve and merge with the environment. Bearing in mind Snyder's profound knowledge of Japanese culture and religion, one can see him striving after that nigh unattainable Zen ideal, which is to become one with the act of perception. As a result, it seems that the unhurried and protracted actions he is performing are vested with a sense of sanctity flowing from the diminishment of his ego. They yield a pleasant slowness, a focused mindfulness, where contemplation and activity come together, divested of their adversarial tensions. The speaker does not use the word gratitude, yet the whole poem is deeply suffused with this sentiment.

Moreover, Snyder simplifies the syntax as if traditional sentence structure, built around the predominance of subject, founded on the assumed duality between the perceiver and that which is perceived, was in itself an insidious locus of self-affirmation. According to Spiegelman:

> The final three-line fragment continues, on the one hand, a description of a "personal" activity, but, on the other, by virtue of its temporal vagueness, it removes the speaker from selfhood into a realm of pure physical sensation. No pronoun, therefore no subject; no verb, no time. Adjectival participles pretend to objectify action; in fact, they require that a reader insert them in a temporal grid.[17]

This is true, but they also compel the reader to insert the speaker in a spatial grid, and, as a result, his presence begins to recede, engulfed by the unfathomable majesty of his immediate surroundings, which evoke the feeling of awe. At the same time, however, as was the case with Pound's poem, when certain pressures of hermeneutic scepticism are brought to bear on the text, one begins to see that the impression of selfless immersion in the world of nature is exposed as fallacy. The very notions of spatial orientation (which structuralist jargon might call "gross constituent units of spatial categorization"), i.e. the categories of "down" and "across" depend on the presence of an interpreting intelligence. To say "down the valley," as Snyder does in the first line, is to reveal the presence of an observer as someone situated above the valley. Such spatial distinctions are not inherent in

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[16] In order to realize to what extent the speaker has blended in with the surroundings, one might compare the poem with Friedrich's famous painting "Wanderer above the Sea of Fog," which epitomises romantic self-imposition on the world. While the speaker in Snyder's poem does his utmost to diminish his presence and recede into the background, the Romantic in Friedrich's painting regards the valleys below with what seems to be a stance of haughty solitude.

[17] Spiegelman, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

nature – they are in the eye, and the mind, of the beholder. Moreover, the adjectives used by the speaker ("cold," "new," "high") suggest a point of view. The word "cold" does not have the desired precision of an impersonal statement, since it is based on a relationship between an object and the subject in relation to whom the object displays certain qualities. Also the phrase "three days heat" does not come in any way from the world of nature, but is predicated on the act of temporal measurement, which in itself implies the presence of a consciousness imposing these categories on the outside world.

If one were to approach this poem as a concentrated effort of the mind to divest the text of any traces of human subjectivity and interpreting consciousness, then the beginning of the second stanza itself, in which the poet falls back on the conveniences of a more orthodox mode of utterance, must read like a resigned admission of defeat.[18] There is only so much one can do to achieve perfect self-effacement. On the other hand, however, the attempt at self-effacement is in itself precious as it audaciously counters the self-aggrandizing tendencies of much of contemporary literature, in this way conferring on the self-reduced "I" the blessings of kenotic purification.[19] According to Nock-Hee Park:

> The smoke haze in the mountain valley obscures the city, and the "cold snow-water" purifies the poet and the scene so that the poem may come to rest in "high still air." The things he can't remember are crucial to his natural vision, which evokes cultural decay in order to conduct a ritual of purification.[20]

Although the ideal of person-less description must remain an utopian project, the spiritual benefits to be reaped from the mere effort of the mind to achieve a state of peaceful immersion in the outside world are more than sufficient recompense for having undertaken it in the first place.

On the unobtrusive compassion of "O! (Edward Hopper)" by Czesław Miłosz

The third example comes from Czesław Miłosz's late volume *This*, published in the year 2000. The painting which inspired the eighty-nine year old poet was "A Hotel Room" by Edward Hopper (1882–1967). The parenthetical note in the title of the poem at once acknowledges its source and unequivocally points to the ekphrastic character of the text:

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[18] Bernstein claims that the self-negating outward movement of the first stanza gives way to the speaker's withdrawal into the self in the second: "In Snyder 'Mid-August at Sourdough Mountain Lookout,' the patient description of the valley in the first stanza triggers the step-by-step withdrawal into the self in the second" – Ch. Bernstein, *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word* (New York, 1998), p. 94.

[19] Spiegelman notes rather harshly: "The absence of some final revelation or significant vision does not, however, mean that Snyder has successfully avoided the self-centeredness of the Romantic poets or of his more extravagant, self-dramatizing contemporaries" – Spiegelman, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[20] J. Nock-Hee Park, *Apparitions of Asia: Modernist Form and Asian American Poetics* (New York, 2008), p. 77.

O what sadness unaware that it's sadness!
What despair that doesn't know it's despair.
A business woman, her unpacked suitcase on the floor,
sits on a bed half undressed, in red underwear, her hair impeccable;
she has a piece of paper in her hand, probably with numbers.
Who are you? Nobody will ask. She doesn't know either.
(trans. Robert Haas)

Although Miłosz often expressed his strong dislike for modern art's obsession with itself, he never declared that it was his ambition to eliminate every trace of human presence from poetry, so the aim of these investigations is to assess the kenotic potential of the poem as such, rather than question the application of artistic principles never formulated by the poet. It may seem at first sight that the poem is a perfect illustration of the notion that ekphrastic poetry is by nature selfless. What could be said about the speaker behind these verses? Apparently, nothing at all, since the poet has selflessly limited his function to that of a creator of textual space, in which a compassionate concern for the other can come to the fore. At first sight, the poem is an example of unpretentiously simple description, a sympathetic account of one woman's grief and loneliness.

And yet certain residual presence of selfhood remains tangible. It is palpable first of all in the tonality of the poem, which is informed by the self-consciously archaic and emotionally charged exclamation "O!" in the first line. This ostensibly outmoded rhetorical gesture sets the mood for the whole poem; of course, the precise nature of the emotional charge introduced by that exclamation is yet to be determined, since it may denote a number of things: an epiphanic surprise at the generosity of the real (typical of Miłosz's poetry), a spontaneous recollection of a cherished memory, an indignant exclamation of moral horror, etc. The emotionality signaled by the exclamation is part of the rhetorical strategy of the poem, thus conjuring the author out of the obscurity of anonymity in which he seems to have hidden. It is all more visible when the poem is paired with the painting. The poem is rhetorical, compassionate and tending towards philosophical speculation, the painting, by contrast, is restrained and subdued, toying with the possibility of an idea without imposing anything on the viewer.[21] It must be noticed that much of the text is an interpretation – not in the Heideggerian sense of the impossibility of not perceiving something in terms of its function and a network of interrelations with other objects in its vicinity – but as an advisedly chosen departure from the representational context of Hopper's painting. Miłosz's poem is a reading of the painting, i.e. an act of creative and generative disloyalty which allows the poet to inject into the painting an existential situation which may subsequently develop into a plot.[22] This allows the poet to inscribe into the originary "text" of the

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[21] "Ekphrasis stages a contest between rival modes of representation; between the driving force of the narrating word and the stubborn resistance of the fixed image" (Heffernan, *op. cit.*, 6).

[22] "[ekphrasis] typically delivers *from* the pregnant moment of visual art its embryonically narrative impulse, and thus makes explicit the story that visual art tells only by implication" (Heffernan, *op. cit.*, 5).

painting new elements, for example, he mentions numbers on the piece of paper the woman is holding in her hand, but the numbers themselves are not visible in the painting. What exactly proves that the woman is a business woman? Nothing really, but such a subjective interpretation of the painting enables the poet to build a mini-narrative around the forlorn figure in the hotel room. Most people would probably see the woman as having just learnt about some tragic event, hence her sadness. Miłosz, on the other hand, has her experience a kind of dark epiphany of the utter vacuity of her existence, a pained illumination of emptiness within.

The rhetorical question "Who are you? Nobody will ask" (l. 6) is of course neither interrogation nor inquiry, but a tender expression of compassion on the part of the speaker, who once again emerges from the margins of the text to ask the question. The very fact of posing the question proleptically negates the semantic content of the following sentence. To put it very simply, it is not true that nobody will ask the question, as the poet has just done that, once again making himself visible in the process, and revealing himself as somebody who cares. Having invested the figure in the painting with a sketchily outlined identity, Miłosz immediately proceeds to humanize her, and enters into an empathetic relationship with her.

In other words, the metonymic element seems to require supplementation through some form of diegesis. In fact, in many ekphrastic poems, one can feel subtle yet tangible insistence of the narrative to emerge in the poem, thus reducing the purely mimetic to an introduction. In this way ekhprasis is supplemented (in both senses of the word as in Derrida's account) by philosophical reflection. Perhaps it is simply the question of the hermeneutic temperament of the reader whether they perceive the plot (however flimsy it may be) as an unwarranted intrusion into the artistic self-sufficiency of the painting, or whether they will see it as a desirable device which saves the text from the banality of protracted description.[23] After all, if the poem was a trivially faithful representation of one medium through another, the text being a descriptive equivalent of the painting, the art of ekphrasis would be just an exercise in poetic technique, forcing the poet to solve the problem of finding artistically compelling means of modifying the synchronic to the exigencies of the diachronic, but from the point of view of hermeneutical interests, the two would be fully interchangeable, which is to say – inconsequential. It is only out of the deliberately posited hiatus between them that the voice of the poet can become audible.[24]

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[23] Some commentators have expressed impatience with this poem, e.g. prof. Michał Markowski wrote the following: "The way Miłosz looks at this painting is strange, and I don't quite understand what he means. 'A business woman?' Whence this idea? 'A piece of paper [...] with numbers?' Where is that to be seen? [...] Miłosz sees a woman who doesn't know anything about herself, she doesn't know who she is, and her sadness is totally unaware of itself. Apparently, she is a saleswoman ('Her hair impeccable,' the poet says reproachingly). Once in the hotel room, she throws off the mask, and she doesn't know who she is anymore because her sensitivity has been numbed by her career. This is a very simple reading of the painting, too simple." – *Tygodnik Powszechny*, 6 December 2009.

[24] One might add in passing that not only in this painting, but also in many others by Hopper, there is a *je ne se quoi* component which compels one to pause and reflect. His work features certain intractable qualities suggestive of half repressed philosophy, an unexpressed

Conclusions

In conclusion it must be said that while description in itself is not inescapably kenotic, it does enable the author to evacuate from the verse the vestiges of both narcissistic and tormented self-absorption. Although the possibility of registering an act of pure, monolithically transhuman description, which would be free from the contingencies of a perspective, remains a myth, the act of turning to the world does require a certain turning away from the usurpations of one's ego.

At the same time, however, even when the poet makes every effort to stop the surreptitiously intrusive "I" from prancing back into the poem unashamedly, it will always sneak back into the text through other channels. Since the act of subjective perception is what makes description possible in the first place, there is no possibility of selfhood dissolving itself into complete absence and anonymity. Even utterances communicating pure perception require that the reader believe in the possibility of an incorporeal declaration, predicated on the total obliteration of the self. As we have seen, one has every right to remain sceptical with regard to such radical claims. The deliberate suppression of the grammatical "I" is by no means tantamount to the deracination of subjectivity from the text. The manner of the poet's aesthetic (Pound) or contemplative (Snyder) engagement with the world and the kind of objects they single out for contemplation is the fissure through which the individual and the idiosyncratic resurface in the text. But the voice of the poet can also become audible in a compassionate effort to understand the other (Miłosz). Thus, with varying degrees of intensity, in each of these poems one can see a movement towards self-effacement, but, paradoxically, the very emergence of that desire leaves a trace in the text which leads back to its source in subjectivity since the desire for kenosis is felt as an unexpressed counterpoint to its descriptive component. The very nature of human consciousness seeking to express its perceptions in language is such that the very event of such expression is bound to leave traces of its existence. It is possible to erase a person from the text but it is impossible to remove a perspective.

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and inexpressible longing, a sense of things having gone awry (which is always dear to poets), a subtly intimated surfeit of meaning, an intriguingly articulate silence, an unignorable presence which remains just on the edge of vision. All those features arouse in the reader not just a desire to look, but also an urge to understand, as if some overwhelming question was being asked.